

A LABYRINTH OF SYMBOLS  
EXPLORING 'THE GARDEN OF FORKING PATHS'



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INTRODUCTION

**N**estled in the middle of J. L. Borges' short story "The Garden of Forking Paths" is the suggestion that a text, a work of fiction, can be a labyrinth. The obvious question, then, would be whether this story is a labyrinth. In order to formulate an answer, it seems necessary to ask another question: "What is a labyrinthine text?" In the following pages, I will explore some of the meanders of Borges' story, as well as the idea of a text which is a labyrinth, with the hope of formulating an answer to both questions.

Since I will not be working with a formal theory of labyrinthine texts, I run the risk of ending by defining a labyrinthine text with the very story I'm working with. Nonetheless, I hope that through an examination of the story, I will find some basic elements of the labyrinthine experience. A physical labyrinth has a plan, although the victim of the labyrinth has no access to it. But if a text can be labyrinth, then it must be a labyrinth of symbols and ideas, such that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to guess the plan of the labyrinth.

A physical labyrinth has walls, hedges, or some other form of boundary that impedes or guides the movement of the subject. But in a textual labyrinth, it's not so clear where the walls are, or when one has reached the center.

When we speak of labyrinthine texts we are dealing with labyrinths of concepts; but haven't labyrinths in fact always been first and foremost conceptual? Building a physical labyrinth is a symbolic act: if the purpose is to restrain a prisoner, as Minos did with the minotaur, it would be much easier to build one chamber, a cell, with a locked door. But the image of a prison which is a labyrinth is much more symbolically charged, probably because the experience of being lost, of moving without a clear direction, is one which we all recognize, and which is a powerful metaphor for our experience of our mortal lives. We all have, then, an intuition of the labyrinthine; my task will be to describe how this sensation is realized in the reading of "The Garden of Forking Paths".

To move through a labyrinth is to explore an unknown space. In this sense, reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth. When we sit with a new book in our hands, we stand before an unknown universe. As we open the book, and read the first sentences, we are taking the first steps in the exploration of this new world. And yet, there are few stories, or novels, that we would call "labyrinthine". In general, a narrative text acts as a guide to itself. It helps the reader move along its paths, discover its secrets. There are, of course, very complicated literary spaces, worlds populated with many characters, stories that stretch over centuries, and tangled plots which can only with difficulty be disentangled. Are these labyrinthine works? Maybe. But it seems to me that if everything is resolved by the final page, then we are not dealing with a truly labyrinthine text. On the other hand, it doesn't seem that a story that ends inconclusively should necessarily be characterized as labyrinthine either. There are lots of stories and novels that leave the reader asking "and then what happened?", but which we wouldn't tend to think of as labyrinthine. The reader can come up with his own endings to the plot lines left hanging at the end of the tale, but that would constitute work which takes place outside of the text itself. Perhaps one important characteristic of a labyrinthine

story would be that it invites, or demands, a second reading. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Now is the time to enter Borges' garden.

#### THE FIRST READING

The story begins by alluding to a book by Liddell Hart, called *Historia de la Guerra en Europa*. An editor, about whom we know very little, summarizes a paragraph from Hart's work, and explains that the following text, the confession of the spy Yu Tsun, "[...] throws an unsuspected light over the whole affair" (19)<sup>1</sup>. The reader is thus prepared for an alternative account of the historical facts found in Hart's *Historia*. He settles in for a good story. And yet in these very first lines, the story is already weaving its deceptive web, inaugurating a game of eliciting the wrong expectations in the reader, a game that will continue throughout the story. The reference to Hart is in large part false, or rather not so much false as it is complicated—much more complicated than the reader imagines at this initial point. I'll return to the case of Liddell Hart, but this will be in the second reading. For the moment, I'd like to remain a little longer in the experience of the "innocent" reader, who enters the garden for the first time.

There are stylistic elements which disorient the first-time reader (and, let's face it, the reader who returns again and again to the story as well). We seem to be reading a spy-story, an action adventure. Yu Tsun's confession, which is lacking the first two pages, begins *in medias res*. The main character is in mortal danger, must flee, and has a daring plan. And yet he constantly digresses into philosophical speculation. After a hurried escape by train, the tone of the narration abruptly changes: after seven pages of frantic activity, suddenly Yu Tsun, who previously had no time whatsoever, suddenly has time to daydream about fantastic labyrinths, and to discuss theories of time with a certain sinologist. In fact, Yu Tsun tells us, his train ride has only gained him forty minutes, but the change

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<sup>1</sup> "[...]Jarroja una insospechada luz sobre el caso" (*Ficciones* 100). Quotes from the story used in the main text will be from Donald A. Yates' translation in *Labyrinths*, and the Spanish originals in the footnotes are from *Ficciones*.

in the tone of the narration, or in the spy's state of mind, makes those forty minutes extend, as if time itself had slowed down, until the abrupt reappearance of the spy-catcher, Richard Madden, breaks the spell. This tension between the two experiences of time (no time and all-the-time-in-the-world) is most noticeable in the spatial change from the city to the countryside, but can also be found in the first pages, in which we see a disorienting oscillation between action and philosophical reflections which makes the reader ask himself "what is this that I'm reading?"

Our hypothetical first-time reader learns that the character Yu Tsun has two immediate tasks: to flee from Captain Richard Madden and to communicate his message to Berlin. The reader knows that Yu Tsun has a plan, but doesn't know what it is. In the initial reading there is, then, an element of mystery. Our reader doesn't know why Yu Tsun consults the telephone book, takes a train to Ashgrove, walks to the Stephen Albert's house, and kills him. Only immediately after the murder of the sinologist do we learn the nature of the plan. And yet, once the initial mystery has been cleared up, the reader is left with the feeling that there must have been something he missed in the story. All sorts of questions pop up. What did all of this have to do with the reference to Liddell Hart? What was the point of entering a long digression on a more or less fantastic theory of time in the middle of a spy story? And why, our poor reader asks himself, do I have the feeling that the digression wasn't a digression at all but in fact the nucleus of the story? But if it was the nucleus of the story, why does it seem like a digression from the main theme? A choice must be made. The reader must either close the book and not worry about it, or return to the story for a second reading. The reader who chooses to return stands at the gates of the labyrinth.

#### LABYRINTHINE ALLUSIONS

##### "LIDDELL HART": APOCRYPHAL HISTORIAN

Let's return to Liddell Hart. At first glance, this is the reference that sets the stage for the story. Ronald Christ, for instance, expresses the intuition of the naïve reader when he says: "[...] we can recall the

opening of 'The Garden of Forking Paths,' which shows Borges operating out of an historical background, grafting his fiction, once again, on the stock of fact" (*Narrow* 136). But this is only part of the story.

In fact, the reference to Liddell Hart is problematic, starting with the fact the Hart's own words do not appear in the story. Liddell Hart is a real, historical person, who has written various books on European wars, but apparently none of them are called *Historia de la Guerra en Europa*. In 1930 he published *The Real War*, a work on the First World War, and in 1934 the same work was republished as *A History of the Real War 1914-1918*. The copy that I found at the local library is called *A History of the First World War*, and this is the title that it has carried since 1970. "The Garden of Forking Paths" was published in 1941, so Borges could not have known that Liddell Hart was to continue publishing the same book with yet another title. Nonetheless, none of the various titles of Hart's book is "*History of the War in Europe*", nor does it seem that the book has been translated to Spanish with this name.

Another problem: the story "The Garden of Forking Paths" has also been published several times, with different page numbers in the reference to Liddell Hart. In my copy of *Ficciones*, for instance, the first words in the story are: "*En la página 242 de Historia de la Guerra en Europa [...]*" (100). In an insightful and amusing article, "The Library of Forking Paths", Robert Chibka investigates a veritable jungle of page numbers, including various translations of the story to English and diverse compilations of "*Obras Completas*", none of which corresponds to a page number in a book by Liddell Hart which discusses the delay in the English offensive mentioned by the "editor" of the story.

Clearly Borges cannot be held responsible for all the errors in translation, changes made by publishers, etc. They are unwitting accomplices. But the seed of doubt is already present in the text, when an allusion is made to a real book calling it by a similar but fallacious name. Apparently, in the first British edition of *The Real War*, on page 252, there is a paragraph which resembles in many ways the one cited by Borges (Almeida Hecho 234; Chibka Library 112). In my

copy of *History of the First World War*, the passage is on page 240, and reads:

The bombardment began on June 24<sup>th</sup>; the attack was intended for June 29<sup>th</sup>, but was later postponed until July 1<sup>st</sup>, owing to a momentary break in the weather. This postponement, made at French request, involved not only the spreading out of the ammunition over a longer period, and consequent loss of intensity, but a greater strain on part of the assaulting troops, who, after being keyed up for the effort, had to remain another forty-eight hours in cramped trenches under the exhausting noise of their own gunfire and the enemy's retaliation- conditions made worse by torrential rain which flooded the trenches.

The reader who finds this quote will note (as many critics have) that although it resembles in many ways the paragraph summarized by the "editor" of the confession of Yu Tsun, it is not the same. Most importantly, the dates have changed so that the attack which, according to the editor was "planned for the 24<sup>th</sup> of July" (19)<sup>2</sup> in fact should have taken place on June 29<sup>th</sup> and was delayed until the first of July, while the editor claims that it occurred on 29<sup>th</sup> of July. The point of all of this being that the book by Liddell Hart that is mentioned in the story either is not one of the several books by Liddell Hart that we can find in the library, or it is the actual book by Liddell Hart, but transformed in the memory of an editor who hasn't bothered to check his references.

Whatever the case may be, before we have traversed the first paragraph of the story, we're already lost in a bibliographic labyrinth of false allusions: the allusion to the book by Liddell Hart is an allusion to a book which does not exist, but which seems very much like a book that does in fact exist, except that the book which does exist does not contain the relevant passage, although, on a different page, there is a passage which very closely resembles the quotation mentioned, if it weren't for the fact that certain details, such as the dates explicitly mentioned in the story, do not coincide.

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<sup>2</sup> "había sido planeado para el veinticuatro de Julio" (100)

So Christ is right when he says that the fiction of "The Garden of Forking Paths" is grafted onto history, but the reader who tries to find page 242 of *Historia de la Guerra en Europa* is justified in asking himself what sort of "history" this is. This is an example of a technique which (as is well known) is common in Borges' fictions, a technique that in the present context I call "labyrinthine allusions". Borges' stories have a strange capacity to infiltrate what we call reality, much like the world of Tlön, a labyrinth "devised by men [...] destined to be deciphered by men" (*Labyrinths* 18) <sup>3</sup>penetrates the real world. When I read the paragraph from *History of the First World War* that I have reproduced above, I am at the same time reading and not reading the passage cited in the story. And when a reader who started by reading a short-story and suddenly finds himself reading a book on history which is not the book mentioned in the short-story and who gets excited on discovering a paragraph which isn't the one he was looking for ought to ask himself what he thinks he's doing. "The Garden of Forking Paths" appropriates Hart's book, and creates a new book, written by another "Liddell Hart", which is parallel, but distinct. How many books do we create every day, when we believe that we accurately remember a title, or a quote?

This brings me to another aspect of the technique of "false" or "labyrinthine" allusions. If we the re-reading and investigation of "The Garden" is an exploration of a labyrinth of symbols, we won't be able to predict where the paths may lead us. All we can say is "let's continue" or "this path is not for me". Quite possibly the investigation of some aspects will lead to dead ends, but I can't agree with Jack Himelblau who writes in "*El arte de J. L. Borges*", speaking of the "false" allusion to Liddell Hart: "*Este juego, el de burlarse del lector, es otra característica de la estética de Borges*" (40). I've never felt that Borges' game was a matter of laughing at the reader. The story can be read quite well without following any of the leads that the author has put in the text. I'm thinking, for instance, of the often-quoted comment made by John Sturrock, speaking of the allusion to Hart: "I have not checked this quotation [sic] because it does not

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<sup>3</sup> "urdido de hombres [...] destinado a que lo descifren los hombres" (*Ficciones* 39)

matter in the least whether it is accurate." (*Paper Tigers* 191). But if one chooses to follow the leads, I don't have the impression that the author is playing a joke on me, but rather that I enter a dialog, or conversation with the story, which is a much more exciting way to read.

THE *HUNG LU MENG*: A CHINESE LABYRINTH

There is another allusion in the story that I'd like to explore, because it also offers a possibility for the reader to converse with the text. As Yu Tsun walks through the English countryside, he thinks about the novel written by his ancestor Ts'ui Pên, a novel "even more populous than the *Hung Lu Meng*" (22)<sup>4</sup>. Let's imagine that our reader/Theseus decides to abandon the Liddell Hart path and instead sets about reading Cao Xuequin's *Hung Lu Meng*. He will find a work that is similar in many respects to Ts'ui Pên's *Garden of Forking Paths*. The *Hung Lu Meng* is an enormous Chinese novel from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and its story sounds as if it were taken from a Borges fiction. It circulated first in manuscript copies containing eighty chapters, but without an ending. When at last it was printed, it appeared with an additional forty chapters added, apparently by another author, although the editor who published it insisted that he had not written them, and was only acting as editor. To make matters worse, in the first chapter the author, Cao Xuequin, also claims that the work is not his, and that he is only one of many editors who have worked with the text:

Old Kong Mei-xi from the homeland of Confucius called the book *A Mirror for the Romantic*. Wu Yu-feng called it *A Dream of Golden Days*. Cao Xuequin in his Nostalgia Studio worked on it for ten years, in the course of which he rewrote it on less than five times, dividing it into chapters, composing chapter headings, renaming it *The Twelve Beauties of Jinling*, and adding an introductory quatrain. Red Inkstone restored the original title when he recopied the book and added his second set of annotations to it.

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<sup>4</sup> "todavía más populosa que el *Hung Lu Meng*" (106)



This, then, is a true account of how *The Story of the Stone* [The *Hung Lu Meng*] came to be written.

Pages full of idle words

Penned with hot and bitter tears:

All men call the author fool;

None his secret message hears. (*Story 51*)

Following this introduction, in which the author presents himself as one of a series of editors, the story starts, but we enter directly into a dream-sequence, without realizing that it is a dream. In the dream, the dreamer meets two monks, who promptly disappear through a gate bearing the inscription: "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real." After a few pages, the dreamer wakes and walks out of his house, only to meet the very same monks from his dream, who he had believed to be products of his imagination.

What could all of this have to do with Borges' labyrinth? Maybe nothing. Unlike a physical labyrinth, a labyrinth of symbols, of ideas, doesn't exist until the reader explores it. And how does one explore a labyrinth of symbols and ideas? By reading, of course, and by thinking. In a certain sense, the reader creates his own labyrinth. The paths, the indications are in the story: the allusion to Liddell Hart, the reference to the *Hung Lu Meng*. One can follow the paths or not. On following them, one may find something that is relevant-but it's impossible to know. That is to say, it is impossible to know what the author was thinking when he put the indications in the story. On the other hand, any reader is within her right to say what is relevant for *her* reading, for *her* version of the labyrinth. This brings us to a peculiar characteristic of the textual labyrinth: reader A and reader B, reading the same story, will explore to distinct labyrinths.

I believe that the fragment of the *Hung Lu Meng* mentioned above does indeed have relevance for Borges' story. First: the disappearance of the author, with an editor of documents in his place. The *Hung Lu Meng*, like "The Garden of Forking Paths", is without a doubt a work of fiction. And yet, it presents itself as a collection of more or less incomplete documents. This is paralleled in "The Garden of Forking Paths", which presents itself as the publication of a

fragment of a historical document. Another element: as a consequence of the many (historical) editors of the *Hung Lu Meng*, the text has inconsistencies. David Hawkes, who has translated the book to English, writes in his introduction that there are several things in the text that suggest that one of the characters hangs herself- and yet in the scene of her death she dies quietly in her bed of a mysterious illness. Apparently, one of the editors didn't approve of the violent death and changed it, without removing all the other textual indications. Doesn't this seem to correspond to Yu Tsun's complaint about his ancestor's novel: "The book is an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts. I examined it once: in the third chapter the hero dies, in the fourth he is alive." (24).<sup>5</sup>

And the labyrinth of possible keys to "The Garden" that one can find in the *Hung Lu Meng* continues. For instance: the poem that Cao Xuequin "added" to his text. There is no doubt that Borges, like Cao Xuequin is interested in the theme of the secret message. But wouldn't these lines also be a good description of Ts'ui Pên? "All men call the author fool; / None his secret message hears". Or perhaps a description of Yu Tsun, and his act of secret communication, the assassination of Stephen Albert, the only person who had been able to decipher Ts'ui Pên's secret message? Yu Tsun's work has certainly cost him "hot and bitter tears"; at least, he says: "He does not know (no one can know) my innumerable contrition and weariness" (29).<sup>6</sup> And as we will see, it is not at all certain that anyone has heard his secret message.

Let's also think about the words: "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; / Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real". Could this work as an epigraph for "The Garden"? If one of the central themes of the story is time, it seems to me that another is history, which is in reality nothing more than another aspect of the problem of time. "The Garden" presents itself as another version of an historical event: a version which is completely improbable, based on coincidences of immense proportions, a version which nobody

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<sup>5</sup> "El libro es un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios. Lo he examinado alguna vez: en el tercer capítulo muere el héroe, en el cuarto está vivo?" (110)

<sup>6</sup> "No sabe (nadie puede saber) mi innumerable contrición y cansancio." (118)

would ever believe. But it turns out that the “official” version in the *Historia de la Guerra Europea* is also a fiction. And if this is a fiction, what are we supposed to believe about the many books by the real Liddell Hart? While looking for the quote mentioned in the story, it’s impossible to avoid reading some of Hart’s prose, which presents the chaotic events of the First World War in a completely definitive (or as Rudy (Garden 134) calls it, “positivist”) language. In the course of a war, all sorts of things occur: atrocities, barbaric acts, and doubtless also acts of sacrifice and of generosity. Reading the paragraph that I quote above, and in spite of its positivist tone, one can imagine that chaotic world, a world governed by chance, that the soldiers trapped in the labyrinth of trenches flooded by torrential rains must have experienced. But the model reader of Hart’s book wants a coherent story, a definitive history of the First World War; he wants to know “what happened”, and doesn’t want to worry about the fact that what he is reading is written by one person, who nonetheless presents everything without the smallest doubt that he knows “what happened”. But who can know what really happens in a war (or every day)? The history written by “Liddell Hart” in the story is a fiction, but the real history, written by the real Liddell Hart, indeed any book of history, is also a fiction. I can’t claim to know what the words in the *Hung Lu Meng* mean, but it seems clear that one of the projects of “The Garden of Forking Paths” is to explore the relation between reality and fiction.

After taking leave of the two monks whom he first had dreamed and then later met in the real (but which is real?) world, who should the dreamer of the *Hung Lu Meng* encounter but a character named Yu Cun or, as it is also transcribed, Yu Tsun. The reader of “The Garden” who has followed the path of the allusion made by Yu Tsun to the *Hung Lu Meng* suddenly finds himself reading the story of another (or is it?) character named Yu Tsun, who forms part of the a Chinese novel that in many respects resembles the novel by Ts’ui Pên, ancestor of Yu Tsun from “The Garden”. One possibility would be to continue reading the hundred and twenty chapters of the *Hung Lu Meng*, looking for possible connections between this Chinese labyrinth and Borges’ labyrinth. For my part, I count myself satisfied and return (for the moment) to Borges’ story.

## POSSIBLE FLOOR-PLANS OF THE LABYRINTH:

## 1. "THE GARDEN OF CONVERGING PATHS"

In the center of the labyrinth of paths that Yu Tsun traces through the English countryside there is a garden, and in that garden there is a pavilion, and in that pavilion there is another labyrinth: Ts'ui Pên's novel, the labyrinth of symbols. This is the text which, according to Stephen Albert's analysis, implies a theory of bifurcating times, an infinite spider web of parallel universes. Ts'ui Pên calls his work a "garden of forking paths", and Albert's exposition of the novel forms the nucleus of the story which bears the same name (and which is part of a collection of stories which also is called *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*). The question is whether the story "The Garden" might not be written according to the same plan as the novel. It is tempting to think about the story as if it took place in a universe like the one described by Stephen, a universe of bifurcating times and worlds. But it doesn't seem that "The Garden" has the same sort of internal inconsistencies as in Ts'ui Pên's novel, and there are no indications that the scheme of Ts'ui Pên's *Garden* is the same Borges' "Garden".

Nevertheless, "The Garden" is a story that deals with alternatives, options and decisions, and I think it could be interesting to investigate the moments in the story that do have this aspect of bifurcating worlds. According to Stephen, Ts'ui Pên's theory is that every time several things could happen, all of them do, in fact, happen. This is what supposedly happens in his novel, but this would imply an infinite book, which is impossible. Stephen says: "In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others. In the work of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses- simultaneously- all of them" (26)<sup>7</sup>. But what is the example that he reads? Two versions of the same battle: in one, the army wins. In the other, they also win. This same model, in which two al-

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<sup>7</sup> "En todas las ficciones, cada vez que un hombre se enfrenta con diversas alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; en la del casi inextricable Ts'ui Pên, opta- simultáneamente- por todas." (112)

ternatives lead to the same result, appears in the story as well. For example:

1. Yu Tsun's plan. Yu Tsun (like Fang, in Stephen's example) has a secret. He knows where the new British artillery depot is located. He needs to communicate this information to his boss in Berlin, and finds that the only possible method is to kill a man whose name is precisely the same as the word he needs to communicate so that his *Jefe* will read this word in the newspapers. He carries out his plan, but in the last paragraph we read: "I have communicated to Berlin the secret name of the city that they must attack. They bombed it yesterday; I read it in the same papers that offered to England the mystery of the learned Sinologist Stephen Albert who was murdered by a stranger, one Yu Tsun" (29)<sup>8</sup>. The wording is ambiguous: if by "the same papers" Yu Tsun is referring to the newspapers in general, his declaration may be correct. But if by "the same papers" he means the same *edition* of the newspaper, that is to say the newspapers published on the same day (or the next day) as the assassination, then the *Jefe* in Berlin will not have had time to read and decipher Yu Tsun's message. In this case, Yu Tsun's plan seems all the more pathetic. The spy was faced with a choice: kill Stephen or not. He killed him, and the Germans bombed the city of Albert. But if he had not killed him, they would have bombed it anyway- the Germans already knew his secret.

2. The moment in which Richard Madden misses the train. Yu Tsun says:

I told myself that the duel had already begun and that I had won the first encounter by frustrating, even if for forty minutes, even if by a stroke of fate, the attack of my adversary. I argued that this slightest of victories foreshadowed a total victory. [I argued that the victory

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<sup>8</sup> "[...] he comunicado a Berlín el secreto nombre de la ciudad que deben atacar. Ayer la bombardearon; lo leí en los mismos periódicos que propusieron a Inglaterra el enigma de que el sinólogo Stephen Albert muriera asesinado por desconocido, Yu Tsun." (117)

was not so slight, since without this precious difference that the train schedule provided me I would be imprisoned, or dead] (22)<sup>9</sup>

This is the alternative universe that Yu Tsun imagines. But in the “real” universe of the story, he *is* in jail, and *is* about to die.

3. The structure of the story itself. According to the history book, the delay in the English attack was caused by the rains, but the editor presents another alternative: the assassination of Stephen Albert. It remains unclear, at least to me, what the connection is supposed to be. But be that as it may, whatever the cause may have been, the delay remains the same. And while we’re on the subject, the story as told by any of the Liddell Harts that we have seen has the same structure: the attack was planned for one day, but took place on another because of the rains. It was delayed, but it took place nonetheless. The delay was, as the editor of the story says: “insignificant” (19)<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, if we read the original quote from Liddell Hart, we see that the delay was indeed significant for the soldiers in the trenches, who had to wait two more days “[...] in cramped trenches under the exhausting noise of their own gunfire and the enemy’s retaliation- conditions made worse by torrential rain which flooded the trenches” (Hart *History* 240).

4. Viktor Runeberg’s death. Richard Madden enters Runeberg’s room, and kills him. Yu Tsun, speculating on what must have happened, says: “It meant that Runeberg had been arrested or murdered” (19)<sup>11</sup>. Then the editor voices his own opinion and says that no, Madden killed Runeberg in “self-defense”. The events are the same in both worlds- the only difference is the perspective. Madden assassinates Runeberg, or he wounds him in self-defense, and these wounds ultimately cause his death. Either way, Runeberg dies. It is

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<sup>9</sup> The bracketed sentence is my own translation, since this entire sentence is absent from the Yates translation. The original reads: Me dije que ya estaba empeñando mi duelo y que yo había Ganado el primer asalto, al burlar, siquiera por cuarenta minutos, siquiera por un favor de azar, el ataque de mi adversario. Argüí que esa Victoria mínima prefiguraba la Victoria total. Argüí que no era mínima, ya que sin esa diferencia preciosa que el horario de trenes me deparaba, yo estaría en la cárcel, o muerto. (105)

<sup>10</sup> “nada significativa” (100)

<sup>11</sup> “Quería decir que Runeberg había sido arrestado, o asesinado.” (101)

a question of ethics. If we have followed the path to Hart's *History*, we will have read at least a few pages on the First World War. The story takes place during the first mechanized war, with all possibilities for killing truly large numbers of people that this entails, and yet Yu Tsun says that killing Stephen Albert was "an atrocious undertaking" (22)<sup>12</sup>, and when he says that Ruenberg was "assassinated", the editor gets his hackles up and says that it was only in self-defense.

I particularly like this last example, because it illustrates the role that perception plays in the story. Another example of this type: in Yu Tsun's world, his ancestor was an eccentric and his novel was a disgrace to the family; in Stephen Albert's world, Ts'ui Pên is a genius and his novel a masterpiece. In the novel, there are infinite parallel universes. But in the story, the parallel universes are universes in which the events stay the same, and the only thing that alters is the way they are perceived. This is suggested in the two versions of the same chapter that Stephen reads to Yu Tsun:

In the first, an army marches to a battle across a lonely mountain; the horror of the rocks and shadows makes the men undervalue their lives and they gain an easy victory. In the second, the same army traverses a palace where a great festival is taking place; the resplendent battle seems to them a continuation of the celebration and they win the victory (26)<sup>13</sup>.

The battle is the same- all that changes in the two versions is the perspective of the army. All of this brings me to another element I would like to elaborate on. Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth consists of the idea that all options are realized, simultaneously. But even if the universe were like this, we would never know it. Chibka, in his excellent article on "The Garden", writes: "Let us stipulate, though no one believes it for a second, that time "actually" resembles the labyrinth

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<sup>12</sup> "una empresa atroz" (105)

<sup>13</sup> "En la primera, un ejército marcha hacia una batalla a través de una montaña desierta; el horror de las piedras y de la sombra le hace menospreciar la vida y logra con facilidad la victoria; en la segunda, el mismo ejército atraviesa un palacio en el que hay una fiesta; la resplandeciente batalla les parece una continuación de la fiesta y logran la victoria" (113-14).

Albert finds in Ts'ui Pên's work; even so, for any given mortal, situated instantaneously at a given spot on a given branch, no labyrinth will exist" (Library 118). We are all of us *in* the labyrinth of life, making decisions and never knowing what would have happened if we had chosen otherwise. Without the total perspective, without a map of the labyrinth, the other possibilities remain forever virtual, unrealized- even supposing that in other universes they are real. That is, of course, why the decisions we make are important. The theory that Stephen proposes makes it easier for Yu Tsun to kill him: the spy can always tell himself that in another universe he didn't do it. But for Yu Tsun, as for any of us, there is only one universe. In Yu Tsun's universe he shoots Stephen.

Although the story presents a theory of multiple times, the universe as presented in the story is of a single time, in which real events can have various interpretations. Viktor Runeberg was murdered or killed in self-defense. Ts'ui Pên was an inspired novelist, or an incompetent hack; not only that, he had two projects (to write a novel and build a labyrinth) which turn out to be the same. The delay of the English attack was insignificant or unbearable. Yu Tsun kills Stephen Albert, and wins, or he loses. "I have won out abominably" (29)<sup>14</sup>. In other words, he has won and lost at the same time. Simultaneously, as Stephen Albert would say.

## 2. THE GARDEN OF MIRROR AND DOUBLES

Another way to think of the story is to look at it as the labyrinth of Crete, a labyrinth with a central chamber containing a minotaur. Yu Tsun, the Theseus of this model, moves through the labyrinth, in this case the paths of the English countryside, going left at every intersection, until he reaches Stephen Albert's garden. Yu Tsun reaches the center, and kills the sinologist. What kind of minotaur is Stephen, then? Although it is true that he is no monster, like the minotaur he is a sort of double being. An Englishman, he has dedicated himself to the study of Chinese culture. And by dedicating himself to the study of Ts'ui Pên's work he becomes, in a sense, Ts'ui

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<sup>14</sup> "Abominablemente he vencido" (117).



Pên. He is the one who discovers the truth about the chaotic novel, and in the course of reading, re-reading, transcribing and most importantly translating and correcting the work, it can be said that he has in effect written it himself. Moreover, the only thing we know about Ts'ui Pên's famous theory of bifurcating times is what Stephen himself tells us, in an utterly definitive manner. Ts'ui Pên's theory, then, is Stephen's theory. Of course, there are other similarities: both work with the same labyrinth in a pavilion in the middle of a labyrinthine garden, both are murdered by foreigners, etc. I suspect that the phonetic resemblance of their names, Ts'ui Pên/Stephen, is not accidental.

So Ts'ui Pên and Stephen are doubles. J. M. Aguirre, finding another element in this multiple figure, proposes that Ts'ui Pên can also be considered a double of Borges. I admit that I am not convinced by all his arguments, but there are undoubtedly aspects of the Chinese author that coincide with the life of Borges: he is a writer and a maker of labyrinths, he has "*aficiones metafísicas, místicas*" and "*la controversia filosófica usurpa buena parte de su novella*" (*Solución* 115). But if Ts'ui Pên is in some way an image of his creator, Borges, then it seems to me that Stephen Albert also resembles a type of reader of Borges. He makes a tremendous effort to understand Ts'ui Pên's text, he elaborates a theory based on the text, and then attributes this theory to the author. Which makes me think of the foreword that Borges writes to *The Narrow Act*, by Ronald Christ:

Some unsuspected things, many secret links and affinities, have been revealed to me by this book of Ronald Christ's. I am often asked what my message is; the obvious answer is that I have no message. I am neither a thinker nor a moralist, but simply a man of letters who turns his own perplexities and that respected system of perplexities we call philosophy into the forms of literature. The fact that in one of my stories the man is both the dreamer and the dream does not necessarily mean that I am a follower of Berkeley and of the Buddha. However, the writer must be thankful for being shown that he has gone beyond what he attempted, beyond his intentions. (ix)

In his explication, Stephen does not doubt for a minute that he understands Ts'ui Pên's novel, and that he has discovered the author's intention. He is completely convinced that Ts'ui Pên believed

in a system of bifurcating paths, but Ts'ui Pên has never proposed such a theory: he is guilty of no more than the writing of an experimental novel. Stephen Albert, dead in his labyrinth, besides being Ts'ui Pên's double (and, by extension, possibly a double of the author of the story in which he appears), is also an image of a type of Borges reader.

But although Stephen plays the part of the minotaur, it isn't the part of the monstrous minotaur, but rather the pathetic, innocent minotaur of "*La casa de Asterión*" (Borges *El Aleph* 67-70). Like Asterión, his labyrinth is his house, his home, and it is a labyrinth which he has chosen for himself. His labyrinth isn't a prison, but rather his conception of the universe. And like Asterión, it seems that he chooses his own death:

"We do not exist in the majority of these times; in some you exist, and not I; in others I, and not you; in others, both of us. In the present one, which a favorable fate has granted me, you have arrived at my house; in another, while crossing the garden, you found me dead; in still another, I utter these same words, but I am a mistake, a ghost."

"In every one," I pronounced, not without a tremble to my voice, "I am grateful to you and revere you for your re-creation of the garden of Ts'ui Pên."

"Not in all," he murmured with a smile. "Time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures. In one of them I am your enemy." (28)<sup>15</sup>.

It seems that Stephen understands that Yu Tsun is going to kill him, and even helps him. After speaking of his own death, and saying that in one of the infinite number of possible times he is Yu

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<sup>15</sup> "[...] No existimos en la mayoría de esos ejemplos; en algunos existe usted y no yo; en otros, yo, no usted; en otros, los dos. En éste, que un favorable azar me depara, usted ha llegado a mi casa; en otro, usted, al atravesar el jardín, me ha encontrado muerto; en otro, yo digo estas mismas palabras, pero soy un error, un fantasma.

-En todos -articulé no sin un temblor- yo agradezco y venero su recreación del jardín de Ts'ui Pên.

-No en todos -murmuré con una sonrisa-. El tiempo se bifurca perpetuamente hacia innumerables futuros. En uno de ellos soy su enemigo". (116-117)

Tsun's enemy, he turns his back to the spy, as if inviting him to shoot. *El sinólogo apenas se defendió.*

Yu Tsun also has his double aspects. Let's begin with his relation to captain Richard Madden. Both characters, the fugitive and the hunter, are employees of a country other than their own: Yu Tsun, a Chinese at the service of the Germans, and Madden, an Irishman working for the British. Speaking about Madden, Yu Tsun says: "Madden was implacable. Or rather, he was obliged to be so. An Irishman at the service of England, a man accused of laxity and perhaps treason [...]" (19)<sup>16</sup>. Daniel Balderston ("Historical" 336-337) connects the accusation of treachery with the Easter Rising of the same year, in which a group of Irish, rebelling against the English, tried to obtain arms from Germany. Furthermore, in the defense of one of the accused, Padraic H. Pearse, Balderston finds a sentiment that is reflected in Yu Tsun's confession: that he didn't do it for Germany, a country that means nothing to him, but rather to defend his own nation; in Yu Tsun's case, he wants demonstrate to his German boss, who "somehow feared people of my race" (21)<sup>17</sup>, that "a yellow man could save his armies" (21)<sup>18</sup>. Balderston (Labyrinth 48) also unearths the story of the Lost Encyclopedia found in Stephen's pavilion, and learns that it places the sinologist and ex-missionary in China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, which suggests to him that Albert has also worked as a spy. In any case, Yu Tsun and Stephen are double figures: Yu Tsun the Chinese English professor, and Stephen the English sinologist. The more we investigate the interrelations between the characters, the less they seem to be distinct individuals. It is as if Ts'ui Pên, Stephen Albert, Yu Tsun, and (perhaps) Richard Madden are variations, modulations of the same character, in the same way that the scene of the murder repeats itself, always different, always the same.

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<sup>16</sup> "Madden era implacable. Mejor dicho, estaba obligado a ser implacable. Irlandés a las órdenes de Inglaterra, hombre acusado de tibieza y yal vez de traición [...]" (101)

<sup>17</sup> "temía un poco a los de mi raza" (104)

<sup>18</sup> "un amarillo podía salvar a sus ejércitos" (104)

## 3. THE "ESCHER" MODEL OF "THE GARDEN"

There is a drawing by M.C. Escher called "Up and Down" (*World* 173). In this lithograph, Escher plays with perspective: we see the same patio from above and from below- but all within the same drawing. In order to see a coherent image, it's necessary to choose one perspective or the other- but this implies ignoring half the picture. This would seem to be a bit like Ts'ui Pên's project, except that Ts'ui Pên wants to represent *all* the points of view at the same time, which implies an infinitely large novel, requiring a reader with an infinite amount of time (and patience), to say nothing of an author with an infinite amount of time (and imagination). It is absurd to think that Ts'ui Pên, a mortal, has actually written such a novel, and doubly absurd to think that Stephen Albert, also mortal, has read, corrected and translated it. Of course, the story plays with the idea that Stephen might be immortal: "His face, within the vivid circle of the lamplight, was unquestionably that of an old man, but with something unalterable about it, even immortal" (26)<sup>19</sup>. Or perhaps the possibility that Stephen in some way *is* Ts'ui Pên, or a reincarnation of the Chinese novelist. Christ, for example, has indicated the presence of certain symbols of cyclic time in the sinologist's pavilion: a spinning gramophone record, a bronze phoenix. But Ts'ui Pên's novel must be no more than an attempt at an infinite novel. If his plan really were to write all the possibilities, he would never be able to finish, and it would come as no surprise that his novel was no more than "an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts" (24)<sup>20</sup>. We mortals cannot create infinity, nor can we conceive of it. For Asterión, fourteen was as close to infinity as he could imagine. We poor humans are not much better off in this respect than the minotaur. We cannot conceive of infinity, but we can *intuit* it. What we can make are *approximations* to infinity.

Escher himself has written an essay titled "Approximations to Infinity" (*World* 39-42). It has to do with his search for a way of repre-

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<sup>19</sup> "Su rostro, en el vívido círculo de la lámpara, era sin duda el de un anciano, pero con algo inquebrantable y aun inmortal" (39)

<sup>20</sup> "un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios" (38)

senting the infinite in a static, two-dimensional medium. I will reproduce a portion of Escher's essay, because it seems to me to be relevant to understanding the way that "The Garden" is constructed:

Anyone who plunges into infinity, in both time and space, further and further without stopping, needs fixed points, mileposts, for otherwise his movement is indistinguishable from standing still. There must be stars past which he shoots, beacons from which he can measure the distance he has traversed.

He must divide his universe into distances of a given length, into compartments recurring in an endless series. Each time he passes a borderline between one compartment and the next, his clock ticks. [...] No one can draw a line that is not a boundary line; every line splits a singularity into a plurality. [...] The dynamic, regular ticking of the clock each time we pass a boundary line on our journey through space is no longer heard, but we can replace it, in our static medium, by the periodic repetition of similarly shaped figures [...] closed forms which border on each other, determine each other's shape, and fill the surface in every direction as far as we wish.

What kind of figures? Irregular, shapeless spots incapable of evoking associative ideas in us? Or abstract, geometrical, linear figures, rectangles or hexagons at most suggesting a chess board or honeycomb? No, we are not blind, deaf, and dumb; we consciously regard the forms surrounding us, in their great variety, speaking to us in a distinct and exciting language. Consequently, the forms with which we compose the divisions of our surface must be recognizable as signs, as distinct symbols of the living or dead matter around us [...] Let it be a universe of stones, stars, plants, animals, or people. (40)

How can we connect this with "The Garden"? I think that the techniques which Escher describes are similar to the ones Borges uses in constructing this story. Escher writes about dividing the space of his engraving with repeated, regular figures. These figures will not be abstract, but recognizable elements of the world around us. I see something similar in Borges' story which has, for instance, the repetition of the scene in which someone penetrates the home of another, and kills him. A foreigner enters Ts'ui Pên's garden and kills him. Yu Tsun enters Stephen's garden, and kills him. Richard Madden enters Viktor Runeberg's room, and kills him. If we think

of the historical setting of the story, the First World War, the same scene repeats itself thousands of times: the “countless men in the air, on the face of the earth and the sea” that Yu Tsun alludes to (20)<sup>21</sup>.

This brings me to the other implication of Escher’s regular division of the plane: there is no space between the figures, that is to say, the form of one defines the form of the next in a series that could continue infinitely. Doesn’t this seem to resemble the case of Yu Tsun, who is hunted by Richard Madden, and who hunts Stephen Albert? Yu Tsun has to kill Albert, because he knows that Madden is going to kill (or jail) him and there is no time for a less desperate plan. And Madden, for his part, has to arrest (or kill) Yu Tsun, in order to prove his loyalty and avoid being arrested by his English bosses. As we have seen, Richard Madden resembles Yu Tsun in many ways; Yu Tsun in turn resembles Stephen Albert, who shares many characteristics with Ts’ui Pên, who is Yu Tsun’s ancestor, etc. In the same way, the novel that Ts’ui Pên calls “*mi jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*” appears in a story called “*El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*” which in turn forms part of a collection of stories called *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. The various works have their resemblances, but are not the same work. The pairs Yu Tsun/Stephen, Yu Tsun/Madden are separated only by a national line: an arbitrary line, but one which necessarily makes them enemies. In fact, I find that Escher’s image of the divided plane is a remarkable representation of the world’s national boundaries, more or less arbitrary divisions of a natural entity, countries that define themselves by starting where the previous one ends.

Ts’ui Pên’s novel is an attempt to approximate the infinite. I don’t know whether we should consider Borges’ story as a similar attempt. There are allusions to infinity in the story, most of all the Chinese novel that is in the story’s center. The word “*infinito*” appears several times. Yu Tsun’s boss examines the newspapers *infinitamente* (202). In the street, Yu Tsun feels “*visible y vulnerable, infinitamente*” (104). And Yu Tsun thinks about an “infinite” labyrinth as he walks on an afternoon that is “*intima, infinita*” (107). There is no doubt that even an enormous novel such as the *Hung Lu Meng* is far

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<sup>21</sup> “innumerables hombres en el aire, en la tierra y el mar”

from being infinite, and a story of barely twenty pages even less so. The worlds created by Escher, which also are meant to suggest infinity, are in fact very small worlds. A work made by a human hand can't be otherwise, as Herbert Quain, apocryphal author of *April March*, a novel with a structure which distinctly resembles Ts'ui Pên's *Garden*, knew very well. Quain's novel is a garden of *trifurcating* paths, but the narrator of "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain" (which also appears in the collection entitled *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*) says that "[...] ya publicado *April March*, Quain se arrepintió del orden ternario y predijo que los hombres que lo imitaran optarían por el binario y los demiurgos y los dioses por el infinito: infinitas historias, infinitamente ramificadas" (Borges *Ficciones* 82). Is the "writer" of "The Garden" an imitator of Quain, then? An imitator who chooses a binary system? We know that another of the stories in the book, "Las ruinas circulares" is written in imitation of Quain... But this is another labyrinth of real and apocryphal authors, narrators who are more or less autobiographical, etc. Let us be satisfied, for the moment, with the intuition that Quain had, that a story, a novel, a drawing can play with infinity, or speak about infinity, but can never *be* infinite. This is reserved for the universe. (But if every work of art were a universe in itself...?)

#### LABYRINTHS

My intention has been to explore the story "The Garden of Forking Paths" while at the same time thinking about in what ways a story could be a labyrinth. Robert Rawdon Wilson, in his reflections on labyrinths and the notion of "game" in literature ("Godgames" 10) considers the literary labyrinth to be a special class of "godgames". Wilson uses the word *godgame* to describe a situation in which one character creates an illusion, a web in order to trap another person; an good example could be the labyrinth built by the king of Babylonia in Borges' story "The Two Kings and Their Two Labyrinths" (*The Aleph* 89) Wilson is thinking primarily of literary labyrinths that form part of the plot of the text, labyrinths made by fictitious characters with fictitious victims, but he also mentions the case of Ts'ui Pên's novel, which launches the idea that a text can be a labyrinth in

and of itself. Pondering this notion, Wilson says "A narrative can be a labyrinth if it seeks to capture its reader in the perplexities of interpretation" ("Godgames" 20).

Before considering the notion of a textual labyrinth more carefully, I would like to spend a little more time thinking about the elements that constitute a labyrinth. Wilson describes the structure of a labyrinth in the following way: "[...] the labyrinthine order is a series of exclusive disjunctives of the form, 'Either A or B but not both' or 'Either A or B or C but only one'" ("Godgames" 12). This is precisely the problem in a work such as Escher's "Up and Down", or with Ts'ui Pên's novel: in order to see a coherent image, or read a coherent story, it is necessary to choose A or B. But the pleasure of viewing a work like "Up and Down" lies in trying to choose both options at the same time. It doesn't take long for our minds to comprehend the scene that is being represented, or to identify the trick that the artist employs; but what is truly interesting is to investigate the region between the two images, in which A stops being A and becomes B. It is this region in the middle of the picture that has something of the labyrinth about it, because it is an indeterminate space, in which each element belongs simultaneously to both points of view.

It would be fascinating to observe and trace the movements of the eyes of several receptors of this drawing; the resulting figure would be an image of the labyrinth made by each viewer. I find myself spending time on the windows and arches, trying to place them in the upper and lower part. This repetition of figures and of plots, objects that are at the same time one thing and another, seems to me to be a fundamental element of the labyrinth drawn by Escher, and of Borges' story. J. Hillis Miller, writing of the various plots found in the myth of the labyrinth of Crete, says:

The need for a permutation of the somewhat mysterious elements of the story is intrinsic to the story itself. It is as if no one telling of it could express clearly its meaning. It has to be traced and retraced, thread over thread in the labyrinth, without ever becoming wholly perspicuous. Each telling both displays the labyrinthine pattern of relations again and again and at the same time leaves its "true" meaning veiled. ("Ariadne's" 65)



Miller sees, in the permutations of the myth of the labyrinth, another labyrinth of repeated plots, of forms that are similar but not identical, a return to the same story but every time from a different angle. In his meditation on Ariadne's thread, Miller finds that when one follows a labyrinth, the image that results, the design drawn by the thread, is another labyrinth. I believe that the passage cited above reveals a fundamental element in the narrative labyrinth: the repeated telling of the same story, but in such a way that the true message is always just out of reach.

In her exploration of the concept of the labyrinth in art and literature, *The Idea of the Labyrinth*, Penelope Reed Doob notes certain characteristics essential to the labyrinth (1-63). Perhaps the most important is her insistence that a labyrinth is not just, or even necessarily, a physical structure: it is first and foremost an idea, a symbol. Doob also points out the importance of the point of view of the receptor or subject of the labyrinth: viewing the labyrinth from above, the schematic view, is to see a complicated and beautiful work of art, while the experience of the subject placed in the labyrinth is one of confusion and chaos.

Also critical to Doob's analysis is the problem of the two types of labyrinth known to the middle ages: the unicursal and the multicursal. According to Doob, the labyrinth as it is found in literature has always been multicursal, a forest of decisions that confounds the subject. In the visual arts, on the other hand, it is most common to represent unicursal labyrinths, in which the subject, if he follows the path, has no choice but to eventually reach the center. The interesting thing, says Doob, is that for the medieval thinker, or for thinkers from the classic period, there was no dichotomy between these two conceptions of the labyrinth. This prompts her to ask what it is that makes both types of labyrinth labyrinthine. What is it that both models have in common? She finds that the two essential experiences of the labyrinth that I have mentioned above, the chaos and confusion on the one hand and the appreciation of an intricate work of art on the other, are present in both models. A visual representation of a unicursal labyrinth expresses the same idea of complexity inherent in the idea of the multicursal labyrinth, and at the same time suggests that there is a plan, that what we are seeing is not a

mere chaos. At the same time, a subject placed in a unicursal labyrinth, although he need do no more than follow the path, also becomes disoriented, and cannot know if he is far from his goal, or whether he is about to reach the center. Both types of labyrinth imply meanders that fold back on themselves and that in some way prepare the subject for the arrival at the center. A person entering the center directly could not appreciate, or understand, what he finds there in the same way as a person who has passed through the entire length of the labyrinth's entrails, searching for the center.

Let's return now to Wilson's definition: a story can be a labyrinth if it seeks to capture its reader in the perplexities of interpretation. According to Iván Almeida, "[...] cuando se piensa en la noción de laberinto, se le atribuye espontáneamente como rasgo principal ya sea el que corresponde a 'para perderse', ya sea el de 'de donde no se puede salir'" (Inmanencia 43). Our spontaneous, intuitive understanding of a labyrinth is of a place where we lose our way, or a place we cannot leave. Thus, the key word in Wilson's definition is "capture". A labyrinthine story does not present a puzzle to be solved, but rather a puzzle to *not* be solved.

In *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, Borges, Silvina Ocampo and Adolfo Bioy Casares reproduce an example of a textual labyrinth that is simple, elegant, and theoretically infinite. The labyrinth is a passage from (once again) the *Hung Lu Meng*, in which the character Pao Yu has a dream in which he meets himself. Pao Yu dreams that he is in a garden, exactly like the garden at his house, and asks himself if it possible that there can be a garden exactly like his own. At this point, he meets a young man, who is also Pao Yu, and who has just awoken from a dream in which he was in a garden exactly like the one at his house, and in which he met another Pao Yu. Just then, Pao Yu (but which one?) awakens, saying that he dreamt that he was in a garden just like the one at his house, and that he met another Pao Yu, who had just woken up from a dream in which...

In this gem, the element of approximate repetition that I would like to tease out in "The Garden" is made explicit. Pao Yu dreams about himself- that is to say, there are two identical Pao Yus. But they cannot be identical, because they have a conversation in which the first Pao Yu says certain things, and the other says other things.

But what happens, then, when the first Pao Yu wakes, and says exactly the same things that the second Pao Yu said, in the moment of waking? Suddenly there is a multiplication of possible Pao Yus, a refraction of the character Pao Yu that allows for an infinite number of doppelgangers. "The Garden of Forking Paths" cannot be reduced to so simple an algorithm as this, but it seems to me that the same technique, the manipulation of a few elements to produce many, is also present in "The Garden".

Doob also deals with the problem of textual labyrinths, investigating the ways in which the labyrinth can be a model for the three stages of text construction: the selection of a topic (*inventio*), the arrangement of the material (*dispositio*) and the way in which the author expresses his material (*elocutio*). Although Doob's work is with medieval documents, I believe some of her observations can be useful to us in considering Borges' "Garden". Of the medieval *inventio*, Doob says: "The best composition [...] involves 'invention' in a peculiarly medieval sense; far from being a novel, a good subject entails reshaping other people's works [...]" (*Idea* 198). A labyrinthine *dispositio* involves presenting the information in an "artificial" way, and a labyrinthine *elocutio* is one in which the author dwells on aspects of the theme that have not previously been given much consideration. In the same way, "The Garden of Forking Paths" can be thought to be another version of a paragraph from *The Real War*, a (relatively long) exploration of a point which is "*nada significativo*". The story's *dispositio*, the fragmentary document presented by an anonymous editor also has its labyrinthine elements, in which we see radical changes in tempo: philosophical reflections mixed with Yu Tsun's frenetic activity.

## CONCLUSION

Of course, "The Garden of Forking Paths" is not a labyrinthine text in the sense in which Doob describes the medieval texts. The medieval labyrinths were complex, but they had a center which an assiduous reader could find, well prepared by the journey. In "The Garden", on the other hand, I do not find that there is a single, indisputable center, but rather many possible centers, none of which

will be completely satisfactory for a reader looking for the text's hidden message. The story does not allow the reader to change perspective and see the labyrinth from above. The innocent, first-time reader is left with the feeling that there was something which he didn't understand, something which he must have missed. The reader who has entered the story many times is left with the same feeling. There remains something elusive, always the feeling that there is something hidden that cannot be clearly seen, but which is on the verge of revealing itself, a minotaur that lurks in the central chamber to greet the reader after his long journey through the meanders of the labyrinth.

If there is a central chamber in "The Garden", I think it must consist of precisely the same state of indecision that I find in the middle of Escher's "Up and Down". In a typical unicursal labyrinth, the subject enters, and passes very close to the center, but cannot know this, because the path immediately carries her far from her goal again, before returning to the center. In the same way, a reader who reads "The Garden" once, and feels he hasn't understood it, has been very close to the center of the story, but cannot recognize or appreciate this center without making the long journey of many re-readings. A labyrinth is a place one cannot leave, or if one does leave, it is by the same door by which one entered, such that one ends at the beginning. Nonetheless, it could be that some progress has been made.

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