The Library, the Labyrinth, and "Things Invisible:" A Comparative Study of Jonathan Swift's A Tale of a Tub and Jorge Louis Borges' Ficciones

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Chapter One: Introduction – "Reducing All Mankind:" A Comparative Study of Jonathan Swift's A Tale of a Tub and Jorge Louis Borges' Ficciones

One of the most difficult and yet perhaps most revealing means of investigating the proclivities and flaws of the contemporary age is to compare the literatures of this time with the literature of a past time. The benefits of such a comparison can first highlight the ways in which talented authors from different ages employ similar methods in skillful ways; but moreover, the assessment can help to place postmodern literature, culture, and individuals within a proper and perceivable historical context. To do so is to recognize the advances, discoveries, promises, limitations, and flaws in the present manner of thinking and to avoid the crippling mistake of regarding only the present, assuming its presuppositions to be always accurate. Most importantly, focused study into a text from a time vastly different from the present avails one of a profound comprehension of human possibility, while at the same time serving as a reminder that, more often than not, the present complexities are far more like those dilemmas faced by greater minds in past times. While vastly different in background, Jonathan Swift's eighteenth-century satirical A Tale of a Tub and Jorge Louis Borges' postmodern short story collection Ficciones both employ a distinctive type of fantasy, allegory, and narrative voice to discompose readers, and furthermore investigate the themes of human reason, memory, and epistemology. Ultimately both works make emptiness their centers, but while Borges' labyrinthine library stories suggest that mankind is irrevocably limited by his subjectivity and trapped within his skewed nature, Swift's clever satire of his modern narrator shows that, supported by reason and

sustained by the foundations of history and community, man does possesses the ability to objectively approach reality.

Jonathan Swift was an Anglican clergyman who lived and wrote in eighteenth century England. Swift composed chiefly in the satirical mode: he wrote primarily to instruct, albeit in a humorous and more often than not biting tone. One of his purposes being didactic, Swift's texts are directed primarily towards his immediate audience, a relatively homogenous eighteenth century European religious assembly. His Tale of a Tub is one of his most complex and most delightful satires, a composition which addresses a multitude of moral defects Swift saw both specific to his own time and throughout human nature in general. The text is one that requires readers' utmost attention to untangle and extract Swift's underlying purposes.

Much different from Swift, Argentinean Jorge Louis Borges was a twentieth century creator of short stories widely known for his fantastical stories, tales filled with mysterious characters, puzzling propositions, and disorienting symbols of mazes, labyrinths, and mirrors. A Spanish author whose stories were successfully translated into English and include a spectrum of Argentinean, Parisian, European, and Jewish figures, Borges' works constitute, in one critic's words, "a species of international metaphor" (Kerrigan 9). His texts address not only a contemporary postmodern audience, but also draws in historical figures, also questioning the reliability of these past voices. With such characteristics, Borges and his works have become one of the staples of postmodern literature studies. Ficciones, Borges' collection of short stories, is open-ended and confusing like a never-ending maze, only suggestive and never conclusive, a prime example of the postmodern attitude.

Despite Swift and Borges' great differences, the texts of these two authors share some significant and fascinating similarities, particularly the manner in which they both employ

fantasy, allegory, and an unreliable narrator in their texts. To begin, the fantastic characteristics of A Tale and Ficciones create a make-believe world, allowing for more possibilities than strict reality and concurrently permitting the authors to raise significant questions *about* that reality. Likewise, the attitude of each author toward allegory and the manner in which they each employ this literary tool in their works is closely related. Both Swift and Borges dislike simple allegory, lampooning both authors who wrote unsophisticated allegory and readers who demanded no more than one-dimensional prose to satisfy them. And despite their attitudes toward this kind of allegory, both authors' works are heavily allegorical and similar in their indirect manner. Essentially, both writers employ a complex device of allegory to suggest a plurality of meanings and, moreover, to upset their readers' comfortable conclusions about reality. Furthermore, both A Tale and Ficciones have as their narrators questionable and unreliable voices. These untrustworthy voices make even the supposed "solutions" or conclusions to the texts' questions dubious and problematic. Ultimately the narrative voices of both A Tale and Ficciones "trap" readers into mazes of uncertainty, further shaking readers' confidence in their interpretive abilities.

Most importantly, both Swift and Borges use these methods of fantasy, allegory, and unreliable narrators to inquire into significant themes of "knowing," namely human reason, memory, and epistemology. Their investigations raise significant questions of objectivity, asking both how we reach objective standards and whether that is a possibility. At these philosophical points, Swift and Borges begin to diverge. Borges' works suggest that the subjectivity and the limitations of the human mind render the universe's nature ultimately unknowable. According to the assumptions of Borges' stories, men are inescapably limited in their biases, ultimately separated from one another by their predispositions and unable to draw definitive conclusions

about the outside universe's order. Since no objective standards can be reached, all venues are a possibility; and since all venues are a possibility but none are definitive, everything is subject to play. In the story "Death and the Compass," Borges composes a "metaphysical" detective story to call into question the nature of reason and mankind's ability to effectively reason. The tale of Funes in "Funes, the Memorious" calls attention to the severe subjectivity and limitations of human memory, while at the same time suggesting that a prolific or perfect memory could in fact be destructive. The story furthermore suggests that, in the face of both a faulty memory and flawed language, systems are the best method of compensation. Memories of the past are cumbersome and are helpful only as fodder for contemporary use. Ultimately, Borges suggests in "The Library of Babel" that, while every explanation of reality's nature is a possibility, even unseen or spiritual ones, certainty about any vindication is an impossibility. Just as the library of the story is an endless maze with an empty and infinite center, Borges' stories ultimately propose that mankind's subjectivity and limitations trap him in a reality with an essentially unknowable and "empty" core.

Likewise, Swift's A Tale deals with these same subjects of reason, memory, and knowing, but draw different conclusions on these themes. Swift's subtle satire on his own narrator reveals his personal disdain for the materialism of modernity, understanding that merely material explanations for life's questions would result in the confining subjectivity of Borges' stories. Swift views these material explanations for all the evidences of reality as unreasonable, resulting in the imbalances he describes in Jack and Peter and embodies in his narrator. Furthermore, while the complexity of Swift's satire admits that objectivity is difficult and certainty never a given, one can maintain his objective understanding of the world by exercising his reason within the supports of history and community. Swift handles these concepts most thoroughly in his

portion on "A Digression Concerning Madness." In this digression we come into contact with Swift's most tangled and brilliant work. Ultimately what readers discover is that, like Borges, Swift has significant issues with human reason and memory, but for entirely different reasons. Swift sees the limitations and flaws of modern reason a problem chiefly of balance, of tipping either into arrogant intellectualism on one hand or zealous ignorance on the other; likewise, modern memory is short-lived primarily due to its fascination with novelty and excitement, and its proud obsession with systematizing all knowledge. Both problems are a result of intellectual imbalance, and both are a result of the modern separation with an anchoring community and a balancing past. Swift foresees the problems modernity's fixation with the material and temporal would cause, skewing the mind's ability to effectively reason and subsequently result in its separation from history and community. Understanding that these human limitations are balanced by community and history, Swift combats Borges' idea that the limitations of reason and memory make all definitive conclusions unreliable. Thus Swift ultimately suggests that, while challenging to maintain and never confirmed by certainty, objectivity is sustained when reason is supported by an equally as reasonable community within a healthy contextual understanding of history.

Thus the reason Swift's works read so similarly to Borges is ultimately because of the subjective modernist narrator Swift employs to confuse and disorient his reader: essentially, like Borges' tale, A Tale is constructed around a core of "nothingness," what Swift considered the end of all modernist, material conclusions. In the "Digression Concerning Madness," the narrator sets up the dichotomy of "fools" and "knaves," suggesting that humanity's only options are either bitter knowledge of the universe's meaninglessness or blissful ignorance, his either/or opposition leaving the conclusion of A Tale empty. The key difference between the labyrinthine

emptiness of Borges' work and the narrative barrenness of A Tale is Swift's repudiation of his narrator's materialism and his own acknowledgement of the universe's unseen element. Swift's modernist narrator, who acknowledges only material explanations for immaterial outcomes, is unable at the crucial conjuncture of the text to provide readers with an explanation of the world's production of criminals and conquerors, madmen and saints. With only material and temporary explanations for reality and divided from history and community, the modern narrator leaves the text literally blank, reflecting the empty centers of Borges' work.

Thus in A Tale readers find both an acknowledgment of the dilemmas Borges' stories propose and a repudiation of the subjectivity Ficciones and postmodernity maintain are inescapable. The problems of subjectivity that Borges' stories raise are real: human reasoning is limited, memory is subjective, and our ability to fully know the universe's nature is severely constricted. A Tale acknowledges these problems, while proposing a better way: by maintaining a proper balance between foolishness and knavery in connection with a balanced community and the anchoring hold of history, individuals are balanced in their reason, helped in their memory, and provided with a superior explanation for the universe's unknowable aspects. Objectivity then, by Swift's standards, is not absolute certitude about all the universe's inner workings; rather, it is a quality of the mind maintained and encouraged by reason within the proper context of community and history, one that both retains its intelligent conclusions all the while making room for new evidences. For, as the text of A Tale so rightly inquires, "[W]hat Man in the natural State, or Course of Thinking, did ever conceive it in his Power, to reduce the Notions of all Mankind, exactly to the same Length, and Breadth, and Heighth of his own?" (348).

Chapter Two: Ambushed by the Author—Fantasy, Allegory, and Narration in Swift's A Tale of a Tub

Fantasy is, like many other literary terms, an expression with a multitude of connotations. Simply put, fantasy is any element of a story that does not correspond with elements found in reality; usually, the term is associated with mythical or magical characters, places, or events in literature. More importantly, literary fantasy opens up an opportunity to explore prospects that strict realism wouldn't allow. Mark Frisch writes that fantasy "creates a world of possibilities, a world that . . . is aesthetically boundless." However, the expression can also denote some surprising and at times almost contradictory aspects. Frisch comments that the freedom of imagination that fantasy creates also "underscores our limitations" by emphasizing those characters we are not and those actions we cannot take (53). While it explores make-believe worlds, fantasy can encourage individuals to be more aware of themselves and reality. Todd McGowan notes that fantasy can be the fulfillment of a real desire, even if it is only an imaginary fulfillment (52). Furthermore, Carter Wheelock argues that fantasy can be a method of drawing *nearer* to the fundamental questions of reality, not stepping away from them (47). This quality is particularly true in the case of satire: fantastic characters, settings, or events are created to more effectively address and satirize points of reality the author wishes to emphasize. Thus fantasy is a mode which can simultaneously take us away from and towards reality by providing a picture of a world markedly different from our own while raising questions that force us to face the most essential elements *of* reality.

The satire of A Tale of a Tub employs fantasy to stress human limitation and to ridicule those who believe they are exempt from those limitations by creating embellished characters to mock real ones. Satire is similar to fantasy in that it a method of extremes, like a circus clown's

round nose and clumsy white gloves: the small and silly are exaggerated to large and ridiculous proportions so as to mock the frivolities made common by everyday appearance. Thus satire often employs fantastic characters to achieve its critical purposes and fulfills the previous definitions of fantasy by taking readers away from physical reality while simultaneously raising fundamental questions and insights into how that reality works, most specifically about society's intellectual and moral shortcomings. Gilbert Highet explains that through satire, those "who have hitherto been normal are transformed into clowns, drunkards, nymphomaniacs, sadists, and characters from obsolete motion-pictures" (156). Many times, as in Swift's case, the satirist takes the exaggeration further, creating figures so embellished that they are at least highly unlikely, if not outright impossible; and yet, as Highet notes, the satire is crammed with realistic details, in order to make the story's atmosphere genuine (149). For example, in the allegorical portions of A Tale, as the brothers Peter and Jack become increasingly mad, the descriptions of them take on a ridiculousness akin to fantastic: the lunatic brother Jack in his most insane state can twist his tongue up into his nose and "deliver a strange Kind of Speech from thence . . . who began to improve the Spanish Accomplishment of *Braying*; and having large Ears, perpetually exposed and arrected, he carried his Art to such a Perfection, that it was a Point of great Difficulty to distinguish . . . the *Original* and the *Copy*" (364). The Aeolists, the cult of the zealous Jack, believe "the *Wind* to be origin of all things" and gather in a circle "with every Man a Pair of Bellows applied to his Neighbour's Breech, by which they blew up each other to the Shape and Size of a *Tub*" (341). Thus Swift's characters take on far-fetched proportions, reaching the limits of reality and stretching into the fantastic.

Furthermore, not only are the characters of satire fantastic, but the world of satire is often equally as whimsical. In order create a critique sharp enough to cut, the satirist must fashion an

entire society of unrealistic proportions, while at the same time employing familiar details in order to connect his satire with its audience. Highet describes this connection between real society and the created world of satire that mocks that society:

> Satire wishes to expose and criticize and shame human life, but it pretends to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth . . . it usually does this in one of two ways: either by showing an apparently factual but really ludicrous and debased picture of this world; or by showing a picture of another world, with which our world is contrasted . . . [S]atire does not usually compare two real societies; it compares a real and an ideal, or a noble dream with a debased reality . . . Sometimes, again, the traveler makes his way quite outside this earthly realm to a region inhabited by begins who are inhuman, or superhuman, or else peopled by human creatures on a different plane of existence . . . [W]hen it involves criticism of life in this world, with exposures of human vices and weaknesses and bitter or teasing humor, then it is satire. (158-9, 162)

Oftentimes then, satirical works will possess fantastical settings in order to make the gap between the author's ideal and common society more clearly understood.

The satirical expert, Swift was masterful in the creation of such worlds. His Gulliver's Travels is perhaps the best example of the fantastic creation of unreal societies for satirical purposes. In Gulliver's Travels, Swift fashions several civilizations with which to compare both his contemporary society and the human race in general. Likewise, in A Tale, Swift's societies are populated with figures such as the *Duchess d'Argent*, *Madame de Grands Titres*, and the *Countess d'Orgueil*, a cult with the idol of a tailor, and a society of people who deify a suit of clothes. In order to mock the abuses of religion, Swift creates whole societies of figures who

worship either fashion or air, depending on his object of satire. The world the three brothers inhabit in A Tale matches the fantastic proportions of their characters, as Swift employs elements of fantasy to exaggerate the faults of society and human morality.

Yet, despite the fantastic characters that populate the allegorical portions of A Tale, the real fantasy of the story takes place in the narrator's *mind*, where a true confusion of fiction and reality takes place. Despite the extraordinary proportions that the allegory segments of A Tale employ, these sections are not the pinnacle of the text's fantastic elements. The three brothers' story takes up less than half of the entire work, and in fact, the majority of A Tale concentrates not on the actual story, but rather on the rambling digressions of the narrator that punctuate the allegory. As critics have noted, the allegorical portions of the text lack Swift's usual complexity and power; Williams explains that, despite the allegory's delightful satire, "all the work has been done for us" in these segments (695). The digressions, however, portions where the narrative voice takes over the storyline, are widely recognized for an almost nameless quality of unreality, an intangible tangle of biting satire, hilarious absurdity, and sheer madness. The digressions' complexities give credence to the notion that is it is these sections, and not the "plot" of the three brothers, that hold the power of Swift's voice, and the silly and yet complex narrator is the text's real subject.

The narrator of A Tale is a profoundly exaggerated characterization of the kind of figure Swift considered to be the worst sort of writer. Williams notes that of all of Swift's "mouthpieces" the narrator of A Tale is the "least tangible" (696). The complexity of this voice provides a sense of "fantasy," if for no other reason than the narrator is laughable to say the least, and at times outright mad. The multiple introductions, prefaces, and acknowledgements that the piece commences with (filling more than fifteen pages before the "tale" of A Tale actually

begins) establish the narrator as the satirist's "clown" that Highet references, before he even writes one word on his supposed subject of "a tub." Thus we are aware from the beginning that "the Author is the object of satire" (Williams 696). As the text continues and digressions punctuate each chapter, the narrator becomes increasingly clownish, slipping into idiocy, and eventually madness. Williams describes the sense of unreality that such an outlandish voice evokes:

> [T]he Author of the Tale is from beginning to end a *fantastic* creature, a mere bundle of unrelated qualities. Though it is useful to speak of him so, it is not really possible to regard him as a *person* . . . The presentation of nonsense is, indeed, the Author's primary satiric function; *fantasy*, unreality, is what he is there to express. (693) [italics added]

Thus when the narrator in the section appropriately titled "A Digression Concerning Madness" states that, like clouds of rain upon the earth, understanding comes about only when the human brain is "troubled and overspread by Vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties, to water the Invention, and render it fruitful" (349), the narrator's madness, which began as mere inanity, has come full circle, and he makes truly insane claims in the most rational and detailed manner. The narrative voice, obsessed with his own importance, soon assumes such a sense of folly and lunacy that he loses all connection with reality, becoming "other worldly" in the worst sense.

Besides its fantastical elements, A Tale also employs allegory in a unique manner, one marked with more convolution and ambiguity than traditional allegory. The impenetrability of Swift's allegory is compounded by the fact that the technique of allegory itself even in its simpler forms is deeply complex. As Gordon Terskey explains, the conventional explanation of allegory, in its most simplified version, is an "extended metaphor." However, as a host of critics

have pointed out, this traditional definition falls significantly short of allegory's functions and intricacies. Terskey goes on to note that the technique of irony is sometimes classified under allegory; and yet, irony (another literary term of great deliberation) is a term of opposites. Furthermore, allegory's attempt to provide clarification on the immaterial through connection with the material oftentimes leaves vast room for interpretation: rather than providing a straightforward relationship between Allegorical Figure A and Real Meaning B, allegory tends towards a "plurality of meaning," where in its most extreme cases, "[n]othing . . . is absolutely opposed to anything else;" the technique "approaches chaos, and rise[s] out of it" (Terskey 398). Furthermore, throughout much of its use in literary history, allegory has been used as a tool to illustrate a moral lesson, often times with religious intentions. For this reason, allegory has been disparaged by some for its tedious and didactic nature. However, the technique has seen a revived interest in recent literary criticism, specifically for its characteristics of ambiguity mentioned above. In accordance with its complex nature, Swift employs allegory in a manner that is edifying, but also takes advantage of all its shades and intricacies, transforming the technique in a way few had done before.

Besides the usually troublesome nature of allegory, Swift's technique is further complicated by his disdain for those who read and write allegory in a purely direct manner. Swift's scorn for simple allegory is surprising given the fact that the three brothers' story seems to fulfill the traditional definition of allegory, with an apparently direct connection between the three squabbling siblings and their distortion of their father's Will, and the Church and its historical treatment of Scripture. Indeed, these sections include some delightful and insightful points, but portions which, as suggested above, require little work from the reader. Thus Section II in which the brothers embroider their coats with forbidden decorations of gold lace, colored

satin, and shoulder-knots is, at first glance, an amusing but easily explicable catalogue of the Church's abuses of doctrine throughout history. The coats, representative of the Church and its doctrine, are decorated by the brothers first by "shoulder-knots," signifying the superfluous "pageantry" the church began to engage in as a response to worldly pressures; the shoulder-knots are quickly followed by other additions, the brothers' manipulating their Father's Will each time to conform to their new practices. While the brothers, the Father's Will, and their coats are representative of the Church and its activities throughout history, the text contains more than just the surface allegory. What Swift might actually being doing in such sections as this is both providing the reader with an accessible list of religious problems, while at the same time mocking those who can go no deeper *than* the easily accessible. Harold D. Kelling, in his explanation of A Tale's structure, suggests that the primary illustration in the allegory of the coats is the "qualities symbolized in the oratorial machines, especially the qualities of subjectivity and dogmatism." Kelling goes on to maintain that "[r]ead by themselves, the sections of the coat allegory are superficial and amusing; and Swift indicates it was his purpose to make them seem superficial" (204-5). When the narrative voice in "A Digression of the Modern Kind" claims he has "in Compliance with a Lesson of Great Age and Authority . . . attempted carrying the Point in all its Heights; and accordingly throughout this Divine Treatise, have skillfully kneaded up both together with a Layer of Utile and a Layer of Dulce," the reader finds that, while the mixture of instruction and pleasure is rooted in history, in the hands of such a mindless Hack, the statement reaches a new level of incredulous hilarity (327). The Hack is the voice of the allegorical sections as well as the digressive ones, and the reader should be just as wary of taking these portions at face values as he is of the deviations.

Furthermore, Swift's inclusion of "W. Wotton's" comical footnotes adds to his mockery of such shallow intellects. Swift's Hack narrator mentions Wotton by name (or, rather [in]discreetly as "Mr. W—tt—on"), as his "worthy and ingenious Friend" (329). The joke, and Swift's underlying disdain for such fulsome ignorance, is compounded upon reading Wotton's bitter invective on A Tale, in which he states that Swift's work "is of so irreligious a nature, is so crude a Banter upon all that is esteemed as Sacred" that he, in the spirit of a true Modern, graciously exposes "the Mischief of the Ludicrous Allegory . . . to shew what that drives at which has been so greedily bought up and read" (592). Swift's inclusion of Wotton's notes on his supposedly "irreligious" text adds another ingeniously comical layer to an already amusing work and more significantly reveals Swift's deep contempt for those writers, critics, and readers who cannot create or infer more than the most obvious referent in what should used and read as a complex and multifaceted literary tool. Swift does not dismiss the use of allegory; rather, he dismisses those writers and readers whose desire for truth reaches only the simplest levels and who employ what they believe to be a "simple" tool to explain profoundly complex and at times inexplicable concepts.

Moreover, while the "story" of A Tale of a Tub is inarguably allegorical, it is an allegory of multiple turns and varying shades, one in which manifold questions are proposed and no easy answers provided. The three brothers' story is far more than a simple "extended metaphor." The allegory, while still instructional on the abuses of the historical Church, shows the dangers of this literary method when improperly used. As Dr. Karen Prior describes, Swift "reverses" traditional allegory by "literalizing the metaphoric" (2). Thus when the cry of "*[t]hat Fellow . . . has no Soul; where is his Shoulder-knot*?" confronts the brothers and their pitiful lack of ornamentation upon their coats, the aim is more than a simple allegory between inappropriate

decoration in clothes and improper religious additions by the Church (306): it is a criticism against the Church's tendency to *equate* the spiritual with the physical, when style, decoration, and the material are linked to a person's spiritual (non)existence.

Another manner in which the allegory of A Tale is complicated is in the multitudinous interpretive levels of the language Swift employs. Throughout A Tale, the narrative voice employs language and makes statements that, taken alone, seem reasonably solid; however, in the mouth of a Hack, they take on entirely different connotation. For example, a line like, "I advise therefore the courteous Reader, to peruse with a world of Application, again and again, whatever I have written upon this Matter" could be legitimately offered, *if* directly spoken by Swift—and indeed, his work *has* been subject to repeated perusals—but spoken by the modernist Hack, the work becomes a comical blend of arrogance and ignorance (305). As Herbert Davis explains, Swift's allegory becomes impossibly complex when one considers how similar language and the same conjectures are made by parties on *both* sides of the game:

> [A Tale of a Tub] is like a string of puns and conceits held together by a thread of irony. The dangers of Swift's satire on the corruptions of religion, whether in the allegory itself, or in the account of the sect of the Aeolist . . . arise out of the verbal play of his wit, which does not hesitate to make a sort of punning game with all the words which had become, it is true, soiled and bent by the usage they had received at the hands of hypocrites and fanatics, but which had nevertheless also been upon the lips of saints and prophets and remained for the devout Christian sacred symbols of his faith. (122-23)

Such double meanings become deeper, more comical, and more puzzling throughout the text. The height of this linguistic genius is the famous line in "A Digression Concerning Madness"

when the narrative voice proclaims that "[l]ast Week I saw a Woman *flay'd*, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse" (352). The satiric layers and multiple connotations of such a line can hardly be recounted. On the one hand, the statement is laughably obvious, particularly in the mouth of such a pretentious Hack; on the other hand, however, the declaration is true. It is, as Beth Kowaleski-Wallace describes, a "vertiginous" experience, one which "encourages us to fathom what it means first to embrace the surface, then to explore the meaning of depth . . . [and] in the end, we are hard pressed to say which side comes out on top." She states, "The brilliance of Swift's text lies in its ability to keep both alternatives in play simultaneously. Thus we live in a world where surface is all . . . *and* in a world where the truth is always deep and necessarily difficult to come by" (437). The delight and difficulty in Swift's allegory lies in the glittering facets of its numerous exterior meanings, and the bright distraction of word play makes reaching the essential depth even more difficult to ascertain.

The flawed and unpredictable nature of A Tale's narrator is another unique and fundamental aspect of this work that makes it particularly "slippery" and profoundly unique. Williams explains that the narrator of A Tale is the most unreliable of all Swift's literary personae, the "least rigid of them all, for he has the special function of plunging us into chaos, confusion, self-deceit, a world of upheaval and destruction" (694). The defective and perplexing characteristics of A Tale's narrator are numerous. To begin with, the Hack suffers from a self-confessed problem with memory. Since "nothing is so very tender as a *Modern* Piece of Wit," the voice admits that "the unhappy shortness of my Memory led me into an Error" (285, 311). The significance and reliability of memory, both in literature and in postmodernism, is a subject to be treated later; suffice it to say that this amnesic profession makes the reader at the least uncomfortable with the reliability of what he is being offered.

As several critics have pointed out, the unreliability of the narrative voice creates special difficulties for the reader. To begin with, the two modes with which the narrator speaks require two opposing responses from the reader; but at which point which response is appropriate is never clear. Richard Nash explains how the allegory and digressions of A Tale evoke differing reactions from the reader but provide few clues on when to employ which response:

> While the allegorical mode of the parable encourages the reader's *submission* to the text, the narrative mode of the digressions encourages the reader to interpret that text *against* its ostensible meaning. In shifting between modes, the reader is forced to range back and forth between wit and judgment, recognition and distinction, in arriving at his own interpretation of the text. (423) [italics added]

Accordingly, when the narrator describes the scene in which brother Peter (now "LORD Peter") serves his brothers a plain loaf of brown bread and proclaims it "excellent good mutton," the reader is understandably expected to become a student of the text and interpret the illustration as a satire upon the Catholic Church's doctrine of transubstantiation (assisted, of course, by the insightful notes of W. Wotton) (323). Such portions of the text require the reader's cooperation. However, when in the very next chapter the narrator claims "an absolute Authority in Right, as the freshest Modern, which gives me a Despotick Power over all Authors before me" (330), the reader is intended to reject the voice's preposterously arrogant claims. And yet, when the voice declares in another digressive section that "the Society of Writers would quickly be reduced to a very inconsiderable Number, if Men were put upon making Books, with the fatal Confinement of delivering nothing beyond what is to the Purpose" (337), we are caught between disagreement with the voice's disparaging tone upon the reduction of so many authors, and agreement with the statement's positive truth. The voice of the mad Hack and the voice of the trusted Swift are

seamlessly interwoven, and we are unable to extricate the two. The dependability of the narrative voice is further undermined by the conflicting sections of allegory and satiric digression, and by the manner in which these two modes are at times fused together.

Such a troubling voice confuses even what readers might consider the "solution" to the problems of A Tale, the mild figure of Martin, leaving readers without a trustworthy guide to lead them to a resolution to the moral problems that the text raises. Towards the middle of the story, Martin emerges as the voice of easygoing moderation, the calming sense of reason opposed to both his brother Peter's knavery and his brother Jack's madness. When Jack and Martin rediscover their Father's Will and its instructions against adding anything to their coats, they set about removing the extra ornamentation. Fueled by the memory of Peter's abusive treatment, Jack attacks the coat with unbridled fury, tearing at the coat until it is nothing but rags. Martin, however, after realizing that completely removing all the decorations would damage the original coat, "resolve[s] to proceed more moderately in the rest of the Work . . . conclud[ing] the wisest course was to let it remain; resolving in no Case whatsoever, that the Substance of the Stuff should suffer Injury," and later advising Jack to do the same. The brother Martin, as indicated by his name and by his actions and reactions to Peter and Jack (along with the "insightful" notes of W. Wotton), clearly represents Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation. Critical consensus is that Martin is Swift's allegorical depiction of the Anglican Church and, moreover, his illustration of moderation and calm restraint; James Alan Dowie observes in a note to his work on Swift as a political writer that "[a]lthough the Anglican Church is not Lutheran, it is clear that Martin stands for both Luther and the Church of England. His moderation is what Swift particularly admires" (357). The reader, as a pupil and not a critic of the analogy, interprets Martin as the embodiment of moderation and reason, a mild and

comfortable compromise between Peter and Jack, both in the sphere of religious reform and personal life.

However, despite his emphasis upon moderation, Swift was neither a champion of comfort or compromise merely for the sake of keeping peace. Martin's speech on temperance is interjected by the narrator who proudly comments that "MARTIN [. . .] doubtless would have delivered an admirable Lecture of Morality, which might have exceedingly contributed to my Reader's *Repose, both of Body and Mind*: (the true End of *Ethicks*)" (335). Suddenly, the reader finds his comfortable analogy interrupted by the dubious voice of the Hack, suggesting that to follow even Martin's method would end in carefree rest—an easy but questionable end for ethical action. As Nash suggests, "Martin occupies the role of the protagonists in the allegory and yet seems to be no more than a cautious, well-meaning, but ineffectual moralizer . . . Certainly, Martin represents a positive alternative to the follies of Peter and Jack, but the avoidance of madness is not itself heroic" (418-9). Williams believes that Martin is an example not of the ideal but of the "compromise standard," the best that "half-blind humanity" is able to achieve (695). Readers should remember that the sections of allegory still proceed from the mouth of the modernist Hack, not (directly) from Swift, and passages like the one above serve as a reminder of this fact. Therefore, in the end, this praise of Martin, the supposed figure of restraint and reason, comes from a mind that follows more along the lines of the brutish Peter or the lunatic Jack. Thus the fundamental authority and reliability of the authorial voice is problematic at the very point were the reader expects the positive or "solution" of the allegory and satire to exist.

Ultimately what we find is that the narrator of A Tale is *intended* to be so unstable and unpredictable in order to achieve the technique for which Swift's satire is perhaps most

famous—what A. E. Dyson calls reader entrapment. The narrator of A Tale is purposely twisted in order to force readers to question both the dependability of authorial voice as well as their own susceptibility to being easily duped. Dyson gives a thorough explanation of this entrapment, and how it works:

> At one moment he [the narrator] will make outrageously inhuman proposals, with a show of great reasonableness, and an affected certainty that we shall find them acceptable; at another, he will make soundly moral or Christian proposals, which are confidently held up for scorn . . . A state of tension, not to say war, exists between Swift and his readers. The very tone in which he writes is turned into a weapon. It is the tone of polite conversation, friendly and apparently dealing in common-places. Naturally our assent is captured, since the polite style, the guarantee of gentlemanly equality, is the last one in which we expect to be attacked or betrayed. But the propositions to which we find ourselves agreeing are in varying degrees monstrous, warped, or absurd . . . No conjuror is more adept at making us look the wrong way . . . (674-5)

Thus the text's guide, the voice which all other literary experience has taught readers to trust, suffers not only from a deplorable lack of memory, but moreover, puts forth outrageous and sometimes dangerous propositions in the most polite and unaffected manner imaginable. Even if readers remain on guard, they are almost guaranteed to eventually fall prey to the voice's gentle and superficially reasonable suggestions, offers they would most likely at any other time reject with horror. Furthermore, those statements or allegorical figures which the reader finally figures to be the "real" author's solution to all the troubles presented in the text often turn out to be just another trap.

Perhaps of all of the complicated and delightful characteristics of Swift's work, it is the ambiguous and troubling narrative voice that makes A Tale of a Tub so surprisingly postmodern and links Swift's work so closely with Borges'. Postmodernism is concerned, among other things, with the (un)reliability of authoritative voices, those declarations which readers (both of literature and life) had previously been able to trust. Furthermore, postmodern authors, of whom Borges is a leader, question whether *any* narrative voice is ever able to provide readers with a trustworthy path. If the author is rejected on suspicious grounds, as is so often the case in postmodern criticism, the focus becomes not the interaction between author and reader, but primarily the exchange between the reader and text—the very emphasis one sees in the criticism about A Tale. Nash explains that an inappropriate attention to the relationship of Swift and his persona interferes with the true issue in that "it tends to project onto the text problems of interpretation that properly belong to the relationship of reader and text" (424). Part of the genius of A Tale is its ability to focus the spotlight on the reader rather than the author and shake our confidence not only in the reliability of the narrator, but in our own abilities as readers. The experience, as Williams describes, is one of dangerous elation: "[W]e are continually pulled on to what seems to be firm ground, where we feel that we know just what is absurd in the remarks of the Author—and therefore, by implication, what is sensible—only to be pushed briskly off again into chaos. The experience is purely enjoyable; what we feel is a breathless exhilaration . . ." (696).

Chapter Three: Lost in the Labyrinth-- Fantasy, Allegory, and Narration in Jorge Louis Borges' Ficciones

The feeling of "breathless exhilaration" in A Tale of a Tub is comparable to the sensation of reading Borges as well. Both A Tale of a Tub and Ficciones possess a particular slippery feel: the reader searches for solid ground, a trusty voice, or a direct analogy. To our chagrin (and enchantment), all expectations are dashed; both works defy predictability. The texts seek to displace their readers, to upset expectations and comfortable conclusions, and the methods of both overlap in some significant and noteworthy ways. Borges' stories, like A Tale, force the reader to interact with the text, judging, interpreting, and drawing conclusions in a particularly unconventional manner. Furthermore, like Swift's, Borges' stories are widely acknowledged for their distinctively postmodern characteristics and the manner in which they employ fantasy, allegory, and an unreliable narrator as a repudiation of modernity.

Borges' short stories possess fantastic elements similar to A Tale of a Tub, perhaps delving into the world of fantasy even more deeply than Swift does, both in its incredible characters and unreal worlds. The fiercely satirical nature of Swift's work requires that he exaggerate his characters, their looks, actions, and habits, to fantastical proportions; and while Borges' stories do not share the same satiric purposes, they do possess characters that flout reality. As Frances Wyers Weber explains, "Borges must be placed in an intermediate zone between the critical and the imaginative, the intellectual and the poetic, the real and the invented" (124). Like Swift's, Borges' characters are not the typical figures associated with fantasy; rather, they are solid, detailed, clearly drawn creatures. Borges' strength of detail, his propensity for naming specific persons and places, both real and imagined, gives his stories a powerful authenticity that makes the fantastic elements that much more extraordinary. In "Funes,

The Memorious," Funes is described with "his face immobile and Indian-like . . . behind his cigarette . . . the strong delicate fingers of the plainsman who can braid leather . . . his voice, the deliberate, resentful, nasal voice of the old Eastern shore man" (107). Funes is a character similar to many figures; and yet, he is so completely *unlike* other characters, for Funes possesses an infallible memory of every sensory experience he has ever known. Thus Borges takes a realistically depicted character and endows him with fantastic mental characteristics, a method he makes use of in other stories. For example, in "The Circular Ruins," the main character in the story has no other distinguishing traits—besides his ability to dream up an entire human being, a man in "minute entirety and impose him on reality" (58).

Furthermore, like Swift, Borges creates fantasy worlds to further explore his fantastic ideas. In "The Library of Babel," for example, the entire cosmos is a storehouse of books: the "universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite, number of hexagonal galleries" (79). "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," follows the discovery of an entirely new world created by a secret gathering of scientists that begins to overtake the real one. Borges follows suit with Swift in creating fantastic characters and worlds in which his exploratory tales can take place.

As noted above, Borges' motivations for creating such characters and worlds are not to satirize or mock; rather, the stories of Ficciones exist in the realm of fantasy in order to probe the fundamental questions of reality and epistemology, typifying the postmodernism's inquisitional state of mind. Fantasy literature allows the author and the reader to enter realms which exist only in imagination, opening possibilities that are hitherto impossible. As Eleni Kefala explains, the concept of infinite opportunity is an essential element to Borges' literature: "Borges chooses fantasy over realism because fantasy eliminates the rational dogmatisms of reason and places the

world and the self within an infinite proliferation of meaning and interpretations where certainties diminish and conflicts bifurcate" (72). The questions which Borges wishes to ponder are of such a deep and fundamental order that to even ask them requires a game of "what if" in its most extreme form: The question "*What if* a man could remember everything?" becomes an even more profound inquiry into the correlation between memory and language, and the nature and necessity of each. Like A Tale, Borges' stories encourage the reader to question the proposition that the physical world is the only reality. Evelyn Fishburn comments that Borges' literature possesses no "closed polarizations: it is not the *either/or* of Cartesian thought but the *both/and* of the postmodernist disintegration of essences." When the idealism of the fictional Tlon begins to invade the "real" world, we face the "extent to which the real is porous to the unreal, objectivity to subjectivity" (59). Thus Borges' fantastic characters and worlds encourage the reader to question and doubt the underpinning propositions.

Furthermore, as in A Tale, the primary fantasy of Ficciones is a fantasy of the narrative psyche, a mixture between reality and unreality, and the effect of this amalgamation is a forcible inquiry into the mind's ability to effectively grasp reality. The narrator of Borges' stories suffers from the same loose grasp on reality that the narrator of A Tale suffers, if perhaps not as palpable. In the "Library of Babel" the narrative voice declares he prefers "dream" to reality (79). In the opening of "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the narrator describes his first discovery of this fictional universe: "I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia. The unnerving mirror hung at the end of a corridor . . . From the far end of the corridor, the mirror was watching us; and we discovered, with the inevitability of discoveries made late at night, that mirrors have something grotesque about them" (17). While there is perhaps nothing overtly crazed about the narrator's account, his depiction of the mirror suggests

at least a strange propensity of mind. Even in stories in which no "I" is declared, the voice directs us into a narrative mind in which reality and unreality are confused, particularly through contradiction. In "Death and the Compass" the narrative voice describes the Hotel du Nord as "that high prism that dominates the estuary whose waters are the colors of the desert," a tower which "most manifestly unites the hateful whiteness of a sanatorium, the numbered divisibility of a prison, and the general appearance of a bawdy house" (129). The partiality to dream and contradiction-filled narratives permeates Borges' stories with a sense of fantasy, an unreality that charges not only the elements of the story, but is fundamental to its philosophical outlook.

The fantastic elements of Ficciones exemplify the postmodern propensity to suspect the presuppositions on reality's nature and to doubt what was previously considered fundamental. Almost all of Borges' narrators confess a shaky hold on reality, connecting them to postmodernity's general feelings on the distinction (or rather, resemblance) between reality and fantasy. George Aichele Jr. suggests that, contrary to modernism's definition of fantasy as a "peripheral" concern, postmodernism gives fantasy a central position by using it to question all reality:

> This disagreement about the relation between reality and fantasy is crucial to the distinction between the modern and the postmodern. For postmodernism, literary fantasy does not refer to what is excluded from the realm of reality. Rather, it expresses the fragmentation and indeed the impossibility of any self-identical referent; the fantastic is the potential within language . . . to speak the incoherence at the heart of every allegation of reality. (325)

Swift's work satirizes the beginning traces of modernism, and in particular modernism's obsession over the material and its disregard for the abstract or spiritual; his solution is to mock

modernity by creating a satirical mix of reality and fantasy. Borges' pieces, on the other hand, were composed near the end of modernity and the beginning of postmodernism. His purpose is not to criticize modernism (although the argument can be made that some of his stories do); rather, Borges, and postmodernism in general, use fantasy to question the very fundamentals of what reality *is*, and more importantly whether the mind can apprehend it.

Another aspect in which Borges' stories mirror A Tale is in the allegorical nature of his narratives and in Borges' own similar attitude toward allegory. Like Swift, Borges dislikes straightforward allegory as a literary method; and, like Swift, he uses allegory despite his disdain for it. In Other Inquisitions, Borges' essay collection, Borges discusses Croce and Chesterton's opposing theories on allegory, noting that "Chesterton infers that various languages can somehow correspond to the ungraspable reality, and among them are allegories and fables . . . I don't know whether Chesterton's thesis is valid; I do know that the less an allegory can be reduced to a plan, to a cold set of abstractions, the better it is" (Other Inquisitions 50). Borges seems to think that allegory, although useful at one point in history, is now ineffective in its ability to address contemporary man, and that the novel has completely eclipsed allegory's relevance and value. In the essay, "From Allegory to Novel," Borges states outright that "[f]or all of us, allegory is an aesthetic error." Furthermore, not only is allegory ugly, it is now painful: "I know that at one time the allegorical art was considered quite charming . . . and is now intolerable. We feel that, besides being intolerable, it is stupid and frivolous . . . How can I explain that difference in outlook without simply appealing to the principle of changing tastes?" (Other Inquisitions 155-6). Taken at face value, Borges' declarations seem scornfully direct concerning his opinions of allegory's appeal and effectiveness as a literary method.

However, to accept such statements as the final word on Borges' sentiments or use of allegory would be a mistake, for Borges was almost as cryptic in his nonfiction as he was in his fiction. Craig Owens observes that, despite such frank declarations, Borges "surely remains one of the most allegorical of contemporary writers," and that such statements made in the "Allegory to Novel" essay "contradict the allegorical nature of Borges' own fiction" (67-8). It would seem that, despite his own words, Borges did not find allegory stupid or frivolous; in fact, it was one of his primary modes. Rather, like Swift, Borges found direct allegory and those writers who would use the method merely as a vehicle for ethical lessons one-dimensional and simplistic. In a scorching essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne, Borges argues that moralists profane allegory when they use it merely as a vehicle for ethics:

> One writer thinks in images . . . and another writer thinks in abstractions . . . the former are just as estimable as the latter. However, when an abstract man, a reasoner, also wants to be imaginative, or to pass as such, then the allegory denounced by Croce occurs. We observe that a logical process has been embellished and disguised by the author to dishonor the reader's understanding. (Other Inquisitions 51)

Thus it is not the mode of allegory that Borges finds intolerable, for indeed allegory is the most effective means for the author to achieve this "elaboration of expression." Borges' stories are allegorical on many levels because he recognized the diverse nature of complex allegory and the way in which allegory opened up opportunity for multiple interpretation. As such, the allegorical elements of Ficciones' stories are complex, indirect, and ambiguous, similar to the elements one finds in A Tale; and furthermore, they are the allegories of an age transitioning from the material and scientific basis of modernity to the playful inquisitiveness of postmodernity.

Several of Borges' short stories are pregnant with allegorical meaning. Borges himself suggests allegory exists in the text, although, as one should expect, the connotations vary and exceed the meaning he implies. In the "Library of Babel" the voice begins the narrative saying, "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps an infinite, number of hexagonal galleries . . ." (79). Thus the structure and constitution of the Library of Borges' story are equated with the structure and constitution of the universe; however, the allegory is in no way direct and at times appears completely inconsistent. The narrator mentions his continual search for a "book," the "catalogue of catalogues," among the Library's shelves; later he refers to a "superstition" of the previous era, a "Man of the Book," saying "[m]any pilgrimages have sought Him out." Such statements are religiously suggestive; but to equate them with a single entity or figure might be a mistake, for "absurdities are the norm in the Library and . . . anything reasonable (even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception" (86). If it is clear that the Library is an allegory for the cosmos, both its pandemonium and regulation, then the significance of objects and figures within the Library remains obtuse. The books of the Library seem to connote, at various points throughout the story, abstract ideas, the universe's physical (dis)order, religious sects, and even human beings (for "each book is unique, irreplaceable, but . . . there are always several hundreds of thousands of imperfect facsimiles" [85]). Furthermore, as in A Tale, the narrative voice of "The Library" is possibly an allegory itself. Carlos Rincon deems the librarian an allegorical figure of the "modern's ambition" who "hopes to show the hidden order of the universe with his game" (163). Not only do the figures of "The Library" possess allegorical significance, but the confused and questioning voice of the story's narrator suggests the mind of a modern who late in life

comprehends the shortcomings of modern materialism. Thus the allegory of "The Library," like A Tale, operates on multiple levels and with multiple signifiers.

Most of the other stories collected in Ficciones are allegorical as well: "Pierre Menard" is an allegory for "modern literature" (Rincon 163); Carter Wheelock reads "The Circular Ruins" as an allegory of postmodern creation *and* postmodern thought (48); and Borges himself calls "Funes" a "long metaphor of insomnia" (Ficciones 105). Borges' stories, rather than represent particular figures or objects, allegorize the attitudes and actions of a particular age; thus while, for example, the character Menard in "Pierre Menard" isn't an allegorical figure for any specific person like Swift's three brothers, he is allegorical for a particular postmodern attitude. It would seem then that Borges' allegory is a breed different from its historical precedents, a technique that revels in obscuring meaning, rather than revealing it. Borges' allegory is the allegory of an age, the beginnings of a new manner of postmodern thinking: it suggests on a philosophical and metaphysical level a multiplicity of meanings, ambiguity of textual connotation, and superficial creation, with each conclusion equally as valid as another. Wheelock notes that Borges' works constitute a special kind of allegory, one that encourages uncertainty instead of clarity, a characteristic that further links Borges with Swift:

> Borges' stories can have such a multiplicity of meanings that they are rightly called polyvalent and are perhaps therefore allegorical on a high level. But these tales also evince the quality of indefiniteness . . . and vagueness, not polyvalence, is considered to be the hallmark of the true symbol . . . Borges' allegories, if they are that, are of so lofty a type that they comprise a unique kind of symbolism. (16)

Thus one can maintain that Borges' stories do contain the allegory he was at times so antagonistic towards; but it is an allegory that puzzles and perplexes, one that, like A Tale, defies

the reader's desire for satisfaction, and furthermore revels in the multiplicity of meaning allegory affords.

Allegory, particularly the kind Borges' employs, possesses particular significance in the postmodern mind. Despite Borges' own allegations that the present age has outgrown allegory, the technique has enjoyed a powerful new appreciation in postmodern criticism. Owens, in his two-part article on the "allegorical impulse" of postmodernism, explains that allegory is "consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete"; the allegorist does not create new images but "confiscates them." He "lays hands on the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost . . . [r]ather, he adds another meaning to the image" (70, 69). Allegory, in postmodern hands, supplants previous meanings, replacing them, and creating new meanings for old images. It is, as Joanna Frueh contends, a manner of "other-speaking," a replacement for an idea that cannot be seen (323). While in previous ages allegory was a technique used to provide clarification on an abstract notion by linking with a corporeal object or figure, in postmodernity, allegory has become another means of promoting ambiguity, a philosophical questioning of reality on its most basic levels, and a way to suggest multiple meanings for single entities. Therefore Borges' stories and their use of allegory not only relate to Swift in their complexity, but represent an age and its insecurities about reality and inquiries into its constituents.

Moreover, Borges' others stories are comparable to A Tale in the way in which its narrators exist in a state of uncertainty and suffer from a crippling inability to authoritatively convey a story. Like the narrator of A Tale, the various voices throughout the stories of Ficciones either confess major narrative disabilities or betray themselves in various ways. In "Pierre Menard" the narrator confesses, "I am certain it would be very easy to challenge my

meager authority;" the opening lines of "The Circular Ruins" admit that "[n]o one saw him disembark in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe sink into the sacred mud;" and the speaker of "The Library" contends that "I prefer to dream . . ." (45, 57, 79). In some of the texts, one might detect a hint of the false modesty that so characterizes the Hack voice of A Tale. The narrator of "Pierre Menard," after confessing his poor ability to relate the story about Menard, mentions that two royal figures sacrifice their "majestic reserve" to give his narration their consent (45). The narrator of "The Library" declares that "[p]erhaps I am deceived by old age and fear, but I suspect that the human species . . . is on the road to extinction" (87). Perhaps the most questionable voice is the narrator of "Funes," a great irony, given the fact that the story is about memory. The narrator begins "I remember him . . ." and then immediately declares, "I scarcely have the right to use this ghostly verb." Eventually the speaker admits he is perhaps the most unsuitable one to tell the story of Funes: "[M]y testimony may perhaps be the briefest and without doubt the poorest, and it will not be the least impartial" (107). Later in the story, the narrator states that, despite his being chosen as the one to recount the story of this incredible figure, he is unable to truly recollect the words exchanged in his conversation with Funes, for they are "irrecoverable" (111). The speaker is crippled by his forgetfulness and by his inability to recover the dialogue of his night with Funes, the most critical point in the story. Upon these admissions, the reader finds himself questioning the stability of any of the narrator's memories. Whether the stories' narrators' confessions are honest professions of narrative flaws, pretentious claims of false authority, or a valid inability to recall events, the voices of these stories repeatedly reveal their narrative deficiencies. Thus, as in the case of A Tale of a Tub, the reader finds the voice to which he normally submits himself replete with shortcomings.

In "Funes," the narrator is not necessarily an object of satire, as the narrator of A Tale is; rather, he is the figure of *all* postmodern narration, an exploration into the notion that all storytellers are subject to the limitations of shallow and indefinite memory, and furthermore that the *readers* of these narrations are subject to the same disabilities. And as in A Tale, the narrator of "Funes" challenges those who story-tellers and story-readers who believe they are exempt from human limitations. Borges' stories work upon the notion of contradiction: repeatedly throughout his stories, opposing elements are woven together, often times creating a newly synthesized element that was previously deemed impossible, such as supplying a forgetful narrator to tell a story about memory. As Kefala states, "Borgesian aesthetics are constructed upon tensions between traditionally bipolar oppositions" (65). The empty "space" between what is explicitly stated and what is only implied that such a voice creates is the imaginative gap that the reader fills himself. The "allusions and hints" allows the reader to "infer multiple interpretations . . . mak[ing] its [the story's] eventual creation the work of the reader" (Kefala 83). However, even this imaginative work is dangerous, since narrative and imaginative flaws are not only a characteristic of the narrator, but the reader as well.

The labyrinthine "trap" that these stories' narrative disabilities display is another manner in which Ficciones and A Tale correlate. Like Swift, Borges ensnares his readers by dropping them in an interpretative maze reflective of the ones that fill his stories. In A Tale, Swift repeatedly upsets the readers' desires for comfortable and simple solutions to the intellectual and moral dilemmas the text raises, ambushing readers in whatever solution they search for; likewise, Borges' stories spoil the readers' expectations by reversing what they expect as traditional solutions and endings. Readers are confined in Borges' interpretative labyrinth just as they are trapped in Swift's satirical snares.

While the fundamental instructional and inquisitive purposes of A Tale and Ficciones are different, the manner in which each work goes about achieving these ends parallels one another in powerful ways, allowing us to investigate not only how these two compositions compare, but also how their conclusions provide commentary both on their respective times and upon each other. The fantastic nature of each work allows the reader to enter implausible worlds, providing opportunity for satire and inquiry by providing a place of multitudinous "what ifs" that physical reality and real events don't allow. The fantastical characters and worlds of both works force readers to face their human limitations and question the reasons and nature of those limitations. Furthermore, the allegorical methods of each work make great occasion for the reader to provide equivalents for the allegorical counterparts, but with the added danger of entrapment. Additionally, the narrative voice of Borges' short stories share the erratic and at times depreciating tone of Swift's Hack, creating a similar sensation of lostness that one might experience as they undergo the push and pull of Swift's satire. The reader, far from being guided as narrative voices traditionally do, is left to fill in the spaces left by the narrator's shortcomings, switching creative roles. The two feelings are slightly but significantly different: reading Swift is like being swallowed in quicksand, even as the man who dug the pit stands by laughing. Reading Borges, on the other hand, is like sinking in that same sand, but as the man sinks with you. Both works, however, are notable for their "exasperating slipperiness" (Fishburn 56). While A Tale is a caricature of its age, Ficciones is a portrait of it, one that explores and exemplifies some of the most crucial questions of the contemporary age. How those elements appear in Borges and what their implications are become profoundly significant in the exploration of postmodern literature.

Chapter Four -- "Fancy Astride his Reason:" Reason in "Death and the Compass" and the "Digression Concerning Madness"

In addition to their comparable use of these literary tools, both Swift and Borges contend with similar themes about human knowledge and one's connection with reality; essentially, both works deal with fundamental questions of objectivity and offer proposals about if and how individuals can effectively comprehend the universe's nature. One of the themes that Swift and Borges treat in length is the nature and value of reason in man's attempt to effectively connect with outside reality. Both works deal in depth with if and how reasoning is an effective tool, and both admit the powerful nature of reason, both positive and negative. However, Borges and Swift diverge on reason's reliability and its value in connecting man to the outside world. Borges takes up this issue most extensively in "Death and the Compass," creating a unique detective story that questions both mankind's ability to employ reason and the universe's reasonable nature, proposing that both are questionable at best. By reversing the traditional detective genre, "Death and the Compass" suggests that one is unable to objectively understand reality since signs (or clues) don't effectively correlate with reality. Swift, on the other hand, by employing methods that require particularly sharp intellectual awareness and by mocking the extremities of the modernist Hack in the "Digression Concerning Madness," suggests that reason is a defining characteristic of the human condition, especially when properly cultivated within the constrictions of healthy community.

While nearly all of Borges' stories address the themes of reason, memory, and epistemology in some manner or another, different stories lend themselves particularly to these various subjects. For example, the advantages and boundaries of intellectual reasoning is one of the primary themes of "Death and the Compass." In this convoluted and twisted tale, Borges

reverses the traditional genre and character roles of a detective story, making this story both entertainingly original and profoundly thought-provoking. The story follows the "pure thinker" detective Eric Lonnrot as he pursues the trail of the criminal Red Scharlach in a series of murders. By connecting all the signs with the numerical and geometric clues left at the other crime scenes, Lonnrot solves the crime, but becomes Scharlach's fourth and final murder. This controversial ending is what makes the story especially interesting as it pertains to the reliability of human reason—the supposed "hero," instead of triumphing over the criminal as the reader expects, becomes his victim instead. Essentially, in "Death and the Compass," Borges associates reason with unreliable means and undesirable outcomes, suggesting that both our ability to reason and the reality on which we apply that reasoning are unstable.

"Death and the Compass" reverses the customary format of the "murder mystery" by ending not with a satisfying capture of the "bad guy," but with the demise of what is believed to be the rational detective character. Hayes and Tololyan argue that "Death and the Compass" is derived from G. K. Chesterton's traditional detective story "The Blue Cross" in almost every significant element *except* in the most basic of points, its "methodology [and] the systems of thought" (399), essentially, its ending and the point the story attempts to make. The characters of Chesterton's story are, as in other detective stories, guided correctly and safely by their reasoning—the "hero" of the tale is the figure who is most quickly and insightfully able to tie seemingly insignificant signs to the major points of the crime. However, in "Death and the Compass" the opposite is so: Lonnrot the "pure reasoner" rejects the real explanation for the first crime, and instead substitutes his own, seemingly more "intellectual" answers. Throughout most of the story, the reader expects that Lonnrot, with his scholarly pursuits and profound insights, will end his hunt not only with the capture of the criminal, but with the discovery of the

mysterious and hidden name of God as well. However, not only does Lonnrot *not* capture the criminal, but he is murdered at the story's conclusion. In the story's opening, he rejects his partner Treviranus' uninteresting but accurate assessment of the first murder as an "accident," favoring a more "interesting" hypothesis instead, and essentially going on to formulate his own incorrect interpretation of the various crimes' clues. Thus Lonnrot ironically rejects a "genuinely methodical procedure," and comes to, as Hayes and Tololyan state, a most *unreasonable* conclusion (400).

However, the story is not a simple reversal of good and bad reasoning: its conclusions call into question the fundamental premises of human analysis, both whether we possess the capacity to draw reasonable conclusions and if those conclusions are ever dependable or beneficial. Hayes and Tololyan conclude that Lonnrot "misreads" the crime, a mistake that leads to his death. However, while the story ends with his demise, Lonnrot *does* read the evidence correctly: the clues, even if they are planted, do in fact lead him to the scene of the fourth and concluding death, even if that death is his own. As the text itself declares, "It is true that Erik Lonnrot did not succeed in preventing the last crime, but it is indisputable that he foresaw it. Nor did he, of course, guess the identity of Yarmolinsky's unfortunate assassin, but he did divine the secret morphology of the vicious series as well as the participation of Red Scharlach . . ." (Ficciones 129). Lonnrot's "divinations" do come too late; but the fact remains that he does correctly foresee and finds the scene of the fourth crime. Thus one cannot necessarily say that Lonnrot was simply wrong in his reading of the clues and that he merely created his own reading of reality. Furthermore, Treviranus' "reading" of the crime assigns simple error and chance to its origins ("Someone, intending to steal them, came in here by mistake" he declares over the doctor's body), and while his conclusions are correct (Scharlach admits the first murder was an

accident), Treviranus' reading presupposes mistake, error, and chance as the origin of the crime (130). There is no indication in Treviranus' conventional conclusions about the crime of the significant intellectualism that so often marks the detective story and praises the abilities of human reasoning. Thus not only does the story reverse the roles and characteristics of the detective story genre, but the tale's reversals undermine the traditional understanding of the intellect and its value.

In this story, Borges couples error and chance with reality (or at least survival), and intellect and reasoning with a fatal end. Likewise, "Death and the Compass," and several other of Borges' stories, fall into the category of what Patricia Merivale and Elizabeth Sweeney deem the "metaphysical detective story." Merivale and Sweeney describe the ontological roots of these metaphysical tales, and their philosophical implications:

> [Metaphysical detective stories] subvert traditional detective story conventions . . . with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about the mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot . . . [They] often emphasize this transcendence, moreover, by becoming self-reflexive (that is, by representing allegorically the text's own processes of composition) . . . Rather than definitively solving a crime, then, the sleuth finds himself confronting the insoluble mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity . . . The detective's apparent inability to decipher the mystery . . . inevitably casts doubt on the reader similar attempt to make sense of the text. (2)

Such stories defy, reverse, or parody traditional detective stories, those tales with "narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader." By turning the detective, the traditional interpreter who uses his infallible reasoning to decode the "text" of the crime, into the victim or

even sometimes the villain, these metaphysical stories undermine a genre that champions intelligent interpretation and guarantees an ascertainable "signifier" for each of its signs, turning the genre upon its head. These metaphysical tales argue that even if reality is solid or consistent, one's ability to reasonably understand that reality is at least questionable if not utterly mistaken. Neither the detective nor the reader is even guaranteed the comforts of a meaningful clue or universe. Metaphysical detective stories are also characterized by "the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence" (Merivale and Sweeney 8). For example, the mystifying paper found by the first dead body that sets Lonnrot on the trail of seeking the mysterious title of God declaring that "[t]he first letter of the Name has been spoken" turns out to be both a meaningless accident, and the key to leading Lonnrot to Scharlach (Ficciones 131). Thus metaphysical detective stories offer as empty signs what one would usually read as the story's most provocative clues. By doing so, the stories force its readers to question not only *who* the real reasoner of reality is, the Lonnrot/intellectual or the Treviranus/accidentalist, but more fundamentally *what* is reasonable and if it can at all be determined, especially if the once-solid clues/signs left for the detective/reader are as unreliable as one's own reasoning. The story does, as Merivale and Sweeney recount, "indicate that 'reality' is ultimately unknowable or at least ineffable" (4). Thus Borges' metaphysical detective tale "Death and the Compass" questions whether reason is a viable course when our reasoning abilities *and* our reality are unstable.

A Tale likewise addresses the limits and benefits of human reasoning, exploring the subject in a unique and insightful manner. Unlike Borges, however, Swift suggests that individuals do possess the ability to reason properly, possible within an active and intelligent community. In fact, Swift openly criticizes those who don't avail themselves of the benefits of

history or community to draw intelligent conclusions about reality. Like Borges, and perhaps even more emphatically, Swift admits the shortcomings of the human mind: he repeatedly rages against mankind's ignorance, and for this reason, the work often reads surprisingly like Borges' story. However, this similarity occurs for a fundamentally different reason, for Swift's work is a satire, and the voice of his work its chief object. While Swift, like Borges, criticizes those who rely too heavily on individual reason, A Tale employs reasonable means to a reasonable reader and satirizes the extremes of arrogant intellectualism and emotional zealousness, suggesting that reason is a medium between these two edges, buttressed by the healthy supports of community.

That Swift was a champion of reason is no secret. Possibly all of his works were published with the purpose of mocking those who either neglected to employ reason and operated in a perpetual state of emotional zeal or blissful ignorance, or those who utilized their reasoning to pervert proper nature or order, specifically in the areas of learning and religion. In either case, his works require a perpetual state of heightened awareness from his readers in order to unravel the Swiftian web. Swift's preferred mode of composition is itself a testament to his emphasis on the values of reason, for, as Richardo Quintana notes, "[t]he avowed intention of the satirist is to expose folly . . . and to castigate [it]" (94). So while Borges questions the benefits or even the ability of one to employ reasoning in correct interpretation, Swift derides those who would employ any other faculty to lead their lives, calling it madness. For him, proper reasoning, one that incorporated an honest attempt at truth, leads one to a contented and suitable life.

Furthermore, the mode of Swift's work, his shifting satire and irony, is one that demands the utmost attention from readers and a particular keenness of mind to effectively dissect. Swift demands the same sharpness of mind from his readers that he exhibits; otherwise, they are

subject to the blows and cuts of his satire—a trap few, if any, escapes entirely. F. R. Leavis describes the adroit characteristics of Swift's writing that require such mental somersault:

> Swift's intensities are the intensities of rejection and negation; his poetic juxtapositions are, characteristically, destructive in intention, and when they most seem creative of energy are most successful in spoiling, reducing and destroying. Sustained "copiousness," continually varying, and concentrating surprise in sudden local foci, cannot be represented in short extracts . . . this kind of thing may be found at a glance on almost any page. (21)

Leavis points out that Swift's tactics are accomplished chiefly through negation, a move that requires intense mental consciousness from readers. Sans a clear or comfortable solution to the multiple problems presented, readers are left to extract their own conclusions while also risking falling into the manifold errors and extremes Swift satirizes later in the text. The modes and manners in which Swift operates require maximum attentiveness, as well as a truly reasonable mind to draw appropriate conclusions from A Tale's twisted passages. Thus the very genre and form of A Tale of a Tub is a testament to Swift's faith in reason's ability to draw correct conclusions on reality; and the sustained interest his work has received is a further demonstration that centuries of critics have agreed.

In addition to the intellectual prowess his text requires, Swift makes his penchant for reason known by mocking both those who lack sense and those who pervert the powerful intellect they possess. In the allegorical portions, the satirical figure of perverse reason is the brother Peter. Peter is "more *Book-learned*" than his brothers and employs his scholarship to distort the Father's will to satisfy their desire for the forbidden coat ornaments, being a scholar with the ability "to find out a Meaning in every Thing but itself," and is eventually regarded as

"the best Scholar in all that or the next Street to it" (306-7, 10). Although Peter begins his "interpretations" with the support of his brothers, he soon becomes so supercilious that he concocts a catalogue of absurd practices, all of which are "met with great Success in the World." Eventually Peter defies the limits of good sense and reason "and would at any time rather argue to the Death, than allow himself to be once in an Error." His arrogance soon becomes so overwhelming that he equates himself with deity and "would call himself *God Almighty*, and sometimes *Monarch of the Universe*" (325, 322). While such passages are a satirical allegory on Church history, they are more profoundly a commentary on what essentially becomes the madness of twisted reason and intelligence.

Interestingly, in A Tale this intellectual perversity takes it's most crucial and profound form in textual (mis)interpretation. Nash suggests that the primary subject of A Tale is the "conflict between the authority of a text and free interpretation" (417). Thus Peter's intellectual expertise and failure are in his dexterity in "explaining" his Father's Will, as he "distinguishes himself from his brothers by distinguishing meaning from text" (418). Essentially, Swift vehemently criticizes the arrogant mind that employs intellect for profit, the mind that would openly violate a text in the name of "free interpretation" and personal justification —the very violations many critics would accuse postmodernism of making and Borges of encouraging. Like Borges' detective Lonnrot, Swift's Peter misinterprets texts; however, unlike Borges, Swift maintains that this misreading is due to a defect in reason, *not* to the fundamental unreliability of the given signs. Thus Swift mocks both those readers who lack proper interpretive insight and those figures who in their arrogance ignore or violate authorial intention. Therefore, the height of intellectual arrogance is found not chiefly in the abuses of religion or learning (although these are criticized too), but in this improper violation of texts. Peter's abuses first stem from his

manipulation of his Father's Will until he begins to "interpret" the Will while ignoring it completely, and eventually, like Borges' detective Lonnrot, begins searching for "vindications" to his own ends.

Likewise, the Hack narrator commits similar violations and furthermore encourages his "modern" reader to do the same. In the introduction, the voice gives a list of his most recent criticisms, which include tracing the progress of the soul in "Tom Thumb" and an analysis of Jerusalem in "Whittington and His Cat," drawing absurd conclusions from fairy tales and children's stories (299). Such examples are profuse throughout the text. In fact, the voice's chief misstep is his improper interpretation or violation of all the texts, both of story and reality, which surround him. Williams observes that "[the narrator] indulges in all the word-spinning which all three brothers use . . . with his wild theories and elaborate analogies, with his digression in praise of digressions, he is a perfect instance of the modern spider producing a cobwebby book out of his own entrails" (695). Like Peter, the narrator is "so totally immersed in deceit that he can utter only nonsense" but "considers himself to be a great reasoner" (Williams 696)—a phrase that echoes the title of "pure reasoner" that Borges' Lonnrot believed himself to be. Thus the narrator is Swift's picture of reason twisted by arrogance that begins to violate and ignore clear textual intention for his own personal interpretations and ends.

For Swift, the line between distorted intelligence and outright madness is thin, a point easily crossed. If the figure of Peter is an allegorical type of perverted reason, then most would assume that the brother Jack is his polar opposite, given his violent and angry reaction to any reminder of Peter. This brother "run[s] mad with Spleen, and Spight, and Contradiction . . . and in a few Days, it was for certain reported, that he had run out of his Wits . . . falling into the oddest Whimsies that ever a sick Brain conceived" (336). However, as Jack sinks deeper into his

madness and begins some of the practices of his cult of Aeolists, he takes on characteristics very similar to the twisted customs of Peter. In fact, as Jack and Peter become progressively disturbed and increasingly volatile with each other, it ironically becomes their "perpetual Fortune to meet" and repeatedly to be mistaken for each other; Jack attempts to further tatter his coat in order to separate himself from the hated Peter but only aggravates the confusion, since "it is the Nature of Rags, to bear a kind of mock Resemblance to Finery . . . and left so near a Similitude between them [Jack and Peter], as frequently deceived the very Disciples and Followers of both" (366). As Jack reaches the limits of his lunacy, he begins to take on the characteristics of the "learn'd" Peter, implying that Peter's intelligence, warped by arrogance and personal gain, looks very much like Jack's madness. Nash offers this analysis by way of explanation:

> The distinctions between Peter and Jack are, at bottom, false distinctions, and the final image we have of the two brothers is not of their difference, but of their similarity . . . While Jack may be distinguished from Peter, to do so is to obscure the very real similarity that folly bears to knavery as collateral branches of madness. (422-3)

Essentially, Swift recognizes that overweening intellectualism, one that would openly violate the terms of a text, is merely a step from a kind of madness similar to a zealous ignorance. While Swift undoubtedly promotes a life of reason, he recognizes the volatile and easily confused fall from proud intellectualism to ignorant madness. The height of this intellectual arrogance and the madness that follows is chiefly manifest when a reader who, like Borges' detective Lonnrot, entirely ignores or deliberately violates any known vestige of authorial intent to suit personal preference.

The height of this madness reaches its full expression in the last digression of A Tale, providing the clearest expression of the similar results of Peter's egotistical intellect and Jack's mad ignorance. In the "Digression Concerning Madness," arguably the most brilliant and convoluted portion of A Tale, the Hack compiles his most twisted arguments for Madness:

> [T]his *Madness* [has] been the parent of all those mighty Revolutions, that have happened in the *Empire*, in *Philosophy*, and in *Religion*. For the Brain, in its natural Position and State of Serenity, disposeth its Owner to pass his Life in the common Forms, without any Thought of subduing Multitudes to his own *Power*, his *Reasons* or his *Visions*; and the more he shapes his Understanding by the pattern of Human Learning, the less he is inclined to form Parties after his particular Notions; because that instructs him in his private Infirmities, as well as in the stubborn Ignorance of the People. But when Man's Fancy gets *astride* on his Reason, when Imagination is at Cuffs with the Senses, and common Understanding, as well as common Sense, is Kickt out of Doors; the first Proselyte he makes, is Himself, and when that is once compasse'd, the Difficulty is not so great in bringing over others. (350)

In this one section of the Digression, the narration is so warped, so full of the negatives and destruction, as well as the delightful humor for which Swift was known, that it is difficult to divide the fusion of Swift and the Hack's voices and extract what exactly Swift is attempting to convey. First, the Hack maintains that, despite the bad name Madness has endured, it is this uncontrollable zeal, this "[t]ransposition of the Brain, by Force of certain Vapours issuing up from the lower Faculties" that is cumulatively responsible for the history of conquests and victories in politics, philosophy, and religion. For only when a man is "mad" enough to overlook

his own limitations and zealous enough to gather others to follow his fanatical movement does history change; otherwise, one is too conscious of personal faults and others' ignorance to attempt any change. Once again the sly, satirical voice of Swift traps us: it can be argued that indeed history is a catalogue of men "mad" enough to propose radical ideas and enact dangerous movements, and we are all too tempted to agree with the Hack's conclusions. However, these historical examples are a result of "Peterly" madness, a strong intelligence gone astray by arrogance and power. The passage is a description the "textual violation" of reality, of a strong mind that construes reality to gain and maintain authority at all costs: reason is upset by "fancy," imagination overrules logic, and common sense is forgotten in the consuming fire of a man possessed by power. Thus we find that Jack, the "mad" brother, is just as easily able to "form Parties after his particular Notions" as the arrogant Peter. Likewise, when Lonnrot insists upon substituting an "interesting" hypothesis for the crime instead of reading the clues correctly, others follow in his footsteps and come to "read" the crime as he does. The individual becomes prisoner of his own arrogance, and, as Price describes, "Man loses his freedom when he surrenders the power of *rational* choice, and his visions have a way of turning out to be irrational compulsions" (703); reasoning that insists upon reading its own interpretations at the cost of textual clarity ends in mental imprisonment and interpretive death. What we find in the digression on madness is the full manifestation of *both* Peter and Jack, finding that the consequences of both extremes are nearly the same.

The seemingly irreconcilable division between Peter and Jack and the heavy emphasis upon these two extremes presents another dilemma. If readers attempt to avoid the dangers of arrogant intellectualism by refusing entirely to attempt any interpretation and commit a possible textual violation, then they find themselves indicted later in the passage of falling into ignorance.

Thus we see the contradiction of a life caught between, as the Hack voice declares, "The Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves" (352). Here we are presented with one of the most controversial instances of Swift/Hack voice confusion: how much of the statement is typical Swiftian satire and how much is Swift's a true sentiment on the state of human nature is almost indeterminable, and the case has been argued thoroughly on both sides, both for an entirely misanthropic view of mankind and for a more complex but generally positive outlook on human nature. Nash comments that the "Fool among Knaves" paragraph is constructed on "the structure of distinguishing between alternatives," noting that if we merely reverse the narrator's statements, "we avoid folly, by convict ourselves of knavery" (423-4). The passage, it seems, forces the reader to choose a side, making oneself either a Peter or a Jack. Left alone, the middle ground and the delicate balance between the two is nearly imperceptible, and, similar to our experience with Borges, we are hard pressed to find a solution, if one even exists.

While, as is typical of Swift, no overt resolution is obvious, a further examination of Peter and Jack and specifically their connection with community, or lack thereof, might provide some insight into a possible resolution to the knave/fool dichotomy. Both Peter and Jack make their respective descents into knavery and foolishness when they become separated from the healthy limits and interactions of society: Peter as the arrogant intellectual positions himself above his brothers, and when they question his authority and his sanity, he "kicks them both out of Doors, and would never let them come under his Roof from that day" (326). Likewise, Jack becomes infuriated when his brother Martin suggests a moderate approach to both their ornamented coats and their brother Peter, flees from him and begins his own cultish following of Aeolists. To say the least, Swift disdained privatized spiritual lives controlled solely by emotion and personal rule. Robert M. Adams notes that the weight of Swift's satire in A Tale falls on

"the *private* spirit, the irrational personal conviction of logical rightness, physical authority, or spiritual justification;" furthermore, Adams maintains that, based on a study of the "machine" in Swift's satire, Swift "despised all Getting Head; and he hated individual passion or appetite (708, 11). Separating oneself from community and privatizing all personal and spiritual life leads to knavery and foolishness, both which in their fullest expressions manifest themselves as madness.

Essentially, Swift believed a reasonable life the most proper way in which to live, and, unlike Borges, he held that one *could* generally make accurate and rational decisions based upon a correct understanding of reality, especially within a community of other reasonably balanced peers. Swift recognized that reason was easily perverted, as in the case of Peter, or lost, as in the case of Jack, and that these conditions are the dangers lurking on either side of a balanced life. Thus, while Borges would question what exactly constitutes "reason," based upon an essentially subjective view of reality, Swift would maintain that the rational life is that which keeps one from being either a fool or a knave, confirmed by the community of others' rational, balanced lives. Thus in Borges' metaphysical detective tales, the intellectual suffers not necessarily because reason and reality are indeterminable but rather because his conclusions are reached against reason in an arena devoid of or against community: the detective Lonnrot goes against the advice of his peers, and depends solely on his own conclusions, resulting in his demise. Therefore, like Jack, Peter, and the Hack narrator, Borges' characters "disregard the firm outlines laid down by morality, tradition, and experience . . . leav[ing] the mind spinning in a dead world, devoid of the true meaning which only 'unrefined morality,' the reasonable acceptance of revealed truth and morality, can find" (Williams 698-9). Thus Swift speaks true when he has his modern fool narrator declare that "where I am not understood, it shall be concluded, that something very useful and profound is coucht underneath, And again, that whatever word or

Sentence is printed in a different Character, shall be judged to contain something extraordinary either of Wit or Sublime" (287); the satiric invective could easily be applied to detective Lonnrot, the postmodern hero who insists upon "reading" meaning where none existed, refusing to heed the counsel of his community.

As Swift would have it, the difficulty in constructing and maintaining a rational life is not in an indeterminate reality on which to base those reasonable decisions; rather, it is the delicate balance between foolishness and knavery, the natural tendency being either to control others with a perverted intellect or to zealously play the fool. Tipping into either error could result in the same tragic end, since "[t]he Phrenzy and the Spleen of both, having the same Foundation, we may look upon them as two Pair of Compasses, equally extended, and the fixed Foot of each, remaining in the same Center; which, tho' moving contrary Ways at first, will be sure to encounter somewhere or other in the Circumference" (A Tale 365). Furthermore, a trustworthy community is needed to confirm the conclusions of one's solid reasoning, for, as Price clarifies, "[w]hen words are reduced to mere forceful sound, all sound becomes operative. The *uncritical audience* which abandons a standard of rational communication treasures *all* forms of expression or stimulation" (703) [emphasis added]. Such a description could be made of Borges and the present postmodern mindset, with its emphasis on style and "stimulation," rather than substance and content.

Chapter Five – The Womb and the Grave: Memory in "Funes, the Memorious" and "The Digression Concerning Madness"

Another philosophical subject which both Borges and Swift address is memory, both its capacity to construct a trustworthy depiction of reality and the advantages that systems have in substituting for the limits of memory. Similar to their treatment of reason, both authors admit the significant role that memory plays in connecting individuals to reality; again, however, Borges and Swift disagree about the reliability of memory and its worth in helping us construct a trustworthy and desirable picture of reality. Borges suggests in "Funes, the Memorious" that not only are individuals subject to subjective, partial, and poor memory, but this subjective state is actually preferable to a full one since it provides us with the ability to think abstractly and avoid the overwhelming weight of perfect and objective recall. Swift, on the other hand, argues through his satire that moderns suffer from a debilitating lack of memory, one that separates them from the healthy constraints and instructions of the past. As the narrator of A Tale manifests, this preference for novelty is a consequence of an irrational mind, and the consequential separation from the past serves only to further exaggerate the conditions of an already imbalanced reason.

In "Funes, the Memorious," Borges suggests that human memory is severely restricted and subjective, but that this limitation is actually a preferable state to a well-formed memory, making it possible for the mind to conceptualize and throw off the weights of detail; furthermore systems are a sufficient substitute for this faulty memory when necessary. To begin, "Funes" employs a timid and forgetful narrator to recount the tale of a figure who is able to remember every sensory experience and who furthermore begins to reformulate the numerical and naming systems to match his perfect memory. However, Funes' inability to forget and to make specific

selections in his memory ironically leads him to create a system that is completely ineffective and chaotic. When the narrator recounts Funes' accident and his subsequently infallible memory, he at first seems to be a most enviable man:

> [P]revious to the rainy afternoon when the blue-tinted horse threw him, he had been . . . blind, deaf-mute, somnambulistic, memoryless . . . A little later he realized that he was crippled. This fact scarcely interested him. He reasoned (or felt) that immobility was a minimum price to pay. And now, his perception and his memory were infallible. (112)

Funes possesses perfect perception and a perfect memory—to remember a day takes him a day, for he can recall every detail of that day, down to every touch and smell of the passing hours. Suzanne Jill Levine argues that in this way, Funes is the figure of Borges' "perfect reader" who would be able to "conjure with each sign the whole design of the narrative" (349). Yet it soon becomes obvious that Funes' state is in actuality a painful and paralyzing one, much more so than an existence with an imperfect and partial memory.

Funes' heightened perception makes sensory awareness "intolerable," so that he must sit in the dark, unable to stand the sensations that a sun-lit life afford. Furthermore, his memory is like a "garbage disposal," and he remembers the horror of "the many faces of a dead man during the courses of a protracted wake" (112). Funes' flawless sensitivity and memory—the constant, never failing, never resting activities of his mental state— severely constrict his actual activities, making physical movement nearly nonexistent. Unsatisfied with the present system of enumeration and naming, Funes calculates a new completely new scheme, one in which numbers are haphazardly replaced by names and phrases, and where each rock and every leaf receives a different and specific name (since "he was disturbed by the fact that a dog at three-fourteen . . .

should have the same name as the dog at three-fifteen" [114]), an arrangement he fails to realize makes sense to only him and his infallible mind. When the narrator attempts to explain to Funes that his new system is "precisely the contrary of a system of enumeration," Funes cannot understand (113). The story ends with Funes' very common and rather pitiful death at a young age. Ironically, the man with the perfect mind lives a very short and limited life, haunted by perceptions and memories of death, wasting his time creating a system that no one but himself will ever use or understand. Thus Borges associates memory with restriction, pain, paralysis, and death.

In "Funes" Borges is both making aware to his readers the limitations of human perception and questioning whether such an infallible memory would ever be desirable in the end. By using a narrator who openly confesses his shaky ability to recall his time with Funes, Borges is subtlety suggesting that *all* storytellers are partial and subjective in their memory and ability to effectively convey story: thus all the narratives one encounters come from unreliable sources. Furthermore, he seems to suggest that the present abundance of systems used to order life is necessary, given the human mind's flaws and restrictions. In fact, Borges ultimately proposes that it is the mind's ability to forget which allows us to *think*—to formulate abstract and conceptual thoughts, values, and rules which, if every specific instance and detail were in perfect recall, would never apply. Frisch discusses the difficulty of a perfect memory in distinguishing between objectivity and subjectivity:

> [Funes] is incapable of thought. In Funes' world there was nothing but immediate details, something like a camera or video shots of the past without any editing. Funes remarkable ability . . . challenges the division between subject and object . . . Funes' shortcoming, his inability to think and reason, suggests that we

> should not be too distraught by our inability to achieve that objective clarity, because true objectivity does not reason, generalize, and think. While these are more important gifts, they also are quite subjective, as they involve editing, selecting, and generally making selective choices. (53-4)

Such an analysis is surprising: one would assume that memory, the ability to closely and correctly recall the details or particulars of an event would be associated *with* the ability to think or conceptualize, not against it. However, in "Funes," Borges proposes that memory, a connection to personal past and general history, can actually limit one's ability to think; the subjectivity and limitations of memory are a benefit to the human mind's ability to conceptualize. To *forget* is preferable to memory, for forgetfulness constitutes the ability to theorize; otherwise, exceptions, details, and exemptions would continually make themselves known against general rule. Fishburn notes that "Funes" is Borges' illustration of how "plentitude is presented in a postmodernist spirit as negative, leading to paralysis, madness, or death" (60). In previous ages, memory was that tool which anchored an individual within personal and global community by connecting him or her with a private and historical past; in postmodernism, however, the profusion of memory is a restraint that serves only as a crushing and confining weight, preventing one from theorizing and playing. Forgetfulness, both from one's past and from general history, is freeing.

Furthermore, "Funes" explores the arbitrary nature of language and the necessity of systems to provide the framework to sufficiently organize human life where language falls short. In a postmodern age, systems are the new props of society, the replacement of the foundations that were once made up of language and past, and the memory that connects the two. The idea of system seems almost contradictory to the amnesic postmodernism of Borges since most would

associate systematizing and classification with a method of memory: objects, events, species, and the like are categorized to reinforce recall ability. However, "Funes" ironically suggests that, despite postmodernism's best attempts to "undermine our belief in all systems of knowledge," human limitation and nature cannot escape systematizing, particularly in a world devoid of history; postmodernism's "trap," as Fishburn proposes, is the snare of "systematizing the negation of systems" (61). Borges recognizes that if language and memory have failed in constructing a reliable version of reality, then systems and the order they impose are a sort of necessary evil, acknowledging that even if classifications are subjective creations, they are indispensable ones.

Furthermore, Borges recognizes systems as essentially indispensable in a world where language loses its significant meaning. Wheelock, in his description of Borges as a contemporary "mythmaker," links Borges with the French Symbolists in their similar belief in the inability of human language to fully capture the truth: "[H]uman thought seem[s] to brush the hem of truth's garment without really possessing it full-bodied and warm. To name a thing, said Valery, is to kill it, to reduce it from a live presence to a dead memory whose corpse is denotative language, distorted and desiccated" (4). The Symbolists associated both language and memory with death, believing that concepts live until they are spoken, and Borges seems to agree. However, Wheelock also notes that Borges diverges from the Symbolists in his willingness to accept the constructions of systems for the sake of order, however temporal, subjective, and faulty those systems might be. His stories propose "other ways of interrelating the parts of the universe;" and while Borges never pretends that "some ultimate, objective revelation will really spring from his dissolution and reformation of reality," his fictions nonetheless "systematically allude" (6-7). If, as Valery proposes, to name a thing is to kill it, *not*

to name a thing is to forget it completely; and while systems are a subjective construct, Borges recognizes and moreover celebrates their necessity in a world lacking reliable history or language. Thus Borges simultaneously suggests that the subjective nature of human memory is a desirable characteristic and that those systematic structures which at times seem so controlling are actually those schemes which allow organized thought processes.

Likewise, Swift addresses the subject of memory throughout A Tale, heavily alluding to the modern tendency toward forgetfulness and the reliance on systems to compensate. However, unlike Borges, Swift harshly satirizes those who celebrate their amnesic propensities; and while Swift is a champion of a reasonable and rationale life, he is scathingly critical of what he sees as modernity's overemphasis of systematizing, especially of those concepts which defied strict classification. From the onset, Swift makes use of his Hack narrator to mock systematizing, a modern problem he regarded with particular hatred. In the title page of A Tale a list of the treatise written by the "author" includes "Lecture upon a Dissection of Human Natures" and "A Pangyrick upon the World;" the introduction boasts that modern writing has produced "the most finished and refined Systems of all Sciences and Arts" (264, 299). Furthermore, the modern critic is a "Discoverer and Collector of Writer's Faults," particularly the "weakness" of ancient critics, whose faults have, like everything else, been gathered by the narrator into a "comprehensive List" (312-2). In "A Digression of the Modern Kind," the narrator reveals that he has applied his systematizing to the "Carcass of *Humane Nature*;" and eventually the voice declares that this is the state of all modern learning: "[T]he Army of Sciences hath been of late with a world of Martial Discipline, drawn into its *close Order*, so that a View, or a Muster may be taken of it with abundance of Expedition. For this great Blessing we are wholly indebted to *Systems and Abstracts*, in which the *Modern* Father of Learning . . . spent their Sweat for the

Ease of Us their Children" (338). In fact, the modern ability to systematize is so common, that the Hack is surprised no attempt has yet been made on a catalogue of literally *everything*: "I cannot but bewail, that no famous Modern hath ever yet attempted an universal System in a small portable Volume, of all Things that are to be Known, or Believed, or Imagined, or Practised in Life" (327). The ease of such arrangements has made learning "so regular an Affair" that to compose a new theory or, as in the Hack's case, to write a book is a project completed with very little exertion. Swift's mocking tone in such statements reveals his belief that the modern life is one replete with systems that serve only to simplify thinking rather than support it.

However, despite Swift's entertaining satire of the modern reliance on systems, the exact problem with systematizing at first is unclear. As described above, Borges' fiction outlines both the limitations of human memory *and* the benefits of systems in helping the human mind conceptualize; essentially, we forget so that we may think, and systems capture those elements we overlook. Swift, on the other hand, disapproves of the simplifying of human knowledge into lists and categories, even if this systematizing does result in uncomplicated learning. One wonders what real evils Swift sees with the modern tendency to be so regulated. In answer to this question, we go back to the *time* problem Swift sees in the modern mindset: as Price notes, much of the conflict in A Tale is built around the clash between the temporary and the eternal, and the modern proclivity toward "distinction rather than truth and . . . novelty and singularity, by ignoring the universal or enduring." The moderns are a "time bound generation," and despite the narrator's outrageous claims in the preface, modern works were so "original" that they withered under time and never survived to reach posterity (700). Thus the Hack's claim that

what he writes is "literally true this Minute I am writing it" makes his work irrelevant the next moment (282).

Furthermore, in addition to the fact that his compositions quickly become extraneous, the modern writer possesses such little regard or understanding of past works and achievements that he sees no purpose in constructing a composition that would endure past his own time:

> Now, tho' it sometimes tenderly affects me to consider, that all the towardly Passages I shall deliver in the fallowing Treatise, will grow quite out of date and relish with the first shifting of the present Scene: yet I must need subscribe to the Justice of this Proceeding: because, I cannot imagine why we should be at Expence to furnish Wit for succeeding Ages, when the former have made no sort of Provision for ours; wherein I speak the Sentiment of the very newest . . . (286)

The modern possesses such little regard or comprehension of ancient achievements that he speaks for his age in disregarding them entirely; and likewise, his concerns extend only to the present age, so much so that he neither expects nor hopes that his work will last beyond the present. Furthermore, the new systems he builds are temporary constructs, methods that take only the most simple, obvious, and physical characteristics of a subject into account. Modern writers/systematizers are, like Borges' Funes' character, building systems that benefit only them and their short-lived age; moreover, each new system, driven by the contemporary, fashionable, and temporary, seeks to "conquer all of nature . . . and thereby to overthrow all rival systems" (Price 702). Like Funes, the modern hacks that Swift satirizes construct systems that benefit only themselves, seeking novelty and stimulation above truth and endurance.

A Tale further reveals how the modern emphasis upon systematizing focuses the mind on the most temporary and material traits of a subject, ignoring both the eternal and conceptual

aspects of an issue, even if, as is most often the case, these are the most essential points. As such, these modern systems serve only to create a strict divide between immaterial and material, spirit and body, and moreover generate a strong proclivity towards the latter term in each binary. The Hack declares that the modern style of learning "force[s] common Reason to find room for it in every part of Nature; *reducing*, including, and adjusting every Genus and Species within that Compass, by coupling some against their Wills, and banishing others at any Rate" (294) [emphasis added]. The moderns, disconnected from the past and from the wisdom and accomplishments of the ancients and the community this communication affords, assume their inability to comprehend the ancients' works a sign of their superiority, rather than the opposite; in the exhilaration of their new discoveries, they assume the ability to know and catalogue all things, including those subjects which both cannot and more than likely should not be systematized. They are reminiscent of Borges' librarians who, upon the declaration that the library contains every book within its shelves, "felt themselves lords of a secret, intact treasure. There was no personal or universal problem whose eloquent solutions did not exist" (Ficciones 83). Ultimately this ignorance and disregard of history leads to an arrogance that pretends to catalogue the whole of human knowledge; but instead of expanding or even simplifying the whole of knowledge, this new system of classification notes only the most base and physical characteristics of subjects, ignoring and disregarding its deeper, more significant and unseen spiritual aspects.

Thus in the end, the fullest expression of this modern systematizing is its connection to sex. In his illustration upon the grand development of modern systems, the Hack rejoices over the "highly celebrated Talent among the *Modern* Wits, of deducing Similitudes, Allusions, and Applications, very Surprizing, Agreeable, and Apposite, from the *Genitals* of either Sex, together

with *their proper Uses*" (339). In this passage the Hack ignorantly praises the modern ability to draw all its conclusions and instructions from (only) a person's sexual organs. The result of reducing the complexity of human nature to the simplicity of systems that catalogue only material aspects of a subject is therefore to note only the animalistic parts of a man, a tendency that expresses itself chiefly in sex. While the act of sex or an individual's sexuality is neither based on nor entirely disconnected to one's spiritual or mental state, the point Swift makes is that modern systematizing admits only the physical aspects of a person, reducing men to merely animal characteristics. As Price explains, the modern method "comes with the reduction of man to mechanism" (703). Adams notes that Swift saw the modern excitement over systems as a product of "the two lower varieties . . . the product of imaginative self-indulgence or of deliberate mechanical manipulation" (708-9). While some topics lend themselves to the helpful ordering of systems, other subjects—such as "the carcass of *Humane Nature*"—defy a strict and comprehensive classification, a truth the moderns seemed ignorant of. Swift argues through the ignorant voice of the Hack that the modern reductive tendency found in the over-abundance of systems diminishes man to animalistic and mechanistic features, ignoring how those aspects affect one's mental and spiritual state or disregarding those states altogether.

As with the subject of reason, the full expression of modern systematizing and shortness of memory is found in the "Digression Concerning Madness." Within this section, the Hack declares the "unhappy" state mankind would find itself in without the help of systems:

> Of such great Emolument . . . which the world calls *Madness* . . . the World would not only be deprived of those two great Blessings, *Conquests* and *Systems*, but even all Mankind would unhappily be reduced to the same Belief in Things Invisible . . . Imagination can build nobler Scenes, and produce more wonderful

> Revolutions than Fortune or Nature will be at Expense to furnish . . . [T]he debate merely lies between *Things past*, and *Things conceived*; and so the Question is only this; Whether Things that have Place in the *Imagination*, may not as properly be said to *Exist*, as those that are seated in the *Memory*; which may be justly held in the Affirmative, and very much to the Advantage of the former, since This is acknowledged to be the *Womb* of Things, and the other allowed to be no more than the *Grave*. (349-51)

The Hack declares that without the modern obsession of systems, men would be forced into the unfortunate and uncomfortable position of believing in "Things Invisible"; furthermore, imagination is always to be preferred over memory, since imagination generates novelty, newness, and excitement, while memory, or history, possesses only actual events which have already passed—the womb versus the grave. While a good understanding of Swift confirms that he makes no sudden, undiluted entrance in this passage and began espousing imagination over memory we cannot commit the error of merely reverse-reading Swift's satire and irony to mean only the opposite of what he states: indeed, while Swift prefers memory to imagination, his own works themselves were extremely imaginative and never merely historical. Here is an instance of Swift's satire meaning something other than, but not exactly opposite, what he expressly states. In this instance, Swift equates imagination with a kind of unbridled, immoderate enthusiasm, an imagination that "frame[s] a gratifying image of world," rather than seeking to understand through memory or historical precedent how the world actually *is* (Price 701). As Price notes, in a reality ruled by uncontrolled imagination, novelty rather than truth becomes the focus, and madness is in style: "The patterns of conqueror, bully, and tyrant all contribute to the archetype by which proselytizing and system building are to be understood. In his account of Bedlam,

Swift finally shows the fundamental standard of this inverted world; madness is only heroism out of fashion" (702). The modern Hack, in his obsession with the contemporary, fashionable, and innovative, arrogantly disregards the past, the centuries of wisdom accumulated by the ancients, whose greatest wisdom was the fact that some subjects defied classification, reduction, or simple comprehension. Ironically, in their attempt to conquer all human knowledge with systematizing, the moderns end up creating a world of their own imaginations, rather than devising a catalogue that corresponds with reality. Thus they invert the origin and ending of all ideas: rather than the death of ideas, history and the wisdom of past minds is the birthplace of the present's inspirations.

Essentially, the plethora of systems is another attempt for the modern mind to separate itself from the community of the past, an endeavor to, as Swift mocks elsewhere, create out of its own entrails rather than gather from community of tradition. Solid reason perceives its own deficiencies; and rather than trying to fill those inadequacies from its own limited resources, it seeks out other wise voices to rectify its losses, voices which have withstood time's test. On the contrary, the modern Hack declares, modern amnesia is a source of pride:

> BUT, here the severe Reader may justly tax me as a Writer of short Memory, a Deficiency to which a true Modern cannot but of Necessity be a little subject: Because, Memory being an Employment of the Mind upon things past, is a Faculty, for which the Learned, in our Illustrious Age, have no manner of Occasion, who deal entirely with Invention, and strike all Things out of themselves, or at least by Collision, from each other: Upon which Account we think it highly Reasonable to produce our great Forgetfulness, as an Argument unanswerable for our great Wit. (332-3)

The moderns, arrogantly declaring the past useless, draw from the shallow well of their own abilities, pretending at depth and encouraging shallowness and superficiality in others, reveling rather than lamenting their limited memory and calling it "wit." This unsuitable arrogance is, as Levine deems it, a "signaling that the critical eye is beginning to turn completely inwards" (713). The moderns achieve a total inability to see beyond themselves and their own times; they create systems both in attempt to reduce all knowledge to easily accessible means, and as a substitute for their own poor memories. Thus the moderns achieve "the *Art of being Deep-learned, and Shallow-read*;" they declare their methods have allowed them to "become *Scholars* and *Wits*, without the Fatigue of *Reading* or of *Thinking*" (330, 337). In "Funes," Borges suggests that separation from past through short, faulty, and subjective memory is freeing, while a solid memory of the past is restricting; Swift, however, shows that reveling in only the present and one's imagination over the anchoring points of the past leads to an inability to understand the more complex and conceptual aspects of a subject. In fact, Borges' Funes could be called a manifestation of the kind of systematizer Swift so vehemently satirizes: despite his perfect memory and perception he remains disconnected from others and as a result his profound mental capacities produce only years of worthless work. Swift's satire of his modern narrator suggests that a short and partial memory is more the result of an ignorant and weak mind that willfully separates itself from the benefits of history rather than an inevitable result of man's inescapable subjectivity. While Borges' systems are a necessity in the face of limited and subjective memory, Swift finds the solution to the problem of faulty memory the exercise of reason anchored in a community of history.

Chapter Six—"The Empty Center": Knowing in "The Library of Babel" and A Tale

Essentially, both concepts of reason and memory treated in Borges' and Swift's works play into their larger theories of objectivity. Borges suggests that humanity's faulty reason and partial memory result in an unreliable grasp on an unreliable reality, making each man subject to his own subjective conclusions and unable to draw any definitive, objective conclusions on reality; moreover, these limitations, rather than disappointing, are preferable since they are interpreted as opportunities for freedom and play. In fact, since all propositions are possibilities, every idea is an opportunity for play. Swift, on the other hand, mocks those who, like his Hack narrator, revel in these mental restrictions by extolling imagination over reason and the temporal over the lasting; and while he admits that human reason and memory are skewed and subject to the errors of ignorance and pride, Swift's highly intellectual mode in addition to his appeals to reasonable living propose that real objectivity is possible, especially when one's subjective limitations are aided in connection with community and with knowledge of the past.

Despite the fact that Borges and Swift deviate in their interpretations of reason and memory, the manners in which Ficciones and A Tale of a Tub treat epistemology, an essential "knowing" of humanity and its nature, are surprisingly similar. Both works read as if our knowledge of the universe is essentially "empty," circling around a blank core. However, the reasons that these works read so similarly are for fundamentally different reasons, based upon the reliability of their respective narrative voices. While Borges suggests and supports subjectivity with his unreliable and confusing narrators, Swift satirizes the faults of his narrative voice, believing they could be corrected. Swift's narrator is a modern hack, a voice divorced from reason, completely unbalanced and slipping at different times between willful ignorance and arrogant intellectualism. Furthermore, the narrator, like the Peter and Jack of his allegory,

has knowingly separated himself from the balancing presence of others, preferring present over past, and in the final analysis is unable to account for the evidences of reality around him.

These themes of imperfect reasoning and memory and the fundamental questions of what reasoning and memory *are* constitute one of Borges' and postmodernism's most basic characteristics: an overarching skepticism towards definitive conclusions about reality or the human condition. Frisch defines this trait as a "crisis of epistemology, a crisis of knowledge," summed up as a loss of faith in the metanarratives that society previously depended upon to define reality (69). Throughout Ficciones, Borges proposes a number of inquiries that serve not only to undermine the stability of the human mind but also the reliability of the reality that the mind has to conceive of: first, Borges suggests that human reasoning is limited and flawed, and that we cannot know what constitutes "reason" or whether to trust any authoritative voice that attempts to provide one. Memory, likewise, is imperfect and subjective; but a perfect memory would serve no better in assisting conceptualization, and in fact, would only do the opposite. Our present methodology of systems serves to assist that limited memory and make life functional.

This "epistemological crisis" is captured most fully in the story "The Library of Babel" where Borges allegorizes the universe as a giant "indefinite, perhaps infinite" library of hexagonal galleries. Reminiscent of Dante's cosmos, the Library "plunges into the abyss and rises up to the heights" with no indications of where it begins or ends (or whether it ever *does* begin or end). The mirrors at the end of hallways both "feign and promise infinity," and the narrator of the tale, an aged librarian, begins his account with the description of his journey for a special book, the "catalogue of catalogues" (79-81). While "The Library" is largely allegorical, it surpasses simple allegory to touch on the relationship between physical and spiritual, material

and immaterial, and specifically "the distance which exists between the divine and human" (81). In the end, while the story admits the possibilities of an immaterial or spiritual element to the universe that interacts or influences the physical one, its inferences declare that a definitive conclusion about an immaterial or spiritual dimension of reality is inconclusive in the end. Ultimately "The Library" suggests that, whatever constructs we build around it, our comprehension of the universe is partial at best, restrained by an inescapable subjectivity in both reason and memory, and thus built around an essentially empty core of unknowing.

As he does with his detective stories, Borges again takes a symbol that is traditionally associated with one idea and twists its meaning to conflict with what the symbol is conventionally believed to signify. Initially the allegory of the universe as a library would seem to indicate a perception of the cosmos as understandably ordered and intelligently arranged, and that its inhabitants and even its Creator can be equally as understood and intelligible. As Perla Sasson-Henry notes, libraries were some of the most significant places in Borges' life, drawn from the hours spent in his father's library as a child. For Borges, libraries were "essential tools in the eternal quest for knowledge and inspiration" (13). Traditionally, libraries are places of shared information and education, housing ordered shelves of meaningful texts. However, apparently these settings of "knowledge and inspiration" did not necessarily equate an equally understandable or inspiring universe. Ironically, Borges himself was a library assistant in the Argentinean National Library when he also began suffering from retinal detachment and blindness. The world of the library literally became dark before Borges' eyes: like the librarian of his story, Borges could "scarcely decipher what [he] wr[ote]" (80). What was in his childhood a source of unlimited knowledge eventually became a place of darkness and confusion, associated with the "almost gothic sense of horror that faintly illuminated and seemingly endless

rows of shelves are capable of evoking" (Sullivan 113). In "The Library," Borges employs a metaphor that is normally associated with order, understanding, and clarity for chaos, ambiguity, and unknowing. As Gerry O'Sullivan explains, rather than order or understanding, the symbol of the library in Borges' stories suggests the opposite:

> [T]he archival metaphor [of the library] suggests the undermining of unities once held to be inviolable in both historical and literary studies—seamless canons; . . . myths of ends and origins; . . . ultimately authoritative, authorial voices. Such centers or centrisms have long maintained their explanatory, and transcendentally validated, hegemony in history and the human sciences, and these disciplines are in turn undermined by the intertextual dispersion at work in, and suggested by, the figure of the library. As Eugenio Donato has noted, the labyrinthine libraries constructed by Borges are indicative of a particular topography of memory . . . Here, the library "systematically emblematizes its own representational memory as diffuse, non-ordered, without origin and without end." (110)

Thus Borges takes an image of order and textual authority, the library, and remakes it to mean something much more ambiguous and disordered. Thus what appears to be an "orderly and structured space" actually serves to undermine order and knowledge by "disorientation" through its labyrinthine nature (Sasson-Henry 13).

As the story continues, the librarian/narrator makes clear that, despite the Library's geometric and almost mathematical appearance, the reality of the Library is chaotic, unordered, and its basic character unknown. A plethora of theories have been offered on the library/universe's makeup: "I," the librarian claims, "affirm that the Library is interminable. The idealists argue that the hexagonal halls are a necessary form of absolute space . . . The mystics

claim that to them ecstasy reveals a round chamber containing a great book with a continuous back circling the walls of the room." However, none of these theories can be either proven or disproven for, in addition to the narrator's own unreliable account, these other testimonies are equally "suspect, their words, obscure" (80). Furthermore, although the number of "orthographic symbols" that make up the library's books is only twenty-five, there still remains the problem of the "formless and chaotic nature of almost all the books" (81). As Sasson-Henry explains, "The Library" has been associated with the "bifurcation theory," a hypothesis that suggests a split or division takes place at a moment of decision that is essentially unpredictable, regardless of the knowledge possessed beforehand. Thus the continuous system of the Library creates "a number of possibilities and solutions," none of which are ruled out (13). The library, conventionally a setting for organization, insight, and knowledge, is a place of continual confusion.

However, the Library's "formless nature" doesn't automatically equate unequivocal pandemonium. For among its halls "anything reasonable (even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception," implying that the Library, contrary to its anarchic appearance, *might* possess order, however unintelligible. The librarian ends his narration on the library's chaotic appearance proposing that the library *does* possess an order, but one that is indeterminable: "The Library is limitless and periodic. If an eternal voyager were to traverse it in any direction, he would find, after many centuries, that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder (which, repeated, would constitute an order: Order itself). My solitude rejoices in this elegant hope" (87-8). Thus the librarian proposes that, while the Library seems a place of disorder, this appearance is most likely due to his limited travels and lifespan; if he or any other person were granted eternal life, the possibility remains that a deeper order to the seeming chaos could be found. Sasson-Henry notes that "the science of chaos" is another theory associated with

"The Library" as a "new way of examining the universe:" "The concept of chaos implies that "what to the naked eye resembles noise, disruption, or disorganization is in fact the result of deeply organized structure" (11-2). As applied to "The Library," the chaos theory suggests that the unintelligible lines that fill the Library's books are not a result of purposeless nonsense, but rather the sign of some profoundly deep, overarching order too grand to be detected by the finite beings that wander its galleries. Yet, solidifying this theory is impossible: it *might* be true, but no foolproof test can be found, and there is no final way of knowing. The point is not that the Library is chaotic or not; it is that there is no way of *knowing* whether or not it is.

What makes this unknowing even more profound is not only the mental limitations of the Library's inhabitants, but their social and moral shortcomings as well. From the account of mankind in "The Library," it is clear that not only does humanity suffer intellectual restrictions of reasoning and memory, but more significantly they are afflicted with an ethical handicap that makes their search for the fundamentals of reality even more unattainable. To begin with, the origins of the Library's inhabitants are unknown, for "Man, the imperfect librarian, may be the work of chance or of malevolent demiurges" (81). From the beginning, the picture of man is largely negative, for humanity is either the result of happenstance or the creation of a malicious god. When the declaration is made that the Library "comprised all books" (contains all knowledge), "the first impression was one of extravagant joy" (83). The Library is at last "justified" and "expanded to the limitless dimensions of hope." All of the world's answers are contained within the Library's shelves. Ecstatic in their new belief that the Library contains all knowledge within its shelves, men crowd the upper stairs in search of their own "Vindications: books of apology and prophecy, which vindicated for all time the actions of every man in the world" (83). However, the search for individual justification takes a horrific turn:

> Thousands of covetous persons abandoned their dear natal hexagons and crowded up the stairs, urged on by the vain aim of finding their Vindication. These pilgrims disputed in the narrow corridors, hurled dark maledictions, strangled each other on the divine stairways, flung the deceitful books to the bottom of the tunnels, and died as they were thrown into space by men from remote regions. Some went mad . . . (83)

In the deep depression that follows, the librarians are divided. Some are "official searchers, *inquisitors*" who continue their weary, impossible search, even as "no one expects to discover anything;" one "blasphemous sect" suggests all searches be given up. The most terrible of these suggest the elimination of "useless works," and under them thousands of books are destroyed. The narrator's "hope" at the end for some eternal traveler to discover the order and meaning of the Library is less than comforting.

Furthermore, the prolific use of religious language in passages like the one above suggests that any spiritual explanation for the cosmos' confused appearance is equally as faulty and indeterminable. In fact, the passage's descriptions of the "pilgrims" imply that any fervent pursuit of religious justification or explanation for the universe leads to maliciousness and hatred between sects. Edith Wyschogrod describes moments like this as the "romance of fact, the yearning for certainty," (15) an attitude that Borges seemed to scorn. Whatever Borges' attitudes towards religion and spirituality, passages such as this one seem to indicate that he held that the certainty of religious conviction led only to cruelty and in the end, despair.

In fact, Borges' account of mankind in "The Library" is uncharacteristically critical. There is a possibility that man could be a being divinely created, but his murderous behavior causes the narrator to believe they could only be the work of an evil deity. Each new discovery

leads to more destruction, as mankind's search for knowledge becomes a search for individual "vindication." While, as noted previously, Borges' allegorical correlations usually possess multiple correlations, it is certainly no accident that such descriptions conjure up images of history's bloody wars and genocides. Dennis Vannatta describes the largely negative conclusion of "The Library" and its pessimistic tone:

> Throughout 'The Library of Babel' one senses more than anything else the total futility of the librarians' pursuits. Their world is . . . ultimately a loveless, meaningless chaos. Near the end the narrator notes that suicide among the librarians has grown more frequent over the years. The reader finds little solace in the narrator's prediction that although "the human species—the unique species—is about to be extinguished . . . the library will endure." And probably Borges didn't either. (n.pag.)

In this story, Borges' conclusions about man's ability to ascertain truth are largely negative, due to mankind's moral weakness. Thus Borges' library/universe is appropriately deemed the Library of Babel—the archetypal scene of utter human confusion that is essentially insurmountable because of its own moral and ethical inadequacy.

Borges, like Swift, employs allegory to propose an epistemology, a theory of knowledge and knowing. Borges' "The Library" is, like Swift's A Tale, an allegory on the nature of knowing; however, unlike Swift's, Borges' premise is a fundamental *unknowing*. This inability to definitively comprehend reality is aggravated by man's own moral pettiness, his willingness to destroy another being or body of knowledge when it conflicts with his own. Borges and postmodernism do not outrightly disregard an immaterial, spiritual, or transcendent aspect to reality; both admit the possibility, and find exploring the options an opportunity for a kind of

intellectual play, a theoretical game of "what if," but without any answers or solutions. Frisch notes, "Borges' skepticism also leaves him skeptical about asserting that there is no God. However, he does maintain that if such a Divine Being does exist, our capabilities of comprehending It and understanding Its workings are very limited" (59). Borges' story suggests that all of man's efforts, like the librarian's search for answers among the shelves, are only play; subjectivity traps everyone within an inescapable system and reduces all man's efforts to a game. However, as "The Library" further suggests, these games soon become destructive. In a system with no rules, with no markers between play and seriousness, the very definition of "play" is lost, and individuals are left creating their own individual rules: by definition, no real game at all. Thus, as noted above, the story ends on a largely negative note, despite the initial attraction of its playful and open-ended nature. Essentially, Borges and the stories of Ficciones allow the *possibility* of universal order and transcendence—just as they admit the possibility of anything else.

A Tale is likewise concerned with man's ability to sufficiently know and properly respond to the world around him in addition to its treatment of reason and memory; and while Swift's text addresses reason and memory differently from Borges', it is at this point of knowing that Borges' and Swift's works seem the most similar. Like Borges, Swift presents a largely negative view of mankind, at least on the surface; and despite his position as a clergyman, Swift also disparages religious figures who behave maliciously and ignorantly. Swift's propositions seem to divide the world between "fools and knaves," those whose remain in blissful ignorance and those whose understanding leads only to bitterness, a dichotomy that fits well with the descriptions one finds in "The Library." Most significantly, the heart of A Tale is, like "The Library," focused around a center of nothingness. However, what readers find is this empty

center proceeds primarily from the mind of the modern Hack, the point of the text's satire, suggesting that, as with reason and memory, Swift associates the failures of his narrator with a fundamental intellectual weakness and a subsequent disconnection with history, and community.

Trapped in some of Swift's more difficult passages, ones in which every direction is blocked and every solution cut by satire, readers are tempted to decide that Swift possesses a wholly negative view of humanity: even if his satire and irony are delightful in the comedic effect, if Swift makes no space for a positive, his position is essentially the same as Borges': whether due to the cosmos' enormity, human limitation and subjectivity, or mankind's mere stupidity and pettiness, true knowledge is essentially unattainable. Adams believes that rather than search for the relationship between body and soul, knowable and unknowable, as his contemporaries were doing, Swift simply repudiated them both (711). Such conclusions on Swift's essentially negative view on mankind are seemingly reinforced by passages in the "Digression Concerning Madness," the portion where the madness of the narrator reaches its heights:

> Those Entertainments and Pleasures we most value in Life, are such as *Dupe* and play the Wag with the Senses. For, if we take an Examination of what is generally understood by *Happiness*, as it has Respect, either to the Understanding or the Senses, we shall find all its Properties and Adjuncts will herd under this short Definition: That, *it is a perpetual Possession of being well Deceived* . . . Credulity is a more peaceful Possession of the Mind, than Curiosity, so far preferable is that Wisdom, which converses about the Surface, to that pretended Philosophy which enters into the Depth of Things, and then comes gravely back with Informations and Discoveries, that in the inside they are good for nothing . . .

> He that can with *Epicurus* content his ideas with the *Films* and *Images* that fly off upon his Senses from the Superficies of Things; Such a Man truly wise, creams off Nature, leaving the Sower and Dregs, for Philosophy and Reason to lap up. This is the sublime and refined Point of Felicity, called, *the Possession of being well deceived*; The Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves. (351-2)

In this passage, we come into contact with some of Swift's most brilliant and most biting satire, and a supreme example of entrapment. Swift, the champion of reason and moderation, proposes a dichotomy which seems inescapable. Coming from the voice of the Hack, the initial reaction is to reject his defense of living "well deceived;" and yet, an honest examination into the general state of most people's "happiness" might perhaps confirm the mad Hack's conclusions.

Furthermore, whether or not Swift's disparaging views extend to all mankind, they certainly apply to a large portion: the passage might be an instance of Swift's honest sentiments on the sole method of happiness in a world run by systematizers, enthusiasts, moderns, hacks, and the like. Moreover, if we reject the state of ignorant happiness for knowledge to enter the "Depth of Things," we run the risk of returning from the search with discoveries that are good for nothing; philosophers and reasoners are left to drink the "dregs" that are left after the fools have skipped away with the cream, turning bitter and resentful over fruitless searches and sour drafts—essentially, the choice is between the blissful state of deception or the bitter state of knowledge. Nash notes that in this paragraph, the reader is encouraged to reject the fool's state, while accepting the premise that "such pairings divide the world." Furthermore, we must admit with Nash that, as the passage portends, "credulity is an uncomfortably natural condition for man . . . If we interpret this paragraph by adopting that which the narrator rejects, we avoid folly, but convict ourselves of knavery" (423-4).

Essentially, the passage, taken at face value, presents such a difficulty because it proposes a dilemma similar to the one that Borges' works propose, albeit on different grounds: that the true nature of the universe is in essence unknowable. In a modern world, only the arrogance of knaves would pretend a true comprehension of reality; the search of wisdom and the work of philosophers results only in bitterness. The state of a fool, happy in his ignorance, is the truly wise state in an incomprehensible reality. Read in this manner, the "play" of this passage is, like Borges' library diversions, a deconstructive game that ends only when all things are torn down, a sport of creating in oneself and in others continual deception. However, before we resign Swift to the ranks of misanthropes and allow ourselves to accept such a mutually exclusive division, we do best to remember the basics of Swift's satire. The most fundamental point of the work, and its most complex and easily confused, is its narrative voice. Like the other aspects of the satire, the satire Swift is invoking against his own narrative voice is obvious; at other times, as we have seen before, it almost disappears. Furthermore, as noted previously, Swift's satire and irony are such that even when readers are sure is he mocking, they cannot assume he means merely the opposite of what he proposes. The passage above is one of the prime examples of this: the passage invokes grand confusion over whether this is the Hack's or Swift's voice or some variation or mixture of the two, and, if the entire portion is meant as a satire, what other options we are left, if not merely deception or bitterness.

The key to interpreting such crucial passages and indeed the whole text might be to keep in mind the most obvious and most difficult point: the narrator. However while Swift may or may not interrupt the narrative or mix his real sentiments into A Tale, the primary figure of the text's satire is the Hack, the prime example of modern materialism and the champion of the fool. If such passages are read as coming from the mind of such a figure, then we must agree with the

narrative voice: if the universe is merely material and therefore subject to systemization with an emphasis upon the temporal, then the world is indeed divided into fools and knaves. Williams, in her analysis on the figure of the narrator, explains how the narrator's conclusions are reached:

> [T]here are values in the Tale, though we must shake off the supposed Author in order to see them, for he is . . . a man of no values at all, intended not so much to express meaning as to nullify it . . . [In] A Tale of a Tub Swift is specifically attacking certain modern positions, particularly those which are frankly materialist . . . those which so concentrate on systematizing the physical world that the spiritual basis of that world is forgotten . . . The world of fantasy presented in the Digressions is dead because it lacks the meaning which can be given to it only by a mind content to keep close to the known, to experience, and humbly depending upon the divine mind which alone can interpret its own creation. (697-9)

The "Fools among Knaves" passage is an example of reality from a materialistic mind: without the alternative of the spiritual or immaterial, the world *is* divided into the mutually exclusive options of fools and knaves. Thus we are provided with an insight into Borges' library/universe: the librarians were enthusiastic fools, set on finding a material explanation for all questions until they discovered their mistake and became cruel knaves, tossing dissenters over stairwells and burning books.

Furthermore, at other points in the text, the narrative voice betrays its inability to delve into the immaterial, spiritual, and more inexplicable nature of man, providing further clues that the dichotomy the narrator proposes in this passage are not the only options obtainable. Directly preceding the "Fools among Knaves" passage, the narrator admits a great difficulty to his theory

of madness, since what he attributes to the "madness" of vapours has produced such varying figures of history. Such a dilemma is "the most abstracted that ever I engaged in, it strains my Faculties to the highest Stretch," and the narrator bids his reader to pay close attention as he attempts to "unravel this knotty Point:"

> There is in Mankind a certain * * * * * * *
>
> * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> *Hic multa desderantur* * * * * * * * * * *
>
> * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> * * * * * * * And this I take to be a clear
>
> Solution of the Matter. (350)

Thus, at the moment the reader expects the narrator to propose his most significant insights into human nature, there appears instead an essentially *empty* passage: for perhaps the first time, the voice is foiled into speechlessness. Nash, along with other critics, interprets this "passage" as the subtle key in understanding the narrator's materialist flaws: "[T]here can be no material explanation such as the narrator has been promising . . . [and] such a flaw undermines his entire materialist system. [The narrator's] realm is the world of the material and the tangible; led by his argument into the airy realm of abstract speculation, he finds himself in uncomfortably foreign territory" (430). At the most crucial point in his analysis, the narrator reaches the absolute limits of his materialist, systematic mind, the point which both unifies and differentiates all mankind. The Hack's materialist explanation that vapours are the cause for all the world's "Conquests and Systems" breaks down when he is pushed to the point of explaining the difference between one conquest and another, between those that might have been justified and those that might have not. Nash writes that therefore this passage essentially reads: "And this [the gap, the much which is

wanting] I take to be an invisible distillation or refined essence of the body" (431). The voice of A Tale is a self-confessed modern madman who is not only comfortable in his own lunacy, but furthermore attributes history's past conquests and the present science of systematizing to the material explanation of madness as well—that is, until he is presented with the conflicting facts that history's conquerors were sometimes heroes and sometimes criminals. The narrator, having exhausted his materialistic explanations for mankind, essentially declares that his explanation for reality leaves "much wanting."

Thus the reason Borges' stories read so much like Swift's satire is because the works are essentially focused around the same idea: a game played around a center of *nothingness*. Up until this point, Swift and Borges, in regards to human reason, systems, and memory differ; here, at the point of the universe's comprehensibility, they appear the same. Both, to some degree, propose that the most mysterious and essential points of reality are fundamentally unknowable. However, their suppositions for such a conclusion are different: Borges proposes the universe is unknowable due to its vastness and the insurmountability of human limitations in reason and memory—essentially the basic tools with which we construct the maxims of reality. The images of labyrinths and mazes, mirrors and colors that fill Borges' stories are symbols of a game, diversions around an essentially empty center. A Tale, likewise, is the same sport: it is an experiment in the modern practice of "*writ[ing] upon Nothing*" (370). W. B. Carnochan notes particularly the emptiness of the digression on madness, noting that "[t]he 'Digression on Madness,' old critical chestnut that it is, is a tough nut to crack because when we are done we find out that just when we thought we were about to taste success we were as far away as ever from the center" (132). The very theme of A Tale is "that of 'nothing,' of the void" (Carnochan 125).

Essentially Swift satirizes the empty or "centerless" reality that Borges' stories propose, insinuating instead that this peripheral state is one of madness. The playfulness of Swift's passages comes not from the idea that all propositions are subject to frivolity due to their subjective nature, but from the conviction that the world can be properly divided into true and untrue, and those falsities which are held up as true ought to be ridiculed as nonsense. Thus Swift's play, unlike Borges', is a constructive kind of play: he mocks so as to identify the dangers of ignorance and better comprehend the proper application of reason. While Borges proposes that mankind's subjectivity bars him from apprehending a solid sense of reality, Swift maintains that reason in the company of community and historical precedent fills the gaps of personal inadequacy and provides the sturdy foundation for reality upon which individuals must humbly build. Only when we ignore these foundations and insist upon material explanations for immaterial subjects and events are we forced to decide between the ignorance of fools and the cruelty of knaves.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion – A Meeting of Mind and Spirit

In A Tale and Ficciones both Swift and Borges skillfully employ the literary tools of fantasy, allegory, and narrator to disrupt the comfortable and conventional assumptions of their readers. Each author recognizes the need to discompose their respective audience and persuade them to thoughtfully investigate their presupposed conclusions. Both works challenge readers of the texts to examine fundamental questions about reality and to investigate the multiple meanings that these authors' fantastical characters, allegorical references, and unreliable narrators propose. Fantasy allows each author to explore other worlds and encourage readers to inquire into the actual one; their allegories force readers to consider multifarious references; and the texts' questionable narrators compel their audience to doubt traditional voices. Essentially, both works operate in an "ensnaring" mode, seeking to trap readers in a maze of interpretative confusion.

Furthermore, both works treat themes of "knowing" and investigate the nature of human reasoning, memory, and epistemology. Borges suggests that human subjectivity makes reason and memory inescapably biased; Swift, on the other, suggests that, while these prejudices are real, they are effectively overcome and assisted by reason within the supports of community and history. While Swift and Borges differ in their conclusions about reason and memory, the works of both pivot on a center of "nothingness:" for while Borges proposes that the subjectivity of the human mind makes a comprehension of reality ultimately open-ended and unknowable, Swift believes that it is the materialism of modernity that leads to "an Experiment very frequent among Modern Authors; which is, to *write upon Nothing*" (370). Thus the resulting emptiness the modern voice of A Tale creates is Swift's greatest satire. While the stories of Ficciones suggest that this essentially empty core is the ultimate condition of all mankind, a proper interpretation of

A Tale reveals that this emptiness is only the case when strictly material explanations are offered for the complexities of reality. With his insightful warnings on the approaching age of modernity, Swift's text proposes that one of the reasons postmodernism, an age which has retained some of the previous time's sentiments, is left without an anchoring tie is because it refuses the securing holds of history, community, and tradition, just as modernity did.

Additionally, a comparison of A Tale and Ficciones reveals that the skepticism of postmodernism over humanity's abilities to correctly apprehend reality is not, as most believe, incompatible with a religious worldview, one similar to what Swift possessed. Rather, religion, in its proper form, maintains some of the same propositions that postmodernism does. As a committed clergyman, Swift was both a deeply intelligent and profoundly religious man, two characteristics he did not find conflicting. He saw, as all religion rightly ordered should, that mankind was severely limited and flawed, and that these limitations made interpretation of any kind profoundly difficult. In its "crisis of knowledge," these attitudes are the very approaches that postmodernism suggests. Postmodernism acknowledges, as centuries of religious belief have, that humanity is flawed in its intellectual as well as its moral capabilities.

Moreover, religion, like postmodernism in many ways, proclaims and celebrates the mysterious and inexplicable aspects of reality. Borges, as one of postmodernism's literary leaders, takes delight in reality's more enigmatic aspects, filling his stories with the playful symbols of mazes and mirrors. Likewise, one of Swift's major problems with modernity is its attempt to explain with materialism every aspect of reality; as a religious leader, Swift recognizes that some aspects of reality, such as human nature and its spiritual dimensions, are full of mystery. Attempts to "systemize" these mysteries would only result in a lopsided explanation of these phenomena, acknowledging only the corporeal aspects of a subject while

ignoring or openly disregarding its spiritual ones. As Borges and postmodernism propose, Swift recognizes that a large majority of reality is inexplicable and that to pretend absolute certainty about all of reality is only pride.

However, Swift also recognizes, unlike Borges, that reason operating with the support of other voices, both past and present, can come to plausibly objective conclusions on the state of reality. While the human limitations make perfect certitude impossible, Swift effectively argues through his satire that reason properly situated within the community and history can maintain an objective stance. As Swift's narrator shows, the modern mind leaves a large "gap" in its explanation of history's and reality's production of various sinners and saints, criminals and kings due to its insistence upon separating itself from others and from the past.

Furthermore, while Swift acknowledges the limitations of human reason and memory, he also proposes that these flaws are helped in proper relationship with one's community and a modest acknowledgment of past minds' explanations for those areas which the present one is weak in. On an individual level, when personal reason and memory fail and limit us, we rely on others' minds to fill the gaps we suffer from; and on a larger scale, we ought to recognize the weaknesses of our own culture, rather than committing the error of unconscious acceptance, and look to the wisdom of ages past.

In the end, the comparison of A Tale and Ficciones' brilliant telling provides special insight into the nature of postmodernism and its relationship to past ages. Such an investigation deepens one's understanding of the whole human experience, and furthermore, provides a better awareness of the present state of mind and past perceptions, allowing other voices to comment on the current state and the state of human nature throughout the ages.

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