

Tlön as hrön

Metafiction and possible worlds in Jorge Luis Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of Jorge Luis Borges' (1899-1986) short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" from the collection *Ficciones* (1944). Critical commentary on the story frequently invokes it as metafictional, but it has not been studied adequately as such. I have chosen to make three separate, but related analyses of the story, interpreting the findings with the overarching theoretical framework of metafiction, and in its extension, the literary theory of possible worlds.

The first analysis is a structural narratological analysis of the narrator of the story and of narrative frames, finding that the regular reading of the narrator as a fictional dramatization of Borges himself is upset due to the complexity of the frames. The second analysis discusses the philosophical system of the fictional planet Tlön and its corresponding allusions to real-world philosophers, finding that the philosophical system describes an ontology of fiction. The final analysis looks at the myriad duplications and mirrorings in the story, positing the duplicating objects called *hrönir* as a structural metaphor, and analysing two instances of the metafictional device *mise en abyme*. I show that the myriad duplications is dramatized as a way of perceiving the actual world, and, as a consequence breaching the boundaries between the fictional and real world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction. Metafiction and possible worlds

S'il n'y avait pas le meilleur (optimum) parmi tous les mondes possibles, Dieu n'en aurait produit aucun.

— Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (1710)

By his own account, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) first started writing prose fiction following an accident during Christmas of 1938, when he was hospitalized due to a blow to the head. The wound was complicated by septicaemia, bringing the author close to death. Fearing that his creative faculties were lost, the hospitalization led Borges to attempt writing a short story. He had previously published several volumes of poetry and essays, so he considered that a failure in a genre he was not used to working in would not be as terrible as the alternative (Borges 1987: 45). The result was “Pierre Menard, autor del Quixote,” now considered one of the most important short stories of the twentieth century. The second, from 1940, was “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.” The accident in 1938 was followed by an intensely creative decade, during which he published two collections of short stories and a collection of essays that are now considered to be among the foremost literary achievements of Argentina, if not the world, in the twentieth century.

Borges’ personal account regarding the creative origins of his fictions is perhaps somewhat embellished: he had already published a book of biographies, *Historia universal de la infamia*—biographies that are more fictional than factual—and a short story, “El acercamiento de Al’Mutasim,” a “review” of a book that does not exist. These were already suggesting the nature of his later fictions; “El acercamiento” was later to be included in his first collection of short stories, *Ficciones* (1944).

Ficciones is divided in two parts: the first, *El jardín que los senderos se bifurcan* was published separately in 1941; the second, *Artificios*, was added with the 1944 publication. The stories reflect the nature of their author, as they are intensely literate with a penchant for metaphysics and mysticism. With the publication of *El jardín*, Borges’ friend Adolfo Bioy-Casares wrote in a review that Borges had established a new genre: the philosophical fiction. This, though perhaps an exaggeration, is a characterization that suits the stories well, since

their nature is metaphysical. This metaphysicality extends not only to the nature of mind, but, significantly, to the nature of fiction itself.

While fiction, and especially the novel, has a tradition of self-awareness, the stories of *Ficciones* explore the implications of fiction as a structuring principle for how man relates to existence. Through his knowledge of for example idealist philosophy, Borges explores both the fictional nature of how we experience the world, but also how, in reading, the fiction *becomes* our world.

These short stories and essays are now widely considered to be early examples of a type of self-conscious fiction that was to become popular from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. Additionally, some of the themes explored are sometimes considered to be progenitors of later structuralist and post-structuralist thought, a standpoint notably voiced by Emir Rodríguez Monegal (1990). The presence of a self-consciousness of the processes involved in the production and reading of fiction within the fiction itself was later to be termed “metafiction.”

1.1 Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

This study concerns “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the first story found in *Ficciones*, widely regarded to be one of Borges’ most important works. Divided into three parts, the story begins with an unnamed narrator—often assumed to be a fictionalised version of Borges himself—that together with a friend, Adolfo Bioy-Casares, discovers a mysterious article about a country called Uqbar, a country they have never heard of before. Even more mysterious is that this article is only present in Casares’ copy of the encyclopaedia, which is a pirated edition of the tenth edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* called the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*. The article details the history and geography of this unknown country, noting that its literature is of a fantastic nature, and its legends are always about the imaginary realms of Mlejnas and Tlön. Other copies of the volume in question do not include the entry, spurring a search for other references to Uqbar. The narrator and his friend discover that there are a few books on the subject, but unable to acquire them, the investigation into Uqbar is abandoned.

However, in part II, the narrator comes upon a book some years later among the belongings of the deceased Herbert Ashe, an English engineer and friend of the narrator’s father. The book turns out to be the eleventh volume of an encyclopaedia called *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*. The encyclopaedia is from an imaginary planet called Tlön, and a long discussion of the planet’s philosophical outlook is detailed. There, the dominating

philosophical view is idealist, and the narrator explains at length the curious beliefs and languages of the planet, comparing throughout to known idealist philosophers like Berkeley and Hume. Towards the end of the discussion we get to know of one of Tlön's most peculiar aspects, the *hrönir*. The *hrönir* are duplicates of lost original's objects, brought forth by hope and expectation. These copies are not perfect; they are slightly different, perhaps awkwardly so.

Finally, there is an added postscript which is famously dated seven years in the future of the story's original publication. Now an entire set has been found of the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*; another find, a letter to Herbert Ashe from another mysterious entity, Gunnar Erfjord, details the creation of the encyclopaedia. It turns out to be the result of a vast conspiracy spanning hundreds of years, where a secret society originally set out to create a country from scratch—Uqbar. However, upon relocating to the Americas, the society was funded by a millionaire by the name of Ezra Buckley, who finds the idea of creating a country redundant in light of the newly established United States. His demand was that, in exchange for his resources, the society would create an entire planet. The way of doing it was to make an encyclopaedia in the manner of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. A hundred years later it was finished, and at the time of the narrator's writing its ideas are starting to infiltrate the mindset of the world. Mysterious, seemingly impossible objects have begun to appear, objects that seem to come from Tlön. The narrator, deploring this intrusion upon the world of another planet, predicts that in a hundred years the planet will be Tlön.

In short, the story is about the discovery of a volume of an encyclopaedia that describes another planet—or another reality—in which idealist philosophy is the prevailing world-view, rather than the positivist scientific and materialist views of our own. The narrator of the story details how the inhabitants of this alternate planet view their world. Finally, the world-view of the alternate planet comes to supplant our own world—or rather, the world from which the narrator tells his story.

1.1.1 Aims

“Tlön” is one of Borges' most famous stories, and has been frequently commented upon. One of the themes that crop up is its metafictionality, how it dramatizes the nature of literature itself. However, there have not been many studies of this aspect of it. In the theoretical literature of metafiction Borges is again frequently quoted, but never studied in depth. For this

study of “Tlön” I therefore aim to study the metafictional aspects of the story, and, specifically, how the story can be read as the actualisation of a possible world.

In order to do this, I will make three separate analyses: the first, in chapter 2, is an analysis of the narrative frames, where my hypothesis is that the narrative structure of “Tlön” upsets traditional narratives, especially considering the role of the narrator; in chapter 3 I will look closely at the philosophies and philosophers alluded to in the story, determining how the philosophies can be said to be dramatised in the story, and contextualising the allusions to their sources; finally, in chapter 4, I will look closely at the metafictional device of self-reflection, the myriad duplications throughout the story, and in particular the *mise en abyme*. Each analysis is then interpreted within the framework of metafiction and possible worlds.

First, however I will explain the theoretical framework for the interpretation of the analyses. This framework is based on two theoretical premises: first, metafictional theory, and second, the theory of possible worlds in literature, as it relates to metafiction. Finally, I will explain in detail how they relate to my analyses. My discussions of the theoretical framework will necessarily be limited; I have decided to focus mainly upon the aspects of theory which are directly relevant to my later analyses.

A note on the sources: for my primary source I have used *Obras Completas* vol. 1 (1989), where the “Tlön” is on pages 431-443. Additionally I have consulted a collected facsimile edition of *Sur* (1976), printed in Nebeln, Liechtenstein, for comparisons between the original publication and the current version that is used. I have also provided English translations for quotes, taken from Andrew Hurley’s translation in *Fictions* (2001) unless otherwise noted. Citations from the *Obras Completas* are referenced as “OC” followed by the volume number; references to the Hurley’s translation are written as “F”.

1.2 Metafiction

The theory of metafiction has its origin in the literary developments especially in the twentieth century, with the rise of modernist fiction and its successors. As a general rule, what today is regarded as metafictional texts were originally developed as an exploration and an unveiling of the techniques used in the realist novel of especially the nineteenth century. It was an examination of literary tropes that had become so commonplace in fiction that they were taken for granted. Metafictional texts partly explore devices of realist fiction with the aim of showing that the “realistic” devices they were originally intended to be may be used for other purposes than the prevailing realism of the nineteenth-century novel. Consequently,

the intention of a metafictional text is to unveil commonplace literary practice, to uncover the artifice involved, and make the reader aware of them.

In Linda Hutcheon's seminal study of metafiction, *Narcissistic Narrative* (1984), she succinctly defines metafiction as the following: "Metafiction,' as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity." (Hutcheon 1984: 1) Patricia Waugh goes further in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), where she along with a similar definition to Hutcheon's makes an engaging claim:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writing not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, *they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.* (Waugh 1984: 2, my emphasis)

Whereas Hutcheon restricts her definition of metafiction to the self-consciousness of modern fiction, what she terms the "narcissism" of fiction (Hutcheon 1984: 1), Waugh appears to be of the opinion that fiction, or literature, has the possibility of having the same ontological status as "reality". While this controversial claim is questionable from a philosophical standpoint, one of the themes in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is strongly reminiscent of Waugh's claim. While the following discussion of the theory of metafiction will focus upon the self-consciousness of metafiction, Waugh's claim also carries outright relevance to the theory of possible worlds, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

1.2.1 Origins of the theory of metafiction

The term "metafiction" was first used by William Gass in *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970), yet the notion of self-conscious literature had been explored theoretically prior to this, notably by Robert Scholes in *The Fabulators* (1967) and its revision, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), where he proposed the term "fabulation," emphasising the turn away from literary realism to a greater focus on story-telling as a textual artefact. John Barth, himself a prominent writer of metafiction, called this type of literature "The literature of exhaustion" in an essay of the same name (1967). Barth considered as the most interesting fiction modern fiction that self-consciously explores the existing possibilities of fiction to *exhaust* them. This is not in order to forward the end of fiction or the novel, as some have interpreted it as, but rather in order to create new forms and techniques of literature to work with, a stance he follows up in the later essay "The literature of replenishment" (1980). Notably, Barth's essay

is not only a polemic on contemporary literature, but a whole-hearted praise for Borges as the foremost representative of the literature of exhaustion.

Subsequent theoretical writing on metafiction has held a close affinity to Borges. He is mentioned frequently in Hutcheon and Waugh, and given a short (though inadequate) analysis in Scholes. In *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov and Barth*, John Stark analyses the works of Borges with Barth's expression as a point of departure, which is followed, as the title indicates, by analyses of the works of Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is not analysed in detail, however, and the theoretical base can also be considered lacking, especially in light of later developments.

1.2.2 Theoretical development

Observing a trend in contemporary fiction, Robert Scholes wrote that he originally aimed for his study of "fabulation" to address a lack in the development in literary theory, due to his view that "readers, teachers, and professional critics at that time were possessed by notions of fictional propriety derived from a version of realism that had seen its best days." (Scholes 1979: 1) His study concerns the turn away from realism in fiction towards "fabulation," and a refutation of the view that fiction which is not "realistic" carries no importance in the real world. One of his views is that modern fiction has returned to allegory through its fictional treatment of ideas, and therefore is a return to a type of literary writing that prevailed before the rise of the novel. His view is that this shift is the result of a rejection of the ideal of realism in fiction, as manifested in social, historical and psychological novels. One result is fiction that has turned to the concept of fiction itself as its subject matter. Scholes argues that this self-contemplative turn is a rejection of the Platonic view of fiction as *mimetic*, and thus that fiction unconstrained by the formerly mimetic ideals can explore its own nature and its mode of conveyance, which is language.

The turn towards its own nature and the nature of language, however, does not mean that fiction has lost its relevance, but rather that it explores in depth the fundamental means of expression we have to interact and explain the world. Through the fictional exploration of questions of fictionality and language, a renewed mode of enquiry into areas traditionally explored by philosophy is enabled. Scholes formally divides metafictional texts into four categories: romance, myth, novel, and allegory, but, as Linda Hutcheon asks about his discussion of each aspect of this structure, "where is the *meta* in this metafiction?" (Hutcheon 1984: 21) Hutcheon points out that Scholes' theoretical discussion does little to explain how

metafictional texts actually are metafictional, but rather that he is restricted to providing a typology of forms they might appear as and then describes them. The theory of how metafiction works and what its implications are is therefore lacking.

Hutcheon, however, argues that the traditional ideal of realism is what she calls a “mimesis of product”. By this she means that traditionally, the Platonic idea of *mimesis* had come to mean that the finished textual *product* was considered realistic. However, newer forms of literature that are termed “unrealistic” are still mimetic, but mimetic of the *process* of creating literature itself, rather than mimetic of the actual world, thus making a clear distinction between two types of mimesis, which she calls respectively mimesis of product and mimesis of process.¹ Thus, she argues, the term “realistic fiction” should be considered a *genre* of writing rather than a *mode* of writing. The mimesis of process comes about when fiction makes fiction itself as its subject matter and lays open to the reader the tools used to produce it. Hutcheon further argues that this is a basic condition of the novelistic form itself, where early novels came to their full right partly as parodies of earlier texts, as with the case of *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy* (23, 27). She observes that the Russian formalists defined parody as “the result of a conflict between realistic motivation and an aesthetic motivation which has become weak and has been made obvious,” (24) and also connecting to the parodic the formalist concept of defamiliarization: the laying bare of literary devices to bring to the reader’s attention formal elements one has become unaware of through over-familiarization.

1.2.3 Overt and covert metafiction

Creating a typology based on the work of Jean Ricardou, Hutcheon establishes four different categories of metafiction: overt and covert metafiction as general categories, each of which is further specified as being either diegetic (in the sense of “narrative”) or linguistic in nature. By overt metafiction it is meant texts where self-consciousness and –reflection is clearly evident and thematized, whereas in covert metafiction “this process would be structuralized, internalized, actualized. Such a text would, in fact, be self-reflective, but not necessarily self-conscious.” (23)

The overtly diegetic metafictional text is the text that actively involves and makes the readers aware they are participating in the fictional universe themselves. It is made through a

¹ The distinction is perhaps somewhat misleadingly named, since the mimesis of product is a mimesis of the world.

self-conscious focus upon the narrative techniques employed, or of the structure of the fiction itself. The result is that the reader becomes aware of these in the process of reading. The overtly linguistic metafictional text “would actually show its building blocks—the very language whose referents serve to construct that imaginative world. That these referents are fictive and not real is assured by the generic code instituted by the word ‘novel’ on the cover.” (29)

By contrast, the self-reflection of covert metafictional texts is not self-conscious in the manner that the text explicitly states or thematizes that it is an artefact or a fiction. An example of covert metafiction is the use of a strict genre-based structure for the story, before the story works against readers’ preconceptions of the genre’s structure.² Another, and specifically relevant to Borges’ work, is *fantasy-literature*.³ Fantasy-literature is considered covertly diegetically metafictional, due to its basic premise of creating a different universe to play the story out in. *All* fiction can be considered an act of creating a separate universe; fantasy-literature depends on a separate universe that is unquestionably a creation, while at the same time insists on the created world’s self-sufficiency, thus forcing the reader to read an unquestionably fictional world as if it were real.

Hutcheon goes on to do readings of texts representing the categories of her typology, finally emphasizing the new role of the reader in literary texts, considering with it the narrative theory around the theory that had emerged in the previous years (esp. Gérard Genette and Wolfgang Iser). Though she does a cursory examination of fiction’s generation of alternate worlds, or “heterocosms,” Patricia Waugh goes further in the development of the implications of metafictional texts’ creation of these and their truth status.

1.2.4 Truth and representation

Waugh’s study of metafiction establishes it as a post-modern practice of writing, and especially concentrates on the problem of fiction vs. reality, in reference to the formalist view that language can never be a complete representation of what is the actual world. Thus metafiction is again placed in opposition to realistic practices of writing. In Waugh’s case it is

² Borges famously wrote an inverted detective story in “La muerte y la brújula” [Death and the Compass] where the detective, in an effort to see order where there is actually chaos, establishes a pattern from an initial crime to predict where the next murder takes place. The criminal, however, had learned of the detective’s willingness to see a pattern and so devises it for him; as the detective arrives at the scene of the final crime to avert it he finds out that the final victim is himself.

³ This is not Todorov’s concept of the “fantastic” in literature, but of Fantasy as a genre. I consider it relevant because of the way in which “Tlön” creates an alternative world with its own ontology, akin to the definition of fantasy-literature provided.

the metafictional self-reflexive problematization of representation or unveiling of linguistic artifice, rather than the thematization or actualization of the reading process, as it is for Hutcheon.

Though Waugh's study of metafiction parallels Hutcheon's to a great degree, she also looks at metafiction's exploration of the truth status of fictions. This is based partly on the previous dictum of realism that mirrors Plato's claim of mimetic artefacts as being lesser than the actual world, and thus that fiction cannot make a claim on truth or relevance. The most interesting argument, and most relevant for this study, is the claim of fictional worlds as alternative worlds, which effectively is a closer study of Hutcheon's concept of fictions as "heterocosms." The "alternative world" thesis takes as its point of departure that

[f]ictional statements exist and have their 'truth' within in the context of an 'alternative world' which they also create. Statements in the real world have their 'truth' in the context of a world which *they* help to construct. Fiction is merely a different set of 'frames', a different set of conventions and constructions. In this view, a fictional character is 'unreal' in one sense, but characters who are not persons are still 'real', still exist, within their particular worlds. (Waugh 1984: 100)

The claim is that fiction has relevance despite their fictionality, both through fiction's reference to actual-world circumstances, along with the use of actual-world language, both of which, while developing stories that must be considered strictly false if applied to events in the actual world, must be regarded as actual-world events in themselves. This serves two purposes, as metafiction also problematizes fiction's truth-status; the self-consciousness of fiction as artifice functions to "reveal the ontological status of all literary fiction: its quasi-referentiality, its indeterminacy, its existence as words and world." (Waugh 1984: 101) Metafiction not only exposes its own devices, but also the inadequacies of realistic fiction in constructing a world that is similar to the actual one. Because of fiction's necessary departure from the actual world, it also can never construct a "complete" world in the way we view the actual world, but a restricted one, what Umberto Eco calls the "small worlds" of fiction. (Doležel 1998: 15)

The questions the theory of fictions as alternate worlds raises have, however, been studied in detail in the literary theory of possible worlds, a field of study especially promoted by the theorists Lubomir Doležel, Thomas Pavel and Marie-Laure Ryan.

1.3 Fiction as possible worlds

My main reference in the theory of possible worlds in literature are three books: Pavel's *Fictional Worlds* (1986), Ryan's *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (1991) and Doležel's *Heterocosmica* (1998).

The theory of literature as possible worlds has its origins in the philosophical field of modal logic, which in the 1960s and '70s pronounced that statements that have no reference to the actual world can still have logical truth. This stance was pioneered by Saul Kripke, and was later developed especially by David Lewis. The theory of modal logic was developed because in logic, in the original Fregean sense, fictional statements, for example thought experiments, would have no truth-value because of their lacking reference to the actual world. Fiction, though often carrying reference to the actual world, will have imaginary constituents interacting with actual-world referents, thus disqualifying them from logical truth.

This position originates with the development of modern logic by Frege, who first considered the logical status of fiction. According to Frege's position, there are three basic assumptions to decide whether a statement has logical truth: "(1) Reference can only be made to that which exists; (2) 'To exist' is synonymous with 'to occur in the real world'; and (3) Only one world exists, the world we regard as real." (Ryan 1991: 14) When writing or talking about fictional texts this stance is problematic. Due to fiction's lack of actual-world reference, the consequence is that no logically true statements can be pronounced on them, even though these statements are intuitively true. For example, the statement "The narrator in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' discovers an erroneous encyclopaedia article," would be logically false by default, since the text of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" violates the three basic assumptions of Frege on truth-statements, even though, having read the story, the statement about it is intuitively true.

The theory of possible worlds logic has its distant origin in a Leibniz's *Theodicee* (1710), who proposed a solution to the problem of evil by postulating that God had created the best among an infinity of possible worlds. However, the establishment of a logical semantics of possibility did not restrict itself just to the problem of evil or theology. Modal logic was established to explore scenarios with assumptions that had no reference to the actual world as logically feasible. Some literary theorists, inspired by the rise of analytical philosophy, applied the framework of modal logic to literary theory, to account for works of literary fiction. Although I will not go into the technicalities of logical semantics, some key terms are necessary regarding my interpretation of "Tlön" in a possible-worlds perspective.

1.3.1 Minimal departure

One of these is what Ryan calls the law of minimal departure, which states that

we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [Actual World]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text. (Ryan 1991: 51)

This law is formulated due to the ontological status of fiction, which is separated from that of actual reality. Even though fiction as a possible world necessarily departs from actual reality, it is reference to actual reality that makes it intelligible and understandable. Thus, when fiction makes statements that are counterfactual in reference to the actual world, the logic of the fiction dictates that we refer to the actual world for its departure. When we read about an encyclopaedia in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” we can immediately be sure that it is similar to the encyclopaedias of the actual world, even if the encyclopaedia itself does not exist in the actual world.

Further possible worlds outside of a primary possible worlds are defined again by their departure; if one has a set of possible worlds, there becomes a hierarchy surrounding the actual world, where outer worlds would have the greatest degrees of departure.

1.3.2 Accessibility

In modal logic, a possible world is an accessible world if it is logically consistent and does not violate the laws of non-contradiction and of excluded middle. In the theory of possible worlds there is stipulated a “system of reality” where the actual world is at the centre, and possible worlds are categorised outside of it by degrees of departure. Thus, if there are two circumstances in the proposed world that are mutually exclusive, it is impossible, and therefore not accessible. Ryan provides an example:

a world in which Napoleon dies on St. Helena and successfully escapes to New Orleans is not possible, since it entails ‘Napoleon did and did not die on St. Helena.’ But there is nothing inconsistent about either one of these facts taken individually, and both are verified in some logically possible world (Ryan 1991: 31)

Ryan establishes an (incomplete) set of properties in texts to establish their degree of possibility and fictionality, properties like the compatibility of inventory (as in the objects that constitute the textual world), chronology, logic, and so on. The fewer of these properties that

are in accordance with the fictional world, the less “possible” the fiction becomes; as such, genres like “Accurate non-fiction” or true fiction are the most possible; their departure from the actual world is the least and consequently most accessible. Sound poetry, however, frustrates the accessibility relations completely, and cannot be regarded as possible worlds as such.

Additionally, Umberto Eco, in the chapter “Lector in Fabula” from *The Role of the Reader* (Eco 1979), attributes accessibility to what he terms “trans-world identity,” in which an object’s continued identity between worlds depends on a their essential and supernumerary properties. What this means is that an object is defined by its essential properties, and that he supernumerary properties are not as important for the definition of the object. Thus, if one has an object that has the same *essential* properties between worlds, one can conclude that they are the same object across worlds, even if the object does not have the same *supernumerary* properties.

Regarding “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the concept of accessibility is particularly relevant because of its progressive departure that logically follows the previous. By this I mean that the initial textual world we read the story is a world of minimal departure; the world of Tlön is at a great departure, but the story effectively progresses toward it in a natural fashion. If the story had opened within the world of the postscript, for example, the accessibility of that possible world would have collapsed because of its lack of concordance with the actual world. The first two parts, however, act as a necessary and gradual preliminary explanation of what is to follow.

1.3.3 Relevance

Essentially, the possible worlds theory of fiction refutes the view that all fiction must be viewed as false, that fiction can have truth-claims within its own set of references. With the framework of logical modality there can thus be made claims about fictions that are logically true, while, with the concepts of departure and accessibility, the statements or worlds of the fiction can be deemed more or less relevant in respect to the actual world. This is not to say that all fiction, to be considered relevant, must have strict accessibility relations to be considered possible.

The power of good fiction is not necessarily judged by how probable or relevant the possible worlds depicted are, but rather the strength of the interpretations they engender.

However, in a story like “Tlön,” the theory of possible worlds in fiction gains a very literal interpretation; the possible world literally *becomes* the actual world.

1.4 Metafiction and possible worlds in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”

How do these theories of literature relate to Borges’ short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”? First, it is notable how Borges is prominent in the discussion of both theories. Regarding metafiction, Barth’s essay, Scholes’, Hutcheon’s and Waugh’s books all make direct references to Borges in their discussion of metafiction, and “Tlön” is mentioned outright as an example for some of their points. None of the analyses, however, go in depth into the story. Typically, Borges’ literary *oeuvre* as a whole is considered metafictional, with especial weight upon his first collections of short stories, *Ficciones* and *El aleph*. Among possible worlds-theorists, Marie-Laure Ryan is especially interested in Borges, and devotes long passages of analysis to several of his short stories in her writings. Again, though, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is left out. Borges features several times in Pavel’s book, though he is completely left out of Doležel’s. There is, however, good grounds for examining “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” both as metafiction and within the framework of possible worlds theory. This, as a result of how it is composed, can be regarded in “Tlön” as a metafiction on reading: through the reading of an encyclopaedia, what is a possible world within its pages becomes an actualized world. Read as such, it can be seen as a self-conscious and self-reflective examination into the nature of reading, where reading in the story actually leads to the possible world of the fiction within it. I will therefore discuss shortly some of the elements of metafiction and theory of possible worlds analysed in later chapters, as well as remarking upon some elements which are not included in these.

1.4.1 Metafictional elements in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”

To take an example that I will come back to several times in my subsequent analyses: the opening paragraph describes a scenario of what Hutcheon would call (c)overt diegetic metafiction: the narrator and a friend are discussing how to compose a novel. This part is important for the story as a whole, for several reasons. Primarily, a first-person narrator⁴ of a literary text tells about discussing the creation of a problematic first-person narrator in a literary text. This marks, perhaps, that the story is not only about Uqbar, as the first sentence

⁴ Which, as I will show in the next chapter, is problematic, though not only in the sense that it might be intuited from the text.

tells us, but also about the process of creating. Self-referential details like this are scattered throughout the text, but, as my hypothesis states, the structure of the story as a whole is metafictional on several levels, which I will address by order of the following chapters:

1) Narrative structure. The narrator of the story is, as mentioned, in first-person, and opens with an hypothesizing of how to create an unreliable narrator. As I will show in chapter 2, this unreliability is not mainly in the sense that Wayne C. Booth would later define it,⁵ as a narrator at odds with the ethics of the story (Booth), but instead that the continued identity of the narrator is a received literary assumption that can be questioned. This is especially evident in the third part of the story, the postscript, which self-consciously and self-reflexively reframes the preceding two parts. This reframe is due to its “post-dating”⁶ the postscript purportedly from 1947, while the previous parts were written in 1940 (While “Tlön,” was, of course, first published in 1940). This is an additional metafictional nod to the reader, as placing the story seven years in the future at the date of publishing clearly marks the story as fiction—rather than giving the reader a “sense of vertigo” from the implications of a “story from the future” as some critics have insinuated. From the author’s view this must therefore be read as a prediction—a possibility.

The postscript redefines the previous parts, as it concedes to having altered them—though only slightly—which complicates the narrative structure, as the entire story cannot be considered as two separate articles published seven years apart, but a revision of an article with an added postscript, thus completely shifting the premise of what Wolfgang Iser calls the “implied reader” (Iser 1974).

2) Philosophy of Tlön. The philosophies of Tlön that are discussed in the second part are all idealist, and all question the relation between reality and fiction. That a fictional text would have a discussion of whether reality is a construction is unquestionably self-reflexive (though not necessarily self-conscious). Though the discussed philosophies are fictions within the fiction, the narrator establishes their link to his (the textual) world, whereas I will make the effort to explain these philosophies and uncover discrepancies of the narrator’s explanation. Thus, through my analysis, I will establish a link between me and Tlön, through a story called

⁵ Booth’s definition is nebulous, and not very applicable in relation to “Tlön”; the narrator of “Tlön” might be unreliable, but not in Booth’s sense.

⁶ The spanish word *posdata* means postscript, but can also be read as post-dating, giving an ironic meaning in relation to the original publication of the story.

“Tlön,” regarding philosophy that claims that all we experience is an illusion. This is, to me, far more dizzying in its implications than the postscript “added” in 1947.

Regarding metafiction, this echoes Waugh’s considerations of the unreality of fiction; the philosophical systems of Tlön explain that all experience are ultimately personal fictions.

3) Duplication and mirroring. Central to the story is the motif of duplication and mirroring. This is, amongst other things, shown most clearly in the discussion of the *hrön* of Tlön: objects that duplicate themselves, with variations, manifested through the hope of their seekers to find them. However, as I will show in chapter 4, duplication is mirrored in the story’s structure on several levels, both in language and structure—as with Hutcheon’s division of diegetic and linguistic forms. This is coupled with the motif of the mirror, which itself is mirrored thematically and structurally in the story.

The opening sentence, “Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar,”⁷ (OC 1: 431) immediately signals the theme of mirrors in the text, which, with the juxtaposition of the encyclopaedia, indicates its thematic function on several levels, not only an encyclopaedia’s function as a structural mirror of the world it describes, but also that the text, or rather the *story* can act as a mirror, both through what the author has put into it, but also how the reader interprets the story. This is in accord with Borges’ own poetics of reading, which we can find formulated in one of his essays, “El primer Wells” from *Otras Inquisiciones*:

La obra que perdura es siempre capaz de una infinita y plástica ambigüedad ; es todo para todos, como el Apóstol ; es un espejo que declara los rasgos del lector y es también un mapa del mundo. Ello debe ocurrir, además, de un modo evanescente y modesto, casi a despecho del autor; éste debe aparecer ignorante de todo simbolismo.⁸ (OC2 : 76)

Though the essay was written in 1946⁹, six years after the publication of “Tlön,” it resonates with much of Borges’ earlier writings, especially the allusion to the First Epistle to the Corinthians. This call for ambiguity, that the work should reflect the reader and be a map of the world: this resonates deeply with regard to “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.” To Borges, ambiguity in literature is a virtue, because it leaves the text open for the readers to fill the gaps with themselves.

⁷ “I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia,” (F: 7)

⁸ “Work that endures is always capable of an infinite and plastic ambiguity; it is all things for all men, like the Apostle; it is a mirror that reflects the reader’s own traits and it is also a map of the world. And it must be ambiguous in an evanescent and modest way, almost in spite of the author; he must appear to be ignorant of all symbolism.” (Borges 1964: 87)

⁹ Cf. “Bibliografía cronológica de Jorge Luis Borges” (Louis 1996) from the web-pages of the Borges Center of the University of Pittsburgh.

1.4.2 The possible worlds of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”

In connection with the observations of the previous section, the theory of possible worlds can be regarded as an extension of the theory of metafiction. The shifting of narrative frames as I have outlined above is also relevant in the frame of possible worlds theory, since the story, beginning in a textual world of very slight departure from the actual world, finally turns out to have a much greater degree of departure, though we, as readers, have been primed for the referential reality through the first two parts of the story’s discussion of the “imaginary” planet Tlön.

In effect, the story actualises the view of fiction as possible worlds, because it not only describes in detail this alternative possible world through a work of fiction, it also shows that this fiction comes to pass into actual reality. Through its play with narrative frames, the setting of the initial two parts in fact describes a world very close to our own to the *reader*. It opens in a world of minimal departure, but within the final logic of the story’s narrative frames, the world the reader initially identifies with actually becomes the most fictitious—the world of greatest departure. The thorough discussion of philosophy *primes* the reader, as it were, for this significant ontological shift in the story’s logic.

The narrative structure, is reflected in the duplications and internal mirrors. The reality described in the fiction is not a strange one, the story seems to describe a likely reality. Yet, as Evelyn Fishburn observes, “once we know [the *hrönir*] are there, we, like the archaeologists of Tlön, will find *hrönir* everywhere, as a constitutive part not only of reality but, pertinently, also of the narrative.” (Fishburn 2008: 57) When considering the *hrönir* as a structuring principle of the story, we are bound to find it, and, as Fishburn says, we will perhaps find it elsewhere. The *hrön* therefore becomes a poignant observation on how reality works, but reframed to become fantastic; as readers we observe that an aspect of the fantastic in literature has invaded our everyday environment. Perhaps this is metafiction in its purest form; to show and reframe the structuring fictions of our everyday lives.

1.5 Conclusion

For the purposes of this study, the theories of metafiction and possible worlds act as the interpretative framework, and the outline I have presented of the theories of metafiction and possible worlds has therefore not been overly technical. For this interpretation I will analyse

“Tlön” in three ways, in the manner shown in section 1.3.2: chapter 2 is an analysis of narrative structure and frames; chapter 3 is a study of the philosophies presented in part II, allusions to philosophies in general, and a comparison to actual-world referents; while chapter 4 is a closer look into textual duplications, mirrorings, *hrönir* as a defining metaphor for the internal structure and *mise en abyme* as a structural element. This is to examine the working hypothesis of this study: that “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is a metafictional work which examines the limits of narrative representation and the nature of fiction as a possible world.

This is not to say that my interpretation is intended as the definitive one. The divergent interpretations “Tlön” has received previously should be evidence enough of this; for example, it has been read as a tale in the utopic tradition (Irby 1971), as an effort to deal with the loss of Borges’ father (Friedman 1987), a parody on esoteric traditions (Jaén 1992) and as an inquiry into the difficulty of representing reality (Riberi 2007). None of these interpretations are wrong, of course, but as we are told of the people of Tlön, perhaps as a warning to the readers of the story: “Sabem que un sistema no es otra cosa que la subordinación de todos los aspectos del universo a uno cualquiera de ellos.”¹⁰ (OC 1: 436) An interpretation cannot exhaust the original, for it depends on an aspect to structure its system. This study is no different, and though what I have written is at least four times as long as the story itself, I cannot hope to have exhausted its possibilities.

¹⁰ “They know that a system is naught but the subordination of all the aspects of the universe to one of those aspects—*any* one of them.” (F: 15)

Chapter 2: Narrator and narrative frames

Allor Virgilio disse: “Dilli tosto: Non son colui, non son colui che credi”

— Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto XIX

Placed precariously right at the start of “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” is a proposition for a way of writing a novel:

Bioy Casares había cenado conmigo esa noche y nos demoró una vasta polémica sobre la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiere o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitieran a unos pocos lectores –a muy pocos lectores– la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal.¹¹ (OC 1: 431)

This “vast debate” is frequently taken as a key for how to read the story. Most critics focus on the “atrocious or banal truth” that supposedly is hidden—they aspire to be among the very few. However, the way their search is carried usually does not take into account the rest of the proposition: the unreliable narrator who, using contradictions and omissions, hides some more “real” truth underneath the visible story. This possible truth is not the focus for my study; rather, it is in my opinion that the emphasis given on an unreliable first-person narrator is a worthy area of examination. The narrator’s¹² and Bioy Casares’ discussion appears to focus on this hidden truth depending directly upon the nature of the narrator and its reliability. However, on closer examination of the story I have come to the conclusion that this unreliability lies not only in the factual disclosures by the narrator; I have also discerned an unreliability in what *seems* to be a single voice within the story.

This chapter is therefore an analysis of the narrator, relating my findings to the theories of metafiction and possible-worlds theory. For the purpose of analysing the narrative voice I will look closely at the story’s narrative frames, which are more complicated than they seem at first glance. For this analysis I have included a thorough discussion of the

¹¹ “Bioy Casares had come to dinner at my house that evening, and we had lost all track of time in a vast debate over the way one might go about composing a first-person novel whose narrator would omit or distort things and engage in all sorts of contradictions, so that a few of the book’s readers—a *very few*—might divine the *atrocious* or banal truth.” (F: 7, my italics: the original translation writes “horrible”)

Subsequent citations from the Spanish text will refer to this edition, unless otherwise noted.

¹² I will consequently refer to the narrator of the story either as “the narrator” or “it,” preferring the neutral gender, cf. Mieke Bal (1997), even though it is quite likely Borges intended the narrator to be a man (masculine), and even refers to the narrator as such in interviews.

relationships between the narrator, its relation to the implied author, and the necessity of distinguishing between the actual Borges and these structural elements. First, however, I will give an overview of previous critical treatment on the question of the narrator.

2.1 Critical overview

Given an examination of analyses of “Tlön,” especially having the problem of voice and narration in mind, one is struck by how uneven the critical literature regarding the narrator’s voice seems to be. Few have specifically analysed the narrator of the story (I have only found one article by René de Costa doing this, who studies several stories and only provides a cursory glance at “Tlön”), and while most analyses are concerned with themes relevant to the story—like idealist philosophy, mirroring or duplication of worlds and progressive fictionality—most, if not all, mention the narrator and comments on its somewhat unclear status. I have provided a chronological overview of central examples from the critical literature.

Ana María Barrenechea (1965) mentions the initial discussion between the narrator and Bioy Casares, noting that it “contains a conversation with Bioy Casares on a first-person story” (Barrenechea 1965: 74). Given that the sentence lacks a subject with whom Bioy Casares is actually discussing with, the implication is that Barrenechea, also, is equating the narrator with Borges, though this is not made explicit. Barrenechea does not distinguish between Borges and the narrator’s voice when she does a curt analysis of the story later in the monograph. There it is *Borges*, not the narrator, who “offers a coherently and minutely organized universe; if he does not expose its complete structure,” (123).

James E. Irby (1971) examines Borges’ precursors to writing “Tlön,” in “Borges and the Idea of Utopia.” Though Irby mentions the narrator, he is not consistent in its identification. Initially it is equalled to Borges: “When Borges discovers the Eleventh Volume,” (Irby 1971: 41) but when discussing the story’s treatment elsewhere, “Borges” has become “the narrator,” (43) though Irby here calls the narrator “he,” which can be interpreted as a reference to Borges, considering he has named Borges earlier.

In a short introduction to *Ficciones*, D. L. Shaw (1976) does not actually mention the narrator at all, but examines how “reality” and fictionality is mixed: “The opening of the tale illustrates [...] Borges’ skill in creating an air of plausibility by deftly mixing together the real and the imaginary.” (Shaw 1976: 14) Shaw goes on to list the various actual persons and places mentioned in the story, which adds to the realistic feeling of the story’s setting. While

not actually referring to the narrator, Shaw consistently credits Borges personally with the opinions the narrator voices, implying that the narrator is equal to the actual Borges. It would seem that Borges' deftness at mixing reality and fiction makes it hard to distinguish whose voice it is that we read in the story.

John Sturrock (1977) makes a distinction between Borges and the narrator, but comes off somewhat ambivalent to whether the distinction is necessary. First we read of "the narrator of the story," (Sturrock 1977: 118) though the clear distinction loses ground when we later read "Borges, or [...] the narrator," (119) proceeding to change between the definite designation "Borges" and the more uncertain "the narrator." The ultimate impression one is left with is that the narrator's presumed identity is not one of the main concerns when reading of the story.

René de Costa (1978) writes on the narrative voice of Borges' early fictions, and tells us that Borges' use of narrative voice has gradually narrowed the distance between author and reader. Of "Tlön" Costa claims that the "narrative 'I' now belongs to someone very much like the signatory to the piece, Jorge Luis Borges," adding, however, that "lest the average Argentine reader of 1940 confuse the fictional narrator (admirer of Tlön) with the real Borges (author of the artifice) and take the story for an essay, a significant postscript is added to the original publication in *Sur*" (Costa 1978: 195). In Costa's view this leads the reader to (at least partially) equate the narrator with the actual Borges, though when the postscript recontextualises the preceding narrative, one is forced to think of the narrator in a different perspective: "Borges has dramatized himself." (196). Again, the narrator of the story has become a fictional Borges, though the nuance is clearer in Costa's reading: the narrator at first appears to be a close analogue to Borges, but turns out to be less so. Though Costa touches upon it, he does not fully account for the complex interaction between the story as it was printed and the article within the story, something I will examine more closely later.

Gene Bell-Villada (1981) asserts that it is "Borges" who narrates the story, placing Borges within quotation marks, giving this "Borges" some sort of fictional pseudo-existence (Bell-Villada 1981: 128). Designated thus, Bell-Villada creates the impression that the narrator actually names itself, and this is not the case—the narrator stays anonymous throughout the story, only referring to himself in the first person. Listing the various actual people in the story, Bell-Villada rounds it up: "and of course, Borges and Bioy Casares." (132), definitely placing Borges in the story, though with a somewhat unclear status.

Mary Lusky Friedman (1987) does not equate the narrator exactly with Borges, but rather relates them closely: "Borges elaborates this idea of irrevocable loss in such a way that

it seems to arise in the tale not out of a sense of grief, the narrator's or Borges' own, but rather out of a set of events that are quite depersonalized.”; “The speaker and his friend, a fictional Borges and Bioy Casares.” (Friedman 1987: 184) Although she acknowledges the fictional status of the narrator, she nonetheless asserts a tight bond between the actual author and the fictional narrator. This is not problematized, as the further analysis hinges on the relationship between the text and Borges' personal biography.

Didier Jaén (1992) writes: “the unidentified first person narrator (presumably Borges himself) and Borges' friend and collaborator Bioy Casares.” (Jaén 1992: 183), identifying the narrator with the actual Borges. Jaén also examines the discussion between the narrator and Bioy Casares and its narratorial implications:

In the development of the story one could surmise, at one level, that this narrator is Borges himself and the ‘novel’ is the story of his investigation about Uqbar and Tlön. At another level, since the story of Tlön and Uqbar turns out to be a parodic history of esoteric and metaphysical ideas, one could say that the narrator of this longer, more encompassing ‘novel’ is not Borges at all but a group of writers, scientists and philosophers who, unwittingly, have been creating the banal or atrocious reality of an idealist or conceptual world. The story also suggests that there is a hidden or invisible “narrator” behind these narrators, who directs them in their task. Finally, since this “secret society” turns out to be a real and very dynamic factor of cultural history, we could say that the deceiving author or narrator is culture itself, or some element of culture that persists in conveying a vision of reality different from the common everyday conception of it. (1992: 183-84)

This analysis is somewhat confusing, and Jaén does not elaborate further upon it, although he touches upon the thought that the narrator of the story might not necessarily only be considered to be “Borges.” My approach, however, will be somewhat different.

Finally, Evelyn Fishburn (1998; 2008), who has written extensively on both Borges' fiction in general and also on “Tlön,” frequently equates the narrator with Borges, albeit as a fictional variation describing the narrator as “‘Borges,’ the narrator” (Fishburn 1998: 56) or “a fictional or semi-fictional Borges,” corresponding this version of Borges with an equally “fictional or semi-fictional Bioy Casares.” (Fishburn 2008: 55).

As a summary, we see that the central critical attention given to “Tlön” does not yield any clear answers as to the identity of the narrator. Most assume the narrator is a version of Borges, due to the frequent references to circumstances in Borges' own biography. However, none of the readings seem to take into account that the postscript¹³ recontextualises the whole text—though the narrator, in the first two parts, seem to share personal circumstances with Borges himself, the postscript makes such changes to the origins of the text that it is worthy to

¹³ I will refer to it as the *Posdata* from now on, in reference to the Spanish original.

consider at least whether the narrator continues to be “Borges” in the postscript, or whether the circumstance of an article from the future changes this assumption.

Given the varying and relatively unclear definitions of the narrator’s identity in “Tlön,” it seems to be clear that a more thorough analysis of the voice of the narrator will be of help—not only to see how the narrator functions, but also how it relates thematically to other motifs more frequently written on. Given the confusion in identifying the speaker, varying between a fictional Borges, the actual Borges and some unspecified narrator, a deeper analysis of the interactions in the text between the, as I will come to argue, *different narrators* and the relationships between each other and to Borges as actual author seems prudent. In an interview with Irby, Borges himself placed, if rather obliquely, the narrator as central to the understanding of the story: “the subject is not Uqbar or Orbis Tertius but rather a man who is being drowned in a new and overwhelming world that he can hardly make out.” (Irby 1971: 42-43) “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is the narrator’s story; the fantastic worlds we read of, though interesting and rewarding to study, are a backdrop to the story of a more personal experience.

Most of the critical literature I have reviewed simply designates the narrator as “first-person,” referring, in some oblique manner, to Borges himself. However, the complexity of the internal textual relationships of the story makes it necessary to use more formal narratological terminology, helping us to make clearer and more precise distinctions. Gérard Genette remarks in *Narrative Discourse* that “The Borgesian fantastic [...] does *not accept person*.” (Genette 1990: 247) While the remark is made upon the basis of the story “The Shape of the Sword,” in which the narrator, telling the story of a traitor, finally himself turns out to be the traitor he is telling a story about, Genette’s statement is perhaps just as true for “Tlön,” though not in the same way. In “Tlön” the assumption that a first-person narrator is static is toyed with, as I will try to show. I believe that the lack of consensus regarding the identity of the narrator motivates a closer analysis of the narrator in the story, and to find whether any findings are relevant in a metafictional perspective.

2.2 Narration and its referents

To appreciate these distinctions fully it is first necessary to identify the narrative levels or frames, since “Tlön” is not narrated in a straightforward fashion, but changes its own originary status recursively as the text progresses. Specifically, the *Posdata*, famously dated

in 1947—seven years *after* the story’s original publication in *Sur* and *Antología de literatura fantástica*, recontextualises the narrative frames. I will not dwell too much on the supposed “feeling of vertigo”¹⁴ this future dating supposedly induces in readers, but for the following discussion it is relevant to keep in mind that the *Posdata* in fact modifies the enunciating position of the two parts preceding it. To help the discussion of the frames, I will make an in-depth summary of the story’s narrative progression, focussing on parts of the text that are relevant for the current analysis.

2.2.1 Narrative progression of Parts I and II

The story is divided into three separate parts, two of which are labelled with the Roman numeral I and II. The third part does not have a label as such, but interpolates “*Posdata de 1947*” into the beginning of the text of that section. Regarding narrative progression, this section is relatively straight-forward: the first sentence, quoted above, is a short contextualisation of the textual present, providing a reason for the author’s intent for writing. Two separate scenes set a few days apart follow: first the situation in which the narrator first hears of the memorable aphorism of the heresiarch: “los espejos y la copula son abominables, porque multiplican el número de los hombres.”¹⁵ (OC 1: 443). Bioy Casares claims to have read the quote in a copy of *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, a pirated edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, but the copy they find in the house does not include the article. Following this is the section where the narrator and Bioy Casares inspect Casares’ copy of the encyclopaedia, reading the article that is included there, and includes a short summary of the article on Uqbar that they find. Finally, the narrator mentions briefly that a friend, Carlos Mastronardi, had come upon another copy of the same encyclopaedia the following day—one without the article. The dates in the first part are internally relational, “El hecho se produjo hará unos cinco años,”¹⁶ (431) though we learn with the conclusion of part II that these two parts are written in 1940, forming a continuous narrative. This is sufficient to conclude that the events must have taken place around 1935.

The next part, bearing the heading “II,” is longer and introduces an additional level in the narrative frames. Since the sections are clearly demarcated, and the fact that we are separated both in time and place, we get a signal that we must also separate the narratives of parts I and II, even if they appear to be related; they are both nested within the larger one. The main body of text in this part is the narrator’s presentation of Tlön’s “concepto del

¹⁴ “sensación de vértigo” (Monegal 1985: 448)

¹⁵ “Mirrors and copulation are hateful, for they multiply the number of mankind.” (F: 7)

¹⁶ “The event took place about five years ago.” (F: 7)

universo.”¹⁷ At the start of part II we learn of Herbert Ashe, who was instrumental to the discovery of Tlön. Ashe was a family friend who is now dead. The narrator recalls a conversation they once had about duodecimals,¹⁸ before telling of how it discovered Ashe’s copy of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön. Vol. XI. Hlaer to Jangr* some months after Ashe’s death in September 1937. The narrator recalls: “Hacía dos años que yo había descubierto en un tomo de cierta enciclopedia pirática una somera descripción de un falso país.”¹⁹ (434) The discovery of the fantastical encyclopaedia ignites a public debate on where it comes from and who made it. The narrator mentions several known figures in the intellectual life of Buenos Aires partaking in the debate: Néstor Ibarra, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Drieu La Rochelle and Alfonso Reyes. Their debate and searches for companion volumes turn out to be fruitless; the origins of the rogue encyclopaedia remain a mystery. These events are overshadowed by the remaining text of part II: the explanation of Tlön’s “conception of the universe.” While I examine that section in detail in chapter 3, there is a story of significance embedded within the discussion of Tlön’s philosophies, placed almost precisely in the centre of the text in its entirety, what I will call the “sophism of the coins”:

*El martes, X atraviesa un camino desierto y pierde nueve monedas de cobre. El jueves, Y encuentra en el camino cuatro monedas, algo herrumbradas por la lluvia del miércoles. El viernes, Z descubre tres monedas en el camino. El viernes de mañana, X encuentra dos monedas en el corredor de su casa. El heresiarca quería deducir de esa historia la realidad —id est la continuidad— de las nueve monedas recuperadas. Es absurdo (afirmaba) imaginar que cuatro de las monedas no han existido entre el martes y el jueves, tres entre el martes y la tarde del viernes, dos entre el martes y la madrugada del viernes. Es lógico pensar que han existido —siquiera de algún modo secreto, de comprensión vedada a los hombres— en todos los momentos de esos tres plazos.*²⁰ (437)

Though this structural centre of “Tlön” is important to the understanding of the story due to several aspects of it, the present focus is that of embedded narrative and its interaction with the surrounding text. It is notable that this story is set apart from the rest of the text by the use of cursive. This is especially significant considering that the narrator intervenes in the story, explaining the connection between the two parts of it, adding (somewhat inexplicably)

¹⁷ “conception of the universe.”

¹⁸ Presumably this conversation took place even before Uqbar was discovered, though this numbering system, is obviously relevant to Tlön, as we come to learn of later.

¹⁹ “Two years earlier, I had discovered in one of the volumes of a certain pirated encyclopedia a brief description of a false country;” (F: 11)

²⁰ “On Tuesday, X is walking along a deserted road and loses nine copper coins. On Thursday, Y finds four coins in the road, their luster somewhat dimmed by Wednesday’s rain. On Friday, Z discovers three coins in the road. Friday morning X finds two coins on the veranda of his house. From this story the heresiarch wished to deduce the reality—i.e., the continuity in time—of those nine recovered coins. It is absurd (he affirmed) to imagine that four of the coins did not exist from Tuesday to Thursday, three from Tuesday to Friday afternoon, two from Tuesday to Friday morning. It is logical to think that they in fact did exist—albeit in some secret way that we are forbidden to understand—at every moment of those three periods of time.” (F: 16, Due to some minor discrepancies between the formatting of the original and Hurley’s translation, I have modified the formatting to correspond more precisely with the Spanish original.)

“afirmaba.” I regard this as a distinction between narrative voices. It must be assumed that it is supposed to be a unique narrative voice for the sophism of the coins, given that it is the “most common” version. Hence, we can assume that the narrator is quoting from a source—presumably the volume of the encyclopaedia—and that the interpolations act as a form of dialogue between texts. I analyse the significance of the sophism in chapter four, since I regard it as an example of *mise en abyme*, and as such it is also relevant for the discussion of narrative frames.

Concluding parts I and II is the paratext “*Salto Oriental, 1940*” marking place and date of the writing of the two first parts.

2.2.2 Referents of parts I and II

Parts I and II are riddled with references, places, and people of the actual world in the time the story was written. The narrator introduces the story with the discussion had with Adolfo Bioy-Casares. There is the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, a pirated edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that seems likely,²¹ the references to the *Erdkunde* and the atlases of Justus Perthes, both well-known and acknowledged reference-works. A reference to de Quincey is true enough,²² and the narrator mentions some books that, though obscure, seem plausible: *History of the Land Called Uqbar*; *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien*; *A General History of Labyrinths*. These are, however, apocryphal.²³

Bioy-Casares and Mastronardi are real enough; the books, however, are not necessarily so. Andreä was an actual scholar, but the book referred to by him does not exist. The author Silas Haslam is also invented, though the name Haslam is Borges’ own grandmother’s maiden name. Ultimately though, the references in this part all seem plausible enough on reading. The only detail that arouses suspicion of fictitious aspects is the erroneous article on Uqbar found in the rogue copy of an encyclopaedia. Of course, if one digs deeper, one finds that even in this section that seemingly has mostly actual-world referents, one finds several departures from the actual world and into fiction. These discrepancies are mostly hidden, however; the setting seems familiar and true.

²¹ Alan White (2003) has identified the probable model for the encyclopaedia: the *Anglo-American Encyclopedia* (my underlining).

²² The passage alluded to is also real.

²³ Borges would later relate in an interview about his practice of working in imaginary books in stories: “[It’s] a kind of stock joke we have of working in imaginary and real people in the same story. For example, if I quote an apocryphal book, then the next book to be quoted is a real one, or perhaps an imaginary one, by a real writer, no?” (Burgin 1969: 50)

Similarly, the *circumstances* in part II all seem plausible, though here we encounter the *Volume 11* of the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, which undoubtedly appears to be more fictitious and takes more space than the circumstances leading to the exploration of it. The people referred to, however, are real; it also seems like the debate carried out in actual learned journals could *possibly* have happened, even if it did not. The referential basis of Parts I and II appear to anchor them in a fictional world of relatively minimal departure from the actual world. Additionally, as I explore more closely in chapter 3, the discussion on the philosophy of Tlön is continually connected to actual-world philosophical referents. Thus we have to make the inference that the fictional world that we infer from parts I and II are worlds of decidedly minimal departure, as the two main departures of this fictional world are a four-page article in an encyclopaedia and a single volume of another encyclopaedia.

2.2.3 Narrative progression of the *Posdata de 1947*

Appearing immediately after “*Salto Oriental, 1940*” that concludes part II is the addition of a postscript which significantly destabilises the narrative frames of what we have read previously. Not placed as a heading as with parts I and II, “*Posdata de 1947*” (440) is interpolated into the text at the very beginning of the section. The explanation of the textual status that follows is significant to the status of the text as a whole, which I will return to after looking at the various narratives in this final section of “Tlön.”

First is an explanation for the nebulous origins of the *Volume XI*. A letter to the deceased Herbert Ashe found in a book describes a conspiracy to create a country by a group of idealist philosophers from the 15th century onwards, most prominent among them Bishop George Berkeley; upon moving to America the project is refocused to invent an entire planet, by a mysterious millionaire named Ezra Buckley²⁴.

Finally, a complete set of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* is discovered in a library in Memphis. After this, events follow rapidly: the narrator recalls the first manifestation of precursors to the final intrusion of Tlön upon the internal reality of the story. A compass engraved with letters from one of the alphabets of Tlön mysteriously arrives at the apartments of the princess Faucigny-Lucinge; the discovery of a mysterious conical object that is “*muy chico y a la vez pesadísimo*”²⁵ (442). The narrator appears to be involved in both of these discoveries. Of the compass we are told: “*Hacia 1942 arreciaron los hechos. Recuerdo con*

²⁴ It might also be significant that “Buckley” is nearly homophonous to “Berkeley.”

²⁵ “very small, yet extremely heavy” (F: 23).

singular nitidez uno de los primeros”²⁶ (441, my italics), indicating that the event was personally experienced and thus remembered, unlike the first. Of the conical object we learn that “Un azar que me inquieta hizo que yo también fuera testigo de la segunda. Ocurrió *unos meses después*”²⁷ (441, my italics). Curiously, the narrative segment that follows is proposed as something of a general, shared narrative, and in fact draws direct attention to the act of narration: “Aquí doy término a la parte personal de mi narración. Lo demás está en la memoria (cuando no en la esperanza o en el temor) de todos mis lectores.”²⁸ (442) This section, which lies in “every reader’s memory,” is not very extensive, lasting from “Hacia 1944” to “Casi inmediatamente, la realidad cedió en más de un punto.”²⁹ (442) The following part growing, contrary to the narrator’s initial assertion, increasingly personal, before the story ends:

El mundo será Tlön. Yo no hago caso, yo sigo revisando en los quietos días del hotel de Adrogué una indecisa traducción quevediana (que no pienso dar a la imprenta) del *Urn Burial* de Browne.³⁰ (443)

2.2.4 Referents of the *Posdata*

With the *Posdata*, the tone becomes more urgent as the departure from the familiar world becomes more apparent. Characters introduced in this section, as the Princess Faucigny-Lucinge, still refer to actual-world people, but the events described now have their reference in the fiction of the previous parts. Though the events leading up to the creation of the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* are described in detail, the originator of its source is a fictional referent. Whereas the origins of the original project—to create a fictional country—was undertaken by a veritable pantheon of actual-world idealist philosophers, the creation of the *Encyclopaedia* has its origin in a single, fictional man, Ezra Buckley. After getting to know of Buckley, we are not privy to knowledge of any further accomplices in the encyclopaedia’s creation, whereas prior to Buckley we know of several: Berkeley, Dalgarno, Andreä, and so on. Thus the creation of the encyclopaedia is marked by the entrance of a purely fictional man.

²⁶ “In 1942, the plot thickened. *I remember with singular clarity* one of the first events.” (F: 22)

²⁷ “An unsettling coincidence made me a witness to the second intrusion as well. This event took place *some months later*,” (F: 22, my italics). It is perhaps noteworthy how the wording echoes the discovery of the *Volume XI* in part II.

²⁸ “Here I end the personal portion of my narration. The rest lies in every reader’s memory (if not his hope or fear).” (F: 23)

²⁹ “In 1944,”; “Almost immediately, reality ‘caved in’ at more than one point.” (F: 23-24)

³⁰ “The world will be Tlön. That makes very little difference to me; through my quiet days in this hotel in Adrogué, I go on revising (though I never intend to publish) an indecisive translation in the style of Quevedo of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Urne Buriall*.” (F: 25)

Additionally, though the events take place in a world clearly similar to our own, the objects that begin to intrude upon the world (are they *hrönir*, perhaps?) all have direct reference to the *First Encyclopaedia*: the letters of the compass “correspondían a uno de los alfabetos de Tlön”³¹ (441); the impossibly heavy cone is an “imagen de la divinidad, en ciertas religiones de Tlön”³² (442). When it is explained that “Lo demás está en la memoria [...] de todos mis lectores,”³³ (442) these have all originated in a work of fiction—within the work of fiction. Within the text’s chronology, the level of departure from the textual world of 1940 seems to increase exponentially up to the time the *Posdata* is written in 1947.

2.3 Narrative frames/Contextual play

For my analysis of narrative frames I have used a graphical representation. This representation has its roots with Gérard Genette’s discussion of diegetic levels (Genette 1988), where he provides a simple illustration of how one decides narrative levels: an narrator tells a story, within that story is another narrator telling a story, and so on. For a more complex narrative, however, a more distinguishing model is necessary, and I have used the model of “Chinese boxes” (Ryan 1991; Branigan 1992). In this model, narrative segments are arranged as boxes, where a box within another defines its position in the hierarchy of nested narratives. Two types of lines are employed: continuous lines, marking an ontological boundary between nested narratives, and dashed lines, which mark narrative episodes or segments.³⁴

The manner in which “Tlön” is structured, we have to distinguish between three separate, consecutive narratives in the analysis of narrative frames: Part I, Part II and the *Posdata*. This can initially be represented by figure 2.1:

³¹ “belonged [corresponds] to one of the alphabets of Tlön.” (F: 22)

³² “image of the deity in certain Tlönian religions.” (F: 23)

³³ “The rest lies in every reader’s memory,” (F: 23)

³⁴ The distinction between types of lines is proposed by Ryan as something of an ad hoc-solution (Ryan 1991: 179), but it is nevertheless effective for my purposes.

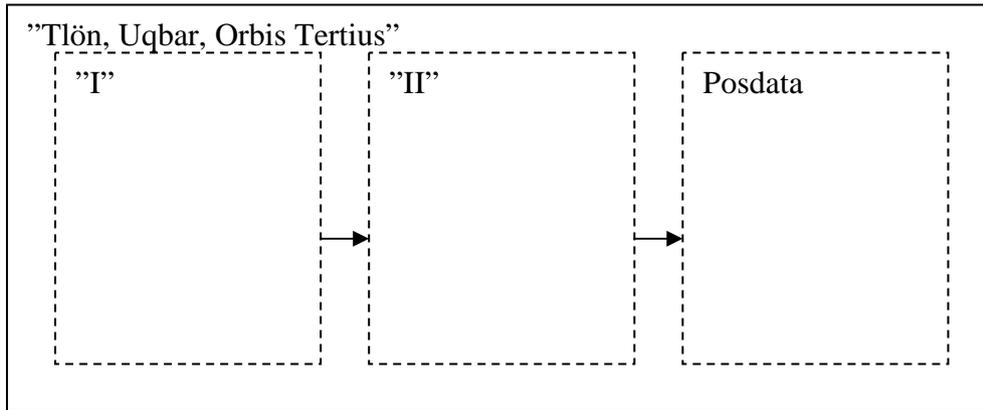


figure 2.1

This figure shows a naïve representation of the narrative structure. It is inadequate, since it does not show the complexity of narrative frames. We see, though, that the separate parts follow each other, and the outer frame shows the ontological boundary for the text as a whole, drawn with a solid line. This line is the boundary between the actual world and the textual world. Thus, the boxes marking the three parts of the story all take place within the textual world, separated from the actual world, with the arrows showing that the three parts of the text follow each other successively.

In short, we can say that this is how the story is experienced at a cursory reading, but it is clearly not sufficient for the understanding of the intricacies of the narrative frames. I will therefore look more closely at the elements making the narrative frames more complex.

2.3.1 Relations

I will outline how the narrative levels relate to each other in “Tlön” as a whole. First, however, we have to consider what the addition of the *Posdata* does in relation to the previous parts, as I have mentioned earlier.

Considering the ontological status of the world-relationships, the *Posdata* is extremely important, because it is supposedly written in 1947. Since the story was published in 1940, the *Posdata* marks a very important boundary: “Tlön” cannot be understood properly if one does not consider the original publication of the story. Initially it appears that the *Posdata* is simply an addition to the other parts, added at a later date: “Reproduzco el artículo anterior tal como apareció en la *Antología de la literatura fantástica, 1940*” (440). However, the narrator

immediately admits that the reproduction is not exactly felicitous,³⁵ adding “sin otra escisión que algunas metáforas y que una especie de resumen burlón que ahora resulta frívolo. Han ocurrido tantas cosas desde esa fecha...”³⁶ (440) The former article from 1940 must therefore be considered to have been edited in light of later events. The narrator implicitly has done a value-judgment and deemed certain elements of the original inappropriate in the context it is printed in presently. Thus, the *Posdata* is not a separate narrative parallel to parts I and II, but an overarching, framing narrative that these are embedded into. This is not immediately apparent upon reading, and the textual markers that frame the narrative come very late into the story.

Between “*Salto Oriental, 1940*” and “*Posdata de 1947*”—in the blankness of the empty lines, so to speak—is a fictional ontological barrier. *Before* the *Posdata*, everything narrated could possibly have happened; *with* the *Posdata*, everything is inarguably a fiction, a pure fantasy.

The use of the first-person singular in the story is appropriate, especially in respect to one of “Tlön’s” main subject matters, that of subjective idealism—a topic I will return to in the chapter on philosophy. When it comes to the narrative, however, the use of a first-person narrator creates a distinct problem, since the narrator of “Tlön” does not identify itself conclusively, i.e. naming itself. Susan S. Lanser argues that one of the consequences of an unidentified first-person narrator is that the reader simply identifies the “I” of the narrator with the author of the text: “I-narrative taunts us with the possibility that the ‘I’ of the fiction has some relation to the author’s ‘I’ even when the I-character is not also a writer or does not share the author’s first name.” (Lanser 2005: 207) This is because the first-person singular is a relational term that always refers to the speaker. With an oral (as contrasted to a written) speech act of telling a story, there will invariably be a truth-claim to the validity of the story. Placing an “I” in the story thus invokes an evaluation of truth regarding the speaker’s enunciation of participation in the story. In other words, when speaking, the use of “I” is always self-referential. However, this is not the case for fiction, as fiction does not operate with the same philosophical criteria for truthful statements (cf. chapter 1). Consequently, the question whether it is true that the “I” of fiction refers to the actual author of the fiction is irrelevant—one must, in fiction, always distinguish between the narrator and the author. From

³⁵ Much like how the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* is “una reimpresión literal, pero también morosa.” (431) [“a literal (though also laggardly) reprint” (F: 7)]

³⁶ “I reproduce the article above exactly as it appeared in the *Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (1940), the only changes being editorial cuts of one or another metaphor and a tongue-in-cheek sort of summary that would now be considered flippant. So many things have happened since 1940...” (F: 20)

the reader's standpoint, however, that the "I" refers to the author easily becomes the default assumption, and it can be a very strong belief regardless of whether the "I" of the fiction bears any resemblance to the actual author.

In "Tlön," this assumption on identifying the "yo" of the story with the author of the story is toyed with, especially considering the internal dynamic of textual origin. Externally, to the readers, it is signposted as a fiction—it is the first story of a collection called *Ficciones*—and thus do not operate with the same criteria for truth. Internal to the textual world, however, it does, and it is here that the dynamic of the enunciating "yo" becomes interesting. There is the textual claim that parts I and II together form an article printed in either *Sur 68* or *Antología de literatura fantástica*, depending on the version of the text we are reading; that it has been reprinted; that a *Posdata* has been added in 1947; and there is the claim that some parts of the "original" article have been edited out. The internal logic of the story dictates that we have to assume that these statements are all true. However, these (true) statements place it within a publishing history where some of the crucial paratextual information readers usually have access to is lost. Specifically, the identification of the "article's" author is lacking; and additionally, we do not know whether it has been reproduced and edited with an additional postscript *by the same author as the previous one*. I will argue for the certainty that parts I and II do not have the same *narrator* as the *Posdata*. However, I will also open for the possibility that the *author* of the *Posdata* may not be the same.

2.3.2 Extra-/intradiegesis and Homo-/heterodiegesis

I use the terms coined by Gérard Genette, who differentiates narrators as being: *homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic*, distinguishing respectively between whether the narrator *includes* itself in the text or *not*; and *intradiegetic* and *extradiegetic*, which places the narrator *inside* or *outside* of the text in relation to the narrative frame, or level, of which it relates to. The distinction between homo- and heterodiegetic narrators is directly connected to the relationship between the extra- and intradiegetic narrator. Genette explains that the homodiegetic narrator is distinguished by the fact that the narrator at the intradiegetic level self-identifies with the narrator at the extradiegetic level (Genette 1988: 85). To assert whether there is homo- or heterodiegesis should, superficially, be simple. As noted, most critics apply the term "first-person" narrator, and as an analogue to homodiegetic this is true for most narrative levels. With "Tlön," however, this impression is deceiving. In the story, the distinctions between

diegetic levels are particularly relevant for the distinction between actual-world authors, textual-world authors and narrators.

Referring to Figure 2.1, the actual author, Borges, is outside of the outer boundary making him the definitive extradiegetic narrator. The figure, in its simplicity, shows the schematic for the assumption that the intradiegetic narrator is equal to Borges, which makes the narrator homodiegetic (i.e., equal to Borges). When previous critics assume that the narrator is Borges, or “Borges,” this is what the narrative schematic looks like. This interpretation would, perhaps, be more or less right, if it wasn’t for the addition of the *Posdata* that recontextualises origins and authorship. Essentially, the *Posdata* introduces two new narrative frames at once, as I will show.

Since the textual claim is that we are reading an article, we also have to assume that the “I” of both parts I and II, and of the *Posdata*, refer to the authors of these respectively. The *Posdata* establishes that what we are reading is an entire article published in 1947. Additionally, it is established that the two previous parts were first published together in 1940. Thus we can assume that the narrators of parts I and II are the same. However, the narrator of the *Posdata* admits to have *modified* the anterior text. The narrator of the *Posdata* also admits to an ideological difference between itself and that of parts I and II. We read that some of the aspects of the previously published article were disagreeable in light of later events: “algunas metáforas y que una especie de resumen burlón que ahora resulta frívolo.”³⁷ (441) The narrator has therefore edited the text. Thus, even if it is possible that the authorial position *might* be the same, the consequence is inevitably that we cannot equal the narrators of parts I and II with the narrator of the *Posdata*.

For two separate narratives to have the same narrator, I take the position that the narrator would need to be essentially unchanged in personality, judgment and ideology. The narrator of the *Posdata*’s ideological stance is different from that of the narrator of the previous parts; the emotional association has differed greatly; the style has changed from one of detached erudition to one of urgency. Thus, even if it were to be the same person—seven years later—there is the self-confessed evidence from the narrator of an inherent change. The supposed changes are imperceptible in the first two parts, however, since the evidence of a “frivolous” attitude has actually been removed from the text. As readers we are unable to distinguish this change in attitude, which also makes it difficult to distinguish the narrators

³⁷ “one or another metaphor and a tongue-in-cheek sort of summary that would now appear somewhat flippant.” (F: 20)

from each other. But since the *Posdata*'s narrator clearly claims that the first two parts have been changed, we must similarly assume that the narrators are different.

As for the *appearance* of the intra-homodiegetic narrator, this is mainly informed by the fact that there is a continual narrating subject calling itself “yo.” To expand on Lanser’s claim that an unidentified first-person narrator creates an identification between it and the author, the continual use of unidentified narrators creates the appearance of continuity of narrators between narrative segments. This appears to be an illusion. The lack of identification of narrators plays on the expectations of the reader—a closer reading disrupts the illusion.

2.3.3 A return to narrative frames

With the previous analysis we now have the information for a more nuanced representation of the narrative frames than in figure 2.1. Primarily we have to establish internal ontological frames, due to the text’s recursive ontological reframing, and the figure now looks like this:

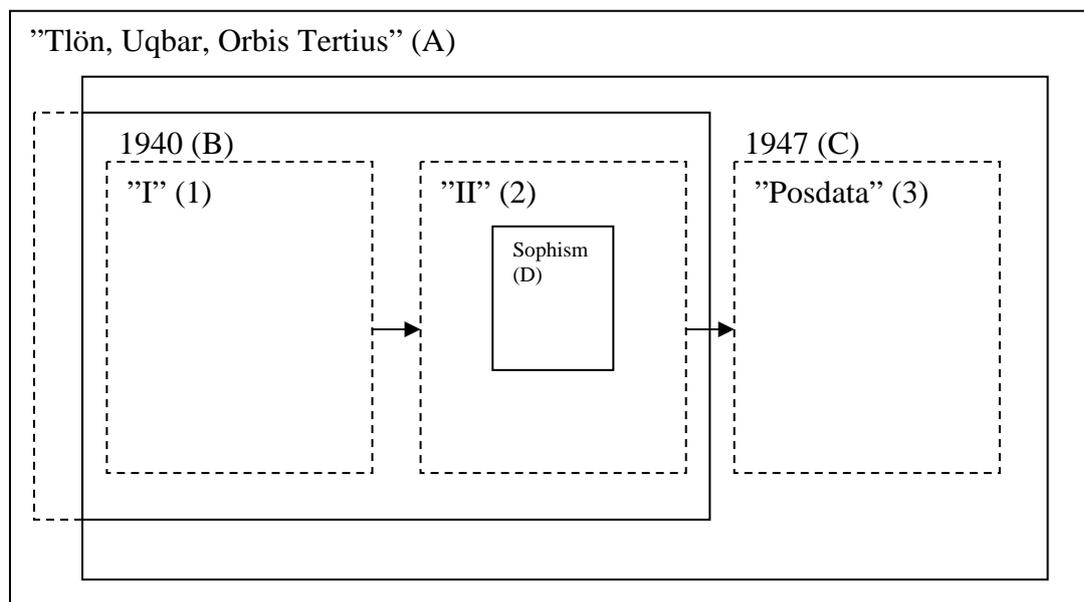


figure 2.2

Figure 2.2 needs some further explanation, due to the addition of three frames that are ontological boundaries. First, I will just mention that the innermost frame, within “II,” is what I call the “sophism of the coins,” which I have marked (D). I will discuss (D) comprehensively in chapter 4; in this connection suffice it to remark briefly on why it is an ontological boundary and not a textual one. The reason is that (D) is a direct quote from a

work of fiction (the *Encyclopaedia of Tlön*) which later turns out to be the structuring principle for a new reality; it is a quote marks it as removed from the rest of the text of part II at a narrative level higher than its framing narrative.

Primarily in the figure, though, is the inclusion of two separate ontological boundaries marking narrative levels. Level (A) of the narrative includes the entire story; so does, in effect, level (C), due to its recursive domination of (1) and (2). However, (B) also has evidence of being a story told at a complete separation from (C), though the textual segments are within (C). The consequence would be that (C) would be an embedded narrative within (B); however, (C) dominates the previous (B) narrative, making it its own. For this reason, I have marked (B) as a frame both within and outside of (C); the part outside is marked with a dashed line, because it is not a true ontological barrier, yet it reaches illusorily outside of the dominance of (C). This is to indicate that it first reads as a frame at one removed from the outer frame of (A), but that this is a narrative illusion; (C) reclaims ontological supremacy, placing (B) at a higher narrative level than itself. This operation, the misleading of the reader, is achieved by suppressing facts at the appropriate places during reading.

2.3.4 Author

Within the story, there is an author—the *implied author*³⁸—of the articles we are reading that has to be distinguished from the *actual* author Borges. However, the textual markers that are needed to identify the implied author are absent—there is no apparent signatory to the piece other than Borges himself. Thus we are left with a homodiegetic narrator that has an unknown implied author as referent, the consequence being that we continuously identify the various narrators as stemming from the same authorial source, even though this may prove to be erroneous. It is therefore necessary to identify whether the different parts can be assumed to have the same implied author, though set seven years apart in time. This will perhaps prove

³⁸ Cf. Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1991). Booth's original term was intended to signify a fictional model of the actual author—the author as the reader would discern him or her when reading a book. Booth's term does not apply to an actual structural element within the story, but the abstract impression we get of the author from reading his work. "Tlön," however, actually has an author within the story, who, though perhaps similar to Borges, must be considered to be a structurally separate and significant entity. However, since the term "implied author" is useful in distinguishing between the author presented within the text and Borges himself, I have decided to use it, rather than complicating the existing theoretical jargon. My use of the term is therefore closer to how Seymour Chatman uses it in *Coming to Terms*, where he comes to the conclusion that "the narrator [...] is the only subject, the only 'voice' of narrative discourse. The inventor of that speech [...] is the implied author." (Chatman 1990: 87); see also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction* (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 88-89)

difficult, partly due to the nature of fiction. As an example I will borrow from the philosophies of Tlön:

... no conciben que lo especial perdure en el tiempo. La percepción de una humareda en el horizonte y después del campo incendiado y después del cigarro a medio apagar que produjo la quemazón es considerada un ejemplo de asociación de ideas.³⁹ (436)

Gabriel Josipovici notes regarding this passage:

Not in the real world, we retort. But what of the world of fiction? After all, in that world there is no causality either, only the semblance of causality. For the smoke is not real smoke, the field not a real field and the cigarette not a real cigarette. The writer has put these three elements together in his mind and on paper and *we read it* as a story of how a fire was caused. (Josipovici 1998: 62-63)

In the real world, the chain of events from cause to effect is vastly more complex and minute than what perception is capable of comprehending. Therefore, we generalize from experience, and fiction takes advantage of this, where setting three different details in sequence will be read as a chain of cause and effect. This is also how “Tlön” is constructed: part I and II and the *Posdata* appear to be connected first by the fact that they are placed in sequence, and we also thus infer that they are written by the same author. Additionally, there are a set of statements that appear to link the different parts with the previous ones through the narrator’s experience. In part II, we read: “Hacia dos años que yo había descubierto en un tomo de cierta enciclopedia pirática una somera descripción de un falso país,”⁴⁰ (434) this sentence appears to relate to the scene in part I where the narrator and Bioy Casares discover the article on Uqbar. However, it is expressed ambiguously: two years ago (we do not know exactly when the narrator makes the discovery of the *First Encyclopaedia*); a certain pirated encyclopaedia (it is not identified as the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*; pirated encyclopaedias proliferated at the time); finally, the fact that there were *two* that discovered it, and that it was actually Bioy Casares who discovered it first. Although I am not saying that the narrator of part II is necessarily different from the one in part I, I stress that the main indicator of continuity within the text is this somewhat tenuous connection. This is in the nature of fiction, as sequence usually indicates contiguity.

Similarly, there is nothing internal to the text in the *Posdata* that affirms that there is a continued identification of the implied author of the narratives. The only indication we have is that the narrator at the end explains it remains with “los quietos días del hotel de Adrogué.”

³⁹ “... space is not conceived of having duration in time. The perception of a cloud of smoke on the horizon and then the countryside on fire and the half-extinguished cigarette that produced the scorched earth is considered an example of the association of ideas.” (F: 14)

⁴⁰ “Two years earlier, I had discovered in one of the volumes of a certain pirated encyclopedia a brief description of a false country;” (F: 11)

The reader's assumption being that the narrator must have returned to the hotel at Adrogué—even though the previous parts were written in Salto Oriental, in Uruguay. That the narrator should be at the same place that the narrator of part II describes may be coincidence; we read it as continuity.

The final reason we continuously identify the different narrators with the same implied author has to do with what has been explained previously, that when there is a first-person narrator, there is a compulsion to identify it with the actual author of the text, even if there are indicators in the text saying otherwise. In "Tlön," however, there are many personal details that can be directly connected with Borges: the many people mentioned in the story were friends or acquaintances of Borges, the setting in Buenos Aires, and then the hotel at Adrogué is recognisable to those familiar with Borges' biography. This is the main reason why critics usually call the narrator "Borges" or "a fictional Borges," as there appears to be a strong correlation with the narrator we are presented with and the actual Borges. Thus the positive identifications between the implied authors of part I and II and the *Posdata* is based on a false assumption: that the narrator, who maybe takes facts from the life of the actual author thus equals the implied authors within the text, even in spite of the impossibility of writing in the future. The implied authors may both be "fictionalised" Borgeses, but that does not mean that the implied author of parts I and II and the implied author of the *Posdata* are identical; rather, they both have their basis in the same person, but this person is *outside of the fiction*.

However, this opens for the question of whether we can assume the implied author to be the same for all three parts. How are we to define an author in respect to the textual world? Internally in the fiction, the label "author" actually becomes misleading. With respect to Genette's distinctions, we can establish that the implied authors of the different segments are equal to their extradiegetic narrators. Additionally, since the intradiegetic narrators are in first-person, they are also homodiegetic. This creates a problem when we consider that it is now established two distinct narrators—though one is suppressed by the other. Thus, the implied author/extradiegetic narrator of the *Posdata* is an individual placed in time in 1947, the other one in 1940. Yet, the 1947-narrator has intervened into the narrative of the first two parts for purpose of them to be in accord with its narrative. This leads to parts I and II having effectively two narrators at once: one who is the same as that of the *Posdata*, and another, a 1940-narrator whose voice is suppressed by the future narrator's recursive suppressions. The visible, apparent narrator of the first two parts is a palimpsest, written over the original narrative, suppressing its personal voice.

There must therefore be two implied authors/extradiegetic narrators of parts one and two: a homodiegetic narrator and a heterodiegetic narrator. The homodiegetic narrator corresponds to the extradiegetic author of 1940, the enunciating “yo.” The heterodiegetic narrator is the author from 1947, whose different ideology changes the text. In effect, the narrator from 1947 rewrites the text by removing from it.

2.3.5 Reader

Similar to the implied author is the implied reader: a model reader that presupposes perfect knowledge of all information that is relevant to the story (Chatman 1980; Rimmon-Kenan 2002). As with the implied author, in “Tlön” the implied reader cannot be read in the traditional manner, due to the narrative frames’ frustration of a straight-forward reading. The normal way in which to use the implied reader is to place it as a fictional construction of the actual readers as a structural element *within* the story. However, due to the separation of the narrative frames, in “Tlön” there is explicitly implied a readership that is quite different from any actual readers of the story.

In order to explain, we have to distinguish between the implied readers of the story and the actual readers of the story. The implied readers of the story seemingly evolve throughout, and we are made to understand that the model reader of the story cannot equal any actual readers of it. Thus we have to distinguish between two ontological narrative frames; one of these frames at the outer extremity which is defined by the story’s actual publication in 1940. The (actual) audience of this narrative have no preconceptions of the internal textual world of the story; thus, the initial setting, with its actual-world referents seemingly index the actual world and give it a sense of minimum departure; the story reads, with the first part, as “realistic” with a minor departure: an erroneous encyclopaedia article on a country that may—or may not—be real.

The implied readers of the story however, are intended to read the story not as a story, but as an article recapitulating a series of events leading up to the current situation. This is indicated by some of the textual details of the *Posdata*: “I reproduce here” (F: 20) and “The rest lies in every reader’s memory” (F: 23). It is both clear and necessary that, within the textual world of “Tlön” the intended readers already know of a number of events leading to the ongoing “Tlönification” of the world. These events are, no doubt, common knowledge for the implied readers. Thus we have a second narrative frame within the outermost one that indicates the ontological boundary for the implied readers; it is also an indication that the

narrative framing figure that I have presented earlier is not sufficient to allow for the implied readers. The implied readers will read it merely as chronological and as a natural progression of the story.

2.4 Consequences and conclusions. “Tlön” as metafiction

As we see from the analysis of the narrative structure, the way the story is plotted goes against traditional framing narrative structure. The opening two parts are at a higher narrative level, but it is higher than we initially expect it to be, or how we would read it naïvely. In part, this is necessary, since what eventually turns out to be the more fundamental narrative frame—a world rapidly becoming more like the Tlön from a fictional encyclopaedia—is a textual world radically removed from the seemingly minimal departure we see in the opening parts. The narrative framing, as shown in figure 2.2 actually creates a narrative frame in which there is no actual text—there appears to be no visible textual agent, though it is here that we have to place the abstract construction of an implied author that narrates the embedded narratives.

Another result is that, in effect, we have two ontological models that are at the same time competing and complementary. Within the ontological perspective of the implied reader, the narrative thus would follow a relatively realistic, referential and straight-forward narrative. One part leads to the next chronologically and necessarily. However, as these implied readers must be considered fictitious constructs, we have to add ontological boundaries to indicate that the narrative frames are recontextualised progressively. This is made not only with the *Posdata* of 1947 but with indications of the previous parts as well. For example, there is mentioned the public debate about the *Volume II*. However, this can be seen as an informative paragraph, and we have to assume that the story is supposed to reach a wider audience than the participants of that debate.

In a metafictional respect this is interesting, because in effect the text has two intended audiences: one, which has experienced the same massive events as the implied author, and therefore must read the story as a true article that is merely a lament over a lost way of life. The other audience, however, the *actual* readers, read the same lament, but, for the story to carry meaning, must involve themselves in a much greater degree of interpretative work to make any actual-world sense of the story. This duality in the narrative framing seems, in John Barth’s words, to be a step towards *exhausting* the possibilities of what is possible with the structure of narrative, because it thus frustrates the attempt from the reader to make a straightforward model of how the story is built up—and this is in spite of the fact that it reads

as a straight-forward narrative. The result is that, paradoxically, the narrative framing is complex, but completely intelligible at the same time. It invites to an analysis that is seemingly more complex than the story warrants, yet, if one is to propose a model of such simplicity, it would in fact banalize the implication of its deeper complexity.

Returning to the discussion of previous critical attention paid to the significance of the narrator in “Tlön,” it should now be clear that a positive identification of the narrator, and even the author, in the story with Borges is not valid. However, the discussion of the various referents to the actual world shows that it is, in respect to Borges’ personal biography, an identification that is intuitively correct to make. The referential basis being Borges, even the friendships of the narrator and the places it resides at, all seem to imply that the narrator also must be Borges. However, it must be emphasised that this is an authorial illusion, and the illusion is enforced by the ontological boundaries the narrative frames provide. The world we initially read in, and consequently make the identification of the narrator with the author Borges, finally turns out to be in narrative frame which is at a greater departure from the actual world than the narrative frame it is embedded in. Therefore, the identification of the narrator of parts I and II with Borges is a fiction. The belief in this fiction, however, proves to be very strong; the first impressions are the ones that last the longest, even if the text itself proves them to be wrong.

In a metafictional respect, this analysis is not what Hutcheon would call “overt” metafiction. However, it is a story that plays actively against stale suppositions of how storytelling is supposed to be. It goes against conventions of how one relates narrators to authors, and plays directly on an important aspect of reading, the filling in of the blanks where the reader fills in elements in their imagination. In “Tlön” this does not only apply to narrated events of the story, but to elements, which when left blank are conventionally filled by previous experience of fiction: the unidentified author becomes Borges; the unidentified narrator becomes Borges; it is not made clear that there has been a change in authors or narrators, and therefore they must be the same. “Tlön,” using Barth’s term, exhausts the possibilities and assumptions of how a story is constructed.

In a possible-world perspective the sophism of the coins, which is removed at the upper level of narration, is significant because it is an example of ontological importance for the internal coherence of the world described within the *Volume II*. For the world described within the volume, this sophism, though apparently innocuous, was a thought-experiment that challenged the prevailing world-view of Tlön. We can therefore say that, in a round-about way, the sophism of the coins actually presents a possible world *within* the possible world of

Tlön; a possible world that has been rejected. Therefore, the sophism of the coins is the precursor to an existential battle; a battle over prevailing ontologies. This battle leaks over into the textual actual world of “Tlön,” and the explanation of its importance must therefore be considered important for the story as a whole. The sophism of the coins is central to the story, both because it is a story of an impossible world, but because the story becomes impossible in the textual actual world as well. Its defeat crosses ontological boundaries. Because it is in a narrative frame that is the furthest removed from the textual actual world, the prevailing ontology of this little quote turns out to be of a world which is at the greatest departure from the outer framing narrative. Its referents are broken, because they have been severed through the explanations of the philosophies of Tlön. The referential basis for them are exclusively idealist philosophies, whereas, in the sophism of the coins, the description of materialism becomes the description of an impossible world. That this impossible world is the textual actual world, that it is a mirror to it, and that it is subsequently defeated, thus makes the progressive intrusion of Tlön upon the world inevitable. The fiction gains supremacy. The importance of the sophism of the coins will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 4.

To speculate on the origins, or motivation, for writing “Tlön,” we might say that it would not be “What would the story be if such and such happens,” but rather, “How would you write a story from the point of view where such and such *has already happened*, though hiding this fact, and making it progressively known? What assumptions do readers make about stories?”

In the context of the following chapters, especially of the philosophy of Tlön which I will explain in detail, I deem my findings and my interpretation of their relevance to be not only plausible, but probable. A proliferation of narrators and authors; in a footnote we read that all men, in the dizzying instant of copulation, are the same man. (438) “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” goes against preconceived suppositions of a continual identification of narrative agents; the effect is that, while the narrators may structurally be separate and unique, the impression is of a single one; the narrators in “Tlön” becomes the same one, an aspect I will study more closely in the next chapter. The world has become Tlön, and the narrator cannot escape, even in writing, the intrusion of Tlön upon the world.

Chapter 3: Philosophy in Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius

... all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known.

— George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710)

Borges' adaptation of philosophical idealism in fiction has been extensively examined and discussed ever since the inception of literary criticism on his work. Understanding 'idealism' as any doctrine holding that reality is fundamentally mental in nature, the tendency has in general been to relate philosophical ideas against broad themes from several of his fictions. As a result, many of these studies have combined aspects of ideas within fictions presenting disparate philosophies to fit them into a comprehensive evaluation of a single philosopher's work, and not necessarily giving due attention to the philosophical views presented in stand-alone fictions. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is no exception, and the philosophical allusions have been studied extensively, though often in contexts with other of Borges' stories. This tendency is somewhat alleviated by Alejandro Riberi's study *Fictions as Cognitive Artefacts*, which discusses the impact of the thinking of Hans Vaihinger, Alexius Meinong and Fritz Mauthner on the writing of "Tlön" into a systematic whole. The issue in this chapter is philosophic idealism in "Tlön". I will discuss this by analysing the text with regard to the different aspects of the relevant idealistic philosophers.

Since critical inquiries into Borges and philosophy are numerous, I have decided not to delve too deeply into the philosophical mechanics of the various philosophers that are alluded to in the story. This list is extensive: Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Berkeley, Meinong, Schopenhauer and Russell are all mentioned, alluded to, or equated with one of Tlön's eclectic mix of philosophies. Given that the philosophy of Tlön has been so thoroughly discussed, I will in this chapter not preoccupy myself too much with providing a systematic exposition of these philosophers, but rely mainly upon previous contributions. However, there is rarely given any direct textual evidence taken from "Tlön" in the discussion of the main philosophers of interest (Berkeley, Vaihinger and Meinong). I have found, at closer inspection, this to be of value to the study of the philosophies alluded to. The point of

departure for discussion on the philosophers is usually simply that they are mentioned, though rarely is the philosophical aspects the narrator tells of directly corresponded to the philosophers they supposedly derive from. On closer examination, I have found that the philosophical ideas presented do not always align completely with the philosophers the narrator contextualises them to. I have therefore examined closely the philosophies alluded to and compared with their corresponding passages, trying to sort out any eventual discrepancies, as well as finding out the significance of these. This may prove to bring some surprises, which relate to other aspects of the reading of “Tlön” than the understanding of the underlying philosophies.

In this analysis I have relied mainly upon previous critical efforts, though I have supplemented the existing critical works with various philosophical reference works. My aim is not to establish a congruent philosophy of Tlön, but rather investigate how this philosophy is directly evidenced in the text. I have examined this not only in regard to the narrator’s exposition of the *Volume XI*, but also within the other parts of the story. Hence, I will in the following section only summarise rather briefly the main philosophies of interest alluded to in “Tlön,” before studying more closely the impact these have had upon the actual text, and also whether the allusions to philosophers necessarily are correct.

3.1 Philosophy

Three circumstances in the text of “Tlön” have resulted in the critical literature giving prominence to a fundamental philosophical divide on reading it. First there is the pre-eminence given in the second part to the philosophical mode of thought in the imagined planet of Tlön. Second, the structure of the story is divided symmetrically into three distinct parts, each—given a little imagination—with its dominant philosophy. Finally, though, is the assertion in the story itself that:

Hume notó para siempre que los argumentos de Berkeley no admiten la menor réplica y no causan la menor convicción. Ese dictamen es del todo verídico en su aplicación a la tierra; del todo falso en Tlön. Las naciones de ese planeta son —congénitamente— idealistas.⁴¹ (OC 1: 435)

Here we have the definitive assertion that Tlön is idealist—Berkeley is perhaps the supreme idealist philosopher—and while not explicit, the implication is that the (congenital) belief on Earth must be other than idealist. However, this vagueness has consequentially led the critical

⁴¹ “Hume declared for all time that while Berkeley’s arguments admit not the slightest refutation, they inspire not the slightest conviction. That pronouncement is entirely true with respect to the earth, entirely false with respect to Tlön. The nations of that planet are, congenitally, idealistic.” (F: 13).

literature to diverge in respect as to *how* it is other than idealist. A few examples: Ana María Barrenechea merely concludes that “he has inverted terrestrial mental attitudes” (Barrenechea 1965: 88), though what this inversion entails is somewhat unclear. D.L. Shaw writes that by

confronting our instinctively materialist account of the world with an equally congenial idealist one, which seems to be just as coherent or more so, Borges suggests the conclusion that the way we see things is determined not by the things themselves but by our mental categories.” (Shaw 1976: 13)

Didier Jaén agrees with both Barrenechea and Shaw, writing that the “general tendency has been to read the story as a negative parody of our world, or of the version of our world produced by the intellectual linguistic bent of cultural accretion.” (Jaén 1992: 184) Jaén does not explicitly address the opposition between “our” world and Tlön however, bringing his discussion on to the similarities between Tlön’s idealism and the history of esoteric thought on Earth. As to more specific investigations into the oppositions of Tlön and the Earth, W.H. Bossart (2003) connects it to the classical nominalist/realist divide, whereas Alan White (2003) citing Borges’ frequent allusion to Coleridge’s maxim that “men are either born Platonists or Aristotelians,” reads the first part as Aristotelian realist, and the second as Platonist idealist—though, in truth, this is not the main argument of his essay.

3.1.1 Doctrines and philosophers

Central to the second part of “Tlön” is the narrator’s summary of the inhabitants of Tlön’s “conception of the universe,” as described by the *Eleventh Volume*. Jaén shows that the story gives a roughly chronological history of esoteric thought in the West, beginning in the first part with heretics, Gnosticism and secret societies, then over to modern philosophical idealism in the second part, with its numerous explicit references to idealist philosophers. What Jaén chiefly shows with this unravelling of philosophical allusions, is that even though the world-view of Tlön seems outlandish and fantastic, none of the ideas are original to the story. Indeed, these fantastic and perhaps somewhat alien ideas have been imagined by men of our own world, and they believed in them themselves. I will summarise below some of the ideas of the philosophers who are alluded to in the story.

As mentioned, the first part of the story alludes only somewhat vaguely to esoteric thought and doctrines, referencing heresy and Gnosticism with Casares’ quote that “los espejos y la cópula son abominables, porque multiplicand el número de los hombres.”⁴² (OC 1: 431) Johannes Valentinus Andreä, the alleged inventor of the Rosicrucian society is also

⁴² “Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind.” (F: 7)

mentioned.⁴³ The second part, however, is rife with direct reference to idealist philosophers from the seventeenth century and onwards. The narrator mentions not only David Hume and Bishop Berkeley, but also Gottfried Leibniz, Alexius Meinong, Hans Vaihinger and Arthur Schopenhauer. In a footnote he even manages to make Bertrand Russell into an idealist, by providing a quote out of context.⁴⁴ The main philosophers, or rather philosophies, that can be traced in the story, are those of Berkeley, Vaihinger, Meinong and Fritz Mauthner, who, although not mentioned explicitly in the story, was a great influence upon Borges.

3.1.1 Berkeley and the idealism of perception

Most explicitly, in *Tlön* the idealist philosophy of Bishop Berkeley is taken to its logical extreme. To Berkeley, the world existed only through each individual's perception of it—one only perceives the world through one's individual sensations. Therefore, he concluded, no object can exist if it is not experienced through sensation from the faculties. The result is that the continued existence of the object is an assumption made from former experience, yet one can have no true knowledge of the world not directly perceived. This is summed up in the dictum "esse est percipi"—to be is to be perceived—and it follows that our knowledge of the world is only achieved through our sensations of it. Thus we can never achieve knowledge of the world as it actually *is*, because the qualities of objects are determined by the act of perceiving them—these qualities are not present when there is no perception of them. However, this creates the problem of objects' continuing existence, which we normally assume because of our regular experience of their continued existence. According to Berkeley, however, this is not necessarily given, and there arose the problem of the discrepancy of experience of objects' continuity and the philosophical conclusion that they did not necessarily have continued existence. To resolve this issue, Berkeley, who was a man of the cloth and later became a bishop, used this philosophical proposition as an argument for the existence of God: objects persist in experience because God perceives all at once, hence their continued existence.

⁴³ The Rosicrucian order described by Andreä was, when he wrote about it, a pure invention. Andreä allegedly wrote *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz* [Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz], supposedly a founding text of the order. We learn in "Tlön" that it was "later founded, in imitation of his foredescription." (F: 10). However, Andreä never wrote a book called *Lesbare und lesenwerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukbar in Klein-Asien*, cf. section 2.2.2.

⁴⁴ Russell writes, in *Analysis of Mind*, that "There is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that "remembered" a wholly unreal past," but goes on to write "I am not suggesting that the non-existence of the past should be entertained as a serious hypothesis. Like all sceptical hypotheses, it is logically tenable, but uninteresting." (Russell 1921: 159-60) In other words, Russell means that one does not need to believe in something just because it is logically true.

Although his system has proved incredible to virtually all subsequent philosophers, its importance lies in the challenge it offers to a common sense that vaguely hopes that these notions fit together in a satisfactory way. (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, "Berkeley, George" 2008)

In the paragraph quoted above that mentions both Hume and Berkeley, we are treated to two judgments on Hume's claim about Berkeley's arguments in relationship to the world: in "our" world the claim is entirely true; and in Tlön it is entirely false. However, the claim has two constituents: that Berkeley's arguments inspire neither the slightest refutation nor the slightest conviction. Thus, if we are to take the last claim to its logical conclusion, Berkeley's argument not only inspires total conviction in Tlön, but also the possibility of refutation. The statement that it does not admit refutation is, of course, in reference to the fact that Berkeley's idealism is entirely subjective; one cannot make objective claims about it, and therefore not refute it. In this sense, that Berkeley's arguments should admit refutation in Tlön appears to be somewhat strange in regards to a planet that is wholly idealist. However, I propose that this is not in reference to logical refutation, but rather that the proliferation of competing idealist views in Tlön act as a form of refutation; Berkeley's idealism is not necessarily the *correct* idealism. But I will now examine Berkeley's position, before looking at some of the consequences in the world of Tlön.

Though Berkeley used his philosophical doctrine as an argument for God's existence, with the creation of Tlön God is completely removed from his philosophy. Ezra Buckley, the freethinking, fatalist backer to the enormous project of creating *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, would only supply his resources on one condition:

"La obra no pactará con el impostor Jesucristo." Buckley descrea de Dios, pero quiere demostrar al Dios no existente que los hombres mortales son capaces de concebir un mundo.⁴⁵ (441)

Though this might seem contradictory—to prove something to a non-existent God⁴⁶—this explains some of the features of Tlön that are described in retrospect, features that are incongruous with Berkeley. Especially the last two sentences of part II come to mind. When things are forgotten or no-one sees them anymore, they quietly disappear:

Las cosas se duplican en Tlön; propenden asimismo a borrarse y a perder los detalles cuando los olvida la gente. Es clásico el ejemplo de un umbral que perduró mientras lo visitaba un mendigo y que se perdió de vista a su muerte. A veces unos pájaros, un caballo, han salvado las ruinas de un anfiteatro.⁴⁷ (440)

⁴⁵ "'The work shall make no pact with the impostor Jesus Christ.' Buckley did not believe in God, yet he wanted to prove to the nonexistent God that mortals could conceive and shape a world." (F: 21).

⁴⁶ We might consider this in light of the theories of Meinong, though, as I will show later.

⁴⁷ "Things duplicate themselves on Tlön; they also tend to become erased and to lose detail when people forget them. The classic example is the doorway that continued to exist so long as a certain beggar frequented it, but

In an idealist world in the Berkeleyan sense, this would not come to pass, as everything is perceived by God. However, with God removed, the continued existence of objects relies upon them being perceived; with nobody to perceive them they effectively disappear (though this invites the question: how can one know something has disappeared, if it is not perceived?).

This “Buckleyan” idealism is not necessarily all-pervasive; for example, the production of *hrönir* and *ur* does not support it. How could one procure artefacts from archaeological digs, since those objects presumably had ceased to exist? The reason is that in the seemingly systematic world of Tlön there are competing philosophies. The philosophies of that world are no more or less true in that world than they are here, but provide alternative explanations—or interpretations—for phenomena. That philosophical explanations in Tlön are contradictory is merely further evidence that the understanding of how the world *actually* works is perhaps beyond our grasp, as we shall see with the philosophy of Hans Vaihinger.

3.1.2 Vaihinger and the fictions of the world

The reference to Vaihinger is slightly misleading: “El hecho de que toda filosofía sea de antemano un juego dialéctico, una *Philosophie des Als Ob*, ha contribuido a multiplicarlas.”⁴⁸ (436) Vaihinger is not mentioned outright, but *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (1911) [*The Philosophy of As If*] was his major philosophical work. The influence of Vaihinger upon Borges has been discussed previously by Carter Wheelock (1969), Floyd Merrell (1991) and Alejandro Riberi (2007); they all do it in spite of the explicit claim Borges made in an interview with Jean de Milleret that he had never read Vaihinger. However, there appears to be a copy of *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* in the library of Xul Solar—a friend of Borges’—that may have belonged to Borges (Helft 2003, from Riberi 2007: 85n). This book was inscribed with Borges’ name, and it is therefore reason to believe he might also have read it.

Riberi writes that Vaihinger, a follower of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, found in Kant a general explanation for discursive thought, because although “Kant had denied epistemological value to metaphysical notions like the soul as a simple substance, he concluded that they served as a regulative idea: we must act *as if* the soul were indivisible.”

which was lost to sight when he died. Sometimes a few birds, a horse, have saved the ruins of an amphitheatre.” (F: 20).

⁴⁸ “the fact that every philosophy is by definition a dialectical game, a *Philosophie des Als Ob*, has allowed them to proliferate.” (F: 15) .

(Riberi 2007: 78) Vaihinger believed this implied that everything outside of our perceptions is unknowable, and as a result that our beliefs regarding what lies outside of them are fictions, but useful fictions: although we cannot know if the world outside of our perceptions is real, we invariably have to act *as if* it is. Ontologically, this applies to all our conceptions of the world outside of our immediate perceptions. We see that the narrator's reference to the *Philosophie des Als Ob* is, considering Vaihinger, a misunderstanding of what that philosophy implies; the "as if" is not a reference to "dialectical games," to consider a philosophical system *as if* it were true. Rather, the philosophy of as if determines our fundamental interaction with the world; we cannot know it, but invariably have to act as if we do. The reference to dialectics might rather more precisely be to the philosophy of Hegel, who proposed in his *Logic* that, to push past apparent limits of reason as proposed by Kant, one should engage in a dialectic of *aufhebung*—or sublation—in which one proposes a thesis with an anti-thesis, in order to arrive at a synthesis. This is also reflected in the comment upon the philosophical works in Tlön, which "invariabilmente contienen la tesis y la antítesis; el riguroso pro y el contra de una doctrina."⁴⁹ (439)

We also see, though, an explanation for how the world-concept of Tlön could enter actual reality in the final postscript. If, from an idealist standpoint, the essence of the world as such—what the world *actually* is—is inherently unknowable, the only way we can interact with it is through the fictions we create about it. The entrance of Tlön upon the world can, in one sense, be considered complete change in the fictions we use to interact with it. Thus, the entrance of Tlön upon the actual world does not consist of an actual change in the world (though some aspects of this change also imply it), but a fundamental change in the fictions constructed—it is the move from a material "fiction" to an ideal one.

In another respect, this has metafictional consequences. When reading a story, we have to act *as if* the information we are given is internally consistent; we cannot evaluate the story using criteria from the actual world. The story creates fictions and we have to read it *as if* they were true.

3.1.3 Language idealism

Idealism, as it appears in the languages of Tlön, relates to idealism based in sense-perception. Every perception of an object at any given moment is unique, making the possibility of generalisations impossible—in other words, there can be no nouns. Instead, "hay verbos

⁴⁹ "invariabilmente contain both the thesis and the antithesis, the rigorous *pro* and *contra* of every argument." (F: 18)

impersonales, calificados por sufijos (o prefijos) monosilábicos de valor adverbial.”⁵⁰ (435).

This is described to be in the southern hemisphere of Tlön; for the northern hemisphere

la célula primordial no es el verbo, sino el adjetivo monosilábico. El sustantivo se forma por acumulación de adjetivos. No se dice *luna*: se dice *aéreo-claro sobre oscuro-redondo o anaranjado-tenue-del cielo* o cualquier otra agregación. En el caso elegido la masa de adjetivos corresponde a un objeto real; el hecho es puramente fortuito. En la literatura de este hemisferio (como en el mundo subsistente de Meinong) abundan los objetos ideales, convocados y disueltos en un momento, según las necesidades poéticas.⁵¹ (435)

Alejandro Riberi relates this concept of language to the philosophy of Fritz Mauthner. In *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*⁵² (1923) Mauthner proposed that language is filled with what he calls “word-superstitions,” which is the superstition that words have direct relationships to the world. The truth, he says, is that most words in subject-object syntaxes are metaphysical constructs—a noun does not directly relate to the object it signifies, because the qualities of the object are expressed through adjectives, and not through the noun itself. Thus, the syntactical elements that bear the most direct reference to the physical world are adjectives, because they have their base in sense-perceptions (Riberi 2007: 105).⁵³

This way of viewing language is closely linked to the structure of the languages that we are introduced to in Tlön. Given that the languages of Tlön presuppose that all “nouns” are either verbally or adjectivally constructed in the instant, one of the inevitable results is the *belief* that physical objects do not have permanence in space, since their concept of objects bears directly to the possibility of representation through language.⁵⁴ Another possible influence upon the invention of the languages of Tlön is Borges’ friend Xul Solar (Alejandro Schultz Solari), who was interested in and created his own artificial languages. Emir Rodríguez Monégál writes in his biography on Borges that “some aspects of the invented language of Tlön are similar to one of the two languages invented by Xul, the ‘neocriollo,’ or ‘new native.’” (Monegal 1978: 217) The link to Xul Solar is preserved in the text when explaining the translation of the Tlönian phrase *hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö*:⁵⁵ “(Xul Solar

⁵⁰ “there are impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) functioning as adverbs.” (F: 13)

⁵¹ “the primary unit is not the verb but the monosyllabic adjective. Nouns are formed by stringing together adjectives. One does not say ‘moon’; one says ‘aerial-bright above dark-round’ or ‘soft-amberish-celestial’ or any other string. In this case, the complex of adjectives corresponds to a real object, but that is purely fortuitous. The literature of the northern hemisphere (as in Meinong’s subsisting world) is filled with ideal objects, called forth and dissolved in an instant, as the poetry requires.” (F: 13)

⁵² The title translates as *Contributions Toward a Critique of Language*. It has not been translated into English to my knowledge.

⁵³ This is similar to Saussure’s distinction between the signifier and the signified, though Saussure’s stance was not idealist.

⁵⁴ It is significant to note that this is a *belief* rather than an actual *fact*.

⁵⁵ “Axaxaxas mlö” is notably repeated in “La Biblioteca de Babel”; “Axaxaxas,” read aloud in Spanish, sounds like laughter.

traduce con brevedad: *upa tras perfluyue lunó. Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned.*)”⁵⁶ (435)

As previously mentioned, Alan White’s study of “Tlön” uses Borges’ frequent reference to Coleridge’s claim—that one is either born a Platonist or an Aristotelian—to divide parts I and II of the story into their respective philosophical worldviews. Accordingly, Part I is the world of Aristotelians, while Part II is the world of Platonists. Though this divide may not be this distinct and clear, it is useful as an explanation for why the idealism of Tlön is so foreign to our own world-view. One suspects that the language used in describing that world is insufficient to convey the meaning completely, just as the languages of Tlön were insufficient in describing the concept of materialism and the perpetuation of an object in time. If their idealist language cannot conceive of materialism except through convoluted philosophical explanation, by constructing a “sophism,” then how can our own language accurately describe their views? How we see the world is dictated by the language we use, and our own language presupposes materialism because it is based on the noun. The noun is a mental category; it is an abstraction of an object which is placed outside of perception. In a language without nouns we are at the mercy of our perceptions every time we encounter an object. This is, in effect, the reason why there in Tlön are no nouns, but simultaneously there is an infinity of them. Every time they use language in reference to an object they create “nouns” based on the perception they have of it. Thus an object cannot continue to exist; our perception of it invariably changes, creating the need for a new “noun” each time we describe it. A discussion of the philosophy of Alexius Meinong can explain this peculiarity further.

3.1.4 Meinong

[Meinong] is one of the most misunderstood and reviled philosophers of recent times. According to a prevalent view, he was a spendthrift metaphysician who delighted in multiplying entities continuously and needlessly. (Grossmann 2005)

The languages of Tlön have their literature; recalling the quotation in the last section on language idealism we read that “En la literatura de este hemisferio (como en el mundo subsistente de Meinong) abundan los objetos ideales, convocados y disueltos en un momento, según las necesidades poéticas.”⁵⁷ (435)

⁵⁶ “Xul Solar succinctly translates: *Upward behind the onstreaming it mooned.*” (F: 13)

⁵⁷ For a translation see the last sentence of note 51.

Alexius von Meinong (1853-1920), an idealist by training under the supervision of Franz Brentano,⁵⁸ distinguished between two modes of being: the first is existence; the second, subsistence.⁵⁹ Finally, one can conceive of objects that are impossible. Because of their impossibility, they exist only in a sort of non-being, called *außersein*, commonly translated as “absistence”. The most famous example Meinong gave of this type of object was the golden mountain which, because of its impossibility can have neither existence nor subsistence, but Meinong nevertheless maintained that its constituents (golden; mountain) did, as a consequence, absistent objects must actually be considered as a category of objects, despite their impossibility. Other examples of absistent objects are the square circle or wooden iron. While Meinong’s concept of *außersein* is what made him most notorious as a philosopher, in “Tlön” the reference is to “the subsisting worlds of Meinong.” This can be explained thus:

Objects, according to Meinong, are *real* if and only if they either exist or are such that, even though they do not exist, they could exist by their very nature. [...] Ideal objects, by contrast, are entities which cannot be said to exist, even though they must be affirmed in some sense. Absence, limit, the past, etc. are claimed to be the traditional examples of what is non-real and, hence, ideal. Meinong adds a number of new examples to this list. He says that the similarity between a copy and the original, though it does not exist, must be affirmed. (Grossmann 1974: 69)

This affinity with Meinong is slightly deceptive, however, as the ideal objects in Tlön are based on the conjunction of sensual perceptions as a result of their language. Conversely, Meinong’s ideal objects are not perceivable (Grossmann 1974: 70). In this sense, the ideal objects brought forth in the poetry of Tlön are based on the *relationship* between sense-perceptions. This relationship cannot be perceived, but the adjectival conjunction creates a relational object.

There is an oversight here, due to the narrator’s limiting of Meinong’s theory of entities to subsistence. As such, the theory of subsistence is not as outstanding as that of *außersein*; if the people of Tlön are interested in philosophy for its aesthetic merit Meinong’s absistent objects surely fit the bill precisely. And the oversight is perhaps merely the narrator’s; in fact it is dismissed as zoology and topography:

⁵⁸ Franz Brentano (1838-1917) is considered one of the founders of modern phenomenology. Teaching at the University of Vienna, another of his students was Edmund Husserl who completely overshadows Meinong in importance, though his phenomenology shares similarities to Meinong’s philosophy.

⁵⁹ The existence-category “subsistence” is in philosophy associated with Meinong, and applies to abstract categories, rather than actual, individual objects.

Las revistas populares han divulgado, con perdonable exceso, la zoología y la topografía de Tlön; yo pienso que sus tigres transparentes y sus torres de sangre no merecen, tal vez, la continua atención de *todos* los hombres.⁶⁰ (435)

The dismissal in effect grants them existence within the world of Tlön. This is perhaps misleading: the transparent tigers and towers of blood appear, in light of knowledge of Meinong's concept of absistence, as prime examples of absistent objects—cf. their similarity to the famous example of the golden mountain. These entities, or *objects*, the tiger and the tower, have had an unsure history of interpretation, though Wheelock has convincingly argued for them as hypostatizing, or myth-creating (Wheelock 1969: 92). If they are merely part of the zoology and topology of Tlön, however, this indicates an important consequence for the world when it becomes Tlön. The entrance of Tlön upon the world is perhaps most clearly signalled by the introduction of seemingly impossible objects, like the cone that is too heavy for its appearance. What was previously an absistent object in the actual world—the heaviness contradicts the laws of physics—is granted existence when Tlön makes its preliminary entrance.

3.1.5 Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Spinoza

Scattered around the text are minor references to philosophies and attributions to philosophers. Before we are treated to the summary of Tlön some speculations concerning the origins of the *Vol. XI* are mentioned:

¿Quiénes inventaron a Tlön? El plural es inevitable, porque la hipótesis de un solo inventor —de un infinito Leibniz obrando en la tiniebla y en la modestia— ha sido descartada unánimemente.⁶¹ (434)

This “infinite Leibniz” is perhaps not so much an allusion to the philosopher and mathematician himself, as it is to his philosophy, specifically to that of monads.⁶² Without going too deeply into it, the concept of monads is that of a fundamental immaterial substance analogous to atoms, but in a metaphysical sense; the monads are infinite in number. Each monad reflects the whole of the universe, and Leibniz used his monadology to explain God: God is the primary monad all other monads reflect. Thus, the world of Tlön would be a

⁶⁰ “Popular magazines have [divulged], with pardonable excess, the zoology and topography of Tlön. In my view, its transparent tigers and towers of blood do not perhaps merit the constant attention of *all* mankind,” (F: 13, my correction).

⁶¹ “Who, singular or plural, invented Tlön? The plural is, I suppose, inevitable, since the hypothesis of a single inventor—some infinite Leibniz working in obscurity and self-effacement—has been unanimously discarded.” (F: 12)

⁶² The “infinite Leibniz” is perhaps also a reference to his invention of calculus, which uses infinitesimals to calculate the limit of a function.

reflection of some “infinite Leibniz” as its originator. Additionally, Leibniz proposed, in order to tackle the problem of evil, that *the world we live in is the best of possible worlds*. This assertion seems to be at direct odds with the concept of Tlön’s entrance upon the actual world;

Regarding Schopenhauer, a favourite of Borges, he is mentioned in the passage following the heresy of materialism, a passage that solves the problem by introducing idealistic pantheism:

A los cien años de enunciado el problema, un pensador no menos brillante que el heresiarca pero de tradición ortodoxa, formuló una hipótesis muy audaz. Esa conjetura feliz afirma que hay un solo sujeto, que ese sujeto indivisible es cada uno de los seres del universo y que éstos son los órganos y máscaras de la divinidad [...] El oncenno tomo deja entender que tres razones capitales determinaron la victoria total de ese panteísmo idealista. La primera, el repudio del solipsismo; la segunda, la posibilidad de conservar la base psicológica de las ciencias; la tercera, la posibilidad de conservar el culto de los dioses. Schopenhauer (el apasionado y lúcido Schopenhauer) formula una doctrina muy parecida en el primer volumen de *Parerga und Paralipomena*.⁶³ (438)

This doctrine may well be “formulated” by Schopenhauer in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, but it does not, however, reflect his philosophical views. Much like the way the quote attributed to Bertrand Russell is actually taken out of its original context to make a point stating the opposite, Schopenhauer’s formulation on pantheism is made, not as a serious proposition, but in order to *refute* it. Schopenhauer was not a pantheist; and Schopenhauer reasoned *against* pantheism when he wrote on it. This form of pantheism is, rather, more akin to that of Spinoza’s, whom Schopenhauer objected to in the relevant passage of *Parerga und Paralipomena*. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* states that Spinoza proposed the following:

Substance being conceived as that which is self-dependent, there follows the ontological argument for the existence of God as the one necessary being, but not distinct from the world (for there is only one substance: any other substance would owe its existence to God, and therefore not be self-dependent). Rather God is immanent in the world, and individual things are themselves modes or modifications of God: the one reality is ‘God or nature’, *deus sive natura*. (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy "Spinoza, Benedictus de" 2008)

We see that this formulation is indeed very close to the “happy conjecture” of that nameless philosopher of Tlön. Even though Spinoza’s pantheism seems to coincide with that of Tlön, earlier we are told that

⁶³ “A hundred years after the problem had first been posed, a thinker no less brilliant than the heresiarch, but of the orthodox tradition, formulated a most daring hypothesis. His happy conjecture was that there is but a single subject; that indivisible subject is every being in the universe, and the beings of the universe are the organs and masks of the deity. [...] Volume Eleven suggests that this idealistic pantheism triumphed over all other schools of thought for three primary reasons: first, because it repudiated solipsism; second, because it left intact the psychological foundation of the sciences; and third, because it preserved the possibility of religion. Schopenhauer (passionate yet lucid Schopenhauer) formulates a very similar doctrine in the first volume of his *Parerga und Paralipomena*.” (F: 17-18).

Spinoza atribuya a su inagotable divinidad los atributos de la extensión y del pensamiento; nadie comprendería en Tlön la yuxtaposición del primero (que sólo es típico de ciertos estados) y del segundo —que es un sinónimo perfecto del cosmos—. ⁶⁴ (436)

This is not exactly a repudiation of Spinoza's pantheism, but rather a modification of it; in essence, infinite thought as a synonym of the cosmos would be a variation upon pantheism. Therefore, if there is spatial extension, it must be contained as an idealism of the infinite thought the cosmos is considered to be.

3.2 Idealism, metafiction, and possible worlds

As we now understand, the diverse idealist philosophies alluded to in the story all hinge on the uncertainty of subjective experience: the world exists only in perception (Berkeley); our language does not necessarily bear direct reference to the world we perceive (Mauthner); our conception of the world is a fiction (Vaihinger); our mind can create objects or entities that have no being (Meinong); and finally, we are all subjects of the same, infinite subject that is equal to God (Spinoza).

Put together, these idealist philosophies also undermine the value of the individual; as part of a pantheist whole, all individuals are parts of the same, infinite individual; this effectively dissolves personal identity, which was also a theme Borges explored from an early point in his literary career. In “La nadería de la personalidad” [The nothingness of personality], from *Inquisiciones* (1925), he argues that personality is an illusion, and that the self is not possible to determine from its possible constituents:

Yo, por ejemplo, no soy la realidad visual que mis ojos abarcan, pues de serlo me mataría toda oscuridad y no quedaría nada en mí para desear el espectáculo del mundo ni siquiera para olvidarlo. Tampoco soy las audiciones que escucho pues en tal caso debería borrarame el silencio y pasaría de sonido en sonido., sin memoria del anterior. Idéntica argumentación se endereza después a lo olfativo, lo gustable y lo táctil y se prueba con ello, no solamente que no soy el mundo aparential —cosa notoria y sin disputa— sino que las apercepciones que lo señalan tampoco son mi yo. Esto es, no soy mi actividad de ver de oír, de oler, de gustar, de palpar. Tampoco soy mi cuerpo, que es fenómeno entre los otros. Hasta ese punto el argumento es baladí, Sileno lo insigne su aplicación a lo espiritual. ¿Son el deseo, el pensamiento, la dicha y la congoja mi verdadero yo? La respuesta, de acuerdo con el canon, es claramente negativa, ya que estas afecciones caducan sin anonadarme con ellas. La conciencia —último escondrijo posible para el emplazamiento del yo— se manifiesta inhábil. Ya descartados los afectos, las percepciones forasteras y hasta el cambiadizo pensar, la conciencia es cosa baldía, sin apariencia alguna que la exista reflejándose en ella. ⁶⁵ (Borges 1994: 103-04)

⁶⁴ “Spinoza endows his inexhaustible deity with the attributes of spatial extension and of thought; no one in Tlön would understand the juxtaposition of the first, which is typical only of certain states, and the second—which is a perfect synonym for the cosmos.” (F: 14).

⁶⁵ “I, for example, am not the visual reality that my eyes encompass, for if I were, darkness would kill me and nothing would remain in me to desire the spectacle of the world, or even to forget it. Nor am I the audible world that I hear, for in that case silence would erase me and I would pass from sound to sound without memory of the precious one. Subsequent identical lines of argument can be directed toward the senses of smell, taste, and touch,

In the essay, Borges argues that even though we all have a strong conscious feeling of individual personality, this feeling is shared by all. Our perceptions and emotions are shared, and can thus not be thought to be individual, even though that is how we experience it. This sentiment is echoed in the philosophies of Tlön.

3.2.1 Unreality and metafiction

In section 1.3.1 of chapter 1, I wrote that the philosophical discussion in Part II of “Tlön” could be viewed in light of Patricia Waugh’s claim that metafiction, in part, explores the connection between reality and unreality in fiction. From my discussion of idealist philosophies we see that one of the main focuses of these philosophies, as they are applied to Tlön, is the focus on the loss of individuality, and the introduction of shared experience.

In reference to the previous chapter, we can say it contributes to structure the way “Tlön” is narrated. There I argue that the way the continual use of a narrative “yo” without a clearer supporting set of paratextual references to distinguish that there are in effect different narrators writing, effectually establishes the illusion that there is a continuous, single voice speaking. I make the argument that there are in fact different implied authors and narrators writing across narrative frames.

This reading is also supported by the philosophical world-view presented in Tlön. As the narrative levels are recursively adjusted into the story, it is also natural to conclude that the entrance of Tlön upon the actual world will have consequences for the reprinting of an article. We are told that in Tlön “todas las obras son obra de un solo autor, que es intemporal y es anónimo.”⁶⁶ (439) This literary version of pantheism is also reflected in how the story is constructed at a narrative level; in effect, all story’s implied authors have become the same author. This loss of individual personality is contrasted with the narrator of the postscript’s lament on the intrusion of Tlön upon the world. However, the narrator seemingly cannot escape, as the diverse yet anonymous narrators are proof to (cf. chapter 2). Finally, the

probing not only that I am not the world of appearances—a thing generally known and undisputed—but that the apperceptions that indicate that world are not my self either. That is, I am not my own activity of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. Nor am I my body, which is a phenomenon among others. Up to this point the argument is banal; its distinction lies in its application to spiritual matters. Are desire, thought, happiness, and distress my true self? The answer, in accordance with the precept, is clearly in the negative, since those conditions expire without annulling me with them. Consciousness—the final hideout where we might track down the self—also proves unqualified. Once the motions, the extraneous perceptions, and even ever-shifting thought are dismissed, consciousness is a barren thing, without any appearance reflected in it to make it exist.” (Borges 2001: 8-9).

⁶⁶ “all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous.” (F: 18)

narrator confesses to an attempt at a seemingly futile activity; an attempt of Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall* in the style of Quevedo. This action can in itself be interpreted as evidence of the loss of identity that is coming. Translation is rewriting in another language, where the mark of the individual is created through the style one writes in; the narrator chooses to use that of Quevedo, and as a consequence erases the individual in the process. As I have implied, the persistent inaccuracy regarding philosophers and their respective philosophies may also be related to this.

How are we to understand this in a metafictional view? We can assume that a fiction which explicitly questions the reality of world must refer to itself—simply because it is a fiction. It is a construction, *inherently* not real by its very nature, and thus, proposing that the fictional world is indeed a fiction, an act of self-reflection and lucidity. Similarly, the pantheistic claim that all men are one man is, perhaps, motivated when we think of the nature of fiction—a single author is the origin of the experience of several characters; a myriad of readers share these characters as an individual experience. The creation and reading of fictions are always acts of the individual, and though the experience may be shared, in the act of reading the reader is alone. The idealist philosophies are perhaps so alluring to the textual world of “Tlön” because, within that world the most fundamental ontological reality *is* that of the text itself. It should therefore be no surprise that the people of Tlön value philosophical systems on their aesthetic merits; the world of Tlön is an aesthetic construction. One would assume, that in such an aesthetic world, philosophies that make aesthetic explanations of it are valued most highly; in their view “metaphysics is a branch of the literature of fantasy.” (F: 15) Within the story, the intrusion of Tlön upon the world is inevitable, simply because, in a fictional ontology, the world-view of Tlön is a more precise one.

The ontology of “Tlön” seems inherently to be a navel-gazing view of fiction from within. As Linda Hutcheon tells us, metafictional writing *is* inherently narcissistic, but the narcissism does not mean that it is not relevant, because fiction presents possibilities: possible worlds.

3.3 Unreliable claims/possible worlds

Claiming from within a fiction that reality is not what it would appear to be might be a simplistic claim, but in this case it becomes powerful through the way “Tlön.” is constructed. In a narratological view, the structure of the narrative upsets the boundaries between ontologies of different worlds, something I have looked at in chapter 2 and will also touch

upon in chapter 4. Relating to philosophy, however, the exploration of possible worlds is relevant as well, especially considering the broad range of philosophical references from philosophy of the actual world.

Monistic pantheism, subjective idealism: the philosophies of Tlön are intuitively in contrast to how one normally perceives the world. This constellation of philosophical beliefs all undermine our physical experience of reality; if one is inclined to believe in them, like the people of Tlön are, then the experience of what is real is subject to change, which is exactly what happens in the story with the entry of Tlön upon the actual world.

The above analysis shows how idealist philosophers of our actual world are thoroughly represented in the various philosophies of Tlön. However, their philosophies are not necessarily referred to precisely, and additionally they may be in contradiction to each other. I will therefore examine the consequences of this. Recalling the discussion had by the narrator and Casares in the first paragraph of the story, theorising about an unreliable narrator, we can perhaps say that this unreliability is not so much in the sense of Booth's concept of an unreliable narrator—a narrator at odds with the ethics of the story told (cf. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*), but an unreliability when it comes to the narrator's apparent knowledge of philosophy. But it is relevant to question whether this unreliability is a result of the narrator's knowledge, or that there are alternative explanations.

3.3.1 Reliability and accessibility

As I have shown, many, if not all of the allusions to philosophers and philosophies are, at least in part, misleading. Several of the references are correct, but affirm the opposite of the argument actually stated in the original work, as with Schopenhauer and Russell. Others are misattributions, even though the philosophy of the attribution may be relevant to other aspects of Tlön, as with Vaihinger. Finally there is the partial attribution, as with Meinong, where only part of the philosophy is mentioned, while more comprehensive knowledge of it is actually motivated.

This pervasive unreliability is somewhat unsettling; we observe the contradictions, but we also observe that the philosophies that are subject to fault are relevant in other places. In all, the narrator appears to be, and *must* be, highly knowledgeable about philosophy, and idealism especially, both to be able to identify correlations to philosophical systems and to name so many significant philosophers. The errors, however, creates some puzzlement. Are we to understand that the narrator consequently misappropriates philosophies? Is the narrator

intentionally misleading us? Unless we scour the sources, as above, this does not seem likely, as the narrator appears to be sincere in the references. But in the textual world of “Tlön” there exists numerous books that do not exist in the actual world; there are people, like Herbert Ashe, who are fictional constructs; there is an encyclopaedia article on Uqbar, and an entire volume of another encyclopaedia about a fictional planet. The discrepancies of the referents are, perhaps, minor but self-conscious departures from the actual world. We may understand that, within the ontology of “Tlön,” Schopenhauer actually was a pantheist; Russell an idealist. In an alternative world this is possible. Yet at the same time, the references to Russell and Schopenhauer are correct, since they actually wrote what is referred. If these passages were all one had read of them, one might conclude that they were adherents of these ideas, and not opposed to them, as they actually were. Truth lies in the mind of the reader—it is individuality expressed again, and here the dynamic between the possible and the actual world presents itself.

Brian McHale writes that “the only ontological difference that the heterocosm approach admits is the opposition between fictional and real. This does not mean, however, that *no* relationship exists between the fictional heterocosm and the real world.” (McHale 1987: 28) In his study *Postmodernist Fiction* he briefly mentions the accessibility to the ontology of Tlön in a chapter discussing possible worlds. There, it is argued that a possible world is accessible through its *conceivability*,⁶⁷ and this is exemplified by “Tlön” because

the encyclopedists who invented [Tlön] obviously generated their ideal world by manipulating structures of the real world, ‘projecting a world which would not be too incompatible with the real world.’ But Tlön is also a *conceivable* world—self-evidently, since its fictive inventors the encyclopedists, and its real author Borges, as well as we the readers have all been able to conceive it. (McHale 1987: 35)

Thus, the ontology of Tlön is accessed across the actual world and the possible worlds due to its conceivability.

Additionally, recalling Eco’s writing on accessibility across worlds, it is relevant to recall Tlön’s lacking focus on individuality. In Tlön the *origin* of ideas are not essential properties⁶⁸ to them—whether pantheism is attributed to Schopenhauer or Spinoza becomes an accidental property. Thus, the *philosophies* of Tlön are accessed across worlds, regardless of the philosophical systems in which they appear or who is their originator. We gain access to these ideas because, firstly, they are actually conceived in this, the actual, world; and

⁶⁷ McHale takes the notion of conceivability from Umberto Eco’s article “Lector in Fabula.” (1979)

⁶⁸ If we are to call ideas objects, they would be objects in the sense of Meinong’s subsistent objects—abstractions, and not physical objects.

secondly, because the mediator for the ideas to the reader, the narrator, parses them into a referential basis that is relatively well-known, or at least possible to refer to oneself. Despite the discrepancies, the ideas are conceived of and thus accessible to us—the philosophy of Tlön is the philosophy of the actual world, but restructured.

It is not the properties of the textual world who are the main referents when considering accessibility across worlds. At the centre of “Tlön” is a lengthy discussion of philosophy—and it is the philosophy that is arguably the most important aspect of the contents of Tlön. All narrative action is centred around the dissemination of philosophical ideas, and the resulting takeover from the Tlönian world-view is a direct result of this dissemination.

Towards the end, the narrator warns of the imposition of a system on the world, and thus the fictional ontology is made relevant across ontological boundaries:

Hace diez años bastaba cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden —el materialismo dialéctico, el antisemitismo, el nazismo— para embelesar a los hombres. ¿Cómo no someterse a Tlön, a la minuciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado? Inútil responder que la realidad también está ordenada.⁶⁹ (OC 1: 442-43)

Within the textual world’s ontology, the intrusion of Tlön is inevitable. But it also implies that in the actual world, systems of thought that attempt to describe the world are actually fictional as well; Borges remarks in an essay that “[i]t is hazardous to think that a coordination of words (philosophies are nothing else) can have much resemblance to the universe.”

Philosophies are words, and words are not the world, they refer to it. We should therefore be wary of any system’s claim to truth. Yet, as he continues, “[i]t is also hazardous to think that one of those famous coordinations does not resemble it a little more than others, even in an infinitesimal way.” (Borges 1964: 114)

3.4 Conclusion

Understanding philosophy, and especially subjective idealism, is central to understanding Tlön, since the discussion of Tlön’s idealist philosophy by itself covers the largest consecutive piece of text within the story as a whole. In this chapter I have attempted a systematic approach to the philosophical allusions in “Tlön,” while contextualising them to actual philosophies, while also showing any discrepancies between the allusions in the text

⁶⁹ “Ten years ago, any symmetry, any system with an appearance of order—dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism—could spellbind and hypnotize mankind. How could the world not fall under the sway of Tlön, how could it not yield to the vast and minutely detailed evidence of an orderly planet?” (F: 24)

and actual references. Additionally I have interpreted the philosophies in a metafictional perspective, showing that the system of philosophy can be understood as essential to understanding the fictional ontology of not only Tlön, but of fiction in general. The philosophies explored in Tlön are highly self-referential to the story itself and its status as a fiction, revealing a level of self-reflection that thematizes the artifice of the fictional world. The philosophies thus become the most basic ontology to the inhabitants of the textual world—it is inevitable that they appropriate a system of thought that explains the internal textual reality perfectly. However, through the theory of possible worlds, I have attempted to show that Tlön tries to erase the boundaries between fiction and reality, thus providing both an insight and a warning to how we regard systems of the world.

Chapter 4: Duplications and self-reflections

For now we see through a glass, darkly.

— *1 Corinthians: 13*

Aside from the labyrinth—a metaphor of ordered space—the mirror is one of the most prominent symbols of Borges’ works. Borges once wrote that the true mark of an enduring author was whether he had produced one or two symbols to remember his works by. To this end, Borges consistently used these two symbols, to the point that we instinctively associate them with him. In “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*,” we encounter the mirror already in the famous first sentence, effectively setting up a theme running throughout the story.

The mirror as an actual physical object does not itself feature prominently within the story outside of the first couple of sentences, but thematically it is more significant: “*Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia [sic] el descubrimiento de Uqbar.*”⁷⁰ (OC 1: 431) In this sentence we have the explicit juxtaposition of two objects that double the world: the mirror doubling the visible world, and the encyclopaedia, with its ordered representation of knowledge, doubles the conceptual world. While neither of them is complete in this function—the mirror is limited by the area that it reflects light from, the encyclopaedia by its choice of subjects and its scope—they both can give the illusion that they do. In concert, setting the physical mirror to face the conceptual, one can only wonder if the infinite is discernible between them.

In the story, duplication returns thematically in several iterations. I will specifically look at encyclopaedias, the use of quotes and the motif of the *hrönir* to explore the theme. How this is done can be viewed as a way of circling in towards a centre in the story itself: in the case of encyclopaedias, the duplication-theme reaches far outside of the story itself, with the story of the encyclopaedia spanning that of western civilisation, while the project as such has remained the same: to represent the sum of human knowledge. The quoting, as I have explored it, reaches both outside of the story itself and within it, but the quotes I look at are specifically related to Borges’ own works, and represents duplications and variations of what

⁷⁰ “I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia,” (F: 7)

he himself wrote both earlier and later than in “Tlön.” Finally, the *hrönir* as a concept exists only within this story, but they are in themselves objects of duplication and variation, a type of objects found in Tlön that are imperfect copies of other objects, and come into existence from expectation rather than physical creation. While the creation of the *hrönir* was inspired by other factors, the *hrönir* have by themselves no direct point of references, and are perhaps the most truly original thing Borges created with the story.

The duplications and their variations seem to be a dramatization of one of the most startling aspects of Tlön, the *hrönir*; we can say that the *hrönir* come to mirror several aspects of the story as a whole, structuring it. Theoretically this self-mirroring of the narrative structure is called *mise en abyme*. Linda Hutcheon calls this device “one of the major modes of textual narcissism,” (Hutcheon 1984: 4) meaning that the *mise en abyme* is a metafictional device that in a text thematizes the text itself. Before analysing the occurrences of it in “Tlön,” I will discuss the theoretical basis for *mise en abyme*.

4.1 *Mise en abyme* and its origins

In his journal from 1893, André Gide wrote of a motif in literature and art which he considered pleasing and representative for the work as a whole:

In a work of art, I rather like to find thus transposed, at the level of the characters, the subject of the work itself. Nothing sheds more light on the work or displays the proportions of the whole work more accurately. [...] What would be more accurate, and what would explain better what I'd wanted to do in my *Cahiers*, in *Narcisse* and in *La Tentative*, would be a comparison with the device from heraldry that involves putting a second representation of the original shield 'en abyme' within it. (Gide 1948: 41, quoted in Dällenbach 1989: 7)

Though this device was well-known and had been—and was to be—extensively used in literature, Gide's evocative comparison was to inspire much theoretical discourse on the subject. Though Gide's meaning was in reference to a technical term from heraldry, to place a shield motive *en abyme* [lit. “in the abyss”] in the middle of the shield, the connotations to the abyss has come to cement the term's enduring status. Strictly speaking, Gide was not the first to term it *mise en abyme*, it was C. E. Magny who introduced it in 1918, in reference to Gide's entry, and there have been various terms employed from early on, notably *composition* and *construction en abyme*, originating with P. Lafille (Dällenbach 1989: 20), and *structure en abyme* (Genette 1990: 233). Mieke Bal attempts to do away with the connotations of *abyme*, opting to term it “mirror-text” (Bal 1997: 58). However, *mise en abyme* has become such an

established term for the device that I do not consider it relevant to use another term than the dominant one.

4.1.1 Types of *mise en abyme*

The most thorough theoretical study on the device is Lucien Dällenbach's seminal book *Le récit spéculaire* from 1977.⁷¹ In it, Dällenbach studies first the critical history of the term's usage, and, based on the varying uses of it, creates a structural typology to define the various iterations that had been proposed earlier. Dällenbach establishes three elementary types of *mise en abyme*:

a 'mise en abyme' is any internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by simple, repeated or 'specious' (or paradoxical) duplication. (Dällenbach 1989: 46)

This three-fold definition springs from the vagueness of Gide's original statement. Since they have later been interpreted in different ways by different theorists, Dällenbach's definition unites them to establish a higher degree of precision in the term, arguing that each definition accurately portrays Gide's original description. That he names *mise en abyme* as a mirror is due to the device's reflexive nature; a *mise en abyme* is an internal textual representation of the text itself, thus making the mirror an apt metaphor.

Dällenbach's initial definition ties directly to the *type* of mirror employed in the text, and the explication of each type is relatively simple: a simple duplication indicates that the text gives a single duplication, but not of the text itself, but of a similar work (thus avoiding infinite regression); the multiple or infinite duplication contains the text itself, and implies that the duplicate of the text includes the duplication of the text, and therefore also regressing into infinity; the last definition, the specious or paradoxical duplication, refers to when the duplicate text actually is *identical* to its origin, to the text itself. This is paradoxical for two reasons: the perfect duplication must also include itself, and therefore constitutes an infinite regression (as with the preceding type of multiple duplications); however, this also confuses the point of origin of the text, making it uncertain what is the cause and effect of duplication. An apt metaphor to signify the last form of duplication would be the *ouroboros*, the snake biting its own tail, where the end is also equal to the origin, *ad infinitum*.

⁷¹ I have consulted the English translation *The Mirror in the Text* from 1989.

4.1.2 Levels of *mise en abyme*

As noted, the previous definition relates to the *type* of reflexion, but Dällenbach also creates further distinctions on another axis, namely, on what textual level the reflexion functions. Here he bases the analysis on Roman Jakobson's linguistic communication model, dividing the functions into those of the utterance, the enunciation and the code. First, however, it is made clear that all textual reflexions relate to the narrative—the diegesis—at an intra- or metadiegetic level—across narrative frames—implying that authorial proclamations or textual marks set outside of the narrative frame cannot be considered as reflective of it. As a consequence, a *mise en abyme* must be an utterance in a narrative frame that is set *within* another frame. A consequence of this is that for something to be considered a *mise en abyme*, it has to be more compressed than what it reflects. A *mise en abyme* compresses the aspects of the reflection that are relevant, functionally to what it is informing the reader about. Mieke Bal notes that “La mise en abyme sera de ce fait toujours *interruption*, de la narration relayée au personnage.”⁷² (Bal 1978: 119) Thus the uniting characteristic of the *mises en abyme* is that they are made intra- or metadiegetically in relation to what they reflect. What characterises the different *mises en abyme* is that they are made at either the level of the *utterance*, the *enunciation* or the *code*.

Dällenbach names the *mise en abyme* of the utterance the “fictional *mise en abyme*” (55). The function of this form is to provide the narrative a self-conscious way to grant both the readers of the story, and, depending on how it is constructed, the characters within it awareness of the story's structure. Thus the fictional *mise en abyme* is a reflection of narrative events. Depending on whether it is placed at the beginning, the middle or the end of the story, it can influence the reading and the action in various ways. Because it has to be restrained, the reflection simplifies and abstracts the narrative action, and it therefore follows that, in Gide's words, “‘nothing sheds more light on’ a narrative than its *mise en abyme*.” (55)

Most relevant to the following analysis is when the reflection is placed at the start or in the middle of the story. Dällenbach concludes that the fictional *mise en abyme* placed at the beginning (prospectively) “cannot help influencing how the book itself will be interpreted” (61); since the events that take place within the narrative are essentially known from an early stage, later narrative action must be interpreted in relation to this knowledge. Beatriz Urraca comments, in reference to “Tlön,” that this technique “‘programs’ the way in which the story is read and interpreted by the reader, and affords the author the utmost control.” (Urraca 1992:

⁷² “In this way, the *Mise en abyme* will always be an interruption of the narrative relayed by the character.” (My translation)

157) This narrative control does not necessarily mean that the reflexion needs to be accurate; if the events eventually do not unfold as implied in the *mise en abyme* there is an ironic effect in the reading—though of course this is also anticipated by the device’s control of the reading. The reflection placed at the middle reinforces the control, because part of it gives an accurate reproduction of previous narration, and thus it will be presumed that the remainder of the reflection correlates to the rest of the story accordingly. Dällenbach quotes Flaubert regarding this central structuring: “‘Every work of art’, wrote Flaubert, ‘must have a point, a summit, a peak to the pyramid, or at least the light must strike one point of the sphere. There is nothing of this sort in life: but Art is different from Nature!’” (Dällenbach 1989: 70) This remark, as we will see later, has a specific relevance to the use of *mise en abyme* in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” and also implies that it has an aesthetic function. Dällenbach notes that since placing this “pivotal” *mise en abyme* may seem artificial in the composition, it is often skewed to be placed either slightly before or after the centre of the text.

Since the “enunciative,” or narrative, *mise en abyme* is not directly relevant for my analysis, I will not elaborate further upon it beyond the fact that it relates to the act of narration: the narrative *mise en abyme* works in three ways, by ‘making present’ the producer or receiver of the narrative in the diegesis; it reveals the production or reception of it; or it explicates upon the context determining production and reception. In effect, using the device in any of these ways is an attempt in fiction of making what is invisible—what is outside of the text—visible internal to the text (75).

Dällenbach identifies three further levels of *mise en abyme*, all relating to the code: the textual, the metatextual and the transcendental. The textual *mise en abyme* is a thematic reflection of the text, which, while similar to the fictional *mise en abyme*, is always also a *mise en abyme* of the code (98), thus encompassing two separate levels. At the level of the code we also have the metatextual and the transcendental *mises en abyme*. The metatextual *mise en abyme* works by revealing how the text works, revealing the structure of the entire work, and thus also providing a plan to how one understands and reads it. The transcendental, while also being at the level of the code, points to the point of origin for the structure, revealing metaphorically the origin of how the text has been structured (98-103).

4.1.3 Summary of the theory of *mise en abyme*

To summarize: Dällenbach proposes a typology of *mises en abyme* divided into three elementary types: the simple, the multiple and the paradoxical. These types are further

specified as being created at different levels of the text: on the level of the utterance is the fictional *mise en abyme*, on the level of enunciation is the narrative, and on the level of the code is the metatextual and the transcendental. Additionally, the textual *mise en abyme* works on the level of the utterance and the code at the same time. Dällenbach stresses, though, that this strict taxonomy can be deceptive because *mises en abyme* often appear in combination, and thus that the governing *mise en abyme* is accompanied by another or several other forms on other levels. Thus, the narrative *mise en abyme* is usually a doubling of the utterance; the metatextual combines the *mise en abyme* of the code with that of the utterance to produce a “code of codes” (106).

Having established the theoretical foundations and limitations for *mises en abyme*, I will now specify the instances in “Tlön” where this narrative device is employed, and identify why these instances are, indeed, examples of *mise en abyme*. Before I analyse the *mise en abyme*, I will set them in connection with the duplicating objects in the story, the *hrönir*.

4.2 Duplications in Tlön

Initially there seems to be a proliferation of textual mirrors in “Tlön,” given how it explicitly thematises both the mirror as a symbol and the encyclopaedia as a metaphor for how a mirror functions. However, with the stricter theoretical delimitations put forth by Dällenbach, there are two specific segments of the narrative that stand out as especially relevant for the understanding of the story, as narrative segments that reveal closer how the story functions. First, there is the discussion of a novel at the beginning of the story, and second, the “sophism of the coins” taken from the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*. Though I have studied these in other chapters, the following analysis of these segments analyses *why* they can be considered *mises en abyme* and *how* they reflect the narrative text. What this then implies for the interpretation will be examined more closely following the analysis. First, however, I will study an aspect from the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* that is, perhaps, not strictly a *mise en abyme* as it has been defined by Dällenbach, but that nonetheless carries resonance throughout the text as a whole: the *hrönir*. The *hrönir* are closely related to the two specific instances of *mise en abyme* that I analyse, but are also relevant to other instances of “reflection,” or duplication.

4.2.1 Hrönir

Evelyn Fishburn takes the previously discussed sentences as examples of *hrönir* in her essay “Digging for hrönir: a second reading of ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’”⁷³. The essay, as the title suggests, goes in search for examples of the *hrönir* in the story, treating them as a structuring principle for it, and, if one is so inclined, our general perception of reality. The *hrönir* are described in the following passage:

Dos personas buscan un lápiz; la primera lo encuentra y no dice nada; la segunda encuentra un Segundo lápiz no menos real, pero más ajustado a su expectativa. Esos objetos secundarios se llaman *hrönir* y son, aunque de forma desairada, un poco más largos.⁷⁴ (439)

This object, borne out of expectation, can again bear forth new hrönir; hrönir from another hrönir, although their physical characteristics do not follow the same scheme for replication:

Hecho curioso: los *hrönir* de segundo y de tercer grado –los *hrönir* derivados de otro *hrön*, los *hrönir* derivados del *hrön* de un *hrön*– exageran las aberraciones del inicial; los de quinto son casi uniformes; los de noveno se confunden con los de segundo; en los de undécimo hay una pureza de líneas que los originales no tienen. El proceso es periódico: el *hrön* de duodécimo grado ya empieza a decaer.⁷⁵ (440)

Each *hrön* bears relation to the original object, determined by a predictable pattern according to where in the line of hrönir they stand, while the series is predicated on the duodecimal system of numbers that is prevalent in Tlön—the twelfth *hrön* begins to degenerate. Whether this degeneration is in reference to the original object or to the eleventh, with its “purity of line,” is uncertain. However, as the process is periodic, it is safe to say that the series should continue to generate new *hrönir* in a similar pattern indefinitely. It is also stated that *hrönir* have been produced systematically, but only for the last hundred years. For some reason the narrator deems this hard to believe, not because of the unlikelihood of producing these objects, but that it has only been going on for only a hundred years. The circumstances for producing *hrönir* are apparently heavily influenced by awareness and state of mind: “Ese primer intento probó que la esperanza y la avidez pueden inhibir,”⁷⁶ (439) and furthermore;

⁷³ From *Variaciones Borges*, issue 25, 2008.

⁷⁴ “Two persons are looking for a pencil; the first person finds it, but says nothing; the second finds a second pencil, no less real, but more in keeping with his expectations. These secondary objects are called hrönir, and they are, though awkwardly so, slightly longer.” (F: 19)

⁷⁵ “A curious bit of information: *hrönir* of the second and third remove—*hrönir* derived from another *hrön*, and *hrönir* derived from the *hrön* of a *hrön*—exaggerate the aberrations of the first; those of the fifth remove are almost identical; those of the ninth can be confused with those of the second; and those of the eleventh remove exhibit a purity of line that even the originals do not exhibit. The process is periodic: The *hrönir* of the twelfth remove begin to degenerate.” (F: 20) A note of interest: the Spanish word for “twelfth,” *duodécimo*, can also be translated as “duodecimal.”

⁷⁶ “That first attempt proved that hope and greed can be inhibiting.” (F: 19)

Así se descubrió la impropiedad de testigos que conocieran la naturaleza experimental de la busca... Las investigaciones en masa producen objetos contradictorios; ahora se prefieren los trabajos individuales y casi improvisados.⁷⁷ (439-40)

Finally, it is worth mentioning that those who were set to find *hrönir* were first primed with expectations as to what they were going to find, having been told that they were likely to find artefacts and shown photographs of the type of objects they might find.

James E. Irby, in his essay “Borges and the Idea of Utopia” considers the *hrönir* as “an extended metaphor of the processes of memory, as well as of historiography,” (Irby 1971: 38) because of the section’s interrelating descriptions of first proliferation (the doubling of *hrönir*) and then loss (the disappearance of objects when not observed). He also connects this with a story Borges tells of his father to Richard Burgin, in *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*:

I remember my father said to me something about memory, a very saddening thing. He said, ‘I thought I could recall my childhood when we first came to Buenos Aires, but now I know that I can’t.’ I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘Because [...] I think that if I recall something, for example, if today I look back on this morning, then I get an image of what I saw this morning. But if tonight, I’m thinking back on this morning, then what I’m really recalling is not the first image, but the first image in memory. (Burgin 1969: 10)

Irby merely notes the affiliation with this notion of memory and the *hrönir* in “Tlön,” but in *The Emperor’s Kites*, a psycho-analytical approach to Borges’ work, Mary Luskin Friedman, citing Irby, explores the connection between this story and the *hrönir* found in Tlön. Her conclusion is that “Tlön” as a whole is a work borne out of mourning, and that the *hrönir* was a way of working in therapy, a process of remembrance:

We may wonder, as well, whether the paradox of the nine coins that Borges’ speaker uses to illustrate Tlön’s idealist philosophies may derive from the same source in Borges’ mental life. I have speculated that the question of whether *hrönir* can retrieve a satisfactory image of something lost may have had special urgency for Borges at a time when he strove to retain through memory—and thereby literally to invest with being—an image of his father. (Friedman 1987: 186)

Notably, Friedman distinguishes the two episodes—that of the coins and that of the *hrönir*—but cites them both as a way of “coming to grips with the fact that his father existed no longer in his own right but as a function of the memories of others.” (Friedman 187), arguing that both of them are indirectly about the motif of losing and finding.

Fishburn, however, goes deeper into the nature of *hrönir* in exploring them as not merely objects, but as a structuring concept. In a reference to one of the story’s footnotes,⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Thus it was discovered that no witnesses who were aware of the experimental nature of the search could be allowed near the site....Group research projects produce conflicting finds; now individual, virtually spur-of-the-moment projects are preferred.” (F: 19)

⁷⁸ From the *Posdata*, after mysterious objects have begun intruding upon our world: “Queda, naturalmente, el problema de la *materia* de algunos objetos.” (442n) [“There is still, of course, the problem of the *material* from which some objects are made. (F: 24)]

Fishburn maintains that “the mystery of their materiality remains unexplained in a footnote, a space in the margins where it sits, threatening the text.” (Fishburn 2008: 56) and also that the definition giving for the variation of *hrön* called *Ur*, “la cosa producida por sugestión, el objeto educido por la esperanza,”⁷⁹ (440) applies to *hrön*, *hrönir* and *Ur* (pointing out that *hrönir* is the probable plural of *hrön*). *Hrönir* are thus “slightly, or lightly, deviating duplications of an unspecified original.” (56) One of Fishburn’s arguments is that the original is *unspecified*, meaning that it can be literally anything, leading of course to the result that “once we know they are there, we, like the archaeologists of Tlön, will find *hrönir* everywhere, as a constitutive part not only of reality but, pertinently, also of the narrative.” (57) Fishburn generalises *hrönir* from what is described in the story as the proliferation and duplication of ideal physical objects to the proliferation and duplication of concepts (no less ideal), and cites the following as examples in the story: the mirror and encyclopaedia of the opening line, the heresiarch quote, the apocryphal references, the mentioning of the impostor Smerdis in the entry on Uqbar in the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*. Most notably, perhaps, is the sophism of the coins, since Fishburn shows that the story actually bears a direct link to the *hrönir* as they are presented in the story as physical objects.

4.2.2 Encyclopaedias

The various encyclopaedias encountered in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” are used as the main device in presenting the plot. The encyclopaedia—together with the mirror—opens the story, and various encyclopaedias continue to provide information, first on Uqbar, then on the fantastic planet Tlön. Other forms of encyclopaedic reference works are also mentioned or alluded to, and the list of encyclopaedic works that figure in the story includes the following: *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*; *Encyclopædia Britannica*; the atlases of Justhus Perthes; *Die Erdkunde* by Carl Ritter; *A First Encyclopedia of Tlön*; and the projected *Second Encyclopedia of Tlön*. The encyclopaedia is among the most important symbols of the story, as it ties together several of the themes explored: representation, utopianism and duplication.

While the encyclopaedia that initially introduces Uqbar is most definitely apocryphal, Alan White, in his article “A Horrible or Banal Truth,” (2003) uncovers an encyclopaedia in the Library of Congress called the *Anglo-American Encyclopedia* (my added emphasis), which seems to correspond perfectly with the description of the *Cyclopaedia*. White concludes that Borges consulted both the *Anglo-American Encyclopedia* and the eleventh

⁷⁹ “the thing produced by suggestion, the object brought forth by hope” (F: 20)

edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* when writing “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (White 2003: 53). Borges’ title (and that of the encyclopaedia White found) reflects that the tenth edition in effect was “Anglo-American,” as ownership changed from British hands after the publication of the ninth, and the additional volumes of the tenth was under American editorship. The *Anglo-American Encyclopedia*, is exactly that, a piratical reprint of the *Britannica*, and also in a sense “laggardly,” as at the time of its production the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was already in a popular new edition the eleventh.

Evelyn Fishburn, however, agreeing with Nicolás Helft, concludes that Borges was actually thinking of the eleventh edition of the *Britannica* in some convoluted way⁸⁰—even though he in private conversation with her had stated that he owned a copy of the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* (Fishburn 2008: 58). There is at any rate no doubt that Borges owned and regularly consulted the eleventh edition of the *Britannica*. This is a digression, however, since the main point is the doublings of the encyclopaedias in the story itself.

The encyclopaedias we encounter in “Tlön” are certainly not fixed entities. From the outset, the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* is described with the adjective “falazmente” [deceitful], a reprint of the *Britannica*, and also exhibits variances between copies. Casares remembers reading an article on Uqbar, yet the copy they first examine does not have it. After examining his own copy at home he finds the article, but when the narrator’s friend, Carlos Mastronardi, encounters another copy of the set, the article is once again omitted. Of course, it is the inclusion of Uqbar in the one set, and not the omission of it in the others that is erroneous; the alphabetical key indicates articles between Tor-Ups, and the narrator notes that “Uqbar” is “no previsto (como habrá advertido el lector) por la indicación alfabética.”⁸¹ (432)

The *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* is quickly forgotten by the narrator after the introduction of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, discovered by mere happenstance after a friend of the narrator’s father had died, who left a volume of this apparently exhaustive work behind: *Vol. XI. Hlaer to Jangr*. This volume is the sole basis for the second part’s elucidation upon the philosophy of Tlön. The postscript tells of the discovery of a letter that explains the mystery: *The First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* was commissioned by an eccentric millionaire and created by a secret society of man of letters, finishing an entire 40 volumes in 1914. The discovery of the letter is succeeded by the discovery of the entire set of 40 volumes in a library. However, this set differs slightly from the previous discovery: “Algunos rasgos

⁸⁰ The argument being that by the publishing date (1917) it would be more likely to make a reprint of the eleventh edition from 1911. However, as I pointed out, Borges explicitly addresses this point, calling it “morosa” [late/laggardly].

⁸¹ “an article not contemplated (as the reader will have noted) by the alphabetical key.” (F: 8)

increíbles del Onceno Tomo (verbigracia, la multiplicación de los *hrönir*) han sido eliminados o atenuados en el ejemplar de Memphis”⁸² (442). In addition, we learn of the project to create a *new* dictionary of Tlön, the elusive *Orbis Tertius*, written in one of the languages of Tlön. Finally, the narrator predicts the discovery of *The Second Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, a hundred years from when he is writing.

As we can see, not only are the encyclopaedias encountered in “Tlön” numerous, they are also continually changing, mutating, incorrectly reproduced and doubled. They are mirrors of the world, but there are mirrors working on them as well, unfaithfully reproducing their contents—by which I mean our narrator’s examination of the philosophies of Tlön. Within the story it is not a stretch to consider the proliferation of encyclopaedias as examples of *hrönir*.

4.2.3 Quoting

The first part of the story contains two intellectual propositions that in my opinion are central to the understanding of the story as a whole, both presented in the second paragraph. The first is the subject of how to compose a “first-person novel whose narrator would omit or distort things and engage in all sorts of contradictions, so that a few of the book’s readers—a *very* few—might divine the horrifying or banal truth.” (F: 7) The second is the quote attributed to an heresiarch of Uqbar: “Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind.” (F: 7) Both these ideas are interesting for two reasons: a) their importance for the theme and reading of the rest of the story, and b) Neither of them are original ideas to the story, as Borges included or discussed them in earlier writing. Indeed, neither of them is presented as original: the discussion of the novel is about how to compose it rather than actually proposing to write one, indicating that the proposition might have been made before; the quote on the heresiarch is supposedly taken from an encyclopaedia.

While these propositions merit a discussion of their content, it is also interesting to note where these ideas come from and how they change in different texts by Borges. This might not be an exhaustive tracing of the diverse iterations of these quotes; with a writer as self-referential as Borges the uncovering of textual copies is a daunting and exhausting task. The purpose here is mainly showing that it takes place, not uncovering all eventual copies.

⁸² “Some of the unbelievable features of Volume Eleven (the multiplication of *hrönir*, for example) have been eliminated or muted in the Memphis copy.” (F: 23)

4.2.4 Mirrors and fatherhood

The quote that initiates the narrator's and Bioy Casares' enlightenment about Tlön and Uqbar in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* is this: "Espejos y la cópula son abominables, porque multiplican el número de los hombres."⁸³ (OC 1: 431) This is Bioy Casares' recollection of what he has read in *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, a pirated version of the *Britannica*. As they without luck try to find the entry on Uqbar in the encyclopaedia, the narrator discards Casares' attribution of it to an encyclopedia as false modesty. However, some days later Casares calls from Buenos Aires and recites from his copy the following.

*Para uno de esos gnósticos, el visible universo era una ilusión o (más precisamente) un sofisma. Los espejos y la paternidad son abominables (mirrors and fatherhood are hateful), porque lo multiplican y lo divulgan.*⁸⁴ (432)

This quote and its relation to how it is revealed in the story is quite interesting. Of course, at the basic level it seems Borges attributes the quote at first as an invention of Casares', then to the unnamed gnostic of Uqbar. Critics have pointed out that the quote is probably original to Borges, but also that it is not original, at least not in the sense that it is original to "Tlön." As several critics note (Jaén 1992, Fishburn 1990, 2008), the quote is itself a modified quote from one of Borges' earlier stories (or biographies). In *Historia universal de la infamia*, we read the following, in "El tintotero enmascarado Hakim de Merv"⁸⁵:

La tierra que habitamos es un error, una incompetente parodia. Los espejos y la paternidad son abominables, porque la multiplican y afirman.⁸⁶ (327)

We see that the quote is slightly different: in the original story the last of the accompanying verbs is not "divulgan", but "afirman"; the accompanying article is also repeated before each verb in the version taken from "Tlön".

Concerning this quote, the textual irregularities from copying and reproducing are even more apparent *within* the story itself. Quoting the article on Uqbar from memory, the original term Bioy Casares uses is "heresiarca"—or heresiarch—yet this turns out to be an artefact of his memory, as the real quotation reads "gnostic". While it is understandable that

⁸³ "Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind." (F: 7)

⁸⁴ "For one of these gnostics, the visible universe was an illusion or, more precisely, a sophism. Mirrors and fatherhood are hateful because they multiply and proclaim it." (F: 8) The translation loses part of the complexity of the original text, for the quote there is set in cursive, but the original wording "mirrors and fatherhood are hateful) is not, a detail the translation loses. The significance of this is that it shows an apparent inconsequential practice for direct quotations within the story.

⁸⁵ The title does not mention that Hakim, or al-Muqanna as he was known, was an heretical Muslim in the ancient Persian region of Khorasan; Khorasan being one of the areas mentioned in connection with Uqbar.

⁸⁶ "The earth we live in is an error, an incompetent parody. Mirrors and fatherhood are abominable, because they multiply and affirm it." (My translation)

the terms could get muddled in recollection, there is a relatively clear distinction between them. The early Christian Gnostics are seen as heretics by the Church, and one of their leaders would be considered a heresiarch. However, being a “gnostic” is also a reference to having a certain belief or world view, rather than “heresiarch,” which is in general a term describing someone leading a school of thought going against orthodox beliefs, more specifically Christian Orthodox belief.⁸⁷ Therefore, while there is a certain overlap of the terms, each of them carries specific meaning. There is not, from the information provided on Uqbar, any evidence that the gnostic in question was, in fact, a heretic—the gnostics found there might just as well support the orthodox mystical beliefs of Uqbar.

While the first sentence from the original quote in “El tintotero” is not repeated in “Tlön,” the second quoted sentence is essentially the same as the one Bioy remembers from the encyclopaedia. However, this sentence comes in several variations. At first mention it goes like this: “Entonces Bioy Casares recordó que uno de los heresiarcas de Uqbar había declarado que los espejos y la cópula son abominables, porque multiplican el número de los hombres.”⁸⁸ (431) As we see, the first time we do not have a quote, but rather the narrator’s recollection of it. The second time is more specific, as the narrator is pointing out the difference of Casares’ quote and the actual quote in the encyclopaedia; preceding Casares’ recitation, the narrator informs us:

Él había recordado: *Copulation and mirrors are abominable*. El texto de la Enciclopedia decía: Para uno de esos gnósticos, el visible universo era una ilusión o (más precisamente) un sofisma. Los espejos y la paternidad son abominables (mirrors and fatherhood are hateful), porque lo multiplican y lo divulgan. (431-32)

Thus we see that the original text from the encyclopaedia is actually *never properly quoted*. It is presented as the text of the encyclopaedia, but written down in Spanish interspersed with English regarding the central (surprising) statement. Thus we actually have four different versions of it: “los espejos y la copula son abominables”; “*Copulation and mirrors are abominable*”; “*Los espejos y la paternidad son abominables*”; “mirrors and fatherhood are hateful”. We see that the only element of the statement actually faithful to all versions is the mirror [espejo]. This can therefore, amongst other things, be interpreted as an episode on the veracity of a quote, of finding the original quote, yet it does not actually provide the full quote in question. We understand the theme of the quote, but as a scrupulous scholar the narrator

⁸⁷ And, in keeping with the Greek etymology, this belief would be considered *para doxa*, or paradox, i.e. contrary to popular belief—a term popular with Borges in all of its meanings.

⁸⁸ “That was when Bioy Casares remembered a saying by one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar: *Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind.*” (F: 7)

undermines himself. Perhaps as a wink to the reader that we should not trust the narrator *too* much, the paragraph continues: “Lo cual me sorprendió, porque los escrupulosos indices cartográficos de la *Erdkunde* de Ritter ignoraban con plenitud el nombre de Uqbar.”⁸⁹ (432) Alan White, in his article “An Appalling or Banal Reality” notes that while the narrator seemingly shows a serious interest and exhibits scrupulous erudition,

he cannot have examined relevant indices in the *Erdkunde*, for the simple reason that that work *has* no such indices: it has *no* cartographic indices (or, for that matter, maps), and no index at all for its two volumes on Asia. (White 2003: 49)

White then points out that the geographical region, in Iraq or Asia Minor, was never covered by Ritter before his death.⁹⁰

I have commented upon apparent incongruities between the referents in the textual world and the actual world in greater depth in chapter 3, but there is another possible interpretation worth mentioning. It seems that these incongruent quotes and the fallacious statement about erudition is actually the result of artefacts of memory. It is stated early in the story: “El hecho se produjo hará unos cinco años.”⁹¹ (431) The entire story is set in past tense, and at the time of writing it has occurred five years previously. It is not an overstatement to suggest that the details would have become muddled after such a time-span. In this first part we see two ideas that are central to the understanding of the rest of the story, and the nature of these ideas is presented in a way that directly relates thematically to the story as a whole: that memory is imperfect, that wording changes along with meaning. We are presented with some facts, but whose details have become slightly muddled or modified during the course of time, presented as true at the time of writing.

4.3 Reflections in Tlön

The previous examples show how *hrönir* is dramatized in the structure of “Tlön.” However, some of the textual *hrönir* are doubly duplications, because they also act as mirrors of the text itself. These *mises en abyme* are the discussion of a novel from the beginning of the story, and

⁸⁹ “This surprised me, as the scrupulous indices of Ritter’s *Erdkunde* were completely ignorant of the name of Uqbar.” (My translation) - Alejandro Riberi gives a closer description of Ritter’s *Erdkunde* in his book on Tlön, *Fictions as Cognitive Artefacts* (2007), noting amongst other things that “Ritter’s work was intended to be a complete geography of the world. Published in 19 volumes—which appeared between 1817 and 1859—it was never completed on account of Ritter’s death.” (Riberi 2007: 23)

⁹⁰ Riberi, however, states that Ritter actually wrote about the area: “On the region of Asia Minor [...], he hoped to complete three volumes, but only two appeared.” (Riberi 2007: 24)

⁹¹ “The event took place about five years ago.” (F: 7)

the “sophism of the coins” at the centre of the story, within the discussion of philosophy in part II.

4.3.1 A novel proposal

The first example of the story relevant to *mise en abyme* is the discussion mentioned at the very beginning between the narrator and Bioy Casares. I have discussed this part briefly in chapter 2, establishing it as a reason for initiating the analysis I do there. Here I will go in greater depth to *why* the analysis is motivated. The text reads:

Bioy Casares había cenado conmigo esa noche y nos demoró una vasta polémica sobre la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiera o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitieran a unos pocos lectores —a muy pocos lectores— la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal.⁹² (OC 1: 431)

Even intuitively this passage seems to be self-reflexive of the story as a whole, and considerable research has therefore been conducted to find out exactly *what* this atrocious or banal truth may be (if that is indeed the case). It is not given, however, that the passage is an example of *mise en abyme*; for example, the self-referentiality is partially broken, considering they are discussing a *novela*—and we are not, strictly speaking, reading a novel. But there are other clues that it really is: the mirror itself.

The mirror is one of Borges’ most persistent symbols, and his use of it is tied as strongly to his personality⁹³ as it is to the possibilities for interpretation that it opens for. In “Tlön” the mirror has already from the first sentence been tied closely to the encyclopaedia, establishing the similarity between them and how they aim at being reflections of the world.⁹⁴ Furthermore, in the words of the heresiarch contained in the article on Uqbar, mirrors “divulge” the world. Given the link between mirrors and encyclopaedias, this is worth keeping in mind. But where the encyclopaedia has a presence throughout the story, the mirror is actually textually present in only two scenes of the narrative, and only one where it figures explicitly. That is the scene which the segment quoted above takes place in—the scene that

⁹² “Bioy Casares had come to dinner at my house that evening, and we had lost all track of time in a vast debate over the way one might go about composing a first-person novel whose narrator would omit or distort things and engage in all sorts of contradictions, so that a few of the book’s readers—a *very* few—might divine the horrifying or banal truth.” (F: 7)

⁹³ Emir Rodríguez Monegal does a psychoanalytic reading of Borges’ somewhat strange fear of mirrors in *Borges: A Literary Biography* (1978: 30-36).

⁹⁴ In the Middle Ages encyclopaedias were called *speculum mundi*, or mirrors of the world.

initiates the search for Uqbar: “Desde el fondo remoto del corredor, el espejo nos acechaba.”⁹⁵ (431) This near-personification of the mirror implies that what has been discussed is laden with meaning, as the mirror—which all along reflects them—is also spying on them. If we take the heresiarchs claim seriously, the mirror’s reflection is also an act of divulging, of making known. Given that the story opens with the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopaedia—in effect two mirrors—the story’s logic seems to indicate that this discussion also has a divulging role.⁹⁶ But in this instance it does not reflect the world we are reading about, like the encyclopaedias come to do. The text appears to indicate that we have a *mise en abyme*—a mirror of the text. First, however, I will discuss some of the duplications of this proposition outside of the story.

The proposition is discussed again by Borges in a later story, “Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain” [“A survey of the works of Herbert Quain”], with a slight variation. It regards the plot of an apocryphal detective novel called *The God of the Labyrinth*, written by equally apocryphal Quain:

Hay un indescifrable asesinato en las páginas iniciales, una lenta discusión en las intermedias, una solución en las últimas. Ya aclarado el enigma, hay un párrafo largo y retrospectivo que contiene esta frase: *Todos creyeron que el encuentro de los dos jugadores de ajedrez había sido casual*. Esa frase deja entender que la solución es errónea. El lector, inquieto, revisa los capítulos pertinentes y descubre otra solución, que es la verdadera. El lector de ese libro singular es más perspicaz que el *detective*.⁹⁷ (462)

First published in 1941, a year after “Tlön”, “Herbert Quain” seems to bear clear reference to the earlier story, considering they were published together in *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*. The short summary of the book’s plot (which the narrator claims to completely have forgotten the details of) neatly coincides—except for that the mystery is transformed into a murder—with the structural divisions of “Tlön”: a) a mystery (the article on Uqbar); b) a slow discussion (the idealism of Tlön); c) a solution (the discovery of a secret society seeking

⁹⁵ “Down at that far end of the corridor, the mirror hovered, shadowing us.” (F: 7) The translation “hovered, shadowing” does not convey the original’s full meaning; *acechar* means to watch or spy, but also to lie in ambush.

⁹⁶ We may also note that no mirrors elsewhere in the story are without their divulging counterparts. Besides the opening sentence, there is the quote from the heresiarch, which is placed inside an encyclopaedia, and additionally, the article tells us that excavations of Uqbar have unearthed stone mirrors. Mirrors are also mentioned later, at the beginning of part II, in the hotel at Adrogué. It is here, among the “illusory depths” of the mirrors that the narrator comes upon the eleventh volume of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*.

⁹⁷ “There is an incomprehensible murder in the early pages of the book, a slow discussion in the middle, and a solution of the crime toward the end. Once the mystery has been cleared up, there is a long retrospective paragraph that contains the following sentence: *Everyone believed that the chessplayers had met accidentally*. That phrase allows one to infer that the solution is in fact in error, and so, uneasy, the reader looks back over the pertinent chapters and discovers *another* solution, which is the correct one. The reader of this remarkable book, then, is more perspicacious than the detective.” (F: 60)

to transform the world). This is, of course, a relatively redundant explanation of the formal structure of the novel; *all* detective novels are like this.

However, in the works of Borges is another occurrence of this idea, in the pages of *El Hogar*, a magazine for Argentine middle-class women, where Borges pseudonymously wrote a section named “Foreign Books and Authors” (Weinberger 2001: 533). In a short review from 1938 Borges tells us that

I conceived it one night, one wasted night in 1935 or 1934, upon leaving a café in the Barrio Once. These meagre circumstantial facts will have to suffice for the reader; I have forgotten the others, forgotten them to the point where I don't know whether I invented some of them. Here was my plan: to plot a detective novel of the current sort, with an indecipherable murder in the first pages, a long discussion in the middle, and a solution at the end. Then, almost in the last line, to add an ambiguous phrase—for example: “and everyone thought the meeting of the man and woman had been by chance”—that would indicate, or raise the suspicion, that the solution was false. The perplexed reader would go through the pertinent chapters again, and devise his own solution, the correct one. The reader of this imaginary book would be sharper than the detective... (Borges 2001: 184)

Here we have an idea which is repeated with slight variations: first in the magazine in 1938; then in “*Tlön*”, published in 1940; finally in “*Herbert Quain*”, published in 1941. The two most prominent examples were published in two stories from the same work, *La jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*, and later, *Ficciones*; the first one was written under a pseudonym.

4.3.2 The discussion as mirror

Dällenbach has two narrative requirements for a *mise en abyme*. First, it has to operate on the intra- and metadiegetic levels, which, in reference to figure 2.2 in chapter 2 we see is consistent: this particular segment of the text is within part I, which is within the narrative frame I have labelled (B), and also includes part II. This frame is within (C), and thus this *mise en abyme* can be reflective of (B) and (C) in Dällenbach's definition, thus fulfilling the first requirement. Additionally there are no narrative frames at a higher level, excepting the sophism of the coins, which does not take place within the main narrative. Second, the *mise en abyme* has to be set apart from the narrative, an *interruption* of it, as Bal writes. Though there seems to be narrative action in the segment—they are having a discussion, the mirror is spying on them—it is effectively set apart from the rest of narrative action because this scene constitutes a contextual description. They were having this discussion *when* they started searching for the origin of a memorable epigram. Therefore we can consider it to be set apart from the narrative action because it is not strictly a part of it, but a contextualising setting for the initiation of it. Thus the second criterion is also fulfilled, and we can content ourselves

that the theoretical requirements have been fulfilled. Now we can look more closely at the contents of this textual mirror to see what the implications are for the reading of the story.

The discussion between the narrator and Bioy Casares constitutes three distinct elements: it refers to *what* a first-person narrator would do, omit or distort things, engage in contradictions; *why* the narrator does this—so that the truth behind these actions remain hidden from all but a select few readers; the nature of the discussion is *how* this is to be done. The *how* and the *what* are the instances that bear direct reference to the story. If we refer to the linguistic model which Dällenbach uses, we see that they correspond to the utterance, or what the narrator does, and the code, namely how one composes it. The *why* does not explicitly refer to the linguistic model, but it provides in the text a motive for doing it, and gives the readers an incentive to look for the hidden truth. It does not provide the author the motive for composing it in such a way, however.⁹⁸

So we see that the two instances that reflect the story in some way can be classified as respectively a *mise en abyme* of the utterance and a *mise en abyme* of the code. From Dällenbach's model it would appear that the textual mirror here is what he calls textual *mise en abyme*, which, while being a *mise en abyme* of the utterance, is always also a *mise en abyme* of the code. However, we can also interpret it as a *mise en abyme* of the origin, of transcendence. Bearing in mind that Borges originally proposed this way of writing a story in *El Hogar* two years before the story was published, cf. section 4.2.1, this discussion is not only revealing on how the story is structured, but also as a possible point of departure for Borges' intentions for the story. If we read it thus, the discussion bears reference both internally on how "Tlön" works structurally, but also why it was written thus. The discussion transcends the text—it is a transcendental *mise en abyme*.

That it works both on the level on the utterance and on the code also means that the understanding of this textual mirror must be based on the interdependency of the two separate parts of it. The *how* depends on the *what*, because the *what* dictates the form it must take. The *what* depends on the *how*, because without the form it cannot achieve the goal of the *why*. Announcing that the following story will mislead most readers, but also giving incentive for the search of some nebulous truth—it is the *why* that sets these two elements in relief, and has,

⁹⁸ A motive for the original proposal, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is of a somewhat ludic character: it would be a detective novel with a faulty conclusion, where the alert reader finds the real killer. Borges also explores this in "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain". Interestingly, Pierre Bayard has apparently taken Borges' proposition seriously, and has written two books, *Qui a tué Roger Ackroyd?* (1998) and *L'affaire du Chien des Baskerville*, where he argues that the actual killers in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Conan-Doyle are not the ones the detectives in the respective books deduce them to be.

as mentioned, spurred much academic detective work. We could therefore say that the detective nature of “Tlön” as a story is not so much in the unfolding of the story,⁹⁹ as it is in an ambitious reader’s search for what secrets it may hide—the interpreter becomes the sleuth. And if one is to search, one has to understand the nature of this initial revelation to know how to proceed.

Therefore we understand that what the narrator does to omit, distort and engage in contradictions is also dependent on how it is presented to us in the story. As a consequence we must pay attention to the narrator two-fold: what is given to us in the way of facts and what is omitted, and how this is structured so as not to arouse suspicion on reading it, to deliberately mislead readers. As *mise en abyme* of both the utterance and the code, we are engaged—if we take the bait—to pay attention to them both when reading.

Additionally, since it is a *mise en abyme* of the utterance, the placement right at the opening of the story exerts *control* over the reading. Urraca writes that “Control is precisely what Borges is after when he opens ‘Tlön’ first with a mirror, and immediately after with the description of an imaginary novel that the narrator is discussing with his friend.” (Urraca 1992: 157) The way this is done, however, is quite distinct from how Dällenbach defines it, and Urraca misidentifies it solely as a fictional *mise en abyme*. Though it is a prospective *mise en abyme* it does not reveal the contents of the story; due to the restricted way it is composed it only reveals that the narrator might be obfuscating the sequence of events or the facts. As such it gives a somewhat ironic result that it does not reveal anything of what happens outright in the story. There is more to it than there seems to be, making its reflective status more negative, leading us to look at what is left unsaid. This is a metafictional declaration: this is not just a story; there is more to it than a superficial reading.

If we consider the mirror as a metaphor for *mise en abyme* this is apt, for in a sense the device here actually is an inverse reflection of the story. Consequently, the control this prospective *mise en abyme* affects the reading in a very special way. It does not prime us to pay attention to what is there and what is going to happen, but rather to pay attention to what *might not* be there, and how the story we get is unreliable. Therefore, on reading one pays even stronger scrutiny to what is actually *there*, to figure out what is *not*. As I have shown in

⁹⁹ Though many refer to the plot as a detective story, the truth is that there is no real detection in it. All the “clues” the narrator(s) find are come upon by chance or discovered by other people than the narrator(s). Even the solution to the “crime” is not evident; the narrator seemingly does not understand that the world is becoming Tlön until it is almost overwhelming in its presence. The revelatory nature of Tlön’s presence is therefore made clear only to the reader; to anyone within that world it would be obvious. We could almost call it an inverse detective story: there is no detection, and there is no solution.

my chapter on the narrator, the surprises go beyond just omitting or distorting the facts, but extend to how the story is structured.

4.3.3 The sophism as a mirror

The second instance of *mise en abyme* I am going to study is the “sophism of the coins,” which in the story is supposedly taken verbatim from the narrator’s copy of *Volume XI*, presented as a philosophical argument for the improbable doctrine of *materialism*. Though I have quoted it before in section 2.2.1, I quote the sophism again for the sake of the argument:

El martes, X atraviesa un camino desierto y pierde nueve monedas de cobre. El jueves, Y encuentra en el camino cuatro monedas, algo herrumbradas por la lluvia del miércoles. El viernes, Z descubre tres monedas en el camino. El viernes de mañana, X encuentra dos monedas en el corredor de su casa. El heresiarca quería deducir de esa historia la realidad —id est la continuidad— de las nueve monedas recuperadas. Es absurdo (afirmaba) imaginar que cuatro de las monedas no han existido entre el martes y el jueves, tres entre el martes y la tarde del viernes, dos entre el martes y la madrugada del viernes. Es lógico pensar que han existido —siquiera de algún modo secreto, de comprensión vedada a los hombres— en todos los momentos de esos tres plazos.¹⁰⁰ (437)

The argument originally ignited debate in Tlön, as its author used it to propose the heresy of materiality: the permanence of objects in space and time. As Fishburn points out, the argument is in fact impossible, as there would not be any real possibility of the last two coins found on the veranda to be the same coins as those lost on the road, concluding that

the last two could only have been *hrönir*, objects of the imagination and desire. The fact that this difference in the status of the first seven and last two coins is glided over seems to me to be an indication that all nine coins were *hrönir*. (Fishburn 2008: 61)

As such, the argument invalidates itself; the contention that the language of Tlön wasn’t suited to formulating the idea of materialism is reinforced by the fact that the specious argument proposing materialism actually does not do it properly itself.

This observation is in fact central to the understanding of *hrönir*, because it ties together the physical objects as they are described in the story in connection with archaeological finds with the reformulation of ideas, as there is widespread agreement that the sophism of the coins is directly inspired by the story of the coins of memory that Borges tells Burgin. Incidentally, the sophism of the coins is situated structurally right at the centre of the

¹⁰⁰ “On Tuesday, X is walking along a deserted road and loses nine copper coins. On Thursday, Y finds four coins in the road, their luster somewhat dimmed by Wednesday’s rain. On Friday, Z discovers three coins in the road. Friday morning X finds two coins on the veranda of his house. From this story the heresiarch wished to deduce the reality—i.e., the continuity in time—of those nine recovered coins. ‘It is absurd,’ he said, ‘to imagine that four of the coins did not exist from Tuesday to Thursday, three from Tuesday to Friday afternoon, two from Tuesday to Friday morning. It is logical to think that they in fact *did* exist—albeit in some secret way that we are forbidden to understand—at every moment of those three periods of time.’ (F: 16)

story, undoubtedly giving it meaningful prominence. Recalling Borges' father's idea of memory and connecting it to the duplication and proliferation of ideal objects makes the *hrönir* more clearly one of the most central conceits of the story, making it more general than the curious story of doubling objects, and into more of a concept—an *idea*—of the uncertainties and proliferations of ideas.

Dällenbach's criteria for placement are fulfilled to the letter: as a textual segment it is separated from the text by being at a metadiegetic level in relation to the surrounding narrative. We can dismiss the narrator's interpolations—the words not set in cursive—as they confuse the point of origin for the sophism, and I argue conclusively in my chapter 2 that the segment must be considered at another diegetic level from the surrounding text. Placing it at a metadiegetic level also effectively fulfils the other criterion, since it is at the highest possible diegetic level, or narrative frame. It must further be an example of a simple duplication, given that it is not presented as the main story itself, and can thus only be a *mise en abyme* that resembles the framing narrative. Having established these formalities, we can look closer at why this segment should be considered an example of *mise en abyme* and why this specific textual mirror is important for the understanding and interpretation of the story.

First we observe how it is placed in the story. Not only is it at the highest diegetic level, it is also almost *exactly* at the very centre of the text of “Tlön.” A line count of the original text from *Sur* (1940) shows that there are 257 lines before the “sophism” and 231 lines after it. While this is not completely in the centre, it is arguably a negligible discrepancy as the difference between the line counts amounts to about half a page. If we also include paratext like the footnotes, it becomes narrowed further down, to 260 vs. 241. This central placement of the text puts it in the crosshairs of structural placement, since the very centre of the story is elevated at a narrative level above the surrounding text, and the text of the sophism itself is set apart as a direct citation from the encyclopaedia—the encyclopaedia being the thematic pivot in the story for the movement from one world to the next. Looking for structural evidence in search of “important” text, the sophism of the coins clearly stands out.

For its central placement, this segment of “Tlön” has been discussed in depth surprisingly little, and to my knowledge nobody has identified it as a *mise en abyme*. Mary Luskin Friedman (1987), in reference to Borges' description of a story his father told him about coins and memory, argues that Borges wrote it as a therapeutic reaction to the loss of his father. Though Friedman's reading is interesting regarding the origins of the story, it cannot be read as an originary *mise en abyme* due to the obscure nature of this origin—Borges

only told about his father's story almost 30 years later in an interview with Burgin (1969: 10-11). However, Fishburn's observation that the sophism is an example of *hrönir*, though not specifying the segment as a textual mirror per se, calls attention to an overlooked detail: that the coins found on Friday morning are not in the same place as where the original coins were lost, in the road: "while the first seven coins may have been the originals or their hrönish duplications, the last two could only have been hrönir, objects of the imagination and desire," (Fishburn 2008: 61). Keeping this in mind would potentially have broader consequences for the reading of the story, if the segment is read as a *mise en abyme*. But to read it as one, we have to understand the sophism itself in greater detail.

4.3.4 A misleading unity

Looking at the first part of the segment, we see that it is essentially narrative, since there is a sequence of events that take place during the weekdays. The loss of nine coins on Tuesday; the discovery of four coins on Thursday; rain on Wednesday; three coins found on Friday; and an additional two on Friday morning. We see that the story told here is one of loss and of finding. Nine coins are first lost then found again, over the course of some days.

The lost nine coins are gradually rediscovered, and thus we are left with nine coins again by the end of Friday. However, as Fishburn notes, two of the coins are found at a different location, and cannot possibly be the same coins. Here is the crux of my argument that follows: the coins that are not part of the original nine are indistinguishable from them, and *effectively* the unity of the nine coins is upheld. When talking of nine coins, one does not pay attention to each coin, given that each of them are of the same type and identical; one speaks of the nine coins as a single unit. Thus the continued identity of the coins is not what matters; it is what defines the unity of them that needs to be upheld. As such, the materialist argument it supposes to propose is poorly constructed, because the points of departure and arrival are both of a more Platonist sort—the gradual discoveries of the coins are not dependent on the coins' continued identity, but of their role in the unity. Seen in this way, the argument is formulated in words (i.e. "find"; "lose") that are perhaps unfavourable to the Tlönian idealist mindset, but the actual result is an upholding of it. The unity is perhaps defined by its constituents, but not of their individual existence. This is similar to the classical paradox of the ship of Theseus, whose parts were all replaced; could it still be considered to be the same ship, even if its parts were not? It would appear that Tlönians believe this, if only because they do not have materialist concepts to believe otherwise.

There is an additional peculiarity of the sophism, which is that the rediscovery of the coins is done by three different persons. One of these is the one who originally lost them—and in a materialist view, X, who lost them, discovers two coins that cannot possibly be the same as the ones lost. However, it does not seem like any of the discrepancies between finders and losers makes any difference to the central axis of the sophism—the coins. Importance is only placed with upholding the unity of the coins, regardless of whether the coins are in fact the same or whether they are in different people’s possession.

We therefore see that the supposedly materialist nature of the argument is flawed in its basic construction. What we would consider a continuing unity of nine coins would naturally depend on their being in the possession of a single person, and that all of these coins continue to be the same ones as the ones lost. In this argument, however, the only consistent aspect is that there are nine coins in total. Possession and identity are of no importance—the only important thing is an abstract entity with an arguably ideal existence: a unity of nine coins. It should therefore be no wonder that the philosophers of Tlön struggled to refute the sophism. It was perhaps constructed in a language that evades their logical categories, but the argument itself is of a nature that is fully in league with what they already know and believe. And therefore the sophism additionally becomes an example of how language can be misleading, and here it creates—to the Tlönians—the fiction of materialism.

Having looked at what the sophism actually formulates, we can now consider how this relates to “Tlön” in a grander scale, opening up for further understanding and interpretation. It can tell us something about the nature of losing, finding, and the reestablishment of unity, and perhaps affirm further some of the findings I have presented in previous analyses, especially from chapter 2.

4.3.5 The world regained

The sophism can better be understood as a *mise en abyme* if we consider it as a reflection of the narrative action of “Tlön,” but reflected as in a mirror, played out in reverse. The narrative action of the story unfolds as a series of discoveries, or findings: the article on Uqbar found by Bioy Casares and the narrator; the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* discovered in the hotel at Androgué; the letter from Gunnar Erfjord among the pages of one of Herbert Ashe’s books; and the two mysterious Tlön-like objects the narrator witnesses by chance. These discoveries all lead to the gradual entrance of Tlön upon the actual world; in the end, the known world has been *lost* in its favour. If we concentrate just on the narrative action, the sophism of the coin is

played out in reverse order of the framing narrative. To compare the two, we can say that the sophism begins with a loss, leading to a search that ends with the reconstitution of what was lost—with a slight difference; the framing narrative of “Tlön” seen as a whole plays out as a series of discoveries that leads to the loss of the known world—the cost of constituting a new one. This inversion does not in my opinion invalidate that the sophism is a textual mirror, because of the explicit thematic correspondence between the smaller text and the larger one. Mirrors abound in the story, and they invert what they duplicate; the textual mirror gives us an inverted version of the narrative events in the story as a whole.

The inverse projection might give us another clue as well, however, one that transcends narrative chronology. Given that the pivotal *mise en abyme* placed at the centre is retro-prospective, we are perhaps given a clue here to the point of departure for the text’s “publication” in 1947—at the outset, the textual world (in the story’s logic) is already in the process of losing the known world to enter Tlön. As I have shown in chapter 2, the narrative level the story starts at is higher than at the text’s framing narrative, even though this is first hidden to the reader.

But how does this reformulated paradox relate to the story? We can think of it like this: the world we have known is perhaps lost, but it has also been put together again of parts we already know. The composition might be different, but the parts that constitute it are essentially the same—though in this case there have been some changes in emphasis. The idealist philosophy that constitutes the world-view of Tlön is the same idealist philosophies that have been abundant in the former world. Nothing is new; it is the belief in them that has changed. The intrusion of Tlön upon the world is a reformulation of the known world, but with parts that the world already knows. The *unity* is upheld, but its *composition* has constituents that perhaps are similar, but not quite equal to, the former ones.

Additionally we may discern a similarity between the sophism and the framing narrative when it comes to characters. If we are to take it as a *mise en abyme* it becomes revealing indeed, because when attributing relationships between the finders of coins with gradual uncovering of Tlön, we might well see the same as what I found in chapter 2: that the narrators, or “finders” in the different parts of the story are not the same. So the *mise en abyme* tells us, if we are prepared to see it, that the framing narrative hides more than it says outright. What the framing narrative in this case is hiding is that the narrator is not a continual, inseparable “I,” the use of the first person is in this sense deliberately misleading. In fact, if we are to interpret what the *mise en abyme* tells us literally, the various discoverers

of information about Tlön must be different people altogether. My previous analysis confirms this possibility.

Perhaps this makes more sense. That a single person should be the first to come across various portents of the coming of an entirely new world-view that is to completely take over seems improbable. But if the first-person narrator of the *Posdata* has become so entrenched in the coming subjective idealism that it cannot discriminate between individual subjects any more, it makes the story that much stronger. The self-conscious subterfuge we are alerted to with the initial discussion becomes subterfuge that makes the story as a whole stronger.

Though the world appears to change, we can take comfort in the sophism of the coins, because it tells us that it is not the world that changes, but its constituents that are numerous and interchangeable. And if it seems like changing an aspect of the world has enormous consequences, we must remember that in truth all these aspects are, depending on your perception of them, so similar as to be the same. The world changes, but as it does, it stays the same. The unity may have been seen to be broken in one way of looking at it, but in another it is impossible to see any change at all.

4.3.6 “Tlön” as “Hrön”

While, as I have shown, the concept of *hrönir* is enacted throughout the story, it is similarly not a stretch of the imagination that Tlön the planet can itself be considered to be a *hrön*-representation of the actual (textual) world. However, there is an interesting circumstance that can be said to dramatize “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the textual artefact, as *hrönir*. I refer to the original publication of the story, where there are two versions: one, the first publication in *Sur* 68, the second in *Antología de literatura fantástica*. It is the version from the anthology that was included in *La jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* and subsequently *Ficciones*, and it is this version that we normally read today. Published around the same time, the story in the versions is the same, but there are minor variations there that makes the texts slightly different.

To show this I have made a comparison of the texts, and I have made a table of this comparison, included in Appendix A, which shows the various discrepancies between the texts. I have found a total of 30 discrepancies between the editions. While there are some of the differences that are no doubt the result of printing errors, and some may be considered purely stylistic changes, some of the discrepancies seem to be intended: in *Sur* there is an entire footnote comparing certain properties of Tlön to some combinations of words found in

Goethe, while it is left out in the version from *Antología*; the *Antología* has included a sentence that is lacking from *Sur*. Similarly, changes in word tenses, where the sentences still carry the same meaning, seems to be motivated for other reasons than purely stylistic ones.

It is my impression, considering the structural implementation of *hrönir* within the story, that perhaps Borges was creating an artefact in the actual world that had some of the same properties of Tlön. Even if this was not actually the case, the result is, when considering *hrönir* as a principle of reality, the “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” we are reading today is a *hrön* of its original publication: it is the same story but with minor change. “Tlön” has become *hrön*, and the *hrönir* can thus become, as Fishburn points out, a way of looking at the world we have not seen before. The fictional element in the story pushing across the narrative boundaries to upset our ontological beliefs.

4.4 Duplications: metafiction and possible worlds

The way Borges has incorporated *mise en abyme* in “Tlön” is not a truly explicit one. Since the segments I have singled out as examples of *mise en abyme* do not proclaim themselves as thus, we can therefore say, in Linda Hutcheon’s terminology of metafiction as “covert” metafiction, since they do not call attention to their metafictional status. The examples we have seen are both what Dällenbach calls simple *mises en abyme*, because their relationship to the framing narrative is not one to one, bearing a similarity to it, but are not explicitly stated as identical within it. Additionally Borges uses them as mirrors in the text in a way that is more literal than they usually are. The reflections of the narrative function so that they show more clearly what the reader cannot see when taking the whole of the text in. In this sense, Gide’s contention that the *mise en abyme* reveals the structure better than anything is very precise, because it reveals to the reader things that would perhaps be difficult to discover otherwise, and it helps to make more certain some suspicions one might raise. Not only is the *mise en abyme* employed for control, but to open the interpretation of the whole story. The words of the heresiarch of Uqbar rings true: mirrors multiply and divulge the world.

Borges was fascinated with textual mirrors for several reasons, something that he was to explain in detail in a later essay. What he describes in “Magias parciales del Quijote” are instances of *mise en abyme* and what encountering this device in literature results in. The essay, from 1949 and collected in *Otras Inquisiciones*, first discusses how Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* is essentially a realist novel, but gradually segues into a discussion of the famous intermingling of the books reality and the reader’s reality. Thinking of the protagonists of the

Quijote who are also readers of the *Quijote*, Borges then discusses other known and lesser known works that employ a device that resembles the device from the *Quijote*:

Aquí es inevitable recordar el caso de Shakespeare, que incluye en el escenario de *Hamlet* otro escenario, donde se representa una tragedia, que es más o menos la de *Hamlet*; la correspondencia imperfecta de la obra principal y la secundaria aminora la eficacia de esa inclusión.¹⁰¹ (OC 2: 46)

Dällenbach takes particular notice of this section, and what follows, because the variations on them relate closely to the typology he has presented. Thus, the incorporation of a play within *Hamlet* that is a variation upon the events of *Hamlet* itself is an example of the *mise en abyme* of simple multiplication. Following *Hamlet* is a description of the paradoxical inclusion in *Ramayana* of itself, before telling us of night 602 in the *Thousand and One Nights*:

Algo parecido ha obrado el azar en *Las Mil y Una Noches*. Esta compilación de historias fantásticas duplica y reduplica hasta el vértigo la ramificación de un cuento central en cuentos adventicios, pero no trata de graduar sus realidades, y el efecto (que debió ser profundo) es superficial, como una alfombra persa. [...] Ninguna [de las interpelaciones] tan perturbadora como la de la noche DCII, mágica entra las noches. En esa noche, el rey oye de boca de la reina su propia historia. Oye el principio de la historia, que abarca a todas las demás y también—de monstruoso modo—, a sí misma. ¿Intuye claramente el lector la vasta posibilidad de esa interpolación, el curioso peligro? Que la reina persista y el inmóvil rey oirá para siempre la trunca historia de *Las Mil y Una Noches*, ahora infinita y circular...¹⁰² (47)

Dällenbach identifies this with the paradoxical duplication, although he is perhaps too fast to identify it: night 602 of the *Thousand and One Nights* is similar to the framing narrative, but not the same. In this respect both the *Quijote* and *Ramayana* are more precise examples, as they feature themselves in the narrative. Finally however, Borges tells of a thought-experiment by the philosopher Josiah Royce, of a perfect map:

“Imaginemos que una porción del suelo de Inglaterra ha sido nivelada perfectamente y que en ella traza un cartógrafo un mapa de Inglaterra. La obra es perfecta; no hay detalle del suelo de Inglaterra, por diminuto que sea, que no esté registrado en el mapa; todo tiene ahí su correspondencia. Ese mapa, en tal caso, debe contener un mapa del mapa, que debe contener un mapa del mapa del mapa, y así hasta lo infinito.”¹⁰³ (47)

¹⁰¹ “Here we inevitably remember the case of Shakespeare, who includes on the stage of *Hamlet* another stage, where a tragedy almost like that of *Hamlet* is being presented. The imperfect correspondence of the principal work and the secondary one lessens the effectiveness of that inclusion.” (Borges 1964: 45)

¹⁰² “Chance has caused something similar to occur in *A Thousand and One Nights*. That compilation of fantastic stories duplicates and reduplicates to the point of vertigo the ramification of a central tale into subordinate ones, without attempting to evaluate their realities; the effect (which should have been profound) is superficial, like that of a Persian rug. [...] “None [of the interpolations] is so disturbing as that of night DCII, magic among the nights. That is when the Sultan hears his own story from the Sultana’s mouth. He hears the beginning of the story, which embraces all the other stories as well as—monstrously—itself. Does the reader perceive the unlimited possibilities of that interpolation, the curious danger—that the Sultana may persist and the Sultan, transfixed, will hear forever the truncated story of *A Thousand and One Nights*, now infinite and circular?” (Borges 1964: 45)

¹⁰³ The quote is imperfect; Borges has subtracted significantly from the original text in his translation of it, which has led some to believe that Borges invented the source. Simmons’ translation of the essay quotes from the original, however, which is found in the “Supplementary Essay: The One, the Many, and the Infinite. Section III,” of Royce’s book, and reads: “... let us suppose, if you please, that a portion of the surface of England is

While we can perhaps trace the influence from this to Borges' later parable "Del rigor en la ciencia" from *El hacedor* (1960), about cartography reaching such a level of precision in China that it renders it useless, Dällenbach observes how it is also an example of his classification of infinite duplication. Therefore Borges has given examples of all three types.

The *Thousand and One Nights*, and especially night 602, is dear to Borges. It is mentioned outright in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," and Fishburn has demonstrated that it might act as a structuring principle in "Emma Zunz" (Fishburn 2004). In "Tlön" the allusion is both direct and subtle: the *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* has 1001 pages, a detail we cannot ignore considering Borges' love of the *Nights*.

It is the final section, however, that really sets into relief why Borges' fascination with the device is interesting in relation to the use of it in his fictions. He writes:

¿Por qué nos inquieta que el mapa esté incluido en el mapa y las mil y una noches en el libro de *Las Mil y Una Noches*? ¿Por qué nos inquieta que Don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*? Creo haber dado con la causa: tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios.¹⁰⁴ (OC 2: 47)

Additionally, Emir Rodríguez Monegal tells of a lecture Borges held where he outlined four procedures to destroy reality in fiction. Among these procedures was "the work of art within the work of art" (Monegal 1978: 406). Thus Borges by his own admission used this device because it had a double effect: it could be used to destroy the sense of reality within the fiction, but it could also be used to make the reader unsure of her or his own reality. The unsettling use of *mise en abyme* opens for the ontological abyss, of not knowing whether one is within the story or outside it.

Furthermore "Tlön" duplicates in a broader sense, due to the *hrönir's* function as a structuring principle for several aspects of the text, including the *mises en abyme* that I have

very perfectly levelled and smoothed, and is then devoted to the production of our precise map of England ... But now suppose that this our resemblance is to be made absolutely exact, in the sense previously defined. A map of England, contained within England, is to represent, down to the minutest detail, every contour and marking, natural or artificial, that occurs upon the surface of England ... For the map, in order to be complete, according to the rule given, will have to contain, as a part of itself, a representation of its own contour and contents. In order that this representation should be constructed, the representation itself will have to contain once more, as a part of itself, a representation of its own contour and contents; and this representation, in order to be exact, will have once more to contain an image of itself; and so on without limit." (Royce 1923) Royce's book sprang out of a series of lectures, and is available in its entirety online (see the bibliographical entry).

¹⁰⁴ "Why does it make us uneasy to know that the map is within the map and the thousand and one nights are within the book of *A Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote*, and Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the answer: those inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious." (Borges 1964: 46)

analysed. The result is a second level of duplication, and this is one that in several of the examples reaches outside of the text itself. The story can be said to dramatize itself as a duplication of the world, but conversely, the world as a duplication of the text. “Tlön” becomes a possible world, because it reveals a point of view within fiction that we can generalize outside of it. This possible world is a possibility within a possibility, and the duplications duplicate themselves, in an act similar to the mirror being set up against another mirror.

It is a possible world—and “Tlön” turns the notions of where one stand upside down. Already from the point one starts reading the world we think is our own is a world of fiction from times past. The implication is that the world of Tlön is a possible world, and that it could be here already. Metafiction’s function to question the nature between fiction and reality, as Patricia Waugh writes, is dramatized.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the myriad of duplications observable in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” contextualising them both within and without the story. Beginning with a theoretical discussion of *mise en abyme*, I have first argued that the story’s concept of *hrönir* can be read as a structural principle which is enacted throughout. Some instances of this are the encyclopaedias and reference-works that appear throughout the stories; another is the use of quotations that vary, or are taken with variation from other sources from Borges’ own works.

I have also analysed two textual segments of the story as *mises en abyme*, as metafictional elements which reveal the inner working of the story itself. I have interpreted the use of *mise en abyme* as a device to cross narrative frames within the story, making worlds possible. I find that the discussion of a novel from the start is used as an element which programs the reading of the story, leading the interpretation. The sophism of the coins is shown to be reflective of narrative as a whole, but in reverse, mirroring the inconsistencies and showing that it is also formulated as an idealistic allegory, rather than a proposition of materialism, as stated within the text.

Finally, the frustration of narrative boundaries reveals the uncertainty of ontological boundaries, showing us that fictional conceits can have relevance in the actual world, making the fictional world a possible one.

Chapter 5: Concluding remarks

The only way to give finality to the world is to give it consciousness.

— Miguel de Unamuno,
The Tragic Sense of Life (1913)

In the first chapter, I posited that though “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” has been frequently mentioned as a metafictional story, it has not been studied exhaustively as such, and that it for this reason were grounds to study it at length in depth in this perspective. In order to do this, I chose to make three analyses: of narrative frames and the role of the narrator; of the philosophies the narrator discusses from *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* in part II of the story; and a closer look at the metafictional devices of duplication, self-reflection and *mise en abyme*.

In chapter two, on narrative frames and narrators, I proposed that what at first reading seems like a single, unchanging narrator, may not be the case, due to the distortion of narrative frames, especially in light of the *Posdata* which recontextualises the entirety of the text before it. Taking as my point of departure various critical pronouncements that the narrator can be considered a version of Borges, I looked into the possibility of a narrator which, though perhaps evoking a person similar to Borges, cannot theoretically be considered to equate Borges. The *Posdata*, dated in 1947, which was seven years after the original publication of the story, upsets a traditional consecutive reading of narrative progression. What I found there was that the narrator of the *Posdata* effectively edits and reformulates the two preceding parts, and thus places them in a narrative frame which is diegetically at a higher level than the last section. The result is that the more fundamental narrative frame the story is told within is at a remove to the future, placing the initial textual world of the first two parts at a narrative remove to the reader. Additionally, I concluded that what seems to be a single narrator throughout the story, must actually be considered to be two separate narrators, one for parts I and II, and one for the *Posdata*. Furthermore, I showed that the narrator carried

a closer relation to the implied author of the parts, rather than to the actual Borges, and that there are grounds for the argument that there are two separate implied authors in the story.

Metafictionally speaking, this play with narrative frames frustrates traditional narrative. At the same time the narrative structure makes the textual world of the first two parts—which at first seems to be a world of minimal departure in reference to the actual world—to be the world at the greatest departure considering the different textual ontologies. In a possible-world's view this means that the readers are habituated progressively to a possible world which is at a great remove from the actual world.

In chapter three I have explored in depth the various philosophies and allusions to philosophers throughout the story. With a thorough discussion of the principal idealist philosophies I show that the ontology of Tlön is an ontology that is fundamental to the nature of a textual world. Of these philosophies, of special interest are some examples I have studied closer and explained in relation to idealist philosophers: the philosophy of George Berkeley took as a fundamental truth that anything outside of our perceptions is unknowable; Hans Vaihinger argued that how we understand the world is through useful fictions of it; Alexius Meinong argued for the validity of impossible objects; and Fritz Mauthner posited that we operate with a language-superstition in that we believe words have direct reference to the objects they relate to. I also show, however, that even if the philosophies in Tlön have their counterpart in the actual world, many of the allusions are misappropriations or quoted out of context deliberately.

I conclude that the appropriation of the philosophies of Tlön is inevitable in the textual world, because it is an ontology that reveals directly the nature of fiction. This is highly metafictional, because within the story the inhabitants of the textual world become, through the philosophies, aware that they are fictions, a truly metafictional conceit. However, the ontologies become blurred through the inconsistent allusions to actual-world philosophers; all philosophies presented from Tlön have their counterparts in the works of actual-world philosophers, though the philosophers are not necessarily quoted in context. However, as I show, the possible world of Tlön is accessible due to the nature of ideas, where the origins of ideas are incidental. The ideas presented in Tlön, within the ontology of the Tlönian idealist pantheism where there is a loss of individuality and authors are meaningless, are the same ideas in the actual world; the ideas of Tlön have been conceived in the actual world, bringing Tlön closer to it.

In chapter four I analyse the theme of duplication and mirroring, taking as my point of departure the concept of *hrönir* as a structuring metaphor. I show that the *hrönir*, the duplicate

objects called forth from hope and expectation, act as a structuring principle for the story as a whole, giving examples such as the proliferation of encyclopaedias and the variation on the use of quoting. I then analyse two of the textual *hrönir* as examples of *mise en abyme*, showing how they reflect upon the story: the discussion at the beginning of the story between the narrator and Adolfo Bioy-Casares; and the “sophism of the coins” which is placed at the exact centre of the story. These examples each reflect on the inner workings of the story; the first revealing how one should read; the second revealing the structure and its inherent inconsistencies. Through these examples I show that there is both a high degree of what one in metafictional theory calls “self-consciousness,” or “the fiction’s consciousness of its own nature.” These examples flaunt the fictionality to the reader, forcing them to consider the story’s status as artifice rather than as a realistic presentation of the world.

However, as I also show in the fourth chapter, the story has dramatized itself as an example of *hrönir* through its different publications. Thus a fictional device has become a part of structured reality—implying that we should question whether actual reality is also fictional.

This final point is what ties together the results of the three analyses. “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is not only a story that calls attention to its own artificiality, it also aims to upset the boundaries between what we believe is real and what is fictional. The intrusion of an entire planet upon the world, it seems, happens all the time. It is intimated in the story that perhaps the people of Tlön know better than us: “They know that a system is nothing more than the subordination of all aspects of the universe to any one such aspect.” As the story shows, the lure of a system to describe the world is tempting, both within fiction and without.

This study of the short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” by Jorge Louis Borges raises new questions which I have not had the opportunity to go further into. The words Uqbar and Orbis Tertius in the title are mentioned, but could, like Tlön, undergo a deeper analysis. I suspect that the three nouns reflect the narrative structure of the novel, but this has to be discussed further. Likewise, there are themes that are worth examining, like the consistent use of the number 11, or how the story shows that attempts at structuring the world are futile. While I discuss the symbol of the mirror, an analysis of the story as a labyrinth, Borges’ other major symbol, is omitted.

More questions could be added, but for me, in the real world, I have been limited by the circumstances of time and space.

Appendix A: Variations between publications

Sur 68	Obras Completas Vol. 1
enciclopedia (30)	encl̄iclopedia ¹⁰⁵ (431)
[The sentence is not included in this version.]	Bioy había adquirido su ejemplar en uno de tantos remates. (432)
Smerdis (32)	Esmerdis (432)
History of the land called Uqbar (32)	History of the <u>L</u> and <u>C</u> alled Uqbar (432)
A general history of labyrinths (32)	A <u>G</u> eneral <u>H</u> istory of <u>L</u> abyrinths (432)
XLVI (33)	XXVI ¹⁰⁶ (433)
dió (33)	dio (434)
first (34)	<u>F</u> irst (434)
guarecía (34)	cubría (434)
admitían (35)	admiten (435)
causaban (35)	causan (435)
Upward behind onstreaming it mooned (36)	Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned (435)
El germanista recordará ciertas formaciones de Goethe: morgenschön, Nebelglanz. Estas, aunque binarias, pueden ilustrar lo que afirmo. (36n)	[The footnote is not included in this version]
Esa (36)	Esta (436)
	— [the typographical sign is included] (436)
el instante poderoso del coito (39n)	el vertiginoso instante del coito (438n)
llegan a (40)	logran (439)

¹⁰⁵ This variation is probably a typographical error in the edition, rather than an intentional change.

¹⁰⁶ Same as above.

el primero, el segundo (41)	la primera, la segundo (439)
Este (41)	Éste (439)
fué (41)	fue (439)
conocedores de (41)	que conocieran (439)
1940, Salto Oriental (42)	Salto Oriental, 1940 (440)
el número 68 de SUR —tapas verde jade, mayo de 1940— (42)	la <i>Antología de la literatura fantástica</i> , 1940, (440)
excisión (42)	escisión (440)
Este (43)	Éste (440)
nihilismo ¹ : (43)	nihilismo: ¹ (441)
Faucigny-Lucinge (43)	Faucigny Lucinge (441)
hospitalidad temeraria... (44)	rudimentaria hospitalidad. (441)
correntoso; (44)	correntoso. (442)
plan ¹ ... (45)	plan... ¹ (442)

I have included the pages where the discrepancies are in the respective publications. Where the differences are not obvious, I have underlined the relevant parts.

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