

Ficciones Study Guide

Ficciones by Jorge Luis Borges

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Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius Summary

The narrator is discussing mirrors with a group of friends when one man mentions a quote from a section of an encyclopedia covering the country of Uqbar. When the narrator and his friends go back to the encyclopedia to find the quote, there is no Uqbar. Later, however, the man who originally quoted the phrase brings his copy of the encyclopedia to show his friends. In this copy there is in fact a description of the country of Uqbar. There is also the quote about mirrors that originally brought this to the attention of the narrator. Not only this, but the description of Uqbar also includes descriptions of the country's terrain, language, and native animals. However, the narrator cannot find anyone who has ever visited this country or is able to find reference to it in other copies of the same edition of the encyclopedia.

The narrator's family is acquainted with an American named Herbert Ashe. Upon the death of Ashe, the narrator discovers a package Ashe had received that includes a book entitled *The First Encyclopedia of Tlon*. This encyclopedia includes descriptions of a strange new planet, its history, architecture, languages, and animal life. Most fascinating to the narrator is the languages of the planet. Different sections of the planet speak different languages, some based on a lack of nouns and others without verbs. The people of Tlon do not believe in any science but that of psychology, believing the mind is the most powerful instrument people possess. One school on Tlon does not believe in time. Others do not believe in material possessions. This group of believers believe that an object exists simply because a person believes it exists. However, if a person does not believe in the existence of an object it ceases to be.

The narrator subsequently learns that Uqbar and Tlon are inventions of a group of men who came together with the intention of creating a pretend country. After inventing Uqbar and sneaking information about it into certain encyclopedias, the men decided it would be better to create a whole planet. Together these men created Tlon and wrote *The First Encyclopedia of Tlon*. These men then sneaked the encyclopedia into certain libraries with the hope that they would be discovered. These men also managed to sneak certain objects that only exist on Tlon into this world. The narrator knows for a fact that has taken place as he has seen one of these unique objects. Slowly the ways of Tlon have penetrated this planet. Eventually the narrator believes this world will be fully taken over by Tlon.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius Analysis

The narrator of this story is never named. However, the reader assumes by the first person point of view that the narrator is the writer himself, Borges. The narrator is with a group of friends when they begin to discuss mirrors, which leads one of the men to mention a quote from an encyclopedia in a section discussing the country of Uqbar. As no one has ever heard of this place, they search out an encyclopedia and learn that there is no Uqbar. The man brings his version of the encyclopedia to prove what he has said, which he does. However, no other version of the encyclopedia includes a description of Uqbar, making everyone in the story to wonder why only one version of the encyclopedia includes a description of this country.

Later, when the narrator finds a complete encyclopedia describing the country of Tlon, and the outrageous life on this planet, the narrator begins to realize that this planet and Uqbar might be connected. Eventually the narrator's curiosity leads him to learn of a group of men who created both Tlon and Uqbar as a kind of joke, for something to do, touching on the theme of imaginary worlds. These men took their creation and wrote an encyclopedia of it. Eventually the encyclopedia found its way into the world where people like the narrator found it. The men also released objects from this imaginary planet into the world. This opens a quandary for both the narrator and the reader, making them wonder how objects from an imaginary place can be real. The narrator seems to think that this has happened because by believing in Tlon, people in this world have made it real. Not only this, but the narrator believes that by believing in Tlon people are allowing Tlon to take over this world.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Approach of Al-Mu'tasim

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Approach of Al-Mu'tasim Summary

A Bombay lawyer has written a detective novel that was well received by most critics, but many readers miss the mythical parts of the novel. The narrator summarizes the first few chapters of the novel, explaining how the hero, an unnamed student, becomes involved in a protest between Moslems and Hindus. The student is so drawn into the fight that he finds himself in a position where he believes he has killed a Hindu. The student runs from the protest and finds himself on top of a tower where he spends the night speaking with a robber. In the morning the student decides he must travel the country and find a man to whom he can make amends for his sin.

The following nineteen chapters follow the student on his travels. The reader follows the student from Bombay to the lowlands of Palanpur where he witnesses the death of a blind astrologer and moves to Calcutta, then to Indapur, finally returning to Bombay. The student involves himself in the lower class of society, walking in another man's footsteps, until he finds a man similar to himself to whom he feels he can make amends, a saint who walks the earth. This man is called Al-Mu'tasim in this detective novel. The young student finally finds Al-Mu'tasim who turns out to be a kind Persian bookseller. The narrator describes Al-Mu'tasim as a person with prophetic traits, a saint or phantom to whom the hero of the book looks up to. The narrator compares the detective novel to many books written in which a protagonist goes on a pilgrimage to find a being superior to himself. The book, the narrator contends, is based on ancient tomes in which the superior being appears only once, making the journey the most important aspect of the novel rather than the discovery of Al-Mu'tasim.

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Approach of Al-Mu'tasim Analysis

This story is written in the first person. The story is written as a non-fiction article critiquing the fictional novel, *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim*. In writing this story, the writer uses the authorial voice, putting his own opinions into the plot of the story. The story describes the plot of a fictional novel in which a student becomes involved in the possible death of a Hindu and goes on the run, hoping to find a man to whom he can confess his sins. The man travels through India, eventually finding this kind man who is comparable to a saint or a prophet. The author compares the student's search for this man to the pilgrimages common to religious believers, giving the story a religious theme.



The theme of violence is seen in this novel as well as the religious theme. The student finds himself becoming involved in a riot between Muslims and Hindus. Although the student does not have specific beliefs that lean one way or the other, the student is caught up in the energy of the people around him and commits what he believes to be the murder of a Hindu. As a result, the young man goes on a pilgrimage to find an undefined person. This person, Al-Mu'tasim, turns out to be a bookseller. By finding this person, the student fulfills his purpose. However, the narrator feels as though the person of Al-Mu'tasim is undefined and does not represent a person but an idea. In this way, the narrator compares this story to the search for God or some other religious symbol, giving this story its religious theme.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote Summary

Upon the death of Pierre Menard, the narrator goes through his manuscripts and makes notes of all the writings he has left behind. Among the visible works the narrator notes a symbolist sonnet, a monograph on the possibility of creating a new vocabulary, a monograph on connecting the ideas of very different writers, an article on eliminating the rook's pawns in chess, various translations, an examination of metric laws, and several opinion pieces. Among his less visible work, the narrator finds several chapters of Don Quixote that Menard has rewritten, using the same words and phrases as the original writer, Miguel de Cervantes.

The narrator was aware of the existence of these chapters before Menard's death because Menard corresponded with him about them. Menard claimed in his letters to desire to become Miguel de Cervantes and write Don Quixote, not as de Cervantes, but as himself as he would have if he had been de Cervantes. Menard has chosen Don Quixote because it is an important work of literature, but it is not an essential work, a work that the world would have missed should it have never been written. Menard feels that the world would have missed Edgar Allen Poe should he have never existed, or the Ancient Mariner, but Menard feels the absence of Don Quixote would not have been felt to such a degree. The narrator reads these chapters Menard has rewritten and comes to agree with Menard. The narrator feels that Menard injects more depth into the narrative, more passion that de Cervantes offered. The narrator feels as though it is a shame Menard was never able to finish his version of Don Quixote.

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote Analysis

This story, once again presented in the first person point of view with the authorial voice, is a satire. The narrator presents the work of a deceased writer, touching on the theme of language and literature. The visible work, as he calls it, is the physical work left behind by the writer that represents original ideas. These works include sonnets and ideas for new games as well as arguments to draw together the very different opinions of outspoken writers. Each of these works are physical and easy to see as original works from the mind of the deceased writer. However, the writer has also left behind what the narrator refers to as subterranean or inconclusive work. The writer has left behind two whole chapters from Part One of Don Quixote and a piece of a third chapter written in his own hand with his own ideas projected through de Cervantes words.



What the deceased author has done is simply transcribe the original chapters of Don Quixote. However, the deceased author has done so by attempting to place himself into the mind of the original writer, Miguel de Cervantes. In so doing, the narrator believes the deceased writer has injected new ideas and new emotion into the story. The narrator is awed by his friend's attempt to rewrite this classic novel and proclaims him a hero for having done so. What is really ironic about the narrator's praise is that he continuously claims his friend did not simply transcribe the novel, but that is exactly what he has done.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Circular Ruins

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Circular Ruins Summary

A man comes to shore in a canoe at a place where there are the circular ruins of a once great temple. The man crawls to shore and goes to sleep. A group of men nearby bring him food, so the man feels no need to do anything but sleep as often as possible. As the man sleeps, he has dreams of teaching a classroom of young people with the knowledge that only one of these students is worthy of all he needs to teach and one day he will have to choose that one student. However, before the man can complete this task, he finds himself unable to dream any longer. For a time the man attempts to recreate the dream as it was before, but has no luck. Then the man contents himself to sleep without dreaming.

After a time, the man purifies himself and prays to the planetary gods, then falls to sleep. A new dream comes to the man. The man dreams of the heart of a human being. Slowly the man watches the heart grow and begin to form the other organs of a human body. The body forms bones and muscles until soon it is the form of a man. The man thinks of this man as his son. The god for whom the temple was built comes to the man and tells him that he will give life to his son and if he teaches his son well, he will be allowed to enter the world and only he, Fire, will know him for the phantom that he is. The Dream Man does as he was instructed. Eventually the man has to send his child into the world, but he hesitates, reluctant to allow his child to leave him. The Dream Man lets the child go and hears news of him from time to time, enough to allow him to know his son is doing well. The Dream Man worries, however, that his son might one day learn that he is the product of a dream since the man took from him the memories of his creation. Then one day fire comes to the circular ruins. The Dream Man is surprised to find the flames do not hurt when they touch his flesh. It is then that the Dream Man realizes that he, too, is the product of someone else's dream.

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Circular Ruins Analysis

This is the first story in the book to be presented in the third person point of view. The narration of this story is omniscient and follows a classic narrative and logical timeline. The story begins with a man mysteriously washing ashore at the sight of a ruined temple where he falls into a deep sleep and dreams an intense dream. Soon the man prefers his dreams over reality, so that when he stops dreaming he becomes upset. When the dreams return, the man dreams of the creation of his own son. However, the

son is lifeless until the man makes a deal with the god for whom the temple was once built.

This story appears to also have some religious themes. The Dream Man seems to represent the Christian God, while his son represents Jesus. The Dream Man sends his son out into the world to help people remember the god for whom the temple was once built, like God sent Jesus to save the souls of the people of earth. However, the Dream Man learns in the end that he is simply the product of someone's dream. By having the story end in this fashion, the author seems to be saying the God and religion are only a figment of the believer's imagination and that God is really just a dream. The story also has other themes, including that of imaginary worlds. The world in which the man lives is clearly not a realistic one, suggesting a place that is imaginary and thus cluing the reader in early in the story that the man does not really exist, but is the product of someone else's dream. There is also violence in the man's death despite his lack of pain. Finally, the theme of language and literature comes into the story when the reader learns later that the inspiration for this story was the work of yet another, imaginary, writer of whom the author writes another story included in this book.



Part One, The Garden of Forked Paths, The Babylon Lottery

Part One, The Garden of Forked Paths, The Babylon Lottery Summary

There was once a group who decided to begin a lottery. It began with barbers who gave bits of bone or decorated parchment in exchange for money. There would be one winner who would receive money in return. Later, someone had the idea that, because a lottery caused the sponsors to lose money, that there should be an adverse outcome as well. With this idea, one winner would receive a good prize and one would be forced to pay a fine. However, when this began, many people would refuse to pay the fine. As a result they would be taken to court where they were given the choice to pay the fine or spend time in jail. Many would chose jail in order to defraud the men running the lottery, the Company. As a result, the Company stopped imposing fines and would simply send people straight to jail.

When the Company gave themselves the right to send people to jail it gave them a great deal of power. As a result, the adverse outcomes of the lottery changed. Soon the Company began imposing outcomes such as destroying a person's reputation or sentencing a person to death. Eventually the people of Babylon stood up against the lottery because they felt only the rich were able to benefit, and this uprising ended up giving the Company absolute power. Soon the Company was killing people at will, sending others to jail, making the lottery completely unpredictable and frightening. Soon people begin posing as members of the Company, ordering deaths and destruction wherever they go, and no one can stop them because no one knows for sure who the real members of the Company truly are. It is a world without rule and as dangerous as it is unpredictable.

Part One, The Garden of Forked Paths, The Babylon Lottery Analysis

This story is also written in the first person, but has less of the authorial voice than the previous stories. The story is about a lottery that has both good outcomes and bad. The lottery gave rise to a rebellion in Babylon, giving complete power to the people running the lottery, the Company. This control allows the Company to do anything they like, including putting people in jail and condemning people to die. The story is similar to other farces, such as Orwell's 1984. The story takes place in a world that is not totally realistic, playing again with the theme of imaginary worlds.

The idea of a lottery with adverse outcomes is ironic to the overall idea of a lottery. Most people think of a lottery as something good, as a way to win a great deal of money with



little effort. However, in this story, the idea seems to be that people are paying in order to put themselves in danger of being sentenced to die or to lose the good reputations they have worked hard to make and preserve. The reader might wonder why people would put themselves in a position to experience the adverse outcomes of this lottery, but it seems the greed of human beings to win free money outweighs the possibility of being the one to lose and be sentenced to an adverse outcome.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain Summary

Herbert Quain has just died and the newspaper has printed only a small obituary for the occasion. However, the narrator believes that Quain deserves to be heralded a genius in his obituaries. Quain was a modest man, however, and would not have liked a lot of fuss over his death. The narrator believes that Quain's works were genius, that he hid secondary meaning in his first novel. The first novel, a detective novel, actually had two solutions, one that was obvious to the reader and the detective within the novel, and another that was less obvious but more profound.

The narrator writes in detail about Quain's other novel, April March. April March contains a different sort of timeline and is written in a sequence in which the novel contains three stories in three consecutive chapters, but each has the first chapter in common. The narrator also admits that Quain himself was unsure of this ternary arrangement and felt that anyone who imitated him should use a binary arrangement. The narrator also mentions Quain's play, The Secret Mirror, in which there is an invisible plot and characters who do not actually exist. The narrator also admits to being inspired by Quain to write several short stories, including The Circular Ruins.

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain Analysis

This story is once again written in the first person point of view utilizing the authorial voice. The narrator, Borges, discusses the works of Herbert Quain, a friend who has recently died and left behind several novels and plays that he feels are works of near genius, touching on the theme of language and literature. The narrator describes each of these literary works and points out their high points, including the hidden plot in one and invisible characters in another.

This story seems to be another satire in which the author is ridiculing people who believe they can write but whom are not good writers. The author quotes Quain in the story saying that everyone can write and that good plots are often purposely frustrated by the author in order to entertain the reader. The reader who does not believe these plots to be good are lead astray by their own self interest. On the surface the reader can take this as Borges' way of saying that there are some bad writers out there who are too full of themselves to see that they are bad writers. The reader can also believe that

Borges is saying that there are no bad writers, only bad readers. Either way, it is an enthusiastic story that will make the reader think, which is clearly the intention of all of Borges' work.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Library of Babel

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Library of Babel Summary

The universe is a large library that contains countless books of all languages and all knowledge. The library is cared for by librarians, though there are not as many as there were at one time. Each book has the same number of pages, the same number of words on each page, and the same titles on each spine. When it became known that the library contained all books, there was a great deal of joy in the universe. People realized that this also meant that the library held the book of Vindications, a book of apology and prophecy. Many people began searching for this book, causing many to be killed or to go crazy in the madness of the search.

At the same time people searched for the books of Vindications, others would search for books containing inappropriate information and would destroy them. These people, the Purifiers, would burn the books, but there was no possible way they could destroy all the books that they disapprove of because in the library there are many redundant books that contain the same, if slightly distorted, information as those the Purifiers destroyed. The library is infinite and redundant, the books irreplaceable but superfluous. A man could search the library for eternity and find the same books repeated in the same chaotic order, creating order in its chaos.

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Library of Babel Analysis

This story is again written in the first person point of view, but the authorial voice is somewhat dampened. The story is a metaphor for the universe. The metaphor in this case is a library, a physical place where all the knowledge of the universe is housed. This information is infinite and redundant, so large that mere humans could never do enough damage to rid the universe of even an ounce of this information. Within the story there are people who attempt to find one specific book that they believe is the secret to all the other books. This book, the Vindications, appears to be a metaphor for the Bible.

Also within the story are a group of people, the Purifiers, who attempt to rid the library, and thus the universe, of certain books to which they object. The author assures the reader that it would be impossible to rid the library of this information because the library's books, while irreplaceable, are redundant and infinite. The Purifiers bring to mind the people during World War II who attempted to burn books in Germany because they promoted Jews. Touching on the theme of language and literature, the author uses

this story to express the belief that literature is the most important tool man has to preserve humanity and human knowledge.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Garden of Forking Paths

Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Garden of Forking Paths Summary

Dr. Yu Tsun is a spy for the Germans during World War I and he has just learned that a fellow German has been apprehended by the English and that he is most likely next. Dr. Tsun has information he needs to get to the Germans, but does not have the time to go through the normal channels. Dr. Tsun thinks quickly of what he might do in order to get the message to his chief. Finally Dr. Tsun rushes to the train station with an idea in mind. Dr. Tsun buys a ticket for a location a stop beyond where he wants to go and boards the trains just seconds before Richard Madden, the man he believes will arrest him given the chance, arrives at the station.

When Dr. Tsun arrives at his destination, he walks for miles. As he walks, Tsun thinks about his ancestor, Ts'ui Pen, who in his old age declared that he intended to both write a great novel and create a great labyrinth. Upon his death, the family found Pen's novel, a disordered, incomprehensible tome, but never found his labyrinth. Tsun thinks about that labyrinth now, wondering if he will ever find it. When Tsun comes upon a house with a beautiful garden, he is greeted at the gate by Dr. Stephen Albert, the owner of the home. Albert is pleased to meet Tsun, especially when he learns that Tsun is a relative of Pen's. Albert takes Tsun into the house and begins to tell him what he has discovered about Pen's labyrinth.

Albert found a letter shortly after Pen's death that led him to believe that the secret to Pen's labyrinth is simpler than his family ever believed. Albert believes that the labyrinth and the bulking, incomprehensible novel are one and the same. Albert believes that Pen wrote the novel, taking into account every possible choice each character could make, and then creating a story that follows each timeline suggested by each choice. In other words, Albert tells Tsun, there are different dimensions to each event. In this event, Tsun visiting Albert, they are friends. However, in another dimension they may be enemies, or one may be an enemy while the other is a friend. With this in mind, Pen wrote a novel in which a character might die in chapter two, but appear unharmed in chapter three.

Tsun is deeply grateful for Albert's work in discovering his ancestor's labyrinth. However, Tsun can see Madden coming up the garden walk toward him and knows that now he must act. When Albert turns away from Tsun, Tsun pulls a gun and shoots him. It turns out that Albert is the name of a town that Tsun has learned the British intend to attack. By killing Albert, Tsun is able to warn his chief of the attack and help the Germans avoid it. Germany is saved to fight another day, but Tsun will face his own death for the killing of Dr. Stephen Albert.



Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Garden of Forking Paths Analysis

This story is told in the third person omniscient point of view. The story is a simple narrative that follows a direct timeline. The story is about a spy for the German army who is about to be captured by the British. Before his capture, the young man must get a message to his chief. However, the young man knows of only one way in which he can do this, thus putting his own life on the line for his country. A subplot of the story is that of a labyrinth his ancestor created within a novel that the family was unaware of until Dr. Stephen Albert is able to point it out to Tsun. Unfortunately for Tsun, killing Albert is the only way he can get his message to his chief, therefore he is forced to kill the one man who was able to decipher his ancestor's legacy.

There is irony in the killing of Albert because he is the one person who was able to decipher Pen's labyrinth and Tsun is enormously grateful to Albert for doing this. Tsun does not want to kill Albert, but he feels he has no choice because the message he needs to get to his chief is more important than the lives of two men. It is also ironic that Albert happens to be the man to decipher the labyrinth and that his name is Albert. If his name had been anything else, Tsun would not have visited him that night and learned about the labyrinth, but he also would not have killed him. The theme of language and literature is also explored in this story as Albert explains that Pen's labyrinth is actually a novel that attempts to take into its timeline every possible outcome of every possible choice his characters make. This would indeed be labyrinth as the choices of human beings are infinite.



Part Two, Artifices, Funes, The Memorious

Part Two, Artifices, Funes, The Memorious Summary

A young man recalls meeting another young man while in the country visiting his cousin. This young man, Ireneo Funes, has the remarkable ability of always knowing what time it is, making him something of a joke in the area. Later, when the young man returns for another visit with his cousin, he learns that Ireneo Funes fell from a horse leaving him paralyzed. Now Ireneo spends all his time lying on a bed, often staring at one object for hours at a time. While the narrator is visiting, Ireneo learns that he has several volumes of Latin verse and asks to borrow them.

Before Ireneo can return these books, the narrator is called back home to attend to his dying father. The narrator goes to Ireneo's home to retrieve his books before leaving. Ireneo tells the narrator that since the moment of his accident he has become hyper-aware of the things around him and that he can no longer forget anything. Ireneo describes what it is like to be so aware of everything around him, of the unique qualities of every object, every organism. Ireneo talks about the futility of a language that has a single word for things that are as different as the many breeds of dogs. Ireneo suffers from insomnia due to this hyper-awareness and has begun to age before his time. Shortly after the narrator's visit, Ireneo dies of heart failure. Ireneo is only nineteen.

Part Two, Artifices, Funes, The Memorious Analysis

This story is written in the first person, but unlike previous stories it lacks the authorial voice. This story is more of a narrative, a story with a traditional beginning, middle, and end. The story is about a young man who, due to a tragic accident, finds that he cannot sleep and remembers things and is aware of things that he was not before. This story touches on the theme of language and literature as Ireneo complains that language no longer has the same meaning for him. Ireneo does not understand how language can have a single word for something like a dog when no two dogs are exactly alike and when one dog can look different from one profile to the next. The story also explores the idea of insomnia, suggesting that Ireneo's insomnia somehow is caused by his unique memory or that his unique memory has caused his insomnia. No matter which caused the other, the story does imply that insomnia killed Ireneo at a young age, suggesting no mind is prepared to be constantly awake or to be so aware of the world around him.



Part Two, Artifices, The Form of the Sword

Part Two, Artifices, The Form of the Sword Summary

The narrator is caught in a terrible storm while traveling and stops to seek shelter at the ranch of a stern but fair Englishman. This Englishman has a terrible scar on his face. After dinner, the narrator asks the Englishman how he came to have the scar. The Englishman tells the story of a man who was a part of the Irish rebellion in the early twenties. The Irishman met one evening a comrade named John Vincent Moon. Moon professes to be a courageous fighter, but when the two men are caught in a gun battle, Moon freezes. The Irishman returns for Moon, breaking him out of his fear and leading him through the streets to safety. The Irishman then hides Moon in a safe house and treats the wounds he received from a bullet that grazed his shoulder. The Irishman continues to hide Moon for a full week while he goes out to fight in the rebellion and Moon hides in the safe house. One day the Irishman returns home early to overhear Moon turning him in to the authorities. As the authorities arrive to take the Irishman away, he slashes Moon in the face, leaving that terrible scar. The Englishman, therefore, is the coward Moon.

Part Two, Artifices, The Form of the Sword Analysis

This story is told in the first person point of view, but the narrator shifts from the first person point of view of the author, who is addressed as Borges in the body of the story, the first person point of view of the Englishman. This second point of view is an unreliable narrator because the Englishman tells the story from the point of view of the Irish hero, but in the end admits to being the coward Moon. This story illustrates the theme of violence, including a gun battle in the story along with the violent slash that leave Moon forever scarred. The scar on the Englishman's face is a symbol of his cowardice, forcing him to relive his actions every time he looks into the mirror and sees his horrible scar. Moon is clearly ashamed of his actions, as seen in his choice to hide his identity in his story until the story was told. This is a sad story of regret and shame, a story that leaves the reader feeling sympathy for the coward that they might not feel if the story were told in any other way.



Part Two, Artifices, Theme of the Traitor and Hero and Hero

Part Two, Artifices, Theme of the Traitor and Hero Summary

Ryan, the great grandson of Fergus Kilpatrick, is researching his grandfather's assassination when he comes across several coincidences that cause him to begin wondering about the truth of his grandfather's death. The first is the fact that Kilpatrick's death took place in a theatre, just like Lincoln's. The second is that Kilpatrick's death remains unsolved, leaving many to believe the police purposely overlooked the true killers. It seems to Ryan that many facets of Kilpatrick's assassination imitate those of other famous murders, including that of Julius Caesar as described in the famous Shakespearian play.

Ryan learns that Kilpatrick charged a friend, James Alexander Nolan, with the task of finding a traitor and a few days later signed the death warrant of this traitor, but the name was blacked out. Ryan believes the traitor was Kilpatrick himself and that he and Nolan conspired to dramatize Kilpatrick's death in order to protect his country from the reality of having a traitor as a president. Nolan based the assassination drama on the Shakespeare play because he had recently transcribed it and was familiar with it. Ryan further believes that Nolan intended for others to follow his lead and play out other assassinations in this form, and that the book Ryan publishes on the subject was also foreseen by Nolan and is part of his plan.

Part Two, Artifices, Theme of the Traitor and Hero Analysis

This story is about Ryan, the great-grandson of Fergus Kilpatrick. The story is told in the third person omniscient point of view, but includes the authorial voice as the narrator introduces the story and speaks of Ryan as though he is a character being made up as the words of the story are being written. Ryan does research on his great-grandfather and sees similarities in his assassination as compared to other famous assassinations throughout history, including those of Lincoln and Julius Caesar. Eventually Ryan comes to the conclusion that this is intentional because the assassination of his great-grandfather was plotted and planned to resemble that of Julius Caesar in the play by Shakespeare.

This story touches on the theme of language and literature because the assassination is based on the famous Shakespearian play. The story also touches on the theme of violence because without the assassination of Kilpatrick, there would be no story.

Finally, this story explores the simple idea of theme as it explores the theme of traitor and hero, the idea that a person can be one, the other, or both.



Part Two, Artifices, Death and the Compass

Part Two, Artifices, Death and the Compass Summary

Erik Lonnrot is investigating a triple set of murders. The first is the murder of a Jewish rabbi in an infamous hotel where a man near a room where a man of some repute once stayed with a great number of jewels. When the rabbi is found stabbed to death in his room, the police believe it is the result of a robber who got the wrong hotel room. Lonnrot does not agree, however, once he sees a paper on which someone has written the words, the first letter of the Name has been spoken. Lonnrot believes this man's death is the result of something he said that offended a group of religious people who believe a specific name for God should not be spoken aloud. Lonnrot's ideas appear to be proven when a second man is found murdered in the same manner with the words, the second letter of the Name has been spoken.

Some time later the police receive a phone call from a man claiming to have information about the crimes. When Lonnrot and the police arrive at the motel from which the call was made, they find what appears to be another crime scene. At the motel, they also find the words, the final letters of the Name have been spoken. A few days later, the police receive a map in the mail that shows how the three crime scenes form a perfect triangle. Lonnrot looks at this and realizes that there will be one more murder. Using the map, Lonnrot pinpoints the location of the fourth murder and drives there. When he arrives, Lonnrot finds himself in a house that is built like a labyrinth. Lonnrot makes his way through the home only to be found by the criminal, Scharlach. Scharlach, it turns out, set Lonnrot up after a burglary went bad, to be lead to this location. Scharlach has trapped Lonnrot in order to kill him for arresting his brother.

Part Two, Artifices, Death and the Compass Analysis

This story is told in the third person omniscient point of view. The main character is a detective, Lonnrot, who believes himself to be smarter than the police. Lonnrot investigates three murders that lead him to the possibility of a fourth. Lonnrot rushes to the location of where he believes the fourth murder will be perpetrated, only to find that he has rushed to his own murder.

This story contains several themes, especially the theme of violence. Lonnrot comes to his own death through the deaths of others. Lonnrot is an investigator and believes that the deaths are a puzzle he must unlock. Lonnrot cannot accept that the first murder is simply a burglary gone wrong, therefore leading the criminal behind the killing to predict his next move. Ironically, the criminal uses Lonnrot's own brilliance against him, trusting that Lonnrot will follow the clues that he leaves behind and lead him to his own death.



Part Two, Artifices, The Secret Miracle

Part Two, Artifices, The Secret Miracle Summary

Jaromir Hladik is a writer who has an unfinished tragedy called *The Enemies*. Hladik is also a Jew. Hladik is arrested and sentenced to die. While in jail awaiting his execution, Hladik regrets never having finished his tragedy. Hladik prays to God to grant him a year to finish his tragedy. In a dream, Hladik is told by God that his wish will be granted. Hladik is filled with hope, however, when the guards come and get him for his execution, Hladik's hope is dashed. The guards place Hladik near the courtyard wall and aim their weapons. As they fire, Hladik becomes aware that time seems to have stopped. Hladik then realizes that although he will eventually die, God has stretched the final seconds of his life into a year in his mind. Hladik finishes his tragedy in that time, but is eventually killed when the year is finished.

Part Two, Artifices, The Secret Miracle Analysis

Hladik is a writer who is about to be executed for the crime of being a Jew. Hladik is not unhappy about his circumstances, but is unhappy to be leaving behind an unfinished work. Hladik wishes he had spent less time perfecting the work and more time finishing it. Hladik asks God for a year to work on his tragedy and is granted the year, however, the year takes place in his mind in the few seconds it takes for the bullets to reach his body. This story illustrates the theme of violence for obvious reasons, but also has elements of religious themes as well. The story seems to prove the miracles of God, but this miracle seems to be a curse as well as a blessing. Hladik gets his year, but he is confined to one place during that year and is unable to write down his tragedy for others to read. Not only this, but Hladik still dies in the end.



Part Two, Artifices, Three Versions of Judas

Part Two, Artifices, Three Versions of Judas Summary

Nils Runeberg has three theories on Judas. Runeberg, a religious man, asserts that Judas was misunderstood and did not betray Jesus Christ. Runeberg claims it was not necessary for Judas to point Jesus out to the Romans, as everyone knew who he was. Runeberg contends that it was necessary for their to be a sacrifice and that Judas chose to be that sacrifice. In this way, Judas is a martyr just like Jesus. When Runeberg published these ideas, however, he was rebuked by most Biblical scholars. Runeberg revised his theory. Runeberg suggests instead that while other men were renouncing the flesh, Judas renounced the spirit by renouncing honor, good, peace, and other pleasures. Finally Runeberg suggests that not only was Judas a mortal who felt the need to sacrifice himself for the good of all man, but that he was God himself. God wanted to come to take on human form and could have chosen any moral person, but chose Judas in order to hide his true identity. Runeberg suffered insomnia the later days of his life and died of an aneurysm. Many scholars blame his insomnia on his odd beliefs.

Part Two, Artifices, Three Versions of Judas Analysis

The story of Judas is as well known to most religious scholars as that of Jesus Christ. However, in this story a man named Nils Runeberg attempts to suggest a different version of the stories everyone seems to know so well. Runeberg suggests that Judas was not a traitor to Jesus out of maliciousness, but was as moral and pure as Jesus himself. Runeberg says that Judas gave up purity the same way Jesus gave his life and that God himself was Judas in order to hide his true identity and his decision to become a mortal man. This story has a great many religious themes to it, especially when comparing Judas to Christ. However, the story also seems to question the idea of religion, as it seems to be suggesting that the core beliefs of all Christians can be tested if the right scholars take a close look at them. Nothing is concrete, the story seems to say, and everything a Christian believes could simply be one interpretation of a story that can be interpreted in many different ways.



Part Two, Artifices, The End

Part Two, Artifices, The End Summary

A man is lying in the back of his store, injured and unable to walk. The man asks his son if there is any customers and is told there are not. Out the window the man can see a local black man who has hung around the store for several years, ever since losing a guitar duel with another man. As the store owner watches, a stranger comes to the store. The stranger has a drink and speaks to the black man about his children and the words he left them with. The stranger says that he warned his children to never kill another man so that they will not have to live their lives the way he has. The two men go outside then and the black man tells the other that he is ready to resolve the dispute that started when the stranger killed his brother. The two men fight and the black man kills the stranger.

Part Two, Artifices, The End Analysis

The theme of violence is once again explored in this story. The story, Borges's idea of how a traditional poem should be finished, is of two men who have chased each other for many years and are now ready to end their duel. The one man kills the other and rather than being happy, must live with the death of the other man on his hands for the rest of his life. This story seems to explore the futility of duels and vendettas, suggesting that perhaps everyone would have been better off if the two men had let their differences go and lived their separate lives. However, the two men cannot do that, so now one is dead and the other must live the rest of his life with the guilt of killing the other.



Part Two, Artifices, The Sect of the Phoenix

Part Two, Artifices, The Sect of the Phoenix Summary

There is a secret organization called the Sect of the Phoenix. Most of its members will not respond to the word Phoenix, but instead call themselves men of the secret. These people are the same as everyone else, including Jews, and have been persecuted like Jews, but they do not keep records of these persecutions. The Sect also does not have a unique language that only they speak, but speak the same languages as those around them. The Sect includes the rich, the poor, children and adults. The Sect is all people, the only thing that makes them different is the secret they keep, a secret no one knows nor is likely to ever find out.

Part Two, Artifices, The Sect of the Phoenix Analysis

The Sect of the Phoenix is a short description of a group of people who are keepers of some great secret. What is ironic about these people is that they themselves do not refer to themselves as members of this Sect and they are just like everyone else, speaking the same languages, appearing the same, living the same. These people are everyone. There is nothing special about these people except for the secret they claim to protect. However, no one even knows if there really is a secret.



Part Two, Artifices, The South

Part Two, Artifices, The South Summary

A man has just come into possession of a copy of *The Thousand and One Nights* and is so excited to read it that he walks into a door and cuts his forehead. The cut becomes infected and the man is made to enter the hospital in order to treat the dangerous infection. When the man is finally released from the hospital, he immediately sets out to spend the rest of his convalescence at his family ranch in the South. On the train ride, the man is so happy to be outside of the hospital that he spends most of the ride staring at the passing scenery. When the man finally approaches his stop, he is told he must get off sooner than expected because of a change in the train stations.

The man gets off the train and goes to a local grocery store to arrange for a car to take him to the ranch. While there, the man decides to have dinner. During dinner a group of men begin taunting him by spitting pieces of bread at him. At first the man ignores them and then he attempts to walk away. However, when the grocer speaks his name, the man feels as though he must defend himself. The other men continue to taunt him by suggesting a knife fight. The man refuses because he is unarmed. However, someone gives him a knife. The man decides to participate in the fight, believing that even if he dies, it would be better to die in a knife fight than of some illness in a hospital.

Part Two, Artifices, The South Analysis

This story is told in the third-person omniscient point of view even though it is thought to be partially autobiographical. The story is about a man who becomes sick from an infection after receiving a cut on his forehead. The man spends a great deal of time in the hospital and is excited about life when he is finally released. The man embraces everything about life, including the possibility of dying in a knife fight, which seems to him to be much better than dying of an illness in the hospital.

The theme of violence once again is featured prominently in this story because violence is the mode of death the protagonist must face after facing down a possible death due to infection. This story also features prominently the theme of life, especially the idea of living one's life to the fullest and appreciating everything about life. The protagonist is shocked when he nearly dies due to an infection from a simple cut on his forehead and embraces life when he is finally released and able to experience the outside world again. However, within hours of being released, the man is harassed by a couple of men who challenge him to knife fight. The protagonist knows he will most likely die in the fight, but is excited for the experience because it seems like a much better way to die than lying in a hospital bed.



Characters

Narrator appears in Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius; The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim; Pie

Many of the stories are told in the first-person point of view of the narrator. This narrator often utilizes the authorial voice in which the narrator makes it clear to the reader that it is the voice of the writer himself rather than a fictional narrator who happens to utilize the first person point of view. In fact, in one of these stories the narrator is referred to in the author's name by a character in the story. By using this point of view, the writer becomes a participant in the story, a character to whom things happen in the course of the story's plot development.

In some of the stories, the author writes his stories to seem like non-fiction articles in which he critiques other writers. In these stories, the author writes about literature and the impact of these specific books or stories on the reader as though he were critiquing the work of actual writers. In other stories, the author talks about events he claims happened to him. In one such story, the author talks about finding an encyclopedia about a planet that does not exist. In another, the author talks about staying overnight in the home of an Englishman who tells him a story about his involvement in the Irish rebellion of the early twentieth century.

The narrator is often a neutral participant in his stories. However, there are stories when the narrator takes an active part in the story. In *The Library of Babel*, the narrator talks about how he has read through some of the books in the library and searched for the secrets that the Searchers have spent a great deal of time searching for. In other stories, the narrator discusses his emotional response to literature, especially that of writer's he knew personally, such as in *Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote*. By discussing his emotional response to these stories, the narrator becomes a part of the story despite playing such a neutral role.

Pierre Menard appears in Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote

Pierre Menard is a writer who has taken it upon himself to attempt to re-write the classic novel *Don Quixote*. Pierre corresponds with the narrator during this time, explaining his desire to recreate the work by channeling the original writer, but still maintaining his own voice. Pierre wants to make the story his own, but wants to keep the feel of the original manuscript. Pierre takes on several key chapters of the novel, rewriting them with a voice that he feels is uniquely his own even though the essence of Miguel de Cervantes remains. In the end, the story remains unchanged, but Pierre has injected his own voice, creating a work that is unchanged, but more vital and unique than ever before.



Dream Man appears in The Circular Ruins

The Dream Man appears on the shores of a river and falls into a deep sleep at the foot of a circular ruins that was once a temple to an unnamed god. The Dream Man discovers that he enjoys sleep and decides to spend the majority of his time sleeping. At first the man has vivid dreams about teaching a class of pupils while searching for the one pupil who deserves to be taught the lessons he wants to teach. However, the Dream Man suffers from insomnia for a time and is unable to dream.

When he's finally able to dream again, the Dream Man begins to dream of one person, forming him in his dreams until he is a complete man. The Dream Man then teaches this one person, thinking of him as his son. Eventually the Dream Man teaches his son to leave his dreams and to go out into the world. At the end, the Dream Man is consumed by a fire that encroaches on the ruins. When the fire does not hurt the Dream Man, he comes to the conclusion that like his son, he is the product of another man's dream.

Dr. Yu Tsun appears in The Garden of Forking Paths

Dr. Yu Tsun is a spy for the Germans during World War I. Dr. Yu Tsun realizes he is about to be apprehended by the British and he needs to find a way to get a message to his chief. Dr. Yu Tsun thinks about this for a long time before he finally finds a solution that seems to be his only option. Dr. Yu Tsun travels into the country to the home of a fellow doctor. It turns out this doctor has figured out a great mystery that has existed in Dr. Yu Tsun's family for many years. Dr. Yu Tsun is grateful, but when his friend turns his back on him, Dr. Yu Tsun kills him. Moments later, Dr. Yu Tsun is apprehended by his German nemesis. It turns out, the other doctor has a name that will clue Dr. Yu Tsun's captain in to the message he must get to him before a great mistake is made in the battle between Germany and Britain.

Dr. Stephen Albert appears in The Garden of Forking Paths

Dr. Stephen Albert lives in a remote area. Dr. Yu Tsun comes to visit him, giving Dr. Albert the chance to share with someone the secret he has discovered. Dr. Albert has done great amounts of research on Dr. Yu Tsun's relative, Ts'ui Pen. Ts'ui Pen, in the later years of his life, told his family he intended to write a great novel. Later, Ts'ui Pen told his family he was to build a great labyrinth. However, after Ts'ui Pen died, all his family found was the novel. This novel was long and had a confusing timeline. Characters that died in one chapter would often turn up alive again in later chapters without explanation. The family believed the novel to be worthless, but was encouraged to publish it by a monk. The family would regret this decision for many years. At the same time, the family continuously searched for the labyrinth, but has never found it. Dr. Albert, through research and the discovery of a letter, realized that the novel is the



labyrinth. Ts'ui Pen wrote a novel that took into account every choice a given character could make and wrote a story for every given possibility.

Dr. Albert explains this discovery to Dr. Yu Tsun, believing this is why Dr. Yu Tsun has come to see him. Dr. Yu Tsun is excited by this information. However, in the same breath Dr. Yu Tsun expresses his gratitude, he uses his gun to kill Dr. Albert. It turns out Albert had a name that Dr. Yu Tsun needed to appear in the newspapers along with his own in order to warn his captain of the intended bombing of the city of Albert.

Ireneo Funes appears in Funes, The Memorios

Ireneo Funes is a young man who was born with the great gift of always knowing what time it is. As a teenager, Ireneo suffers a devastating horse riding accident that leaves him bedridden. Ireneo begins to suffer insomnia. During his confinement, Ireneo begins to become aware of everything, including the minute details of every object within his sight. Not only this, but Ireneo finds that he cannot forget anything. Also during his confinement, Ireneo becomes aware of the futility of language. Ireneo believes that most words are too simple to cover everything in the world, such as the word dog for the large variety of shapes and sizes of dogs that fill the world. This ability to recall everything causes Ireneo to age quickly, causing him to die of heart failure at the age of nineteen.

The Englishman appears in The Form of the Sword

The Englishman is an angry, dark man who runs his ranch with a iron fist, but he is fair despite his dark moods and tough rules. The Englishman, it turns out, is Irish. The Englishman has a scar on his face. When the narrator asks the Englishman about this scar, he learns that the scar is the result of the Englishman's participation of the Irish rebellion of the early twentieth century. The Englishman became frightened the first time he faced gunfire and was saved by a fellow rebel. This fellow rebel took the Englishman into his home and protected, giving him the time he needed to recover from his wounds and to build his courage. However, in exchange for this kindness, the Englishman turned his friend in and received his scar from the friend in retribution.

Fergus Kilpatrick appears in Theme of the Traitor and Hero

Fergus Kilpatrick was a celebrated leader of Ireland. Kilpatrick was killed in a theater by a group of conspirators. In the story Theme of the Traitor and Hero, the narrator compares Kilpatrick's death to those of Julius Caesar and Abraham Lincoln. The narrator continues to suggest that perhaps Kilpatrick's assassination was staged in order to protect his followers from realizing he was a traitor to their trust. The narrator says that one of Kilpatrick's men came up with the idea of copying the story of Julius Caesar as written by Shakespeare and therefore creating a story that would make



Kilpatrick a hero and protect everything he had worked to build for his country. Kilpatrick, in this theory, was a willing participant in his own assassination, aware of the events that would lead to his death.

Eric Lonnrot appears in Death and the Compass

Eric Lonnrot is a detective in the story, Death and the Compass. Lonnrot believes from the beginning of the case that something bigger than simple robbery is going on. Lonnrot comes to believe that the murders are due to a fanatical religious group who believe a specific word for the name of God should not be spoken. Three men are killed in three strategically selected areas that make it appear as though they were premeditated by this religious group. However, when Lonnrot arrives at what he believes will be the fourth and final crime scene, he discovers that the first murder was in fact a simple robbery gone wrong. However, when the criminal mind behind the crime learned that Lonnrot was on the case, he set up the other murders in order to lure Lonnrot to the final location. The criminal mind is a man whom Lonnrot wronged when he arrested his brother. In revenge, the criminal set Lonnrot up and will now kill him. Lonnrot proves to be too smart for his own good.

Jaromir Hladik appears in The Secret Miracle

Jaromir Hladik is a Jewish writer who is arrested for the crime of being Jewish and sentenced to die. Jaromir Hladik has not finished one of his plays and would like the time to do so before he dies. Hladik prays to God for the time he needs. In a dream, Hladik is told that his time has been granted. However, Hladik is led out to the courtyard to be executed. Hladik believes his time will not be granted when he is placed against a wall and the order to fire is given. In the seconds before the bullets enter his body, Hladik becomes aware that time seems to have slowed to a near stand still. Hladik realizes that this is the time he asked for. God has slowed time in his mind so completely that the few seconds it takes for the bullets to reach him, a year will pass in his mind. Hladik uses this time to finish his play in his mind.



Objects/Places

The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia appears in Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia is the encyclopedia that the narrator and his friends use to attempt to find Uqbar, but they fail to do so. Later, another friend brings his copy of the encyclopedia that includes the description of Uqbar.

The First Encyclopedia of Tlon appears in Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

The First Encyclopedia of Tlon is the book the narrator finds among his friend Herbert Ashe's belongings that brings Tlon to his attention and sends him on the quest to find out everything he can about Tlon.

Don Quixote appears in Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote

Don Quixote is a novel written in the eighteenth century by Miguel de Cervantes.

The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim appears in The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim

The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim is a detective novel discussed in the article The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim.

Circular Ruins appears in The Circular Ruins

A man lives and dreams in the shadow of circular ruins that were once a temple to an unknown god.

The Company appears in The Babylon Lottery

The Company is a group of merchants that thought up and began a lottery that would eventually become such a large undertaking that the Company appears to have control over all the people of Babylon.



The Library appears in The Library of Babel

The library is the universe and contains all the histories and knowledge of the universe.

The Purifiers appears in The Library of Babel

The Purifiers are a group of people who attempt to rid the library of books they feel are inappropriate. However, there are so many redundant books in the library that the Purifiers could never get rid of them all.

The Searchers appears in The Library of Babel

The Searchers search the library constantly for the one book that is the key to understanding all the other books.

Ts'ui Pen's Labyrinth appears in The Garden of Forking Paths

Ts'ui Pen is rumored to have built a labyrinth, but no one has been able to find it. However, a man has discovered that Ts'ui Pen's labyrinth is a novel he has written in which every possible choice has been predicted and written into the story.

Scar appears in The Form of the Sword

The Irishman who gives the narrator a place to hide from a torrential rainstorm tells him the story of how he received a terrible scar on his face. The scar is the souvenir of turning in the man who saved his life.

Julius Caesar appears in Theme of the Traitor and Hero

Julius Caesar by Shakespeare is the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar. It is believed that this play may have been the inspiration behind the dramatized assassination of Fergus Kilpatrick.

Themes

Imaginary Worlds

Several of the short stories in this book center around imaginary worlds. One of the most notable is the first story in Part One, *The Garden of Forking Paths*. This story, *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, centers around the narrator's discovery of several encyclopedias that include descriptions of the imaginary country of Uqbar and the imaginary planet of Tlon. These encyclopedias were written by a group of men who thought it would be fun to create these fake worlds and plant information about them throughout the world. Not only do these fake stories make their way into the hands of the narrator, but other objects from Tlon also find their way to him. Eventually the narrator becomes confused by how the objects of a fake world could be formed and appear in this world. The narrator, concerned by this event, becomes convinced that eventually Tlon will take over our world, becoming reality and making our world the imaginary planet.

Another example of imaginary worlds is the description of the Library of Babel. The Library is an actual library that holds all the books of knowledge in mankind that represents the universe. In this case, the imaginary world is a metaphor for mankind. Finally, the author creates a world in which a man is capable of dreaming the creation of his own child and is able to send him out into the world to promote the causes of a god. In this world, the man is obsessed with his child, spending a great deal of time dreaming of the child and protecting him from the cruelty of the world. However, in the end, the man learns that he too is simply the product of someone else's dream.

These imaginary worlds are an essential part of the stories in which they appear. In *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, there would be no story if not for the imaginary country and planet that appear in the story. The same is true of the library in *The Library of Babel*. However, the setting of *The Circular Ruins* in which the man dreams his own child, the setting is secondary to the plot, but if not for the setting, the story might not have the same power, the same authority, that it has. It is for these reasons that imaginary worlds is a major theme of some of the stories contained in the book.

Language and Literature

Several of the stories in this novel revolve around language and literature. In *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the language of the imaginary Tlon plays a major role in the story because it serves to show how unique this imaginary planet is. In the story *The Library of Babel*, the plot revolves around the books that fill the library, books that represent all the knowledge of mankind. These books are extremely important to mankind, but are also a source of confusion and misunderstandings. These books tend to be redundant, saving them from destruction by the Purifiers, but also making it difficult for believers in a



single book that can decipher all the other to find the one book they believe they are seeking.

Literature is also an important part in the story Pierre Menard, the Author of Don Quixote. Pierre Menard is a man who has decided to rewrite Don Quixote and ends up simply writing the same novel exactly as it was written by its original author. However, the narrator finds this undertaking to be brave and awe inspiring, an undertaking that not all men can complete. In An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain, the author discusses as though in a non-fiction article the works of a man named Herbert Quain. These books are written in a unique style that follows an odd timeline rather than a more traditional organization. In the Approach to Al-Mu'tasim, the author again critiques the work of another writer, describing the authors intention by introducing the concept of Al-Mu'tasim. Finally, in The Three Versions of Judas, the author describes an author's opinions of Judas, suggesting that God came to earth as Judas in order to break the mold of expectation and to create a situation that was necessary in order to fulfill his intentions for mankind.

Language and literature is a central theme in many of the stories in this book because they are central to the plots of these stories. If not for certain books, many of these stories would not exist because their plots center around certain books, both real and imaginary. Language is also of great importance to these stories, not only because of the language used to write the stories themselves, but because the author analyzes certain languages as an important part of the plot of several stories. For these reasons, language and literature are important themes of these stories.

Violence

Violence occurs in several of the stories in this book. The first story in which violence is a theme is The Babylon Lottery. In this story a group of men decide to start a lottery but quickly discover that by only having a good outcome in the lottery they are losing money. As a result, these men, the Company, decide to add a poor outcome as well. This bad outcome includes many things, but one is death. The next story in which violence plays a part is The Form of the Sword. In this story, an Irish man has a terrible scar on his face that he received after turning in a man who helped him during the Irish rebellion. The scar, it turns out, is this man's punishment for betrayal. Theme of the Traitor and Hero introduces the idea of executions. This story suggests that a traitor is to be executed, but to save his reputation, he participates in a drama that causes his execution to appear to have been an assassination by several conspirators.

In Death and the Compass, three men are killed in order to trap an investigator into walking into his own execution. The Secret Miracle is a story of a man who is granted a miracle in the seconds before his execution. The End finishes a historic poem about two strangers searching for each other to finish a duel that began many years before. Finally, The South is about a man who, after recovering from an illness, finds himself thrust into a knife fight. All of these stories include moments of violence. The violence of these stories tends to be secondary to the overall plot. However, the existence of

violence in these stories is important to the plot as it provides motivation for the various characters within the stories. Violence is a theme of these stories because of its important role in each story.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the majority of the stories is the first person. The narrator in these novels is most often the writer, Borges, making this point of view an authorial point of view. Many of these stories are formatted to appear to be non-fiction articles, critiquing the writings of other writers or discussing the impact of these writings on literature. In many of these stories, the writings being critiqued are imaginary, but the style and the point of view make the writings seem real, giving the stories some authenticity. Other stories are written in the third person. These stories are more traditional narratives, short stories with a typical beginning, middle, and end. As with the first person point of view, these stories also contain an authorial voice, giving the impression that even in the third person, the writer is still inserting himself into the story.

The points of view in these stories work because they are all consistent throughout the story in which they appear. When the author begins in the first person, he stays with the first person throughout the story. When the author begins in the third person, again he remains consistent throughout the story. The first person point of view also works because in the stories in which this point of view is utilized, the author is often writing as though the story is a non-fiction article and this point of view gives the story authenticity, almost tricking the reader into believing what the story is trying to project. The third-person point of view is omniscient, allowing the reader to see the emotions and thoughts of the characters, offering an intimacy that is essential to short stories. This point of view is effective in these stories as it offers this intimacy and it lends the story a sense of narration that might not be possible with another point of view.

Setting

There are many different settings within this collection of stories. The most frequently seen setting is large cities within Argentina. These settings are secondary to the plot of the story, however, and are not described in great detail. Other settings include imaginary planets, such as Tlon in the first story, Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius, and imaginary places such as the library in *The Library of Babel*. These settings tend to be described in deep detail because they are an essential piece of the overall plot of the story. In the final story, *The South*, the setting shifts throughout the story, but the ranch that the protagonist is attempting to reach is such an integral part of the plot that reader feels it is a major setting to the story even though the ranch is never actually seen and is never fully described in detail.

The settings of these stories all play a different role depending on which story they appear in. The settings of the more fantastic stories, such as *Tlon*, *Uqbar*, *Orbis Tertius*, are essential to the overall plot because the plot moves on the narrator's belief that these places exist. In other stories, however, the setting is secondary to the story, only



existing because the story has to take place somewhere. Finally, there are settings that never appear in detail in the stories but play an essential part because of the way the protagonist feels about the setting. Although each setting has a different role in each of the stories, all the settings are important to the overall plots of the stories. The writer handles each setting with expert ease, making each setting work perfectly within the story in which it appears.

Language and Meaning

The language of each story is stilted, proper English. The stories were originally written in Spanish and translated into English, therefore some phrases are awkward and difficult for the reader to comprehend on a single reading. The stories were also written in the first few decades of the twentieth century, in a time when language was more than just a device to tell a story; therefore many of the phrases and sentence structure are more elaborate than the modern reader might be accustomed to.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the time and language in which the stories were originally written. The language is flowery at times and flows roughly to the modern reader's ear. However, the language has its own simple elegance that word lovers will enjoy reading over and over again. The stories are not written for casual reading and the casual reader might find the language difficult to comprehend. However, the language works because it is the type of language a reader might expect to be found in such classic tales by a classic author.

Structure

The book includes seventeen stories that are divided into two parts. The first part, named for one of the stories, includes eight stories that all have some kind of common thread running through them. The common thread for the first eight stories is fantasy. The second part, called *Artifices*, includes nine stories. These stories are less fantastic and more narrative, some mysteries and others philosophical. Each story is fairly short, most consisting of less than eight pages. All the stories are told with a great deal of exposition with only a few containing small snatches of dialogue.

The structure of the book works because it groups common stories together in a way that the writer wanted them to be presented to the reader. Each part also begins with a prologue in which the writer uses a paragraph or two to describe the following stories to the reader, perhaps to give the reader a sense of the experience they are about to undertake. Each story in each part of the book seems to build on the one before, giving the reader a sense of continuity. Finally, the structure of the book puts similar stories together, taking away the sense of randomness another structure might create and making the stories easier to understand and read.



Quotes

"Then Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had stated that mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of man."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius, pg. 17

"He did not want to compose another Don Quixote—which would be easy—but the Don Quixote. It is necessary to add that his aim was never to produce a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable ambition was to produce pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote, pgs. 48-49

"He walked toward the sheets of flame. They did not bite his flesh, they caressed him and flooded him without heat or combustion. With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he also was an illusion, that someone else was dreaming him."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Circular Ruins, pg. 63

"Like all men in Babylon I have been a proconsul; like all, a slave; I have also known omnipotence, opprobrium, jail. Look: the index finger of my right hand is missing. Look again: through this rent in my cape you can see a ruddy tattoo on my belly."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Babylon Lottery, pg. 65

"The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps an infinite, number of hexagonal galleries, with enormous ventilation shafts in the middle, encircled by very low railings."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Library of Babel, pg. 79

"He knew that my problem was to shout, with my feeble voice, above the tumult of war, the name of the city called Albert, and that I had no other course open to me than to kill someone of that name. He does not know, for no one can, of my infinite penitence and sickness of the heart."
Part One, The Garden of Forking Paths, The Garden of Forking Paths, pg. 101

"I remember him (I scarcely have the right to use this ghostly verb; only one man on earth deserved the right, and he is dead), I remember him with a dark passionflower in his hand, looking at it as no one has ever looked at such a flower, though they might look from the twilight of day until the twilight of night, for a whole life long."
Part Two, Artifices, Funes, The Memorious, pg. 107



"His face was crossed with a rancorous scar: a nearly perfect ashen arc which sank into his temple on one side of his cheek on the other."

Part Two, Artifices, The Form of the Sword, pg. 117

"In Nolan's work, the passages imitated from Shakespeare are the least dramatic; Ryan suspects that the author interpolated them so that one person, in the future, might realize the truth. He understands that he, too, forms part of Nolan's plan...At the end of some tenacious caviling, he resolves to keep silent his discovery. He publishes a book dedicated to the glory of the hero; this, too, no doubt was foreseen."

Part Two, Artifices, Theme of the Traitor and Hero, pg. 127

"He stepped back a few paces. Then, very carefully, he fired."

Part Two, Artifices, Death and the Compass, pg. 141

"He asked God for an entire year in which to finish his work: His omnipotence had granted him the time. For his sake, God projected a secret miracle: German lead would kill him, at the determined hour, but in his mind a year would elapse between the command to fire and its execution. From perplexity he passed to stupor, from stupor to resignation, from resignation to sudden gratitude."

Part Two, Artifices, The Secret Miracle, pg. 149

"As he crossed the threshold, he felt that to die in a knife fight, under the open sky, and going forward to the attack, would have been a liberation, a joy, and a festive occasion, on the first night in the sanitarium, when they stuck him with the needle. He felt that if he had been able to choose, then, or to dream his death, this would have been the death he would have chosen or dreamt." Part Two, Artifices, The South, pg. 174



Topics for Discussion

What is Uqbar? Why does Uqbar appear in only one version of the encyclopedia? How does the narrator connect Uqbar to Tlon? Are they connected? Who created these places? Why? Where did the artifacts of Tlon come from if Tlon is imaginary? Why is the narrator convinced that Tlon is taking over the world? Is he right? What does his warning suggest for mankind?

Who is Al-Mu'tasim? What is the significance of this story? How does Al-Mu'tasim compare to other stories of pilgrimages? What story would you compare Al-Mu'tasim to? What is the writer trying to say about religion in this story? What is your opinion about the writer's beliefs in religion based on this story?

Discuss The Circular Ruins. Who is the man who arrives at the ruins? Why does he sleep so much? What is the man attempting to achieve? How is this man's child born? Why does this man send his child out into the world? What is this man's ultimate goal? When the fire comes, why does it not injure the man? What are his conclusions about this fire? What does the end mean to the man's son?

Discuss the Library of Babel. What is the library? What is the significance of the library and its contents? Who protects the books of the library? Should the books be protected? What is the significance of the one book that will decipher all the others? What does this book symbolize? What are the Purifiers attempting to do in this story? Why does the narrator believe their task is impossible? How does this apply to real life?

Discuss Funes, The Memorious. Who is Funes? What happens to Funes? Why does Funes believe he is aware of everything in the world? What does this have to do with his inability to sleep? What does this say about insomnia? Why does Funes die? What is the implication of his death?

Discuss the Secret Miracle. When the man is about to be executed, why does time stop? What causes this? How does the man use this to finish his story? Does this have an impact on anyone else? What does this story imply about life? What does this story imply about time?

Discuss The South. What happens in this story? Why is the man taken to the hospital? How does this hospitalization affect the narrator's perception of life? Why is the man harassed by the men in the general store? Why does the man not walk away from the conflict? Why does the man embrace the knife fight even though he suspects he cannot survive? How might he have approached this fight before his hospitalization? What does this story say about the way a man perceives life?