

RELIGIOUS SUBTEXT AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE
IN BORGES' "DEUTSCHES REQUIEM"



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"**D**eutsches Requiem" remains one of Jorge Luis Borges' most understudied short stories. More relevant, however, is the fact that this piece has been widely misunderstood. "Deutsches Requiem" is neither a justification of Nazism nor the explication of criminal violence.¹ At the same time, this short story is not, as it has been suggested, an anatomy of evil. That Borges was a moral writer is unquestionable. This tends to lead, nonetheless, to the automatic assumption that morality is an outright condemnation of evil. As far as "Deutsches Requiem" is concerned, this is a heavy-handed oversimplification. "Deutsches Requiem" is a moral story precisely because it deals with the dissolution of an existing set of traditional values, namely Christianity. Put another way, the violence unleashed by the advent of Nazism breaks down our reassuring metaphor of a world ordered according to providential design.

¹ In a unconvincing argument, to say the least, Gene H. Bell-Villada has asserted that "Deutsches Requiem" is among *El aleph's* weakest stories because it "conspicuously avoids all fantasy". Also, the critic dismisses "Deutsches Requiem" as a short story dealing primarily with "criminal violence," which is one of the points this paper will attempt to disprove

The breakdown of a moral system that grants meaning and coherence to our existence goes beyond good and evil. It only leads to amorality, the implications of which are far more disturbing. War and violence are not metaphors of evil in Borges. They stand for chaos and disorder. It is rationality tore asunder. It is the disintegration of Judeo-Christianity, the view of world governed by a benevolent Providence. As this study intends to show, it is no surprise that the coming-of-age of a new epistemological and ontological order brought to the fore by this short story is mirrored by its Biblical subtext. Yet the mirror, while it effortlessly duplicates an image, invariably presents left to right reversals. As has been observed by Borges himself, Otto zur Linde, the Nazi officer who narrates the story, represents the paradigm of an inverted Christian saint. Of course, it could be easily surmised that if zur Linde is the reversed reflection of a Christian saint, then it must necessarily follow that he is an apostle of evil. This is as imprecise as it is simplistic. An examination of the interplay between the story's narrative structure and the Biblical subtext will reveal how the life of Otto Dietrich zur Linde emulates that of an amoral saint, not an evil one. At the same time, a closer examination of the *Book of Job* and its relation to "Deutsches Requiem" modifies the good versus evil dichotomy, elevating it to tragic heights.

Our first task is to examine "Deutsches Requiem's" narrative structure in order to understand how its form serves as a metaphor of the content. The story opens with an epigraph extracted from the *Book of Job*. This is significant, for it alerts the reader in a three-fold manner. First, it reminds us that what is to come deals with indestructible faith. Secondly, it puts forth the notion that whatever the faith to which we have entrusted our lives and whatever the destiny that faith has determined for us, it is still an imperative of ours to question its designs. Lastly, the quotation functions as a forewarning, telling us that the story we are about to read is an apology the object of which is to explain and justify someone's trials and tribulations. This is the Biblical text that immediately follows the Job quotation:

I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him! Listen carefully to my words; let your ears take in what I say. Now that I

have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated. Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die. (*Job* 13: 15-19)

Narrated in the first person, “Deutsches Requiem” deals with a Nazi officer, Otto Dietrich zur Linde, who tries to build a case for himself so that future generations can comprehend the rationale behind the torturing and murders he has orchestrated as director of a concentration camp in Tarnowitz. Consequently, his confession comes at a moment when he must break his silence in order to be understood, not forgiven. Death hangs over zur Linde’s head, for he is to be executed. By speaking up, like Job, he does not intend to literally keep death at bay. Rather, the explanation that attempts to justify his actions brings the deed to a closure. It is necessary for him to explain to the world why he has acted in such a way –he sees himself as a symbol of the generations to come– so that his deed does not pass inadvertently; misrepresented by his contemporaries, his sacrifice and self-degradation regarded as a mere futility. Thus, like Job, he understands that only a declaratory exposition can justify his existence onto the eyes of man:

No pretendo ser perdonado, porque no hay culpa en mí, pero quiero ser comprendido. Quienes sepan oírme, comprenderán la historia de Alemania y la futura historia del mundo (...) Mañana moriré, pero soy un símbolo de las generaciones del porvenir. (576)

The violence unleashed by the Nazis, as zur Linde sees it, has wrought a new epistemological and ontological order, parallel to that forged by the advent of a new religious faith. It is not surprising that zur Linde, throughout his argument, poses his life in terms of that of sainthood, and his execution, the achievement of martyrdom.

At its most apparent, the *Book of Job* deals with indestructible faith. Job, “this blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil”, is tested by God as Satan, one of his angels, questions the true integrity of Job’s devotion. God grants Satan, first, permission to bring destruction to those who surround Job and to his property. The Lord introduces a caveat nonetheless: save him from harm. God rejoices and takes pride in Job, whose faith, despite such tribulations, remains indestructible. Again, Satan challenges God, stating that if Job is truly his loyal servant, he should remain unconditional

even in the face of physical illness and suffering. Once again God accepts Satan's provocation. This time he allows Satan to bring ruin to Job's health, but to spare his life. Stricken by a gruesome skin disease, Job accepts his fate, while chastising his wife's hasty words, who exhorts him to curse God and die. However, Job, in a moment of despair and weakness, damns the day he was born, wishing he had died in his mother's womb, thus sparing him from all this suffering. An unexpected episode, which sheds light on "Deutsches Requiem," then ensues.

We must remember that Job is highly regarded within his community, a model of piety and virtue, a man who always gave comfort to the downtrodden. Elifaz, reacting to Job's outcry, reminds him:

Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? (*Job* 4: 2-6)

His following deliberation questions Job's integrity and puts him, to the eyes of the community, as an outcast:

Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish. (*Job* 4: 7-9)

In other words, the community, his three closest friends included, suspect that Job must have committed a terrible crime in order to receive from God such a harsh punishment. Elifaz appeals to the law of retribution: for every sin, God exacts a price. Wicked actions are punished in the same manner and in equal measure to the pain they have caused. The resulting dialogue operates within the logic of the accusation being put forth by his friends, who see him as an outcast and abomination, and Job's defense from those charges. Job's most moving plea comes when he begs his humanity not be taken away from him. Job understands that, all along, his commu-

nity had failed to see him as a man, a flawed human being capable of falling from virtue and righteousness:

Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. (*Job* 6: 12-14)

The interpretation that Job’s community infers from the divine intervention defines him as a pariah. Thus, Job’s punishment and entailed suffering has ramifications. He must not only suffer because God has conceived such a design for him, but Job must also accept that he stands to the community as an abomination. His apology – aside from forcing Job himself make a sense out of the celestial designs motivating his affliction– must clear his name and restore his humanity. He does not want to be seen as a monstrosity. In exactly the same way, that is the task which Otto Dietrich zur Linde is obliged to take on. Dietrich zur Linde must make the world see that, above all, the chaos and disorder wrought by the Nazi regime, the deeds which the world regards as atrocities, where nonetheless carried out by men not different, but indeed very much like us; men imbued with the same passions and sensibilities. With a tinge of irony zur Linde later on reports:

Sepa quien se detiene maravillado, trémulo de ternura y gratitud, ante cualquier lugar de la obra de esos felices [Schopenhauer, Brahms, Shakespeare], que yo también me detuve ahí, yo el abominable. (577)

At length, the epigraph enunciates to the reader the deeper pathos underlying the story. This reflects Carl Jung’s quite pessimistic reading of the *Book of Job*. In *Answer to Job*, Jung explains his reading of this Biblical story, which, as it turns out, is extremely relevant to “Deutsches Requiem”:

The Book of Job is a landmark in the long historical development of a divine drama. At the time the book was written, there were already many testimonies which had given a contradictory picture of Yahweh –the picture of a God who knew no moderation in his emotions and suffered precisely from this lack of moderation. He himself

admitted that he was eaten up with rage and jealousy and that this knowledge was painful to him. Insight existed along with obtuseness, loving-kindness along with destructiveness. Everything was there, and none of these qualities was an obstacle to the other. Such a condition is only conceivable either when no reflecting consciousness is present at all, or when the capacity for reflection is very feeble and more or less adventitious phenomenon. A condition of this sort can only be described as *amoral*. (Campbell 526-527, Jung's emphasis)

God, then, rises as an Omnipotent figure from whom both good and an evil emanate. As Jung later explains, this "divine darkness" is unveiled in the *Book of Job*. The divinity is beyond good and evil – both are contained in Him – acting as an amoral force that has no regard for human suffering or happiness.

In relation to "Deutsches Requiem," this divine indifference poses two fundamental questions. First we are forced to consider that, were the world conceived according to providential design, are we to accept as face-value the inherent benevolence of this design? In other words, were it an act of God, can we even dare to speak of the violence unleashed by the Nazis in terms of evil? Consider one of zur Linde's closing statements: "Que el cielo exista, aunque nuestro lugar sea el infierno" (581). He believes that, much like the divinity (he considers Nazis, and himself, self-made men, Overmen who have risen from the obliterated Christian moral system), all opposites lie in them: "Que otros maldigan y lloren; a mi me regocija que nuestro don sea orbicular y perfecto" (580). This, however, is further problematized by zur Linde's Nietzschean view of the world, which rejects all "Christian timidities", and nonetheless is contaminated by an ineffable, secret order that escapes the executors of a design of such cosmic proportions: "Hitler creyó luchar por *un* país, pero luchó por todos, aun por aquellos que agredió y detestó. No importa que su yo lo ignorara; lo sabían su sangre, su voluntad" (580). This "orden orbicular y perfecto" expands on what Borges' vindication of Judas, "Tres versiones de Judas," had already proposed. A Danish theologian, Nils Runeberg, submits that Judas' betrayal was not random, but rather "un hecho prefijado que tiene su lugar misterioso en la economía de la redención" (515). Among many things, this story speaks about the tragic self-degradation some are condemned

to live in order to fulfill a cosmic design, allowing others to be redeemed. This seems to be the case with zur Linde. He and the Nazis must degrade themselves so that their new religion be brought to the fore. Indeed, "Tres versiones de Judas" opens with the following quotation from T.E. Lawrence: "There seemed to be a certainty in degradation" (514). It is a question whether zur Linde, before facing his death, is convinced at all there is no transcendence. This presents our second problem. Again, the tragedy of zur Linde has much to do with the doubt, the terrible doubt that consumes him. Were he a fully convinced Nietzschean, should he be concerned with a providential order governing his fate? Why does he submit that his place is in hell? As we shall come to later on, Nietzsche had declared the death of God, compelling men to forge for and by themselves a new ethical order. Nietzsche, who had rejected platonic idealism, condemns any reliance or belief in an afterlife transcendence. This could provide an answer to the second problem. We must accept that zur Linde, seeing himself as an apostle of the new ontological and epistemological order being wrought, is convinced nonetheless of the religious undertones of his quest. And while he has rejected Christianity, he subjects himself nonetheless to the ethos and metaphysics operating that religion. Here, then, lies zur Linde's inner existential torment. The Nazi's design and zur Linde's tribulations, regardless of his negation of a world ordered according to providential design, must be understood as an all-encompassing cosmovision. Again, let us consider Jung on *Job*:

He [Job] cannot deny that he is up against a God who does not care a rap for any moral opinion and does not recognize any form of ethics as binding. This is perhaps the greatest thing about Job, that, faced with this difficulty, he does not doubt the unity of God. He clearly sees that God is at odds with himself—so totally at odds that he, Job, is quite certain of finding in God a helper and an "advocate" against God. As certain as he is of the evil in Yahweh, he is equally certain of the good. In a human being who renders us evil we cannot expect at the same time to find a helper. But Yahweh is not a human being; he is both a persecutor and a helper in one, and one aspect is as real as the other. Yahweh is not split but is an antinomy—a totality of inner opposites—and this is the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism, his omniscience and omnipotence. (Campbell 531)

As we shall see, the entire story operates structurally and thematically within this logic. That is, a secret, enigmatic order –which encompasses all opposites– governing all cosmovisions, the purpose of which are escapable to men. Dietrich zur Linde tries to understand his fate as governed by an order which he devotedly supports and which he convincingly participates in establishing. It is a world ordered not according to good versus evil, but an amoral structure. Hence, his being an inverted Christian martyr and saint.

The narrative structure operates to this effect. The epigraph, in conjunction with the first two paragraphs, elucidates the stance in which the narrator positions himself. These first two introductory paragraphs explain from where the narrator is coming and reveal his convictions. We understand that he is a man who believes in pre-determinism. Whether this has been arranged by a divinity is, at least for zur Linde, beside the point. He is convinced that his fate has been preconditioned by his blood and ancestry. He does make an important omission, as the “editor’s” footnote indicates: he disregards the theologian and “hebraista” Johannes Forkel. Concerned with paying homage to his ancestry, highlighting only those who had a heroic, military background, we understand that contradiction lies within zur Linde’s character. His suppression of his religious background alerts the reader’s attention toward such paramount thematic issue. At any rate, zur Linde explains that what is to come is a justification, a declaratory explication of his deed and his wretched fate. For this reason, the actual story is divided from the first two paragraphs by a *blanco activo*.

Otto Dietrich zur Linde’s narration of his life is structured vis-à-vis the path toward sainthood and martyrdom. After the *blanco activo*, thirteen paragraphs comprise the narration. As the story progresses, we move toward the center of the labyrinth. The center of the labyrinth, according to Borges, is where we meet our fate: the justification of our existence is finally revealed to us. Here, we subsequently encounter death. This is the case with zur Linde’s life, at least at a symbolical level. It is not mere chance that the core paragraph, the seventh, is significantly the longest one. Here, zur Linde dies, for he has successfully “put off the old man”.

In all of its phases, zur Linde's life story mirrors that of a saint. It operates in accordance with the five stages toward sainthood, namely: conversion, temptation, the defeat of temptation, martyrdom, glory. In his *Borges' Narrative Strategy*, Donald Shaw observes this pattern:

"Deutsches Requiem", that is, has as its macroscopic or multiple subtext the whole of what we know as Lives of Saints. Zur Linde is a parodic or inverted saint, one who sacrifices and mortifies himself for the Nazi ideal as a saint normally sacrifices and mortifies himself for the Christian ideal (...) The macroscopic does not exclude the microscopic; what it does in this case is to provide the underlying model, the conventional saintly pattern: conversion 'trial of faith' martyrdom. (87)

Notwithstanding, while making a clever analysis of the story's narrative strategy in relation to the saintly structure, Shaw makes an oversimplified reading of the religious subtext, stating that:

We saw earlier that zur Linde represents directly (...) a being who has embraced evil, violence and murder as a way of life, not because he is a satanic figure, but because he needs something around which to structure his existence. He [zur Linde] dedicates himself ascetically to evil, mortifying and overcoming what is good in his nature, just as other men had dedicated themselves selflessly to the holy life, treading down and rooting out systematically whatever in their sinful nature was an impediment to following the way of perfection. (125)

However, Shaw's manichean explanation of zur Linde as an inverted saint is unsatisfactory. Earlier in his book, the critic had gone as far as stating that the story's narrator has absolutized evil (71). Yet Shaw assumes that performing a deed against the Ten Commandments -murder, in this case- is not a defiance of Christian Law (subject to forgiveness, something zur Linde clearly does not seek, for he is unrepentant), but a mere act of evil. Shaw never explains exactly what he means by evil, since he submits that zur Linde's acts cannot be characterized as satanic. In other words, can evil exist outside a world view in which good is represented by God and evil by Satan? The distinction is never made clear. Shaw seems to take the violence unleashed by the Nazi's at its face-value, attaching to it the

notion of evil without offering an argument explaining how both are linked. Violence is not a metaphor of evil in “Deutsches Requiem”. The object of violence, as zur Linde sees it, is to obliterate the notion of a world ordered by any sort of design, even ordered by providential design. Thus Zur Linde: “Lo importante es que rija la violencia, no las serviles timideces cristianas” (OC 1: 581). Indeed, evil could well be part of those Christian timidities that zur Linde venomously condemns, considering it is fear of eternal condemnation in hell what keeps believers of the faith of Christ from wrongdoing. What is important is that the “order” wrought by violence forces each man to fashion his own ethics, his own code of conduct. In other words, the ideal behind zur Linde’s actions is the forging of Overmen.

Interestingly enough, we never know for a fact whether zur Linde ever was the material perpetrator of a crime. He has accepted the charges of being a torturer and murderer not out of guilt (“no hay culpa en mí”, he assures us) but lest he be taken for a coward. In fact, he does not kill Jerusalem: “(...) el primero de marzo de 1943, [Jerusalem] logró darse muerte”. Technically, the poet commits suicide. Had Otto Dietrich zur Linde embraced evil as a source of order and meaning, zur Linde would still be working within the theology of Christianity. Yet because he is, at least for all practical purposes, the intellectual author of the torturing and murders that take place in the concentration camp, this does not necessarily mean that he is evil, if we at least bother to see zur Linde as someone trying to craft a moral order of his own, one that goes beyond the good/evil dichotomy. Considering our previous assessment of the *Book of Job* – and Jung’s interpretation–, it is fair to say that zur Linde is an inverted Christian saint insofar as he stands as an *amoral* individual, not an evil one.

An analysis of the inlaid details that reveal the Christian subtext, and how these inform the structure of “Deutsches Requiem”, will be useful in understanding the narrator as an amoral man, one trying to fashion his own ethics of conduct. After the *blanco activo* that separates the introduction from the actual story, the following two paragraphs are devoted to tracing zur Linde’s life up until his enrollment in the ranks of the Nazi party. The narrator explains what conditioned his beliefs, the readings he undertook, and we come to

understand him not as doer, but rather a contemplative individual. We realize, thus, that he is much of an intellectual, a man not given to action. Convinced by his readings of Nietzsche and Spengler, zur Linde decides to pay homage to the latter's radical German, military spirit. Born in 1908, the narrator officially becomes a Nazi in 1929, at the age of 21.

The third paragraph of the story enunciates the saintly pattern that Shaw points out. Three key words reveal the religious undertones that will begin to dominate the narrative: *aprendizaje*, *vocación*, and *congregaba*. As Barrientos points out:

En el partido socialista, zur Linde aprende realmente a odiar a los judíos y se prepara para exterminarlos; la expresión "años de aprendizaje" nos asombra porque estamos acostumbrados a pensar en el odio, en la violencia, como algo instintivo. Tampoco estamos acostumbrados a pensar en la tortura como un deber. (72)

In other words, the violence unleashed by the Nazi's is managed, rationally carried out. It is programmatic, and as such, it seeks to complete an objective, fulfill an agenda. Thus, in zur Linde's scheme of things, violence is not an end, the gratuitous act of introducing pain and suffering, but the means of unleashing a new ontological, existential, and epistemological order. Behaving violently goes, nonetheless, against zur Linde's disposition. *Vocación* can mean "inclinación a cualquier estado, profesión o carrera", but the word's second meaning points toward its religious connotation: "inspiración con que Dios llama a algún estado, especialmente al de religión". The call zur Linde hears has a two-fold meaning. First, it exemplifies the period of doubt the saint undergoes when he is called upon by God. At this point, the saint does not deem him/herself worthy of walking the path of righteousness. The saint believes that he/she is unfit for the divine task that has been devised for his/her existence. Second, the willingness to undertake the call, in light of the lack of *vocación* and the intrinsic ineptitude the soon-to-be-saint perceives in him/herself is an act of selflessness and devotion, the object of which is to prove one's abnegation and sacrifice for that higher goal. In fact, zur Linde asserts that "Comprendí, sin embargo, que estábamos al borde de un tiempo nuevo y que ese tiempo, comparable a las

épocas iniciales del Islam o el Cristianismo, exigía hombres nuevos." The coming of a new order requires men of will and determination. Otto zur Linde not only equates Nazism with a religious system, but is also convinced that it was a higher ideal that forced men to submit their individuality for a cause. Just as the faithful gather in a church, in order to worship God as a congregation, the higher ideals of Nazism also inspire, at least for zur Linde, the imperative of seeking a sense of communion: "en vano procuré razonar que para el alto fin que nos *congregaba* [my emphasis] no éramos individuos" (577).

The fourth paragraph goes deeper into the religious subtext. Three inlaid details point further into this direction. First, Otto Dietrich zur Linde understands now that, while he has accepted and converted to this new religion, his faith must be put to the test. He clearly states how convinced he is of the spiritual plight Nazis have embarked upon. Again, his lexical choice stands as evidence: "yo esperaba la guerra inexorable que *probaría* nuestra fe" (577, emphasis mine). In other words, that faith is the "violencia y la fe de la espada". The devotees of this new religion must bring violence to the fore in order to let chaos and disorder rule. That is their imperative. Only war can bring about that change, the shattering of a moral order dictated by providential design; amorality, not evil, the only bestower of meaning and structure.

The second religious inlaid detail takes us back not to the dawn of Christianity, but to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. According to the text, two bullets severely wound zur Linde. The extent of damage is so irreparable that his leg must be amputated. Otto zur Linde suffers mutilation, a defining moment in an apprentice's spiritual quest. Indeed, this mutilation radically twists the narrator's life. Crippled, zur Linde is unable to carry out what he had most romanticized: his Germanic military spirit. Consequently, at the moment he understands that he has been forever deprived of the opportunity to test his faith. More significant is the fact that zur Linde suffers emasculation due to the incident. On the one hand, the "editor's note" suggests such mishap. On the other hand, we have zur Linde's own observation: "Símbolo de mi vano destino, dormía en el borde de la ventana un gato enorme y fofo". Generally, animals that undergo castration become both unusually oversized and

"fofos". This is, in effect, Borges intention: "Quise sugerir que había quedado impotente a causa de la herida; de ahí la mención del gato enorme y fofo que él ve como símbolo de su 'vano destino'" (Irby 30). Now, let us consider Saint Ignatius Loyola's path to conversion:

Ignatius Loyola was an unlikely leader for the Counter-Reformation and an even less likely formulator of modern rational methodology (...) While he was in battle as a young man, a cannonball passed between his legs, smashing the bones and crippling him. His manic drive refused this situation. He forced upon himself a series of extremely risky operations in which the legs were rebroken and reset. The final result still wasn't pleasing to the eye (...). This final folly of pleasure broke him, physically and mentally, and the resulting crisis brought on his passage towards God. His actual conversion was full of the sort of mysteries and meetings with the divine that one would expect from an important saint. (Saul 43)

Let's now consider John Ralston Saul's reading of the Loyola affair:

The Chinese castration of imperial advisers was a means of removing dynastic dreams from ambitious young men. Certainly Riche-lieu's methods remind one of the eunuch approach. And the idle speculator can't help but gaze back at Bacon's praise of asexuality among rational elites or for that matter at Ignatius Loyola, creator of the rational system, and wonder about the exact height at which the cannonball passed between his legs and the exact damage it did on the way through. (50)

The motif of emasculation prefigures the nature of the struggle zur Linde will soon have to embark on in order to defeat temptation and prove his faith. Because of his having been emasculated and therefore rendered asexual, we come to understand zur Linde's predicament and the testing of his faith not at a carnal level. Zur Linde is not up to mortifying his flesh. On the contrary, the struggle is conspicuously an ontological one: a part of zur Linde's self must be done away with. He must overcome that "detestada zona de mi alma".

The affinity between the lives of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the German officer has a thematic relevance for two reasons. First, it reinforces the idea of zur Linde being an inverted Christian saint. Like Loyola rising to the leadership of the Counter-Reformation, the Nazi

officer lives through what he sees as hard times, “*épocas iniciales [que] exigían hombres nuevos*”. Secondly, it draws attention to an important motif in the story, that is, a mysterious, perhaps ineffable order (zur Linde repeatedly speaks of “*un orden secreto*” and “*continuidad secreta*”) that rules the history of individuals and mankind. The narrator conjectures: “*Lutero, traductor de la Biblia, no sospechaba que su fin era forjar un pueblo que destruyera para siempre la Biblia*” (580). Zur Linde, just like St. Ignatius, works within religious or pseudo-religious structures that have as an imperative the destruction of a variation of a Christian faith. Of course, the struggle can be read as a confrontation of ways of conceiving reality and ordering our existence. At length, be it Nazism or Counter-Reformation Catholicism, the object is to impose structure to reality, replacing an existing one by a new system of belief, whether it is the heavy-handed authority of the Church of Rome or the amorality of the Nazi Overmen.

Finally, a third, less apparent Biblical inlaid detail develops in this fourth paragraph. Zur Linde is wounded on the first of March of 1939. The narrator is ambiguous about his exact date of birth, yet we can assume that around the above-mentioned date, he is approximately 30 years old. Like Jesus Christ, Otto Dietrich counts the same age when he brings to the public sphere the conviction of his beliefs. Nonetheless, the mutilation will force zur Linde to test, inversely, his beliefs not in open public space, but in an Inferno-like dungeon.

In the fifth and sixth paragraphs Otto zur Linde understands his new physical condition as part of secret design. Faith, he surmises, is tested not in random outbursts of heroism, but living devotedly in accordance with its mandates. Here, zur Linde parallels his existence with that of St. Paul:

Morir por una religión es más simple que vivirla con plenitud; batallar en Efeso contra las fieras es menos duro (miles de mártires lo hicieron) que ser Pablo, siervo de Jesucristo; un acto es menos que todas las horas de un hombre. (578)

Both Shaw and Barrientos have pointed out the direct correlation between this passage and the Pauline epistles. While Barrientos notices the textual correlation, Shaw provides the evidence:

Thus in Colossians, 3.9 we read: 'You have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature', and in Ephesians, 4.22: "Put off your old nature and which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt". (125)

These two citations refer to zur Linde's assertion in the sixth paragraph, in which he states that: "El nazismo es, intrínsecamente, un hecho moral, un despojarse del viejo hombre para vestir el nuevo" (578). Again, his word choice denotes zur Linde's inclination to understanding the cause of Nazism in terms of religious, existential turmoil. This paragraph enunciates the test zur Linde has been waiting for in order to "put off the old man". He must kill something in him, sacrifice something that is dear to him, in order to prove his convictions. This is how he rationalizes the process of temptation, and the defeat of that temptation, he is about to undergo:

El cobarde se prueba entre las espadas; el misericordioso, el piadoso, busca el examen de las cárceles y del dolor ajeno (...) En la batalla esa mutación es común, entre el clamor de los capitanes y el vocerío; no así en un torpe calabozo, donde nos tienta con antiguas ternuras la insidiosa piedad. No en vano escribo esa palabra; la piedad por el hombre superior es el último pecado de Zarathustra. (578)

Here, zur Linde reveals the crux of his own personal plight. So that a new order may rise, the men who commit themselves to the endeavor of bringing it to fruition must give away something that is dearest to them, a defining aspect of their personalities. Defeating temptation is the way to destroy that in us that is the weakest and which could never make us virtuous onto the eyes of the new moral system that has been imposed. Here the reversal operates at its best. Paul must prove himself as a servant of Christ, he must live humbly. Consequently, he must give away what defined his character: his being an arrogant and implacable tormentor. In *Acts 26.10*, Paul explains the life he lead before his conversion:

I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

Inversely, zur Linde must leave behind all those “antiguas ternuras”, and to do so, he must defeat the *piEDAD* in him. He speaks of it, again, in religious terms, a flaw, sinful in nature, that could make him fall from grace if he does not do away with it. If Paul rejects the arrogant and tormentor in him, so as to live humbly, zur Linde must kill the compassion and mercy in his heart in order to be implacable, as an Overman should be. Notice that for zur Linde it is not an act of wrongdoing or evil. To be implacable is to rid himself of the sinful disposition in him, just as it is for the apostle of the gentiles. If Paul gave up imprisoning and tormenting, zur Linde gladly accepts it. At any rate, for either one of them, the rejection or acceptance of the life of the jailkeeper requires an implacable act of sacrifice.

In this context, to be implacable is, for zur Linde, to kill the compassion in him. The torturing of David Jerusalem, a poet admired by the Nazi officer, is a means, not an end. Zur Linde is not concerned with making him suffer to fulfill a sadistic or wicked impulse in him. He does so in order to overcome something he hates in himself: compassion. This entails an enormous sacrifice for zur Linde. In the seventh paragraph, the narrative structure of the story comments on this aspect. The entire narration has developed towards this point. We have been moving from his conversion, his moments of doubts, up to this moment, in which his faith will be tested. There has been a progression from the general (the several aspects that informed his acceptance of Nazism as a valid ethical code), to the specific (the defeat of temptation in order to prove the acceptance of that system of belief). The seventh paragraph, significantly the longest one, captures and concentrates the existential turmoil of zur Linde. In other words, the form of the story shows how there has been a descent into zur Linde’s personal Hades. The dungeon, in itself, serves as symbol for the darkness that surrounds Otto Dietrich zur Linde. Nonetheless, we find the key of this descent into darkness in zur Linde’s admiration for what he regards as one of Jerusalem’s best poems: “Aún puedo repetir muchos hexámetros de aquel hondo poema que se titula *Tse Yang, pintor de tigres*, que está como rayado de tigres, que está como cargado de tigres transversales y silenciosos” (579). There we have it. The metaphor alludes to things contained within things, a continuous labyrinth that traps us and confuses us

the further we tread into it, the deeper we explore into its center. This center is dark, enigmatic. Much like San Juan de la Cruz's "la noche oscura del alma", the defeat of the temptation that Jerusalem poses, is zur Linde's own "dark night".

Zur Linde, faced with Jerusalem, the man he admires, is put in the position of having to confront himself. Now he sees himself in the mirror and he understands the design that has been secretly devised for him, the justification of his existence. He has reached the center of the labyrinth, finds the justification of his existence, and must therefore die. This is explained by the second poem he mentions, *Rosencrantz habla con el ángel*. Zur Linde explains the poem deals with secret justifications, ineffable designs that give meaning to our existence. Borges himself illustrated this aspect:

Hay la referencia al poema de Jerusalem, *Rosencrantz habla con el ángel* en el tema de la secreta justificación desconocida de la vida de un hombre. También, al final hay el espejo en el que se mira zur Linde para saber quién es, que insinúa la idea de una imagen inversa, opuesta. (Irby 31)

Like the poem's English moneylender, whose existence is justified by inspiring Shakespeare with the character of Shylock, Jerusalem justifies his existence serving as the instrument that helps zur Linde defeat temptation. By torturing Jerusalem, zur Linde both cleanses himself and symbolically kills himself. In retrospect, this is how he interprets the event:

Ignoro si Jerusalem comprendió que si yo lo destruí, fue para destruir mi piedad. Ante mis ojos, no era un hombre, ni siquiera un judío; se había transformado en una detestada zona de mi alma. Yo agonice con él, yo morí con él, yo de algún modo me he perdido con él; por eso, fui implacable. (579)

Evil is certainly not inspiring zur Linde's deed. In that dungeon, the Nazi officer is actually giving death to himself. Paying heed to St. Paul's imperative enunciated in *Ephesians* 4: 22, Otto zur Linde is, in effect, "putting off the old man" in order to be cleansed of all vices. His implacability is condition by the imperative of the

Overman ideal, that is, to rise over Christian morality, to fashion an ethics of one's own.

As it has been seen, the religious subtext operates in order to portray not an anatomy of evil, but the rise of amorality. This amorality transcends notions of good and evil. That, at least, is Otto Dietrich zur Linde's purpose: to fashion an ethical code that stands outside the good versus evil dichotomy. Pathetically, however, this is never quite clear to zur Linde. He has presented himself as an apostle, a saint of this new order ("la violencia y la fe de la espada"), yet still is attached to the old beliefs. In one of his closing statements, zur Linde categorically asserts that "Que el cielo exista, aunque nuestro lugar sea el infierno" (581). We can infer two interpretations from this statement. Zur Linde and the Nazis, like theologian Nils Runeberg's Judas, are part of secret order, enigmatic and mysterious. In the economy of the redemption, for there to be a heaven, there must be a hell. If there is good, there must be evil. There is a tragic determinism in zur Linde's stance. He perceives himself, and the Nazi's, as instruments of a cosmic design the mechanics of which are beyond their control:

Hitler creyó luchar por un país, pero luchó por todos, aun por aquellos que agredió y detestó (...) Esa espada nos mata y somos comparables al hechicero que teje un laberinto y que se ve forzado a errar en él hasta el fin de los días o a David que juzga a un desconocido y lo condena a muerte y oye después la revelación: *Tú eres aquel hombre*. (...) Que otros maldigan y lloren, a mí me regocija que nuestro don sea orbicular y perfecto. (580)

Then, in a prophetic stance, zur Linde foresees that "Se cierne ahora sobre el mundo una época implacable. Nosotros la forjamos, nosotros que ya somos sus víctimas" (581). Much like the *Book of Job's* God, zur Linde's order operates as an all-encompassing design, where opposites are contained, none of them being mutually exclusive. As Jung's interpretation of the *Book of Job* indicates, Someone or Something that contains all the opposite can only rise to the status of amorality.

The second interpretation deals with zur Linde's ineptitude in understanding and having a clear grasp of the readings that have

conditioned his ethical stance. On the one hand, Borges sought to create

I'll make him feel like a Nazi, or the Platonic idea of a Nazi. (...) I will try and imagine a real Nazi not a Nazi who is fond of self-pity as they are, but a Nazi who feels that a violent world is a better world than a peaceful world, and who doesn't care for victory, who is mainly concerned for the *fact* of fighting. (...) The important thing is that violence should *be*. (Burgin 21)

Yet on the other hand, Borges explained that this ideal Nazi was a “*especie de santo, pero desagradable y tonto, un santo cuya misión es repugnante*” (Irby 30). The key word here is *tonto*. Though in the short story zur Linde is described as a contemplative kind, a man who leads an intellectual, even socially detached life (“*mis camaradas me eran odiosos*”), Borges, in this interview, suggests that he has basically got it all wrong. Not because he acts in an evil manner, but because he misinterprets, even misreads, Nietzsche. Put another way, his intellectual limitations have made him deform Nietzsche's take on the world. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the German philosopher states that:

How *could* something originate in its antithesis? Truth in error, for example. Or will to truth in will to deception? Or an unselfish act in self-interest? Or the pure radiant gaze of the sage in covetousness? Such origination is impossible; he who dreams of it is a *fool* [my emphasis], indeed worse than a fool; the things of the highest value must have another origin *of their own* —they cannot be derivable from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, mean little world, from this confusion of desire and illusion! (...) This mode of judgement constitutes the typical prejudice by which metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized; this mode of evaluation stands in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this their ‘faith’ that they concern themselves with their ‘knowledge’, with something that is at least solemnly baptized ‘the truth’. The fundamental faith of the metaphysician is *the faith in antithetical values*. (33-34)

In this light, zur Linde still believes in a world ordered according to a providential design conditioned by antithetical values. These antithetical values feed from each other, condition each other. Otto

Dietrich zur Linde has not risen over the good versus evil dichotomy. The tragedy of zur Linde is that, having fought tenaciously to overcome Christianity and its Platonism, the idea of a transcendence, he cannot overcome its beliefs. After all, his ethical system, contrary to what Nietzsche had expounded, was not concerned with the here and now, but with a Truth embodied in an afterlife. His last words confirm such belief: "Mi carne puede tener miedo; yo, no." Antithetical values still condition his way of conceiving reality. After going through great pains in order to model his life after the figure of a saint, Otto Dietrich zur Linde, convinced he has attained glory, ironically remains immersed in what he most detested, "las serviles timideces cristianas".

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