

Collected Fictions Study Guide

Collected Fictions by Jorge Luis Borges

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Plot Summary

Jorge Luis Borges has written many stories, from less than a page long to up to about 15 pages, that are collected in this volume. The first collection, *A Universal History of Iniquity*, deals with many criminals from Argentina, China, the United States and other areas. Many of these stories are based on actual events, but have been so altered by the author as to constitute real fictional works. The second collection, "the Garden of Forking Paths" is a series of longer stories that involved mainly fantastic topics. Some of these, such as "the Library of Babel" involve satirical accounts of the author's work in a library, which he did for many years. Geometries and mathematics affect many of the author's stories, including a fascination with the maze or the labyrinth. "The Garden of Forking Paths" is a story about a literary and military intelligence labyrinth, imposed on a garden that is physically a bit of a maze.

The collection of stories from 1944 is called "Artifices." The themes of treason and crime are prominent. The fate of Jews being persecuted and killed in Nazi-occupied Europe is clearly on the author's mind. This is the case in the story "the Secret Miracle" which is about a Jewish victim. Other stories are more subtle, with a Jewish detective falling victim to Jewish criminals in "Death and the Compass," after crimes at a Rabbinical Conference. Stories involve questions of courage, identity, and, a sometimes theme of the author's stories, the Knife Fight.

In the next collection, the *Aleph*, mystical themes are introduced, as well as ideas and legends from the Islamic world. The volume, "the Maker" is difficult in that many of the stories are less than a page, being merely sketches of themes. These themes run from the assassinations of political leaders to modern interpretations of classic works such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. These short works are continued in the collections "Museum" and "In Praise of Darkness."

"Brodie's Report" returns the reader to a collection of more substantial stories. These stories are often painful tales of the ignorance and violence of the frontier in Argentina and Uruguay. Duels range from knife fights and political killings to the styled rivalry of society ladies in the story "the Duel." The collection, "the Book of Sand" is filled with mystical tales of fantasy, as well as the horrors of political assassination in "Avelino Arredondo" and more tales of the wild days in Argentina and Uruguay. The story "the Bribe" has a rare insight into attitudes in the United States. The last collection, "Shakespeare's Memory" is sharp, though the author is already old and blind. The story "August 23, 1983" gives the author a chance to tell of his change in identity with his aging. The other three stories are based on fantasy, though mostly having realistic plot lines. "Shakespeare's Memory" is about a writer trying to assimilate new powers that he or she has not earned.



A Universal History of Iniquity: Part I

A Universal History of Iniquity: Part I Summary

The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morell

Lazarus forms a criminal organization of some 1,000 men who help a Negro escape and then resell him to another plantation owner. The Negro would escape again. A new recruit joins, but soon betrays the group. Lazarus goes to the area of Natchez, and plans a slave revolt.

The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro

Roger Tichbourne, drowns at sea and the mother, Lady Tichbourne is convinced that Tom is her lost son Roger. When the mother dies, there is a fight over her will. Tom seems to be winning in court, until his mastermind, Bogle, is killed in an accident.

The Widow Ching—Pirate

The widow Ching leads a fleet of pirate ships. The Emperor decides to confront the pirates and attack them, but the pirates destroy the Imperial fleet. Again, the Emperor gathers a new fleet to confront the pirates. However, instead of a battle, the female pirate leader receives a series of kites with messages about a dragon and a vixen. After a while, she understands that she must surrender.

Monk Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities

Eastman starts his violent career as a bouncer at a dance hall. Eastman and another gang leader, Kelly are told by the local politicians that mass street fighting cannot be tolerated. Kelly makes a deal with the politicians, but Eastman refuses. As a result, soon Eastman is jailed for ten years. When he gets out, he has no gang anymore. He is caught street fighting and soon after joins the Army.

The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan

Bill Harrigan, aka Billy the Kid, is born in New York City, and by the age of 12, joins a gang that literally hides in the sewers. Fleeing a jail sentence, Bill goes west to New Mexico, in 1873. A Mexican gangster walks into a bar and insults the gringos, the white Americans. He is quickly shot by Bill. This is the beginning of the legend of Billy the Kid. Finally, Billy is shot dead by his former friend, Sheriff Garrett.

A Universal History of Iniquity: Part I Analysis

The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morell



Lazarus is a resourceful criminal. He runs his criminal organization, first as a gang of horse thieves, then around the thievery of slaves and betrayal of both the white slave owners and black slaves. In his first criminal operation, horse thievery, Lazarus is not beyond using as a diversion, going to the local church and preaching, while his men steal. His total amorality and cynicism is astounding and nearly unbelievable. Lazarus uses the racial lines and social divisions of the South, in the area of Louisiana and Mississippi, to be able to run his criminal operation. Lazarus uses teams of mulatto, meaning mixed-race men, who are presumably free, to run his slave stealing operation. These free mulattos are devoted enough to Lazarus' operation to eventually kill the black slaves that have been promised freedom. Finally, Lazarus is betrayed and cannot continue his operation of helping slaves escape and then recapturing them. He plans a huge slave revolt and capture of New Orleans to satisfy his grasp for wealth and power. Lazarus is only stopped by illness and death.

The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro

Tom Castro spends his life in a sort of daze, but because he is friendly, he is assisted by others. He is friendly and cheerful, and people decide to either use him or somehow accommodate him. Ebenezer Bogle uses Tom Castro to carry out a scheme, on the basis of mistaken identity. Ebenezer is an intelligent black man who has nervous habits and problems in doing normal things, like crossing a street. He decides to use Tom to exploit the obvious desperation of a noble English mother, Lady Tichbourne, over her son, who is lost at sea. His genius is in realizing that the mother's desperation alone would make it easy for Tom to impersonate her son, despite the fact that Tom looks totally different from her son. After succeeding in impersonating the son for three years, Tom is confronted as an impostor after the mother's death and the contest over her will. Since there are creditors to the mother and other people who would benefit if Tom is declared the legitimate heir of Lady Tichbourne, the case goes to court and there is a real battle to have Tom declared the legitimate heir. The case would have succeeded, except for the unfortunate death of the mastermind of the fraud, Ebenezer. Tom by himself quickly collapses and is quickly convicted for fraud. When he gets out of jail, he makes a living both arguing that he is innocent and guilty of fraud to audiences, depending on which conclusion he feels will be pleasing to the majority of the audience.

The Widow Ching—Pirate

The widow Ching is first drawn into piracy by the brutal and treacherous murder of her husband. She commands a huge pirate fleet that is able to destroy the fleet of the Chinese Emperor. The interesting thing about the widow Ching is her detailed and orderly law for the conduct of crew members of the pirate fleet. She regulates looting and the sexual use of captured women. Though she is a pirate leader, she must also realize that she is a subject of the Chinese Emperor. The Emperor is responsible for the overall prosperity of China.

So, when the widow Ching's pirates are looting and killing, they are confronted with a second Imperial fleet, which does not immediately attack them. Instead, the Imperial fleet sends over dragon kites that watch over a vixen, symbolizing a woman in rebellion,



the widow Ching. Though she is in rebellion, the dragon, symbolizing the Emperor, is still watching over her. On this basis, the widow Ching feels that she must seek the pardon of the Emperor, and turn to the lesser crime of smuggling the drug opium.

Monk Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities

Monk Eastman's story is another in a series of stories about born criminals. Eastman becomes violent, beating up two men in order to get a bouncer's job. Eastman's downfall as a gang leader is that he does not know when to stop. He thinks the more he fights and kills the more his power will be. Eastman does not realize that the public and the politicians cannot tolerate so much open violence and killing, night after night, even in New York City. When he does not agree to stop, he is soon jailed on real or imaginary charges, for 10 years. Lucky for him, he gets to be sent to the Army fighting in France against Germany. There his savage instincts pay off, and he has a great time shooting his way through the war. Once back in New York for a few years, he is shot dead.

The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan

Bill Harrigan is a killer from his childhood. He kills for a living and also for amusement and to show how tough he is. He learns to be violent and cruel in New York City, but like other young people, he goes to the movies and begins to dream about the opportunities of the Wild West. When he has to flee the police, he decides to go West to seek his fortune. Bill shoots a Mexican tough who challenges all the "gringos" in a bar, and for this he is applauded, given food, whiskey and acclaim. He spends the next seven years running around and committing crimes. He steals horses, kills 21 men, not including Mexicans and runs on both sides of the Mexican border. His only personal companions are the girls he can buy in whorehouses. His former friend, the Sheriff, shoots him without warning, because there is a bounty on his head, dead or alive.



A Universal History of Iniquity: Part II

A Universal History of Iniquity: Part II Summary

The Uncivil Teacher of Court Etiquette Kotsuke no Suke

The teacher for the Japanese Emperor of etiquette and courtesy, Kotsuke no Suke, is provocative to the Lord of Ako. In a rage, the lord of Ako slashes at Kotsuke no Suke with his sword. Kotsuke flees, and for this crime against the Emperor's representative, the lord of Ako is told to commit suicide by hari-kari. The retainers or Ronins of the lord of Ako, plan revenge. The retainers find the man Kotsuke, and finally kill him.

Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv

A man named Hakim, comes up with a religion of heresy against Islam. Its doctrine is that mirrors and having children are evil, because this multiplies humanity. After five years, Hakim's forces are surrounded by the Caliph, the ruler of Islam. They seem to be ready to fight until there is a horrible discovery in the Hakim camp. Hakim is a leper and his face is crumbling. He is immediately stabbed to death.

Man on the Pink Corner

Rosendo Juarez is a tough guy and a knife fighter, but one night he is confronted and forced to show if he is tough enough. The man looking for a fight is called the Yardmaster. The narrator, in the first person voice, is at Julia's place, dancing. Then a big man pushes his way into the place, to confront and challenge Rosendo Juarez. Rosendo refuses to fight. Later, the Yardmaster comes back bleeding and dying.

Et Cetera

A Theologian in Death—The theologian Melancthon writes that spiritual salvation is only through "justification by faith alone," and not by acts of charity. After his death, he wants to change his view, but he cannot, because it is not sincere.

The Chamber of Statues—There is a tower that none of the kings go into. The new king insists on going into the tower. There are beautiful statues inside of horsemen. Finally, the King sees an inscription that says that he will be defeated and conquered.

Story of the Two Dreamers—A man has a dream that he will make money in Persia. There the authorities seize him for committing a crime. A judge tells the man that he is a fool to follow a dream to Persia. The man goes back to his home and finds wealth in his yard.

The Wizard that was Made to Wait—A Dean of a cathedral learns magic, and soon goes through a meteoric rise in the Church, becoming the Pope in Rome. The former dean always says to the wizard to wait, that he will favor the wizard soon. The former dean is



now the Pope and he threatens the wizard with imprisonment. Suddenly, both men are back where they first met and the dean is again a poor church dean.

The Mirror of Ink—The sorcerer shows the ruler pictures of horses moving in the ink spot. One day, the ruler wants to see an execution. He is seeing it, when the man to be executed is the one with a veil on his face. That, unveiled, is the ruler, who then dies.

Mahomed's Double—The idea of Mahomed is that of a great religious leader. People are called a Mahomed, but they are not the real Mahomed, the prophet who brought the Koran to the Muslims. Mohamed comes to a group of Muslims in a vision, as a god.

A Universal History of Iniquity: Part II Analysis

The Uncivil Teacher of Court Etiquette Kotsuke no Suke

This is a romantic though brutal tale of revenge. Kotsuke is only slightly wounded, but insists on going to the authorities, who force the lord of Ako to commit suicide. Then, in an elaborate scheme, the 47 retainers of the lord of Ako plot their revenge. This must be planned carefully, since the Emperor's representative, Kotsuke, lives in a well defended, fortified castle. Why do they have to have revenge, when justice has been done to their lord? This is where the beginning of the tragedy is in the story. The retainers know that by attacking the Emperor's representative, they will all die through imperial justice, if not in the assault. They also know that they may not even succeed in their mission of revenge and killing Kotsuke, but they do it anyway, as a chance to avenge their lord's honor. This is the motive for the actions that make up the romantic legend of the assailants of Kotsuke, and also what make this tale so brutal and insane. It is the seeking of mass death for the sake of honor.

Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv

The story of Hakim has in it a recurring theme in the author's work, that of Gnosticism, or a philosophy of secret knowledge. Hakim is a Gnostic rebel who recruits a rebellion, but is actually against most of humanity. His new religion hates mirrors and copulation, since these increase the population of man. Hakim seems to have magical powers, and is in many battles without being killed. His face is known to make men and beasts blind, by its glory or horror, but finally this is altered, perhaps at the point that Hakim decides to meet a gang of lepers and embrace them during one of his battles. One of the women in the harem, at the point of being executed, says that a finger of Hakim's has fallen off and his other fingers have lost their fingernails. Rather than having a glorious face, Hakim is shown to be a leper, a man whose nose has decayed and who has a most disgusting face. This shows that he has lost his magical powers, and he is then killed.

Man on the Pink Corner

This is a brutal story of knife fighters somewhere in Argentina, probably in Buenos Aires. The reader can tell it is Argentina by the mix of Italians, Englishmen, and other ethnics.



Also at one point, the people pass around mate, the national drink of Argentina. The tango is danced, the famous dance of Argentina. Rosendo is challenged by another knife fighter, the Yardmaster. It is assumed from the story that although at first Rosendo refuses to fight the intruder, he later slips off and challenges the Yardmaster, when he is outside with La Lujanera. Why does Rosendo disappear and then come back? He could have had a failure of nerve momentarily. Or he may not have wished to kill the Yardmaster in front of many witnesses. Why does Rosendo disappear after the fight? It is likely that since he had earlier been challenged by the Yardmaster, the police would have known that Rosendo is the prime suspect in the killing. That is why Rosendo has to flee. After the Yardmaster returns and dies, his friends wildly suspect that the woman, La Lujanera, has killed him. The narrator steps in to assure them that it is not possible that she did it, but looking at a later story by the author, maybe she did do it.

Et Cetera

A Theologian in Death

The theologian denies faith and charity as the necessities of salvation. That means that all good works and helping of other human beings is meaningless without faith. It also means that one of great alleged faith can also commit crimes and be evil to his fellow man, as long as he has faith. Therefore, the theologian Melancthon is condemned to hell.

The Chamber of Statues

The King goes into the tower though he is warned not to go there. He sees beautiful statues, tables and books, but these wonderful things do not help him. He is condemned by an inscription on the top floor of the tower, and soon is obliterated.

Story of the Two Dreamers

One can travel far to seek fame and fortune, when a treasure chest is lying in your backyard. What is important is to have knowledge about your own life and location, not obey crazy dreams. It is better to seek practical solutions to one's problems, not go adventuring and traveling wildly, where one can be accused of crimes and unjustly killed.

The Wizard that was Made to Wait

This is a tale from old Spain, from an Arabic source. A poor church dean wants to learn magic. Obviously, the dean wants to learn magic to advance his career and the careers of people in his family, but that is all he is concerned about. He breaks his promise to help the wizard as he advances. The dean rapidly advances in the church but keeps the wizard waiting for the reward. The dean thinks that he can benefit from magic and then discard the wizard. The former dean does not dream that everything he has gained can be and is taken away in a moment.

The Mirror of Ink



The ruler, Yaqub, the Afflicted One, is very cruel. He tells the sorcerer that he will be executed as soon as the ruler learns the sorcerer's art. The ruler cannot control his curiosity and his desire to know all, to be omniscient. He orders that the veil of the man in the vision be removed, though warned that he should not do this. Yacub's desire for forbidden knowledge overwhelms his caution and this results in his death.

Mahomed's Double

Mohamad is the idea of a great religious leader, but Mohamad was really a man, as well. When Muslims demand to see Mohamed as a god, they see a vision of him. However, the vision does not do anything, and nothing else happens.



The Garden of Forking Paths: Part I

The Garden of Forking Paths: Part I Summary

Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

Bioy Casares reads this in an encyclopedia article on a place called Uqbar, but now the narrator and Bioy cannot find the article in the encyclopedia. Another book found is "A First Encyclopedia of Tlon, Volume XI." It is printed by the Orbis Tertius. This volume describes another planet called Tlon. There is an in-depth description of the grammar of the language of Tlon.

The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim

This story is the review of a novel that does not actually exist called "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim." A law student finds himself in the middle of a riot and fight between Muslims and Hindus. He gets involved in the riot, and thinks that he has killed a Hindu. The student roams around India in the company of the lowest and most vile people, then traces the holy man and is approaching his room to meet him. At this point the novel ends.

Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote

Menard writes a large number of philosophical and obscure works. The narrator claims that Menard has composed two chapters of Don Quixote. At the end, the exact same passage from Don Quixote is repeated with a totally different commentary for each one, one based on the 17th century Cervantes, and the other on the later Menard interpretation.

The Circular Ruins

A man who is a sorcerer slowly in his dreams, creates a man. The fire god tells the sorcerer that only fire and the sorcerer know that the man created is created by dreaming. So this creature, a young man, is created and sent to the other temple. Then there is a fire. The sorcerer decides to be engulfed in the fire. The fire reaches him, but he is not burnt. The sorcerer realizes that he is a dream as well.

The Garden of Forking Paths: Part I Analysis

Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

The narrator is confronted with the strange fact that the article about Uqbar is not in his Encyclopedia but only in that of his friend Bioy. A secret society has created a world, which they say exists, though it is purely a creation of their minds. The narrator then tells of the family friend Herbert Ashe, who is interested in changing base 10 numbers



(using 10 numerals) to base 12 numbers (using 12 different numerals) or possibly also to base 60 numbers. This man is sent a volume of the Encyclopedia of Tlon, which the narrator takes. It is a book published by the "Orbis Tertius," which turns out to be the trade name of the secret society which has concocted these myths about imaginary places. Little by little, it is supposed that a vast secret society exists that promotes the fantasy of a planet called Tlon. The psychology of Tlon is collectivist, in that people do not even sign their own books and there is no such thing as plagiarism.

The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim

It is difficult to figure out what the author is aiming to convey. Perhaps it is just the mystery of someone, who is not religious, chasing after a holy man. There is a lot of ambiguity, since the man did not want to be religious, but almost against his will, ends up killing in the name of religion. This story is the review of a novel that does not actually exist, so this is an example of the author's stories of this period that have a somewhat existentialist quality. The story tries to describe the feelings of the protagonist in a totally fantasy driven plot.

Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote

The work "Don Quixote" by Cervantes could symbolize a whole different series of images and emotions today, says the writer Pierre Menard. This is an extreme example of the already absurd writings of a type of literary criticism that re-interprets an older work according to new philosophies and viewpoints. Likewise, a literary work could be re-interpreted for different language cultures, as it is translated, or for other sub-groups of a population, for example, women, children, and workers.

The Circular Ruins

The story has a very magical tone. The act of creation causes a lot of stress and takes a lot out of the sorcerer. In the beginning it is impossible to know the sorcerer's purpose. Only at the end does it become clear that the sorcerer is continuing the cycle of procreation that has created him, by dreaming. At the end, the sorcerer sees that he is immune to fire and therefore he too has been created by a sorcerer dreaming and dedicated to the fire god, in the same way he created his son.



The Garden of Forking Paths: Part II

The Garden of Forking Paths: Part II Summary

The Lottery in Babylon

To provide more excitement, the lottery is changed to include some unlucky tickets, where the recipient of the ticket has to pay a fine or serve a jail term or receive the death penalty. The lottery company is given total power in Babylon. With people's entire lives determined by chance, the next step is to formulate a general theory of chance and games.

A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain

The innovation of Herbert Quain is that he writes his novels in very innovative ways. Most radical, is a novel which can be continued by three different chapters. The novel is sort of 9 books in one, and 9 possible pathways besides reading it from beginning to end.

The Library of Babel

The Library is seen as an endless place in the shape of a hexagon. The library is a place that also seems to have existed for an endless amount of time. Some men want to search all the books for all knowledge. Others condemn whole walls full of books and destroy them. In order to ease the librarian's task, it is hoped to be possible to find a book of books or a group of such books that summarize all the other books.

The Garden of Forking Paths

Dr. Yu decides that he must go visit one Dr. Stephen Albert. Dr. Yu takes out his revolver and shoots Dr. Albert in the head, instantly killing him. Within moments, Richard Madden comes in and has Dr. Yu arrested. The next day there are sensational headlines in the local newspaper about the murder of Dr. Albert, and the murderer, Dr. Yu being apprehended, revealing the city, Albert, to be bombed.

The Garden of Forking Paths: Part II Analysis

The Lottery in Babylon

The lottery is a game of chance, but by the end of the story, it also becomes a metaphor for life in general. The underlying principle of the Babylonian lottery is that everything is determined by chance. This chance is then affected by corruption, bad luck and other arbitrary decisions. For example, someone in the lottery could be unlucky enough to draw a death sentence. This could be modified by a panel of nine judges, who could arrange for another lottery draw. They could have one draw yield a painful death,



another to be a conversion to no death sentence and a reward instead, or the death sentence could be simply canceled.

No one is certain at any point who are the officers of the lottery company, whether the lottery drawings are fair, or even if the lottery company exists. The author seems to be asking the reader, is life totally random? Is a lottery of this sort not actually necessary? This is a principle of chance carried to an extreme. No normal society has people in it who go from top government position, and then to prison, and back, possibly alternating every sixty days.

A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain

Herbert Quain, the imaginary author, writes a book based on a mathematical construction. His first book is not remembered for its plot, but rather for its absurd structure. A novel that actually begins in November, went back to October, and ended earlier, in September, would be obviously totally absurd and unreadable. All of Herbert Quain's work is based on outrageous, esoteric theories. To confirm this is a satire, it ends that after Herbert Quinn has a success with his play "April March," he is upset. His next book of stories is written with plots that are purposely made to be promising, and then ruined.

The Library at Babel

This story reflects an extreme amount of frustration of a librarian with his library. Indeed, the author is known to have worked as a librarian for many years. A large library can at least seem infinite. For example, in a library of even 10,000 average size volumes, where it takes 12 hours or 2 days awake, to read the title of each one, it would take 20,000 days or about 60 years to read all the volumes of books there. However, in the case of the national library of a large country like Argentina, it could contain many more books.

Trying to classify these books and using all these books strikes the author as absurd. He asks if new languages could perhaps be discovered in the library. Perhaps an Eastern European language could be combined with an American Indian language or other weird combinations made. Some people desire to have every book known to civilization. They want to read them all, or at least make a summary of all of them. Others are book burners, and want to include whole classes of books to destroy. After reading too much, in any case, the letters and words of all these books become, in a person's mind, a jumbled mess. Finding endless ways to classify books or to relate one book as connected or the source of another becomes an all-consuming task. These connections and classifications systems are much more complex than the duo-decimal classification system for the endless books of the library.

The Garden of Forking Paths

The story is a simple story with its charm being its capability to distract the reader from the objective of Dr. Yu, the German spy. The reader is led to believe that Dr. Yu is seeking Dr. Albert in order to hide him, or somehow get information to the German high



command. Even when Dr. Yu goes to the town where Dr. Albert lives, almost by magic, boys tell Dr. Yu where to find him. Perhaps the author presumes that the reader would know that the German agent is making inquiries. The intense conversation between the Chinese man, Dr. Yu and the Chinese expert Dr. Albert is very engaging, but after reading the conclusion, is actually totally irrelevant to the objectives of Dr. Yu. Of course, Dr. Yu could have just taken out a gun and shot Dr. Albert immediately, but then there would not have been much of a story.



Artifices: Part I

Artifices: Part I Summary

Funes, His Memory

Funes has been crippled and wants to borrow some Latin books from the narrator. Later the narrator visits Funes, to get his books back. Funes talks of cases of people with fantastic memories, and that he has this sort of memory since the day of the accident, when he is crippled. He also has a total clear memory of his 19 years alive. Funes has learned four languages. Funes dies two years later.

The Shape of the Sword

An Irishman meets John Vincent Moon and sees that Moon is a coward. The city falls to the "Black-and-Tans." Then the Irishman hears Moon on the phone selling him out and giving away his position so he can be captured. The Irishman chases Moon down and cuts him on the face with a sword, before being captured. Then, the Irishman, the narrator, admits that he is John Vincent Moon, and that is how he got the scar.

The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero

The central character, Mr. Fergus Kilpatrick. Since, Kilpatrick is known as an Irish national hero, it is decided that he cannot be openly exposed as a traitor. Mr. Nolan is the leader of the conspirators, and he gets Kilpatrick to agree to cooperate in his own assassination. Nolan uses a combination of ideas and scenes from Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar, and other sources. Kilpatrick is shot to death in a theater.

Death and the Compass

Lonnrot is a detective in the case of Dr. Yarmolinsky, who is murdered at a Jewish Talmudic Conference. There are two other murders, it seems. The gangster Red Scharlach captures Lonnrott in the villa. Scharlach wants revenge. He details how he has trapped Lonnrott by killing the treasonous gangster Azevedo, and creating a sham, a false murder, for the third crime. Then Scharlach shoots Lonnrott.

Artifices: Part I Analysis

Funes, His Memory

The total reason for this story is to show the circumstances of the narrator meeting Ireneo Funes and the abilities of Funes. The young man only has another two years to live, until he dies at age 21. How could such a person acquire these talents, due to a horrible accident? Perhaps, once a person knows he cannot move himself, or do much of anything physical, he turns inward. All the powers of his mind, in the case of Funes,



turn towards the cataloging and retention of memories. Some of these skills are extremely useful, like the ability to learn and memorize several languages at will, including Latin. Others of these skills are of dubious value, such as giving over 20,000 numbers an individual name. Unfortunately, no one has the ability or motivation to give this talented person, some physical therapy or a medical regimen to keep him alive for long, and he is to perish soon.

The Shape of the Sword

John Vincent Moon is a traitor to the cause of Irish independence. He sells out his comrade for money and then flees to Brazil. He ends up owning a ranch somewhere in Northern Argentina, on the plains, the pampas, that are often flooded. The story has an interesting structure, in that it is a first person narrative, with a first person narrative, in its telling of a story within a story. Moon tells the narrator, who stops at his ranch, the story as if he is a loyal Irishman, only revealing his treason at the end. Moon is known at his ranch as an Englishman, which in a sense is true, since he is paid by the English before fleeing Ireland. Ironically, the bitter English versus Irish war is soon forgotten, as many Irish later, as Moon says, serve in the British army. The war itself is not a full-scale war, as hinted at by the ability of the "Irishman" to knock down the Black-and-Tan soldier, though the soldier is armed. The war is more a civil conflict like the one which occurs later in Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom.

The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero

Conspiracies can be strange things because they involve the orchestration of important events, which have to appear to the public as random occurrences. The assassination of the Irish leader Kilpatrick has to appear to be an act of a lone assassin, caused perhaps by bad security, and not to be the result of a conspiracy. This conspiracy is unique and odd, since it involves the victim as well. These events are looked at by the historian Ryan, who finds out that the other Irish leader, James Alexander Nolan, is a Shakespeare buff and translator of Shakespeare into Gaelic. Ryan decides to ignore his discovery of the conspiracy, since he too has an interest in maintaining the myth of the tragic assassination of the hero Kilpatrick.

Death and the Compass

Erick Lonnrot is a successful detective who manages to destroy Scharlach's brother and nearly kill Scharlach, in a crackdown on crime, three years ago. Now Scharlach uses Lonnrot's wits against him. The key tool that Scharlach uses to destroy Lonnrot is Lonnrot's intellectual pride. Lonnrot is drawn to reading the obscure and mystical Jewish books of the first man killed, Yarmolinsky. Then, he is profiled and controlled by Scharlach. Lonnrot seals his doom by ignoring the obvious physical evidence in the "third crime," that there is no body, and no one has been killed. Also, Lonnrot refuses to tell the Police Inspector what he is doing, ensuring that there is no back-up team to save him, or even avenge his death. Also, ironically, the story is written during World War II and the period of Nazi crimes against the Jews, but involves Jewish gangsters killing a Jew.



Artifices: Part II

Artifices: Part II Summary

The Secret Miracle

Jaromir Hladik is arrested. As Hladik's execution grows near, he becomes upset because his play, "the Enemies" is not finished yet. This drama is written in verse. He asks God for a year to complete his play and his request is granted. Hladik is about to be shot, then, time freezes. He has a year to think and in his own mind complete the play. Time continues after the year, and Hladik is shot to death.

Three Versions of Judas

Runeberg argues Judas is just the other side of Jesus Christ. This theory is severely attacked by many theologians. In his next writings, Runeberg concedes that since Jesus is God, he does not need Judas to betray him for his mission. In a final book, Runeberg writes that God became a man to create a total sacrifice and to be totally despised. Therefore, God became Judas.

The End

Recabarren is a crippled man looking out his window, at a black man who is playing the guitar outside his bar. The black man had lost a singing contest and now only plays the guitar. Then the man, Martin Fierro comes back after an absence of seven years, after he killed the black man's brother. The two men have a knife fight, but this time the black man survives and Martin Fierro is left dead.

The Cult of the Phoenix

The cult of the Phoenix is an ancient organization going back to ancient Egypt. What keeps the sect together is "the Secret," which is a ritual. There is a story of punishment too that goes along with the Secret, but it is mostly forgotten. The ritual is not described but involves something with cork, wax and slime.

The South

Dahlmann recovers from illness and is going to his ranch house in the country, to recuperate. Dahlmann gets off the train and walks to a general store-bar, in order to find a way home. Then some rowdy young men bother him. A man demands that Dahlmann fight him with knives and a knife is thrown to Dahlmann. Dahlmann goes outside with the knife fighter, though he is totally unprepared for this combat.



Artifices: Part II Analysis

The Secret Miracle

A remarkable thought experiment is performed, where the playwright Hladik is given a year to think, before he is shot. However, this does not mean that he gets to go to a publisher, or gets to perform the play. Hladik does not even get to write the play down, but because it is in versified poetic form, he is able to remember the whole play as he completes it. The author takes the problem of this playwright who is about to be executed, but wants to finish his play and then applies a type of existentialist philosophy to the problem. According to this existentialist philosophy, if the playwright Hladik is able to think for a year and finish the play, then the play has reality, though he immediately dies after, for the simple reason that he thought the play.

Three Versions of Judas

Nils Runeberg, a theologian, is a heretic according to traditional Christian beliefs. Nils Runeberg is an imaginary person, invented by the author. In earlier times he would have been arrested and burnt at the stake. Instead, at first his work gets a tremendous amount of attention, though it sparks a huge amount of literary and theological controversy. In Runeberg's second version of Judas, there is a more in depth study of the psychology of Judas. Existentialist philosophy is applied to Judas. It is decided that Judas could have felt like he is doing something good by betraying Jesus Christ. The latest version of Judas is so shocking as to be laughable, that Judas, not Jesus, is the son of God, because God could do anything he wants. So Runeberg's God becomes an existentialist.

The End

According the book notes, the story refers to a guitar and singing contest the black man and Martin Fierro have, a contest written down in a famous Argentine poem. The black man wants to get revenge, but is convinced to not do it in that version of the story. In the author's version of the story, Martin Fierro comes back seven years after killing the man's brother and is in turned killed. The author seems to relish the idea of revenge, or perhaps simply likes writing an alternative ending to a famous story.

The Cult of the Phoenix

This story seems to be a sly joking about or slight attack on obscure religions. The sect could be forms of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism or Islam. The members of the sect or cult pass on their observance of a ritual to other people over many generations. There does not seem to be any rational explanation for why the sect or cult continues.

The South

Juan Dahlmann is a third generation Argentine. Dahlmann becomes sick with blood poisoning. When he recovers he decides to go to his ranch house in the south of



Argentina. At the end of the story, he is again near death, from a knife fight that is about to happen. Dahlmann has little idea of how to fight with a knife, but is caught up in the romantic moment. His bland city death is eclipsed by the opportunity for a romantic death. He is inexperienced with knife fighting and his chances of survival are slight. Perhaps the other man will only wound him, by a slash across the face, to "mark" Dahlmann. Dahlmann is caught up in the romanticism of feeling states, the Argentine knife fight, the pampas, the milonga or tango music, and so on. As one near death, he feels bad, but he almost feels good about the romantic nature of his possibly approaching death.



The Aleph: Part I

The Aleph: Part I Summary

The Immortal

After wandering in the desert, a Roman legionnaire, Marcus, manages to drink from the river of immortality. He leaves a group of troglodytes and makes it into the City of the Immortals, but no one lives there anymore. The troglodyte, who follows him around, after a rare desert rain, recites lines from Homer's Iliad. This man is Homer himself. Finally, Marcus finds the stream of the water that restores mortality.

The Dead Man

Otalora escapes across the river to Uruguay, and works for Bandeira. Otalora challenges Bandeira's leadership and wants his woman. Otalora thinks that he wins the foreman over to the scheme. Otalora gets to sleep with Bandeira's woman. Bandeira is silent. Suddenly, at a meeting, at midnight, Bandeira announces that the game is over, and Bandeira's former woman shoots Otalora to death.

The Theologians

John is asked to refute the heresy of a group called the Monotoni, who believe that everything in history repeats itself. Another heretical group is the Histrioni. Aurelian has to fight a new heresy that claims that there are no repetitions at all of anything on earth, through all time. In refuting this heresy, Aurelian cites John's argument that history is a straight procession forward. Therefore, John is accused as a heretic, and killed.

Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden

The story is told of Droctulft, a barbarian warrior who ends up switching sides and defending Ravenna, center of the Roman Empire. The narrator compares this case to his grandfather Borges and his grandmother from England. The grandmother meets a woman from England who is now the wife of an Indian chief in Argentina. The woman has become thoroughly an Indian.

The Aleph: Part I Analysis

The Immortal

Immortality is like being a god, and is sought as the ultimately good. When the River of Immortality is finally drunk from by the Roman tribunal, he finds out the hard way what it feels like to be immortal, and it is not good. An immortal society has no desire to improve, or leave behind a better society to the next generation. They become troglodytes, men who cannot even speak or wear clothes. Somehow, the narrator,



Marcus, rises above this fate, because though he lives for many centuries, he is still seeking the water that will make him mortal again. Marcus realizes that those that are conscious of time and that know that they are immortal have no desire to be great. They actually lose their god-like human potential to be creative and learn things. Such creatures are, paradoxically, because they are immortal, no longer human beings in the image of God. For, to be in the image of God means to be a creative being, capable of acting in a moral and just manner. To be totally indifferent, as the immortals are described in the story, is the opposite of being human, in a degraded, bad sense.

The Dead Man

This is the story of an arrogant killer, Otalora, who thinks he can seize power in the criminal world. Otaloro runs his power grab and thinks that he is winning people over from Bandeira. In reality, once his treacherous plans are discovered, he is played with like a toy. Otalora is exposed to the danger of a gunfight but somehow survives this. He is even allowed to enjoy a feeling of leadership and enjoy the woman and power, because Bandeira has decided that he is already as good as dead.

The Theologians

Unfortunately, theological disputes in the church can descend, like anything else, into petty rivalries and power struggles. Aurelian wants to defeat his rival, John of Pannonia, for no other reason than to give himself peace of mind and the satisfaction of having done so. The interesting thing is how the heresy later confronted is the opposite of the first heresy. The Monotoni believe that everything is circular in time and history and that everything is repeated. Then there is the other sect, who do not believe in repetition, and also believe in a double universe in another reality. In the heat of the moment, where heretics are killing their own children to try to prove absurd theological doctrines, the Histrioni are viewed as the opposite of the Monotoni, so therefore the enemies of the Monotoni, like John, are seen as possible friends of the Histrioni. The story shows the absurdity of abstract theological disputes, based solely on Aristotelian logic. The author concludes, through a divine voice, that both John and Aurelian are the same, in allowing their fanaticism to create injustice and madness. If John had been less insistent on his righteousness and his position, the judges may not have thought themselves forced to have him burnt at the stake.

Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden

The author is fascinated with people who decide to change what side they are in a conflict, and who convert to the other cause. Just as the barbarian Droctulft quits a lower order of civilization and joins the fight for Rome, the other phenomenon and direction is also a possibility. An Englishwoman is captured by the Indians, and given as a wife to one of their chiefs. After 15 years of captivity and having two children with her Indian husband, the former Englishwoman has no desire to try to reclaim her former identity.



The Aleph: Part II

The Aleph: Part II Summary

A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)

A man is killed and his son grows up to be a gaucho. This man, Tadeo Cruz kills a man that makes fun of him for not going into the city of Buenos Aires in 1849. Tadeo flees and is captured after a hard fight. For punishment, he is put in the army, and Tadeo later marries. One night Tadeo is sent to catch a man who is wanted for murder. The man is cornered, and Tadeo decides to fight for the cornered man, Martin Fierro.

Emma Zunz

Emma Zunz finds out that her father has committed suicide due to crimes committed by Aaron Lowenthal. Emma's revenge begins with an excuse to arrange a meeting. Emma poses as a prostitute to simulate being raped. Emma then goes the next day to meet with Lowenthal and grabs the gun that she knows is in his desk and shoots him. Emma tells the police over the phone that she has been raped, so she killed Lowenthal.

The House of Asterion

A recluse, Asterion, is in his huge palace. He runs around the house and cannot read. He lives in a maze-like structure, a labyrinth. Every nine years, he kills nine men, presumably by butting them with his horns. It is said that a redeemer will come one day, to redeem Asterion. That redeemer is Thesus, who kills Asterion, the Minotaur.

The Other Death

Pedro Damian dies thirty years after a battle at Masoller. It is said that he returns to his fields in Argentina after the battle. A Colonel claims that Damian was a coward and ran away during the battle. Another old veteran claims that Damian died bravely in battle. The narrator claims that though Damian flees the battle and lives on in solitude forty more years, on his deathbed, by a miracle, he becomes the hero who died in battle.

Deutsches Requiem

Otto Dietrich is a Nazi war criminal about to be executed. Otto becomes a Nazi party member in 1929. Otto is shot and loses a leg. Otto becomes a sub-director of a Nazi concentration camp. Otto deliberately tries to be cruel, as part of the ushering in of the New World order. Otto is sent a poet, David Jerusalem, who dies. Other nations, not Germany, will get to win wars and commit crimes. It is over for Otto.



The Aleph: Part II Analysis

A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)

Here again is a story of a sudden switching of sides in a conflict. Tadeo is born to a father who is killed in battle before his birth apparently. Tadeo later kills a man and becomes a fugitive. He remembers this brutal fight, when he is concerned and captured, later when he is sent, as a soldier in the army, to do the same thing to a cornered fugitive. Tadeo seems to be domesticated after serving in the army for many years and now settles down in a frontier settlement, with a wife and child. Yet, when surrounding a killer and deserter, he wants to defend this man at a certain point. Tadeo is overwhelmed by the vision of a solitary man fighting, like he once was, and somehow he wants to be that way again. Since the story has Tadeo live until 1874, four years later, he apparently survived this wild action. Perhaps the fugitive is allowed to run away, without Tadeo being hurt or executed.

Emma Zunz

Emma Zunz plans the perfect crime. She does not feel guilty, because the crime is to get revenge for her father, who committed suicide. Emma uses a pretext to see the mill owner, Aaron Lowenthal. She plans to say that he raped her, so she killed him. To make sure she is believable and so she can pass any gynecological examination, Emma poses as a prostitute. The key is to get a foreigner, a sailor to take her virginity, so there is no evidence of what really happened. Emma destroys the money she gets from the sailor too, to further her aim of no evidence. The only slightly loose detail is how Emma knows that Lowenthal has a gun ready to use in his desk. It could have been concealed elsewhere, or with the safety on. A first time user could have some difficulty shooting even at close range.

The House of Asterion

The story is about Asterion, in the first person point of view. Asterion lives in his maze, wandering about. At the end of the story, it is made clear by the author that Asterion is the famous Minotaur of Greek mythology. The Minotaur has a combination of bull- and man-like features.

The Other Death

The narrator tries to find out what it could mean that Pedro Damian is said by one good witness to be a coward who lives by fleeing the battle and by another good witness that he was brave and dies in battle. Rationally, it is impossible for both of these things to be true. The explanation of the paradox is supernatural. Damian willed himself, on his feverish deathbed in 1946, to be a hero. Therefore, even though he dies forty years later, it has been changed to dying on the battlefield in a civil war in 1904. So what is the author trying to say? It is a spoof on the ideology of the macho who glorifies death in battle. Though Damian is an Argentine and though the wild civil wars of Uruguay are now meaningless to him, he is still ashamed to have been a coward. The magic of



machismo somehow converts his cowardice into bravery, 42 years after his alleged death.

Deutsches Requiem

This story successfully humanizes the crimes of a Nazi war criminal. Otto knows that he is committing crimes while he is doing it, but he justifies the crimes as necessary. The victors over Germany are going to kill him, but who will be the next war criminals? Hitler set loose a terrible war and war crimes, but he had no idea how he would end up changing the world and world history. What is important, the specific deed of a man, as Aristotle writes, or the general effects of these actions, as Plato insists? It appears the latter is correct. An endless labyrinth of actions and counter-actions make even horrible crimes less clear in their ultimate implications.



The Aleph: Part III

The Aleph: Part III Summary

Averroes' Search

Averroes cannot figure out what the worlds "tragedy" and "comedy" really mean, as theater plays. Abu-al Hasan tells the story of a huge house in Canton, China, where people are conducting a performance of a play. Averroes insists that the old poetry of the Koran is still the greatest ever, and no innovations need to be made. Averroes goes home, and looks in the mirror. Suddenly, he disappears.

The Zahir

A woman the narrator is in love with dies. Afterward, the narrator becomes obsessed with the coin, the Zahir. He spends the coin, but still remembers it. Finally, he picks up a book in German about the "superstition of the Zahir." Then the narrator hears that that the sister of the dead woman is in a mental hospital. She has an overwhelming obsession with a coin.

The Writing of the God

The narrator is a priest of a pyramid named Tzinacan. He is in a jail cell, where behind a wall is a jaguar. By looking at the jaguar, he learns the spell he needs. He has an experience of unity with God. He can read the writing that he sees on the skin of the jaguar. If he says the 14 words he reads, he can escape and become powerful, but now he has no desire to do it.

Ibn-Hakam-Al Bokhari, Murdered in his Labyrinth

Ibn-Hakam says that he is a king, but became a fugitive with a treasure. He kills his cousin to take the treasure himself and sails for England. The other man says that the cousin Sa'id is the one who stole the treasure. Sa'id tells the preacher that he is afraid of death at the hands of the ghost of Ibn-Hakam. Actually, Sa'id smashes in the faces of Ibn-Hakam, the slave and the lion, to conceal the identity of the murdered, and flees.

The Aleph: Part III Analysis

Averroes' Search

Averroes is an Islamic philosopher in Spain and a very cultured man. He is writing a piece attacking Al-Ghazali, who sounds like a fundamentalist or reactionary writer who attacks the practice of philosophy. Averroes knows something of Greek philosophy, having studied Aristotle and Plato in a translation of a translation. Yet, he seems to have never read or seen the Greek tragedies, such as "Prometheus Bound" or the tragedy of



Oedipus. Neither has he read comedies such as "the Clouds" and other satirical works of Greek authors. Averroes has no way to really understand what a comedy and a tragedy are. He gets an explanation from Aristotle's work at the end of the story, but it seems rather weak.

When Averroes hears of the story of a play being performed by Chinese in Canton, he has no idea of what it is. The witness of the performance never really learns what he saw either. The reader sees a very developed civilization that is unable to understand some relatively simple concepts. Is the reader able to understand the Arab civilization either?

The Zahir

The story is about a person being obsessed by an object. In this case it is a small coin, a Zahir, but in other cases it could be a tiger, another animal or any one of a large number of things. In the author's story "the Blue Tiger," the protagonist is obsessed with blue stones. The narrator is confronted with the death of a dear woman that he loved and was attracted to, and views her body. The woman had been a fashion model. In the state of mourning after seeing a loved one die, a person can become much more suggestible to all sorts of obsessions. The narrator at the end of the story finds out that the sister of the dead woman has the same sort of obsession with a coin, perhaps the same type of coin. What the reasons for these obsessions are is not known.

The Writing of God

Tzinacan is an Aztec priest, who has sacrificed victims to his gods. Now, he is a captive in a strange jail, where he is held next to a jaguar. He later calls the jaguar a tiger, or the Spanish word, tigre. This is a fantasy story, since nowhere in reality would a man share a perpetual cell, even separated by a wall, with a jaguar. However, this has the symbolic purpose of imprisoning Tzinacan with a symbol of his God. It is as though the Aztec god has also been imprisoned. Tzinacan only receives a bit of light when he is fed. It must take many days and months to read the jaguar's skin. The jaguar's skin tells Tzinacan how to free himself, but in the process of discovering the writing, he has changed. He has merged with the Godhead and is no longer Tzinacan, with his desire to escape. Tzinacan, or whoever he is now, is in full consciousness of the divine and happy to remain the way he is.

Ibn-Hakam-Al Bokhari, Murdered in his Labyrinth

This is an intriguing story though it involves a suspension of belief. For if the other man's body is left in the labyrinth, would it not be possible, with a quick examination of the body, to see that someone new, not known to the preacher or the people of the town, has been murdered? The preacher knows Sa'id by the name Al-Hakam, and would expect that the same man that he knows would be the dead man. The two cousins would have to look virtually alike for the plot to work. Other than this problem, the story is clearly done as a fantasy story. No one from the Sudan, no matter how rich, could construct a huge labyrinth on a hill by the sea in Cornwall, England.



The Aleph: Part IV

The Aleph: Part IV Summary

The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths

The King of Arabia, it is said, visits the King of Babylon. The King of Babylon cruelly puts the King of Arabia into a labyrinth. It takes the King of Arabia hours to find his way out of the labyrinth, and escape. The King of Arabia attacks Babylon and captures its king. The King of Babylon is abandoned to his death in the desert, as that is the labyrinth that the King of Arabia claims to have.

The Wait

A man is pursued. Senor Villari only goes out at night, doing things like going to the movies alone. Villari reads the newspapers to see if there is any news on his enemy, Alejandro Villari. The fugitive has to go to a dentist and fears that he has been recognized. Finally, one morning, Alejandro Villari and other men come into the fugitive's room and shoot him to death.

The Man on the Threshold

There are riots and Judge Glencairn is sent in, and disappears. After a long search, the narrator gets a note to go to a house, in a courtyard where a celebration is happening. The narrator talks to an old man, who tells the story of a British judge, Nicholson, and what happened to him long ago. The narrator has suspicions and looks further into the courtyard where the house is and finds Glencairn's body.

The Aleph

Beatriz Viterbo dies and the narrator visits her family's house, meeting Carlos Argentino. Carlos is a poet and wants help getting published. Then, a while later, Carlos calls to ask for help to prevent his house from being torn down. Carlos tells of a mysterious "Aleph," a mystical portal to visions. In the basement, amazingly, there is a portal to visions of the whole world. In a fit of jealousy, the narrator comes up from the cellar and acts like he saw nothing there. Carlos' house is torn down, but Carlos succeeds in getting his poem published and it wins second prize.

The Aleph: Part IV Analysis

The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths

The moral of the story is that, to build a labyrinth has no purpose. It is used to torture innocent people, who fear being trapped in it forever. God has his own labyrinths, such



as the burning hot and dry desert, which are larger and more terrible labyrinths than anything man can build.

The Wait

This is a vaguely horrifying story, yet has the feeling of the ordinary about it. A man is in hiding. The fugitive knows that if he stays there he will be found eventually, but he does not know what else to do. He is helpless and becomes like an animal, living day-to-day, totally in the present. The fugitive dumbly stays in his hiding place, until he is found and executed.

The Man on the Threshold

Everyone is thought to know what happened to Glencairn, but no one will tell the investigator, who is the narrator of this story. Then he gets a note and is told of what happened long ago, but then the narrator finds out this is what happens this time as well. This is an example of a story where time repeats. Many years ago an evil judge had been kidnapped and put on trial by the people. He is sentenced to death by a madman. The narrator becomes suspicious of the people celebrating and flooding the courtyard. First he finds the naked madman with a bloody sword, just like in the story he heard, and then he finds the body.

The Aleph

Through the narrator's love for the dead Beatriz, he becomes an acquaintance of Carlos Argentino. Carlos takes the narrator, unwillingly, on a journey of artistic ambition and mystical revelation. He reveals to him the Aleph, a portal to the present and past. As a side note, Beatriz, or Beatrice, is the name of the woman who takes Dante on a tour of paradise, in the poetry-novel "the Divine Comedy" by Dante Alighieri. Since Carlos Argentino is described as a second generation Italian-Argentine, this would be a natural literary reference. The narrator, who is also a writer and poet, looks on Carlos as a nobody, failure and pest. Yet Carlos is the one who ultimately is successful as a writer. The narrator shows his jealousy and resentment. First, he denies seeing the incredible vision that he sees in the Aleph. Then he ends the story saying that the Aleph, despite the incredible vision of the world that he sees in it, is really a false Aleph.



The Maker: Part I

The Maker: Part I Summary

The Maker

A man in ancient Greece is going blind. He thinks about when he was a boy and is insulted. His father gives him a knife, and he fights. Now he thinks of writing poems, like the Odyssey.

Dreamtigers

The author dreams of big man-eating Asian tigers, but he never can see them. He only sees little tigers, and wants supernatural tigers.

A Dialogue About a Dialogue

A dialogue about immortality is interrupted by noise. A sharp knife is available nearby. One man asks Macedonio if they should both commit suicide, and then continue the conversation in their spirit forms. The man cannot remember if they commit suicide.

Toenails

Toenails come from the feet but what is their purpose? Perhaps they will keep growing when the author is dead.

Covered Mirrors

The author used to be afraid of reflections in mirrors, and meets a woman, spending time with her. He says that he is not in love with her. The author tells the woman about his fear of mirrors. Later, she goes insane because of mirrors and thinking that the author is chasing her.

Argumentum Ornitholicum

God exists if a number of birds flying are known, and he does not exist if the number is not known, that is, is indefinite.

The Captive

A boy is captured by the Indians and found years later. He cannot speak Spanish, but knows where his knife is hidden, from boyhood.

The Mountebank



A man comes to a village pretending to be the Argentine President, General Juan Peron. He displays a coffin with a dummy representing the late Eva Duarte Peron, the President's wife.

The Maker: Part I Analysis

The Maker

This is the story of Homer, the great ancient Greek poet, who writes the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. He is said to have been blind when he composes these works. The author, Borges, is also blind in his later years. Homer composes the poems in his memory and recites them. Eventually, he has an assistant write them down.

Dreamtigers

It is hard to internalize the magnificence of a big man-eating tiger. An Indian tiger is bigger than the local Argentine jaguar, just as the rest of the world overwhelms far away Argentina.

A Dialogue About a Dialogue

This is a sort of cynical dialogue on immortality. The narrator assumes that immortality is merely the continuation of sense certainty of individuals, but in a new form. If both people in the dialogue die, their spirits can continue the dialogue. This is obviously ridiculous. Immortality, if it exists, is not so linear.

Toenails

Reasonable people say everything has a purpose, but what is the purpose of toenails? They have no purpose except to be cut. When one is dead, what does it all mean? This is another piece where the author expresses his existentialist philosophy.

Covered Mirrors

The author claims that the woman has gone insane because of him, but it is highly unlikely. He says that she fears him in the mirrors, but it is more likely that the woman, whose care givers must cover all mirrors in her room, has simply become very paranoid.

Argumentum Ornitholicum

This is a thought experiment around whether or not the number of birds seen is indefinite. If it is indefinite, it is reasoned that God does not exist. If the number is inconceivable, then God does exist. Perhaps this is just a game of words and logic.

The Captive



Someone's childhood memories are significant, but they do not change what a man is raised to be. This boy of European-ancestry is raised to be an Indian and returns to being one.

The Mountebank

This is a rather sharp attack on the populist President, General Juan Peron and his strong following among the masses and working class in Argentina. His young wife, Eva Duarte Peron is especially popular until her early death. The piece is an intellectual's attack on the prejudices and desires of the working-class.



The Maker: Part II

The Maker: Part II Summary

Delia Elena San Marco

A beloved woman says good-bye to the author and never returns, because she dies. The author wonders if he can ever speak to her soul again.

A Dialog Between Dead Men

This is a dialogue after death. Quiroga is a political leader, who is still mad at Rosas, the one-time Argentine dictator, ousted from power in 1852. Quiroga is more of a personal killer and thug. He speaks down to Rosas, who ordered others to kill without doing it himself.

The Plot

Julius Caesar is assassinated in Rome, betrayed by his friend Brutus, who joins the assassins. Likewise, a gaucho is assassinated by others, including his godson, with the equivalent cry of "Et tu Brute?"

The Yellow Rose

Gianbattista Marino is a poet who writes about a yellow rose. Marino realizes that his words can never reveal the reality of the rose.

The Witness

A man in a stable is ready to die. He is the last to see the pagan rituals of the Saxons. Some memories are lost forever.

Martin Fierro

There are the battles that free South America and there is personal violence, like when Martin Fierro calmly knifes to death a black man.

Mutations

The arrow is a weapon and kills people, but now it tells what direction to go to. The rope and the cross have changed in their meaning.

Parable of Cervantes and Don Quixote

Cervantes is tired and old when he writes "Don Quixote." He does not know that "Don Quixote" will be as widely known as the tales of Sinbad.



The Maker: Part II Analysis

Delia Elena San Marco

People are not immortal, though they act as if they are. The question is, going back to Plato, is there immortality of the soul? If so, can the author, Borges ever speak to Delia in the next world?

A Dialog Between Dead Men

Quiroga and Rosas are two personalities in the bloody early history of Argentina. Rosas was a rancher and a leader of a gang of gauchos (cowboys) of the Federalist Party. Quiroga is also a member of this party, but is killed in an ambush, which the author tends to blame on Rosas.

The Plot

Betrayal of leaders by their friends and relatives has been going on for a long time. It can involve the great Julius Caesar, or a poor gaucho cowboy; they are stunned to see themselves killed by people they believe in.

The Yellow Rose

Marino has deluded himself that his poems about love and yellow roses create a new reality and thought object. Now he cannot see the thought object that his poem creates and he is overwhelmed by the reality of the rose.

The Witness

Each person is unique, not only in what he witnesses, but in what he or she leaves behind. People leave behind children, memories and sometimes more complicated things like poetry, fiction and forms of government.

Martin Fierro

There has been much fighting in the South. There were the battles for Independence, then long periods of civil war and dictatorships, typified by the almost 20 years of Argentine dictatorship under Rosas. Likewise, the author compares President Peron, who is ousted in the 1950s, to Rosas. The author seems more interested in common and personal violence, like petty knife fights and killings.

Mutations

Many of the old implements of death have become symbols of various sorts. The new symbols of death are fighter-jets, bullets and missiles. Will they someday also have a change in their meaning as symbols?

Parable of Cervantes and Don Quixote



A writer, Cervantes, is at the end of his life, but can dream about the world of Don Quixote. He has no idea how successful his dreams will be, or how he will capture both the reality and fantasy of Spain.



The Maker: Part III

The Maker: Part III Summary

Paradiso, XXXI, 108

How do people touch God, and touch the infinite, the author asks. A pilgrim is described as seeing Jesus Christ and the light of God.

Parable of the Palace

The Chinese Emperor shows off his palace. The poet recites a short poem about the Palace and then is executed for stealing, metaphorically speaking, the Palace.

Everything and Nothing

The story is about the playwright William Shakespeare. He is seen as so absorbed by acting and writing plays that he has no personal identity.

Ragnarok

The ancient gods that have been suppressed by Christianity appear. Suddenly, the gods are seen as criminal and are shot.

Inferno, I, 32

The leopard appears in Dante's inferno. Likewise, Dante dies a fugitive later, but first God tells him the great role he has in history. When Dante wakes up, he cannot understand.

Borges and I

There is Borges, the public figure, and the "I" who is Borges. The author hears of the activity and successes of Borges, but wonders if this is "I."

The Maker: Part III Analysis

Paradiso, XXXI, 108

Dante describes an encounter with God, but the light of God is seen many times by saints and martyrs. Unless people are sensitive to the light and evidence of God, they will not see it, though it is right in front of them.

Parable of the Palace



The Emperor has absolute power. Anyone out of line is executed. Even though the poet is an accomplished artist and scholar, he can be executed on the whim of the Emperor, because the poet is still a slave.

Everything and Nothing

The author thinks that to be a successful actor and playwright, Shakespeare has to give up his identity. He is successful and adopts the identity of a successful person. After 20 years, he goes home as a successful retired businessman. However, does Shakespeare really give up his identity to be a playwright? Perhaps the plays have a message and intention as a whole for the audience. Here, each character's identity is determined by the needs and purposes of the play and Shakespeare is not one the characters. So who is he?

Ragnarok

In literature and poetry, the ancient Greek and Roman gods, among others, are often talked about. First, the old gods are seen as a wonderful attraction. Then, when they cannot talk, they are seen as vile. The gods are good as symbols, but their actual presence is not wanted.

Inferno, I, 32

The leopard is a symbol in the Inferno, the first section of Dante's Divine Comedy, but it does not understand the reason that this is so. Dante's book is not understood. It transforms the study of human psychology, dividing man's actions into those of Hell, the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. The people in hell make decisions on the basis of immediate lusts, no matter how horrible the results will be. Purgatory represents people who want to be moral, but become overwhelmed by their desires. Paradise is the psychology of people who design their action for all eternity of the good of mankind.

Borges and I

The author wonders if anyone cares for his real self, as opposed to the professional writer, Borges. Are they two people or one person? Yes, the author benefits from the writer Borges, but does he feel alienated from his work? So, Borges is one person, but on a day to day basis, he does not feel like he is the same as the writer Borges.



The Maker: Part IV, In Praise of Darkness

The Maker: Part IV, In Praise of Darkness Summary

Museum—On Exactitude in Science

Huge maps are drawn in the Empire, and are the size of the Empire. Later, the huge maps are seen as unnecessary and are abandoned.

In Memoriam, JFK

Just as John F. Kennedy is murdered by an assassin, the President of Uruguay is gunned down in 1897 by an assassin.

In Praise of Darkness

The Ethnographer

A young man, Fred Murdock, is urged to go off to live with the Indians and write his PhD dissertation. He gets the tribal medicine man's secret and goes back to the university to his Professor. He tells the Professor that he cannot write about the secret, because that is not what is important.

Pedro Salvadores

Pedro Salvadores is a member of the Unitarian party and is being hunted down. Pedro lives in the cellar for nine years, while his wife gets a job to support them. When Rosas is overthrown, Pedro comes out of the cellar, though he does not get his land back.

Legend

Cain walks with Abel after Cain kills Abel. In this case, forgiving is to forget, first for Abel and then for Cain too.

A Prayer

The author makes a prayer, but then rejects it. He cannot ask for his sight back. He cannot ask for forgiveness. Instead, he thinks how he can give others courage, hope and other qualities. He also asks for total death at the end, presumably also for his soul.

His End and His Beginning

A person dies, yet somehow works in his office. After a while he realizes that the dreams and nightmares that he has are his new reality.



The Maker: Part IV, In Praise of Darkness Analysis

Museum- On Exactitude in Science

Tasks that are done by one generation, with much work, may later be seen as unnecessary. The work may have been not needed ever and been ridiculous. Perhaps, the next generation is not able to understand the old work anymore and stops doing it.

In Memoriam, JFK

While the assassination of JFK, in November 1963 is overwhelming, such crimes have happened before and will happen again. Before people have been killed without bullets, and in the future a new weapon will be available to kill world leaders.

The Ethnographer

Fred Murdock is told by his Professor to learn the secret of the Indians. He is a passionate young man who would try to do anything. He learns a great deal from the Indian medicine man's secret, but decides not to write it down for his thesis. The secret is beautiful to him, but he does not think his readers would understand. His Professor is coldly enraged by Fred Murdock's refusal to write down the secret.

Pedro Salvadores

Pedro hides in the cellar of his house, but does he have any choice? He could have attempted to flee to Uruguay or found another route of escape. Since his wife has two children while he is in hiding, do people really believe she has a lover? Perhaps Pedro just wants to continue to be with his dear wife. In any case, hiding in the dark becomes his life and he never really recovers.

Legend

Perhaps Cain and Abel are walking together in heaven after Cain has also died. There is a mark on Abel's brow from the stone used to kill him by Cain, but God also left a mark on Cain after the killing. Abel forgives Cain, and thus also releases Cain from guilt.

A Prayer

The author says the Lord's Prayer, but thinks that it is insufficient. He repudiates parts of the Lord's Prayer, saying why should he ask that others forgive his trespasses? The author hopes that his life helps others in some way, but does not really see any continued life for his soul.

His End and His Beginning

A familiar legend in the author's work is the dead man who takes some time to get used to being dead. The man is used to his routines while being alive and still considers them

real, although no one looks at him or talks to him. Something new can be horrifying, even though it is heaven.



Brodie's Report: Part I

Brodie's Report: Part I Summary

The Interloper

Christian Nielsen brings home a woman named Julia one day. His brother, Eduardo brings a girl home too, but throws her out. Julia is submissive and a servant to the men. Christian leaves the house and says to Eduardo that he can have Julia. This does not quite work, and then one day, the men actually sell the woman. One day, Christian kills Julia. The men hug, and bury the body.

Unworthy

Fischbein is an Argentinean Jew who is invited to Ferrari's hangout and becomes part of Ferrari's gang. There is a plot to rob Weidemann's weaving mill, planned by Ferrari and an older guy, Don Eliseo. Ferrari asks Fischbein to be the lookout for the robbery that is supposed to occur Friday night. Fischbein tells the police about the robbery plan and then goes ahead as the lookout man. Both Ferrari and Don Eliseo are killed.

The Story from Rosendo Juarez

Rosendo fights a man and stabs him to death. The police agree to let Rosendo go if he becomes a tough that defends a political operation. One night, Rosendo is at a dance and a tall fellow that looks like him called the Yardmaster comes and challenges Rosendo to a knife fight. At that point Rosendo reflects that his whole life is ridiculous. Rosendo refuses to fight and leaves town.

The Encounter

Uriarte challenges another fellow, Duncan to a one on one game of poker. Meanwhile, the young narrator is shown, by the owner of the house, the house collection of knives. Outside, Uriarte claims that Duncan is cheating at cards. The men go up to the display collection of knives and go outside and fight. Uriarte stabs Duncan to death. The narrator thinks that what had been fighting were not the two men, but the knives themselves.

Juan Murana

Juan Murana has died and the wife, Florentina is getting old. The aunt says that if Juan Murana knew about it, he would not let them be evicted. One day the boy and his mother go to the landlord and there is a crowd gathering by the landlord's door and it is said that someone came in at night and stabbed the landlord to death. One day the aunt shows the boy the knife, called Juan, that killed the landlord.

The Elderly Lady



The elderly lady is 100 years old. Her father, Col. Mariano Rubio won a minor battle against the Spanish. On the old lady Maria's birthday, a huge crowd gathers in her house. The party takes place in the evening and is stressful for the old lady, who does not speak, but still has to sit up for long amounts of time, take pictures and shake hands. She dies within a few days.

Brodie's Report: Part I Analysis

The Interloper

This is an extremely macabre story. The Nielsen brothers are wild men of the frontier. Obviously, they expect that there is no justice, and they do not expect to pay for the crimes towards Julia. This is a frontier town and the brothers are drunks, cattle rustlers and thieves. They have in all likelihood committed many crimes together. The biggest crime that they commit against Julia is to treat her as a total object, to be used, abused, bought and sold and discarded. Why they do not just set her free to do what she wants is hard to say, but of course if that happened there would be no story.

In a sense, the crime against Julia is Eduardo's fault, as he refuses to get his own woman, his own house and behave like a man. He is so involved with his doings with his older brother Christian that he cannot seem to just go off and find his own girl. The reason for this may be the obscure codes of an all-male, macho society. After all, this is the Argentine frontier. There are probably many more men there than there are woman. It may have been seen as weakness to dump a woman like Julia. Perhaps there is something special about her that makes both men fall in love with her.

Unworthy

Santiago Fischbein admires the gang leader Ferrari and wants to be a member of the gang. They give Fischbein a feeling of belonging and toughness that he actually does not have. They call him "little Russian" (or Jew) but this is just a term of endearment. However, Fischbein is obviously getting nervous that police have stopped by the bar, the local hangout, twice and seem to know that they are dealing with criminal elements. Likewise, Fischbein's mother resents the fact the Fischbein is hanging out with a bunch of hoodlums, trying to ape their style. Fischbein enjoys belonging to the gang and likes Ferrari but actually carrying out crimes is make-believe for him. He would like to strut around with tough guys and feel good indefinitely. Once he is asked to commit a crime, the only thing for him to do is to tell the police. Fischbein does not know what will happen to him, but since the police deliberately kill the two ringleaders, he is safe. From the tone of the story, Fischbein abandons his life of crime at this point.

The Story from Rosendo Juarez

This story is a special treat, since it continues and sheds light on the story of "the Man on the Pink Corner." In that story, it seems that Rosendo Juarez, after refusing to fight the Yardmaster, changes his mind and attacks the Yardmaster when the Yardmaster is out with the woman, La Lujanera. In the former, La Lujanera claims that a mystery man



challenged the Yardmaster to a knife fight and kills him, but now it appears that La Lujanera kills the Yardmaster.

Rosendo comes from a home where he never knows his father. He feels a need to show that he is a tough guy and becomes a knife fighter and killer because another man challenges him. Rather than jail him, the Police give him to a political operation to act as an enforcer and thug. In the world of the demonstration of masculine bravery, the man on top is never secure. The Yardmaster hears of the toughness and prowess of Rosendo and comes with his gang to a dance to challenge Rosendo to a fight. Rosendo is not scared, but decides his life is ridiculous. He leaves the dance, and leaves town, never to come back. He finds a peaceful life as a worker in rural Uruguay.

The Encounter

The narrator, after telling the whole story of the knife fight that he sees as a boy decides that the knives had personalities. Years before the fight, two men hate each other and both are knife fighters, but they never get to fight. One dies in election violence and the other dies of old age. Then, somehow the knives are collected by the owner of the ranch and become part of an historic knife collection. This sounds impossible, but it is also an ironic way of saying that the fight that begins between the two men has no reason for occurring and is totally absurd. Both Uriarte and Duncan are at the ranch for a pleasant lamb roast. They drink too much as they are waiting for the whole lamb to be cooked and start to play poker. Uriarte accuses Duncan of cheating and provokes the fight, ending up killing Duncan. Afterwards, the killer cries, feeling the absurdity of the killing he just committed. So, to say that the knives themselves wanted to fight makes as much sense as an explanation for this deadly fight as anything else.

Juan Murana

Here the author has another story where a mystical object, the knife fighter's knife, takes on a life of its own. The aunt is a recluse, but when she realizes that her late husband would have killed the landlord, she decides that the knife is the living embodiment of her husband Juan. The aunt, Florentina, then takes the knife "Juan" for a little trip in the middle of the night and stabs the landlord to death. Since the landlord lives alone, and no one sees the aunt, the crime is never prosecuted. Since the aunt is sick and dies soon, there is an air of the supernatural to the story. Only the spirit of Juan, either coming back from the dead or vivid in the aunt's mind, is able to give the aunt the power to go outside, across town, enter the room of the landlord and successfully stab him to death. Even more magically, she is not seen coming or going and commits the perfect crime, with the help of "Juan."

The Elderly Lady

As usual, ceremonies about the past are empty and ostentatious. The lady does not know what is happening. Perhaps she thinks that the house is under attack by a troop of soldiers from the evil former dictator Rosas. History is important, but to the actual people involved in the history, it is often a vague dream. The people may know that they

are in their country and how they got there, but they have little reflection on what it all means.



Brodie's Report: Part II

Brodie's Report: Part II Summary

The Duel

Clara Glencairn is a society lady in Buenos Aires. When her husband dies, she decides to seek a career as a painter. Her friend Marta Pizzaro inspires Clara to try painting. There is a bit of rivalry between Clara and Marta sometimes expressed in strange ways. Marta wins an appointment to represent Argentina at an International Art Conference in Columbia. The rival of the two continues until Clara has a stroke and dies.

The Other Duel

Cardoso and Silveira have a long standing feud. One day both the men join a rebel force and they fight for about a year and then are forced to surrender. As usual, the custom is for the victors to execute the prisoners by slashing their throats. Juan Patricio Nolan knows of the feud between Cardoso and Silveira, so he tells them there will be a special race of who goes faster when their throat is cut.

Guayaquil

There are a couple of references to places now in Venezuela, which is the headquarters of Gen. Simon Bolivar. The narrator has a dispute with another professor, Dr. Eduardo Zimmerman of another Argentine university over who will claim a letter. The narrator is also a professor. Prof. Zimmerman spends some time talking about his native city, Prague, then capital of Czechoslovakia. Prof. Zimmerman gets the honor.

The Gospel According to Mark

Baltasar spends the summer at his cousin's ranch, and tries to talk with the Gutres, and read to them. Baltasar finds an English Bible left around the house, and translates it into Spanish, getting the family's attention. One night the girl goes to Baltasar's room. The next morning, the father asks if Jesus allowed himself to be crucified to save mankind. Shortly after, the father and son drive him to the back, where a cross is ready.

Brodie's Report

The Yahoo is a type of wild man living in the forest among the ape men. The Yahoos cannot be converted to Christianity. They do not know what a father is, either on earth, or in heaven, or what it means for a father to have a son. They have concepts in their language that are vague and hard to interpret. Executions take place on the basis of unproved accusations. The Yahoo do not know about guns, which at first Brodie shoots in the air, but latter, Brodie uses a gun to defend himself and the Yahoo against the Ape-men. After this, he leaves the area.



Brodie's Report: Part II Analysis

The Duel

There can be competition between people that does not descend into knife fights and other nasty deeds. Clara and Marta are friends and also rivals. They look at each other's paintings and sometimes Marta helps Clara, other times she tries to defeat and surpass her. Marta is the one who is involved in painting first and becomes so absorbed in her friendly duel with Clara that Marta rejects an offer of marriage as a diversion from her favorite pastime of comparing herself with Clara. When Clara dies, a piece of Marta dies as well, commemorated in the portrait she does of Clara that is shown in the National Gallery.

The Other Duel

The mass execution of men in the losing army is the practice of the day. The Whites lose the civil war in Uruguay so presumably everyone in their army who does not escape is executed. The overwhelming impression of the story is the total savagery of the times, since Cardoso asks before the battle that, if the Whites defeat the Reds, he be allowed to slash one of the prisoner's throats. Unfortunately for him, the other side wins. It is interesting that Cardoso and Silveira, despite the long-term resentment and hatred between them, do not resort to a knife fight to settle their disputes.

Guayaquil

This is another story about a duel, though on an intellectual level. Both the narrator and Professor Zimmerman seek to go to Sulaco to retrieve the letter from Gen. Simon Bolivar. Though the narrator is the native Argentine and more qualified, he does not really want to travel and grab the letter. He is easily convinced by Prof. Zimmerman, that Zimmerman will get the letter. This reflects the matter of the letter itself. Gen. Bolivar apparently easily gets the honor of leading the joint South American armies that will fight and defeat the Spanish in Peru, and drive them out of the Americas. These types of disputes are solved more by the will of the participants than anything else. Which professor, or which general really wants to do the task at hand?

The Gospel According to Mark

This is one of the most macabre stories in the volume. It does not make clear if Baltasar is actually crucified by the family, or if they come to their senses. There is the problem of a family that lives in the Argentine plains, have no education, and have lost their sense of civilization. For the family to think that Baltasar, who translates for them the Gospel of Mark, is Jesus, seems a bit far fetched. On the other hand, for Baltasar, the eternal university student, the sheer depravity and rural-induced idiocy of the Gutres is also totally an unknown, so anything is possible.

Brodie's Report



Yahoos, in a similar setting, are what the human-like creatures are called in a section of the book "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift. This is a type of satire on civilized behavior, or the lack of it in our civilization. For example, the Yahoos all fling mud on each other, meaning that they constantly insult each other. The author feels that the safest type of poet or writer is one who goes about his business and moves or affects no one. If people are affected, they can become upset and want to hurt the author.

The swamps that people congregate in could be large cities, like in Argentina, where a very large portion of the population lives in the capital, Buenos Aires, and around it, with other large regions of beautiful countryside, barely inhabited. A king, who is blinded and mutilated, and helped by four witch-doctors, is like the common practice in modern nations of having someone as a figurehead for President or Prime Minister, who is manipulated and controlled by his or her advisors.



The Book of Sand: Part I

The Book of Sand: Part I Summary

The Other

The author, Borges, is about 70 years old and in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is sitting on a bench and another man sits down, humming a song from his homeland. Borges realizes that this is himself at age 18. The two Borgeses discuss literature, including Dostoyevsky's work "the Double." The older Borges recites a line from the poet Hugo in French to show to the other that this is not a dream.

Ulrikke

The narrator is a middle-aged, unmarried Colombian professor on a trip to York, England, perhaps for an academic conference. He meets a tall, beautiful Norwegian woman named Ulrikke at an inn. He sees her the next day at breakfast and goes for a walk with her. Casually, she agrees to sleep with him at an inn.

The Congress

Alexander hears about the Congress. The Congress is led by Don Alejandro Glencoe, a Uruguayan rancher. Don Alejandro is in the process of building a huge headquarters for the Congress, on his land. The narrator and Fermin Eguren are sent abroad. There, the narrator has a short love affair. Finally, the narrator returns to Buenos Aires. Fermin Eguren is still spending lots of money in Europe. One day most of the Congress is brought to the ranch. Don Alejandro comes in and announces the Congress is over, and he must sell his ranch.

There Are More Things

The narrator's uncle dies and his house is sold to a middleman who represents the real buyer. The narrator gets a series of strange reports from residents of the town of Turdera. One day in summer, the narrator is walking past this house, and there is a sudden rainstorm. He tries the gate and gets in. Inside, the walls are demolished and there is a strange odor. Also the furniture is odd. He climbs the ladder upstairs and there is a huge table with portholes, sort of like a bed. The narrator goes downstairs and then sees the inhabitants of the house come in.

The Sect of Thirty

A manuscript is discovered that describes a heretical Christian sect. The members of the sect give away all their possessions and are naked on the basis of a perverse argument based on the Gospels. The sect is based on an equal adoration of Jesus and the traitor Judas. This is where the sect gets its name, from the "thirty pieces of silver"



that Judas receives for betraying Christ. Finally, at the age of 33, members of the sect are crucified.

The Book of Sand: Part I Analysis

The Other

The story is an interesting opportunity for Borges, now past age 70, to compare himself with himself when he is 18 years old. Both men still have an ear for the local music of their homeland, in this case a milonga of their youth. The conversation develops through banalities and the attempt to convince the younger Borges that the encounter is real. More to the point are their different reactions to Dostoyevsky, which Borges can now barely remember. For the youth, Dostoyevsky is the perfect expression, through his works, of the Slavic soul. The youth has the youthful zeal of speaking for the downtrodden masses. Borges now scoffs at universal ideas and appeals. The two men have a different interpretation of the author Whitman as well. For the younger Borges, Whitman never lies and is idolized. For Borges now, Whitman writes what he desires, though he never fulfills that desire that he has. The ending is funny, in that the younger Borges, by ripping up the dollar bill, is shown to not care if the encounter is real or not.

Ulrikke

On one level, this is the sexual fantasy of a middle-aged male bachelor. The professor, with little effort, wins the favors of a tall Norwegian lady for a day. Ulrikke is a woman moving from adventure to adventure, and still fairly young. The professor is near the end of his adventures. Involved also are literary fantasies, since Ulrikke talks of the fantasies of "de Quincey," an author, who writes about his search for his lost Anna. Then she tells the professor that he has found her, meaning that Ulrikke is the found Anna.

The Congress

The Congress is an organization based on an ideal one-world government. It seems to be a sort of democratic version of the British Empire, with a strong input of English ideas, not only from Twirl, who is from the United Kingdom, but also from the British author, Carlyle. The Congress organization rapidly degenerates into a cash cow for those advising Don Alejandro. Twirl is buying huge amounts of books, and can be supposed to be getting a percentage from the book dealer, Nierenstein, that he always uses. The Narrator, Alexander Ferri is sent to England on a romantic journey, while Fermin Eguren wastes money on prostitutes in Europe. Don Alejandro is manipulated due to his frustrated political ambitions, to bankroll the Congress organization at an increasing rate that eventually bankrupts him. When he sells the ranch, Don Alejandro declares that there is no need for a Congress, because everyone, everywhere, is in the Congress anyway.

There Are More Things



This is a fantasy, a supernatural story, as the dedication to H.P. Lovecraft indicates. The narrator at the end of the story sees the inhabitants of the house, presumably creatures from another world. It is unclear if they see him, attack him, eat him, ignore him, or even make friends with him. The theme of the story is the horror of meeting creatures from another planet. What makes it more horrible is that such creatures could somehow sneak into a town and take human form. The alien's representative, Max P., represents the aliens. Has Max been taken possession of, or is he an alien in disguise? It is not clear, though in either case, he is the one who orders that the walls inside the house be knocked down and that the strange "alien" furniture be constructed. The funny thought voiced by the narrator is that these aliens that have come to earth may also be scared or be repulsed by the earth and by human beings.

The Sect of Thirty

What is the point of citing such a horrible sect and manuscript? This story is a sort of ironic joke on the dangers of too literal a reading of the Holy Scriptures. Doubtless the problem of fundamentalism has been around for a long time. In the case of the described sect, they must soon obliterate themselves because of the extreme nature of their beliefs. However, many extreme fundamentalist sects exist who endure because they do not carry their religious doctrines to quite as far an extreme. By admiring Judas and treachery, the members of the sect become traitors to themselves. The moral of the story is that religious beliefs have to be also measured up to the yardstick of common sense.



The Book of Sand: Part II

The Book of Sand: Part II Summary

The Night of the Gifts

An older fellow, Rufino, takes the narrator to town to a house of prostitution. There is a woman there called "the Captive" who tells the story of when she was under fire during an Indian raid. Suddenly, a bunch of rough men come into the house, including a known gangster, Juan Moreira. The narrator goes to hide in a bedroom upstairs. Then the Captive initiates him into sex. Later a sergeant stabs Juan Moreira to death with a bayonet.

Undr

The narrator gets a report from an Icelander, Ulf Sigurdason about the land of Urns. Ulf composes a poem in praise of the king of Urns, hoping to avoid execution. After his arrest, he is brought to the King, recites the poem, and receives a gift. Ulf wanders for many years, as both lord and slave. Finally, he returns back to the poet, his benefactor, Thorkelsson. The only other thing important to the Urns people is singing and poetry. The Icelander Ulf is able to stay alive with his poetry that he recites to the king, but still must go through years of danger and adventure.

A Weary Man's Utopia

The narrator is waking along the plains and comes to a house, where a tall man motions to him. They speak in Latin, the language used in the future time. The man of the future has no name and has lived for 400 years. In the future, old people kill themselves when they are tired of life. People create their own science and art. Then a woman and some men come and grab the man's household goods. The group walks a distance to a crematory, and the old man walks into it to die.

The Book of Sand: Part II Analysis

The Night of the Gifts

After a philosophical discussion, an old man remembers his first death, and first sight of a killing. This thought is brought on by the discussion of Plato, from the famous Meno dialogue, that nothing is truly learned from scratch, people remember things they know from past lives and their heavenly passage. This story is part of the author's fascination with gangsters and knife fighters. The narrator's friend Ruffino is quite rough, but he and Ruffino run into Juan Moreira, the Argentine version of the Wild West outlaw, like Billy the Kid. On the one hand, this is the day of the narrator's so-called loss of innocence, but perhaps these milestones are exaggerated, though remembered.



Undr

This is a fantasy story about the far north and a mythical land called Undr. The narrator gets a second hand report of the place, because it is so dangerous and remote. This place has much literature, but it is not written in books, but in memories in poems and written in large symbols on rocks. Ulf, the Icelander, tries to placate the king by composing a new poem, but it is not sufficient, he is still under suspicion as a foreigner. Another poet comes to Ulf's aid, though he cannot tell Ulf the special word that had been mentioned in a poem from someone else before the king. For many years Ulf wanders and fights. He enjoys the love of a woman. Finally, he comes back to visit his benefactor, Thorkelsson, who is dying. This tale of fantasy tells of a land called Urns, a place of hostility and warfare. The Urn's evilness is contrary to the claim that they are now Christians. It seems that the only other thing besides sex and fighting that is important to the Urns people is the one sacred word that the Icelander, Ulf finally learns. Undr is their word for wonder, though their life seems to be one of unending disaster and chaos.

A Weary Man's Utopia

The narrator is magically brought into the future and meets an old man from that time. There is no progress in the future because progress has been stopped. Nations have been destroyed, languages forgotten and there is no more printing of books or study of history. A Malthusian policy of limiting and reducing the population is in effect, and mass suicide of the human race is being contemplated. Yet, paradoxically, the man from the future is 400 years old, so medical science has definitely advanced. The narrator agrees with the man from the future that much of what passes for nations and news is total nonsense. Money has gone out of existence and so have governments, in the future. This may be called a weary man's utopia, but reality has turned into a nightmare. To cap off the total ignorance of the time, the old man is cremated at the Adolph Hitler crematoria, with Hitler remembered as a philanthropist.



The Book of Sand: Part III

The Book of Sand: Part III Summary

The Bribe

Dr. Ezra Winthrop is a leading and older professor along with Herbert Locke, and Eric Einarsson, who comes to Texas in 1969 and has been trying to establish himself. Dr. Winthrop is given the task of choosing who will lead the upcoming conference on Germanic languages. Professor Einarsson writes a journal letter on education, directly counter to Professor Winthrop. Soon after, despite this published letter, Prof. Einarsson is awarded the chairmanship of the conference. In fact, the letter makes Prof. Winthrop bend over backwards and appoint Prof. Einarsson the conference chair, as expected.

Avelino Arredondo

Avelino Arredondo is part of a faction of the Red party that is unhappy with the President, Juan Borda. Avelino tells his friends that he has to go off into the countryside for a few months. For two months Avelino lives isolated. Avelino is waiting for a certain day, when the President will appear at an event. Then August 25th arrives, and Avelino dresses carefully in order to mingle with a formally dressed crowd at an event. The President is pointed out to him, and Avelino takes out a gun and shoots him dead.

The Disk

A woodcutter lives on the edge of the woods. One day, an old man knocks on the door asking for a place to sleep. The woodcutter lets the man in, feeds him and gives him a place to sleep. The next day, the old man announces that he is a king and to prove it, shows the woodcutter the disk of Odin. The woodcutter wants the disk, thinking it valuable. The woodcutter kills the old man, but never finds the disk.

The Book of Sand

A salesman knocks on his door offering to sell the narrator a Bible. The narrator has several Bibles already, but then the salesman shows him a sacred book from India, the "Book of Sand." It has no beginning, and no end. The narrator ends up offering him a lot for the book. The narrator becomes paranoid that someone will steal the infinite book. Finally, he decides that the book is horrible, and he hides it in a stack of books at the National Library.

The Book of Sand: Part III Analysis

The Bribe



The story has a comic aspect to it, though from an academic standpoint, it is another of the author's duel stories. In the rather friendly confrontation between Prof. Einarsson and Prof. Winthrop, Einarsson admits that he, in a sense, "bribed" Winthrop by giving him a chance to display his well known quality of fair-play and impartiality. Likewise Einarsson cannot resist indirectly telling Winthrop his strategy to make sure that he is appointed the chairman of the Germanic language conference, and how he was successful. This story gives an insight into academic games, such as Einarsson also admitting that he makes an earlier connection between an Old Germanic tale and England, in order to make points with an English speaking audience, and flatter them. This shows much about the claim of academic objectivity, another farce in real life.

Avelino Arredondo

The story is based on an historic event—the assassination of the Uruguayan President Juan Borda. Whether the assassination happens in this way is unknown. The most interesting event is when Avelino goes to a bar a few days before the assassination, and is forced to yell out "Viva Presidente Juan Idiarte Borda." Does this allude to some covert assistance for the assassin? It seems that when a political assassination happens there is usually the explanation that it is done by a lone assassin. Obviously, if Avelino is really a lone assassin, he is extremely lucky that no changes are made in the President's route or time of appearance and that no security measures interfere with him. Considering that Avelino is a member of the Red party and a faction of the Red party wants to eliminate the President, an inside job cannot be ruled out. Sadly, the author's story sounds like a repeat of the cover story of the time: powerful people want the President dead, but covering up a conspiracy makes the assassination possible. In footnotes, it is reported that later a street in Montevideo, Uruguay is named in honor of the assassin.

The Disk

The woodcutter is known as a miser and greedy. This is what ruins his life. Now he is old, and probably ready to starve to death out of neglect. He hates the old man, who calls himself a king, for not giving him the disk of Odin, which he thinks is worth a bar of gold. A disk that has only one side is an imaginary figure, but there is a similar thing in three-dimensions, known as the Moebius strip. The Moebius strip is a rectangular strip that is twisted so that the back side is attached to the front side, and therefore, the Moebius strip has only one side.

The Book of Sand

A book that has an infinite number of pages is another interesting geometric construction that the author deals with. This book is similar to the Moebius strip, which due to the turning of the surface, has only one side which loops into itself, and like a circle has no end. Oddly, the man buys the "Book of sand" solely for its miraculous qualities. He cannot read the script of the book or understand the pictures, nor does he attempt to. He is only intrigued with its physical properties, which turn out to be an obsession for him. The man finds that there is a page marked as 10 to the 9 th power, or,



1 billion. He ends up hiding the book in the 900,000 books on the shelves of the National Library of Argentina. Like the man in the story, the author Borges also once worked in the National Library.



Shakespeare's Memory

Shakespeare's Memory Summary

August 25, 1983

Borges goes up into a hotel, to his usual room, number 19. He finds that an older Borges, himself, is in the room already. The younger Borges is 61 years old. Borges has written a story about a character who commits suicide, but the younger Borges insists that this room 19 is where their mother stayed. The younger Borges is told that he will later try to write his great book. He publishes it under a pseudonym and it is seen as a parody of Borges. The older Borges says that he is killing himself and dies.

Blue Tigers

A Scottish professor hears about the sighting of Blue Tigers and goes there. The Scotsman climbs a sacred hill at night, and reaches the top. There he finds a bunch of small blue stones. He notices that the number of stones, or discs, changes as he moves them. The Scotsman returns to his home and does mathematical calculations, counting by how much the blue tigers increase or decrease in number. One sleepless night, the man walks to a mosque. Inside the mosque he meets a beggar who to his relief takes the disks away.

The Rose of Paracelsus

A young man comes saying that he wants to be Paracelsus' disciple, bringing a sack of gold coins to win his favor. He demands that Paracelsus burn a rose to show his power. Paracelsus tells the young man that it is a matter of seeing through appearances, if he wants to be a wizard. The young man throws the rose into the fire, but Paracelsus merely says that maybe he is a fraud like his detractors claim. The young man leaves. After he is gone, Paracelsus turns the ashes into a rose again.

Shakespeare's Memory

Hermann is an academic. At a Shakespeare conference in London after World War I, he and two Englishmen talk and one of them has a secret. He offers Hermann a chance to possess the memories of William Shakespeare. Hermann accepts Shakespeare's memory and begins to feel the effects. Hermann has strange memories of tunes and even the old pronunciation of English. He enjoys it at first, but soon becomes overwhelmed by Shakespeare's memories. Hermann calls a man from the phone book, and gives him the memories of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Memory Analysis

August 25, 1983



This story is written in 1983, so the 84-year-old Borges is writing a fantasy about meeting his young self at age 61. The younger Borges argues that in the draft story referred to, the character commits suicide in a different hotel, than where they are now. It is hard to say where suicide comes into the story, except as an option to exit the world if there is an overwhelming need to do so. The older Borges dies, but no overt act of suicide occurs and afterward he disappears. This could mean that the 84-year-old writer feels that he has no significance anymore.

Blue Tigers

The Scotsman who narrates the story in the first person is seeking the blue tiger. However, when he goes to the village where the blue tiger has been seen, something startling happens to him. He climbs the hill overlooking the village and finds blue tiger stones. These stones have magical properties and the village headman says that the Scotsman has committed a sacrilegious crime by going up the hill and bringing the stones down. The blue tiger stones challenge the Scotsman's sanity, since they mean that arithmetic does not exist as a general axiom, a system that affects everything anymore. The blue tiger stones are exempt from the laws of arithmetic and, even back in Lahore, the Scotsman has to fight to retain his sanity.

Only at a Muslim Mosque, representing one of the religions that believe in one God, does the Scotsman find a way out. He meets a mysterious beggar who relieves him of the stones as charity. So, the power of the one God, through a messenger masquerading as a beggar, is able to overcome the Hindu magic and mystery of the blue tiger stones.

The Rose of Paracelsus

The standpoint of Paracelsus is that the purpose of studying magic or the Kabbalah is to enjoy and learn about these things, not reaching a specific physical goal. The young man wants some assurance that his years of effort will yield a tangible result. As in all religious teaching, if the disciple has no faith, or no belief, his willingness to give up all his money is worthless. Therefore, Paracelsus cannot and will not show the young man his sorcery because the young man will only ask for greater miracles, or to change stones into gold.

Shakespeare's Memory

In this fantasy story, one man has Shakespeare's memory given to him and gives it away to Hermann Sorgel. Hermann's achievements under the influence of the memory of Shakespeare are slight, only a couple of articles. Hermann is actually overwhelmed after at most a couple of years because he has both his own memories and the overwhelming presence of Shakespeare's thoughts. He begins to feel that he is losing his mind. The memory of Shakespeare does not give Hermann the ability to act or write like Shakespeare. He cannot compose plays or sonnets because he is only given the raw material, the potential of readings, and experiences from the mind of Shakespeare. Perhaps the thoughts of a genius are too much for an ordinary scholar.



Characters

Lazarus Morrell—The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morrell

Lazarus Morrell is a poor white man who turns to crime based on manipulating both slaves and slave owners.

Tom Castro—The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro

Tom Castro is a foolish man who, due to his smiling pleasant exterior, wins friends and survives. Finally, when his mentor and mastermind Bogle collapses, he is thrown in jail.

Ebenezer Bogle—The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro

Ebenezer Bogle is a black man and a genius that meets Tom in Australia. He gets Tom to scheme to pretend to be the rich woman's son lost at sea. Unfortunately for Tom, at a critical point Ebenezer dies.

The Window Ching—The Widow Ching-Pirate

Shortly after her husband is treacherously poisoned, the Widow Ching takes up the leadership of a pirate fleet. She tries to be ethical in some respects in her leadership, and is finally convinced by the Emperor to give up her looting and pillaging.

Mark Eastman—Mark Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities

Mark Eastman is a violent man in New York. Due to his inability to think about political restrictions on his activities, he is thrown in jail. He fights on the Western front in World War I and later, back in New York, is murdered.

Bill Harrigan—The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan

Bill Harrigan, also known as, Billy the Kid, becomes a criminal at a young age. At age 14 he goes West and becomes the famous legend.

Kotsuke no Suke—The Uncivil Teacher

Kotsuke no Suke does not try to avoid wounding the feelings of his pupil, a Lord. He gets slashed by a sword, and eventually is killed in revenge for the death of the Lord.



Hakim—Hakim, the Masked Dyer

Hakim is a Muslim heretic who comes back from the desert and leads an army. No sees his face because he is veiled, but it is discovered that he has leprosy, and he is killed.

Rosendo Juarez—Man on the Pink Corner

Rosendo Juarez is the local tough guy and knife fighter in a neighborhood of Buenos Aires. He refuses to fight the Yardmaster and disappears. Rosendo is also described in "The Story from Rosendo Juarez."

The Yardmaster—Man on the Pink Corner

The Yardmaster comes to a dance where Rosendo Juarez is, to challenge him to a knife fight. After Rosendo refuses to fight, the Yardmaster is killed by an unknown person.

Melancthon—A Theologian in Death

Melancthon is a theologian who does not believe in the role of good works in obtaining spiritual salvation.

the Sorcerer—The Mirror of Ink

The sorcerer saves his life by letting the ruler Yacub the Afflicted see pictures in an ink blot. He warns Yacub to not insist in removing a man's veil in an execution scene.

The Narrator—Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

The narrator does research into a trail of documents that tell of Tlon and Uqbar. The narrator hypothesizes that there is a network spreading information on the these fictitious places for a couple of hundred years, consisting of a couple of hundred people.

A Law Student—The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim

The law student is appalled by participating in a murder in a religious riot. He is a non-religious Muslim who is impelled to seek a righteous man Al-Mu'tasim. The law student is a character in a book made up by the author.



The Sorcerer—The Circular Ruins

The sorcerer spends many months dreaming of his son, who is brought into reality by his dreams. He worships at the temple of the fire god, and is revealed as also a man created by dreaming.

The Man of Babylon—The Lottery in Babylon

The man of Babylon has been a top official and a slave, depending on what he draws in the lottery of Babylon, which occurs every two months.

The Man of the Library—The Library of Babel

The man of the Library spends endless amounts of time cataloging and examining the books of the Library. He claims that the Library is infinite, with an infinite number of books.

Dr. Yu Tsun—The Garden of Forking Paths

Dr. Yu Tsun is a Chinese man who is a German spy during the First World War in England. He is attempting to send a message to the German High Command about where they have to bomb.

Dr. Stephen Albert—The Garden of Forking Paths

Dr. Stephen Albert is a Sinologist, an expert on China. He is murdered by Dr. Yun Tsun, in order to signal the Germans to attack a place called Albert.

Ireneo Funes

Ireneo Funes is a young man in a rural town in Uruguay. He is crippled in a horse riding accident, and is bedridden. He has been able to perfect his memory to an astonishing degree.

John Vincent Moon

The "Englishman at La Colorada" is exposed in his story as the coward and traitor to the Irish cause, John Vincent Moon. Now he owns a ranch in the pampas of Argentina or Uruguay.



Fergus Kilpatrick—The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero

Fergus Kilpatrick is known as an Irish hero, but is shown to have been a traitor through an historical investigation. It is theorized that he participated in his own assassination.

Erik Lonrot—Death and the Compass

Erik Lonrot is a Jewish investigator and crime fighter in a town somewhere in France or a French speaking territory. He prides himself on his intellectuality, which is used to trap him, bringing him to his death.

Red Scharlach—Death and the Compass

Red Scharlach is a Jewish gangster and the nemesis of Erik Lonrot. He has sworn revenge against Lonrot, and outwits Lonrot and kills him.

Jaromir Hladik

Jaromir Hladik is a Jewish writer and intellectual in Prague, Czechoslovakia, when the Nazis march in March 1939. He is sentenced to death, but is angry because he has not finished his play "the Enemies."

The Black Man—The End

The Black man has been waiting by a tavern for years. He is waiting to fight and kill the man who killed his brother years ago.

Juan Dahlmann

Juan Dahlmann works in a library, but also has a ranch house in the Argentine south, the plains or the pampas. He becomes extremely ill and then is recovering.

The Narrator, Marcus Flavius—The Immortal

The narrator, Marcus Flavius, is a leader of Roman legionnaires or troops and seeks the river that makes men immortal, and the City of the immortals.



Homer—The Immortal

Homer is one of the primitive men, or troglodytes, that are near the City of the Immortals. Once he was the poet, Homer, the famous Greek writer of the Iliad and the Odyssey, but by being immortal he has degenerated into a troglodyte.

Bandeira—The Dead Man

Bandeira is the gang leader of a bunch of horse thieves in Uruguay.

Benjamin Otalera—The Dead Man

Benjamin Otalera is a young man and outlaw, who thinks he can take over as the leader of Bandeira's gang. He is an ambitious young criminal. He thinks that he is taking over Bandeira's gang, until he is shot. He then realizes he had been condemned to death a while before.

John of Pannonia—The Theologians

John of Pannonia is a theologian who counters the heresy of those who say that history is cyclical, the Monotoni sect. It is later claimed that he is a heretic, and he is burned at the stake.

Aurelian—The Theologians

Aurelian is a theologian who is a rival to John of Pannonia. He uses John's argument against a sect that does not allow any repetition of human events against John.

Droctulft—Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden

Droctulft is a barbarian who suddenly decides to fight to defend the Roman Empire, after being part of the forces attacking it.

Tadeo—A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)

Tadeo Isidoro Cruz is a man who lives on the Argentine plains (pampas). He is sent into the Argentine army as punishment for committing a murder in anger. Later, he sides with a fugitive whom he is chasing.



Emma—Emma Zunz

Emma Zunz is a factory worker whose father is disgraced and commits suicide. She knows that Aaron Lowenthal is really guilty of the crime and arranges to kill him without being punished.

Asterion—The House of Asterion

Asterion has the voice of a human being, or at least articulate thoughts, but is actually a Minotaur, the half-man, half-bull creature that is finally killed after killing many men.

Pedro Damian—The Other Death

Pedro Damian is said to have fought and died in one of the many civil war battles in Uruguay. However, someone else claims that he ran away from the battlefield.

Otto Dietrich Zur Linde—Deutsches Requiem

Otto Dietrich Zur Linde early becomes a member of the Nazi party in Germany. Due to losing a leg during a riot, he cannot serve on the front. Instead he becomes an official in a Nazi concentration camp.

Averroes—Averroes Search

Averroes is the name of a well-known Islamic scholar from the Middle Ages. He is working on a commentary on Aristotle's book "Poetics" and is having difficulty understanding what comedy and tragedy are, since he has no knowledge of the performance of plays.

The Narrator—The Zahir

The Narrator is obsessed with a woman who dies. After the wake and seeing the woman's body, he becomes obsessed with a small coin, known as the Zahir.

Tzinacan—The Writing of God

Tzinacan is an Aztec priest who has been imprisoned by the Spanish for life. He lives in a dark cell, next to the cell of a jaguar.



Dunraven—Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth

Dunraven is a young man who writes epic poems. He tells the tale of the murder of Ibn-Hakam.

Unwin—Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Lab

Unwin is the mathematics student who goes with his friend Dunraven into the Labyrinth. Unwin figures out that the cousin Sa'id actually murdered Ibn-Hakam.

The Wait—The False-Villari, the Fugitive

The unnamed man, the false Villari, is a man who is a fugitive, hiding from his enemies who want to kill him.

The Narrator—The Man on the Threshold

The narrator is looking for the missing Scotsman, who is a judge. He finds the body after receiving a note and hearing a story from years past about another judge who is killed.

Carlos Argentino—The Aleph

Carlos Argentino is the cousin of the dead woman that the narrator knew. He is an aspiring poet and a sort of mystic. He discovers "the Aleph" in his basement, a portal to visions of the world, past and present.

Homer—The Maker

The character described is the ancient Greek poet, Homer, the author of the Odyssey and the Iliad. Though the description is clear, oddly enough the name Homer is never mentioned.

Julia—Covered Mirrors

Julia is a woman that the narrator goes out with and befriends. Later she goes insane, and cannot look at herself in a mirror, without her insanity being triggered.



The Man in Mourning Weeds—The Mountebank

The man in mourning weeds is portraying, or impersonating the Argentine President, General Juan Peron, who is ousted in a coup in the mid 1950s. Before that, Gen. Peron's wife, Eva Duarte Peron, dies of cancer. She is a favorite of the working class.

Rosas—A Dialog Between Dead Men

Rosas is the dreaded dictator of Argentina who is ousted in 1852. He persecutes the author's ancestors and other members of the Unitarian party. This persecution is a repeated theme in the author's work.

Martin Fierro—Martin Fierro

Martin Fierro is a legendary gaucho, an Argentine cowboy, who is in a knife fight with a black man whom he kills.

Cervantes—Parable of Cervantes and the Quixote

Miguel de Cervantes is the author of "Don Quixote," the famous stories of the adventures of the wandering knight, Don Quixote.

William Shakespeare—Everything and Nothing

Shakespeare is the famous English playwright. He is portrayed as going to London without an identity, which he only gets by playing and writing plays to play other characters.

Dante Alighieri—Inferno, I, 32

Dante, the famous author of the "Divine Comedy" dies alone and in flight to Ravenna, Italy, never to know the success of his great work.

Borges—Borges and I

Borges, the author, compares his identity as a writer, to that of a person who has an ego. He thinks of whether the personal Borges shares in the triumphs and failures of Borges the writer.



Fred Murdock—The Ethnographer

Fred Murdock, an enthusiastic young man, is sent by his professor to find the secrets of an American Indian tribe and write his dissertation about them. He goes, but does not write about what he learns.

Pedro Salvadores—Pedro Salvadores

Pedro Salvadores becomes a target of the dictator Rosas' secret police. He hides in his cellar, protected by his wife for 9 years.

Christian and Eduardo Nilson or Nelson—The Interloper

Christian Nilsen, or Nelson is one of two brothers. His younger brother is Eduardo. Christian gets a woman, but ends up killing her, in order to preserve his relationship with his brother Eduardo. The cooperation of the brothers is more important to them than anything else.

Santiago Fischbein—Unworthy

Santiago Fischbein is a young Argentine Jewish man who gets involved in a gang. He wants to be loyal to the gang leader, but does not want to assist in a robbery, and so betrays the robbery to the police.

Francisco Ferrari—Unworthy

Francisco Ferrari is the local gang leader in Fischbein's neighborhood. For unknown reasons, he decides to befriend the young Fischbein. After Fischbein betrays his robbery plan, Ferrari is killed by the police.

Rosendo Juarez—The Story from Rosendo Juarez

Rosendo Juarez is a young tough guy and knife fighter. He kills a man and becomes a political thug. He is written about also in the story "Man on Pink Corner." Rosendo becomes tired of defending his reputation as a knife fighter and killer and runs off to Uruguay.



Duncan and Uriarte—The Encounter

Duncan and Uriarte are playing poker. Uriarte challenges Duncan to a knife fight and kills him. Afterwards, Uriarte is crying because he does not understand what came over him and caused him to kill the other man.

Florentina—Juan Murana

Florentina is the widow of the Argentine knife fighter, Juan Murana. She is the aunt of the man telling the story. Florentina has Juan's knife and it is revealed that she kills the landlord with it, saying that "Juan did it."

Clara Glencairn de Figueroa, Marta Pizarro—The Duel

Clara is the wife of the Argentine ambassador to Canada. When he dies, she chooses to start a career as a painter. She is assisted by her friend, but also sometimes rival, Marta Pizarro, also a painter. After Clara's death, Marta paints Clara's portrait, and never paints again.

Manuel Cardoso, and Carmen Silveira—The Other Duel

Manuel and Carmen are neighbors that own ranches. The men first compete with one another for the love of a woman, and later Silveira thinks that Carmen has poisoned his dog. When the two men are captured, they have a race, after their throats are cut, dying in the act.

Eduardo Zimmerman, and the Narrator—Guayaquil

Eduardo Zimmerman and the Narrator both want to have the privilege of going to a "Caribbean Republic" to study certain letters by General Simon Bolivar. Both men are professors in Argentina. Eduardo is a Jewish refugee, while the Narrator has family for generations in South America. Eduardo, due to his stronger will, easily gets the right to study the letters.

The Gutre family—The Gospel According to Mark

The Gutre family consists of the father, a son and a daughter. They have been in Argentina for a long time, though the family is originally from the United Kingdom. They have lived on the pampas in Argentina and have forgotten how to read and write.



Baltasar Espinosa—The Gospel According to Mark

Baltasar is a medical student, aged 33, who goes to his cousin's ranch for the summer. There he reads the Gospel of Mark to the Gutres, who then think he is Jesus Christ.

Brodie—Brodie's Report

Brodie is a Presbyterian minister who goes to visit the Yahoos, an uncivilized, beast-like group of men, to attempt to convert them to Christianity.

Borges, the Narrator, and the Younger Borges

The author, Jorge Luis Borges, has a conversation with his younger self on a bench in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Ulrikke—Ulrikke

Ulrikke is an adventurous and young Norwegian woman who readily agrees to have a brief affair with the narrator.

Don Alejandro—The Congress

Don Alejandro is a wealthy rancher from Uruguay. At his ranch, he lords over his gauchos. He is in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and he decides to form an international organization called the Congress. Later, he is induced to spend his wealth buying books and funding frivolous trips and squanders his wealth. He is forced to sell his ranch and dissolves the Congress organization.

The Narrator—The Night of the Gifts

The narrator is almost 13 years old when an older boy takes him into town to a house of prostitution. He is afraid when gangsters walk in, and goes upstairs, where a prostitute initiates him into sex. Then the police come after the gangsters, and he sees a policeman kill a gangster.

Hermann Sorgel—Shakespeare's Memory

Hermann Sorgel is an academic who wants to gain magical powers when offered "Shakespeare's memory." He thinks that he can learn something special but instead, after a period of happiness, he is overwhelmed by having the memories of himself as well as of Shakespeare.



The Irish king, and the Poet Olan—The Mirror and the Mask

Three times the Irish king has the poet Olan make a poem about the Battle of Clontarf, where the king is victorious. The poet is successful and wonderful, but by the third poem he has committed blasphemy somehow, and kills himself.

Ulf Sigurdson—Undr

Ulf Sigurdson is an Icelander who journeys through the land of the Urns. He learns that the essence of their poetry is a single word, "Undr," which means wonder.

The Man of the Future—A Weary Man's Utopia

The man of the future has no name. He speaks Latin and is 400 years old. By the time that the narrator visits him, he is ready to end his life.

Professor Ezra Winthrop and Prof. Eric Einarrsson—The Bribe

Professor Winthrop is an older man, and a senior professor who is given the task of selecting the professor to chair a conference. Professor Einarrsson is a younger man from Iceland. Einarrsson decides that he must chair the upcoming conference, and designs a "bribe" to get Prof. Winthrop to appoint him. The bribe appeals to Prof. Winthrop's sense of fairness and impartiality, described as uniquely American traits.

Avelino Arredondo—Avelino Arredondo

Avelino Arredondo is a passionate young man, who decides to assassinate the President of Uruguay, Juan Idiarte Borda, for being a traitor to their political party. He makes a special effort to make it apparent that he decides to do this on his own.

The Seller of Books—The Book of Sand

The seller of books is from the Orkney Islands off of Scotland. He sells the narrator the "Book of Sand," after he does not want to buy a bible.



Borges, older and Borges younger—August 25, 1983

A 61 year old Borges goes up to his room and meets the 84 year old Borges. The older Borges tells the younger that he will write a parody of the good Borges. Ironically, the story is written when the author is 84 years old.

The Professor, the Narrator—Blue Tigers

The Professor, who is the narrator, is a professor at the University of Lahore, in what was then British India, now, Pakistan. He gets his fascination with tigers from the poetry of Blake. He prefers Muslims to Hindus, and the local mosque somehow helps him escape from the stones called blue tigers.

Paracelsus, the Sorcerer—The Rose of Paracelsus

Paracelsus, the sorcerer, is careful not to take a student who is not sincerely interested in learning magic. He is asked by the student to prove his magical powers, but refuses.



Objects/Places

Morell's House in New Orleans—The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Mo

Morell's house in New Orleans, Louisiana, is surrounded by the authorities, when he is accused of planning a slave revolt.

Zhu-Jiang River, in China—The Widow Ching

The Zhu-Jiang River, in China, is where the widow Ching's pirate fleet attacks villages. Villages are burned and looted and their inhabitants killed or sold into slavery.

Rivington Street, Manhattan, New York—Monk Eastman

Rivington Street, Manhattan, New York, on the Lower East Side is the scene of a night-long gang fight. The politicians demand that such blatant fighting be stopped, but Monk Eastman refuses, so he is arrested.

The Castle of Ako—The Uncivil Teacher of Court Etiquette

Kira Kotsuke no Suke goes to the Castle of Ako, in Japan to teach the Lord of Ako etiquette. Here Kira Kotsuke is assaulted and in response, the Lord of Ako is compelled to commit suicide.

The Shining Face—Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv

Hakim covers his face, because all those who see him are said to go blind. However, after his confrontation with lepers, Hakim is shown to have leprosy. His face is shining from the loss of skin, and even much of his nose has fallen off.

The Maldonado—Man On Pink Corner

The Maldonado is a river on the edge of Buenos Aires. It is in the Maldonado where the Yardmaster's body is dumped.



The Strong Tower—Et Cetera—The Chamber of Statues

The Strong tower is locked up and none of kings go in there. The new king takes the locks off the gate and insists on entering the strong tower.

A First Encyclopedia of Tlon Vol. XI—Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Te

The volume, a first Encyclopedia of Tlon, is found left for the narrator's dead friend, Ashe. The Encyclopedia of Tlon has detailed descriptions of the literature and language of the planet Tlon.

Tlon—Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

Tlon is a mythical planet which is described in detail in the Encyclopedia of Tlon.

Al-Mu'tasim—The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim

Al-Mu'tasim is the unknown righteous man whom the law student from Bombay is seeking. He is only glimpsed at the end of the story.

Don Quixote—Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote

Don Quixote is the title of the book by Cervantes, of the travels and adventures of the mad knight Don Quixote. It is written by Cervantes in the 17th century.

The Circular Ruins, the Temple—The Circular Ruins

The circular ruins are ruins of the temple to the Fire god. This is where the sorcerer dreams of his son, who is then brought into life.

The Lottery—The Lottery in Babylon

The lottery is an all-consuming game of chance that takes over Babylon. All citizens of Babylon get a ticket every two months and they can get a big reward, or a punishment, even the death penalty.



April March—A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain

The book "April March" is written with chapters in backwards order. A total of nine different stories can be read by choosing one of three chapters once and then again choosing one of three chapters.

The Library—The Library of Babel

The Library of Babel is infinite, with its endless stacks of shelves arranged in hexagons. It is reputed to have always existed.

The Pavillion of Limpid Solitude—The Garden of Forking Pat

The pavilion of limpid solitude is where the ancestor of Dr. Yu Tsu writes a chaotic labyrinth of manuscripts.

Pliny's Naturalis Historia—Funes His Memory

Pliny's Naturalis Historia is one of the narrator's Latin books. Funes borrows it and in a short time has memorized a whole section of it, which he recites.

The Sword—The Shape of the Sword

The sword is from the General house where the two Irish fighters are hiding. It is on a suit of armor there. It is used by the betrayed Irishman to cut and scar John Vincent Moon.

A Theater—The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero

A theater is where Fergus Kilpatrick is shot to death. He has been made an accomplice in his own assassination, which involves saying lines in the theater from the Shakespeare play, Julius Caesar.

The Name—Death and the Compass

The Name, or the Name of God, in Hebrew has four letters and cannot be said. Lonrot is led to believe that the killers are killing four people in order to reach the unutterable name of God. The killings are said to occur on the 4th day of the month, since the Jewish day begins at evening.



The Enemies—The Secret Miracle

"The Enemies" is the name of the play that Jaromir Hladik wants to complete before he dies. It is written in poetic verse, and involves a character, Baron Romerstadt, who is surrounded by enemies, and is really his impostor, who is a madman. Hladik gets a miracle from God, by getting a year of frozen time to complete the play.

The Memories—Shakespeare's Memory

With the help of Shakespeare's memories, Daniel has written a book on Shakespeare, but he has tired of the possession of Shakespeare's memory. Hermann acquires the memories, and then thinks of tunes and works of the 16th century and even the old pronunciation of English. The memories include Shakespeare's thoughts on the moon and Diana, the goddess of the moon. Hermann dreams of Chapman, the translator of Homer and a friend of Shakespeare. Hermann cannot do more than write an article or two based on his new acquisition.

Judas—Three Versions of Judas

Judas is portrayed in Nils Runeberg's book as the other side of Jesus Christ, since his betrayal of Jesus is necessary. In a second version, Judas is said to have good motives for betraying Christ. In the third version, Judas is seen as the real Son of God.

The Guitar—The End

The guitar is used by the black man to keep himself busy waiting for his opponent.

The Knife, the Dagger—The South

First the young rowdy man challenges Dahlmann with a knife, then the old man on the floor throws a knife to Dahlmann to use in a fight. The deadly ritual of a knife fight is part of the legends of Argentina.

The City of the Immortals—The Immortal

The City of the Immortals is a maze, filled with strange angles. It has been abandoned because the immortals have lost interest in it and left it, some becoming troglodytes.

El Suspiro Ranch—The Dead Man

El Suspiro (The Sigh) ranch is a run-down ranch in Northern Uruguay. It is near the border with Brazil, and where Benjamin Otelero operates as part of a smuggling gang.



The Montoni—The Theologians

The Montoni is a heretical sect that claims that history repeats itself. History is cyclical.

The Zahir—The Zahir

The zahir is an Argentine coin of little worth. Somehow the narrator becomes obsessed by the zahir.

The Jaguar—The Writing of God

The jaguar, or the tiger, symbolizes the power and strength of the Aztec Empire. It too is imprisoned with the Aztec priest, Tzinacan.

The Labyrinth—Ibn-Hakam Al-Bokhari, Murdered in his Labyrinth

The man who says he is Ibn-Hakam builds a Labyrinth up on a cliff by the sea. The labyrinth has extensive twisting paths, before coming to a large interior apartment.

The Courtyard—The Man on the Threshold

The narrator speaks to an old man by a house in a courtyard, where people come in and out and where, further within the courtyard, a large celebration is taking place.

The Aleph—The Aleph

The mysterious "Aleph" is a mystical portal to visions in the basement of Carlos Argentino's house. The narrator is stunned to see that there is an Aleph, which is a portal to visions of the whole world and of history as well. In a fit of jealousy, the narrator comes up from the cellar and acts like he saw nothing there.

The Knife—The Maker

The father gives the boy a knife to fight the other boy who taunts him. The other boy is wounded or killed.

The Mirror—Covered Mirrors

The woman who the narrator is dating is suddenly overwhelmed by paranoia. She cannot look at mirrors which display her reflection.



The Knife—The Captive

The lost boy, now grown-up, finds his old pen-knife hidden in the chimney of his house. The knife symbolizes his old life.

The Coffin—The Mountebank

The coffin contains a dummy of Eva Duarte Peron, the wife of Argentine President Juan Peron. Eva is idolized by the masses.

A Dialogue Between Dead Men—Rosas, Quiroga

Rosas is the dictator of Argentina between 1834 and 1852. He is the leader of the Federalist party, centered in the estates of the countryside, while his opponent Quiroga is of the same party, but is a rival who was killed.

The Palace—Parable of the Palace

The palace is said to be so vast that roads around it seem straight, when they are really huge circles. There is a series of towers along a wall, that slowly and without being noticed, go from being yellow to a slightly darker color, to red. The poet's poem of the palace is said by the Emperor to be too good at capturing the essence of the palace.

The Gods—Ragnarok

The gods are from ancient Greece and Rome. At first their appearance is seen as wonderful and unbelievable. Then it is suspected that they cannot talk. They are seen as knife-wielding criminals.

The Secret—The Ethnographer

Fred looks for the secret of an Indian tribe on a reservation. After staying there for a long time, the medicine man studies Fred's dreams and then is given access to the tribe's secret knowledge.

Juliana—The Interloper

Juliana Burgos is brought home by Christian to be his woman. After a period of silent jealousy, he begins to share her with his brother. The two brothers treat the woman like a servant and object. At one point, Christian sells her to a house of prostitution, but then the brothers keep visiting her. Christian buys her back, and after a new period of jealousy, over her "fancy clothes," finally kills her.



The Grocery Store-Bar—Unworthy

Fischbein is invited to Ferarri's hangout, which is a grocery store-and-bar. He goes there every Saturday night, as part of Ferrari's gang. The police start to go to the bar, looking for people with concealed knives. The bar is also where the gang plots their crimes.

Elections—The Story from Rosendo Juarez

Rosendo is known to have committed a murder, but is sent to join a political gang. Elections in Buenos Aires are rough at this time and involve plenty of violence and political thuggery. Rosendo is a thug and potential knife fighter in these elections.

The Glass Case with Knives—The Encounter

The knives are kept in a glass case showing which men used them to fight. When there is a dispute between the men playing cards, they go to the display collection of knives. Uriarte chooses a long fancy knife, and Duncan chooses one with a wooden handle. The narrator wonders if the knives have personalities and if they are the ones controlling the fight, rather than the men.

Juan Murana—Juan Murana

The boy hears that Juan Murana, his dead uncle, is a famous knife fighter. One day it is stormy outside and the boy is going through different rooms in the house. He goes up to the attic bedroom where the aunt lives. The aunt repeats that Juan did it. Then she shows the boy the knife, calling it Juan. The boy realizes that the aunt took the knife and killed the landlord.

The Dreams of the Elderly Lady—The Elderly Lady

The old lady's father, Col. Mariano Rubio, wins a minor battle against the Spanish, fighting for the Unitarians in Argentina. When his party loses power, he flees to Uruguay where he marries and had two daughters. The old lady, Maria, lives with her daughter Julia and, like the author, hates the dictator of Argentina, Rosas. The old lady talks of the old street names in Buenos Aires, and of Uruguay, as the Eastern Bank of the Rio Plata.

The Portrait of Clara Glencairn—The Duel

Marta Pizarro paints a stark portrait of Clara Glencairn after Clara's death, and then never paints again. The portrait embodies Marta mixed feelings of friendship and rivalry that she feels for Clara.



The Rivalry Between Cardoso and Silveira—The Other Duel

First the men have a rivalry over the affections of a woman. Their ranches are next to each other, so there may have been a dispute over stray animals. Silveira wins a large amount from Cardoso in a card game at the general store. Later Silveira's sheepdog is found poisoned and he suspects the other. Somehow, there is never a knife fight between the men.

The Letter of Gen. Simon Bolivar—Guayaquil

A letter by Simon Bolivar is found about his meeting with the Argentine General Jose de San Martin. At this meeting in Guayaquil, now in Ecuador, Gen. Bolivar is allowed to lead the armies that are to defeat the Spanish in Peru and drive the Spanish totally out of South America. Professor Zimmerman gets the right to go retrieve this letter and write the academic papers analyzing its meaning.

The Cross—The Gospel According to Mark

The Gutres believe that Baltasar is Jesus Christ after hearing him read the Gospel. They construct a cross to crucify him, like the story in the Gospel of Mark.

The Yahoo—Brodie's Report

The Yahoo is a type of wild man living in the forest among the ape men. There is a funny description of how the Yahoos fling mud at each other, to greet each other. The Yahoos huddle in a swamp rather than live on a more comfortable plateau above. The four advisers or witch doctors rule, with the king as a figurehead. The Yahoos cannot count higher than the number four. The minister David Brodie tries to convert them to Christianity, but finds they lack crucial concepts to understand the faith, such as that of Father and son.

Literature—The Other

The two Borgeses meet on a park bench, which for the older Borges is in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They discuss literature, including Dostoyevsky's work "the Double," which the older Borges now can barely remember. The older Borges recites a line from the poet Hugo in French to show to the other that their meeting is not a dream. They also discuss the American poet, Walt Whitman, whom the younger Borges idolizes.



The Inns—Ulrikke

In this brief affair and encounter, first Ulrikke and the Professor meet at an Inn, the site of an academic conference. They walk to the woods and arrive at another inn. Both of the inns are named "the Northern Inn."

The Congress—The Congress

One day Alexander Ferri hears about the Congress and a short time later he is invited to their Saturday night meetings. The Congress is led by Don Alejandro Glencoe, a Uruguayan rancher. Much of the talking at the meeting is done by Don Alejandro's aide, a Mr. Twirl, and Don Alejandro's nephew, Fermin Eguren. The Congress is designed as a sort of seed crystal of world government, representing all the people of the world. Twirl gets Don Alejandro to agree to finance a series of costly projects, including buying a huge library that is put on Don Alejandro's ranch in Northern Uruguay.

The House, The Furniture—There Are More Things

There is something strange going on in the house that is sold after the death of the narrator's uncle. In a nearby town, Glew, the narrator talks to a carpenter who has produced the furniture for the remodeled house. The carpenter responds that there is something crazy about the orders he received in building the furniture. Inside the house, the walls are demolished and there is a strange odor. Also the furniture is odd. There is a ramp upstairs and also a ladder. He climbs the ladder upstairs and there is a huge table with portholes, sort of like a bed.

The Thirty Pieces of Silver—The Sect of Thirty

The sect worships the traitor Judas, who receives the thirty pieces of silver as a reward for his betrayal of Christ, according to the Gospels. That is where the sect, the Thirty, gets its name, from the "thirty pieces of silver."

The House of Prostitution—The Night of the Gifts

An older fellow, Rufino, takes the boy, the narrator, to town, to a house which turns out to be a house of prostitution. A bunch of rough men come into the house, and the narrator goes to hide in a bedroom upstairs, where he then has sex with the Captive woman.

Poetry—Undr

Ulf Sigurdarson composes a poem in praise of the king of Urns. He finds out that the poetry of the Urns consists of only one word. When Ulf's friend Thorkelsson is dying, he



sings one more song for Ulf. Undr is their word for wonder, which is their poem and poetry.

The Paintings—A Weary Man's Utopia

In the future, people have to create their own science and art. The man of the future paints his own paintings and gives one to the narrator. It is the only painting that has clear colors that are seen by the narrator, the other paintings are too vague. The narrator brings back the painting as a souvenir when he returns to Buenos Aires.

The Published Letter—The Bribe

Professor Einarsson publishes a letter in a Yale journal saying that old English (Anglo-Saxon) should be taught from the standpoint of a string of works going back from before the 11th century A.D., instead of concentrating on the epic, Beowulf. This is directly counter to the approach of Professor Winthrop. The letter is signed by the initials, E.E., University of Texas. Prof. Einarsson admits to Prof. Winthrop that he had the letter published to deliberately antagonize the other Professor.

The Room in the Back of the House—Avelino Arredondo

For two months, Avelino deliberately isolates himself in the back of his house. His food and other necessities are provided by a faithful house servant. Avelino is waiting for a certain day, when the President will appear at an event. The only book that he has is the Bible, which he tries to read, not very successfully.

The Disk—The Disk

The disk of Odin is shown to the woodcutter by the old man, to prove that the old man is a king. The woodcutter wants the disk, thinking it valuable. The disk has the unique property of not only being shiny, but having only one side. When the old man's back is turned, the woodcutter kills him, attempting to steal the disk, which is never found.

The Book of Sand—The Book of Sand

The Book of Sand is a sacred book from India. It has as many pages as the grains of sand on a beach, an infinite number, since it has no beginning, and no end. The narrator is fascinated with the book, thinking it to be an unbelievable treasure. He worries that someone will steal the infinite book. Later, he decides that the book is horrible, and he hides it in a stack of books at the National Library, where he used to work.



The Stories of Borges—August 25, 1983

Borges has written a story about a character who commits suicide, but the younger Borges insists that this room 19 is where their mother stayed and could not be the room where a suicide, even in a story, occurred. The younger Borges is told that he will later try to write his great book. He publishes it under a pseudonym and it is seen as a parody, an imitation of Borges.

The Blue Tigers—Blue Tigers

The Professor climbs the sacred hill and finds a bunch of small blue stones in the cracks in the ground. He ends up calling them the blue tigers. He notices that the number of blue tigers changes as he moves them or transfers them from hand to hand, which drives him to the brink of madness. The Professor does mathematical calculations and counts by how much the blue tigers increase or decrease in number. Through the help of a mystical beggar in a mosque, the Professor, to his relief, gets rid of the blue tigers.

The Rose—The Rose of Paracelsus

A young man demands that Paracelsus burn a rose that he brings, in the fire, and then turn it into a rose again. The young man throws the rose into the fire, but Paracelsus will not use his magic. After the young man leaves, Paracelsus turns the ashes into a rose again.



Themes

Getting Lost in a Labyrinth

The theme of many of the author's stories is people getting lost in a maze or a labyrinth that they or someone else construct. In the story "The Garden of Forking Paths" the traitor Dr. Yu Tsun gets lost in a series of intellectual labyrinths, before carrying out his mission of murder. Even more intriguing is "A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain" in which it is hypothesized that a writer could write a novel with an alternative ending, with the reader forced to search through a labyrinth of different endings. Often these labyrinths and mazes have the meaning of going back to the beginning in an endless cycle. These thoughts are related to the philosophical debate on whether civilization is going straight forward, in the direction of progress, or only can if the right choices are made, or not. The alternative view is that history is always in the form of a cycle. Civilizations grow up, mature, and then get to the point of physical breakdown. Or events may not lead to breakdown, but to a cycle that a person may have formed in his life, that he or she repeats indefinitely, until they cannot continue to do it any longer, or to their death.

The Knife Fight, the Duel and Courage

The author writes many stories about duels and knife fights. Sometimes the duel may be done on a relatively friendly basis. In the story "the Duel," the two ladies, Clara Glencairn de Figueroa and Marta Pizarro. There is no overt hostile act, but there is a subtle power struggle. Sometimes rivalries can thrive under the surface in close friendships and family and sibling rivalry. In fact, the author contends that the driving force of drama and story-telling is rivalry. Often the rivalry is internal, as a person seeks their true identity. In "Unworthy," the character Fischbein wants to belong and be like the gang-leader Ferrari. He enjoys hanging out at the bar and play-acting the role of hoodlum and tough guy, though his mother and aunt highly resent his behavior. Only when he is asked by Ferrari to aid and abet an actual robbery does he prove unworthy of being a member of the gang, and betray Ferrari. Fischbein's decision to be a good young man, results in Ferrari's death. Rivalry and knife fights may be something that, like "The Story from Rosendo Juarez," finally tires out the knife fighter or tough guy. In other cases, it almost seems like the fight and the rivalry has gone into the weapons themselves. In "The Encounter," two knives fight again, with the men wielding them not realizing quite why they are fighting. In "Juan Murana" the spirit of the man who used the knife gives an old widow the strength to commit a murder against her oppressor, her landlord. There is a pronounced romanticism in the machismo and courage of the men who fight with knives. This may be an Argentine tradition, but it also has a universal aspect to it.



Unexpected Gifts and their Effects

When unexpected gifts come down on men and women, their effects may be positive or negative. As the saying goes, one should be careful what one wishes for, because one may get it. In "The Immortal," Marcus, the Roman Legionnaire seeks the waters that make one immortal and drinks from them, but the consequences of being immortal are totally different than he thinks they are. An immortal person loses all desire to make progress or to learn something new. The only thing that keeps his sanity is the search to now find the waters that make one mortal again. In "Shakespeare's Memory" Hermann, an academic, gets a gift that he could never even have dreamed of, the memory of Shakespeare. For a while he is happy beyond belief and he is able to write a few articles based on his new knowledge, but then he discovers that having the memory of Shakespeare is a far cry from making someone another Shakespeare. Soon, he is overwhelmed and wants nothing more than to become himself again. People become what their lives make them, and to reject one of their earned gifts for gifts magically bestowed creates real problems and conflict. This theme of gifts is most prominent in Borges' fantasy stories, but also shows up in reminiscences of the past. As in "The Night of the Gifts," an old person remembering their youth is like someone talking about another person, because of changes in their personal identity.



Style

Point of View

Many of the author's stories are in the first person point of view. In fact, a classic set-up of Borges' stories is to have a narrator introduce a story, for example someone on a journey, and then another person will tell a story in the first person point of view. This is the case in the story "The Shape of the Sword" where the narrator is on a trip through the Argentine pampas, and stops at the ranch house of "the Englishman" who tells about the history of his scar. Other stories are in the third person point of view, usually centered on one person as the protagonist. Some of the most interesting stories depict conversations at a dinner table or elsewhere between two or more people. In the funny story "Averroes Search," in the third person viewpoint, Averroes is described struggling with the concepts of comedy and tragedy in theater. After this, there is a dinner party, and other people address this problem of what drama is, with one person having seen a drama in China, but not figuring out what it was that he saw. Borges likes to play with the idea of point of view from a personal and inner standpoint. He has a conversation with himself in the story "August, 25, 1983" and also in the story "The Other," looking at the way a person's sense of identity changes over time. So, Borges prefers to write his stories in the first person, but seeks to impart a strong sense of identity in his stories in the third person point of view as well.

Setting

The settings of the author's stories vary but the most often used are the streets of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. Nearby is the smaller city of Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay and the pampas, the plains of Argentina and Uruguay. In between Argentina and Uruguay is La Plata, the large river mouth and center of commerce and transportation. The most classic setting of Borges' stories is the run-down neighborhoods on the outskirts of the Argentine capital including houses of prostitution, local toughs and knife fights. Stories that describe knife fights include "Man on Pink Corner," and a continuation of that story in, "The Story from Rosendo Juarez," "The South," "A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz," "Martin Fierro," "The Encounter" and "Juan Murana." In fact, the young Borges made his start with stories of crime and iniquity, using source material from the United States, Japan, the Muslim World and other places. Very personal crime and war stories are another specialty of Borges. However, these stories of violence are not meant to shock the reader with a lot of gore. Rather, they aim to portray the dark side of the human condition.

Another favorite setting of Borges is the University. Academic types may not be able to shoot their opponents, since they have duels on a more intellectual level. In "the Ethnographer," the protagonist is asked to find out the secrets of an Indian tribe and then publish a report, which he refuses to do. In "The Duel" one lady encourages the other lady to go into painting, but then competes with her all through her artistic career.



In "The Bribe," set at the University of Texas, the Professor originally from Iceland manipulates an American Professor on the basis of his known inclination to be absolutely fair and impartial. So Borges' stories, though taking place in many places outside his beloved Buenos Aires, all tend to thrive on conflict.

Language and Meaning

Borges' original writing is in Spanish, and is translated by Andrew Hurley, who does a fine job at translating. Some of the translation can be difficult, as shown in the explanatory notes. In the story, "Unworthy" there is an attempt by the author to include the jargon of the Buenos Aires population, including their little ethnic insults. This is in a Buenos Aires that includes Spanish, part-Indian, Italian, English and Jewish populations. So a subtle ethnic slur like "El Rusito," little Russian, is translated as "Little Sheeny," for the teenage Jewish boy in that story. Most or all of the language is clear in such gangster and knife fighting stories, with available notes on certain neighborhoods in Buenos Aires and such local things. More difficult to understand can be the author's philosophical and theological references. Borges is familiar even with Renaissance figures such as Nicholas of Cusa, the writer on how the infinite circle becomes the same as a straight line, and the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, and his theory of knowledge. In fact, Borges' reference to the division of people into Platonic versus Aristotelian types, in the story "Deutsches Requiem," is something that many readers may not understand, though the reference is important and even stunning in its implications. Likewise, the author's readings and references to the Islamic world and past Islamic philosophers shows a grasp of philosophy and world history. The implications of the story "Averroes' Search" and his difficulties in his commentary on Aristotle's book "Poetics" are something difficult to understand, though well worth the effort. It is worthwhile to read the back notes on stories to get the references to particular the history of Argentina and South America.

Structure

The book is broken up into 9 different collections of stories, published between the years 1935 and 1983, a couple of years before the author's death. There are over 60 short stories of from 3 to 15 pages. In addition there are a group of ultra-short stories and themes, with about 35 or more of this type of work. Some stories are short, because they are written to illustrate a special person or interesting type of social phenomenon. For example, the story "Funes, His Memory" is explicitly written to tell of the incredible memory of the crippled young man, Ireneo Funes, and how he prides himself on his incredible memory. In a longer, a more developed story, "The Immortal," the story begins with a man who has a goal, in this case to become immortal and see the City of the Immortals. He struggles and achieves his goal, which is very different than he imagined it to be. He then spends the rest of his life trying to become mortal again. Many of the author's stories are structured around a protagonist's goal, whether he or she achieves the goal, and if achieving the goal brings the results that the protagonist desired. This type of story continues to appear until the end of the collection,



with the story "Shakespeare's Memory" where similarly the protagonist tries to deal with his newly acquired mental power. "The Congress," another longer story, follows this model as well, where the reader follows the development and destruction of the Congress organization. Other stories are direct conflicts between two people. In "The Encounter" two men end up fighting to the death with knives, with the author wondering if the knives themselves control the fight, as an explanation for the senseless violence. In "Death and the Compass," the Jewish detective is defeated and killed by the Jewish gangster, who exploits the detective's pride in his intellectuality. Other more subtle conflicts also drive stories, where conflicts in the arts and academia can be as wrenching, though they are not bloody.



Quotes

Horses stolen in one state and sold in another were but the merest digression in Morell's criminal career, but they did prefigure the method that would assure him his place in a Universal History of Iniquity.

P. 9, *The Cruel Redeemer* Lazarus Morell

"He was one of the toughest men there was back then from Bateria to the Southside—but no sooner was he dead and his mouth shut for all time, I lost all my hate for him."

P. 51, Narrator, *Man on Pink Corner*

Who, singular or plural, invented Tlon? The plural is, I suppose inevitable, since the hypothesis of a single inventor—some infinite Leibniz working in obscurity and self-effacement—has been unanimously discarded.

P. 72, narrator, *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*

The manifold god revealed to the man that its earthly name was Fire, and that in that circular Temple (and others like it) men had made sacrifices and worshiped it, and that it would magically bring to life the phantasm the man had dreamed. . . .

P. 99, "The Circular Ruins"

I myself alone, have more memories than all mankind since the world began," he said to me.

P. 135, Ireneo Funes, "Funes, His Memory"

"One thing I want to ask you before we get down to it. I want you to put all your courage and all your skill into this, like you did seven years ago when you killed my brother."

P. 170, the Black Man, "The End"

"It is another river that I see," he replied morosely, "the secret river that purifies men of death."

P. 184, the Bloody Rider, "The Immortal"

That which the heresiarchs howl today, to the confusion of the faith, was said during this century, with more levity than blameworthiness, by a most learned doctor of the church.

P. 206, Aurelian, citing John of Pannonia, "The Theologians"

Of course I do not lack for distractions. Sometimes I run like a charging ram through the halls of stone until I tumble dizzily to the ground; sometimes I crouch in the shadow of a wellhead or at a corner in one of the corridors and pretend I am being hunted.

P. 221, Asterion, "The House of Asterion"

Forty syllables, fourteen words, and I, Tzinacan, would rule the lands once ruled by Moctezuma. But I know that I shall never speak those words, because I no longer remember Tzinacan.

P. 253, Tzinacan, "The Writing of God"



News of the Mutiny or the latest word of Akbar, this man might have (I thought), but not of Glencairn.

P. 271, the Narrator, "The Man on the Threshold"

What kind of man, I ask myself, thought up and then acted out that funereal farce—a fanatic? a grief-stricken mourner? a madman? a cynical impostor? Did he, in acting out his mournful role as the macabre widower, believe himself to be Peron?

P. 301, the Narrator, "The Mountebank"

"That's not it, sir. Now that I possess the secret, I could tell it in a hundred different and even contradictory ways. I don't know how to tell you this, but the secret is beautiful, and science, our science, seems more frivolity to me now."

P. 334, Fred Murdock, "The Ethnographer"

No one summoned the courage to intervene. Uriarte had lost ground; Duncan then charged him. Their bodies were almost touching now. Uriarte's blade sought Duncan's face. Abruptly it looked shorter—it had plunged into his chest. Duncan lay on the grass.

P. 367, The Narrator, "The Encounter"

The next day began like all the others, except that the father spoke to Espinosa to ask whether Christ had allowed himself to be killed in order to save all mankind. Espinosa, who was a freethinker like his father but felt obliged to defend what he had read them, paused.

P. 401, The Narrator, "The Gospel According to Mark"

A half century does not pass without leaving its mark. Beneath our conversation, the conversation of two men of miscellaneous readings and diverse tastes, I realized that we would not find common ground.

P. 416, The Older Borges, "The Other"

The Congress is the books we have burned. It is the Caledonians who defeated the Caesars' legions. It is Job on the dunghill and Christ on the Cross. The Congress is even that worthless young man who is squandering my fortune on whores.

P. 434, Don Alejandro, "The Congress"

A man was letting himself down the wall. in one movement, the sergeant ran him through with the bayonet. The man fell to the ground, where he lay on his back, whimpering and bleeding.

P. 450, The Narrator, "The Night of the Gifts"

"I come now to the essential point—my controversial note in the Yale Monthly. As you must surely be aware, it presents, or attempts to present, the case for my approach to the subject, but it deliberately exaggerates the shortcomings in yours, which, in exchange for subjecting students to the tedium of three thousand consecutive complex verses that narrate a confused story, provides them with a large vocabulary... that will allow them to enjoy... the entire corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature.

P. 469, Prof. Einarrson, "The Bribe"



If someone were to tell me that there are unicorns on the moon, I could accept or reject the report, or suspend judgment, but it is something I could imagine. If, on the other hand, I were told that six or seven unicorns on the moon could be three, I would declare a priori that such a thing was impossible.

P. 500, The Professor, "Blue Tigers"

In an article I published in the *Zeitschrift für germanische Philologie*, I wrote that Sonnet 127 referred to the memorable defeat of the Spanish Armada. I had forgotten that Samuel Butler had advanced that same thesis in 1899.

P. 512, Herman Sorgel, "Shakespeare's Memory"



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the romanticization of the Knife Fight. Discuss the mythos of violence. In the story "The South," the protagonist is drawn mystically into a knife fight that he is totally unprepared for. In "The Encounter," one man kills another and then weeps over the senselessness of the killing. Is the author trying to entertain the reader, or does he have something deeper to say about these conflicts?

Discuss coming of age. In "The Night of the Gifts" the story is about a protagonist who sees his first killing, and experience his first sex in one night. In the more mystical story "the Circular Ruins," the sorcerer creates a man by dreaming, before realizing that he also is a product of dreaming. Do these experience change the protagonists? Do they learn anything from them?

Discuss fantasy stories. The author has a mysterious and mystical side to his story telling. Many of the stories contain a magical element though otherwise are written in a logical fashion. In "The Secret Miracle," the writer is given a year of thought, by God, to finish his play, while in "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth," a logical series of events happen, though could a king from the Sudan construct a labyrinth on the English coast? Can the addition of elements of fantasy heighten the interest of a story?

Discuss ambition. In "the Dead Man," the protagonist plans to go from a low-level thug to the leader of a gang. In "Guayaquil," the superior will of Professor Zimmerman allows him to get the honor of a trip, over the more established native Argentine professor. Emma Zunz, in the story of that name, only has the ambition of successful revenge. What drives different characters' ambition?

Discuss insanity. People can become obsessed with objects or people. In "The Zahir," the narrator fears that he is going insane with his obsession over a coin. In "Covered Mirrors," the author fears that he has contributed to the insanity of a former female friend, in telling her his fear of mirrors. In other stories of fantasy, such as "The Circular Ruins," though incredible events happen, the author never questions the character's sanity. Is the author effective in dealing with fantasy and insanity?

Discuss crime and the criminal mind. In Edgar Allen Poe's famous stories, often the inside thoughts of a criminal are described. Likewise, Borges approaches the criminal mind as something to look at, not just to condemn. In the story, "the Shape of the Sword," the traitor describes his treason as if it happened to someone else, before admitting that he did it. In "Deutsches Requiem" the condemned Nazi concentration administrator describes his thoughts as he waits to be executed. Is this type of writing, of describing a criminal's thoughts, interesting to the reader? Is it somewhat more terrifying, on an intellectual level, than describing crimes as they happen?

Discuss greed. In Borges' stories of iniquity, greed is often the motive, as in "The Improbable Imposter Tom Castro." Other stories involve attempts to win success, but on



a more honorable, but still manipulative level, like "The Bribe." Do all men have a dark side, in their fight for success, or is there a clear dividing line between criminals and more honorable people, who use their wits to achieve their goals?

Discuss the desire for immortality. In "The Immortal" a man succeeds in the proverbial search for the fountain of eternal youth. In "The Congress" the protagonists form an organization that attempts to create a new, better world order, before it shatters. Describe the different ways people search to be immortal, either literally, or through their success, fame, or new, world changing ideas.

Describe interpretations of a nation's history. Several of the author's stories describe the crimes and viciousness of the Argentine dictator Rosas, such as "Pedro Salvadores." Other stories describe the often chaotic and brutal civil wars of Argentina and Uruguay, such as "The Other Duel" and "Avelino Arrendondo." Do these stories stand up on their own as stories? Or would the reader like to research these historical periods, to see if the author's description of these events is accurate, or a grossly partisan point of view?