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

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

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THE Labyrinths OF JORGE LUIS BORGES
AN INTRODUCTORY TO THE STORIES OF THE ALEPH

By L. A. Murillo

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

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

1 Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1949; second edition, 1952. Quotations are
from the second edition. This article on El Aleph is an abbreviated version of
a paper read before the New England Chapter of the AATSP at the Modern
Language Center, Harvard University, in January, 1957. Other collections of
short stories by Borges are: Historia universal de la infancia (1935), El jardín
de senderos que se bifurcan (1941), Ficciones, 1935-1944 (1944), La muerte y la
brisa (1951). A complete and up-to-date bibliography on Borges may be
found in the excellent study by Ana María Barrenechea, La expresión de la
irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges (Mexico City, 1957). A partial
bibliography may be found in Cuentos de Jorge Luis Borges, Monseñor College
Edition (Godfrey, Ill., 1938).

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

3 W. H. Matthews, Mazes and Labyrinths; A General Account of Their
History and Developments (London, 1929), contains descriptions of the many
types of labyrinths and their uses up to the present. It is more than probable
that the labyrinth coil (or design) and the spiral symbol are related in several
ways, in the manner of performing ritual dances, for instance. D. A. Mackenzie,
Migration of Symbols and Their Relations to Beliefs and Customs (New York,
1928), has a full study on the spiral but does not relate it to the labyrinth coil.
From the earliest times this coil has been identified with the magical powers that man has aspired to possess and to control. In our present socialized life the most common picture of it would be a fingerprint. How strange it is to think that we bear upon our fingertips a coil, a "labyrinth," that identifies us impersonally and almost inactively to state agencies and detective bureaus. Anthropologists have been amazed to discover the wide extent of the knowledge of the labyrinth among primitive peoples. One of the most curious instances is that of a New Zealand tribe whose men tattoo on their faces a series of labyrinthine coils.4 "Críaez en mi cara estuviera escrita la magia..." says the magician-priest in the story "La escritura del Dios" (p. 108).

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

According to the best information, the earliest labyrinths in Egypt, from whom the Cretans borrowed the idea, were temples, which were later used as burial places for kings.6 In such a temple the Egyptian priest performed a ritual in which the king, and then eventually a beast-god substituted for the king, was killed that the power of life might be reborn. The religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians required that the dead king be provided with treasures or provisions for life after death. Much later, when Egyptian culture was in decline, the temple-tombs of the kings were designed with intricate and secret passages, in order to protect the dead kings and their treasures from thieves. Eventually the labyrinth would be built to lure the reckless and the fearless into its corridors, to thwart them, and to put an end to them. These labyrinths were devised by men like Daedalus, the ingenious artificer, or by builders and designers boastful of their skill to bewilder and to confuse.

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

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

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

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

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

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4 Karl Kerényi, Labyrinth-Studien, Labyrinthos als Linienreflex einer mythologischen Idee (Zürich, 1950), Illus. S.
king of Arabia, asked him to go into his labyrinth. The king of
Arabia implored divine aid and found the way out. When he
returned to Arabia, he gathered his armies and laid waste the king-
dom of Babylon; he captured the king, tied him on a swift camel,
and took him out to the desert. There he said to him:

“¡Oh, rey del tiempo y substancia y cifra del siglo! en Babilonia me quisiste
perder en un laberinto de bronce con muchas escaleras, puertas y muros; ahora
el Poderoso ha tenido a bien que te muestre el mio, donde no hay escaleras que
subir, ni puertas que forzar, ni fatigosas galerías que recorrer, ni muros que te
vean el paso.”
Luego le desató las ligaduras y lo abandonó en mitad del desierto, donde
murir de hambre y de sed. La gloria sea con Aquel que no muere. (pp. 124-25)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The effort drained away his mind and his will.

Un día o una noche—entre mis días y mis noches qué diferencia cabe?—soñé que en el piso de la cárcel había un grano de arena. Volvi a dormir, indifícere; soñé que despertaba y que había dos granos de arena. Volvi a dormir; soñé que los granos de arena eran tres. Fueron, así, multiplicándose hasta soñar que los granos de arena eran cien. Oíos, un vasto esfuerzo me desperté. El despertar fue instint; la innumerables arena me sofocaba. Alguien me dijo: No has despertado a la visión sino a un sueño anterior. Ese sueño está dentro de otro, y así hasta lo infinito, que es el número de los granos de arena. El camino que habría de descender es interminable y morirá antes de haber despertado realmente.

Me sentí perdido. La arena me rompió la boca pero grito: Ni una arena soñada puede nataarme ni hay sueños que estén dentro de sueños. Un resplandor en la tiniebla superior se cercia un círculo de luz. Vi la cara me despertó. En la tiniebla superior se cernía un círculo de luz. Vi la cara... (pp. 109-10)

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

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

Que muera conmigo el misterio que está escrito en los tigres. Quien ha entrevisto el universo, quien ha entrevisto los arácnidos designios del universo, no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus travesuras, en sus aventuras, en sus virtudes, en sus defectos. Por eso no pronuncio la fórmula, por eso dejo que me olviden los días, nadie...

Por eso no pronuncio la fórmula, por eso dejo que me olviden los días, nadie...

(continued in the next section, pp. 111-12)
The self has undergone a death and a rebirth. But the ironical circumstances in which the mystical union is attained and the script of the god deciphered annul the positive power of the birth experience. Is the decision to withhold uttering the magical sentence a divine revelation, or is it the self-delusion of a helpless prisoner overcome by a kind of delirium? The new birth of the self proves to be a denser, more perplexing labyrinth, and what was apparently a way out of one labyrinth turns out to be only another corner, and then a forking into another labyrinth whose existence the reader of Borges will not have anticipated.

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

In the stories of Borges the labyrinth, with all its multiple associations, symbolizes the consciousness of man in our time: his fears, which for all their dreadfulness do not seem to differ much from the ancient fears of primordial man; his frustrated will to power, that more than ever resembles the frustrated conjurations of magical formulas; his helplessness, his anxiety, his dread of death, and, above all, his despair. Not the least ironical point of this little book is that the resources of its highly sophisticated and esoteric art, the ingenuity and exotic erudition of its author, have as their purpose (in a manner curiously parallel to the “scientific” discoveries of anthropologists and psychiatrists) the revelation of the oldest, most primitive, and most constant desairs of man. From within the hollows of his labyrinths, Borges echoes that postscript of our age by which we manage to survive: not until now has man known himself to be such an odd creature that, in his deepest despair, despair may be a comfort to him.

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PAUL CLAUDEL AND THE SENSORY PARADOX

By HAROLD A. WATERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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