

“The Greatest Trick the Devil Ever Played”: Borges’ “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” as Metaphor for the Construction of the Narrative of Imperial America

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Abstract

As Hernán Díaz points out in *Borges: Between History and Eternity* (2012), Borges wrote and thought prolifically about the literature, philosophy, popular culture, and history of North America: “from his first book of essays to his last [...] there is a vast Borgesian corpus dealing with the American tradition” (p.p.73-78). This paper will explore deconstruction-based theories of narrative construction of personal and collective history as a background for Borges’ short story “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*”. I will discuss that the narrator Borges in the short story becomes one who “omit[s] or disfigure[s] the facts” of American history so as to “permit a few readers [...] to perceive an atrocious or banal reality” revealed by the short story acting as a monstrous “mirror spy[ing] upon us”. Borges’ fusion of autobiography and fiction in the short story embodies the use of “false facts” to reveal the banal historical reality that the conspirators of *Tlön* symbolize the European thinkers and American political leaders that shaped America’s historical narrative. The result is a reading of Borges’ “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” as Marxist deconstruction of the American Dream.

Key Words: *Borges, Tlön, America, United States, metaphor, deconstruction, imperialism*

“El truco más grande que jamás haya jugado el diablo”: “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” de Borges como metáfora para la construcción de la narrativa de la América imperial

Resumen

Como Hernán Díaz señala en *Borges: Between History and Eternity* (2012), Borges escribió y pensó prolíficamente sobre la literatura, la filosofía, la cultura popular y la historia de América del Norte: “desde su primer libro de ensayos hasta el último [...] hay un vasto cuerpo borgesiano que trata sobre la tradición americana” (pp. 73-78). Este artículo explorará las teorías basadas en la deconstrucción de la construcción narrativa de la historia personal y colectiva como telón de fondo del cuento de Borges “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*”. Discutiré que el narrador Borges en el cuento se convierte en uno que “omite o desfigura los hechos” de la historia estadounidense para “permitir que algunos lectores [...] perciban una realidad atroz o banal” revelada por la corta historia que actúa como un monstruoso “espejo que nos espía”. La fusión de Borges de la autobiografía y la ficción en el cuento representa el uso de “datos falsos” para revelar la realidad histórica banal de que los conspiradores de *Tlön* simbolizan los pensadores

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Europeos y los líderes políticos estadounidenses que dieron forma a la narrativa histórica de Estados Unidos. El resultado es una lectura de "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" de Borges como deconstrucción marxista del sueño americano.

Palabras clave: *Borges, Tlön, América, Estados Unidos, metáfora, deconstrucción, imperialismo*

Jorge Luis Borges explains on the first page of his first chapter (titled "Origins") of his collection of essay fragments *An Introduction to American Literature* (1973) that

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Berkeley formulated in a poem a cyclical theory of history: he maintained that empires, like the sun, go from east to west ("Westward the course of empire takes its way") and that the last and greatest empire of history, conceived as a tragedy in five acts, would be that of America. (p.p. 5-6).

In Borges' mind, Berkeley-ean idealism, the project of empire building, and a cyclical theory of history are situated at the very opening of American literary history. Over twenty-five years before, Jorge Luis Borges' short story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1940),ⁱ focuses its opening paragraph on another trilogy of ideas: a mirror, an idea for a novel, and an encyclopedia. The short story's narrator Borges states that,

I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia. [...] The event took place some five years ago. Bioy Casares had had dinner with me that evening and we became lengthily engaged in a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions, which would permit a few readers - very few readers - to perceive an atrocious or banal reality. (TUOT p. 3).

I will argue that the trinity of ideas in both of these works parallel each other in that the fictional short story "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius," is in essence an allegorical or metaphorical representation of Borges' diagnosis that the history of the United States ends up fulfilling Berkeley's prediction (as espoused by Borges) in the essay fragment "Origins." The narrator Borges in the short story becomes the narrator who "omit[s] or disfigure[s] the facts" of American history so as to "permit a few readers [...] to perceive an atrocious or banal reality" revealed by the short story acting as a monstrous "mirror spy[ing] upon us". Borges' fusion of autobiography and fiction in the short story embodies the use of false facts to reveal the banal historical reality that the conspirators of Tlön symbolize the European thinkers and American political leaders that shaped America's historical narrative.

In his short essay, "Note on Walt Whitman", Borges writes, "A false fact can be essentially true. [...] the fact, perhaps false, can be true as a symbol [...] Nietzsche would reply that the important considera-

tion is the change an idea can cause in us, not the formulation of it" (p. 71). But what is the underlying idea causing change? As the short story unfolds, it becomes apparent that Tlön is the idea causing change in the people of the short story's world. However, what is the essential truth Tlön symbolizes for Borges' audiences? This essay will argue that Tlön is a metaphor for America, that is, the cultural-historical narrative of the United States and its eventual development into an expansive-imperial agenda. The essay will first explore Borges' methods of writing fiction to highlight his narratives' ideological foundation as a precursor of deconstruction and this foundation's implications on fictional and historical narratives, then what metaphor means within this worldview, and finally how these factors set up a short story of fantasy fiction as an allegorical critique of U.S. history and foreign policy.

I.

Borges' method of writing his short fiction is one of false facts or blending fact and fiction to such an extent as to create intertextual labyrinths wherein his readers might get lost between layers of facticity, meaning, and reference. Beatriz Sarlo's book *Borges, a Writer on the Edge* (2001) explains his method of crafting narrative as follows:

Borges orders [his] material through false attributions to a mixture of existing and invented texts, and the introduction of many of his real-life friends. Thus, the limits between what really happened, what could have happened, and what could never happen are interwoven through a method of verisimilitude [...] that questions the status of reality [...] opens up the problem of the conditions and limits of knowledge and understanding [...] not only to interpret the world but also to modify the way it is perceived and the way it exists. (no pag.)

As Sarlo explains above, Borges' short stories depict notions of "reality" conceived of as idealist-materialist hybrid narratives wherein products of the imagination fill in the gaps in facticity as a means of stimulating questions in his audiences, questions about whether people perceive and know the world or construct at least partially if not wholly fictitious narratives about it. According to Sarlo, Borges achieves this by "weaving" together in his stories elements from his autobiographical existence (e.g. friends, locations he lived in, books he has read), historical facts (e.g. events that can be verified), and products of his fantastical imagi-

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Along a similar vein to Sarlo’s reading of Borges, J. Hillis Miller argues in his seminal essay “Narrative and History” (1974) that works of fiction and historians’ understanding of “world” history are structured through similar processes and according to shared Western assumptions of agency, causality, time, and other such fundamental metaphysical concepts. J. Hillis Miller explains that

The assumptions about history which have been transferred to the traditional conception of the form of fiction [...] include the notions of origin and end (“archeology” and “teleology”); of unity and totality or “totalization”; of underlying “reason” or “ground”; of selfhood, consciousness, or “human nature”; of the homogeneity, linearity, and continuity of time; of necessary progress; of “fate,” “destiny,” or “Providence”; of causality; of gradually emerging “meaning”; of representation and truth- in short, all those assumptions made about world history. [...] The set of assumptions common to both Western ideas of history and Western ideas of fiction are [...] a true system, in the sense that each implies all the others. No one of them may be shaken or solicited, without a simultaneous putting in question of all the others. (p.p. 459-461).

As a deconstructionist, Hillis Miller views all forms of narrative (fictional and historical) as constructions of causality and meaning out of a loose association of sequential events. Hillis Miller, in other words, does not mean to suggest that the basic facts in history such as the existence of a person or the taking place of a major event never occurred. Instead, he is making clear that “the narrating of an historical sequence in one way or another involves a constructive, interpretative, fictive act” (p. 461), that operates under the same assumptions Westerners have about fictional narratives. These assumptions include that a chronology of events involving a beginning, middle, and end exists; that there is some element of agency or control in the outcomes brought about by the decisions of human

beings; that the disclosing of some hidden meaning takes place over time; and that the end of a narrative portrays some preordained fate or destiny (Hillis Miller, 1974, p. 460).

Hillis Miller continues by explaining, “Historians have always known that history and the narrative of history never wholly coincide,” leading some writers to work towards “deliberately abolish[ing]” “the system of assumptions about history [...] that] has had [such a] great coercive power to bewitch” (p. 461). Among these deconstructionists, Hillis Miller names Borges as an example of writers whose “unravelling has also been a dismantling of the basic metaphor [...] of history;” a raising of “questions about the key assumptions of story-telling,” and a “deconstruct[ing] of] naïve notions about history or about the writing of history” (p. 462).

One example of Borges explicitly working to expose these “naïve notions about history or about the writing of history” arises in his short critical analysis of the works of Leon Bloy titled “The Mirror of the Enigmas” (1940- the same year as “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”). Borges postulates that a Christian doctrine that continues to dominate the West even in its secular age is “the notion that the Sacred Scriptures possess” a symbolic meaning concerning the true historical events that they narrate (p.127). This notion entails “that as men acted out those events they were blindly performing a secret drama determined and premeditated by God” so “that the history of the universe – and our lives and the most trifling detail of our lives – has an un conjecturable, symbolic meaning,” where “the collaboration of chance is calculable at zero” and “impervious to contingency” (p.p. 127-28). However, Borges goes on to make it clear that “It is doubtful that the world has a meaning,” even a literal one, and even “more doubtful still [...] that it has a double and a triple meaning” (p.128). Thus, it becomes clear that Borges recognizes in this short essay that the Christian-influenced idealism of Westerners unconsciously implements the process of metaphor, approaching a Godless, meaninglessly arbitrary reality as a text imbued with purpose and seeking its meaning, constructing reality as such because it is perceived as such.

In “The Hedonic Reader: Literary Theory of Jorge Luis Borges” (1980), Nicolas Shumway and Thomas Sant write,

In 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' ('Berkeley at the Crossroads') Borges comments that Berkeley is 'the very source of my own thought.' (I, 109) To be sure, [...] though he accepted the doctrine of *esse est percipere*, he rejected the good Bishop's theistic conclusion [...] From these premises, that perceptibility is the being of things and that reality exists only within the perceiver, Borges concludes that nothing apart from the human imagination can be considered a source or 'ground' of art. Art does not mirror reality in the sense of reflecting something externally present because reality is a function of the mind and is inextricably linked to imagination. (p.p. 40-41).

For Borges, the imaginative process of metaphor making (to be discussed in more detail shortly) in literature and art very much mirrors the process of "reality" making in perception, the only differences being that the former is a mostly conscious process producing "fictional" narratives while the latter is a mostly unconscious process producing "autobiographical" and/or "historical" narratives. Literature/art is a constructed layer of metaphorical narrative that reflects on another constructed layer of metaphorical narrative called reality, with the bare minimum of sense data to ground or source it all. Borges' work as proto-deconstruction endeavors to expose the Western cultural assumptions governing its metaphysical and historical narratives as processes of metaphor construction.

Although Borges' project of historical deconstruction of Western cultural assumptions characterizes most (if not all) of the short stories in Borges' collection *Labyrinths* as well as his corpus of work in general,ⁱⁱ it is perhaps best epitomized by the short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."ⁱⁱⁱ In particular, Borges' short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" deconstructs the historical narrative of "America". The story's three century old conspiracy to invent a fictional country (then later revised to a planet whose artifacts and texts gradually materialize) serves for Borges as a metaphor that parallels the ways that the United States generated its own national/cultural historical narrative, then expanded this narrative as a form of cultural and epistemological imperialism.

II.

James W. Underhill explains in his historical survey of the various ways of understanding metaphor, *Creating Worldviews: Metaphor, Ideology, and Language* (2011), that "In the traditional framework, metaphor becomes a sign which is replaced or displaced by another sign. The literal meaning is cancelled out or transformed by the metaphorical meaning" (p. 35). The correspondence theory of knowledge (i.e. that knowledge or the signified and language or the signifier correspond to externally existent realities known

as referents) underlies the traditional framework of metaphor. However, during modernity, Hume's skepticism concerning the certainty of a human knowledge reliant on induction and Kant's assertion that human minds remain within the phenomenal world of subjective sensible appearances (the signified) and synthetic statements of personal judgement (the signifier), never reaching the noumenal world of things-in-themselves (referents), undermined the correspondence theory underlying the traditional framework of metaphor. By the time of the semiotics of post-modern thought (as in the deconstruction of J. Hillis Miller), there is no longer an original literal meaning that is being replaced just as in Borges literary artistic construction relies on its inspiration in (not existent reality but instead) constructed narratives perceived as reality.

For Hillis Miller (1974), Western narrative, be it fictional or historical, is itself always already a self-effaced metaphor based in the series of metaphysical assumptions previously discussed. He writes, "the regular and inevitable appearance of these overt metaphors whenever the system [of assumptions about narrative] is being expressed reveals the fact that the system is itself a metaphor, a figure whose originally metaphorical or fictive character has been effaced" (p. 460). Human beings have traditionally remained unaware of the fact that drafting fictional stories, generating phenomenological autobiographies, and formulating historical narratives are themselves processes of metaphor. Human beings project onto arbitrarily occurring/contingently selected events in time the sequentiality and rules assumed essential in narrative, intentionality, narrative structure, and perception woven together through a process of production, often forgetting this process. Silvia G. Dapia explains this concept in "'This Is Not a Universe': An Approach to Borges' 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'" (1997),

In Borges's story, humanity forgets once again that languages and systems do not reflect the true 'catalogue of the world' and that, instead, the catalogues of our languages and systems shape our understanding of the world [...] and must conclude that we will never have access to the world but only to a construction of the world. [...] Borges infinitely postpones the possibility of arriving at the world as it is. (p.p. 105-106).

The process of narrative construction as a means of "perceiving reality" is a process of metaphor making. For example, human beings experience the inner, mental process of making an object out of clay or wood: they picture what they will make, find the materials, work those materials to produce the desired object, then enjoy the fulfillment of completion.

Human beings process the events in their personal or collective experiences by applying that same schematic as a metaphor to personal and collective chronologies, the schematic of the process of making. They remain unaware of this entire process, assuming it to be an autonomous perception of the world “as it is,” however.

Modern precursors to post-structuralism and deconstruction like Borges recognize the process of metaphor underlying autobiographical and historical narratives as a subjective process of construction. Underhill (2011) writes that as early as Wittgenstein the “philosophy of language was elaborated to a great extent using the metaphor of ‘language games’ in which ‘players’ learned the ‘rules’ necessary to allow them to communicate within given contexts” (p. 33). Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) expands on Wittgenstein’s idea of language games. Lyotard explains that all fields of knowledge or modes of discourse end up being language games wherein what constitutes the legitimate, true, or just is determined by the rules of that particular language game (p. 8). Thus, “every utterance should be thought of as a move in a game [...] to speak is to fight in the sense of playing,” and the rules “are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players” (p. 10). Whether the field of knowledge falls under the general domains of scientific knowledge or of narrative knowledge, “knowledge has become the principle force of production,” leading “experts” to stack the deck of language games against developing countries (p. 5). Lyotard anticipates that “the gap between developed and developing countries will grow ever wider in the future” to such an extent that nation-states and multinational corporations “will fight for control of information” and open up new fields for producing previously unforeseen “industrial and commercial [...] and political and military strategies” (p. 5).

However, through the examples of idealists like Plato and Hegel, Lyotard exposes how Western language games always justify themselves by Platonic “noble lies” (see *The Republic* Books II and II, in particular 414c-417a [1996]), that is, by grand narratives or metanarratives depicting game players as heroes of truth or heroes of liberty (Lyotard, 1984, p.p. 30-34). Often, these grand narratives blur the lines of fact and fiction by mythologizing historical events into allegorical (i.e. metaphorical) narratives espousing the cultural values meant to be internalized by those under the domain of the language game. Accordingly, in Borges’ short story “Tlön...”, “the letter completely elucidat[ing] the mystery of Tlön” written by Or-

bis Tertius member Gunnar Erfjord characterizes the conspirators behind Tlön’s fabrication and infiltration of the narrator’s reality as “a secret and benevolent society” (TUOT p. 15), coupling esoteric exclusivism with the noble lie of a heroic benevolence.

However, the metaphors of allegorical grand narratives do not displace an original factual narrative of any kind since narrative by its very essence is already an act of allegorizing, a process of metaphor by its very nature, as discussed by J. Hillis Miller above. Underhill (2011) expands on this by writing,

Metaphor has already eclipsed reality. Meaning, context-bound, is generated within the scope of established patterns of speech [...] language consists in leaving concrete reality behind and in establishing networks of meaning which can serve as layers upon which further layers of meaning can be superimposed. Such layers can be conceived of as springboards from which we can jump to other dimensions by generating not ‘real’ connections but meaningful patterns within the language system. (p. 37).

III.

The narrator Borges echoes this same idea when he explains how Tlön’s, “methodical fabrication [...] has made possible the interrogations and even the modification of the past, which is now no less plastic and docile than the future [...] Things become duplicated in Tlön; they also tend to become effaced and lose their details” (TUOT p. 14). Human beings duplicate the external events of the material universe through the construction of internal perceptions along the parameters of a conceptual scheme composed of internalized narratives, weaving these new experiences into the networks of narrative meaning already in place. Conversion of a person does not involve a disclosing of truth, but rather the infiltration of “object[s] produced through suggestion, educed by hope” (TUOT p. 14), into preexisting narrative realities, the kernels of a new ideological narrative, an infiltration of old narrative schemes by new false facts that bring about a change.

Eventually, in Borges’s short story, Tlön’s artifacts, texts, and language increasingly infiltrate the narrator’s spatial-temporal reality, suggesting that this once fictional world will eventually replace the “real” one (TUOT p.p. 16-18). Tlön’s artifacts, texts, and language symbolize the false facts that introduce foreign layers of constructed historical narrative as process of metaphor to form newly accepted “networks of meaning”. Tlön’s artifacts, texts, and language infiltrating the “real world” represent the “leaving [a prior accepted] concrete reality behind” as a means of “springboards from which we can jump to other

dimensions". However, the "fact" that the narrator's "real world" is itself merely a simulation in the reader's mind composed of the narrator's words typed out by Borges the writer emphasizes that "Metaphor has already eclipsed reality. Meaning, context-bound, is generated within the scope of established patterns of speech which do not require a return to literal meaning" (Underhill, 2011, p. 37). Metaphor and language by their very immediacy in the process of human cognition undermine and encroach upon human experience of the externally real, a phenomenon further complicated by the political dimensions of language and culture discussed by Lyotard earlier. Borges writes in his fragment "A Short Comment on August 23, 1944," "for Europeans and Americans, one order – and only one – is possible: it used to be called Rome and now it is called Western Culture" (p.135). The project of Americans, a project descended from Europe, is one of ordering the multiplicity of narrative voices into a single narrative, that of Western culture.

The encroachment of Tlön's artifacts, texts, and language on the narrator's reality reveal the imperial dimension to Borges' short story. Careful readers of Borges must recognize this point as echoed by his later literary fragment "On Exactitude in Science,"^{iv} which briefly describes a species of cartographers whose demand for perfection "In time, [...] struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it". In the short story "Tlön...", written descriptions of the spatial geography and temporal history of a fictional world in the plot undermines and replaces the narrator's "real world" of the framing narrative. In the fragment "On Exactitude in Science," an idealized geographic representation of a space (i.e. a nation's topography, an Empire's political reach, etc.) covers over and replaces the physically given, natural country it depicts. Conspiratorial encyclopedists manufacture the virtual, fictitious Tlön into an invasive ontological replacement; imperial cartographers duplicate the Empire's cartographic dimensions as an eclipsing spatial replacement. Both groups fabricate, through the process of symbolic metaphor, simulations that test the limits of the possibility of human knowledge of the real through the perfectibility of linguistic and cartographic representation. In both cases, we have the products of representation by the human mind incarnating into tangible realities then undermining and replacing what was originally given as substantial and real, like Baudrillard's simulation overtaking its original reality. Given the number of similarities and parallels, Borges himself, then, equates Tlön's encyclopedists with the cartographers of empire.

The conspiracy to fabricate Tlön and Uqbar by the group referring to itself as Orbis Tertius represents Borges' take on the history of the American historical narrative as empire building. The trajectory of Tlön in the story depicts America's (i.e. the United States) infant formulation of the New World as an appropriated European Edenic/utopian dream, this American Dream's expansion through North America via the Manifest Destiny narrative, and its final conquest of the globe by its spread through the global consumption of its corporate products and media-based texts. In essence, the conspiracy to build Tlön, first in the imagination, then textually, and finally materially, parallels and represents the European-derived historical narrative of the United States. Tlön's origins as brief entries concerning a region in the land of Uqbar placed in randomly selected encyclopedia volumes (TUOT p.p. 3-5, 15) represents an inverse of the task of Renaissance European readers to discern the veracity of European explorers' journals and letters like those of Columbus, Magellan, and Cortes from the fictional travel narratives of writers like John Mandeville, Thomas More, Thommaso Campanella, Daniel Defoe, and Francis Bacon. In particular, Bioy's presentation of the narrator's first exposure to a text mentioning Tlön as a sub region of Uqbar in imprecise geographic terms (TUOT p.p. 4-5), is reminiscent of the vague yet faintly Edenic descriptions of the Caribbean Islands in Christopher Columbus' *Four Voyages to the New World: Select Letters* (1492-1504). However, the encyclopedia's errors of geographically placing among "Khorasan, Armenia, Erzerum [...] in an ambiguous way [...] to fix the boundaries of Uqbar [by] its nebulous reference points [...] to the lowlands of Tsai Kaldun and the Axa Delta" (TUOT p. 5), ring more like the fictional travels in Asia Minor and the Middle East of the pseudonymous John Mandeville (1357-1371), a text carried by Columbus on his first voyage to the New World. In addition, the narrator's cataloging of the religious and philosophical beliefs, linguistic patterns, and literature of the people of Tlön (TUOT p.p. 8-14), mimic the cataloging of indigenous cultures recorded in such texts as Hernan Cortes' *Cartas y relaciones de Hernan Cortés al emperador Carlos V* (1485-1547) and Bartolome de las Casas' *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552).

Borges seems to suggest that the endeavor to map and catalog the world's geography and its peoples during the Age of Exploration would give rise to the pursuit of cataloging all bits of knowledge into the encyclopedias of the Age of Enlightenment. To

name, catalog, narrate, dissect, explain all things is to exercise power and control of how they are perceived. Sixteenth and seventeenth century European explorers' control of their own narratives to mask their desires to attain "gold, glory, and God" with the narrative of the adventure of discovering every inch of the globe would birth its eighteenth-century successor in the scientific publication of the encyclopedia. The power of travel narratives to legitimate European ideology and its use of violence while simultaneously delegitimizing indigenous worldviews and their rights to use violence to preserve their ways of life gave way to science's endeavor to legislate the language games of human discourse into legitimate European scientific knowledge and illegitimate indigenous narrative knowledge.

The underlying philosophical idealism required to enable such ideological imperialism on indigenous peoples first by means of Christianity then by means of materialist science is attested to by Borges' numerous citations of and allusions to George Berkeley. Sheldon Brivic writes in his essay "Borges' 'Orbis Tertius'" (1975),

Critics have generally agreed in interpreting "Tlön . . ." as an expression of radical idealism influenced by Berkeley [...] This reading of the story as an illustration of the power of imagination to create new realities is quite sound [...] comparing the world which Borges projects to the non-Western worlds of the Hopi and other tribes [...] idealism and primitivism tend to share many attitudes. Perhaps the principal shared attitude is a potentially rebellious belief in something other than what we usually call ordinary reality the reality which gives orders [...] the traditional connotation of *orbis tertius would be tertia regna* the infernal regions or underworld, the realm of Hades as opposed to those of Zeus and Poseidon. [...] the non-Western world and its culture have often looked infernal from the point of view of European civilization. When one culture conquers another, the deities of the defeated group tend to be converted into demons, as witness the links between paganism and witchcraft. (p.p. 390-392).

Although Brivic's points about the idealism inherent in many indigenous cultures and their religions' gods' relegation to demonic statuses in Western ideologies are valid, his conclusion that Tlön and its *Orbis Tertius* symbolize non-Western idealism as a "rebellion against a reality that orders" is too simply dualistic. Brivic's conclusion ignores the fact that idealism seems universally present in all of non-Western and Western cultures of the human race. Borges alludes to this in the Epilogue to his collection of essays *Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952*, "the number of fables or metaphors of which men's imagination is capable is limited, but these few inventions can be all things

for all men" (p. 189). The *Orbis Tertius* organizing Tlön's infiltration of the narrator's world is not the third world of developing countries (an anachronistic equation that Brivic [1975] admits on page 391), but rather the third world from the sun, Earth. Moreover, Brivic fails to recognize that the idealism behind the ideologies, texts, and artifacts of Tlön are the ones colonizing the narrator's South American reality, not vice versa. Brivic (1975) also neglects the fact that the idealists (e.g. Berkeley, Schopenhauer, and others) that the narrator compares to those of Tlön are European, not non-Western or indigenous. The idealism required for believing that the entire Earth can be reshaped according to the metaphorical narratives of a "secret and benevolent society (amongst whose members were Dalgarno and later George Berkeley)" "in the early seventeenth century" (TUOT p. 15), can only represent the messianic delusions of a Western utopian ideology driving the European exploration and conquest of the New World, birthing the narrative of America.

Borges' reference to "the early seventeenth century" above should evoke specifically the transition from the exploration of the New World to its colonization as British colonies (e.g. Jamestown, Virginia 1607 and the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1620). The European explorers' views of the New World and its indigenous populations as blank canvases of raw material for conversion, exploitation, and/or removal was shared subsequently by colonists, reified into political structures by an elite of white land owning "Christian" freethinkers, then proliferated throughout the world via the U.S.'s political, military, economic, technological, and media policies, innovations, and narratives. As Hernan Díaz points out in *Borges: Between History and Eternity* (2012), Borges wrote and thought prolifically about the literature, philosophy, popular culture, and history of North America: "from his first book of essays to his last [...] there is a vast Borgesian corpus dealing with the American tradition" (p.p. 73-78). In a lecture titled "Nathaniel Hawthorne", Borges himself chooses to "begin the history of American literature with the history of a metaphor [...] the one that compares dreams to a theatrical performance" (p. 47). He then proceeds to explain the metaphor through two literary allusions: Addison's remark that "When the soul dreams, it is the theater, the actors, and the audience" and Khayyam's idea that "the history of the world is a play that God [...] contrives, enacts, and beholds" (p.p. 47-48). Borges relies on idealism to explain the American literary tradition, an idealism that equates the human imagination's omnipotence in constructing dreams

and literature with the divine omnipotence in creating the material universe.

Ten years earlier, in "Avatars of the Tortoise," Borges quotes the German idealist poet Novalis, "The greatest sorcerer would be the one who bewitched himself to the point of taking his own phantasmagorias for autonomous apparitions. Would this not be true of us?" then responds by admitting, "I believe that it is. We (the undivided divinity that operates within us) have dreamed the world" (p. 115). Once again, it is evident that Borges believes humans generate internal "plays" or narratives to make sense of life's events wherein they are simultaneously the playwrights, stage, actors, and audience. The narrator Borges in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," as a fictionalized version of Borges the writer, represents the synthesis and fabrication that takes place within human consciousness during the process of metaphor that generates internal life narratives and a sense of self-identity. Given the narrator's friendship and collaboration in the story with a character named Bioy Casares, a fictionalized version of Borges' biographical friend and collaborator of the same name, a similar synthesis and fabrication via process of metaphor occurs in the mental representation of others. The series of events leading to the "discovery of Uqbar" and thereby of Tlön's conspiracy begins with a discussion of a "novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers – very few readers – to perceive an atrocious or banal reality" (TUOT p. 3). The construction of a narrative "in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions" obviously applies to the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" that Borges wrote as well as that of Tlön's conspiracy that the narrator Borges relates.

This discussion of such a narrative segues to the postulation "in the late hours of the night" of the "monstrous" nature of the "mirror [that] spied upon us," which leads to Bioy's introduction of Uqbar and *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia* (TUOT p. 3). The discussion of a novel of this type in "conjunction [with] a mirror and an encyclopedia" (TUOT p. 3), lead the narrator Borges to "the discovery of Uqbar" and Tlön's conspiracy. This "move" in Borges' language game establishes the short story's structure as a *mise-en-abyme* (a frame narrative or story within a story whereby the layers of narrative copy an image, symbol, or structure, acting like mirrors facing one another, reduplicating tropes or concepts in a recurrence). Sarlo (2001) writes, "Here Borges cleverly brings together two objects, the mirror and the ency-

rence). Sarlo (2001) writes, "Here Borges cleverly brings together two objects, the mirror and the encyclopedia, which can construct *mise-en-abyme* images: the encyclopedia is a conceptual mirror of a world" (no pag.), as is the story that contains the encyclopedia that contains the story of Tlön. Through a sequence of loose mental associations, all four (e.g. the short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the novel discussed by the narrator Borges and the character Bioy, the mirror in the hall, and Bioy's *Anglo-American Cyclopedia*) reflect "reality" as something "atrocious," "monstrous," or "banal". The "banal reality" that this labyrinthine mirror embedded into the structure of the short story reveals to Borges' readers is how this same process of metaphor as narrative construction used by Borges and the Tlön conspirators applies to human beings' personal mental construction internal autobiographies and that collective peoples utilize to draft national/cultural histories.

Borges' Tlön conspiracy represents an analysis of American history that rests on a recognition that this same process occurs in the history of America, only on a global level with the intent of converting the entire human race to the same narrative. The literary and political history of the United States consists of an American idealist derivative of the British imperialism from which the colonies originally sprang. The narrator Borges refers to Bioy's textual point of departure for tracing Tlön's conspiracy as "fallaciously called *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia* (New York, 1917) [...] a literal but delinquent reprint of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1902" (TUOT p. 3). Borges and Bioy's discovery of a new country begins with an "Anglo-American" encyclopedia that claims to define all of reality and non-reality within its covers, a language game meant to legitimate certain narratives and delegitimize others. It is no accident that the text first unveiling Uqbar as a country is an "Anglo-American" "literal but delinquent reprint of" a British source text, a reflection upon the American people and their worldview as embodying a derivative deviation from their English colonizing point of origin. To use Borges' own phrasing from "Nathaniel Hawthorne" and "Avatars of the Tortoise," the further development of the history of Tlön's symbolizes an American narrative that "dreams the history of the world" as a global play, based on the pursuit of its Manifest Destiny to absorb the Earth as its "theater, actors, and audience".

The significance of the *Anglo-American Cyclopedia's* publication date in 1917 possibly lies in the U.S.'s involvement in World War I and that year's U.S. State of the Union Address, both evidence of American interventionism. The increase of American

interventionism. The increase of American interventionism inadvertently cooled U.S.-Argentina relations by contradicting and undermining Woodrow Wilson's plans for an isolationist Pan American Pact (a proposal to further fortify the Americas against European or Asian influence under the U.S. leadership first begun by 1823's Monroe Doctrine). Further, these acts led to Argentina's attempt at a Conference of the Americas designed to aim at international neutrality, free from U.S. self-serving leadership (Stimson, 1917). During World War I, young Borges' experiences in neutral Switzerland molded his literary and political outlook. Around that same year of 1917, Borges enthusiastically followed the Expressionist poets, pacifists who "discovered that the toll of war is always paid by the innocent [...as] European youth was [no longer] sacrificed (for the greater glory of the German, French, or English empires) in remote colonial outposts [... instead] being killed at [Europe's] very doorsteps" (Monegal, Santi, and Alonso, 1978, p.p. 56-57). Borges' stance of pacifist neutrality in contrast to American interventionism seemingly collide in the year of 1917, the year of "publication" of *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia*.

Bioy goes on to speculate that Uqbar occupied some "region of Iraq" (TUOT p. 4). Iraq contains the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which according to the Judeo-Christian Bible's Book of Genesis 2.10 spouted from within the walled Garden of Eden. The Anglo-American encyclopedic description of the geographic location of Uqbar further places it near Khorasan (northeastern Iran), Erzerum (presumably a different spelling of Erzurum in Turkey), and Armenia (in the Caucasus Mountains between Europe and Asia just across the border from Turkey). These geographic locations allude to the region's roles as points of origin for Mesopotamia (i.e. Iraq and Iran) and its cultural inheritor Judeo-Christianity (Palestine/Israel and Western Europe), the duality of God, the devil, and apocalypticism through the influence of Zoroastrianism (i.e. Iran and Turkey), and Caucasian ethnicity (i.e. Armenia and the Caucasus Mountains). All three of these geo-cultural allusions indicate fundamental elements shaping the narrative that would become "America."^v The British colonization of North America was predicated on a millennia-old Western European Caucasian narrative thread endeavoring to unify all of the Earth under the single religious aegis of one form of Christianity or other ever since Constantine's advisor Lactantius coined the term *katholikos*,^{vi} a narrative that classified itself as "benevolent" and all those opposing it as evil, gentile, pagan, or savage.

The narrator Borges' encyclopedia goes on to describe the "literature of Uqbar [as] one of fantasy [...] its epics and legends never refer[ring] to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön" (p. 5), the first reference in the short story to Tlön. Along the same lines, the writer Borges ascribes to the literary tradition of the United States "like the literatures of England or Germany" the tendency to deal more with fantasy, invention, and creation than rhetoric, transcription, or observation in his lecture "Nathaniel Hawthorne" (p. 64). In the short story, the encyclopedia's assessment of Uqbar's literature as an idealist literary tradition that postulates a place not yet in existence mirrors the writer Borges' characterization of the literary tradition of America. The autobiographical nature of the American tradition's roots voiced and fostered religious fantasy as ethnocentric propaganda from its very inception for the purposes of building a New World primarily through narrative.

These fantasy-infected narratives descended from earlier European, mostly British traditions. Bunyan's allegorical *Pilgrim's Progress* and John Mandeville's *Travels* were both fictional travel narratives that professed to relate spiritual truths, that is, these texts served as examples of Borgesean false facts. The fantasies of apocalyptic millennialism and visionary utopianism characterized the writings of explorers and colonists like Columbus (who published not only the letters and journals chronicling his voyages to an Edenic New World, but also a *Book of Prophecies* in 1505), Cortez, Winthrop, Bradstreet, Smith, Mather, and many others. These early American autobiographical fantasies in the forms of travel narratives and spiritual narratives projected idealist visions of the American Dream as a second chance in a New World onto the more material project of converting the Edenic wild of North America into a Caucasian-Christian-capitalist ruled utopia. They did this long before the dreams of a utopian American experiment in democracy (e.g. the American Revolutionaries, aka the "Founding Fathers") and the advent of American fiction (e.g. Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson, Melville, Brown, Alcott, etc.) alongside the rise of utopian communes during the 19th century American Renaissance (e.g. Brook Farm, Fruitland, New Harmony, North American Phalanx, etc.).

Moreover, Bioy's encyclopedic bibliography on Uqbar sets up a detective's lead on four texts invoked as attesting to Uqbar's veracity despite "exhaust[ing] atlases, catalogues, annuals, of geographical societies, travelers' and historians' memoirs" that reveal "no one had ever been in Uqbar" (TUOT p. 5). Two of the four texts in the bibliography are never men-

tioned. The "third," Silas Hasam's 1874 *History of the Land Called Uqbar*, is (as is the second title attributed to Hasam in the footnote in the story, fittingly titled *A General History of Labyrinths*) an imaginary text written by a fictional writer (TUOT p. 5), much like Sir Mandeville and his Travels. Of more importance, the last text mentioned is *Lesbare und lesens-werthe Bemerkungen uber das Land Ukkbar in Klein Asien* from 1641 by Johannes Valentinus Andreä (TUOT p. 5). Although the book is not real either, the writer is. Johannes Valentinus Andreä is most famous in the writer Borges' and his readers' shared history for *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz Anno 1459* (*The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz or Rosencross*), anonymously published in 1616 despite its pretense of originating in 1459, and the *Republicae Christianopolitanae descriptio* (*Description of the Republic of Christianopolis*) from 1619. The narrator Borges refers to this latter (existent) book when he admits that Andreä was a 17th century German theologian who "described the imaginary community of the *Rosae Crucis* – a community that others founded later, in imitation of what he had prefigured" (TUOT p. 5). In parallel fashion, the non-existent *Lesbare und lesens-werthe* text on Uqbar, that "curious book by Andreä," is described by the narrator Borges as the initial product "in the early seventeenth century" of the work of a "secret and benevolent society [...that] arose to invent a country" (TUOT p. 14). The narrator Borges' references to Andreä in conjunction with this secret but "benevolent" society alludes to the ways in which early American explorers and colonists were convinced of their moral motivations even as they constructed the narratives to justify their appropriation of the American wild in the service of the project of "invent[ing] a new country".

As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British philosophers, explorers, and colonists had begun composing what would become the narrative of America as a country. In our own "real world," Andreä's *Republicae Christianopolitanae* text and its imaginary ideal Christian community of the Rosy Cross began the *Societas Christiana*, embodied by at least two Protestant utopian movements that began in Germany and swept through Europe and into Great Britain. These utopian movements believed in education, science, and Neo-Platonism as the keys to national prosperity, ideas central to the Protestant-derived English Puritanism that colonized the New England region of the New World and set the cultural tone of America.^{vii} Many of the ideas in the *Republicae Christianopolitanae* text and its imaginary ideal of a Christian community would influence that

most formative of early colonial American texts, John Winthrop's "City on a Hill" passage in his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630). Winthrop's sermon visualized the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a Christian utopia wherein

we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities [...] as members of the same body. So, shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people [...] ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies [...] men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England". For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God [...] we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. [...] to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going. (no pag.)

Like the noble lies of Plato's utopian Kallipolis in *The Republic* (415b-c), Winthrop's sermon fantasizes an ideal image of the colony as a harmonious body elected by God and threatens that the only alternative is cataclysmic annihilation. This Janus-headed use of Plato's "force and fraud" sets forth a narrative designed to help its members "become god-fearing men, and indeed godlike, insofar as that is possible for men" (Plato 383c). However, these "secret" methods of constructing mythological or grand narratives of origin used by "benevolent" leaders of society tend to take on a life of their own as they get woven into later historical narratives, as Borges allegorically sketches out in the remainder of his short story.

Other examples of such Uqbar and Tlön-like idealist driven utopian fantasies as American grand narratives posing as autobiography or history include the following. John Smith's texts *A Map of Virginia. With a Description of the Countrey, the Commodities, People, Government and Religion* (1612) and *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) narrated the Virginia colony as a land of opportunity for those willing to work through their indentured service. His "Letter to Bacon" (1618) would inspire in part Francis Bacon's utopian *New Atlantis*. *William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation: 1620-1647* in many ways fused Smith's and Winthrop's economic and religious utopian narratives for the colonies. *Wonders of the Invisible World* by Cotton Mather (1693) and *Magnalia Christi Americana: The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702) inherited Winthrop's use of the untamed forest and its indigenous as threatening images of cataclysmic annihilation to imbue America with its first taste of

widespread panic and paranoia in order to better foster conformity among the colonists. By 1776, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence" reified America into a political reality through the formulation of a systematic philosophical foundation, alluded to by the narrator Borges' catalog of the various ideologies of Tlön (TUOT p.p. 8-12), whose competing schools of thought mirror the debating factions behind *The Federalist* and *Anti-Federalist Papers*.

Thus, a parallel exists between the evolution of the narrative of Tlön in Borges' short story and the history of the United States in the ways numerous documents written by various men over several decades produced what began as a series of fictional ideas that became the dominating narrative of a country. This parallel is further solidified by the roles of Borges' Andrea and his secret society's construction of Uqbar and "our" Andrea and the Freemasons' founding of the United States during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the "real-life" secret society inheritors of Andrea, the Rosicrucians, did not materialize as a physically real secret organization in the United States until the 1900's, the Freemasons of Europe and America incorporated many of the ideals and symbols of the Rosy Cross as early as the middle of the eighteenth century.^{viii} Many of the leaders of the American Revolution and founders of the U.S. Constitution were members of the Freemasons.^{ix} Andrea and Winthrop's ideal of a colonial Christian utopia in our timeline was carried on by the Masonic Framers of the American Constitution just as Uqbar's early model attributed to Andrea was by the secret society later developing Tlön.

By March of 1941 (the year marking the official beginning of the Second World War that culminated in the United States rising to the status of one of the two global "superpowers"), the narrator Borges describes the contents of a discovered letter that "completely elucidated the mystery of Tlön" (TUOT p. 14). Given the reading I am proposing, it becomes unsurprising that the fictional conspiratorial secret organization "after an interval of two centuries [...] sprang up again in America. In 1824" (TUOT p. 15). Mere months after James Monroe's December 1823 speech proposes the Monroe Doctrine to clear all global competitors of the United States from the Western Hemisphere, Borges' "ascetic millionaire Ezra Buckley" from Tennessee informs an agent of the secret conjurers of Uqbar that "in America it was absurd to invent a country and proposed the invention of a planet" (TUOT p. 15). The global-sized ambition of Borges' entrepreneur Buckley mirrors the empire-build-

ges describes the contents of a discovered letter that "completely elucidated the mystery of Tlön" (TUOT p. 14). Given the reading I am proposing, it becomes unsurprising that the fictional conspiratorial secret organization "after an interval of two centuries [...] sprang up again in America. In 1824" (TUOT p. 15). Mere months after James Monroe's December 1823 speech proposes the Monroe Doctrine to clear all global competitors of the United States from the Western Hemisphere,^x Borges' "ascetic millionaire Ezra Buckley" from Tennessee informs an agent of the secret conjurers of Uqbar that "in America it was absurd to invent a country and proposed the invention of a planet" (TUOT p. 15). The global-sized ambition of Borges' entrepreneur Buckley mirrors the empire-building gaze of the Monroe Doctrine. American history and government archives at Michigan State University summarize the stakes involved in the Monroe Doctrine as

The way in which the United States chose to intervene in Latin America, especially in Cuba, Mexico, Gran Colombia, and the Falkland Islands, was greatly influenced by the benefits and interests of the nation at the time. [...] the reason the United States chose to intervene in these countries were so that the United States could receive other entities in return. The entities being protected and fulfilled through the interests of the Monroe Doctrine were land, economic prosperity, and [disseminating] the ideologies of the United States. (no pag.).^{xi}

The American narrative, values, and worldviews began circulating throughout Latin America as a result of the Monroe Doctrine at the same time that the narrator Borges' alternative history has Buckley expand the project of the country Uqbar into the global project of Tlön. Borges' American entrepreneur as bourgeois surrogate God, pharaoh-like Buckley bequeaths "his mountains of gold, his navigable rivers, his pasture lands roamed by cattle and buffalo, his Negroes, his brothels, and his dollars" (TUOT p. 15), to the "secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, algebraists, moralists, painters, geometers" (TUOT p.p. 7-8), meant to build him a new pyramid- the planet Tlön. Borges' passage here is reminiscent of Marx's catalog in *The Communist Manifesto* (1987) of the bourgeoisie's marshalling of all of nature to the production of wealth through commodification:

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground. (no pag.)

The narrator Borges' Buckley uses resources to construct a larger, more convincing Tlön, reflecting the use of American resources to extend the reach of the U.S. influence in the service of U.S. bourgeois interests under the aegis of the Monroe Doctrine. Borges' catalog of Buckley's sources of wealth encapsulate nineteenth century America's national revenue, a revenue that quickly placed America on the playing field of global markets and international politics: The Gold Rush, the growing steamboat shipping business, the world's largest slave labor, and the competitive nature of the dollar against other national currencies.

But why does Buckley claim it would be absurd to invent a country in America? Because the United States of America already was by 1824 that successfully invented country. It could only make sense to the double egoism of a millionaire American idealist to "up the ante" by taking a cue from the Monroe Doctrine and expanding the project of constructing a culture to a global level as a means of "demonstrat[ing] to this nonexistent God that mortal man was capable of conceiving a world" (TUOT p. 15). This "vastest undertaking ever carried out by man" shifted Tlön from a region of Uqbar to the name of the imaginary planet itself when the conspirators completed "the last volume of the *First Encyclopedia of Tlön*" in 1914. This shifting of the textual "source" material from a British encyclopedia with no mention of Uqbar and Tlön to an Anglo-American "delinquent reprint" to a proper encyclopedia of Tlön coincides with the generation of Tlön from nonexistent figment to an imagined region of Uqbar to its expansion as a planet, setting up its infiltration of the narrator's world.

This double shift in Borges' fiction possibly represents the shifting of America from unknown, unimagined land to New World of the British colonies to "delinquent reprint" or rebellious derivative United States to global American presence. In addition, Borges' use of years once more matches an important year for American history. In this case, the *First Encyclopedia of Tlön*" completion and publication in 1914 corresponds to the year that marked two major events for the United States. The first was the inauguration of the Panama Canal with the passage of the U.S. military steamship the U.S.S. Ancon, which be-

gan over seventy years of U.S. military presence and profit at the expense of the people of Panama. The second event was the beginning of the Great War, which involved the U.S. in its first major role within global politics. The first event represents the U.S. dominance of Latin America and the Western Hemisphere, the second event the beginning of U.S. interventionism in the affairs of Europe, Africa, and Asia (i.e. the Eastern Hemisphere).

Borges choosing the publication of the first encyclopedia of a planetary Tlön in 1914, the year marking the U.S.'s domination of the West and first venture into intervention in the East, makes sense. Immediately upon the completion of Tlön's first encyclopedia, the society planned to succeed this English edition with another "more detailed edition, written not in English but in one of the languages of Tlön," a further "revision of [this] illusory world [...] called provisionally *Orbis Tertius*" (TUOT p. 15).^{xii} *Orbis Tertius* means the third orb, third sphere, or third world, which in our solar system would be the planet Earth. Thus, the conspirator's project evolves from a region called Tlön in the imaginary country Uqbar to the imaginary planet Tlön to the third world *Orbis Tertius*. Tlön's evolution parallels the evolution of America from rebellious colonies as part of the expansive British Empire in a tiny region of the vast New World to newly founded country in the Americas to dominating nation of the Western Hemisphere to major player in global politics.

Hernan Díaz (2012) explains how Borges' entrepreneur Buckley is a distorted replication of Berkeley, "a slightly disfigured version [...] like a hrön" (p. 67), bringing to light Borges' allusion to idealist George Berkeley, most famous for his quote "to be is to be perceived". The narrator Borges emphasizes how the global culture dominant on Tlön, "Their language [...] religion, letters, metaphysics – all presuppose idealism," seeing their world as "successive and temporal [...]they] conceive the universe as a series of mental processes which do not develop in space but successively in time," nothing more than an "association of ideas" (TUOT p.p. 8-9). And what country on Earth could be better represented by such worldviews than the United States? Who could be more idealist in its construction of a collective reality and amnesiac in its historical memory than the United States? The historical narrative of America shot from Columbus' paradise to Winthrop's utopian city on a hill to Mather's mass hysterical den of Satanic conspiracy within two centuries, transitioned from the transcendental American Literary Renaissance to the fratricidal Civil War in thirty years, manifested as twentieth century

anti-war hippies who ended up war profiteering corporate yuppies in twenty. Who better than Americans see their world as a “successive and temporal” “series of mental processes,” nothing more than an “association of ideas,” especially now in the twenty-first century America of “fake news” and conspiracy theories?

Despite the scientific and economic materialism and the philosophical pragmatism by which America has defined itself consciously, there has been from its very inception an undercurrent of almost solipsistic idealism undergirding its religion, politics, and culture. Only in Borges’ imaginary Tlön and places like America could engineers and scientists be idealistic enough to seriously consider the universe might be a hologram or found a religion like Heaven’s Gate. The narrator Borges catalogues Tlön’s various schools of metaphysical thought,

that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality other than as a present memory. Another school declares that all time has already transpired and that our life is only the crepuscular and no doubt falsified a mutilated memory or reflection of an irrecoverable process. Another, that the history of the universe - and in it our lives and the most tenuous detail of our lives - is the scripture produced by a subordinate god in order to communicate with a demon. Another, that the universe is comparable to those cryptographs in which not all the symbols are valid and that only what happens every three hundred nights is true. Another, that while we sleep here, we are awake elsewhere and that in this way every man is two men. (TUOT p. 10).

Interestingly, this catalog in the short story matches the table of contents of the book the readers hold in their hands in that the these Tlön-ian metaphysical ideologies can be identified with each of the world-views of the short stories in the writer Borges’ *Labyrinth*. However, Tlön’s proliferating metaphysics, “a branch of fantastic literature,” meant to be “astounding” rather than truthful (TUOT p. 10), mimics the competing ideologies behind America’s long history of utopian communes, religious sects and cults, political parties and movements, conspiratorial theories, and current addiction to popular culture. Jose Eduardo Gonzalez writes in “Borges and the Classical Hollywood Cinema” (1998), that “the influence that Borges’ interest in cinema had on his fictional work,” in particular “the style employed in Hollywood’s films,” and his “use of other products of mass culture” in combination with allusions and revisions of products of “high” culture “were designed to ‘give us the illusion of being present at real events unfolding before us in everyday reality’” (p.p. 486-87, 489, 493). By the twentieth century, America has perfected its tradition of convincing fantasy through the development of

mass media. As Gonzalez points out, the writer Borges was intimately aware of the addictively delusory effect of American cultural products of narrative and media. The narrator Borges makes clear that in Tlön, “Centuries and centuries of idealism have not failed to influence reality” (TUOT p. 13). However, in the timeline of the writer Borges, it is centuries and centuries of American idealism that have not failed to affect Earth’s reality.

The United States has long been the land of pulp, comic books, Hollywood movies, video games, cartoons, theme parks, role-playing games, cosplay, social media, etc., attesting to an addiction to illusory narrative products that has spread throughout the Earth, inventing and satisfying addictive market demands on a global pandemic scale. According to the short story’s postscript, by 1942, artifacts from Tlön materialized throughout the world as “intrusion[s] of this fantastic world into the world of reality,” whose “weight was intolerable,” and even after “removed, the feeling of oppressiveness remained” (TUOT p.p. 16-17). The artifacts, a vibrating compass in the alphabet of Tlön, a tiny bright metal cone with the images of one of Tlön’s gods, and a complete set of the *First Encyclopedia of Tlön*, represent products that offer geographic, existential/religious, and epistemological direction respectively. These products of Tlön shape the consumers’ lives even as they are consumed.

In fact, the narrator Borges goes on to explain that, “Almost immediately, reality yielded on more than one account. The truth is that it longed to yield. Ten years ago, any symmetry with a resemblance of order - dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism - was sufficient to entrance the minds of men. How could one do other than submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly plant?” (TUOT p. 17). Here, the writer Borges’ timeline once again crosses over into the narrator Borges’ timeline and vice versa, a transgression to highlight the monstrously abominable consequences of humankind’s idealist desire for an orderly narrative. How “any symmetry with a resemblance of order [...] was sufficient to entrance the minds of men,” enough to commit the worst of history’s atrocities. As John R. Clark makes clear in “Idealism and Dystopia in ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’” (1995), the idealist schools of thought in Tlön become identified with people of the mass movements of the twentieth century, and,

Anyone wanting to believe such cryptic ratiocinations will need to possess an incredible naïveté and an overwhelming secular faith in modern systems of ‘thought.’ Yet that is precisely the point. For it was just such naïveté that led to the great heretical and secular ‘religions’ of our own century—Hitler’s National Socialism and Stalin’s Communism—that elevate the abstract to the State. (p. 77).

The narrator Borges references Stalin’s Marxist historical narrative of dialectical materialism and the racist paranoid narrative of German Nazism (as well as the U.S.’s) to illustrate the desperation of the masses to have dictated to it what to believe. Clark (1995) goes on to suggest that the writer Borges omits references to the Soviets and the Nazis (despite the years alluding to them throughout the short story) until this climactic moment to better heighten the tension resolved when they are finally introduced (p. 78). However, Clark fails to note that, by the same argument, those dates and the behavior of Tlön also allude to another country that fits the overall pattern of the short story better, but is never explicitly revealed: The United States. The two Borges converge as the short story equates Tlön’s infiltration and conquest of the narrator’s historical reality with the American West’s ideological seduction of the globe. The narrator Borges observes that his “reality [...] longed to yield” to the gravitational pull of Tlön’s narrative reality and its artifacts, symbolizing the writer Borges’ recognition that the addictive lure of the uniformity that the American cultural narrative offers only grows exponentially with the seduction represented by the consumption of American commodities.

After the Allied victory ended World War I, the writer Borges “applauds Pio Baroja explicitly” describing Woodrow Wilson as a “Marcus Aurelius of the great republic of trusts and sewing machines, the sole apostle and referee of international disputes” (Monegal, Santi, and Alonso, 1978, p. 58). Young Borges already equated back in 1917 the U.S. political empire with an economic conquest through finance and exported products. Despite Argentina’s financially lucrative neutrality during World War I and the early part of World War II, largely producing the exportation of wool, grain, and beef, primarily to England and Germany, the U.S. farm lobby worked aggressively to economically and diplomatically isolate Argentina in 1942 and 43 (Woods, 1974, p. 357). By 1945, Argentina had “fallen in line” behind the United States against the Axis and later against communism during the Cold War. The infiltration of Argentina by the American cultural narrative took place through the prolific importation of American radios in the 1920s, American cinema by the 1930s, and American tele-

74 Año 12, número 24, Enero-Junio

vision sets by the 1940s (all of which persisted and increased during the Cold War) (Gonzalez, 1998, p. 486).

Alan White reaches a similar conclusion concerning the significance of Borges’ short story when he writes in “An Appalling or Banal Reality” (2003) that “Borges’s appalling or banal reality” consists of “replac[ing] the Biblical myth of a pristine origin [...] with the dream of a pristine end, a world transformed and dominated by science and technology” (p. 48). This bombardment of Argentina by American technological products and culture was supplemented by the influx of American dollars and a corresponding political pressure after 1955’s ousting of Peron. The U.S. would give Argentina \$55 million in 1976 to fight communism, \$120 million in military weapon parts sales by 1977 along with \$700 thousand to train Argentine military officers, \$13.3 billion in U.S. investments and \$9 billion in U.S. imports by 2011, and so on (Vine et al.). A similar bombardment has occurred globally; currently, the U.S. has over 800 military bases in 70 countries. The globalization of the American ideological narrative through its proliferation of military presence, global finance, technological commodities, and cultural narratives mirrors the quiet infiltration of Tlön:

The contact and habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world [...] Already the schools have been invaded by the [...] language of Tlön; already the teaching of its harmonious history (filled with its moving episodes) has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood [...] A scattered dynasty of solitary men has changed the face of the world. Their task continues [...] Then English and French and mere Spanish will disappear from the globe. The world will be Tlön. (TUOT p. 18).

Like Borges’ Tlön in the passage here, the U.S. model of capitalism governs the economies and international trade of most countries of Earth. The American calendar year of 2020 and the American time zone classification dominates the Earth’s collective perception of time. American English is the dominant language taught in schools around the globe. The utopian idealism that has desired to reshape the Earth in the image of America, serving American interests, continues to drive American foreign policies along military and economic trajectories, invigorating or destroying the stability of nation-states according to their adoption U.S. currency as their economic base and the agendas of U.S. corporate interests. Once more, the writer Borges’ description of Tlön’s effects on the narrator Borges’ world mirrors Marx’s description of the spread of capitalism across the globe, perfectly capturing the U.S. conquest of the narrative reality of the Earth:

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life [...] The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. [...] It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (no pag.)

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^{vi} Originally, a Greek term meaning universal, meant by Lactantius to justify the expansion of the Roman Empire under the guidance of Christianity in the hopes of preparing the world for the Second Coming. See Lactantius’ *Divinarum Institutionum*.

^{vii} See Max Weber (1905) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

^{viii} See Frances A. Yates (1972) *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment and Jean-Pierre Bayard (1986) Les Rose-Croix*.

^{ix} See Michigan State University’s *Freemasons and the Founding Fathers* (<http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/uniontodisunion/exhibits/show/freemasons-and-the-murder-of-w/freemason-and-the-founding-fat>).

^x See the United States National Archives at <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=23>.

^{xi} See <http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/usforeignrelations/exhibits/show/monroe-doctrine-and-latin-amer/introduction-to-the-monroe-doc>.

^{xii} Although Borges refers to the secretive organization as *Orbis Tertius* elsewhere (page 17), the phrasing on page 15 allows for the possibility that it was at least considered as a revised name for *Tlön*’s later iteration.

ⁱThe parenthetical citations will designate “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” as TUOT. All other works by Borges will be named in the paragraphs themselves.

ⁱⁱThe association of Borges with deconstruction as one of its precursors is extensively attested to by just a tiny portion of the expansive list of research on this topic. A quick JSTOR search includes “Borges’ Deconstruction of History in ‘The Dread Redeemer Lazarus Morell’” by Maria Ester Martinez (1984), “‘She was unable not to think’: Borges’ ‘Emma Zunz’ and the Female Subject” by Bella Brodsky (1985), “The Self-Deconstruction of Convention” by Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Mark Anspach (1994), “Borges the Golem-Maker: Intimations of ‘Presence’ in ‘The Circular Ruins’” by Stephen E. Soud (1995), “A Game with Shifting Mirrors: Non-Meaning and Meanings as Arbitrary Function of Reader Perspective in Borges’ ‘Ficciones’” by Victor C. Van Hee (2000), “Deconstruction and Its Precursors: Levinas and Borges after Derrida” by Erin Graff Zivin (2018) merely in the first two pages.

ⁱⁱⁱFirst published in the Argentine journal *Sur*, May 1940.

^{iv}First published in *Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, año 1, no. 3 in 1946.

^vSee, for example, John Collins’ *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, Regina Schwartz’s *The Curse of Cain, The Letters and Journals of Christopher Columbus*, *El Libro de las Profecías of Cristobal Colón*, Kirkpatrick Sale’s *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, John Winthrop’s “City Upon a Hill: A Model of Christian