

The Infinite Library

Kane X. Faucher

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The Infinite Library by Kane X. Faucher is an engaging, intertwined, humorous, playful novel published on the 25th anniversary of Jorge Luis Borges' death and 70 years after the publication of Borges' story "La biblioteca de Babel" in his collection of stories *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. Faucher's novel opens with a line from this Borges story and the references and the debt to Barges are evident throughout. The main character, Alberto Gimaldi, is employed by one of the librarians of this infinite

labyrinth, Tho. Von Castellemare, and during the course of the novel, he turns into Castellemare's antagonist, stealing one of an infinite number of books, trying to understand the mysteries of the library, and challenging Castellemare's sense of order and control of the library. Gimaldi discovers that this library, like the one in Borges's short story, contains every book ever written and every conceivable book, including books relating to his own past and present time as it is happening. As his path through life forks in different directions, so does the book relating it. Like the story "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," he also discovers books describing alternate realities of his life as well. References abound to central Borges themes such as issues of identity and the self, pluralism, the nature of "truth," "reality" and "history," and the limits of our knowledge.

Faucher is a talented writer who demonstrates his ability to portray diverse characters and work with varied dialogue. While the novel is quite long, the mysterious enigmas of the plot line hold the attention of the reader. The Borges scholar or student of Borges will find it especially engaging. Faucher not only weaves subtle references to various Borges works throughout the novel, but also shows himself to be an astute reader and critic of Borges through these intertextual references through the organization of the plot and through the philosophical musings of his main character, Gimaldi.

To give you an idea of the role of Borges and his writings in this work and of Faucher's style, allow me to quote a few passages from the text. This first one is from a "book" that the protagonist, Gimaldi, is reading:

"I don't get it. Gimaldi is reading us right now? This is happening in this book?"

"Right down to the very dialogue," Castellemare smiled. "Awful as it is, -- I can almost hear Gimaldi groaning. We are not very convincing or interesting for Gimaldi's tastes, I'm afraid...."

"This is making me a bit dizzy. I'll ask anyway: what is real, then? If we are merely characters in a book, and yet I can read the other Gimaldi as a character in a book where he is reading me, which narrative is real?"

"They both are; they all are. There is even another book based on these two entitled *The Infinite Library* which is simply another version of this story. All are equally real." (194-95)

There is another point around the middle of the novel where Gimaldi encounters the Librarian who is obviously Borges himself. The character himself admits that one of his identities or names is “Borges,” but claims that “identity is multiple.” The contrast between Borges the Librarian and Castellemare are striking and intentional:

“May I help you?” a kindly voice with an accent said, startling me.
 I turned to see an old man with grey hair combed back, his eyes stunned with blindness. He was attired in a frumpy suit, but his face spoke generosity, imperturbably patient wisdom, and honesty.
 “I am ... looking for answers,” was my reply.
 “The questions are far more interesting, I find,” he said with a smile, eyes untrained. “Paradoxes, enigmas, labyrinths of thought... these are sustaining...” (p. 330)
 “...I must admit that you seem to be the kindest person I have met in my journey.”
 “Fraught with peril is the quest for knowledge. But so beautiful, too. In the end, the riddles are what matter, guaranteeing the permanence of the endless journey. I have written on libraries in my time, and even occupied the role of librarian. And here I am now, gifted by forces unknown to continue occupying the role I so cherished in life, out there, in that place of the warm and the quick.”
 “In my world?”
 “All worlds are one, in their way, a collection of possibilities, an aleph. This was my flash of intuition then, and it proved correct.” (331)
 “Castellemare claims that it [the Library] is the central hub of all possible worlds following the destruction of the Library of Alexandria.”
 “Such a vile destruction makes me wince, I apologize. Yes, that is one of many theories, one of many histories. It is not that Castellmare is wrong, but that it is just one view, one facet of an infinitely faceted crystal. I admit that at one point, long ago, I sought for some way for a Library as this one to be justified until I came to the realization that it requires no such justification – it is its own justification.” (332-33)

The portrait of Borges here is of a sensitive, wise, open-minded, gentle man who is at peace with himself and his universe. While in its playful mode, the novel runs a bit longer than is necessary, it is both enjoyable and insightful. As a whole, it is a tribute to the Argentine writer as well, and one that “the Librarian” would have been quite proud of.

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