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Reading, Borges
In Search of Lost Eternity

A Thesis Presented by
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Abstract of the Thesis

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Jorge Luis Borges repeatedly suggests that the history of metaphysics is a “history of perplexities.” In the introduction, I briefly explicate this notion by suggesting that there are mysteries that characterize the human condition. In each successive section, I examine the influence these “perplexities” have on Borges’ work. The primary enigma that motivates Borges’ writing, I suggest, is the one between temporality and eternity—that humankind is imprisoned by temporality and yet dreams of the ecstatic heights of the eternal absolute.

We then locate in the first section this paradoxical possibility within the use of metaphor and allegory to make present for the reader certain eternal forms. Borges initial insight is then explicated with reference to Aristotle, Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein and expanded with reference to a broader vision of metaphor and allegory in the second section. In the third section, we see that the vision of eternity offered by these literary techniques is held back by their very medium, language.

In conclusion, we see that while the socio-historically established discourses of philosophy and science are means of addressing the foregoing enigmas, they necessarily overlook the universality of wonder and perplexity. I suggest, then, that the true dialectical movement the sublation in some hybrid or amalgam but rather the recognition of the mutuality of the mystery that gave rise to each. Thus it is not a teleological dialectic, in which the synthesis is to come as the result of thesis and antithesis, but rather one in which the synthesis is originary, irreducible and enigmatic, and in turn gives rise to thesis and antithesis.

“A storyteller has but a few stories to tell; he needs to tell them anew, over and over again, in all their possible variations. The tales and tricks are not haphazard; they spring from his inner and hidden self and must be analyzed by the critic.”

—Jorge Luis Borges, introduction to *Borges the Labyrinth Maker*

“I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth.”

—Umberto Eco

“But we do not even possess the certainty of our poverty, inasmuch as time, easily denied by the senses, is not so easily denied by the intellect, from whose essence the concept of succession seems inseparable. So then, let my glimpse of an idea remain as an emotional anecdote; let the real moment of ecstasy and the possible intuition of eternity which that night lavished on me, remain confined to this sheet of paper, openly unresolved.”

—Jorge Luis Borges, in “A New Refutation of Time”

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Preface—On Our Uncertainty

It seems that we today are uncertain. New-Age texts, Western Buddhism, Hinduism and yoga have joined the Western chorus of monotheisms announcing their answers to questions of life and death—but more answers have simply meant more questions. The advances of modern science, both pure and applied, have failed to provide certainty beyond themselves. Not only must material science be dumbfounded by questions of the spirit; even in (largely American) debates of fact between evolution and creation, between astronomy and theories of a “young Earth”, has scientific endeavors have also failed to establish a universally accepted account of Earthly history.

To use Foucault’s term, we are an age without a general *episteme*. Thus, in criticizing the totalizing conceptualization of objective thought, Levinas suggests, “The real must not only be determined in its historical objectivity, but also from interior intentions” (Levinas 57-8). That is, the determination of reality is not under the sole discretion of a totalizing discourse on history, e.g. natural science or Hegelianism, but ought to respect the self-determination of Others. If we have one at all, our *episteme* is one that rejects its own universalism, leaving only historically and socially localized distinctions of truth and justice.

Although vastly varying in origin, it seems as though the greater part of this socio-historical relativism arose out of a reaction against the universality of Enlightenment thinking. In other words, this modern epistemological angst has its inception in the dawning awareness of the forms of violence directed against the

Other implicit in universalist discourse, in the various guises of marginalization, imperialism, and genocide—or, following Levinas, the violence of “war”. Nevertheless, the actual historical reasons do not matter: what matters is the antagonism that persists today between any semblance of universality and that which corresponds to ‘responsibility to the Other.’ What we have gained in socio-historical understanding we have lost in terms of eternity.

This essay endeavors to demonstrate that literature, in particular that of Jorge Luis Borges, offers a way out of this epistemic dilemma—or, rather, a means of recognizing the terms of the dilemma in a synthetic unity without demanding a decision. First, it examines in the work Borges a philosophical search for lost eternity, whether we may still think of an eternal form today. Second, it examines the countervailing trend in his corpus: what he calls “the impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme” (NF 231), his tendency towards linguistic skepticism. Then, combining the eternal and the ‘provisional’, it addresses what might be called a dialectic of eternity and temporality. If successful, the conclusion will demonstrate how literature simultaneously provokes a connection with the eternal while illustrating, as transparently as possible, its historically determined limitations. My hope is that this will offer a middle way between Enlightenment universality and post-modern nihilism, between the belief that truth is eternal and universal and that such a belief is not only fundamentally mistaken, it bears a potential or implicit violence. The middle path is ouroboric, first positing access to the eternal, then revoking that access, and finally, like Arcesilaus, “[refusing] to

either accept or deny the possibility” (Critchley 21), oscillates between an affirmation of the eternal and of the iron bars of historicity.

Introduction—The Primordial Enigma of Humanity

—“Wisdom Begins in Wonder”

Socrates is reported to have said (perhaps apocryphally) that wisdom begins in wonder. That wisdom should begin in the domain of the unexpected, the inexplicable or the curious, rather than in knowledge, is a wondrous example of Socratic irony. But, then again, such a paradox from the wisest man in Athens—who claimed to know only that he knew nothing—is perhaps to be expected. All irony aside, this dictum illustrates something epistemologically fundamental: at the root of all knowing is a puzzle: dissolve the outer covering of certainty and discover a core of confusion and wonder. In this manner, astronomy responds to the wonder of the heavens, biology to the enigma of life.

The natural sciences, on the whole, correspond to the mysteries of material beings—how they effect one another, from what are they made, how does such and such a state of affairs come about, and so on. To these physical enigmas, unequivocal answers are often possible. For instance, the rate of falling objects in our atmosphere or the temperature at which water freezes in regular atmospheric pressure. Other cases, such as the wave-particle duality of light, escape unambiguous characterization. On the other hand, so-called metaphysical problems begin in ambiguous wonder, perhaps never to exceed it.¹

¹ For Levinas, this is the very definition of the metaphysical—that which always exceeds our capacities.

This introduction considers several metaphysical problems—the mind/body problem, the problem of universality, the problem of identity and finally the problem of metaphysics itself—with the cases in which the difficulty is most acute. The purpose is to illustrate certain enigmas that provoke philosophy and literature alike.

—“A History of Perplexities”

With the occasional exception, the history of Western philosophy has been a history of the mind/body problem. Whether in the Greek division between bodily drives and rational action, or the modern persistence of dualism, philosophers have generally considered man’s nature to be double. We know our bodies to be material, while sensing that consciousness and its ‘contents’ must be of another order. As Descartes taught us, thought lacks the primary characteristic of material being: extension. While it is certain that many modern and post-modern philosophers have struggled to overcome this bifurcation of humanity, their success remains doubtful. Nevertheless, irrespective of any implicit dualism in contemporary philosophy, every one is an explicit monist today. Materialism, the substance of choice, is everywhere: whether in the embodied intelligence of the phenomenologist or in the neurologic structures of consciousness, whether in the activities of the behaviorist or in the textuality of the semiotician.

Still, materialism, in itself, does little to mitigate what Merleau-Ponty called the ‘enigma’ of vision and consciousness. That is, regardless of the metaphysical ventures of philosophers, the irreducible facets of existence, consciousness and

corporeality, existence as both subject and object, remain as intractable as ever. Along these lines, Merleau-Ponty laments, “How crystal clear everything would be in our philosophy if only we would...brush them to one side of an unequivocal world!”(Merleau-Ponty 130) Thus, only by a commitment to materialist discourse, and consequently to ignoring certain characteristics of mental life—for instance the irreducibility of signification to the mere interplay of signifiers or that of vision to neurophysiology—can one become a convicted materialist.

In close conceptual proximity to this enigma lies another. Insofar as, on the one hand, the mind was thought to be universal and the discoveries of logic eternal, and on the other, the body was temporal, or ‘pathological’ to use Kant’s term, the concept of humanity was thus composed of another irreducible dualism—eternity and temporality. As Schlegel has it, “Conceive of something finite made infinite and you have a man” (Schlegel 250). The capacity for abstract thought and language lends to humanity a quasi-divinity—logical necessity is thought to provide access to universal knowledge: a sort of omniscience, and the capacity of language to render events distant in space and time present founds a genre of omnipresence. Scholars from Plato to Hegel and Spinoza to Kant have, in various modes from the eternal Forms to *Geist*, and from everlasting Substance to the categorical imperative that commands men and angels alike, suggested that logical reasoning could provide insight into the everlasting Absolute.

Our age is characterized by its rejection both of this nearly superhuman capacity of reason and of the divinity known as metaphysics. Reason and what it may suggest, it is widely held today, are socio-historical products, incapable of

transcending their locality and historicity. But just as materialism in itself is incapable of suppressing the enigma of dualism, beneath a theory of historical *epistemes* ferments the sentiment that Schlegel describes as knowing without knowing “that no man is merely man, but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind” (DOP 54).²

This introduces a third enigma of existence, related to the first, and introduced by Arendt with the concept of plurality. She writes, “We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else” (Arendt 8). This paradox, of being the same such that no two are ever the same, is arguably at the heart of a great deal of philosophic inquiry, from the problem of solipsism to the universal judgments of Kant, and to the infinite alterity of the Levinasian Other. It seems, perhaps, that our concepts of identity and difference are not fit to discuss this enigma. Others, similar to the paradoxical notion of plurality, are needed.

Thus we might consider what is called the problem of identity. If I am the same as everyone else while being different, in what does this difference consist? If I can be different from what I am the same as, then can I be different from myself? While popularly dismissed by contemporary philosophers, prestigious minds before us have asked such questions. From Heraclitus in the West and Chuang Tzu in the East, to anyone who is aware of the modifications of time, the question of identity has often posed an enigma. It seems that, at once, I am the same man I was

² This tension is tuned to the highest pitch by Kant, both in his Practical Reason and in the analytic of the beautiful. In each, we find the injunction to judge universally, and, in each, we find the relative impossibility of knowing whether we judge or act out of universality.

yesterday while being different from him—just as (or differently than the way) I am the same as you, while being different from you. Philosophically—that is, in the philosophy of academic halls—this may be a pseudo-problem, but to everyone who has felt these changes acutely the mystery persists.

Finally (though there is no final enigma of existence), we consider the problem of metaphysics itself. Coleridge, in a maxim destined to recur in these pages, suggested that perhaps all men are born either Platonists or Aristotelians. One way of reading this dictum is vis-à-vis metaphysics. That is, to the Platonist, the world that we inhabit is but mere appearance, the shadow of the true reality of Ideas. The Ideas and the supersensible realm they inhabit constitute the province of the philosopher, whose function is to penetrate this realm and secure the true and certain knowledge of the Ideal Forms. To the Aristotelian, on the other hand, such a supersensible realm is a nonsensical fantasy, for the world of appearances is the *only* world, the only fount of reality. Whether as Ideas, monads, noumena, *Geist*, the Will, or the Divine, the metaphysician intuits that behind the sensible and contingent, there lies the intelligible and necessary. And whether as a materialist, empiricist, pragmatist or atheist, his opponent replies: “What you see is what you get.” But as before, the prejudices and alignments of individuals matter less than the eternal debate, the irreducibility, between the two as they do little to diminish this

primordial enigma of metaphysics.³ As Borges notes, “Idealism is as ancient as metaphysical angst” (NF, 326).

Hopefully, this brief and schematic history is enough, if not to convince, at least to suggest to the reader certain irreducible antagonisms of our existence—the apparent incompatibility of the body and mind, the capacity to know beyond one’s physical limitations, the coincidence of our irreducible individuality with the fundamental similarities between those individuals, or even that individual identity itself, and the question of ultimate reality among countless other epistemic quandaries. I suggest that these dichotomies, these antagonisms, these paradoxes exist before any philosophic interpretation of them. Humankind wills, thinks, acts, knows, discusses and judges before the development and deployment of theories of willing, thinking, knowing, etc.

Borges suggests that the history of philosophy is “a history of the perplexities of the Hindus, of the Chinese, of the Greeks, of the Schoolmen...and so on” (COV 2)—in short, a history of the mysteries and paradoxes of the human condition. Beneath the perplexities of philosophy the primordial enigmas of humanity oscillate. All philosophy and literature begins and ends with these mysteries. As we see in the present essay, the primary difference between the two is that the former, in general,

³ We can also reflect on other forms of this problem: the argument from contingency for instance evokes the metaphysical mystery. Is our universe contingent or necessary? If the former, then what is its cause? This is related to another eternal metaphysical conundrum: that of infinite regress. If all things stand upon the ground, then what does the ground stand upon? One could compose an encyclopedia of metaphysical myths, such as that of Atlas, and of arguments for a Prime Mover that would illustrate the variety of responses to the presence of metaphysical mystery.

seeks to resolve the paradox, whereas the latter seeks to vivisect it, revealing the raw, mysterious, palpitating core of life.

Chief among these questions, perhaps the one that triangulates them all, is the problem of eternity. The enigma of eternity can be formulated in many ways—Heraclitus' river of time, the ideological disputes between realism and constructivism; all of the foregoing mysteries are in way one or another the problem of eternity. But the question must be asked: is eternity, in Borges' words, merely a "spent hope", or is time the "shredded copy" of eternity? Might the eternal be nothing more than the projection of one man's mind infinitely in time and space? Or is there the possibility that, as we are swept along by the currents of time, we might get our heads above the murky waters of temporality and breathe the immortal air of infinitude? Let us now turn to the work of Borges, beginning with his essay "A History of Eternity." There, and throughout his collected works, we see that the principle motivation for Borges' work is to investigate in language this possibility of glimpsing the eternal, and that, more importantly, his work embodies the wonder and perplexity that we feel when we intuit that, perhaps, we have fortunate enough to have such a glimpse. In reading and in Borges' work there is a search for an eternity that was perhaps once a reality for men but now appears as nothing more than a noble yet impossible specter of a naïve past.

I. Eternities: Platonic, Catholic and Borgesian

—An Abridged History of Eternity

The first paragraph of Borges' "A History of Eternity" already suggests a trace of nostalgia for eternity. "For us, time is a jarring, urgent problem, perhaps the most vital problem of metaphysics, while eternity is a game or a spent hope" (NF, 123). Humanity's aspirations for eternity, which in the past were vital, central to epistemic, ontological, and moral questions, today seem trivial, mistaken, or delusional, "distracting no one from the conviction that eternity is an image wrought in the substance of time" (ibid), that eternity is simply an impoverished abstraction of lived time. It is paradoxical then that it is in the history of a metamorphosing eternity that Borges finds his timeless Absolute.

Borges abounds in paradoxes. "A History of Eternity" suggests that not even eternity is eternal; that its history involves a number of shifting forms and identities. The question then becomes: is there one eternity or many? If there are many, can there be a single history of eternity? Thus, this title evokes the rivalries that arc across the centuries between Heraclitus and Zeno, Plato and Aristotle, Hegel and Schopenhauer and countless others who struggled with the concepts of history and eternity. In short, it immediately recalls the mysteries of time, history and eternity—that is, if there is such a thing.

Before recalling his history, we should remind ourselves that in "this biography of eternity [the author] committed certain distortions, for instance, that of condensing

into five or six names a step that took centuries” (footnote on NF, 139).¹ Therefore, the summary presented here is not an “objective” history, but a synopsis of the “distorted” history of which Borges conceives, of the “biography” of the living concept of eternity.

He begins his historiography of an eternity in flux by noting its constants. “None of the several eternities men have charted—nominalism’s, Irenaeus’, Plato’s—is a mechanical aggregate of past, present and future. Eternity is something simpler and more magical—the simultaneity of the three tenses” (NF, 124). Eternity is thus *both* timeless *and* the very essence of time—past, present and future, simultaneously, though simultaneity is a concept foreign to eternity.

As we recall from our studies of Plato and his followers, the eternal, timeless, unchanging realm of Ideas condescends into material, temporal, imperfect particulars. These Ideas, in one ceaseless present, which encompasses both past and future, reflect all of the subsumed particulars, past, present and future, “multiplied by time’s mirrors” (NF, 128). The highest Idea, one “that includes and exalts them all [is] Eternity, whose shredded copy is time” (ibid).

Having rejected this Eternity itself as nearly impossible for us, “for whom the final, solid reality of things is matter” (NF, 126), Borges then turns to the second

¹ “‘Fiction’ and ‘non-fiction’ are notoriously blurred boundaries in Borges’ fiction, but not in his non-fiction. That is, his fictions may often resemble non-fiction, or include factual elements, but his non-fictions *never resemble fiction*, or include information that is not independently verifiable.” From Elliot Weinberger, “A Note to This Edition,” Selected Non-Fictions, xiv, emphasis added. The above note from Borges seems to directly contradict this description of his non-fiction: the “condensing” of history into a few names begins to blur the boundary between the two by turning historical individuals into sorts of characters in the historical drama of the life of eternity.

eternity; that of the Church fathers—one that perhaps persists in the minds of the faithful. Borges suggests that this eternity would be “unthinkable...without the professional mystery of the Trinity” (NF, 130). This conclusion seems valid, insofar as the triple and simultaneous nature of divinity stands as the incontrovertible premise of orthodoxy. In order to counter the Gnostics, who asserted the temporal derivation of first the Father, second *Logos*, and third the Holy Spirit, Irenaeus declares that this “process...did not occur in time, but consumes past, present and future once and for all” (ibid). Thus, the Holy Trinity, in and by which all things are engendered, embraces the totality of temporality simultaneously. What, for our mere human intellect is successive and linear, appears to Divinity as an infinite now, encompassing all space and time.²

Regardless of the commonality of the eternal present (though this phrase is misleading: we have already seen that eternity encompasses past, present and future), Borges finally asserts the “mutual hostility” of the two eternities: “one, realist, years with a strange love for the still and silent archetypes of all creatures; the other, nominalist, denies the truth of archetypes and seeks to gather up all the details of the universe in a single second” (NF, 135). How to decide between these two eternities, one embodied by a tripartite and yet singular God, who as Nietzsche asserts has died, and

² In his short story, “The Aleph,” Borges attempts to present both the possibility of this Divine experience and its incompatibility with the human experience of temporal succession and the artifice of language. “In a similar situation, mystics have employed a wealth of emblems: to signify the deity, a Persian mystic speaks of a bird that is somehow all birds...Ezekiel, of an angel with four faces...In that unbounded moment, I saw millions of delightful and horrible acts; none amazed me so much as the fact that all occupied the same point, without superposition and without transparency. What my eyes saw *simultaneous*; what I shall write is *successive*, because language is successive” Jorge Luis Borges, Collected Fictions, pp. 282-3.

the other in the immaterial realm of Ideas, which appears impossible for us today? How to recover the solidity guaranteed to us by eternity? Is there an eternity that does not rest on a philosophical or theological argument? An eternity that is not esoteric? One that is accessible to any cognizant human being, and not merely those that accept certain premises for eternity? Is there a self-sufficient eternity—thinkable not only today, but for all time, since it does not rely on socio-historical conceptual articulation?

Borges hypothesizes that these expired eternities were developed by “remote men, bearded, mitred men...secretly in order to staunch in some way the flow of hours...for it is true that succession is an intolerable misery” (NF, 135). Here we find the solace that the heroism and the injustices of the past will remain, if not in our memories, then in eternity. If we hope for this solace, then we must somehow recover not only our past, but also eternity itself, in which is preserved even the most irrecoverable past.

Is time then a synonym for oblivion? Is every moment precious and unique, every individual a singular occurrence in that infinite collection of entities we call the universe, never to occur again? The world of the nominalist certainly seems this way. Nevertheless, Borges offers his vision of eternity. His eternity lacks the intellectual, abstract arguments of the Platonists and the Church fathers. The eternity of Borges is neither divine nor metaphysical. We need not the heights of philosophical reason or of mystical ecstasy in order to intuit its reality: we can find it in ordinary experience. As he says in his early essay, “The Nothingness of Personality,” “reality has no need of other realities to bolster it” (NF, 8).

—The Immediate Intuition of Eternity

In fact, Borges' development of his new eternity is entirely narrative; a fact which prefigures much of the discussion to come regarding the eternal aspects of narrative and fiction. As he said in his Charles Elliot Norton Lectures, under the title *This Craft of Verse*, "I do not think any discussion can be carried on without any examples" (Borges, COV 58). Fortunately, Borges has already provided us with an example. It is necessary to quote from this narrative, to see how it proceeds and, more importantly, to provide the groundwork for Borges' other investigations regarding the possibility of eternity. Out on a stroll through unfamiliar streets and alleys, he comes upon an impoverished neighborhood.

The houses faced away from the street; a fig tree merged into shadow over the blunted streetcorner, and the narrow portals...seemed wrought of the same infinite substance as the night. The sidewalk was embanked above a street of elemental dirt, the dirt of a still unconquered America...I stood there looking at this simplicity. I thought, undoubtedly aloud: "This is the same as it was thirty years ago. Perhaps a bird was singing...but there was no other sound in the dizzying silence except for the equally timeless noise of crickets. The glib thought *I am in the year eighteen hundred and something* ceased to be a few approximate words and deepened into reality...I suspected myself to be in possession of the reticent or absent meaning of the inconceivable word *eternity*...This pure representation of homogeneous facts...is not merely identical to what existed on that corner many years ago; it is, without superficial resemblance, the same. *When we can feel this oneness, time is a delusion which the indifference and inseparability of a moment from its apparent yesterday and from its apparent today suffice to disintegrate.* (NF, 138, emphasis added to last sentence)

In this passage, we see how eternity is experience by Borges. The "infinite substance [of] the night," the "elemental dirt," the "timeless noise of crickets" and the unchanging neighborhood combine in Borges' consciousness to produce the image of eternity. The Borges who experienced the same thirty years ago fuses with the Borges standing here

and now, producing an eternal Borges and an eternal night and barrio. Moreover, the possibility that another may have experienced the same, years ago or far into the future, is the possibility that all who experience it are “not merely identical” but “without superficial resemblance, the same.”

Since the constituents of this eternity are *this* night, *this* neighborhood, rather than of ideal archetypes or a transcendental divinity, we might consider Borges’ eternity to be a materialist or even a nominalist eternity. Primary are the particulars of the night, the stroll and the neighborhood, which produce within him the experience of the eternal. This is eternity as timelessness within temporality; the universal within the particular.

In the next section, we examine the possibility of metaphor, simile, parable and allegory as a vehicle to manifest this eternity composed solely of particulars and singularities (§ II). However, we see also that metaphors and allegories must necessarily be provisional—for they are the experience of eternity temporalized and made historical (§ III).

II. The Poet as a Maker

—“Less an Inventor than a Discoverer”

Borges' short story "Averroës' Search," in his own words, is an attempt "to narrate the process of [the] failure...[of] a man who sets himself a goal that is not forbidden to other men, but is forbidden to him" (241). The man is Averroës; the forbidden goal, knowledge of the exotic forms tragedy and comedy.³ Engaging in dialogue later that night with other theologians, the problem of "tragedy" and "comedy" (from Aristotle's Rhetoric) continues unresolved, even after they are provided with an alien description of theater. Rather than revealing the mysteries of a foreign art form, this description merely leads the Arab scholars to deride these "acts of madmen," and to celebrate the virtues of their native language. (An attack reminiscent of Borges' criticism towards the Argentine mind in his essay "Our Inabilities"; provincial, unwilling or unable to image the Other, uninterested in any subject matter beyond their own borders.) Further, they begin to show their disregard for "outmoded" "pastoral images

³ The inaccessibility of these decidedly Greek inventions to the Arabic mind suggests a form of the unknowability of the Other. Yet we see in this present essay that it is only the "surface" as such which is unknowable and that certain fundamental experiences of the Other are eminently knowable (cf. §3-4). In fact, while a necessary failure to understand the other is one of the themes of the story, yet another is that while Averroës searches for something inaccessible to him, Borges knew that Averroës "was no more absurd than I, trying to imagine Averroës...that my story was a symbol of the man I had been when writing it, and that in order to write that I story I had to be that man, and that in order to be that man I had had to write that story, and so on, *ad infinitum*" (NF, 241). And insofar as what is Other is barred to us, is not then Averroës' search a symbol for all of us? Thus, the Other becomes knowable in her very unknowability, since the Other shares precisely this psychological isolation. "I also think of him as a symbol of everybody, because after all, what any single individual must know is very little as compared to the sum of all things" (CON, 89).

and Bedouin vocabulary” (239). (Here, we might recall the Borges who delivered “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” who deconstructs *gauchesco* poetry, so obsessed with ‘local color’.) Borges seems to disdain this lack of imagination, this narrow world-view. Instead, he coordinates the heights of literary creation with a form and content that reaches beyond the provincial.

Through Averroës, who the narrator felt is a “symbol of the man he was when writing” this story, the “implied author” Borges stands up for the rustic and even archaic—but never parochial—metaphors of these poets. In the defense of a particularly pleasing metaphor—that “fate is a blind camel”—Averroës expounds this endorsement of aged metaphors and poems. In the course of his monologue, this reflection is offered:

A famous poet is less an inventor than a discoverer....The image that only a single man can shape is an image that interests no man. There are infinite things upon the earth; any one of them can be compared to any other...Every man has surely felt at some moment in his life that destiny is powerful yet clumsy, innocent yet inhuman. It was in order to record that feeling, which may be fleeting or constant but which no man may escape experiencing, that [the] line was written. (NF, 240)

There is a recurrent theme of Borges’ present in Averroës’ defense of conventional metaphors against “the image that only a single man can shape.” We should, for instance, examine that oft-interpreted yet illimitable work of pseudepigraph by Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*.” Menard, who believes, in a line reminiscent of Averroës above, that “every man should be capable of all ideas,” (or at least the ideas *worth discovering* are *not* those that may only be formulated by a single person) decides that the most promising method to recreate the *Quixote* is “continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre

Menard" (CF, 91). In other words, Menard's method suggests the distances of history, language and individuality should not prevent the re-discovery of certain metaphors, allegories, poetic images, characters and situations and that, moreover the experiences of each and every individual are the essential ingredient to these discoveries.

Furthermore, that the most valuable images man has crafted are those that may be re-discovered again and again. If the reader feels that it is unwarranted to compare a single metaphoric image to an entire novel, let him return to This Craft of Verse, this time the lecture on "The Telling of the Tale." Not unlike the above suggestion that universal history is that of a few metaphors, we find the idea that people have been "telling and retelling [the tales of Troy, of Ulysses and of Jesus] over and over again...You might think of somebody, in a thousand years or then thousand years, writing them over again" (COV, 47). Thus Borges suggests that the form of these stories corresponds to an experience, desire or imagination that transcends one man, a people or a historical epoch. In fact, even if these stories were lost, we could imagine somebody rewriting (or a close analog) them even without the knowledge of Homer or the Gospels. Many studies of comparative religion or mythology could be referenced to demonstrate the commonality of these "archetypal" images.

In contrast, we find the idea that the countless things of the universe could be recombined endlessly in This Craft of Verse. Noting that the Chinese have referred to the world and its inhabitants as the ten thousand things, Borges suggests that the number of possible metaphors is the nearly unimaginable product of 10,000 times 9,999 times 9,998...3 times 2 times 1—a number so large that several on-line factorial calculators merely gave the answer as "infinity." Additional searches for a large-

number factorial calculator revealed that $10,000 \times 9,999 \times 9,998 \dots \times 2$ is equal to a figure over 35,000 digits long. However, this is only true if everything could be compared to everything else in a single metaphoric image (which is how some allegorical poems and novels are developed). If we consider the metaphor to contain only two elements, the number is $10,000 \times 9,999$, a figure in itself not insignificant. “So we might be led to think: Why on earth should poets all over the world, and all through time, be using the same stock metaphors, when there are so many possible combinations?” (COV, 22). A related idea is presented in Borges’ essay “Pascal’s Sphere”; “Perhaps universal history is the history of a few metaphors” (NF, 351). The answer seems to be that there are identities present in the metaphor or allegorical image that transcend their historical determinations, such as those between death and sleep or destiny and the blind stumbling of a camel—just as Borges’ two nights, while temporally and historically isolated are identified in his experience of the meaning of the word eternity.

This section has a two-fold purpose: first, to explicate this conception of poetic discovery of which any man could be capable. Along these lines, we answer the questions: What is it that the poet discovers? How is it like or unlike scientific discovery?⁴ With answers to these questions in hand, we are then able to respond to Borges’ question why should certain themes recur again and again.

⁴ Italo Calvino, in his essay “Philosophy and Literature” calls for such an investigation, not only to situate philosophy and literature to one another, but also to include what are broadly called natural sciences in a “*ménage à trois*”. “We will not have a culture equal to the challenge until we compare against one another the basic problematics of science, philosophy and literature.” The Uses of Literature, pp. 45-6.

—Universal as/and Particular

Before examining Borges' work to reveal the method of poetic discovery, it is illuminating to briefly explicate a philosophical background for what follows. The purpose of this section is not to provide a philosophic grounding for the rest of the essay—it is not intended to prove the validity of the present analysis of literature and of Borges. Rather, we see quite the opposite: on the one hand, the analysis of Borges' work demonstrates the verity of these philosophies.

In his *World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer suggests, "poetry is to philosophy as experience is to the natural sciences" (WR II 427). One reading of this analogy is that experience (broadly conceived) is both the basis and the confirmation of the natural sciences as poetry (read: literature) is the basis and confirmation of philosophy. It is in the laboratories of literature that the hypotheses of philosophy find their validity. In other words, there is an epistemically reciprocal relationship between literature and philosophy. On the other hand, we endeavor to demonstrate in the present essay a leveling of these discourses, that neither philosophy nor literature should stand above the other but rather that they correspond to separate means of addressing mysteries of existence—philosophy seeks to resolve the enigma while literature manifests its paradoxes. This is also embodied in Schopenhauer's analogy: while an experience may remain enigmatic or equivocal, its causes and effects unknown, it is the role of natural science, as Foucault has shown us, to create an Order out of the Chaos of things. Thus within each lies a mutual confirmation—and yet a

certain confrontation, as well—of certain facets of each with the other. It is this co-operation that we propose to explore presently.

The ancient Greeks were eager to understand the relationship between the arts and philosophy. Most of us are all aware of Plato's condemnation of the arts and the victory he awards philosophy in the "ancient quarrel" between them. His student and immediate successor, however, held a very different view. Aristotle suggests in his *Poetics* that, while not identical with philosophy, "poetry is...more philosophical and a higher thing than history" (27). Thus, he sets forth a continuum from the science of particulars (history) and that of universals (philosophy). Poetry, theater and, by extension, literature—as we hope to confirm here—follow a middle way. Each "tends to express...how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act...and it is this universality which poetry aims in the names she attaches to personages" (ibid). The subject of poetry and literature, then, is "certain types" or characters—in the sense of a man being of this or that character—with which the author identifies a that or that name. Additionally, it is the plot that provides the occasion. "It clearly follows that the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots" (29). Thus, we see in the first lines of the *Iliad*, in the translation by Robert Fitzgerald "Anger now be your song" or by Samuel Butler, "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles", the subject immediately set forth is not Achilles as a particular, historical individual, but the *anger* of Achilles, his furious character. Or, again in Butler's translation of the *Odyssey*, "Tell me, O muse, of that ingenious hero." The name of Odysseus is not invoked but rather, first and foremost, his *character* as an ingenious hero. According to Aristotle, this is the reason we consider Homer a great poet and not an ignorant historian.

We find an analogue to this in the early short stories of Borges, specifically *The Universal History of Inequity*. Although drawn from historical sources, Borges chooses to depart where he felt that a more universal character and plot could be developed. Thus, “The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrington” is less about the historic individual now known as Billy the Kid than the cruel detachment that results from poverty, the arrogant indifference of colonizers, the indignity of a man murdered. Therefore, those who criticize the “historical inaccuracy” of the work miss the point: Borges does not try to remain faithful to historical truth, but to what he felt are plots and characters that recur again and again.⁵ This accounts for the paradox of entitling a short volume a “universal history”, for it attempts to convey the eternal forms of inequity—slavery, piracy, thievery, murder.

Though some have taken this title as irony, it is rather indicative of the dialectical Borges, who suggests the universal and eternal, while never affirming them, while never exceeding the particular. Whether the work in question is successful in this regard I leave to the individual reader to decide for him or herself. What is certain is that Borges later abandons this technique of quasi-biography to develop his idiosyncratic style of magical realism. We suggest that this development was due, in part, the fact that the idealized, fabulous characters of Pierre Menard or of Homer

⁵ We find Borges recollecting this idea in his *This Craft of Verse*, though with a different emphasis. “De Quincy said that all anecdotes are apocryphal. I think that had he cared to go deeper into the matter, he would have said that *they are historically apocryphal but essentially true*” (93). But to see the identity with, the repetition of the idea that led to *A Universal History*, all we need do is think of the stories it contains as anecdotes of the scoundrels there described—factually incorrect, perhaps, but “essentially true”. We have yet to see to which essence, or the essence of what, this refers.

transfigured by immortality permit Borges' plots to present less localized and more eternal characters.

We repeatedly find this model in Borges. In the prose poems "The Plot" and "In Memoriam, J.F.K." we find the distillation of this model of universality, of characters and plots. In the former: the betrayal and murder of a man by his close associates and the shock at discovering among them his own son (or godson); the latter the violence that men repeatedly do to one another. "He dies, but he does not know that he had died so that a scene can be played out again" (Borges, CF 307). In "The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" (a title which, like *A Universal History of Inequity*, already suggests its archetypal subjects—since its subject appears first and foremost as the *theme* and not of the particular traitor and the individual hero), we find the following reflection: "These (and other) parallels between the story of Julius Caesar and the story of an Irish conspirator induce [him] to imagine some secret shape of time, a pattern of repeating lines" (Borges, CF 144). The subject of literature, for both Aristotle and Borges, is universal forms of character and of plot that reveals this "secret shape of time". If we remember that Plotinus considers eternity the archetype of time, the true form of time hidden behind its appearances, then we may begin to see how literature, the metaphor, allegory, allusion, plot and character may manifest eternity. By combining examples from ancient Rome with those in the modern Americas, Borges creates an eternity that is not an aggregate of past, present and future, but manages to combine them in a single, everlasting present—the eternal moment that is the consciousness of the reader. Below, we see how this metaphorical identity of character and plot forms the basis of Borges' "The Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden".

Aristotle would come to be joined across the centuries by another voice, albeit one who took great inspiration from a position contrary to his own. Schopenhauer, too, thought that the subject of the arts is the universal form, that of history, the particular; yet for Schopenhauer, these forms correspond to and are inspired by Platonic Ideas. But aside from the Platonic doctrine of the Forms, we find a strong affinity between Aristotle, Schopenhauer and Borges on literature.

Schopenhauer argues that the genius of art lies in the aesthetic contemplation of objects of perception. This contemplation amounts to something akin to the phenomenological *epoché*. That is, Schopenhauer would have us believe that a disinterested contemplation of the world and its objects would reveal to the artist and the philosopher the thing-in-itself, devoid of the intellectual and pragmatic structure imposed upon it by our cognition and Will. Thus the artist, in aesthetic contemplation, apprehends the universality of the thing-in-itself and presents it for the viewer.

What kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but, which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the *Ideas* that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is *art*, the work of genius. It repeats the eternal Ideas apprehended in pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world...This particular thing...becomes for art a representative of the whole, an equivalent of the infinitely many in space and time. (Schopenhauer, WR I 184-5)

No doubt vast differences separate the metaphysical Schopenhauer from the first 'metaphysician' Aristotle. Yet here we find a commonality: "The poet from deliberate choice presents us with significant characters in significant situations; the historian takes both as they are" (WR I 244). The content of art (of which, for Schopenhauer,

literature comes closest to the ideal, save only music) then is the universal type or Idea. Schopenhauer merely expands the Aristotelian notion of poetry as universal: rather than being confined to character and plot, Schopenhauer suggests that the poet can draw out the universal form of objects of perception. Thus, the subject to poetry is as much the eternal sunset as it is the human situation in which it takes part, perhaps as a symbol of the end of life.

This vision of art is borne out in the work of Borges by the prose poem, “In Memoriam, J.F.K.”. Above we read it in with an Aristotelian emphasis, on the situations and occasions of human activities of violence. But we may also emphasize the Schopenhauerian aspect, the focus on an implement of murder. Quoting from the beginning and end of this piece: “This bullet is an old one...In the dawn of time it was the stone that Cain hurled at Abel, and in the future it shall be many things that we cannot even imagine today, but that will be able to put an end to men and their wondrous, fragile life” (NF, 326). In this poem, the bullet (that we are lead to believe that killed J.F.K.) is not represented as a historical artifact, but rather “becomes a representative of the whole, an equivalent of the infinitely many in space and time”.⁶

Thus literature, and art in general—or perhaps the aesthetic attitude—embodies a fundamental paradox. While its method of representation relies on particulars (this

⁶ Another expression of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic contemplation is found in the short story “The Zahir”. A vast and erudite enumeration of mythological and literary coins is bracketed by these reflections: “The thought struck me that there is no coin that is not the symbol of all the coins that shine endlessly down throughout history and fable...The thought that in any coin one may read those famous connotations seemed to me of vast, inexplicable importance.” *Collected Fictions*, p. 244.

person, that action, this place, that time), what it attempts to make manifest exceeds the particular. This, therefore, is the paradox: the representation of a particular presents the universal; a form in time may manifest the eternal form—timelessness within temporality.

Here we should recall Coleridge's claim that all men are born Aristotelians or Platonists. This time, we might interpret this to mean that the former see the universal aspect of art, while the latter focus only on its particularity (as one of Plato's criticisms of poetry and the plastic arts is that they manage only to present a particular copy of a particular thing, and never the universal Idea, the domain of philosophy proper). This would mean that for Aristotelians/Schopenhauerians, the value of an artwork lies solely and entirely in its capacity to represent the universal, while for the Platonist, precisely the opposite applies—that is, the disparaging of art rests on its incapacity to exceed the representation of the particular—and even at this copying of a copy it fails. But as we approach the work of Borges in more detail, we see that literature can capture this paradox without emphasizing one element to the detriment of the other. In this way, we see how literature can present this paradox without reducing it, as Aristotle/Schopenhauer and Plato do, to one or to the other. That is, literature and art simultaneously and dialectically manifest the universal while never exceeding their own particularity.

—“The Growing Edge of Language”

There is yet another constellation of philosophies we must consider if we are to understand the relationship between literature, philosophy and science. In his essay, “Philosophy as/and/of Literature,” Arthur Danto tell us “There is a view abroad, credited to Nietzsche, that in metaphor we have the growing edge of language, assimilating by its means the unknown to the known, where the latter must originally have been metaphor now grown cold and desiccated and taken for fact” (reprinted in Cascardi, 21). This single sentence provides a great deal for the present essay. For the moment, let us take up the conception of the metaphor as the “growing edge of language”. Later we consider how “what looks like a metaphor in the beginning ends as a fact, and...may be eliminated in favor a technical term” (ibid).

We might approach this in any number of ways. Since we are primarily concerned here with the poet as a maker—and not only one who invents (plots, characters, etc), but also one who *makes* discoveries—we must think of how the metaphor can extend language into the unknown, “so what appear to be metaphors...belong to philosophy as science, rather than to philosophy as literature” (ibid).⁷ Borges presents this idea to us as well, though he does not credit Nietzsche. “The Argentine poet Lugones...said, in the foreword to a book called *Lunario sentimental*, that every word is a dead metaphor. This statement is, of course, a

⁷ Later we criticize this triangulation of philosophy, literature and science and offer our own mark of difference between them (cf. “The Imminence of a Revelation as Yet Unproduced”). We find that that the difference is not in the form nor in the content, but in whether the language is ‘alive’ or ‘dead’.

metaphor” (COV, 22). That is, to say a metaphor has “died” must be a metaphor—but we shall see that a metaphor is not only a way of comparing disparate phenomena, but also, and more importantly, a mode of understanding and thought. In order to exhibit the word as dead metaphor, Borges shows how several words, once concrete and immediate, became something perhaps more abstract through the use of metaphor. “Let us consider a word such as ‘dreary’: the word ‘dreary’ meant ‘bloodstained.’ Similarly, the word ‘glad’ meant ‘polished, and the word ‘threat’ meant ‘a threatening crowd.’ Those words that are now abstract once had a strong meaning” (COV, 79).⁸ That is, an immediate and concrete term was applied metaphorically (at first, according to Borges account) to its effect opposed to the cause. The metaphor facilitated the process of abstraction, because it is the metaphorical identities between threats (an angry mob, a carnivorous animal, weapons, poisons, etc.) that makes the new sense of the word clear as that which is common to all threats. Thus, what “*is like* a threat (a dangerous crowd)” becomes “what *is* a threat (the abstract possibility of danger)”.

Let us consider how certain concepts can be initially formed and this will become much clearer. Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, demonstrates the fundamental ambiguity of ostensive definition. For instance, if we wish to teach another the meaning of the word “brown”, it is not necessarily clear if we point to something of that color and say, “This is brown” (cf. §25-38, esp. 28). After removing this reason for our misunderstanding of the functioning of language and, in particular,

⁸ As we later see, the value of poetry lies in its capacity to return some of the “strong meaning” to such “abstract” words (Cf., e.g., “Our Body not Our Intellect” and “The Ontology of Metaphor”).

naming, Wittgenstein turns to the problem of essences and of “clear and distinct ideas.”

This leads to the conception of the family resemblance.

For instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a ‘number’? Well, perhaps because it has a—direct—relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this may be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things that we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (§ 67).

We do not think of “number” as being a metaphor. Perhaps it is a “dead metaphor” (though we have not considered what this might mean). In the following paragraphs, I endeavor to show that at the base of this concept rests a metaphorical relationship, an “indirect relationship”.

In order to see this, we work backwards from a concept that we possess as such and uncover its metaphorical base. In §72, Wittgenstein provides the following examples.

Suppose I shew someone various multicolored pictures, and say: “The color you see in all these is called ‘yellow ochre’”.—This is a definition, and the other will understand it by looking for and seeing what is common to the pictures. Then he can look *at*, can point *to*, the common thing.

Compare this with a case in which I shew him the figures of different shapes all painted the same color, and say: ‘What these have in common is called ‘yellow ochre.’

Of course, in the first case, the interlocutor ought to understand the concept of color if he is to understand this definition. For if each picture contained the same object colored differently, then the hearer might understand “yellow ochre” to mean this object. This is why, in the second example, it is important that the shapes be different; if one is to define “yellow ochre” as what they have in common. It should also be

necessary that the pictures in the first example do not have other colors in common, since this would confuse the matter. Thus, it is only through the relationships—direct or indirect—between the images, their color and and their content, their similarities and differences, that the concept “yellow ochre” is defined in these examples.

But let us assume that the speaker too lacks the concept of “yellow ochre”, but recognizes the commonality nonetheless. And let us assume that she wishes to present this to another. At this point, there *is* no commonality between them; that is, it has not been named and therefore does not exist as a being called “yellow ochre” or anything else. In this case, let us assume that the teacher employs two images: one of a lion’s hide and the other of dried grass. The analogy, “Grass like a lion’s hide,” would then potentially manifest this similarity and bring it to presence.

In this case, the concept that takes the place of the metaphor is somewhat simple. I have selected this example from Wittgenstein due this fact. However, if we return to the metaphor discussed by the Islamic theologians in “Averroës’ Search,”—that fate is a blind camel—we see that not all conceptualizations are so straightforward. The ‘analysis’ Averroës offers—“that destiny is powerful yet clumsy, innocent yet inhuman”—itself relies on metaphor or family resemblance. For what is common between the power of a camel and that of fate? Or between the clumsiness of one and the other? Here we feel strongly Wittgenstein’s (metaphorical) image of the strength of the thread not relying on a single fiber that goes throughout, but in the overlapping of many fibers. We also can recognize the process of “seeing what is common”—though in this case, the commonality is far more indirect.

Thus, Averroës attempt to replace the metaphor with a ‘technical term,’ or a series of concepts demonstrates the non-essential nature of the eternal. By combining the images of the camel and of fate, non-incidental aspects of commonality are revealed, manifesting eternal elements of each. While we attempt to capture these commonalities in an “essence”—that of, e.g., power or aloofness—we find that these concepts too rely on metaphor and so cannot name what is present in each. Or rather, it is only metaphorically that Averroës can analyze the metaphor and ‘illustrate’ what is common. Thus, we should be on guard against such analysis, assuming that it is, in some way, more accurate, unambiguous or truthful than the metaphor itself.

This is the sense of Danto’s remark that the metaphor in philosophy belongs to science rather than to literature. That is, the metaphor discovers and shares a previously unknown or unrealized element of existence, just as two principle functions of the scientific method are discovery and dissemination. Examining Locke’s metaphor that intuition is the “the candle within us”, we can further see how the metaphor functions in philosophy as science. It is the case that things are sometimes illuminated in a flash of understanding. What was once seen dimly suddenly comes to light. Of course, these are all metaphors as well. Yet there is a viable metaphor between understanding and light (this metaphor is perhaps recorded earliest by Plato’s allegory of the cave, in which the shadows of mere appearance are contrasted with the light of true wisdom). In so far as Locke’s metaphor of intuition facilitated his discovery and elaboration of the function of the intuition—that is, in so far as his analogy was killed and the headstone “intuition” erected over its grave—his philosophic metaphor is closer to science than to poetry. Thus, we can cover up or replace the metaphor

between the illumination of the candle and that of the mind with the word “intuition,” which now appears as a ‘real’ faculty of the mind—rather than a metaphorical relationship between illumination and knowledge. This, too, occurs in Wittgenstein’s example of yellow ochre and the way in which we use that phrase in place of the analogy “grass like a lion’s hide” (or another version of it).⁹

Next we examine in greater detail the sacrifice of the metaphor¹⁰ to a ‘technical term.’ We also see how the metaphor perhaps reveals the “secret shape of time” in Borges’ work.

—“The Imminence of a Revelation as Yet Unproduced”

So far we have suggested that beneath language—especially scientific and philosophical language—are the catacombs of dead and forgotten metaphors. We have attempted to see how metaphor functions not only within literature, but also as a sort of

⁹ There is an revealing example of how the metaphors of philosophy is killed and taken for the assertion of fact recorded by O.K. Bouwsma in *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949-1951*. “[Wittgenstein] had himself talked about philosophy as in certain ways *like* psychoanalysis, but in the same way in which he might say that it was *like a hundred other things*...A month later Keynes met him and said that he was much impressed with the idea that *philosophy is psychoanalysis*. And so it goes” (p. 36, emphasis added).

¹⁰ Though we have focused primarily on the metaphor, we concur with Schopenhauer in that the “metaphor, simile, parable and allegory...differ only by the length and completeness of their expression” (WR I, 240)—between which there lies a commonality, one that we do not wish to replace with a technical term. For we have seen the relative futility of this practice, displacing what is clearly a metaphor for a metaphor that conceals its metaphoricity. though, in the interest of space and the reader’s attention, we abbreviate this list by referring only to metaphors—but in no way wish to suggest that these other forms that Schopenhauer includes can be reduced to the metaphor, or the metaphor can be to them. Rather, I wish to suggest that the allegory, parable, simile, plot or character are themselves metaphors, but *only metaphorically*.

scientific discovery, presenting to the reader or hearer a hitherto unknown or unrealized connection. Let us now examine Borges' "Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden".

It begins with the intertextual reference—Borges referencing Croce referencing the historian Paul the Deacon—to the tale of Droctulft, "a Lombard warrior who during the siege of Ravenna deserted his own army and died defending the city he had been attacking" (CF, 208). The narrator remarks that this account moved him a way that he did not understand at the time, but later came to comprehend. One may therefore read this story not as about the warrior Droctulft and the English captive maiden of the title, but of the narrator coming to a revelation. In order to do so, the narrator asks the reader to "imagine Droctulft *sub specie æternitatis*—not the individual Droctulft...but rather the generic 'type'" (ibid). Thus, after recounting or reinventing the story of his 'conversion' from aggressor to defender, the narrator concludes that even if the story is "not true as fact, it may nevertheless be true as symbol" (CF, 209), as a symbol of the eternal form of a warrior moved to defend the city he once attacked.¹¹

This narrative of conversion strikes a deep chord in the narrator. Searching for the cause, he recollects the Mongols who, despite their aspirations of conquest "[grew] old in the cities they yearned to destroy" (CF, 210). But no sooner does the entombed and desiccated history of encyclopedias and textbooks enter his mind than he rejects it. Instead, he draws upon a story more intimately connected to his own life.

¹¹ We might recollect Borges remark that all anecdotes, while being historically false, are essentially true.

In this story, told to him by his grandmother,¹² the roles are apparently reversed. The English maiden makes no siege upon the locals (disregarding the colonial violence of her country, of course: she is certainly no general). Rather, it is Indians who attacked her town that are her captors. It is not clear if she willingly joins their cause against the English but she apparently comes to accept her new fate as one of them. Our narrator presents these conclusions.

The figure of the barbarian who embraced the cause of Ravenna, and the figure of the European woman who chose the wilderness—they might seem conflicting, contradictory. But both were transported by some secret impulse, an impulse deeper than reason, and both embraced that impulse that they were unable to explain. It may be the stories I have told are one and the same story. The obverse and reverse of this coin are, in the eyes of God, identical. (NF, 211)

The narrator has no recourse except to the commonality of their “secret impulse,” one “deeper than reason” and which therefore lacks a name in any language that either he or I know. Yet this story, not unlike the interlocutor that Wittgenstein imagines, presents to us a commonality, a secret (yet surface-level) affinity in the two images of the narratives. In fact, it is in light of the differences between the two stories that their commonality emerges more clearly. (We might recall the importance of the differences in the above discussion of Wittgenstein in seeing what is common, or more importantly, seeing what is common that your interlocutor wishes you to see.) This is the reason

¹² It would not be too far to assume that this story connects with Borges the man as well as Borges the narrator. For Borges himself possesses English blood, is himself the descendent of those who perhaps numbered among the friends and relatives of the English maiden. Yet, in spite of this, Borges feels himself to be Argentine. Thus, his own (family) story is not unlike the story of the captive maiden—no longer European, but thoroughly inhabitants of the New World. “Perhaps my grandmother came to see that other woman, torn like herself from her own kind and transformed by that implacable continent, as a monstrous mirror of her own fate” (CF, 211).

why the more heterogeneous the elements of metaphor, the more astonishing and revelatory it is.

The title of this sub-section comes from Borges' essay "The Wall and the Books," in which he engages with the acts of the first Chinese emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who not only built the Great Wall, but demanded that all books that pre-date his empire be eradicated. Borges (and, since this is a non-fiction essay, we can assume that the author and the narrator are identical, can we not?) seeks out in this essay the reasons why the knowledge that these "were the work of the same person...inexplicably satisfied and, at the same time, disturbed me" (NF, 344). After several speculations on the commonality of these two acts, Borges concludes

We might infer that *all* forms have virtue in themselves and not in an imagined "content"...Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces worn by time, certain twilights and certain places, all want to tell us something, or have told us something we shouldn't have lost, or are about to tell us something; that imminence of a revelation as yet unproduced is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact. (NF, 346)

This is to say that the metaphor, the allegory, the simile, even the juxtaposition of "construction and destruction on an enormous scale" may, by and in themselves, intimate to us a fact, some knowledge. Borges reminds us here of the dictum of Walter Pater that all art aspires to the condition of music, and offers his own supplement that "in music, form and substance cannot be torn asunder" (COV, 77). Or rather, that in the aesthetic fact, form *is* substance, *is* the content, for there is no content that need be expressed in addition to the poetic. That is, the concurrence of the construction of the vast wall and the elimination of numberless books need not be analyzed for any deeper meaning—the combination itself is the meaning.

On the other hand, we could replace the metaphor between the two fables with a concept. In doing so, we assume that a deeper meaning than their mere combination must be present—and more over, that this “secret impulse” that is “deeper than reason” may be brought to the light of thought. For instance, the narrator of the “Story” suggests that Droctulft is not a traitor but an “*illuminatus*, a convert.” Thus we can name the “essence” that they share. But as Wittgenstein would remind us, there is a conceptual danger that lies within this. The possible assumption, one that underlies much of the Western philosophical tradition, is that this concept depends on that essence each of its particulars possesses: the essence of “*illuminatus*”. But as we have seen, there is a vast difference between the situations of the warrior and the maiden, the commonality of which can only be suggested metaphorically, perhaps only in light of their heterogeneity. For in “reality”, the conversions, the *illuminations* of the two are quite distinct. “Any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support” (Wittgenstein 2001, §198). That is, the technical term that supplants the metaphor, and that which is supposed to be more accurate or explanatory can do nothing of the sort—and instead of clarifying merely obfuscates the metaphorical origin of essence. On the other hand, we now see that the “essence” of essence is metaphorical.

It is precisely here in the deployment of a technical term that we witness the death of the metaphor. That is, when the metaphor is sacrificed to the technical term, we are inclined to forget that the term itself is metaphorical and to assume an identity between the phenomena it names. This identity takes us beyond the domain of the metaphor, since in it we are no longer comparing disparate appearances, but

(apparently) naming something identical to each. We might then understand Borges' suggestion that language is (largely) a graveyard of metaphors, and that, "if we go in for abstract thinking, we have to forget that words were metaphors" (COV, 23).

Further, following a distinction offered by Borges in *This Craft of Verse*, we can see how philosophy attempts, by the use of many tools, technical terms among them, to conceal the ambiguity of the metaphor by the assertion of an essence. In his lecture on "The Metaphor," Borges examines some of the recurrent metaphors, those that suggest a universal history of metaphor—an idea that itself recurs in Borges, for example in "Pascal's Sphere". Among these is the analogy between life and dreams. Drawing on examples from the Anglo, Germanic and Chinese traditions, Borges demonstrates that it is possible that any person in any time or place may feel that his or her life is a dream. There is perhaps any number of commonalities that we might attempt to name between the two: a sense of unreality or ephemerality, that of inhabiting a realm of signs, or that the form of each intimates a secret pattern, etc. But on the other hand, Borges intervenes, Shakespeare's line from *The Tempest*, "We are such stuff that dreams are made on," suggests that this stuff—this *substance*—is the essential content of the form of each life and dreams. That is, it asserts that there is an essence shared by both life and dreams that Shakespeare rather uncouthly names "stuff". *Both the form of the assertion and the appearance of a concept to which the metaphor of life and dreams are reduced* lead Borges to suggest "this sentence of Shakespeare's belongs rather to philosophy or to metaphysics than to poetry" (COV, 28). Thus, we may distinguish between, on the one hand, the metaphysical "essence" of the philosophers—whether Ideal, empirical, phenomenal, cognitive, to be found in thought, the realm of the Forms,

in the Will or in signification—an essential *identity* above and beyond particularity, and on the other the metaphorical essence of poets, one revealed only *in* and *by* the artfully arranged presence of particulars. Therefore, rather than saying “Life is a dream” and suggesting that every other attribute is secondary, when the poet suggests that “life is like a dream” or when we understand that “life is a dream” metaphorically, we immediately intuit the aesthetic fact as a “revelation as yet unproduced”, without reducing other elements of life and dreams to mere accidents and without seeking out a secondary expression of that revelation.

Thus, the “imminence of a revelation as yet unproduced”, the “aesthetic fact” can be contrasted with the mediate revelation produced by naming; what we generally call a “fact,” empirical or conceptual. Therefore, we might argue that the difference (if there is one) between philosophy and science, on the one hand, and on the other, literature lies not in its content (since each investigates eternal forms—whether of knowledge, phenomena, objects, etc.) nor its form (since language and metaphor occupy a central place in all) but in the manner in which its language is understood. Do we feel its language as a living metaphor or a dead concept? Borges himself suggests so much in *This Craft of Verse* when discussing the works of Martin Buber. “[Those] books...came to me as poetry, through suggestion, through the music of poetry, and not as arguments” (COV, 32). Afterwards, Borges was surprised to find that Buber’s work is meant as philosophy, as arguments, definitions and abstract concepts—in other words, he was surprised to find out that Buber’s words are meant to be felt as dead metaphors, not as living language.

—“To Think is To Ignore (or Forget) Differences”

In this section, we begin to develop in full one of the paradoxes mentioned at the outset of the present essay: the question of identity and difference. We first examine the problems created for one who is searching for eternity; then use these considerations in the next and final section to see how the irreducible enigma of eternity is present in reading and in Borges' work.

Philosophers from Plato to the logical positivists have, in a variety of guises, imagine an ideal language that would precisely and unequivocally define every being in existence. Borges presents a critique of such a language in his story, “Funes, His Memory.” Here Borges shows us that general, abstracted ideas presented a special problem for Funes. “Funes, we must not forget, was virtually incapable of general, platonic ideas. Not only was it difficult for him to see that the generic symbol “dog” took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes, it irritated him that the “dog” of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally” (CF,136). Unable to neglect the differences between not only every particular but also every perception of every particular, Funes allegorically presents the infidelity of language to existence. He may not have been totally incapable of general ideas, but we can be certain that Funes felt that every general noun was at best a metaphor and a poor one at that—and that the similarities that united these particulars under a general form are vastly outnumbered by their differences. He would have never gone in for essentialist, logocentric thinking.

Of course, we ordinary human beings have no such difficulty. The semi-oblivion that befalls our past ensures that we are able to go in for abstract thinking. In fact, it is

our memory that, next to Funes' perfect archetype of memory, is but a flawed imitation, which permits our use of the universal. In this view, the universal is nothing more than the by-product of a defective memory, which, incapable of recollecting the particular fills in its gaps with the assumption of the universal. In other words, the universal as opposed to the particular is nothing more than the insufficient compensation for oblivion.

This is the reading we offer for title of our current sub-section, taken from "Funes, His Memory." When we employ abstract thinking, we must forget (or ignore) the differences of particulars. In the ordinary case of nouns or verbs such as "dog" or "run", we ignore (or forget) the variety of forms, sizes, colors, etc. of dogs, and of gaits and strides of all the variety of creatures of which we say that they run.

Moreover, the same is true of our metaphor, thought until now to be form of eternity, the means of revealing the 'secret shape of time'. That is, in "The Story of the Warrior and the Maiden," in order to realize the universal form of the *illuminati*, we had to forget (or ignore) the myriad distinctions and contradictions between the two narratives. If we recall Borges' stroll through the eternal night of that distant Buenos Aires *barrio*, we know that in order to think the neighborhood of the past and that of the present to be identical, he had to forget any differences that might have existed. Perhaps the moon was full in that distant night, and new the night he returned. No doubt the temperature, the humidity, or other prosaic details changed between the two 'versions' of the 'same' night. But for Borges to profess to be "in possession of the reticent or absent meaning of the inconceivable word eternity", he indeed must have

forgotten (or ignored) these details. In either case, eternity now appears to be nothing but the illusory construct of a feeble and impoverished memory.

But which one is it? Has he forgotten or merely ignored? No doubt there is no recreating his frame of mind from the details provided in his account of the experience of the meaning of eternity. Yet we can propose a solution, which recalls our distinction between philosophy and science on the one hand and literature on the other. We suggest that the poet, or the maker, chooses to ignore the differences, while the philosopher, apparently or otherwise, forgets them.

In order to more clearly see this distinction, let us note that Borges attributes Shakespeare's line "We are such stuff that dreams are made on" to philosophy rather than to poetry. If so, we may suggest that this is because this line of Shakespeare's (apparently) forgets the differences that separate life from dreams and reduces them to the same 'essential' "stuff". On the other hand, we have Borges' reference to a line from Walther von Vogelweide, "Have I dreamt my life or was it a true one?" (COV, 28-9) In order for this to be a question, it is true that Vogelweide must set aside the differences that divide life from dreams. But he does not forget them.

This is the basis of the question: are the differences more essential than the similarities? In other words, Borges-Vogelweide's question, along with all analogies, evokes the question of identity and difference and of the universal and the particular. Additionally, Borges-Vogelweide's poetic interrogation raises a subset of this question: the identity or difference between living and dreaming. This question then, along with

Chuang Tzu's allegory¹³ included by Borges in the same section, is of the form, "Are these the same or are they different?" i.e. "Is my life identical with a dream or it is different from it?" Here we find that while the difference is (temporarily) ignored for the sake of the allegory, it is not forgotten and in fact finds itself represented by the form of the question itself.¹⁴

Thus we find that the metaphor—in so far as it belongs to literature and not to science—embodies and evokes the paradox of identity. In it, we find a recurrence that may or may not be eternal, an identity that may or may not be identical, an immediate 'now' that may or may not be the simultaneity of the past, present and future. We find an identity simultaneously posited and revoked. Thus we might understand Borges' comment from *This Craft of Verse* "This comes closer to what the poet is trying to say, because instead of a sweeping affirmation we have a question" (COV, 29). Are there only particulars or is there an eternal form to existence? The poet as maker shows us the simultaneous possibility of both, rather than the philosopher, born either an Aristotelian or Platonist, who "brushes them to one side of an unequivocal world".

¹³ This story is that of Chuang Tzu dreaming that he was a butterfly and, then upon waking, wondering whether he was Chuang Tzu dreaming that he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming itself to be Chuang Tzu.

¹⁴ Perhaps the best metaphor between life and dreams mentioned by Borges is that of Schopenhauer, who said that life and dreams are pages from the same book, but to live them is read them in order, while to dream is to flip through time at random. Thus, this analogy—not unlike Vogeweide's question simultaneously ignores the differences (so that they may be from the same book) while reminding us of them (the continuity of waking life versus the arbitrariness of dreams).

Earlier we considered Locke's metaphor that the intuition is "the candle within us." There we suggested that as a metaphor, Locke's description could make manifest the manner in which what we call intuition 'lights our way, however dimly' to the reader. We also suggested that the technical term "intuition" could take the place of the metaphor between knowledge and luminosity. The above discussion on the forgetting or ignorance of difference now sheds more light on this process from metaphor to technical term. For, if our conclusions drawn from Borges' fictions and non-fictions are correct, we see that the so-called technical term is one that conceals and forgets differences, while the metaphor preserves them. Thus, the intuition is the light by which the world is illuminated, that is, brought to awareness. This is perhaps what it means to feel that a metaphor is a living or dead metaphor—whether it presents the enigma of difference/identity or whether it conceals and forgets difference in asserting identity.

Let us again take the example of a common noun. When we say, "That is a dog, and that, too, is a dog," we are inclined to forget any differences between the animals in question and suppose an identity between them. Thus, the *being* a dog (or that of any category or universal) relies on our forgetfulness and the determination of what *there is* must in consequence be the product of our forgetting and ignorance. And if we are very forgetful, we might then seek out what must be common to all dogs, that on which the supposed identity is based, their essence.

Of course, it is impossible that we should be able to keep in mind every similarity or difference that each thing has in relation to every other; we cannot all be Funes. In "The Postulation of Reality" Borges compares the paucity of our language to that of

consciousness. “Imprecision is tolerable or plausible in language because we almost always tend toward it in reality. The conceptual simplification of complex states is often an instantaneous operation. The very fact of perceiving, of paying attention, is selective; all attention, all focusing of our consciousness, involves a deliberate omission” (NF, 61). Directing our attention to, e.g., of the redness of the sunset, requires us to recall the similarities to other red objects and to forget the differences that exist between the variety of reds and the plurality of red objects—and for that matter, to ignore the differences between the varieties of sunsets. Yet the metaphor or allegory is ouroboric in this regard: it simultaneously ignores certain differences while reminding the interlocutor that those difference exist, even if they are beyond our horizons at that moment. Thus, if language is a revealing and a concealing as Heidegger taught us, the metaphor reveals its concealment, while science and philosophy as often as not conceals the concealing; the ignorance or forgetfulness of abstract thinking.

On the other hand, we can now suggest that positivism relies on just these “deliberate [or otherwise] omissions.” For the coincidence of the linguistic *there is* with perceptive *there is* known as positivism depends on the alignment of two blind spots: that of memory (the forgetting of difference) and that of perception (the focus of consciousness on “essences” to the point where non-identity is not even noticed). Thinking of Funes, whose memory had no blind spots even if his perception did, we see that he felt the infidelity of language to existence. Conversely, we might recall the narrator of “The Aleph,” who acutely recognized the gulf between the world and the word when his perception, through the Aleph, becomes absolute. “What my eye saw was *simultaneous*; what I shall write is *successive*” (NF, 283). Where an alignment of

omission occurs, on the other hand, the possibility to see another order of things, or of the inadequacy of the present order, can be calculated at zero. This danger is highest when discourse is our guiding principle or when the word determines the meaning of being rather than a being determining the meaning of a word.

In this case, there is the ever-present danger that one will begin to erect conceptual frameworks beginning with the word—which stands as much for shared memories as much as shared forgetfulness—and over this burial ground of forgetfulness we build the edifices of philosophy and science. Since these edifices rest on the ignorance of particulars, we see that their conceptual linkage is derived, first and foremost, from this ignorance. Thus, philosophy and science—all abstract thinking—have the tendency to conceal the primordial enigma, to forget that words are derived from metaphors, and to forget (or ignore) differences between particulars.

On the other hand, we must ask: what if the author of “A History of Eternity” was not Borges but his creation, Funes? Would the impeccably precise recollection of Funes prohibit his intuition of eternity? In that case, eternity is nothing more than an illusion, a senseless by-product of the pathetic brevity of human recollection.

—Concepts and Shared Memories

In this last section we once again explore the possibility of the metaphor’s access to Being beyond language and beyond history. Doing so, we recognized two aspects of all language. The first we might be called the empiricist or phenomenal aspect of language. That is, in the mode we are concerned with the experiential content of meaning. By this, we mean to evoke, for instance, the actual texture of this paper as an

element of the meaning of the phrase, “the texture of this paper.” Thinkers of the idealist, empiricist and phenomenological traditions often privilege this aspect of language, arguing that the core meaning of language is found in synthetic experience. We might understand that Borges has this element of language in mind when he suggests that “words are symbols for shared memories. If I use a word, then you should have some experience of what the word stands for. If not, the word means nothing to you” (COV, 117). As we see below, this vision of language does not lead Borges to solipsism but is in fact trans-subjective.

But first, we must return to the other aspect of language. Let us call this one the conceptual or intertextual aspect of language. This aspect relies on definition and analysis. Thus, while the first aspect is inductive and synthetic, this aspect is deductive and analytic. The conceptual aspect of language is the principle of all dictionaries and analytic arguments. As intertextual, this aspect of language is privileged in structural linguistics and semiotics as well as by many post-modernists. It is also likely the aspect of language that Borges had in mind when he said, “Verbal distinctions should be valued, since they stand for mental—intellectual—distinctions” (COV, 43), a sentence reminiscent of the structural linguistics of Saussure. This is also the only aspect of language present for the Librarians of Babel, who have no experience save books and for whom most words could have no meaning save other words and books in those in the inescapable hexagonal galleries.

In “The South,” Borges tells of a literary man whose inheritance is found in the wild South. On his train ride, Borges gives him this characterization, reminiscent of the distinction we presented above; “his direct knowledge of the country was considerably

inferior to his nostalgic, literary knowledge” (CF, 177). The former relies, of course, on direct experience, while the latter is purely a product of intertextuality—the birds and villas of Shakespeare, the countryside of Cervantes, the flora and fauna of Linnaeus, or the variegated atomic arrangements of Lucretius.

We might summarize the foregoing with a reference to Schopenhauer. “The *concept* is abstract, discursive, wholly undetermined within its sphere, determined only by its limits, attainable and intelligible only to him who has the faculty of reason, communicable by words without further assistance, entirely exhausted by definition. The *Idea*, on the other hand...is absolutely perceptive” (WR I 234). While we have slightly shifted the meaning of Schopenhauer’s technical terms *concept* and *Idea*, one can see how the concept applies to the former which is “communicable by words...determined only by its limits” without anything more, while the latter is “absolutely perceptive,” and which is the content of all exceptional art.

—“Our Body, Not Our Intellect”

In addition to the conceptual aspect of language emphasized by rationalist argumentation based on the ossification of a metaphor, we recall the experiential aspect expressed by Borges in the claim that “words are symbols for shared memories.” Borges provides an illuminating example in his lecture “Thought and Poetry”. “In the case of ‘night’, we may surmise that it at first stood for the night itself—for its blackness, for its threats, for the shining stars. Then...we come to the abstract sense of the word ‘night’” (COV, 81-2) as the time between sunrise and sunset—a definition which, no doubt, requires no recollection of the actual night, but instead rests on a

Saussurian mark of differentiation, in this case actually embodied by the sunset and rise. In this case, we see exactly what Schopenhauer expresses in the difference between the discursive *concept* of night “determined only by its limits” (i.e., sunset and sunrise, day, twilight, etc) and the perceptive *Idea* of night, which stands “for its blackness, for its threats, for the shining stars” belonging not to the *concept* of night, but to the immortal night itself.

If we recall Wittgenstein’s example of the ostensive definition of yellow ochre, then we might see how the world “night” comes to stand for “its blackness, for its threats, for the shining stars.” When a student of a language is learning a language organically—that is, as we learn a first language and not the way we learn it in a classroom—he or she learns through the use of a word with certain associated phenomena or practices. For instance, when the child is learning the word “night,” he or she will learn by its use apropos the actual night: “It will be night soon,” as it gets darker, “Look up; the stars are really shining tonight,” or “You can’t go out at night, it’s too dangerous”, etc. If the child comes to grasp the fibers that run throughout each (or most of) the instances in which the word is used, if he or she begins to *see what is common*—in this case *night itself*—he or she begins to understand and be able to use the word for him- or herself. That is to say, the word “night” originally stands as a kind of metaphor between one night and the next, drawing out the commonalities, direct or indirect, between each night—in other words, “its blackness, its threats, the shining stars.” Insofar as we all inhabit the same nights, face the same blackness and threats, and look upon the same shining stars, the night itself is the insurance that (to a necessarily unspecified degree) we all have shared memories and therefore shared

meanings for the word. Again we recall Borges' comment that "words are symbols for shared memories." On the other hand, we have already seen how the word, as a mark of intellectual distinction, merely inscribes the intertextual differentiation, "between sunset and sunrise." In this latter case, we see how the concept is fully expressed in language and by its definition. On the other hand, next we see how the contribution of memory by and in the imagination of the reader is necessary for the expression of the Idea and for the evolution from discursive concept to perceptive Idea.

Borges says in *This Craft of Verse*, "I think of writing as being a kind of collaboration. That is to say, the reader does his part of the work, he is enriching the book" (COV, 119), he must complete the sketch in his imagination. Additionally, we find in "The Postulation of Reality," "Our body knows how to articulate this difficult paragraph, how to contend with stairways, knots, overpasses...Our body, not our intellect" (NF, 61). When we think of the memories that underlie the symbols of our language, we realize it is these embodied experiences—and not more and more words—that illuminate and give life to the word. We might read this suggestion in a passage from Whitman quoted by Borges in his essay "The Nothingness of Personality."

The words I use are not redolent of far-flung readings, but signs that mark what I have felt or contemplated. If I ever made mention of the dawn, it was not merely to follow the easy current of usage. I can assure you that I know what the Dawn is: I have seen, with premeditated rejoicing, the explosion that hollows out the depths of the streets, incites the slums of the world to revolt, humiliates the stars and broadens the sky by many leagues. (Quoted in NF, 7)

In other words, Whitman's words were not meant to evoke deep readings or to suggest other works of literature, but as marks of his experience, his life. The word "dawn" as his example recollects our discussion below on Borges' example of "night": Whitman's

dawn is not the result of “the easy current of usage” but rather from living, feeling, contemplating the dawn and its capacity to excite and induce joy in men, just as Borges’ senses in the word “night” its shining stars and its threats.

I would like to recall the words of Arthur Danto on “Literature as/of/and Philosophy”. This passage focuses on a criticism of Derridean readings of philosophy, but can be applied to what we have been called intertextual interpretations as well.

To treat philosophical texts after the manner of Derrida, simply as a network of reciprocal relationships, is precisely to put them at a distance from their readers so intraversable as to make it impossible that they be about us in the way literature requires, if my conjecture is correct. They become simply artifacts made out of words, with no reference save internal ones or incidental external ones. And reading them becomes external, as though they had nothing to do with us, were merely there, intricately wrought composites of logical lacework, puzzling and pretty and pointless. The history of philosophy is then like a museum of costumes we forgot were meant to be worn. (Danto in Cascardi 22)

We see here that if we only understand language as a system of reciprocal relationships of meaning, then the network of language is truly inescapable, and we are indeed trapped in our socio-historical nomological networks. Like the Librarians of Babel, we would be able to find meaning in texts only insofar as another text could provide that meaning, *ad infinitum*, with “no reference save internal ones”. The Librarian/narrator of “The Library of Babel” prays that “some man...has perused and read” “a book that is the cipher and perfect compendium *of all other books*” (CF, 116), for it is only by such a book that the relative truth and falsity, the value and worthlessness of all texts in the library can be judged. For those of us outside the Library, we are fortunate not to need such a divine text—indeed to have the world and ourselves about which our books of philosophy and literature can be written. So while Danto’s philosophy is like a costume

to be worn, to be tried on and to see how we may relate to others and the world with it on—in other words, to *live* in and through it—Borges thinks that poetry should bring language back to life. Though a great deal separates the two, we can intuit the affinity, we can ‘see what is common’: that the significance of literature and poetry should be found in life and not in other books.

What the poet does, then, must be distinct from the philosopher or the scientist, whose knowledge and discoveries are to be fully shared only with the initiates of their language and practices. The poet, if he is to “bring language back to its source,” must be concerned primarily with the experiences that we share over the language that we learn.

In some cases—for instance that of Joyce—this has caused poets to construct a strange and novel language, one that is not weighed down by conceptual and intertextual articulations (though Joyce is certainly not lacking in intertextual reference as well). Exemplary in this regard is, for Borges, Joyce’s “the rivering waters of, hitherandthithering waters of. Night!” “We feel that such a line could only have been written after centuries of literature...And yet I suspect there was a moment when the word ‘night’ was quite as impressive, was quite as strange, was quite as awe-striking as this beautiful and winding sentence” (COV, 88-9). In this case, Joyce has, for Borges, brought the word “night” back to its source, to the current of nocturnal moments that Tennyson describes in “The Mystic” as “time flowing in the middle of the night”, back to stand “for its blackness, for its threats, for its shining stars”—in short, back to the night that rests at the core of the word “night”. After centuries of literature have accumulated

in our own intertextual Libraries of Babel, Joyce found it necessary and possible to manufacture neologisms in order to return language to a vital source.

But language need not resort to such extraordinary neologisms in order to be returned to its source. Nonetheless, the point is the same. The great writer discovers or re-discovers the source of language that we all share, our experiences and memories of the world. Schopenhauer describes this process with characteristic perspicacity.

[In poetry] the concept is what is directly given in words, and the first aim is to lead from this to the perceptive, the depiction of which must be undertaken by the imagination of the hearer...It is then often brought to perception by some example subsumed under it. This occurs in every figurative expression, in every metaphor, simile, parable, and allegory, all of which differ only by the length and completeness of their expression. (WRI 240)

In other words, the poet chooses his words such that they lead not from word to word in intertextual linkage the way a philosopher or scientist must, but from the word to imagination, and from imagination to perception. Schopenhauer suggests how the poet leads the reader from concept to Idea:

But in order to set this imagination in motion in accordance with the end in view, the abstract concepts that are the direct material of poetry, as of the driest prose, must be so arranged that their spheres intersect one another, so that none can continue in its abstract universality, but instead of it a perceptive representative appears before the imagination, and this is then modified further and further by the words of the poet according to his intention. Just as the chemist obtains solid precipitates by combining perfectly clear and transparent fluids, so does the poet know how to precipitate, as it were, the concrete, the individual, the representation of perception, out of the abstract, transparent universality of the concepts by the way in which he combines them...The skill of a master in poetry as in chemistry enables one always to obtain the precise precipitate that was intended...To almost every noun Homer adds an adjective, the concept of which cuts, and at once considerable diminishes the sphere of the first concept, whereby it is brought so very much nearer to perception. (Schopenhauer, WRI 243)

Thus the carefully arrangement of concepts within a work of art cut across our semiotic networks in a multiplicity of directions, slicing and dicing them until only the solid core of perception, the Idea of the Will, the representation of perception, is left. Of course, we need not only look at the use of Homer's adjectives to grasp how one concept can "cut" another—we can also re-examine any number of the examples of metaphor and analogy given to use by Borges.

Returning to "In Memoriam, J.F.K.", we find that the first line tells us that the subject of the prose poem is a bullet: "This bullet is an old one" (Borges, CF 326). Yet reading through the third and fourth paragraph, it becomes clear that Borges does not have in mind only modern munitions. "In earlier times, the bullet had been other things...It was the silken cord given to viziers in the East...the triangular blade that slit a queen's throat" (ibid). Each addition to the list "diminishes" the concept of "this bullet"—which may at first possess any number of denotative and connotative meanings for any number of readers. But as the list moves beyond guns and ammunition, what the reader has in mind concerning bullets distills. The impurities that are references to gunpowder and muzzle velocities are removed as the addition of pre-modern implements of murder are included. In the mind of the reader, these other references act as a filter, sifting out of the conceptual articulations of *bullet* so that only a precipitate is left, i.e. the eternal form of implements of assassination. This form, according to Schopenhauer, is almost purely perceptive. But this does not mean that what is present in Borges' story is nothing more than a sight or sound. Rather, it is the lived, experiential, brute reality of man's capacity to do violence that is manifest here.

Furthermore, by juxtaposing many weapons from many cultures at many times used with many motives, intertextual reference is mitigated, requiring the reader to concentrate on only the deaths mentioned and not their referential contexts. The perspicacious reader will recognize that the life of John F. Kennedy, the legacy of so-called Camelot (in turn, with its own intertextual set of references to the tales of King Arthur) or the political turmoil endemic to the 1960s and 70s are of little to no import here. What is important is highlighted by the variations in Borges' catalog: after including several political leaders, he comes to Christ and Socrates. Next to those iconic martyrs is found anonymous viziers and queens, their glory or cruelty irrelevant. Along side Christ and Cain and Abel, we find a pagan Carthaginian chief. Clearly the narratives and conceptual articulations of these figures are not important. Rather, Borges' enumeration gets us to focus on what is common to all: the eternal recurrence of assassination, brutality and murder.

Thus far, we have attempted to see how Borges in particular and literature and general can suggest certain (non-Platonic) eternal forms embodied only by particulars and their direct or indirect commonalities, in other words a nominalist eternity. We understand the metaphor as a means of suggesting "the secret shape of time" that is eternity. In the final sections, we explicate the mysterious possibility of revealing eternity, the "archetype of time"; first by looking at Borges' skepticism and then by examining the possibility that the products of poetry and literature may transcend their historical epoch by presenting the primordial identity/difference between phenomena.

III. “The Impossibility of Penetrating Divine Schemes... ...Should Not Dissuade Provisional Human Schemes”

—Infinite Intertextual Labyrinths

It is the dream of the Enlightenment era that one map would ultimately contain all others. Today, there are those who consider this merely a question of scale, or of the “emergence” of one map from another (e.g., biological phenomena arise out of, but are irreducible to, purely chemical or physical ones). Of course, this emergence is never fully accounted for by proponents of this theory (cf. *Freedom Evolves* by Daniel Dennett, where practical freedom apparently inexplicably appears along with certain levels of complexity.) It appears as something of a miracle, creating conceptual difficulties such as the so-called hard problem of consciousness (of David Chalmers).

Moreover, this difficulty is multiplied by another—for we do not have merely one psychological or sociological map, but many. There is Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the developmental psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg and countless other complementary and contradictory schools of psychology. The number and variety of these schools of thought now require years of higher education to learn their nuances and distinctions. To this, add the exponential combinatorics of schools; for instance Zizek’s development of Marxist/Lacanian socio-psychoanalysis. Additionally, there are the Chicago and Frankfurt schools of social analysis, among others. To this, add the readings of one school by another, for instance Marxist analyses of existentialism or feminist interpretations of Freud. If one tries to think of all the

combinations, complementary and contradictory, one quickly feels a powerful sort of hermeneutic vertigo.¹⁵

In this sub-section, we amass a set of examples within the work of Borges that manifest this hermeneutic vertigo. These examples demonstrate Borges' linguistic skepticism, the epistemic and interpretive angst that results, and finally the need to leave oneself an escape route out of the chambers of language. In the next sub-section, further examples expand our vision of Borges' skepticism in terms of the arbitrariness of the sign. We see that these examples provide the dialectical tension in the work of Borges, at once a vision of eternity and of profound skepticism. We are therefore positioned to see in his work the primordial enigma of temporality and eternity and man as a synthesis of the finite and infinite, the temporal and the eternal, and possibility and necessity.

Borges portrays the interpretive abyss of hermeneutic combinatorics in "The Library of Babel". The first hint of the intertextual *mise en abyme* of the Library can be found on page 115. One anonymous librarian "deduced that the library is 'total' ...and that its bookshelves contain...all that is able to be expressed, in every language." The narrator then enumerates many of the books that are necessarily (conjectured to be) contained in the Library.

All—the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalog of the library, thousands and thousands of false catalogs, the proof of the falsity of those catalogs, a proof of the

¹⁵ There are critics who have suggested that this pluralistic vertigo in Borges is an ultimate sign of his skepticism. But we see in our conclusion that the proliferation of voices is for Borges both a reason for skepticism as it offers a provisional access to the eternal.

falsity of the *true* catalog, the gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary upon that gospel, the commentary on the commentary of that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all books...(ibid)

The list could of course be continued indefinitely (but we have already seen how the strength of language, exemplified in Borges' use of enumeration, lies in its capacity for synecdoche). Yet even in this abbreviated list, there are several volumes here that attract our attention. Not only are the false catalogues proven false, but there is also a proof the falsity of the true catalogue (perhaps it is like *The Unimaginable Mathematics of Borges' Library of Babel*, demonstrating that the only true catalogue is the Library itself). Not only is the gospel of Basilides the False located in the Library, but a commentary on it, along with a commentary on the commentary—and one might imagine, commentaries *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*, *ad vertigo*. The vast combinatorics of the library thus meets a second order—the semantic combinatorics of intertextual interpolation.

Borges' image that best suggests this infinite intertextuality or interpolation is that of the Book of Sand. The idea of the Book of Sand is first mentioned in his works in a footnote, attributed to another, in "The Library of Babel."¹⁶ "Letizia Alvarez de Toledo has observed that the vast Library is pointless; strictly speaking, all that is required is a *single volume*...that would consist of an infinite number of infinitely thin pages...Each

¹⁶ The name comes from a short story Borges recorded later on of the same name. "He told me his book was called the Book of Sand because neither sand nor this book has a beginning or an end" (CF 481). This book evokes Cantor's problem of normal sets better than the version which replaces the Library, since it is in no way limited by the page numbers and typographical restrictions which limit the Library, and could therefore include every text of every length, including itself.

apparent page would open into other similar pages” (CF, 118). This image, along with the vertiginous description of commentaries *mise en abyme*, suggests a text not unlike that conceived by certain advocates of the theory of intertextuality—a global, or rather universal, text that encompasses all that has been, or will be, written. In between every page of every text, then, we could in theory find every other text. Between the lines of Marx we would find Sartre and Freud; interpolated into Proust we would find Camus and Kafka—and in an intertextual *mise en abyme*, we would find Marx within Sartre within Marx, *ad infinitum*—as well as all other possible combinations of intertextuality. Situated between any affirmation and its consequent we could find any number of corollaries and contradictions, syllogisms and antinomies. This recalls the words of the “infidels” of the Library, the books of which they tell us “constantly threaten to transmogrify into others, so that they affirm all things, deny all things, and confound and confuse all things” (CF, 117). That is, each work has countless potential (and therefore, on premises of the Librarian, actual) commentaries on it, supporting its conclusions and refuting its premises.

The last incarnation of the Book of Sand—or of an infinite intertextuality—to be examined here is found in “The Garden of Forking Paths.” The antagonist is searching for the infinite, labyrinthine garden of his ancestor. Instead, he finds a book filled with the “contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts” (CF, 124). Each chapter of the book apparently reflects a different narrative: “in the third chapter, the hero dies, yet in the fourth he is alive again” (ibid). It is then revealed to him that the labyrinth for which he searches in this text of contradiction, “It occurred to no one that book and labyrinth were one and the same...Two circumstances led me to the final solution of the

problem—one [was] the curious legend that Ts'ui Pen had intended to construct a labyrinth which was truly infinite" (ibid). Thus, we find the suggestion that a text, perhaps all texts, is a vast, even infinite, labyrinth of meaning, whose solution or ultimate reading is eternally postponed.¹⁷ No doubt many post-structuralists and deconstructionists would agree with this and this may be the reason his work has enjoyed such enthusiasm among post-modernists. In his essay "When Fiction Lives in Fiction" Borges notes that the "essential aim" of *Hamlet's* play within a play is "to make reality appear unreal to us" (NF, 161). No doubt the effect of the Library's commentaries upon commentaries is to make truth seem less truthful to us.

Thus two problems of language are presented. The first is the necessarily incomplete nature of language and representation, that truth and language are never sufficient for Funes-like precision. The second—the possibility that significance is infinitely deferred by an interminable series of intertextual references—is visible when we examine not only these 'maps,' but also the various maps of those maps,

¹⁷ The image of a truth infinitely postponed is found in at least two other places in the work of Borges, one also within "The Library of Babel," the other in "The Approach to Al-M'tasim". In each we find a protagonist in search of an absolute. In both cases, the chosen methodology suggests a process of infinite referential regression. In "The Library of Babel," the librarian who seeks the ultimate compendium of all books thinks to first examine book *A*, which would reveal the location of book *B* that could be used to find book *C*. The last book in the series would reveal the location of that perfect compendium—if the last book exists. If finding the last text is the chain is not difficult enough, one must also find the *first* book in the order—perhaps one would have to consult another series of texts in order to find that one as well. "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" presents a similar series. A law student seeks a man of enlightenment. He believes that in order to find this man, he must first find man *A*, who will tell him where to find man *B*, and so on, until he meets Al-Mu'tasim." The epistemic and intertextual problem this represents is of course that of infinite regress, of identifying the first and last in the series.

commentaries on philosophies, histories—in short, the various catalogues and commentaries which affirm and deny all things.

—“An Arbitrary System of Grunts and Squeals”

We now turn to another, but not unrelated aspect of Borges' linguistic skepticism in consequence to the arbitrariness of the sign. Perhaps the best-known example of this arbitrariness is found in his essay on “John Wilkins' Analytical Language”. In this essay, we find Foucault's inspiration for *The Order of Things*: Borges' reference to the (very likely “historically apocryphal” though “essentially true”) Chinese encyclopedia, the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. The fourteen categories of animal presented there, in stark contrast to the naturalized categories of Mr. Wilkins, confuse and destabilize the reader's taxonomic horizons, thus suggesting the absence of an eternal schema on which to base the titular categorical, analytical language. Or rather, it is the juxtaposition of Wilkins' language with that of the *Heavenly Emporium* that is revelatory. This will become clearer in a brief exegesis of this essay.

Wilkins proposes that there be an ideal language in which the form of words reflects the categorical relationships between things, so that the first phoneme of a word stands for its highest genus, the second for a sub-genus of the first, and so on. For instance, “*de* means element; *deb*, the first of the elements, fire; *deba*, a portion of the first element, flame” (NF, 230). The greatest difficulty with this language, Borges tells us, is that of the forty categories at the top of the hierarchy. Why forty we might ask? And why *these* forty and not another? Moving down the hierarchy of categories, we find that “the whale appears in the sixteenth category: it is a viviparous, oblong fish”

(NF, 231). Does this mean that the sixteenth category (presumably out of the original forty) contains fish? Or animals in general? If it stands for animals, are they divided according to Aristotle, who divided all egg-layers into only two categories, or to Linnaeus, who did the same with all invertebrates or to modern biology, with its countless phyla, classes, orders, families, genera and species? Or, as the essay seems to suggest, should we employ the fourteen categories of animal proposed by the *Heavenly Emporium*: “(a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those who have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies” (ibid). In this classification, dogs that belong to the emperor are not the same genus as stray dogs, which are not the same as those which belong to the third category, those that are trained.¹⁸

This (apparent) impossibility of deriving a universal set of categories leads Borges to “suspect that there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense of that ambitious word” (ibid). Borges’ universe is not that of the materialists—the unity of all the matter and energy that exists—or of any other meta-narrative, but instead resembles “The Library of Babel” in its hermeneutic abyss of infinite, discontinuous

¹⁸ We are reminded of the earlier examples of the metaphor, in which stars and eyes are compared. There it was made clear that stars may have more in common with eyes than they may have with other stars—or even themselves—under different conditions. Here we find that a similar patten—dogs that are trained belong in the same category as, say, bears that are trained, though they must be differentiated from stray dogs.

intertextuality. Thus, we find a multi-verse in these meditations: one composed of forty categories and another composed, by The Bibliographical Institute of Brussels, of 1,000 classes, each classified by its numerical place in the system. If a universe must be unified, then the best we can hope for are the universes of meta-narratives—a materialist universe, an idealist universe, a Marxist, a biological, a chemical, a physical universe, and so on. But these will be impoverished universes, resulting not from an organic inclusion, but from the arbitrary exclusion of those beings that hold no meaning according to this given “master” work or that, be it *Das Kapital*, *The Origin of the Species*, or the *Holy Bible*.

The title of this sub-section comes from the works of G.K. Chesterton, which Borges introduces as “perhaps the most lucid words written about language:”

Man knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colors of an autumn forest...Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semi-tones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. He believes that an ordinary civilized stockbroker can really produce out of his own insides noises which denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire. (Reprinted in NF, 232)

Clearly, then, if we are to have any access to the eternal, to the absolute upon which we base our lives it is not to be found in linguistic representations of reality. Our linguistic conventions are too simple, too reduced to accurately reflect not only the variety and complexity of the world, but also we humans and the relationships that bind them all together. This is not an empirical question to be resolved by the construction of an ideal language—it is an *a priori* fact of language, dependant on logical restraints, that it

cannot “penetrate the divine scheme of the universe” (NF, 231) in any unifying or organic sense of the word.¹⁹

— Towards a Responsible Pluralism

Language is therefore limited, an impoverished and futile attempt at representing the universe in its grand complexity and variety. What then, of the metaphor, the allegory, literature as the highest art form? Is it possible that language can transcend its limitations, its socio-historical determinations in order to present an idea that is truly thinkable for all men? Or do the iron bars of temporality and the confinement of consciousness ensure that all truth is local, subjective, individualized?

We have seen thus far the possibility of literature to provoke visions of eternity within the reader, “the secret shape of time” made manifest. Story-telling and its techniques suggest the hidden meaning of that distant and nearly emptied word “eternity.” But is this suggestion merely an illusion?

We must recollect Borges’ suggestion that words stand for shared memories. We must not forget that while our minds may endlessly grasp at the conceptual, linguistic sense of language, our bodies can animate those words and bring them back to life with the aid of the embodied memory of experience and the imagination. We find

¹⁹ Borges is far from placing the blame squarely and solely on language. “Imprecision is tolerable or plausible in language because we almost always tend toward it in reality. The conceptual simplification of complex states is often an instantaneous operation. The very fact of perceiving, of paying attention, is selective; all attention, all focusing of our consciousness, involves a deliberate omission” (NF, 61). Additionally, stories such as “The Aleph,” “The Library of Babel,” “Funes, His Memory,” or “The Secret Miracle” among others all suggest the almost sublime paucity of human perception and cognition.

that only the conceptual articulations of language, its intertextual and interlineal referents are socio-historically limited—while the embodied, lived articulations of language can transcend their epoch, manifesting the eternal aspects of their referents through metaphor and allegory, the language of the body.

Nonetheless, the reader must always keep in mind the partial and limited nature of language. No word, sentence or even philosophical thesis can make a complete account the nearly infinite entities, actions, attributes, and modes that constitute existence—nor the endless recombinations of existents in any number of linguistic schematic categories, in the vein of John Wilkins and his analytic ilk. In fact, we have seen that language is a necessarily incomplete map and that there is no reason why other languages and expressions cannot be found or invented to describe what is not yet present in any given language. Instead of a bleak vision of language and truth, this presents the possibility of infinite languages, an exponential explosion of truths. Not in the sense, however, of relativism or nihilism. Rather, it opens the world to a responsible pluralism of language users. Thus, we see that while the construction and deployment “divine scheme” may forever be barred to humanity, this is no blight on our provisional human schemes. In fact, precisely the opposite is true. Once one realizes that a perfect language is impossible, individual languages become free to be glorified on their individual merits rather than judged by their relative distance to some impossible ideal. In the final remarks, we explore the new responsibility of humans who use language.

The responsibilities of the reader are therefore multiple. The reader, to the best of his or her ability, must remember, first, that words are dead metaphors, and

therefore to resist the temptations of abstract thought. Second, the reader must, in remembering that words are metaphors, be mindful of the differences as well as the similarities between the phenomena under consideration. This, too, will help the reader avoid abstract thinking. Third, the reader, if at all possible, should animate writing not with intertextuality and the endless deferral of significance, but with his or her own life, memory and imagination—from the text, “given in words, and the first aim is to lead from this to the perceptive, the depiction of which must be undertaken by the imagination of the hearer.”

Moreover, the crucial irony inherent in an “eternal” metaphor, however, is that the metaphor itself must not be taken as eternal. We might choose to recollect Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on the verity of representational techniques: “techniques were false only in that they presumed to bring an end to painting’s quest and history, to found once and for all an exact and infallible art of painting” (Merleau-Ponty 135). That is, when a metaphor, or a technique, is considered ultimate, “exact and infallible” it has the tendency to be elevated to a principle of reality, as we have seen with earlier examples of the death and ossification of the metaphor into words, dictionaries, and beings.

But what exactly is the ontological status of the metaphor? Real or ideal? Can we know the eternal or merely the temporal and temporary? Can we intuit the Ideal Form of things or nothing more than the projection of our own minds? Or again, which has metaphysical priority, the eternal or the temporal? These are questions that we ask ourselves, and questions that are at the heart of Borges’ search for lost eternity.

These questions are also the preliminary questions of metaphysics; whether it is possible and what form its study might take. One can point to two answers to these

questions that came at the height of metaphysical studies, that of Kant and that of Schopenhauer. Kant's critical philosophy forever put the world behind the veil of consciousness and cognition. The noumenal thing-in-itself was outside any possible sphere of knowledge and we are confined to the world of appearances, phenomena. In Kant's view, all knowledge is phenomenal, confined by the limits of human thought. In fact, even the supposition of noumena (its existence as the unknowable thing-in-itself) must necessarily be an idea of reason and nothing about which is "objective." In this case, any supposition about reality—even that the irreducible individuality of existence precedes its categorical determinations—is itself the result of human cognition.

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, offers a way out of the mental prison of Kant. Though he, too, believes that ordinary phenomena hide the true reality of things as they are in themselves, he also holds that it is possible for the artist and the philosopher to puncture this veil and to reveal the Will of the thing-in-itself beyond any mere phenomenal representation of it. But which is it? Are we confined to the Kantian minds or can we, as Schopenhauerian philosophers and artists intuit things as they truly and eternally are? A better question might be: confronted by this either/or, *must we make a decision?*

We might instead suggest that Borges work embodies this paradox. Coleridge may have suggested that all men are born either Platonists or Aristotelians—that they either intuit the universal or the particular as the ultimate reality—but we are starting to see that the world can be Platonist, Aristotelian and pantheist simultaneously. All at once, the desk that I write upon can be singular, universal and a part of the ineffable One. In order to see this, we must reject at once the *either-or* of the law of the excluded

middle and the Hegelian synthesis that seeks to reduce antinomies to a third, middle term. For we do not seek to diminish the paradox in light of one interpretation or the other, nor do we wish to sublimate that which differentiates the singular from the universal from the One. Instead, we wish to celebrate the poetic devices—of metaphor, allegory, plot, character, parable and so on—for their inimitable capacity to at once represent the Unity and Plurality of existence and all of its myriad, variegated—and yet eternal—forms.

Ultimately, Borges' work shows us that the true timelessness of the human condition, the past, present and future united in a single moment, is that of questioning, of mystery and wonder. In the final analysis, Borges' oeuvre shows us more than the stories by themselves—while each one makes present its own mystery, his work as a whole presents the eternal recurrence of wonder, that humankind, in its most universal, is in a state of mysterious awe in the face of the enigma of existence.

In sum, while we doubt the capacity of language to render the universe in all its particularity and peculiarity, in its totality and unity, its relativity and absoluteness, we cannot even be certain about that. This is, of course, the problem of self-reference in skepticism: if we cannot have knowledge of the world, how can we know that we cannot have this knowledge? If the world and the word are nothing more than illusions, what veil can be drawn back to reveal the magician's trick? I shall end the way in which I began, with a quotation from Borges' "A New Refutation of Time," now that it has been informed and expanded by the foregoing considerations. "But we do not even possess the certainty of our poverty, inasmuch as time, easily denied by the senses, is not so easily denied by the intellect, from whose essence the concept of succession seems

inseparable. So then, let my glimpse of an idea remain as an emotional anecdote; let the real moment of ecstasy and the possible intuition of eternity which that night lavished on me, remain confined to this sheet of paper, *openly unresolved.*”

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