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www.Borges: On "The Two Kings and Their Two Labyrinths"

> Chroniclers worthy of trust have recorded (but only Allah is All-Knowing) that in former times there was a king of the isles of Babylon who called together his architects and his wizards and set them to build him a labyrinth so intricate that no wise man would dare enter inside, and so subtle that those who did would lose their way. This undertaking was a blasphemy, for confusion and marvels belong to God alone and not to man. With the passage of time there came to his court a king of the Arabs, and the king of Babylon (wishing to mock his guest's simplicity) allowed him to set foot in his labyrinth, where he wandered in humiliation and bewilderment until the coming of night. It was then that the second king implored the help of God and soon after came upon the door. He suffered his lips to utter no complaint, but he told the king of Babylon that he, too, had a labyrinth in his land and that, God willing, he would one day take pleasure in showing it to his host. Then he returned to Arabia, gathered his captains and his armies, and overran the realms of Babylon with so fair a fortune that he ravaged its castles, broke its peoples, and took captive the king himself. He bound him onto a swift camel and brought him into the desert. Three days they rode, and then the captor said, "O king of time and crown of the century! In Babylon you lured me into a labyrinth of brass cluttered with many stairways, doors, and walls; now the Almighty has brought it to pass that I show you mine, which has no stairways to climb, nor doors to force, nor unending galleries to wear one down, nor walls to block one's way."
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> He then loosened the bonds of the first king and left him in the heart of the desert to die of thirst and hunger. Glory be to the Living, who dieth not.
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> [This is the story the Reverend Allaby tells from the pulpit in "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth." See p. 115.][1]

To read Borges' short story "The Two Kings and Their Two Labyrinths" is to enter a labyrinth, to become entrapped in a parable of consciousness. Not only is the content of the story, particularly its end, shocking; the process of following it entangles the reader in a combination of intellectual perplexity and

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933–1969*, edited and translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Dutton, New York, 1978, pp. 89–90.

strong emotional response. The reader is forced to make a concerted effort to decipher a text, which ultimately declares itself undecipherable. A sense of frustration is built into the interpretive enterprise in which the reader is tempted to engage. Unlike the happy exit out of a maze in a royal court garden, at the end of Borges' story we are left with the anxiety of being imprisoned in the cage of consciousness and language.

The title of the story hints at a double struggle of power and worldviews. Two kings and two cultures meet in a violent confrontation. The geographical setting highlights the extremity of this showdown: the *isles* of Babylon vs. the *desert* of Arabia, that is, the topographically best defined piece of land whose contours are perfectly marked against the least demarcated territory. This duality permeates the whole story. The geographical contrast is complemented by the historically impossible encounter between ancient Babylon and Muslim Arabia, a paradoxical collapse of historical time alluding to the mutual exclusiveness of the two opposing representations.

Babylon, the cradle of civilization, is the land of the Fertile Crescent, of agri*culture*, of well ordered political structure. Arabia is a deserted land, rough nature that is untouched by human intervention, a territory of nomads bound neither by regime nor regimentation. While Babylon is the culture of lavish luxuries and subtle discrimination, Arabia represents the locality in which people find refuge from these urban values. The desert is the monastic retreat, the sanctuary of those who seek to abandon both politics and civilization in favor of a direct relationship with the transcendent and trans-human. The desert is the setting for an ascetic engagement with the self rather than for the exercise of curiosity in the surrounding world and the self-indulgent attempt to conquer it. Furthermore, Babylon (remembered for its biblical tower) is the milieu of language; the desert – that of silence.

Borges relies on his readers' familiarity with these associations as the backdrop for his highly condensed fable. The king of Babylon builds a labyrinth. The labyrinth is a powerful symbol of civilization, of the creation of an *artificial*, man-made, environment. It is typically "against-nature" in being contrived rather than discovered, actively created rather than passively accepted as part of reality. But the labyrinth is also a human transgression and usurpation of divine power. Note that the two categories of professionals conscripted for the ambitious Babylonian undertaking are architects and wizards. Building a real maze calls for the combination of the rational power of technology and planning with the occult powers transcending the bounds of human rationality. Science and magic both challenge God's authority. The outcome of the enterprise appears to be a double success: people are either too intimidated to enter the maze, and if they do, they are unable to find their way out of it. The

king of Babylon thus asserts his complete political power, his absolute rule. Furthermore, with the aid of architecture and magic nature itself is conquered by man.

However, Borges notes that this undertaking was a blasphemy, a scandal, and his reason is striking: "for confusion and marvels belong to God alone and not to man". This is an inversion of the traditional philosophical view, which ascribes law and order in their absolute sense to the metaphysical realm, while leaving confusion and chaos to the epistemically and morally defective human beings and to the contingent domain of physical nature. The blasphemous hubris of the Babylonian king leads him to assume the divine power of the creator of marvels and confusion, challenging God in a similar manner to that of the builders of the tower that physically aspires to reach the skies. The maze is an absurdity of a rationally contrived confusion, an order that represents disorder, an architecturally devised means of disorientation. It is a self-defeating enterprise, as we shall see, exactly like its biblical precursor, in which language, the major tool of human transcendence, becomes the fatal obstacle and self-destructive source of failure.

Confusion, like miracles, belongs to God. Any human attempt to construct it is bound to fail, since all constructions necessarily yield an *order*. The Babylonian labyrinth must have an "in" and an "out". The principles of "confusion" are inevitably rational and consequently the humanly constructed confusion can never be real. We cannot extricate ourselves from the force of reason, which we project onto the world. Only God can create confusion, since he is not himself bound by any preceding order. The finite is necessarily confined to rules and laws, reasons and causes. Only the infinite is the locus of real randomness and marvel.

The king of Arabia epitomizes the radical alternative to the Babylonian worldview. In contrast to the sophistication of the Babylonian court, he is noted for his "simplicity". Unlike the "wise" Babylonian, he enters the labyrinth, and despite the labyrinth's "subtlety" even manages to come out of it. His simplicity makes him victim to the temptation to enter the man-made trap, but it equally leads him out of it with the divine help accorded to the faithful. The king of Babylon is then invited to inspect an alternative labyrinth. As a matter of fact, though, he is not given the chance of being "lured" into it, as was the king of Arabia, but is violently forced to do so. Rather than being tempted by beauty (brass) or by curiosity, intellectual challenge and personal ambition (stairways to climb, doors to force, walls to overcome), the king of Babylon is led by a *natural* force (a camel) into the middle of the roughest of all natural environments, and is left there to die of the lack of the most basic human needs – thirst and hunger. Ultimately, it is the king of Babylon who is repre-

sented as the really "simplistic" figure, the one who falls victim to his own childish fascination with mazes.

Once severed from his man-made, artificial environment, his *court* (note that the king of Arabia has no court!), the king of Babylon immediately loses his power to survive and dies. The desert proves a no less efficient labyrinth. It is the polar opposite of its Babylonian counterpart: rather than offering *deceptive* landmarks, it has *no* landmarks at all; instead of a confusing web of alleys and stairways, it suggests no sense of orientation to begin with; rather than a most sophisticated network of signs, the desert is empty. It is the essential *anti*-labyrinth, the least contrived environment, that landscape which offers no direction. The void cannot be confusing, since there is nothing in it to be confused about. Unlike the labyrinth, which has an "in" and an "out", it has no entrance and no exit. Most horrifying, the only way out of it is death, nothingness.

The desert is not only the absolute contrary to the Babylonian maze-culture on the level of space, but equally on the level of time. In the only occurrence of direct speech in the story, the king of Arabia addresses his rival with the ironical title "king of time and crown of the century". This is of course in contrast to the reference to God in the last sentence, "who dieth not". Human illusion in the attempt to organize space and territory is complemented by the effort to subjugate and rule time by slicing and counting it in periodical components. Babylonian calendars and historical accounts are the temporal counterparts to architectural mazes.

As we said in the beginning, the clash between the two labyrinths is not only between two conceptions of reality but also between two human characters struggling for domination. We should notice the powerful emotional drives underlying the metaphysical encounter between the two *Weltanschauungen*. The king of Babylon is driven by intellectual hubris and by condescending mockery, a self-indulgent pleasure in his intellectual superiority. His entourage consists of architects and wizards. The king of Arabia, on the other hand, is driven by wrath and vengeance, much baser natural impulses, which are acted out in a most violent and disproportionate manner (proportion is also a sign of civilized society). His entourage consists of army generals. The pagan king of Babylon is playing an intellectual game, concocting tricks combining shrewdness and magic. The other king, a fundamentalist adherent of monotheism, knows no nonsense. He has no patience for the snobbish Babylonian aesthete. Like a puritan iconoclast, he physically destroys all signs of the hated culture: he overruns the whole realm of Babylon, ravages its castles and kills its people. This is the closest he can get to turn Babylon itself into a desert! "Leveling" would be an appropriate metaphor for the Arabian act of revenge, since it

obliterates all distinctions and discriminations, signs of orientation and coordinates of meaning. What remains is nothingness, which is reminiscent of the diluvial punishment in Noah's time, the water leveling all natural and human reality, leaving no trace of either human or even divine creation.

Borges makes a literary effort to prevent the reader from sympathizing with either of these kings. The self-indulgent hubris of the mocking Babylonian king is no more appealing than the angry and destructive revenge of his Arabian rival. Furthermore, the two conceptions of reality are suggested as alternatives in a neutral manner, avoiding any authorial bias or preference. Indeed, the king of Babylon dies at the end of the story, but this by no means indicates the superiority of the empty desert over the fertile and constructed isles of Babylon. The passive acceptance of the total lack of meaning is no more promising than the illusion of an elegantly constructed reality. The desert, after all, is not only the deadly punishment for the king of Babylon but also the virtual death of the king of Arabia. The second labyrinth is offered to the king of Babylon as "another" labyrinth – not a better one.[2] The two mazes are two extreme points of view, neither of which we can completely avoid. We are bound to create coordinates by which we lead our lives and orientate in the world. But in moments of self-awareness, which Borges wants to prompt in us, we know that these are all mere human projections, which equally mislead and deceive us, as they appear to safely guide us.[3]

An ironical point of view can be achieved only on the background of duality. A critical assessment of the Babylonian culture can be gained only by confronting it with its radical opposite. The full, deadly meaning of the desert anti–labyrinth can be appreciated only through the geographical, intellectual and emotional visit to the alluring Babylonian contrivance. But these mutual stately visits or perspectival shifts leave us imprisoned in our limited human point of

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[2] Sometimes textual changes made by the author himself are highly significant to the work of interpretation. In the earlier editions of the story, Borges uses "mejor" (better), but then he himself changes the term to "otro" ("another") in the later, amended editions. Through that little change we get a direct glimpse into authorial intention, a change that supports our reading of the parable as maintaining an intended symmetry between the two kings and the two points of view. The original, value-laden phrasing is less typical of Borges in its one-sided commitment to one horn of a dilemma.

[3] Naomi Lindstrom correctly notes that Borges' narrator adopts the Muslim point of view, and that he (the narrator) is less severe with the Arabian king who cruelly kills his fellow than with the Babylonian king who merely mocks and humiliates his guest. However, this does not mean that Borges is in anyway inclined to the Muslim view point. After all, by the mere act of putting the story in words he is undermining the meaning of the narrator's pious attempt to teach us the lesson of the futility of cultural constructions. Naomi Lindstrom, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1990, p. 61.

view. The anthropocentric enterprise of maze building can be transcended only by appealing to God, as this short story does six times. God serves as the logical, epistemic, and metaphysical standard by which we are called to evaluate human aspirations. He is all-knowing in the sense that even the most reliable traditions are subject to doubt from "his" point of view; he is, as we mentioned, the locus of wonder and confusion, i.e. the perspective from which we view with suspicion our human conception of the world as a *cosmos*; he is the only possible Archimedean point from which we can hope to escape the paradox of bootstrapping (leading us, like the king of Arabia, out of the maze); he is fate itself, the necessity of all events and circumstances (things happen only "God willing"); he is the ultimate source of moral proportion and justice (bringing the first king to see his fellow king's labyrinth); and finally he is the one who does not die, his immortality serving as the standard by which all human effort is made to look pathetic.

The appeal to God as an absolute Archimedean point of comparison is reminiscent of another famous pair of labyrinths, Leibniz's "two famous labyrinths where our reason very often goes astray":[4] the labyrinth of freedom and necessity and the labyrinth of continuity and indivisibility. The first relates to the logical difficulty of explaining the possibility of contingency and freedom in a world governed by divine providence and necessity. The second is concerned with the mathematical and metaphysical problem of the composition of a continuity (the world) out of indivisible units (the monads). Leibniz's solution to both conundrums is based on the concept of infinity. The infinite is a positive concept, which is prior to its components and cannot be reduced to them. Thus, the line is real and the points allegedly composing it are just ideal constructs; or the indivisible monadic building blocks of reality are real but the (divisible) empirical objects we experience in the world are just phenomenal. Only God, an absolute intelligence, can conceive the continuity and necessity of reasons and causes (which to us look contingent) and the infinity of monads (which we experience fragmentarily as physical objects). It is hard to believe that Borges did not know this doctrine, which is a hallmark of Leibniz's philosophical system. Leibniz's use of the metaphor of a labyrinth may be given a Borgesian explanation: there is the maze-like infinity of the series of causes (like turns or forks in the Babylonian labyrinth); and there is the desert-like infinity of the indivisible (indeterminate) landscape, which is completely continuous. And the crux for Borges too is that only by transcending the inside

[4] G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1951, p. 53. See also his essay "On Freedom", in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. R. Ariew and D. Garber, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1989, pp. 94–98. We are grateful to Elhanan Yakira for having turned our attention to this source.

perspective and looking at the labyrinth from the outside, can there be hope for resolving the riddle.[5]

However, as has again and again been noted by Borges scholars, the recurring theme of labyrinths in Borges' oeuvre primarily refers to language and art, or more specifically to his *own* texts.[6] The reader of our story cannot fail to experience the feeling of being trapped in a literary labyrinth which draws him into a web of stairways and doors, challenging his deciphering abilities, his capacity to make sense of a complex text, his eagerness to understand all the ins and outs of the enticing story. And Borges himself, the master builder of labyrinths, is well aware of his ingenuity and skill but also of their futility. He knows well the fate of his Cretan precursor, another ancient master architect, Daedalus, who built an "inescapable" labyrinth but then lost his son in his hubris-driven attempt to soar into the skies. Borges knows that language is the only means by which human beings can project order into the world, orientate in it, give meaning to what otherwise would remain chaotic ("confusion"). But language and art are deceptive and *mis*leading in presenting us with riddles, as if these have "solutions". Even the most intricate maze, like the one devised by the king of Babylon, has a solution, a way out. But unlike human mazes, the world is a mystery, and mysteries have by definition no solution. Moreover, suggesting a solution is humbug, even a transgression.

The self-referential meaning of this short story is ingenious. Not only is the content of the story paradoxical and its meaning indeterminate, its *authority* is doubted. The *author* of the story is not its authority, since he is only reporting a tradition. Tradition and its "chroniclers" are declared in the opening sentence trustworthy, but with a qualification – "(only Allah is All-Knowing)". This slight reservation casts a global doubt on the whole story, which follows the first sentence. We have no way out of the labyrinth of historical record, our only starting point for knowing what happened. We will never know for sure whether events belong to history or to fiction, since only from a transcendental

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[5] Think of the well-known *aerial* photographs of Hampton Court maze. From a bird's eye view, not only is the illusion dispelled (with the awe and fun of the "inside" view), but the complexity of the labyrinth is fully resolved. But of course Borges' point is that the Babylonians did not have aerial photography and the Arabian King could not prepare his visits by consulting a tourist guidebook.

[6] For an illuminating article see Lawrence C. Schehr, "Unreading Borges's Labyrinths", *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 10 (1985/6): 177–189. Schehr compares the labyrinth story to a Möbius strip in its systematic confusion between inside and outside. In our story we, the readers, are outside the maze in which the protagonists get lost, but are equally inside lost in the enterprise of reading and deciphering (p. 179). He also emphasizes the role of death as the point where the text collapses and dissolves and of writing as the only escape from death: "To cover death, texts are generated" (p. 184). Texts are "attempts to fill the void of the signified" (p. 188).

point of view can the distinction between reality and illusion be made. But even *within* fiction, literature, we are trapped in an endless labyrinth. The title of our story has a footnote,[7] a reference to *another* text in the volume of Borges' work, "Ibn-Hakkan al Bokhari", which is another story about a labyrinth. And this story too opens with a motto containing yet another reference, this time to a further removed source, outside of Borges' work and of the physical volume which the reader is holding: the Qur'an (29: 40). And that text is a parable (like the one we are reading!), which tells us about the *spider* that built itself a house, to which those who trusted themselves rather than God are compared. And the reader is invited to use his own literary associations to further possible references, for instance the Old Testament source of inspiration for the Qur'anic text in Job 8: 14–16 which describes the impious man "whose trust is a spider's web; he leans on his house – it will not stand", which in turn is reminiscent of Psalms 127: 1 ("Unless the Lord built the house, its builders labor in vain on it"), which draws us further to the Christian rendering of this Psalm in the hymn called Nisi Dominus …

This network of meanings and associations, links and connections, creates an endless labyrinth, partly devised and controlled by the "author", partly left to the imagination of the reader struggling to invest the text with meaning. The spider is a powerful metaphor for the creation of art as well as for the activity of interpretation. Like the purely anthropocentric king of Babylon, it creates exclusively from its own resources. It builds its house out of its own body. And this network of coordinates by which the spider both moves himself and traps his prey is most systematically contrived and beautifully executed, which makes it all the more tempting. Readers of Borges are like flies caught in the ingeniously woven literary web of his stories.[8] However, as all three monotheistic religions have noted, the spider's house is a blasphemy, since it assumes that human beings are self-sufficient. The spider's house is hence declared to be the most contemptible of houses from the metaphysical point of view.[9] But

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[7] The formal use of footnoting is itself ironical: in our academic culture, footnotes are the sign of "scientific" accuracy and objective evidence. But then, of course, from a Borgesian perspective, the whole system of historical cross references can never break the borderline between text and reality, i.e. it is a *closed* system of signs, none of which has any privileged ontological status, exactly like a system of literary associations and connotations which are so ingeniously constructed by Borges' fable. Thus, it is highly doubtful whether the "chroniclers" who are declared to be the source of the story's authority are indeed "worthy of trust" anymore than the fictitious narrator. (And what is the effect achieved by adding a footnote to the word "footnote" in *this* text?)

[8] As has been noted by Martin, the etymology of the Latin word "text" is weaving (and web). See Jorge Hernandez Martin, *Readers and Labyrinths*, Garland, New York, 1995.

[9] Hume refers to the Brahmin tradition, in which "the world arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels, and annihilates afterwards

Borges believes that art (Babylonian culture) is an irresistible temptation and an inescapable tool for expressing the futility of human effort to capture desert-like reality.[10] The only alternative to art is silence, but silence is death.

If we go back to the beginning of the article and to the beginning of the text, the title of the story not only alludes to a double struggle of power and worldviews but ultimately refers to the most fundamental characteristic of all human thinking. Piaget called it symmetry; Plato referred to it as *diairesis* or dialectics. Our intellect works in comparisons, juxtapositions, discriminations, and distinctions that amount to dualistic divisions, the capacity to substitute one entity for another by tracing sameness and difference.[11] These are the basic functions of consciousness and therefore *comparing* labyrinths (and kings) are the only means of making sense of them. But consciousness has that unique (devilish) ability to suggest what lies beyond it, thus making any comparison systematically ambiguous and a-symmetrical. It can, and is inevitably led to, raise possibilities that seem to be commensurable yet are not really so, like our two labyrinths, which only share a common *name*. Even the most basic duality in the beginning of the story, that basic taxonomy of *two* kings and *two* labyrinths which offers a reassuring basis for reflection and under-

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the whole or any part of it, by absorbing it again, and resolving it into his own essence". He comments that from our anthropocentric point of view this hypothesis sounds ridiculous since we view the spider as "a little contemptible animal", but had the world been populated only by spiders (rather than intelligent human beings) such an idea would have sounded quite plausible; for why may an orderly system not be spun from the belly of a spider rather than from the human brain or mind? Hume's skeptical irony here is very similar to Borges'. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (ed. N. Kemp Smith), Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1947, pp. 180–181.

[10] Percy Bysshe Shelley's carefully wrought sonnet "Ozymandias" is also set on the background of desert landscape. It echoes the vanity of the (artist's) attempt to avoid being entrapped in it. A comparison between Shelley's sonnet and Borges' story serves to emphasize the artist's privilege of embedment in consciousness, which by its nature is inevitably ironic. Irony involves both a deeper understanding through self-conscious reflection as well as the awareness of the limits and hence the futility of that capacity of self-conscious bootstrapping. Readers of the sonnet will not fail to notice the structural analogies to Borges' story (the appeal to twice- and thrice-removed sources of authority) as well as the use of similar key metaphors (the deadly desert, king of kings, the sculptor/architect, vanity and mockery).

[11] A classical source of this idea is Plato's *Sophist* (253d): "Aren't we going to say that it takes expertise in dialectic to divide things by kinds and not to think that the same form is a different one or that a different form is the same?" Plato proceeds to describe the philosopher as the dialectician who is concerned with *being* and clarity, contrasting him to the sophist who "runs into the darkness of *that which is not*, which he's had practice dealing with, and he's hard to see because the place is so dark" (254a). Borges' quasi-dialectical pursuit of that which lies beyond clear rational reflection would be easily characterized by Plato as sophistical. *Plato: The Complete Works* (ed. John M. Cooper), Hackett, Indianapolis, 1977, p. 276.

standing, is dissolved in the end of the story into the unintelligible and ungraspable: death, on the one hand; the glory of divine immortality, on the other (and since we, mortal humans, can think only in dualistic terms, this dualistic contrast of death and immortality is the only means by which we again can try to describe the indescribable!).

Getting lost in a Borgesian maze-text ultimately points out the senselessness of depicting the world as a maze, since only by coming out of a maze can the experience of getting lost (in it) be articulated. Being entrapped in consciousness, from which no bootstrapping effort can provide an external perspective, we are left either with the childish presumption of the Babylonian parable-maker to capture the world by means of intellectual reflection or with the Arabian resignation to a world with no points of reference, no center and no coordinates by which one could even be described as getting lost, let alone as navigating one's way out. The playful idea of managing our lives as muddling through endless paths and challenging junctures is thwarted by the foreboding sense of complete void.

Although the experience of reading Borges' story, like that of navigating one's way through a maze, is primarily intellectual in nature, we should not ignore the emotional response elicited in the reader. We have already mentioned the anger and vindictiveness with which the king of Arabia reacts to his humiliation in the Babylonian court, leading to the disproportionate revenge at the end. Although we argued that the story carefully places the reader in a neutral position between the two kings, and makes him reluctant to take sides or identify exclusively with either of them, we should note that the reader's sense of fascination with the intellectual thought experiment and its decipherment is accompanied by a sense of frustration or even rage at the absence of resolution of the conflict. Intellectual playfulness and moral resentment are abstractly split in the parable into the figures of the two kings, but are hardly separable in the reader's response to the story. This duality of playfulness and rage is psychologically exhibited by children engaged in challenging games that have no easy solution: they are equally fascinated by the challenge and enraged by their failure to successfully address it. The search for meaning drives human curiosity to the limits of language and consciousness; but the encounter with the bounds of consciousness creates a sense of rage similar to that of a caged animal. Being caught in the labyrinth of self-conscious thinking we react like enraged prisoners desperately knocking on the walls of their prison cell.

Jorge Luis Borges died just before the age of Internet, but he cast his literary world wide web long before its electronic realization.

Compendio

El artículo intenta una lectura meticulosa de esta breve y condensada parábola. Borges presenta una violenta confrontación entre dos perspectivas en competición: cultura y naturaleza, civilización y desierto, régimen político contra ascetismo monástico, ciencia y religión, articulación temporal contrastada con la eternidad, definición espacial vs. territorio sin límites. Estos contrastes son iluminados por los "dos laberintos" de Leibniz y sus nociones alternativas de infinidad – una que puede ser captada por la razón humana, y la otra solamente por Dios. Pero la oscilación entre estos dos laberintos crea un nuevo laberinto en el cual se encuentra atrapado el lector. Este es un laberinto de conciencia, del giro infinito de la reflexión sobre nuestros propios pensamientos. Además, Borges, el experto constructor del laberinto literario, cae en la trampa que el mismo ha creado, perdiendo autoridad de autor en un laberinto de habla reportada, referencias textuales y referencias en esas referencias que conducen a un proceso asociativo infinito e incontrolable, formando una red infinita. El cuento de Borges evoca ansiedad en el lector, porque el aspecto juguetón del ejercicio intelectual típico de la orientación en laberintos es acompañado por un choque sumamente emocional entre las dos perspectivas. Vivaz ironía es acoplada a una total seriedad.