

Complexity of Borges' Minimalism in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (1964)

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ABSTRACT: *Borges' short fiction is recognized for its minimalist narratives. In his short fiction he projects imaginary worlds of trans-historical and trans-cultural identities and spaces. His stories present a world of incompatibilities, dichotomies and contradictions. The collapse of regimes and national borders in Borges' fiction symbolizes the breakdown of ontological boundaries of a postmodern world. Alien spaces are interpolated or superimposed within familiar spaces to create complex layering of cultural zones and imaginary homelands. Trans-migration of characters from different fictional worlds creates a pastiche of the old and the new. This paper attempts an interpretation of a number of Borges' short stories published in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (1964) through analysis of the themes, stylistic techniques and strategies employed by the writer to create a masterly representative short fiction of the postmodernist variety. It is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the themes, techniques and various strategies employed by Borges to create the desired effect whereas the second section deals with the writer's exploitation of language as a means of representation.*

Key Words: Postmodern Fiction; Minimalism; Trans-historical; Transcultural; Ontological; Disembodied Narrator; Non-linear; Pluralization; Pastiche; Intertextuality

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I

Minimalism in literature is meant to refer “to a tendency towards paring down of means, or reductive method and an aspiration towards complexity through simplicity” (An introduction to literary minimalism in the American short story). Minimalist literature proves to be demanding for the reader in that its specific narrative techniques such as restraint, subtlety and omission lend a high level of complexity to the text. Unlike the maximalist realism created by Emile Zola or Gustave Flaubert, minimalist writers struggle to curtail the amount of details incorporated in the narrative to portray everyday reality. ‘Less is more’ for the Minimalists and they mostly aim at portraying what it means to live ‘In Our Time’. Samuel Beckett’s work is one of the foremost examples of minimalism in literature. However Hemmingway, Raymond Calver and Frederick Barthelme are the pioneers amongst minimalist fiction and prose writing.

Besides being marked by its dependency upon restraint, Minimalist Literature is characterized by the absence of narrator, a suggestive use of figurative language, and the omission of vital narrative elements/kernels. The richness of the interpretation hinges upon the interactive vitality of the implied reader, expected to make a meaningful contribution to the open text. As Minimalism became widespread during the middle of the 20th century, hostility towards this literary variety (of expression) gained momentum too, reaching culmination in 1989 “The notion that minimalism’s pared-down, elliptical and inexplicit aesthetic necessarily inculcates an equally underwhelming, impoverished and ultimately valueless effect upon the reader” (An introduction to literary minimalism in the American short story) was popular amongst literary critics. However its importance could not be undermined completely due to its influence upon future literatures.

Borges’ Short Fiction published in 1964 under the title; *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* is a good example of minimalist fiction. His short stories are hardly ever understood at first reading. The minimalist yet complex style of the author is a real challenge for most of the readers. The non-linear structure of Borges’ short fiction anthologized in the above mentioned work results in an ontological pluralization of the text. Language (of the text) is truly the contributor and locus of strangeness and ambiguity. Fragmentary plots and intertextuality through quotations are employed to disrupt the continuity of the form and structure. The foregrounding of the ontological dominant in most of his short stories

further adds to the overall complexity of Borges' style. This foregrounding is usually done by incorporating a quotation from a certain literary or some other significant work as an epigraph. For example the short story titled: "The Circular Ruins" begins with the epigraph; "And If he left off dreaming about you..." The line has been taken from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, VI (57) and serves to highlight the author's preoccupation with the modes of being and existence in the said story. Likewise "The Secret Miracle", another short story, begins with an epigraph quoted from the Koran, II, 261:

And God had him die for a hundred
Years and then revived him and said:
"How long have you been here?"
"A day or a part of a day," he answered.

These stories engage with questions related to the nature of human existence, the relevance of faith and time to man's life, the inevitability of death, and the cycle of life. Protagonists of "The Circular Ruins", "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "The Secret Miracle" are mostly cut off or alienated from the worlds that surround them. The "solipsistic isolation of one individual consciousness, one-life world, from another (*Postmodernist Fiction* 80) concretizes the egocentrism of human existence and the general outlook of postmodern man. "The uninhabited and broken temple suited" well the man in ruins who had to undertake a "magical project" of dreaming "a man: he wanted to dream...with minute integrity and insert him into reality" (57). Similarly Hladik of "The Secret Miracle" is all by himself in "aseptic, white barracks on the opposite bank of the Moldau" (95) trying miserably "to find some way to hold fast to the fleeting substance of time" (96).

Besides foregrounding the ontological issues, these epigraphs introduce intertextuality by superimposing subjects related to different temporal and spatial constructs/zones. This type of intertextuality turns the text in hand into a "palimpsest through which the traces---tenuous but not indecipherable---of... 'previous' writing" become "translucently visible...inverting the other's work ...to exhume and revive those lost Troys..." ("Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" 56) The change that occurs, thus, in the previous writing, is a development in that "the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way...which the past's awareness of itself cannot show (Eliot *Tradition* 957).

The epigraph in the beginning of "The Circular Ruins" is taken from the

Alice book which belongs to the Fantastic (genre). Postmodernist Fiction heavily draws upon both the Fantastic and the Science Fiction to demonstrate how these sister genres' development can be traced parallel to its own. Yet this is not the only purpose why these parallels are drawn. Such parallels mainly serve to add complexity to the ontological structure of the stories by bringing the incompatible world of reality and the world of dreams in one zone.

The world of dreams usually short-circuits the continuity of the ontological form and structure of the short stories by creating an impression of a world within a world. For example the enactment of the "drama" observing "the unities of time, place, and action" with its "Hradcany" setting "in the library of Baron von Roemerstadt, on one of the last afternoons of the nineteenth century" and the "final act" (97) is a violation of the frontiers of a fictionally constructed spatiotemporal zone of Hladik's existence in 1943, where he is terrified of being killed "by a firing squad" on "March 29th, at 9A.M." (96). Likewise a disembodied narrator of "The Circular Ruins" constantly refers to "the silent man's" existence being "consecrated to the sole task of sleeping and dreaming" (58). In his chaotic dreams the "stranger dreamt that he was in the center of a circular amphitheater" with "clouds of silent students" whose faces "hung many centuries away at a cosmic height, but entirely...clear and precise" (58). The man that the strange man dreams and inserts into reality eventually becomes his double: "the projection of another man's dream" capable of walking on fire unharmed, "a mere appearance, dreamt by another" (61).

Borges intelligently exploits the strategies used by the Fantastic genre to get optimum results in his short narratives as demonstrated by "the work within work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time, and the double" (15). All these devices have contributed to make the stories under discussion master pieces in their own right.

Juxtaposition of incommensurable and incompatible spaces is achieved through temporal displacements and transmigration of indiscriminate characters. "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" a well-known story by Borges, illustrates the exploitation of this technique in the best manner. In this short narrative the fictional space of Bioy Casares and "I" in "a country house on Gaona Street in Ramos Mejia" (20) is brought side by side with alien spaces such as "Khorasan, Armenia, Erzerum", "the lowlands of Tsai Khaldun and the Axa Delta" (21) to create a non-linear narrative structure. Interpolation, in this manner, of alien spaces within familiar spaces adds a

complex layering of diverse cultural zones and imaginary homelands. Transmigration of trans- historical characters such as Leibn iz, Hume, Berkley, Spinoza, Gunnar Erfjord, Hinton, Martinez Estrada and Jesus Christ (and the list goes on) is made plausible through similar devices. Besides pushing the boundaries of both space and time, this strategy, according to *Postmodernist Fiction*, helps create a quasi-carnival topos (174), a characteristic feature of this genre. The non-linear structures of Borges' short fiction are cyclical, often reversible even labyrinthine where "Time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures" (42) till infinity.

Postmodernist worlds of the future typically employ...temporal displacement, projecting a future time but without taking any particular provision for bridging the temporal gap between present and future; that bridge is left for the reader to build (*Postmodernist Fiction* 66).

Time travel as the most strategic trope shared by Science Fiction and the Postmodernist genre helps organize interplanetary flights by trans-historical characters. It also mirrors, in Brian McHale's words "the text's formal heterogeneity" besides crystalizing "a visionary or Utopian hunger for a more perfect social order" (172).

Borges' fiction exhibits his overwhelming interest in the intertwining relationship between language, knowledge and power. The short story titled "The Lottery in Babylon" projects a capitalistic world order where even the logical people from Babylon, fond of symmetry, throw themselves into the game of lottery without questioning "the omnipotence of the Company and... its metaphysical and ecclesiastical power." Company becomes their new God. The onslaught of a capitalist economy reduces the postmodernist world into one global village. All the rich and the poor should participate in this "new order" which is "a necessary historical stage" (44). The well-reasoned argument of some moralists that the possession of money does not always determine happiness could not stop most of them from participating equally in the lottery. In such a world knowing loses its privileged position...The one world which the modernists sought to know is replaced by a plurality of autonomous worlds that can be described and the relations between which we can explore, but can never be the objects of true knowledge (Bertens 75).

If Tlon is to be looked at as a metaphor for such a (globalized) world then connectivity and the life style of Tlon have ousted regimes by invading national borders surreptitiously. The globalized world is a "scattered dynasty of solitary men" (33). The English, the French and the Spanish

etc. have disappeared from this globalized space. Classification of all sorts implies falsification. Postmodernist world is characterized by its fluidity, diversity, uncertainty and a distinct indifference towards truth and/or grand narratives. Here “*equality* is one thing and *identity* another” (27).

Borges frequently borrows from the existing literary sources in order to rework and recreate these borrowings into his short narratives. He is quick to acknowledge his sources and opines that all writers are in fact “translators and annotators of pre-existing archetypes” (15). In “Kafka and His Precursors” Borges writes that each writer creates his own precursors. He shares Eliot’s views in this respect as expressed by him in his famous essay: “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (957).

The heterogeneity of the borrowed pieces embedded within the texts of Borges’ short narratives lends them a unique originality. Moreover they deliberately mislead the reader “into regarding the embedded, secondary world as the primary, diegetic world” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 115). The technique serves to mystify the reader. However the mystification is often followed by a subsequent demystification which lays bare the actual ontological status and structure of the text to the much confused reader.

Postmodernist texts are often glossed by using two types of gloss: the text with marginal gloss, the text with footnotes. *The Waste Land* by T.S.Eliot is an example of a footnoted text. Borges too uses the technique in a number of his short stories to split the text into the text proper and the gloss. “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*”, “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” and “The Library of Babel”, short stories that are split into texts proper and the footnotes, are schizoid texts that challenge the reader even more. The reader has to choose as to which text to read first, the text proper or the gloss?

“Reading these quasi-simultaneous texts” according to Brian McHale, involves the reader’s eye having to skip across the page, from center to the margin or from top to bottom. With such texts readers are forced to manipulate the book as a physical object, never able to lose sight of the ontological divide that is there between the world that is projected and the (material) book that projects it. It can be extremely annoying. Nevertheless annoyance is used as a device of foregrounding.

Triptych, according to Merriam Webster dictionary, literally means a picture (such as a painting) that has three panels placed next to each other.

The term is also used to define an ancient Roman tablet writing with three waxed leaves (foldable) hinged together vertically and used as an altarpiece whereas polyptych is an arrangement of four or more such panels. Borges has used triptych and polyptych both as techniques exploitatively in his short narratives such as "A New Refutation of Time". Once the unity of the structural ontology is split by using such devices, further splits follow to pluralize the narrative structure. For example the story mentioned earlier is split into the "Prologue", "A" and "B". The "Prologue" is preceded by an epigraph and the "A" is further sub-divided into "1" and "2". "A" and "B" also glossed by footnotes, are closely followed by a glossing of the "Prologue" by separate footnotes at the end of "B" (221). This kind of pluralization is genuinely ontological. Plurality of the worlds too, with regard to the internal and external differences, yields the characteristic multiplicity of Borges' short fiction.

In most cases the "I" of Borges' stories is not the Omniscient narrator or the univocal center from where the author speaks. More often than not Borges' stories project fictional worlds as spatial constructs that revolve around a perceiving subject, either a character or a vantage point adopted by a disembodied narrator. Sometimes the author is almost *seen* visibly as the creator of a fictional space. "He represents himself in the act of making his fictional world-or unmaking it" (*Postmodern Fiction* 30). This kind of a visible maker of the fictional worlds no longer retains his God-like stature. Rather he becomes reduced to the level of a mere artefact, a fictional construct. "Borges and I" illustrates this interesting point perfectly well. The parable begins thus:

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment...I know Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary...ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me (230).

Barthes' concept regarding the "Death of the Author" as the univocal center of the fictional world has been questioned by Foucault. Foucault opines that the presence of the author as the central consciousness within a text is neither possible nor required. Rather he talks about the author function (as an institution) generally governed and regulated by the institutions which, in a given society regulate the circulation of discourses. Foucault's rediscovery of the author function, particularly in the wake of the "Death of the Author" in postmodernist texts has made the presence of

the author as a *subject* possible:

Here authority and subjectivity are dispersed among a plurality of selves...the authorial role is distributed among figures located at different levels of a recursive Chinese-box structure...the roles of character, narrator, and author circulating among them (*Postmodernist Fiction* 201).

The author, in postmodernist literature, often exists at two different ontological planes. One: He is the subject of the autobiographical detail available within the projected fictional space. Two: He is the creator of the projected fictional space. This duality of the author's existence contributes to the dialogism so characteristic of the parable: "Borges and I" mentioned above.

Another device that creates the multiplicity of consciousness within the text is the random clustering of indiscriminate characters who take turns to take the narrative forward. Their distinctly different world views and speech (habits) create linguistic diversity and the plurality of vision within the fictionally constructed world. This also explains polyphony of voices in postmodernist literature. Bakhtin, in his book: *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) writes:

...the entire novel breaks down into images of languages that are connected to one another and with the author via their own characteristic dialogical relationships...these represented languages themselves do the work of representing...The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with *almost no direct language of his own*...languages...mutually and ideologically inter-animate each other (47).

Borges uses polyphonic voices in "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "The Garden of Forking Paths" which further rapture the ontologically non-linear structures of these stories and add plurality of worldviews. At times Borges achieves the multiplicity of consciousness within his stories through the juxtaposition of various levels of existence of a single protagonist/character. "The Circular Ruins" is a good choice in this instance where "the silent man" visibly exists at the conscious and subconscious levels. At the subconscious level of existence he is shown to have debates (in his dreams) about the theory of creation. His idea of creation clashes with the other concepts of creation that seem inspired by all sorts of discourses. "Clouds of silent students...hung many centuries away and at a cosmic height" who are lectured by the strange man "on

anatomy, cosmography, magic" (58) are in fact different discourses that are constantly contesting (within him) amongst themselves to take supremacy.

Similarly multiple levels of Hladik's existence in the short story titled "The Secret Miracle" bring multiplicity of consciousness to the narrative. Hladik "died hundreds of deaths in courtyards...machine-gunned by variable soldiers in changing numbers, who at times killed him from a distance, at others from close by" (96). The terror that Hladik experiences in his nightmares at subconscious level prepares him to face the actual moment of dying without fear or "fatigue, not even the numbness of his protracted immobility" (99).

The "split self" or multiplicity of a single "self" are significant themes of postmodernist fiction and these themes are best projected in Borges' short narratives through the above illustrated stylistic techniques. Due to the stylistic diversity and heterogeneity the overall impact of these short stories vis-à-vis form is that of a pastiche. Modern life style has given rise to fragmentation at all levels. Postmodern society is no exception. People in a postmodern society are usually stratified into small groups on the basis of their class, rank or profession and develop their own private code or idiolect which results in each individual becoming "a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else." There is no "linguistic norm in terms of which one could ridicule private languages and idiosyncratic styles" (Cain et al 1849).

II

Language: A Means of Representation.

Deciphering Borges' language is the touchstone of scholarly accomplishment. His language truly challenges even a reader initiated into scholarly writings. His minimalist style has the potential to make one "see a World in a Grain of Sand.../Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour (Blake *Auguries of Innocence*).

The difficulty in understanding Borges' language is owing to the complexity of his linguistic techniques. He has a penchant for hard philosophical words in their strict etymological sense. He often plays elevated terms off against more humble and direct ones. He uses "colons and semicolons in place of casual connectives to give static, elliptical, overlapping effects" (17). Consider for example the following lines selected randomly from "The Circular Ruins":

He was not long disconcerted by his companions' sudden elimination; his progress, after a few special lessons, astounded his teacher. Nevertheless, catastrophe ensued. The man emerged from sleep one day as if from a viscous desert...intolerable lucidity of insomnia weighed upon him (58).

Borges employs language discursively to project the inherent plurality of heteroglossia in his short narratives. His (use of) language is not oblivious of the numerous social discourses that exist outside his fictionally constructed worlds and are in contestation constantly. The diversity of social speech types and of individual voices is incorporated in almost every story in Bakhtin's style. "Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters" creates heteroglossia (Cain et al 1079).

As for instance "The Secret Miracle" begins with a disembodied narrator sharing details about Hladik's execution fixed for "March 29th at 9:00 A.M." Then after a while Hladik's own voice enters the narrative through direct speech in the first person: "I am now in the night of the twenty-second; while this night lasts (and for six nights more), I am invulnerable, immortal" (96). The narrative voice shifts yet again and this time it is the librarian's voice that is heard thus: "God is in one of the letters on one of the pages of one of the four hundred thousand volumes of Clementine. My fathers and the fathers of my fathers have searched for this letter; I have grown blind seeking it". Another voice, (this time a reader's) enters the story "This atlas is worthless." Finally an indistinct voice (probably that of God) is heard: "The time of your labor has been granted" (98).

Borges uses heteroglossia to rupture the ontological unity of his fictionally constructed worlds. These fictional constructs are diegesis, rather than mimesis of the (real) world. Diegesis, as understood from the works of Plato (*Ion*, *The Republic*) and Aristotle (*Poetics*) is opposed to mimesis in that it refers to the information related by the narrator and many times is comprised of characters' thoughts and actions excluding dialogue, which is categorized under mimesis. Diegesis is in fact the narrator's commentary on the thoughts and actions of characters (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online).

Heteroglossic texts are not always polyphonic. Take for instance the classic modernist text: *The Waste Land* by Eliot. Despite "juxtaposing and interweaving a variety of languages, styles, registers, genres, and intertextual citations" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 166) it projects a unified

monological world view. However self-erasure, on the part of the author, has made univocal/monological world-view an impossible phenomenon in Postmodernist Literature. Self-reflexive and self-conscious texts are in vogue now-a-days that are aware of them ontologically, and project multiplicity of world views through polyphony and dialogism.

Bakhtin talks about the dialogism of language in his book: *The Dialogic Imagination*. He explains dialogism as an “intense interanimation and struggle between one’s own and another’s word (Cain et al 1073) which results in discourse and counter discourse. Bakhtin also believes that a living language exhibits heteroglossia because it is inherently discursive and stratified internally into “social dialects, characteristic group behaviors, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of age groups....” (1078).

The short story titled “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is a good illustration of the variety of (jargon) language that belongs to the group of (professional) historians and cartographers. Randomly selected lines from this story that follow would show us how:

“...the encyclopedia is fallaciously called *The Anglo- American Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1917) and is a literal but delinquent reprint of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1902” (20).

On the last pages of Volume XLVI we found an article on Upsala; on the first pages of Volume XLVII, one on Ural-Altai Languages, but not a word about Uqbar. Bioy, a bit taken aback, consulted the volumes of the index...he exhausted all of the imaginable spellings: Ukbar, Ucbar, Ooqbar, Ookbar, Oukbahr (20).

Other examples of heteroglossia, in terms of linguistic behaviors, are seen in “The Circular Ruins” and “The Secret Miracle” where the main themes of the stories revolve round creation (of life), death and immortality: “He perceived it, lived it, from many distances and many angles...he touched the pulmonary artery with his ringer...the whole heart...set about to envision another of the principal organs...reached the skeleton, the eyelids...innumerable hair (59). Detail of this type of heteroglossic varieties makes the linguistic structure of Borges’ stories labyrinthine and the true locus of strangeness.

Borges’ indulgence in the physical dimensions of texts vis-à-vis the

placement of printed words on the white spaces (of pages) is characteristically postmodernist. It truly challenges the reader for the text becomes a labyrinth for the eye that meanders through various angles at which words are placed, in pursuit of meaning. A good demonstration of such an indulgence is his short story: "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" In this story spatially displaced familiar words, studded with a considerable number of foreign words, at times italicized, serve to intimidate even an initiated reader.

Foucault describes the language of literature as transgressive, mortal, repetitive, and redoubled ("What is Literature?" 65). He further explains that a literary work does not arise from blankness that exists before language, but from the repetitiveness of the library and that the library distributes the inherent space of literature. Borges often creates the redoubling effect of literary language that Foucault talks about by repeating that which already exists. He reinvents classical pieces by reworking their bits and fragments into his fiction. The epigraph: "And what if he left off dreaming about you..." at the beginning of "The Circular Ruins" has been picked up from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1871) chapter *Through the Looking Glass*, VI. With the help of this single line he is able to foreground the ontological dominant; his main thematic concern in this story. Moreover the epigraph serves to juxtapose the Fantasy World of Alice side by side with the (seemingly) Real World of "the silent man... from the South" (57). The title of the chapter "*Through the Looking Glass*" introduces the topos of time travel in Borges' story. Looking glass is used in postmodernist fiction as a trope for Time Machine that makes interplanetary flights or trans-world migrations possible. As a matter of fact journey *is* a recurrent motif in the story. The looking glass (or mirror) reflects the image of the one who stands before it. Creation too is a reflection of the Creator. The silent man "feared his son might...be the projection of another man's dream" (61). In "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" Borges writes, "*Mirrors and fatherhood are abominable because they multiply and disseminate...universe*" (21).

Foucault describes language of literature as "signs through which every word, every phrase indicates that it belongs to literature" (*Language, Madness, and Desire* 55). The epigraph "And what if he left off dreaming about you" occurs where Tweedledee points out the sleeping Red King to Alice and tells her that she is just a character in his dream. The line instantly makes a mental connection with another line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on/and our little life

is rounded with sleep" (Act IV, Scene 1). The silent man in the story: "The Circular Ruins" soon "comprehended that the effort to mold the incoherent and vertiginous matter dreams are made of was the most arduous task a man could undertake" (59).

The story under discussion is an allegory of the creative process which requires Isolation, solitude, concentration and time. Creation involves a process of revision and maternal pride over the work (created). Desire to create is inversely a desire for immortality. Borges' minimalist style impressively conveys the essence of the theme (of creation) through a mathematically precise and symbolic language.

Language is discursive according to Foucault. It is never neutral, but rather invested. Language makes the formation of subjects possible through discourse and counter discourse. Multiple discourses are constantly engaged in contestation to gain supremacy over other discourses. Language both establishes and breaks stereotypes. Language destabilizes grand narratives. Borges' short story "The Garden of Forking Paths" is replete with examples of invested language where it becomes the bearer of power, ideology, cultural notions and historical signifiers. For instance: I have carried to its end a plan whose perilous nature no one can deny. I know its execution was terrible. I didn't do it for Germany. No, I care nothing for a barbarous country which imposed upon me the abjection of being a spy (35).

Words like: "yellow man", "visible", "vulnerable", "cowardly", "weak" and "weary" are associated with Ya Tsun. They are all invested ideologically and serve to establish a stereotypical Chinese man within the story. On the other hand words like: "implacable", "strong", "pursuer", "warrior" and "horse-like face" are used to signify Madden as a counter discourse of the "weak" and "weary" Ya Tsun. He is the "sick and hateful" German. Ya Tsun's claim that "a yellow man could save his armies" (35) is an attempt, on his part, to break the stereotype by challenging the grand narrative.

Embedded within the ontological structure of the same story is the power discourse represented by an institutionalized Military which, through cultural conventions, administers individuals to various subject positions. However, the nationalist discourse appears to have gained supremacy over the discourse of war and jingoism through language such as follows: "*Thus fought the heroes, tranquil their admirable hearts, violent their swords, resigned to kill and to die*" (40).

The discursiveness of Borges' language is further illustrated below through examples from the story titled: "The Secret Miracle". In this story power is wielded through "the Gestapo's charges" against Hladik; author, "of Jewish blood", by the Third Reich. He is put in a solitary confinement in "white barracks on the opposite bank of the Moldau" (95) before his execution which is fixed for "March 29th at 9:00 A.M." During his confinement in jail he has nightmares about his immanent death which he knows, is going to be violent and premature. "Hladik had rounded forty" (96) and does not want to die. He looks for answers to the ontological questions that stream through his mind in the philosophical and the religious discourses. His mind is constantly assaulted by these warring discourses contesting each other. The discourse of power of the Third Reich has already subjected him to a vulnerable position where he is unable to defend himself. He is left with not much choice. In this existentialistic situation the fatalistic discourse of faith rushes to rescue him. "From perplexity he passed to stupor, from stupor to resignation, from resignation to sudden gratitude...his face dropped, under the quadruple blast. Jaromir Hladik died on March 29, at 9:02 A.M."(100).

Conclusion

The paper in hand has attempted to unravel some of the mysteries wrought by Borges' minimalist style through a detailed close reading of a few selected short stories. His stylistic and linguistic techniques contribute mainly to the complexity of his short narratives. However his initiation into the metaphysics, mythology, religions and literatures of the world are equally responsible for rendering the analysis of his texts an uphill task. The difficulty experienced by a reader in the decipherment of his eclectic, postmodernist pastiche is owing to the palimpsest dynamics of his writing.

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