

**Envisioning Language and Creating the Hyperreal:
The Postmodern Condition in Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones***

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The structure of *Ficciones* (1944) consists of seventeen short stories, each a self-contained work. Although they do not form a cohesive narrative, they are all self-reflexive in nature, texts that comment upon the making and interpreting of literature. For example, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* and *A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain*, are reviews of the work of a fictional author, themselves parodies of academic essays. Others, such as *The Lottery in Babylon* and *The Library of Babel*, contain narrative intrusions where the author comments upon the story itself. *Ficciones* self-referential techniques and the ironic play they engender help define postmodernism. By examining these stories in light of their self-reflexive nature, I will argue that these stories, far from being mere fabulation, actually address what Jean-François Lyotard calls the "postmodern condition": a world lacking a definitive sense of "Truth," whose subject and foundation becomes the nature of language. Though his fictions were originally published before what is generally considered the beginning of the Postmodern era, the end of World War II, Borges may be seen as a forerunner of the movement, one who prefigures and influences postmodern writing to come. Thus, by reading Borges' texts in light of key postmodern theoretical texts, such as *Simulations* (Jean Baudrillard), *The Postmodern Condition* (Jean-François Lyotard), *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (Linda Hutcheon), *Signs of Borges* (Sylvia Malloy), *and After Babel* (George Steiner), one can understand Borges' position and importance in the postmodern literary canon.

Borges' fictions are generally allegorical, representations of reality in an imagined setting, full of symbolism, philosophical speculation, and reflection on literature and language. Similarly, in *Simulations*, Baudrillard outlines the progression of *simulacra*

(an insightful parallel to the fiction of Borges), tracing the transformation of reality through representation and simulation. He only references Borges in the opening paragraph, but this allusion is certainly farther reaching. By citing Borges' story "El Rigor del Ciencia," Baudrillard posits Borges' fiction at the center of a postmodern discussion concerning the nature of reality. The image, and in Borges' case, the text, maintains the following succession according to Baudrillard: -it is the reflection of a basic reality -it masks and perverts a basic reality -it masks the *absence* of a basic reality

-it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

(*Simulations* 11)

Essentially, Baudrillard's four-part axiom describes how Borges' postmodern fiction falls under the second order above.

Through his discussion of literature Baudrillard comes to the following conclusions about reality and hyperreality:

It is...a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced—this is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection which no longer leaves any chance even in the event of death. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the

orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference.

(4)

Thus, Baudrillard sets the stage for a critique of Borges that removes his fiction from a comparative standard based on realism, giving rise to meaning and interpretation that was previously lacking a philosophical foundation. Images such as the mirror, which can be found throughout *Ficciones*, gain a connotative meaning through their ability to literally and figuratively reflect and alter reality. In particular, critics including (but not limited to) Sylvia Malloy, Jonathan Stuart Boulter, and Stephen E. Soud have developed ideas influenced by Baudrillard.

Sylvia Malloy's critical text, *Signs of Borges*, explores the ways in which Borges utilizes the image and the symbol in order to address his working themes. Other criticism, according to Malloy, has made Borges "a predictable Borges who no longer surprises us" (i). Her intention is to read Borges differently than her late-twentieth century contemporaries, whose critiques "[have] been weakened by a tradition of reductive readings... [Borges'] name has been domesticated, has become a mere password" (2). Thus, Malloy begins a new conversation based upon the significance of symbolism in Borges. In this sense, her intention and mine both attempt to reinvigorate the significance of *Ficciones* in a contemporary world, one that, although removed from this text by nearly three quarters of a century, is still grappling with Borges' same epistemological concerns: time; identity; and the nature of language. She follows the "text's shifting perspective" and "nonfixivity" of image to construct (or rather deconstruct) an argument for their intentional disparity, "a plural textual masking, organized as "gradual deceptions" (3). With the idea of deception and masking, an easy

parallel is made to Baudrillard's ideas of simulacrum. Likewise, Malloy does not evade Baudrillard's ideas, employing them in several chapters of her work, using them to represent the facade of Borges' work, behind which a reader finds significant thematic speculation and exploration. Malloy, as well as Jonathan Stuart Boulter, diverge from Baudrillard's notion of Borges in this realm because of what Malloy calls the "risk...that [Borges' fictions] be considered...the product of game-playing, as merely aesthetic tricks" (3-4). However, these so called "aesthetic tricks" form part of Borges' critique of the way we see the world and also comment upon the culture Borges enshrines. While Malloy first attempts to take on Baudrillard, Boulter ultimately provides a strong foil, one that is necessary when considering the historical horizon of Borges' works and their influential nature.

In "Partial Glimpses of the Infinite: Borges and the Simulacrum," Boulter refutes Baudrillard's figuration of Borges' fiction as "having nothing but the sense of second-order simulacra" (*Simulations* i). Boulter infers that Baudrillard "means that Borges' depiction of the simulacrum is of a primitive sort," a mere reflection of reality, where fourth-order "is its own pure simulacra" and therefore "problematizes any discussion of truth, falsity, appearance, and the Real" (Boulter 356). Here Malloy and Boulter intend to remove Borges' fiction from contingency upon "reality," as Baudrillard fails to do, in order to fully understand the "constructed" reality within Borges' fictions. It is the capacity to reflect and in the sense of fourth-order simulacrum, participate in what Lyotard calls the "postmodern condition." In his narrative, "Borges and I," (*The Maker* 1960), Borges begins with the line, "It's Borges, the other one, that things happen to" (CF324). In this short narrative, Borges acknowledges his own separation from both the

text and the "Borges" that wrote that text, thus reflecting on a constructed reality, a simulacrum, that "bears no relation to any reality whatever... [and] is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard). Borges self-consciousness of his separation from the text is illustrated by the following:

I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can spin out his literature, and that literature is my justification. I willingly admit that he has written a number of sound pages, but those pages will not save *me*, perhaps because the good in them no longer belongs to any individual, not even to that other man, but rather to language itself, or to tradition...So my life is a point-counterpoint, a kind of fugue, and a falling away—and everything falls into oblivion, or into the hands of the other man.

I am not sure which of us it is that's writing this page (CF324). Though Borges critics more frequently cite Baudrillard, Lyotard offers a theoretical exploration of many of the themes that frequently underlay Borges' fictions. Lyotard's text, *The Postmodern Condition*, presents the idea of the "crisis of narratives" that invariably leads to "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiii-xxiv). With this "crisis of metaphysical philosophy," or the failure of the metanarrative, a text seeking to reflect reality through language must necessarily position itself beyond a second-order simulacrum (according to postmodern theory) because of this order's direct contingency upon reality in the metaphysical sense. Therefore, in order to achieve "real-world" value, fourth-order simulacrum becomes the more accurate representation.

Borges' postmodern fiction is self-reflexive, a level of removal that can easily be seen to act through fourth-order simulacrum, as its artifice is self-consciously

representing a representation, knowingly and intentionally severing all ties to the metanarrative and causing, as a key member of the postmodern discussion, Linda Hutcheon, describes, a radical transformation or "decentering" ("Decentering the Postmodern" 57). Hutcheon writes, "Postmodernism marks less a negative "disintegration" of or "decline" in order and coherence (Kahler 1968), than a challenging of the very concept upon which we judge order and coherence" (57). Accordingly, postmodern critique is inherently contingent upon a defined center because, "The decentering of our categories of thought always relies on the centers it contests for its very definition" (59). In this vein we come upon Borgesian metaphors such as a labyrinthine library with no apparent center ("The Library of Babel" *Ficciones*). "The Power of these...expressions is always paradoxically derived from that which they challenge," according to Hutcheon, and this notion can be seen in another facet of the criticism of Borges. Jaime Alazraki, George Steiner, and Stephen Soud have all written about Borges in relation to a centered point of comparison, the Kabbalah. Steiner writes, "We can locate in the poetry and fictions of Borges every motif present in the language mystique of Kabbalists" (*After Babel* 67). Symbolic images are critical to understanding Borges' fiction, so attention to such overt imagery as that surrounding the Kabbalah is necessary to constructing a comprehensive interpretation of *Ficciones*.

Much contemporary interpretation employs postmodern or poststructural approaches, though interpretation does venture beyond these two critical models. Two texts in particular have set the stage for more traditional approaches: *Borges, the Labyrinth Maker* by Ana Maria Barrenechea and *Borges and the Kabbalah* by Jaime Alazraki. The first of these two is an in-depth examination of Borges' treatment of

themes such as the infinite, time, chaos, and narrative reflexivity (Barrenechea xi). It is apparent that Barrenechea engages mostly the same themes of postmodernists like Malloy or Baudrillard, but she relies on the New Critical technique of close reading. She never addresses the ideas of simulation or a "failed metanarrative" (Lyotard), elemental aspects of postmodernist critique. Barrenechea's work was published in 1965; the result being that her role in the contemporary critical conversation is one of an important point of reference for the new ideas emerging, those coming about after the publications of Baudrillard, Lyotard, Malloy, and Hutcheon.

For example, Barrenechea realizes the importance of chaos in Borges' work, stating that "[i]t might be said that rather than look for a solution which he knows beforehand is doomed to failure" being that "the world is a chaos impossible to reduce to any human law... [Borges] comments on or elaborates the literary and philosophical propositions of greatest imaginative range in order to communicate the drama or magic of human destiny" (*Borges the Labyrinth Maker* 50). Barrenechea views Borges' narrative as self-consciously devoid of any substantial presence in respect to the infinite universe. She writes, "The very fact that philosophy makes use of words is another reason for invalidating its pretension of being a copy of the universe" (79). Barrenechea continues this idea into the realm of Man's desire to encapsulate the universe through language and the absolute impossibility of doing so (79). Thus, her position on representation and simulation, namely through fiction, opposes the idea of fourth-order simulacra, a representation that is a reality in itself (Boulter 356).

Using the Kabbalah, many critics have located Borges in a deep and rich Judaic tradition, using the esoteric methodology of this mystical approach to negotiate

Ficciones' complex, labyrinthine form. Kabbalistic readings find in *Ficciones* a thematic and symbolic foundation from which Borges may further comment upon the nature of language and the text. Two texts that engender such critical conversations are *After Babel* and *Borges and the Kabbalah*, written by George Steiner and Jaime Alazraki, respectively. Both authors, Steiner and Alazraki, propose the influence of Kabbalistic thought on Borges and his expression of this influence in his fiction. The primary tenet of the Kabbalah is the fragmentation of language that resulted from Nimrod's construction of the Tower of Babel. Steiner writes, "Every element in ["The Library of Babel"] has its sources in the 'literalism' of the Kabbala and in Gnostic and Rosicrucian images, familiar also to Mallarme, of the world as a single , immense tome," thus presenting an argument rooted outside of the postmodern conversation (*After Babel* 69).

More cautious, less literal than Steiner, and more in keeping with the interpretive approach and general assumptions this paper makes, Alazraki sees the Kabbalah's influence on Borges as two-fold: Borges attempts to create "the ultimate metaphor for this [Kabbalistic] conviction," one that attests to a "unity similar to the "profound unity of the Word," and if to write is to rewrite that single text, to read can only be the process through which that single text can be interpreted or reinterpreted, as the Kabbalists thought of the Scriptures, infinitely" (11); or that the Kabbalistic interpretation of Borges follows such that "the Kabbalah—not as an esoteric doctrine but as a method for demonstrating its doctrine—is, within its own premises and theosophic purposes, a rigorous method of literary criticism" (11). I say conservatively because Alazraki allows that Borges isn't necessarily a devout Kabbalist, just that Borges recognizes the value of

such a method. It is difficult to interpret Borges' intention concerning Kabbalism. In a lecture published by Jaime Alazraki, Borges allows different interpretations of his intention. At one point, Borges is quoted as saying, "the Kabbalistic method [is] a method that we don't have to accept but which is not senseless if we understand the Kabbalists' premises" (57) and speaks of the Kabbalah as "a deliberate effort not to present truths in abstract terms but rather to hint at them by means of symbols and metaphors" (54). Thus Borges' approach to the Kabbalah in this vein can be seen as an appreciation of method, but not necessarily a belief in doctrine.

In the essay, "Borges and the "Death" of the Text," Carter Wheelock similarly argues that Borges' methodology is one that mirrors a Kabbalistic one. Wheelock doesn't apply the Kabbalah specifically, but still focuses his thesis on an esoteric understanding occurring between the author and reader (Wheelock 152). The parallel then, is the critical focus on the relationship between the author and reader rather than the text and the reader. Therefore, his notion of the "death" of the text aligns his interpretation with Steiner and Alazraki. Wheelock writes, "The reader cannot advance to the plane of aesthetic value so long as he clings to the intellectual content of the language[,]...so to speak, he must ...scorn the base means of ascent in order to meet the writer on the level of wordless understanding" (152). By "scorning" the language of the text and instead focusing on achieving a "completeness of idea," Wheelock parallels the idea that the disparity of language, i.e.-post-Babel, makes language secondary to "psychological realism, in which every event must be made believable according to criteria which simulates objective reality" (152). The differentiation between psychological realism and textual realism establishes what can be paraphrased as an esoteric understanding

between the author and reader in the "public" (universally accessible) space of the text. As a result, Borges' position is one of a god-like figure, an omniscient perspective, suggesting that which must be subsequently inferred by the reader, who must employ openness to suggestion and close reading. Wheelock writes:

The effect of ...insinuations is to supply the reader with attributes of the thing to come, so that when it does come it requires no convincing description. The reader supplies the image of it himself, out of accumulated suggestions, and because he supplies it, he "believes" it. What Borges is saying is that the reader of fiction is not looking for a text's agreement with reality but for completeness of idea...The new and unusual...are accepted—recognized as somehow legitimately "in place"—if they are already half-born in the reader's awareness. (152) Additionally, in Borges' effort to maintain textual coherence between seventeen disparate short-stories, strongly connotative symbols like those related to the Kabbalah and consistent allusion to its precise hermeneutics, incorporated throughout the stories, strengthens the abstract unity present in *Ficciones*, as well as providing a textual footing for other modes of interpretation. In this way, other current critical conversations that rely upon other disciplines, such as Chaos Theory, find a means of interpretation that simultaneously parallels and parts from the dominant conversation surrounding Borges.

In particular, a fascinating connection has been forged between Borges and Chaos Theory, which includes "nonlinear dynamics, irreversible thermodynamics, meteorology, and epidemiology," as enumerated by *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Hayles 9). Borges is a favorite of Hayles

because of the order in disorder that is developed in his fictions as well as the consciousness of a failed metanarrative and the abysmal nature of language. The following passage from Hayles helps to characterize the relationship between Borges and Chaos Theory:

A metaphor that self-reflexively mirrors itself in another metaphor threatens to lose the grounding that reassures us the comparison is not entirely free-floating. It could be imagined as a compass with one leg moving freely and the other resting not on the ground but on the leg of another compass...Borges's emblem of a staircase that ends in space, leading not to a door but to vertigo, speaks to the dangerous potential of metaphors to expose the ungrounded nature of discourse. From a scientist's viewpoint, the vertiginous staircase...explains very well why metaphors have not been admitted as valid components of the scientific process...what this response misses is the fact that language is always already metaphoric...At moments of dangerous reflexivity, when the polysemy of metaphor threatens to overwhelm scientific denotation with too much ambiguity, the tradition confronts the new possibilities that metaphor has brought into play. At this point a bifurcation is likely to appear, for the situation is sufficiently complex so that even a small fluctuation can send the commentary surrounding the heuristic in a new direction. It is no accident that decisive turns in the traditions...are often associated with self-reflexive metaphors. (33-4)

Thus, Borges' fiction, easily characterized as a self-reflexive allegory, reveals the complexities of language and reality, both necessary to science, opening the door to a theory that not only encompasses the "local determinism" (Lyotard) of science, but also conceptualizes our universe holistically, as a system of chaos in which order emerges periodically but not universally. It is the same in "The Library of Babel," where Borges writes:

I hereby state that it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite. Those who believe it to have limits hypothesize that in some remote place or places the corridors and staircases and hexagons may, inconceivably, end—which is absurd. And yet those who picture the world as unlimited forget that the number of possible books is *not*. I will be bold enough to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: *The Library is unlimited but periodic*. If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder—which, repeated, becomes order: the Order (CF118). While the many Borges critical approaches often diverge from one another, they all deal with finding value and meaning in *Ficciones*. In the search for value, there is certainly going to be contention, especially with the more radical interpretations of postmodernists or the narrower interpretation based on structuralism or new criticism. The beauty of Borges is that value has always been found, no matter the mode of interpretation. By exploring a pairing of postmodernism and Kabbalism, *Ficciones'* apparent disparity achieves a necessary, abstract unity.

Borges' stories are collage-like texts, enriched through their diversity, cohesive and coherent through their self-reflexivity. In *Collected Fictions*, Borges describes the universe as defined by its "essential characteristic" of "emptiness," where "under all the storm and lightning, there is nothing...all just appearance, a surface of images" (p. 5). *Ficciones*, in its attempted illustration of this universe, can and must be equally ungrounded, hence the ability of its fantastic and speculative nature to accurately comment upon the human condition in a postmodern world. The two sections of *Ficciones*, "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "Artifices," are thematically reflective of one another, though they approach these themes differently. The stories in "The Garden of Forking Paths" are fantastic examinations that use metaphor and language to explore the potentiality of fiction. In the two academic parodies, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and "A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain," Borges avoids necessity for the "laborious madness...of composing [the] vast books" that he attributes to Herbert Quain and Pierre Menard. Borges instead believes that "[t]he better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist" ("Forward" 67). The instrumental element of the imagined text is not limited to these two stories. "Tlon , Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" and "The Garden of Forking Paths" also employ this narrative technique, though their thematic implications vary. In each story, the imagined text and its author are secondary to the philosophical, epistemological, or speculative point that Borges attempts to make. "Tlon , Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," for example, contains the fictional text *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* which is "a literal...reprint of the 1902 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*" (68). Though "Volume XLVI" of this encyclopedia reveals the existence of the fictional country, Uqbar, it has no real thematic weight in the story.

In actuality, the "meat," if you will, of the story is in its discussion of the literature of Uqbar, "a literature of fantasy...its epics and legends never refer [ing] to reality but rather to the two imaginary realms of Mle'khnas and Tlon" (70). Tlon is an imaginary planet that the narrator learns is the setting for *all* of the literature of Uqbar. Therefore, the focus of the story is overtly reflexive of Borges' own fiction, literature based on the fantastic.

Similar reflexivity can be found throughout *The Garden of Forking Paths*. In the story, "The Library of Babel," Borges' narrative describes a library that contains, in text, the entire universe. This library "is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries [with] twenty bookshelves, five to each side" (112). The Library's "bookshelves contain all possible combinations of the twenty-two orthographic symbols" (115). In such, the Library contains the universe, "the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels ...the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all books" (115). This story, as well as this personal analysis, is theoretically contained in it. One line of the narrative reads, "This pointless, verbose epistle already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five bookshelves in one of the countless hexagons—as does its refutation" (118). In addressing itself as subject, Borges' narrative exemplifies a definitive element of postmodernism, its own fallibility, and its own corruption. As Francois Lytoard says of the postmodern, it is "incredulity toward metanarratives." Borges' "Library," which is essentially *the* metanarrative, shows that there is no universal rule, other than the simple fact "that the library is "total"—perfect, complete, and whole.. *All*—the detailed history of the future,...the faithful catalog of the Library, thousands and thousands of

false catalogs, the proof of the falsity of those false catalogs, a proof of the falsity of the *true* catalog" (115). Later in the narrative is an expression of the *human* condition in postmodernity:

...there must exist a book that is the cipher and perfect compendium *of all other books*, and some librarian must have examined that book...I cannot think it unlikely that there is such a total book on some shelf in the universe. I pray to the unknown gods that some man—even a single man, tens of centuries ago—has perused and read that book. If the honor and wisdom and joy of such a reading are not to be my own, then let them be for others. Let heaven exist, though my own place be in hell. Let me be tortured and battered and annihilated, but let there be one instant, one creature, wherein thy enormous Library may find its justification. (116-7)

Within this passage is the simultaneous terror and hope of modern man, the ever-present question of vindication, of order. To this question, Borges offers "this solution to the ancient problem: *The Library is unlimited but periodic*. If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder—which, repeated, becomes order: the Order" (CF118). Hence, the order in chaos is repetition, structured metaphorically as a library; therefore allowing the potential of language to represent the endless possibilities of the universe. As well, Borges' reference to "twenty-two orthographic symbols" (italics added), the Greek words 'orthos', (correct), and 'graphein' (to write), thus makes reference to the twenty-two letter, Hebrew alphabet. By calling this alphabet (alefbet in Hebrew) orthographic, Borges positions the narrative in line with a Kabbalic perspective

because the "correctness" of these symbols can be read to refer to the Kabbalist notion that the Torah's text comes directly from God. In the Library then, the connectedness from one text to any other is maintained only by the symbols in which they are written. This vein of interpretation lends itself to many central themes in Borges' *Ficciones* including: the notion of chance found in "The Lottery in Babylon"; the deferral of existence in "The Circular Ruins"; the interplay of esoteric interpretation of text in "The Garden of Forking Paths," "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," and "Tlon , Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"; and the nature and origin of language, though found in nearly all the stories, is particularly prominent in "The Library of Babel."

The reflexive nature of the narrative offers the main structural theme of *Ficciones*, creating cohesiveness. This structure is present within the individual stories and well as the text as a whole. "Artifices," the second section of stories in *Ficciones*, acts as a mirror to the first. Its title accurately identifies the nature of the stories as they are artful representations of the philosophical and epistemological speculations of "The Garden of Forking Paths." Borges' stories thematically focus on concepts such as time, identity, duality, social alienation and perspective. Each of the stories in "Artifices" generally focuses on a single point of speculation. In effect, Borges maintains an idea to the point of constructing an illustrative narrative around it. "The End" plays with the narrative perspective, telling the story through a man lying in bed, paralyzed, only able to see that which is right outside of his door. It's told in third-person but focalized through Racabarren, the prostrate man in bed. The story's action follows the dual between Fierro (presumably Martin Fierro, the subject of Jose Hernandez' famous epic poem) and an unidentified black guitarist. Borges highlights the connectedness of

literature, creating meaning by fusing two texts, *Martin Fierro* and "The End," through language and artifice, subsequently adding to a postmodern universe in which connectivity can be achieved through literature and language. Both texts are enriched by the presence of the other, an illustration of the ability for a text to evolve through interconnectedness, "since books are a living thing in constant growth," as Borges said in Roberto Alifano's *Twenty-four Conversations with Borges* (1984). Additionally, the narrative intrusion—as in the line, "From learning to pity the misfortunes of the heroes of...novels, we wind up feeling too much pity for our own"—and the narrative perspective creates a text which is seemingly "aware" of itself. By itself, the postmodern elements of this story are subtle, but when connected to the other stories, especially those in the first section, the result is for those elements to stand out, enriched by the narratives around it, a continuation of enrichment through the connectivity of language.

References and symbols throughout *Ficciones*, including the overt allegory of "The Library of Babel," point to the Kabbalah. Many of the Borges' symbols and techniques mimic or allude to those from this esoteric Jewish tradition. One of Borges' more evident Judaic images can be found in his story, "The Circular Ruins," a fiction in which a man dreams into existence another being. "He dreamed the heart warm, active, secret—about the size of a closed fist, a garnet-colored thing inside the dimness of a human body that was still faceless and sexless; he dreamed it, with painstaking love, for fourteen brilliant nights" (CF98). The Kabbalah's methodology, not its doctrine, is what is vital to a comprehensive examination of *Ficciones* as a forerunner of the postmodern movement.

Stephen S. Soud's essay, "Borges the Golem-Maker," equates the creation of a being in Borges' story with the Judaic notion of the "golem," an animate being created by a human from inanimate material, thus a being not created by God. In the narrative, the protagonist prays to a statue one night, at a time when his creation is near completion. The statue is an icon of an unknown god. "That evening, at sunset, the statue filled his dreams. In the dream it was alive, and trembling...the manifold god revealed to the man that its earthly name was Fire" (99). The god gave life to the dreaming man's creation, and would "so fully bring him to life that every creature, save Fire itself and the man who dreamed him, would take him for a man of flesh and blood" (99). In the end, as flames from a "concentric holocaust" surrounds him and the circular ruins in which he has existed, dreaming up his own creation, "[h]e walked into the tatters of flame, but they did not bite his flesh—they caressed him, bathed him without heat and without combustion. With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him (100)."

Thus, Borges creates a chain of creation, one that Stephen S. Soud interprets as a means by which Borges creates his own "presence" in the text. Accordingly, the way that Borges includes Kabbalistic and Judaic images and symbols is not to indoctrinate his texts, but rather as a means of communicating certain methodologies of interpretation to the reader. By representing certain Kabbalic traditions in text, Borges calls attention to their hermeneutics, something that is primary to the Kabbalist. By calling on this tradition, one in which it is believed that all language and text is descended from an initial divine text, one written in "twenty-two orthographic symbols," Borges' focus turns to the nature of language (CF115). Hence, in a world which questions the ability to

maintain "the concept of unity ... in the absence of the transcendental signified" (Soud 739), an "incredulity toward metanarratives," and the "crisis of metaphysical philosophy" (Lyotard xxiii-xxiv), Borges finds the only way to maintain a foundation in literature is through language itself, hence his allegorical reference to the Kabbalah and the origin of language. Additionally, through a maintained presence, Borges engenders esoteric communication between the author and reader, allowing meaning and the simulation of reality to flourish in the environment of pure fiction, in the fantasticism of fabula. This concept as well does not avoid Borges' self-reflexivity. In "The Garden of Forking Paths," Borges illustrates the notion of esoteric communication through text, especially in one line: Ts'ui Pen: "I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths" (CFi2s).

In this sense, Borges' *Ficciones* both outlines and exemplifies the postmodern narrative, offering a model for both the postmodern author and reader. The structure and technique of the narratives create a reflexivity that illustrates Borges' awareness of the ability for fiction to represent and question a postmodern reality. Within the fantastic genre, Borges explores a universe that is "a surface of images," one lacking the positivism of the metanarrative, and instead grounding his fictions through the interconnectivity of literature in the labyrinth of the text. Using fiction to comment on the postmodern condition, Borges sheds light on themes such as identity, time, language and the artifice of literature. The narrative intrusion and structural reflexivity of *Ficciones* allows Borges to maintain a subtle presence throughout the collection, which subsequently reinforces the commentary on the abovementioned themes and enhances the abstract continuity of the text. Furthermore, Borges' utilization of the imagined text

in order to create his narrative, a theme reflected in "The Library of Babel," locates *Ficciones* beyond the constraints of time. As Sharon Lynn Sieber writes in her essay, "Time, Simultaneity, and the Fantastic in the Narrative of Jorge Luis Borges:"

Space overcomes time and events take on a kind of linear displacement. Patterns are formed through the travels in space rather than through the events unfolding on the time line, or through the displacement from time through alienation. The structure of this spatialization helps to develop further the connections within simultaneity, analogic vision, the fantastic, and language and also articulates just how the conflict between reason and revelation or science and mysticism (and our ideas of the space-time continuum and linearity) has further eroded the temporal foundation of modernity. (200)

By "decentering" (Hutcheon) this narrative from a supposed metanarrative, or figuratively, by decentering this text from "a book that is the cipher and perfect compendium of *all other books*" (CF116), and also decentering the text from time, Borges constructs an environment in which language is the only universal, one that is free from the constraints of reality, where the mere potential for a text to exist makes its existence real.

A line from "The Library of Babel" exemplifies *Ficciones'* representation of language and the fantastical and his own self-awareness of the intricate forms he has created:

There is no combination of characters one can make...that the divine Library has not foreseen and that in one or more of its secret tongues does

not hide a terrible significance. There is no syllable one can speak that is not filled with tenderness and terror, that is not, in one of those languages, the mighty name of a god. To speak is to commit tautologies. (CF117) Borges creates philosophical texts that engage epistemological issues not by using a linear argument but by employing the fantastic. In this manner, Borges' narratives construct a labyrinthine text that is self-reflexive in order to reflect the universe around it. It achieves what Francois Lytoard calls a "local determinism," the result of both the failings of the metanarrative and the abilities of language. Hence, Borges' *Ficciones* accurately illustrates the postmodern condition because it does two things. First, it locates its own fallibility as a disconnected narrative, one lacking the foundation of a grand metanarrative. Second, it illustrates how language can represent and simulate reality. Of course, this reality is not fixed but open-ended. In this sense, *Ficciones*⁷ hyperreal metanarratives open an infinite universe of interpretative possibilities.

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