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I, Minotaur; You, Theseus

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Winner of the '07 Robert T. Wilson Award
for Scholarly Writing

I, Minotaur; You, Theseus

Renee Goff '07

Start the paper. Introduction. Attention getting opening. It has to be good. If the first sentence of the paper doesn't get the reader's attention, he won't keep reading. Keep the language high. Don't use contractions. Use complete sentences. Use quotes. Explain the quotes. Keep it interesting. In my paper I will... The introduction should have an attention getting opening, the thesis statement, and the main points of the paper. But if all the main points are explained in the introduction, what is the point of reading the paper? And what exactly is an attention getting opening? A question, an interesting historical fact, an outright lie? If someone is reading a seminar paper, he is probably fairly boring to begin with. No, not boring: academic. Therefore, he (or she, for you can never be too politically correct these days) is reading the paper because he wants to, and it really doesn't matter what the first sentence is. And if no one is willing to at least read the first paragraph and give the paper an honest chance, they have no right reading the paper anyway! Exclamation points should not be used in academic papers, best beloved. They are rarely used in novels either, except in England, who seem to love demonstrating excitement in books, which perhaps compensates for their reluctance to show excitement in the other areas of their lives...

"The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges uses the labyrinth to portray his idea of the relation between space, time, and reality. Well, he may not be presenting *his* idea, necessarily, for authors and narrators are different things, especially in postmodern fiction, but he presents *an* idea. What is a labyrinth, you ask? That, best beloved, is an excellent question. A labyrinth is a puzzle of sorts, a journey that one begins without knowing where it will end. According to the online Oxford English Dictionary (which we all know is the most authoritative source on anything), a labyrinth is "a structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in bewildering complexity, through which it is difficult or impossible to find one's way without guidance; a maze."¹ There are several different types of labyrinths; spatial, temporal, and symbolic.

I, best beloved, went through a spatial labyrinth several years ago. It was in the hills of northern California. It was not a very big labyrinth and I could see the entire thing from on top of the hill. This labyrinth was more of a spiritual journey than an actual puzzle with varying ways to get in or

¹ Footnotes after a quote are used to source the material quoted.

out. I, however, was unaware of this spiritual element and was quite confused why the other people I was with were so solemn and slow as we followed this path in the dirt outlined with stones. I tried to maintain my composure, but I am not one to remain silent (or still) for very long. It also happened to be a very sunny day, I was in a new climate (It was my second day in California), and I have terrible allergies. After about thirty minutes (perhaps less, but it felt like an eternity), I was quite antsy and started looking away from the labyrinth and up at the hills and the sunny sky. Then, I felt a sneeze coming. I am a loud sneezer. I tried to control it, but not terribly hard, for I was indeed bored and I have always felt that it is not good to hold sneezes in. Your head might explode! Well, best beloved, my attempt to hold it in only made it bigger, so after about thirty minutes of complete silence (which the others of my group were relishing) I sneezed so loudly it echoed off the hills! I looked at them sheepishly and they looked at each other a moment, then we all burst out laughing. It was hilarious! Leave it to me to ruin a good moment. Oh, but where was I? Remember, best beloved, academic papers are not the place for personal anecdotes, no matter how well they relate to the actual topic at hand. (Why at hand? Why not at foot?) Spatial labyrinths have been around for an incredibly long time, but, according to critic Hendia Baker, there has recently been a revival in postmodern fiction. What is post-modernism, best beloved? That is an excellent question. Where do I begin? Where all good stories begin: at the beginning. Once upon a time, dearly beloved, there was a form of literature called the traditional novel. This novel had all the necessary aspects for a novel, the characteristics children are taught in schools like plot, setting, characters, point of view, etc. These traditional novels were all the rage and read ferociously by anyone who had the time to read such things. They told life not as it was, exactly, but how it could be, how it should be. It presented characters like ourselves and represented a world similar, but better than ours. But, after a time, some people grew bored with the traditional novel. These people believed that it held them captive under tradition and they needed to break free. So, they created stories that did not behave as traditional novels. Sometimes time did not work chronologically as it ought, but switched and flipped at the author's discretion. Some of them were mostly inner dialogue, and might switch points of view randomly in the middle of the tale. This escape has come to be known as modernism^{2,3}.

² Footnotes are used to include additional information to the topic at hand that is not vital enough to place inside the paper. They should be as short as possible and are rarely longer than a paragraph. I, as a good essay writer, need to include background information on modernism and postmodernism, but since it is not the main point of the paper, it shall go in a footnote.

³ John Barth explains modernism well in his essay *The Literature of Replenishment*:

The ground motive of modernism [...] was criticism of the nineteenth-century bourgeois social order and its worldview. Its artistic strategy was the self-conscious overturning of the conventions of bourgeois realism by such tactics and devices as the substitution of a "mythical" for a "realistic" method and the "manipulation of conscious parallels between contemporaneity and antiquity [...] also the radical disruption of the linear flow of narrative, the frustration of conventional expectations concerning unity and coherence of plot and character and the cause-and-effect "development" thereof, the deployment of ironic and ambiguous juxtapositions to call into question the moral and philosophical "meaning" of literary action, the adoption of a tone of epistemological self-mockery aimed at the naïve pretensions of bourgeois rationality, the opposition of inward consciousness to rational, public, objective discourse, and an inclination to subjective distortion to point up the evanescence of the objective social world of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. (Barth 278)

I know, best beloved, that section includes an awful lot of big words. But it is necessary in an academic paper to not only source the biggest names, but get their main points into your paper. It will support your paper and make it look more impressive if you include the big critical theorists. It's like name dropping at a party; it makes you look more impressive and respected. (Though, honestly, anyone can drop names, actually knowing what you are talking about is what counts.) Basically, Barth repeats what I said above about feeling bound by tradition and breaking out into something new. The modernists were not as concerned with the language anymore, but with the form of literature: "one cardinal preoccupation of the modernist was the problematics, not simply of language, but of the medium of literature" (Barth 279).

Naturally, this caused quite a hullabaloo. While some people agreed and liked the change, there were some that preferred the traditional style and felt that these authors were radicals. Critics were quite excited by this change in style, for it gave them new material to criticize and analyze to death. But who were these authors I speak of, best beloved? There are several different opinions of who fits into their ill-defined category, but it is

Modernism was great fun for a while, but even that got old. Instead of using slang, best beloved, always use higher elevated language. Modernism was great fun for a while, but even that grew tiresome. New authors ~~came along~~ appeared on the scene and decided that modernism was not original enough for them, so they wrote even weirder stories which we currently call postmodern literature.⁴ This was even more complicated than modernism,

fairly safe to say that Eliot, Joyce, and Kafka were modernists. Virginia Woolf, particularly her work "Mrs. Dalloway" was modernist. John Barth is regarded as a modernist and a postmodernist.

⁴ Postmodernism? I know, you just learned what modernism was. But hang in there, best beloved. Modernism was great fun, but because society has changed so rapidly this century, literature must do its best to keep up. They tried modernism for a while, but got tired of those bonds as well. While modernism was "stable, aloof, [and] hieratic", postmodernism is "playful, paratactical, and deconstructionist" (Hassan 591). I know, best beloved, more big words. Let me explain further. Modernism focused on the problems of the form. Professor Hassan and his peer writers believe that postmodernists took what they did and stretched it till it was nearly unrecognizable: "postmodernist fiction merely emphasizes the "performing" self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness of modernism, in a spirit of cultural subversiveness and anarchy" (Barth 279). John Barth believes that this new development in literature should not replace modernism, but add to it with gentleness and respect: "My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents" (283). They should take in what was already done and add to it, make it better. This is something to enhance the literary world, not condemn it. Modernists

but also more fun. Jorge Luis Borges is a postmodern author and his piece "The Garden of Forking Paths" is a postmodernist piece of fiction. Did that explain everything clearly, best beloved? Good. Now, where was I? Oh yes, labyrinths.

Hendia Baker thinks that there has been a revival of labyrinths in postmodern fiction. She writes, the labyrinth "has experienced a revival in postmodern literature, where the labyrinth is viewed as text, and the text as labyrinth" (Baker 297-8). This is not incredibly surprising given the nature of postmodern fiction and its themes, as Baker explains, "the labyrinth is connected with the main characteristics of postmodernism: uncertainty, fragmentation, indeterminacy, decentering, and meaninglessness" (298). Much postmodern fiction can be construed as a spatial labyrinth because it does not travel in a chronological coherent manner, but is often fragmented and scattered. When a story alters the general view of time, however, it becomes a temporal labyrinth which, Baker writes, "is virtually uniquely twentieth century" (299). With spatial labyrinths, one can see the entire layout and the solution of the labyrinth if viewed from the outside. As I noted in my earlier story, I could see the entire labyrinth layout and solution from on top of the hill. The same should be true with temporal labyrinths, but how can one get outside time?

Best beloved, you look confused. How can a work of fiction become a labyrinth in time? In our time, we have clear definitions of past, present, and future. But if a story is viewed from the outside, from the author's perspective, the story is viewed from above (like me on top of the

thought there might be a problem with the form of traditional narrative and questioned the rules. Postmodernism declares that there are no rules and discusses the no rules idea while breaking all the rules. Modernism questioned the method but still wrote for its readers. Postmodernism writes for itself: "postmodernist writers write a fiction that is more and more about itself and its processes, less and less about objective reality and life in the world" (Barth 279).

So what should you expect from postmodernist pieces of fiction? Well, it "veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional (open in time as well as in structure or space), disjunctive, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of ironies and fragments, a 'white ideology' of absences and fractures, a desire of diffractions, an invocation of complex, articulate silences" (Hassan 593). Perhaps it would be best to give some examples of postmodern authors. Kafka, Beckett, Borges, Nabokov, and Gombrowicz are all considered postmodern by Hassan (589). Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) is often considered postmodern as well (Barth 278). Barth also mentions Donald Barthelme, Saul Bellow, and Stanley Elkin (279-80). I think Lydia Davis, Anne Carson, Robert Coover, and Alan Lightman should also be considered as such. Their work defies the traditional forms and questions narrative itself.

hill) and the entire story/labyrinth can be taken in in one moment. Past, present, and future become one and all occur in the present (Baker 303). Ethan Weed agrees that only the one inside the labyrinth, the reader currently reading the piece of fiction, believes in past and future. He says, "To move through a labyrinth is to explore an unknown space. In this sense, reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth" (Weed 162). The author is the maker of the labyrinth and the reader is placed inside it and must find a way out by reading. Perhaps this would be made clearer with direct text references. It is advisable to always bring the paper back to textual evidence, for without the text we are simply spouting nonsense. What, best beloved? I haven't used any textual evidence as of yet? And it is already page six?! (Never use more than one item of ending punctuation at the end of a sentence in a scholarly work. It is even frowned upon in fiction but sometimes they let it slide.) I am such a terrible essay-writer!!! "The Garden of Forking Paths" begins with a citation from a history book explaining that a particular attack in World War I was delayed due to weather conditions. A newly revealed statement by Dr. Yu Tsun, however, suggests an alternate explanation. Tsun's statement is then given, but without the first two pages. So, the reader is given a brief introduction and thrown into the middle of a work (Dr. Tsun's statement) with very little information. It is common for the reader to forget this initial paragraph and believe that she is reading only the story about Tsun. But this story that is "Dr. Tsun's partial statement" is inside "The History of the World War" text by Liddell Hart which is still inside "The Garden of Forking Paths" text by the all supreme author Jorge Luis Borges. Remember, best beloved, what Weed said; we readers are exploring an unknown text; therefore, we are inside a labyrinth. But what kind of labyrinth is this? Though Tsun's statement was not complete, it did start relatively near the beginning and appears to move chronologically; therefore, I do not think it is a spatial labyrinth. Baker says that "time becomes a labyrinth where characters travel in different directions and eventually meet," but we have not yet been given enough characters with actions to positively declare this story is a temporal labyrinth (Baker 302). The only kind left is a symbolic labyrinth. Language, writing in general, is a system of symbols with arbitrary meaning strung together in the attempt to convey meaning. Remember, best beloved, Weed said that "to move through a labyrinth is to explore an unknown space. In this sense, reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth" (Weed 162). If text is nothing but symbols, then fiction is a labyrinth of symbols. But what do we do with a labyrinth of symbols? Can this really exist? Weed explains that "unlike a physical labyrinth, a labyrinth of symbols, of ideas, doesn't exist until the reader explores it. And how does one explore a labyrinth of symbols and ideas? By reading, of course" (Weed 169). All fiction is a labyrinth of symbols. Postmodern fiction adds spatial and temporal labyrinth layers to the work, as Borges does in his tale of Dr. Tsun.

The statement begins with Dr. Yu Tsun realizing that his role as a spy in the war has been discovered and he must somehow complete his mission before he is caught by Captain Richard Madden. While contemplating his situation, Tsun says that he "reflected that all things happen to *oneself*, and happen precisely, precisely *now*. Century follows century, yet events occur only *in the present*; countless men in the air, on the land and sea, yet everything that truly happens, happens *to me*..." (Borges 120). Tsun explains that everything occurring in the past, present, and future feels like it is happening to him right now. The characters from those events are colliding with him now in the present. Baker said that "time becomes a labyrinth where characters travel in different directions and eventually meet" (Baker 302). Therefore, this story has just become a temporal labyrinth as well as a symbolic labyrinth. I know that probably confuses and frightens you, best beloved, but the only thing you can do is try to make your way through the passages and hope to find the way out. I will try to explain this concept more clearly. Tsun feels like everything in the past and future is happening to him in the present. There are a few explanations of how this can occur. Firstly, this is a past-tense retrospective narration. Tsun's statement was written after the events occurred, outside the time of the experience. Tsun can see all parts of the story at the same time because everything has already happened; he is outside the labyrinth. All events are occurring at the same time inside his memory and, as he said, they all feel like they are happening in the present. Century after century has existed, but we can only ever feel the present while it is occurring, happening to us. For example, when I remember my own labyrinth story, I know that it happened several years ago, in the past. But when I remember it and feel the emotions that I felt then, the event feels like it is happening now, in the present. So, the event can be in the past but feel like it is happening in the present. The events of Tsun's tale are all in the past, but as he remembers them to write his statement, it feels like all of them are happening in the present at that moment.

On the next page, the reader learns that Tsun is the great grandson of Ts'ui Pen, a man who "renounced all temporal power in order to write a novel containing more characters than the Hung Lu Meng and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way" (Borges 122). He spent thirteen years constructing this novel, but "the hand of a foreigner murdered him and his novel made no sense and no one ever found the labyrinth" (Borges 122).⁵ Tsun takes a moment to ponder the lost labyrinth and imagines it as "a labyrinth of labyrinths [...] that contained both past and future" (Borges 122). Tsun imagines that his great grandfather created a

⁵ Interesting sidenote: I find it curious that Dr. Albert, the one who solved and recreated Ts'ui Pen's labyrinth, was murdered by the hand of a foreigner and no one knew the labyrinth explanation of the murder until Tsun wrote it in his statement which is now shared (and solved?) with us.

labyrinth that contained past and future. This sounds grandiose, but Tsun is constructing such a labyrinth with his statement because it is written in the future describing events from the past and both past and future are within the tale. (Actually, all authors construct a labyrinth of symbols that contains both past and future) But now the idea of getting lost in such a labyrinth has been added to the conglomeration, though not dwelled upon. Tsun continues his journey until he reaches the house of Dr. Stephen Albert. Ironically, Dr. Albert is a Sinologist who has studied Tsun's great grandfather Ts'ui Pen extensively. They discuss the novel, which Tsun exclaims is "a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts" because "in the third chapter the hero dies, yet in the fourth he is alive again" (Borges 124). Tsun believes that for this reason (and other similar reasons) the book is a complete and embarrassing failure of a great man who lost his sense of reality. Dr. Albert reassures him that this is not the case:

"Here is the Labyrinth," Albert said, gesturing towards a tall lacquered writing cabinet.

"An ivory labyrinth!" I [Tsun] exclaimed. "A very small sort of labyrinth..."

"A labyrinth of symbols," he corrected me. "An invisible labyrinth of time." (Borges 124)

Dr. Albert corrects Tsun, revealing that the labyrinth of symbols, which is the labyrinth of the great Ts'ui Pen, is not physical as Tsun believed, but a symbolic labyrinth of language: his novel. They are one in the same: "book and labyrinth were one and the same" (Borges 124). This reinforces my earlier statement that all fiction is labyrinths of symbols. But how does this knowledge explain the contradictions Tsun despises so fervently?

In a letter left by Ts'ui Pen, he wrote "I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of the forking paths" (Borges 125). Albert explains that the title of this novel "The Garden of Forking Paths" suggested to him that perhaps space does not fork like spatial labyrinths, but that time forked instead, creating multiple futures. Dr. Albert believes that "in all fictions, each time a man meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the work of the virtually impossible-to-disentangle Ts'ui Pen, the character chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He *creates*, thereby, 'several futures,' several *times*, which themselves proliferate and fork" (Borges 125). Therefore, the novel does not have contradictions, necessarily, but multiple futures/presents existing at the same time. Why would someone create such a labyrinth, best beloved? Tsun asks the same question, to which Dr. Albert responds, "your ancestor did not believe in a uniform and absolute time; he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times" (Borges 127). Albert continues to explain that these divergent strands of time contain all possibilities, many futures. That is why Ts'ui Pen left this novel to several futures but not to all. He believed that his own reality, not just the

one in his book, contained all possibilities. While in the reality we are currently experiencing he wrote the novel, in others he did not write the novel. He chose another option; therefore, he could not leave it to them. Similarly, Dr. Albert explains that in some futures Tsun is his enemy, and in others he is his friend.

I know this is a tricky concept, best beloved, but Borges incorporated this principle into his text to help us. There are several instances, particularly with Captain Richard Madden, which do not make sense if time is running in its normal manner. At the very beginning, Tsun realizes that Captain Richard Madden has caught Tsun's colleague Victor Runeberg because Madden answers the phone at Victor's apartment (in German?). It does not say where the flat is, but considering that the telephone was used to convey top secret spy information as opposed to meeting in person, I would wager that it was fairly far away. But shortly thereafter, Richard Madden is seen on the train platform where Tsun is taking the train to Stephen Albert. Richard Madden does not see Tsun and he misses the train. Tsun believes, therefore, that he is safe and that even if Madden discovers where he is headed he has at least an hour before he arrives: "I figured that my pursuer, Richard Madden, could not possibly arrive for at least an hour" (Borges 123). Yet only after a brief talk with Dr. Albert, Madden arrives on the scene after a very curious incident:

I felt again that pullulation I have mentioned. I sensed that the dewdrenched garden that surrounded the house was saturated, infinitely, with invisible persons. Those persons were Albert and myself—secret, busily at work, multiform—in other dimensions of time. I raised my eyes and the gossamer nightmare faded. In the yellow-and-black garden there was but a single man—but that man was as mighty as a statue, and that man was coming down the path, and he was Capt. Richard Madden. (Borges 127)

This curious sequence has several explanations. Once again, this statement was written by Tsun after the fact. Therefore, it might not have actually happened as he said it did. It is possible that an hour or more of time did elapse before Richard Madden arrived, but that time seemed to fly by as it often does. It is also possible however, that time is operating differently here. What is this pullulation Tsun mentions? The best explanation that I have created is that in this moment, an alternate dimension collides with the one the reader has currently been following. There are infinite possibilities, right? In another dimension, Madden reached the train on time, saw Tsun and followed him. He was only a few moments behind (perhaps he didn't turn left at every crossing) but waited before capturing him. It is clear that

before the release of this statement the government did not know about Tsun killing Albert merely because of his name; therefore, Madden would not have thought to stop Tsun to protect Dr. Albert. If Captain Madden did not know that Tsun was going to kill Dr. Albert to pass information to the Germans (which it appears he did not until the release of this statement) there is no way he could have known where Tsun was going on the train. His arrival there at all does not make sense unless there was a collision of another time where Captain Madden had more information to follow. All of this is merely my hypothesis, but it must be true in at least one dimension. My goodness this is a long paragraph! It is most important, best beloved, that your essay paragraphs are of similar length, about half to three-quarters of a page long. Never have a paragraph that is more than a page.

Alright, best beloved, let's recap. As I have explained, "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Ts'ui Pen is a labyrinth. "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Borges is a labyrinth. Language is a labyrinth of symbols. Therefore, we have a labyrinth within a labyrinth within a labyrinth. "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Ts'ui Pen is a labyrinth inside the labyrinth of "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Borges and both are inside the labyrinth of symbols that is language. But what does all this labyrinth stuff have to do with anything? Why am I wasting all this time? I think that Borges is doing more with his labyrinth than exemplifying the themes of postmodernism. I think Borges is using his labyrinth as a symbol for something even greater: something called Metafiction.

What is Metafiction, best beloved? It is, in a nutshell, is a story about a story. What? you exclaim, outraged in your confusion. Now, best beloved, be nice; Metafiction is very self-conscious.⁶ It often has the narrator's internal dialogue on the page. I, as a good essay writer, cannot talk about Metafiction without bringing up Linda Hutcheon, who is one of, if not the, leading critic on Metafiction. In her essay "Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox", she discusses the mimesis of process and product. Now mimesis, best beloved, it simply a fancy word for mimic, imitate, or represent. It is what authors do in fictional writing, they imitate the real world. In Metafiction, there are two kinds of imitation: imitation of product, and imitation of process. Mimesis of product is what has traditionally been known as traditional realism (Hutcheon 38). In a novel there are settings, characters, behaviors, etc., that the reader acknowledges are imitations from the real world. If a character is believable, it is a good imitation. If a fictional book captivates the reader until they believe (at least for a moment) that it is or could be real, the fiction is an excellent mimesis of product. There are literary tricks to help accomplish this feat like an invisible narrator. If a narrator is not present, the reader can forget that she is being told a story. Metafiction refuses to follow these guidelines. Hutcheon says

⁶ Ha! Literary joke! Did you laugh?? (get it? Metafiction is self-reflexive, self-conscious, so be nice...??)

that "Metafictions, on the contrary, bare the conventions, disrupt the codes that now *have* to be acknowledged. The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading" (39). The reader must accept the role as "reader" who establishes not only the meaning of literature but proves its existence.

But this is not all that Metafictions do, best beloved. They also have mimesis of process. When a reader reads a text, she can (and often does) forget that there is a process behind this book. For months, years, an author toiled behind these pages determining what actions characters would take, what effect each action had on the characters and the piece of fiction as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, Metafictions often have the author's internal dialogue on the page either along with the characters or overpowering the characters who are normally the main focus of the work. This mimesis of process, Hutcheon explains, "now demands that he [the reader] be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader, who, in Ingarden's terms, "concretizes" the work of art and gives it life (39). The reader is finally exposed to all the toil and turmoil a writer must endure to create a finished piece of fiction. Writers finally get some release and don't have to hide behind the curtain playing wizard. We can be real people!! And once authors are given this liberty, it often becomes the essential driving force of the work, as Hutcheon explains, "In Metafiction, the reader or the act of reading itself often become thematized parts of the narrative situation, *acknowledged* as having a co-producing function" (Hutcheon 37). Now that the author can have a little fun, the reader has to take on more responsibility: "the act of reading, then, is itself, like the act of writing, the creative function to which the text draws attention" (Hutcheon 39). This opens us an entire new area of critical theory called reader-response, but I'm not going to get into that here.

Alright, now breathe, breathe. I know this is a lot to take in at once, best beloved, but it will all be made clear with time. Yes, Metafiction is still fiction, it just has a different focus. It has simply "expanded to include diegesis or the process of narration itself" (Hutcheon 40). And it is really quite fun. There is a new partnership between the author and the reader. They are creating something together. And, honestly best beloved, I agree with Hutcheon that it is about time the reader "acknowledge his active creative role" (41). For the role has always been there, the reader just didn't know he was doing it: "Of course, he has always been the one to activate the latent universe of the novel or short story; Metafiction merely makes this fact conscious and functional by revealing the conventions that "traditional realism" sought to conceal, or even deny" (Hutcheon 41). No more disguises; everyone can be exactly and no more than who he is, writer and reader alike.

Now, while Borges' piece "The Garden of Forking Paths" is not Metafictional, I believe he was using the symbol of the labyrinth in his tale as a metaphor for Metafiction. "Why?" you ask. Because Metafiction is a

labyrinth, just like his story. Don't worry, best beloved, I'll prove it to you. Remember what I said about only understanding a labyrinth from the outside. Think of "The Garden of Forking Paths" as an entity below you. You are supreme, God-like, and looking down on it from above. Can you see it, best beloved? There is the story "The Garden of Forking Paths" by the great Ts'ui Pen. To Tsun and everyone else who read it (aside from Dr. Albert, of course) it was complete nonsense, a maze no one could find their way through. But one person knew the way out of that labyrinth. Do you know who?⁷ Now look outside that and see "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges. Do you see it? This story also feels like a labyrinth (especially if you've only read it once). But one person knows his way out of that maze with his eyes closed. Do you know who?⁸ Now look a little wider and see the entire thing encompassed in the labyrinth of language. It's a mess, isn't it? But here you are looking at it from above and (almost) making sense of it. So, who can see the entire labyrinth from the outside and the way out?⁹

When an essay writer is explaining a particularly tricky point, best beloved, it is often wise to include examples. Since I have already included examples from Borges, to help illustrate and support my point further, I will use another text. "Lost in the Funhouse" by John Barth is an excellent example of the point I am describing. In this Metafictional short story, there are a few characters present in the story: Ambrose, Peter and Magda (Ambrose's mother and Uncle are mentioned as well). These would be viewed as the main characters, but they do not drive this short story. There is a second story overlaid with it: Barth's story. If I want to be extremely technical (and I suppose, as a good essay writer, I ought to) there is the layer of narrator AND the layer of John Barth the author who are separate and different. (Already there are three layers to this maze.) The narrator interjects quite frequently and explains the various writing techniques used in the story. For example, the narrator first describes the characters: "...and Magda G___, age fourteen, a pretty girl an[d] exquisite young lady, who lived not far from them on B___ Street in the town of D___, Maryland" (*Funhouse* 72-73). In the very next sentence, the narrator (or Barth, depending on which way you look at it) explains to the reader why the underlines were used: "Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality. It is as if the author felt it necessary to delete the name for reasons of tact or legal liability" (*Funhouse* 73). This additional information is not in a footnote or in parentheses (where it might be a little more acceptable) but right along in the story without any altering feature to differentiate it from

⁷ The great Ts'ui Pen

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges

⁹ YOU

the "real" story. The short story is packed with such examples (but you will simply have to read it best beloved, for I have no time to include more here).

Barth also included the theory of multiple dimensions, all choices being made at all times in some futures but not all, within the tale of his characters. Upon first reading, I thought that these instances were simply contradictory statements to annoy and frustrate the reader. It is possible that that is simply what they are. After reading Borges, however, and pondering the multiple versions of reality explained in "The Garden of Forking Paths" and realizing its relation to postmodernism and Metafiction, I questioned my earlier opinion. What if, when presented with option A and B, instead of choosing one or the other, Barth (and therefore the characters) chose both? Now, both (and all) storylines exist simultaneously. For example, the narrator first reveals, "Naturally he [Ambrose] didn't have nerve enough to ask Magda to go through the funhouse with him" (*Funhouse* 90). There is nothing odd about this statement; it is perfectly in line with Ambrose's character. But the sentence is immediately followed by, "With incredible nerve and to everyone's surprise he invited Magda, quietly and politely, to go through the funhouse with him" (*Funhouse* 90). What? I exclaimed upon reading for the first time. He can't do both! Ah, but he can, best beloved. Multiple storylines can exist simultaneously; Borges showed us that. The narrator continues and provides multiple endings to the story:

He died telling stories to himself in the dark; years later, when that cast unsuspected area of the funhouse came to light, the first expedition found his skeleton in one of its labyrinthine corridors and mistook it for part of the entertainment. He died of starvation telling himself stories in the dark; but unbeknownst unbeknownst to him, an assistant operator of the funhouse, happening to overhear him, crouched just behind the plywood partition and wrote down his every word. [...] The family's going home. Mother sits between Father and Uncle Karl, who teases him good-naturedly who chuckles over the fact that the comrade with whom he'd fought his way shoulder to shoulder through the funhouse had turned out to be a blind Negro girl—to their mutual discomfort, as they'd opened their souls. (*Funhouse* 95, 97)

Which ending is the "real" ending? It has been said (and you may choose to believe it) that the multiple endings are not multiple dimensions existing simultaneously as suggested in "The Garden of Forking Paths." Barth may simply be exposing the conventions of fiction by not following them. It is also possible that rather than supporting the multiple realities theory he is

simply revising his story as he writes, which can lead to contradictory statements and actions. But considering that they are lost in a funhouse (which is certainly a labyrinth of sorts) and Barth is a postmodern and Metafictional author who is undoubtedly aware of Borges and the claims his stories make, I think the theory that the multiple endings to "Lost in the Funhouse" are actually multiple futures existing simultaneously is certainly an option to consider. Gracious this is a long sentence! Best beloved, I would keep your sentences no longer than two lines. You want to make sure that the reader can follow your train of thought and doesn't lose sight of the point.

Whether or not you believe that representing multiple dimensions was Barth's original intention, his story is an example of what is meant by multiple dimensions existing within fiction at the same time. Now I know what you're thinking, best beloved. Multiple dimensions? That's the stuff of science fiction, not reality. Do you doubt me, best beloved? Would I lead you astray? Science has proven multiple dimensions for years: "Einstein and others have shown that time is just another dimension, and that the concept of space-time should replace a separate time and space" (Baker 304). This is difficult for us to visualize because we are ourselves lost in spacetime and can only see straight ahead. Baker explains that, "Like someone trapped in a spatial labyrinth who only knows his/her immediate environs, a person trapped in a temporal labyrinth has access to only one lifetime of spacetime" (304). I said at the beginning that to see the whole labyrinth and the way out, one must view it from the outside, from above and beyond. As a reader (especially one who has already read it), this is possible: "Such an eternal state is a state similar to that of the author and reader who stand outside the fictional world" (Baker 304). Visualize Barth's piece from the outside. His story is about a funhouse. Not only does it describe a funhouse, it is packed with unusual things (like fragments and incorrect grammar) that make the reader feel like she is in Barth's narrative funhouse as well as lost in the funhouse with Ambrose. A funhouse is a type of labyrinth, and Barth even uses 'labyrinth' to describe the confusing and interlocking passageways within the funhouse.¹⁰ Therefore, Barth's story is a labyrinth. Barth's story is also a Metafictional piece. Since his story, a Metafictional work, is a labyrinth, perhaps Metafiction is the labyrinth. One might even conclude, given this information, that the labyrinth is used as a metaphor or symbol of Metafiction.

But all of fiction is a labyrinth; Metafiction simply reveals it for what it is. At the beginning, the author is in the middle of the labyrinth. He has to write a story, find his way through the labyrinth and out. Some people believe that this process is simple. With Metafiction, the processes are laid bare. Trust me, it's a maze. But some people believe that fiction is merely a line with choices.

¹⁰ See earlier quotation.

AUTHOR → choice A → C
 → choice B → D → E
 → F → G → I
 → H → J etc. etc. etc.

When an author is presented with choices, he simply makes the choice and all of the options that are not pursued simply die. One story line continues and reaches a single final "real" conclusion. This is the form of the traditional novel, but not postmodern fiction and certainly not Metafiction. Remember what Ts'ui Pen believed about time: "he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are simply unknown for centuries, contains *all* possibilities" (Borges 127). Metafiction, in its simplest form, is a story about a story. In all Metafictions there are at least two stories progressing simultaneously. More often than not, there are more. There is the author (1) writing a story (2) about a story (3) AND there is the reader reading this story (4). If the author, instead of making a choice between option A and B chooses to pursue both, that adds another dimension (5). If a character in his story decides not to choose option A or B but both, that adds another (6). What if there are multiple readers (7, 8, 9)? All exist in the maze that is fiction. They are all encompassed in the symbolic labyrinth that is language, in the spatial labyrinth that is this particular piece of fiction, and are all in the temporal labyrinth that surrounds it because fiction encompasses past, present, and future at all times. In addition, all time an author spends in the text, all time that surrounds the characters, and all time the readers spend in the text are part of the temporal labyrinth of this particular piece of Metafiction. It's enormous. I think that this is true of all fiction, because all fiction has these elements, it just hides behind the conventions of traditional narrative. Metafiction exposes the traditions by breaking them.

The conclusion, or the ending of the paper, is placed at the end. It should wrap up the paper *nicely* with a nice neat bow. Make sure that you don't say the same word too frequently in close vicinity. Be creative and vary usage. In your conclusion, best beloved, you should restate the main points made in the paper without copying the introduction word for word. You do not want to make any new points or add any new information, but it is *nee* helpful to relate the points made in the paper to a larger scheme. For example, if the entire essay were about a Shakespearean play, in the conclusion you can add your opinions as to why this play is still studied today and what studying Shakespeare today can add to society. It is *nee* good to have a catchy ending, but this is not fiction or poetry; therefore, it is better to wrap up your points and simply stop than have a corny ending that makes the reader discard any valid points you made above in the paper itself. It is also *nee* alright to have a conclusion that is short and sweet. If everything needed to be said is said, don't keep going until it is as long as your other paragraphs; simply stop. Many people are afraid of conclusions,

but there is really no need. Though, I certainly recommend doing it last. For how can you write a conclusion without a paper to conclude?

"The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges is a postmodern short story that uses the labyrinth as a metaphor for Metafiction. In Metafiction, there are always at least three layers involved in the story: author, story, and reader. The author begins at the center of the labyrinth and moves outward as he creates his story. Once the story is completed he knows his way in and out freely, unless of course he gets lost in his own tale. The reader is placed in the middle of the labyrinth when she begins the piece, and discovers her way by reading. Once she has read the piece it can be seen clearly from the outside and she is free to roam in and out at will (assuming she did not get lost on her way). But is it the goal to solve the labyrinth of fiction? I've been in it for so long best beloved, it has grown rather cozy (or I'm lost, which is a distinct possibility). And even if we know that we are living in a labyrinth, there is nothing we can do about it, for we feel all time in the present. In fiction, everything is always happening to the characters at all times (for the entire work exists at all times) but to us it all happens in the present, in the now that we read it. There is no escaping the labyrinth. It is timeless and eternal. Baker says that "space-time is a timeless, eternal labyrinth of simultaneously, existing interlinked present moments" (Baker 306). I know, best beloved, this is still rather confusing, but Baker insists that "temporal labyrinths and the labyrinth in time will become more intelligible the moment we accept the implications of the notion that space-time is relative, and only comprehensible from the outside" (311). Readers can only ever hope to understand the piece of fiction after it is read and the reader can view it from the outside. While we are reading the story, we are still inside the labyrinth and do not know the way out.

But do we really want to leave? Does Borges want us to leave? Sharon Sieber thinks that "For Borges, the labyrinth is a symbol of a system in which there are two simultaneous goals: emerging from the labyrinth and immersing oneself completely in the labyrinth" (Sieber 208). Remember, best beloved, Borges is a postmodernist. He has a reason behind all this madness. Sieber says in regard to Borges, "Using order to subvert order and reader expectation, he completely 'undoes' or deconstructs the literal understanding of language as a system of representation and therefore also deconstructs the notion of time" (208). If you are feeling confused by this whole labyrinth nonsense, you are exactly where he wants you. A general rule to keep in mind when reading postmodern literature, best beloved; When you are feeling frustrated, are you supposed to feel that way? Borges wants the reader to doubt his explanations of reality. Sieber says that "This is the high play in which Borges engages readers, luring them into the inherent ambiguity of the linguistic maze of pure form and geometry, not only to admire the creation, but also to feel 'hoodwinked' by their own perceptions and false reasonings within the symmetry of time and space" (208). But don't feel like you've been cheated, best beloved. It was the intention to get

wrapped up in the labyrinth of Borges, but that is simply what he does. This is what all authors do, for all operate the labyrinth of language, not to mention the labyrinth of fiction and their own particular pieces: "language gives the author the ultimate power to deconstruct one tradition and impose a greater play of traditions in the labyrinth. Every event is connected for Borges. Every reader is connected, as is every reading" (Sieber 210). We are all another layer of the labyrinth, the "infinite series of times, a growing dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times" (Borges 127). We are lost in it, adding layer upon layer. We may escape the labyrinth of particular fictional pieces, but there is no way to escape the labyrinth of language. Even while you are reading this essay you are trapped in the labyrinth that contains authors, critics, and readers who will forever be contributing to this thing called literature. There is no avoiding it, no escape. Even though you will finish it and move on, will you ever truly escape?

What? This is completely ridiculous... So far fetched... rubbish! This is such a terrible paper. Why did I ever think that writing about a labyrinth would be a good idea? I'm sorry, best beloved. I'm sure you're furious with me. You put your trust in me as narrator to lead your through this maze without deceiving or abandoning you. I do apologize, best beloved. Even authors get lost in their own pieces sometimes. Did you think this would be a good paper? Did you expect it to make sense? How can I expose the conventions by breaking them and expect the paper to be understood? I wanted to be experimental... radical... revolutionary. But the true experimental writers don't need that "A" in their Senior Seminar class to boost their cumulative GPA. Academic papers are supposed to be clear, concise... This paper should have ended ages ago. It has gone on and on and never had a clear direction. Maybe that is the problem. Did I even start with the introduction? God, this sucks. Perhaps I will simply start over.

Postmodernism, the after-thought of modernism,¹¹ has been causing havoc and uproar through critics' dinner parties and readers' homes for some time now. The author is tired of hiding behind the "invisible narrator" curtain and displaying an all powerful wizard to the mass reading audience. The reader has always partnered with the author to make a story come alive, and it is about time he knew of it. This labyrinth that is language and fiction, with multiple layers all on top of the other, is growing larger and more dangerous. People need to be aware of its strength and power. Many are getting' lost in the labyrinth of fiction and never coming out again. Is this so bad? No, best beloved, not at all, but the risks need to be posted on a sign or something. Metafiction has tried to do just that. Metafiction, which by definition is a story about a story, reveals to the reader that he is a crucial element to fiction, for without the reader there would not be fiction. Does a story exist if no one reads it? Jorge Luis Borges, a postmodern author, wrote "The Garden of Forking Paths," a story about a labyrinth, and is itself a

¹¹ Boy, that's contentious!

labyrinth of sorts. He presents an alternate view of space, time, and reality that can be used as a metaphor for Metafiction. In this paper, I will argue that Borges uses his labyrinth as a symbol for Metafiction. Background information on postmodern with an explanation of Metafiction will be provided. I will also explain labyrinths and why fiction is a labyrinth, as well as how Borges' particular story "The Garden of Forking Paths" is a labyrinth text. "Lost in the Funhouse" by John Barth will also be used to strengthen my point. I might prepare some bread crumbs or smooth stones, best beloved. I don't want to lose you this time...

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