Representamen in Hyperreal Framings of Borges

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ABSTRACT

The culture that has emerged since the 20th century is that of a multi-layered agenda where a fixed point is nowhere to be found. Constant innovation in every aspect of life breeds consistent replication of either tangible or tangible *representamen* that have virtually built *hyperreality*. It is a condition when one can longer determine the exact idea. In the context of multiple reproduction, ideas undergo countless alterations toward the goal of perfection. Thus uncertainty is the natural byproduct of several attempts to arrive at the desired end. This study investigates the *representamen* in hyperreal situations in Borges' narratives, as these are direct referents of unstable ontology.

Keywords: Borges, innovation, pop culture, indeterminacy

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainties are always a part and parcel of one's existence. Understanding why they exist leads to the general view of life embedded with realities of being. An individual's everyday interaction with objects is an encounter with meanings.

Stephen Fox' *Ontological Uncertainty and Semantic Uncertainty in Global, Network Organizations* provides a way to understanding ontological uncertainty as a " principle that involves different parties in the same interactions having different conceptualizations about what kinds of entities inhabit their world; what kinds of interactions these entities have; how the entities and their interactions change as a result of these interactions."

This phenomenon is made clear by Baudrillard (83) through his elaboration on the concept of "hyperreality" which engages the medium and the real in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable.

The unidentified truth here, nonetheless, becomes a partial embodiment of truth that paves the way for another concept: *simulacra* or a *representamen*, a created thing brought about by infinite regress, lacking a fixed point of reference.

As for Baudrillard (8), a simulacrum is " a reproduction without original , is never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."

Time and again, in man's attempt to question the standards around him, obsession comes along in making the copy even better than the real.   Schwartz (qtd. in Tofts 3) notes that "the copy will transcend the original." With this culture of "the copy", inconsistencies arise, thus, in every concept there are always two sides.

Brandist's (7) explanation on dialogism   touches on Bakhtinian perspectives on language and culture wherein dialogism might have an ontological significance that transcends the human world.

Terms such as fantasy and reality are in no way absolutes, nor are they dependent figures within a binary opposition rather manifestations of possible worlds, projections of the world as it may be. Kerrigan (qtd. in Lockard 2) proves this by saying that Borges is "an author whose stories are successfully translated into   English and include a spectrum of Argentinian, Parisian, European, and Jewish figures."

Human beings differ from other parts of reality in their capacity to imagine what may lie beyond. This imagination presupposes signs, and signs raise issues of meaning. And this quest for meaning is never-ending under the principle of ontological uncertainty.

Within the context of the rationale and the historical inclinations, this paper is conceived of.

This study argues that Jorge Luis Borges' three select short stories: Circular ruins, Death and Compass, and The Library of Babel reveal ontological uncertainty.

This assumption is supported by the critical theories of formalism, expressivism and affectivism.

Formalistically, a literary piece is attacked without the consideration of external factors such as the opinion of the reader or the background of the writer. In this approach, the text itself is the only source of interpretation. In simple terms, the text interprets itself.

Expressively, the background of the author or writer overrules all other factors. It is by means of looking into the milieu of the writer that the literary piece can be fully understood.

Affectively, literature is subjected to the scrutiny of the reader himself. This banks on the principle that capitalizes on the death of the author/writer once the work is published. Doors are given for introspection to understand the work better. The author is left with nothing but to acknowledge that she no longer holds the ultimate meaning of the work.

Within the matrix of this theoretical discussion, this paper engages in discourse analysis of Borges' *Circular Ruins, Death and Compass* and *The Library.*

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The method utilized in this study is discourse analysis; hence, this is a qualitative research that generates verbal data to prove the assumptions purported by the main problem and its sub-problems. This research method mainly uses analytical interpretation of the discourse text of the chosen short stories.

The research procedure follows three phases: (1) analyzing the author's psyche, (2) assessing characterization, and (3) scrutinizing the underlying thematic concepts to delineate the *representamen* in *hyperreal* framings.

Phase 1. Analysis of the author's psyche

The biography of the author, Jorge Luis Borges, is analyzed using expressive criticism in order to determine similar experiences that transpire in his stories which eventually strengthen the concept of ontological uncertainty emanating from the author's inner psyche.

Looking into the author's background gives value to the writer's presence in his work which then becomes a good mechanism for the inner psyche to surface. This is imperative in order for the researcher to have better understanding of Borgesian perspective which is assumed to have banked on his personal experiences.

While expressive analysis is expected to draw out the author's individuality, formalistic analysis plays in unraveling the same which is the inner psyche by looking into the formalistic elements such as theme, setting, plot, point of view, character, irony, symbol, and language.

Phase 2. Analysis of characterization

Only the characterization of the major characters in the three stories that reveal ontological uncertainty are looked into. Gestures, personal beliefs, and discourses are some of the elements to be assessed in order to prove the existence of Borgesian perspective on ontology being uncertain.

A character may portray a "particular society or social scheme that is either life enhancing or life destroying. In this study, whatever society is portrayed by the characters, that is, either that of enhancement or destruction, it is essential that a perspective on ontological uncertainty is proven to be inherent in these characters and in their interaction to this particular society.

Phase 3. Analysis of the thematic concepts

The elements namely: resistance to meaning, metatextuality and indeterminacy are examined as they shed light to the general perspective upon which this research is anchored.

As for resistance to meaning, since the author no longer holds the authority over his work, the reader now has the right to claim it as his as he is the one to provide meaning to the work.

Hence, affective analysis is the tool to be utilized in this process of extracting the views of the researcher toward a particular work.

The approach that will be used for indeterminacy is still affective since it considers primarily the social constructs of one's culture which are arbitrary in nature. Therefore, the researcher is also subjected to the same condition of arbitrariness given that different social constructs inhabit inevitably in the society.

Lastly, to generate the underlying thematic concepts through metatextuality, the researcher delves into the plot structure. The sysnthesis of verbal data is carried out in order to prove the assumption of this entire study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inner Psyche

Setting. The uncorrupted village coupled with its tranquil atmosphere, the huge library and sophisticated hotel speak of a mental attitude that highly desires for organization. Borges' choice of environment is a certainty that a man like him favors order and decorum--- In his biography by Ruch, young Borges is safeguarded by the four walls of the library in the house which becomes his haven of overflowing knowledge. This serves as the fixed point of reference to the path that leads to erudition.

Sasson-Henry (qtd. in Lockard 13) notes that for Borges, libraries were quintessential tools in the eternal pursuit of knowledge and inspiration.

Point of View. Circular Ruins and Death and Compass are narrated in the third person while The Library of Babel is told in the first person. Utilizing the third person point of view, the author capitalizes on omniscience.
The narrator stands at a point wherein he acts as the overseer of what happened from beginning to end. With the narrator as an observer, biases, present in the first-person narrative, are avoided. With first-person narrative, Borges underscores the importance of one's personal intellectual journey.

Irony. In *Circular Ruins*, he ended with a dreamer who is also dreamed by another. This presents Borges' disgust on presuppositions that eventually cease to provide one what he desires in the end.

Death and Compass downplays Lonrot, the detective who gets trapped instead of the criminal who is the perpetrator of the crime. He exactly defines man's tendency to become gullible in times of desperation and great need.

The Library of Babel shows that the quest of knowing whether or not the library is infinite, or whether or not answers can be sought is in itself the meaning of every man's existence.

Symbol. Circular temple, the *tetragammaton*, and the library are the three major symbols. Circle is a universal shape symbolic of cycle, continuity, and unity. Contextually, it manifests that circular activity--- the never-ending quest of knowledge which is the "law of intellectual life". It is this endless movement and direction that goes along with what exists beyond reality, as endpoints are usually reflective of what can happen, thus *real*.

The *tetragammaton* (stars of David) is represented by two triangles joined at their bases. This displays Borges' passion for sophistication that emerges from complex structures. He finds interest in things that make him use his mind.

Similarly, it lends credibility to the notion of hyperreal as the object itself stands for the Jewish tradition which is reinvented by different people in various cultures.

Language. His choice of words is excellent. In the three stories, he has consistently employed the formal register. Born to a well-to-do family, there is no questioning the kind of upbringing he gets. He is impeccably brought up by his parents and grandparents. Spanish and English are the two languages that he speaks in the house.

Harss and Dohmann (102) reveal that Borges has always been democratic in his borrowings, with a predilection of English style and syntax, which have had a strong influence on the structures in his writing: his adverbial forms, punctuation, exceptionally brief, compact paragraphs. He is a master of understatement and conversational humor.

With lexicons, anyone can play with it. The permutations that result in their abundance in his mind only provide enough evidence of how capable he is of duplicating and replicating ideas. Translations and transliterations could be considered simple outcomes of his erudite mind.

Characterization

In the three stories, characters undergo the process of breaking barriers. It is the primary aim of the author to be persistent in knowing how reinvention could take place.

Brave, purposive, innocent, intellectual, curious, experimental, persistent, myopic, audacious, impulsive, problematic and principled are the traits that the characters possess in the stories.

These descriptions are hinged on the speculative nature of Borges that is revealed primarily *by the narrator, characters' actions, secondary characters' statements and author's personal comments.*

However, despite the skepticism, there is the redeeming value of enlightenment that leads to validation of principles. This behavior primarily underscores the quality of the mind en route to discovering an idea.

Binary opposition is best understood here as one of the reasons why he is able to formulate quality products such as thoughts. Simply put, curiosity is absent without circumstance and liberation does not exist without innocence.

Thematic concepts

Resistance to   meaning. Infinite regress of time provides choices; defying any form of power is a glaring phenomenon of human condition; and chaos breeds confusion. Alazraki (47) touches on Borges' idea that it is natural to suspend belief about something because one needs to question the veracity of history and of perceptions of reality in general.

Constant suspension of the validity of truth ushers one into countless times of determining what needs to be done, thus, fulfilling the journey in the forking paths where one finds points of convergence and divergence.

Indeterminacy. Confusion dawns upon every man in the quest for truth; games of strategy and chance are man's coping mechanisms; and inability to attain meaning is central to man's existence.

In any case, the representation of multiple points of view and the subversion of established traditions contribute to the sense of ontological uncertainty. Borges' suggests that while every explanation of reality's nature is a possibility, even unseen or spiritual ones, certainty about any vindication is impossibility.

Metatextuality. Recurring memories haunt man; never-ending realities excite human perspective; and man embarks on a vain attempt to establish order in a chaotic universe.

It suggests a certain imprecision of discourse that parallels the imprecision of memory and translation and, therefore, questions their validity.

There is no exact point of reference. Ideas linger in mind whether or not there is an absolute truth. So, if man tries to create one and establish it, it is still subject to change because the foundation is weak. In Borges; stories, metatextuality is prevalent.

Barrenechea (130) ascertains that Borges constructs stories in the form of essays on invented authors and books, inserting commentaries by known critics which serve to provide   a real basis, and even complicates the magic by showing his inspiration in one of them.

Borges unites these themes into a   general concept of ontology: Man is in search of meaning. Given that meaning is arbitrary, then, there is *uncertainty*. Borges, one who primarily comments on his own work, exercises the just manifestation of a writer to partially address this phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Jorge Luis Borges' narratives depict the fundamental characteristic of the representamen in the hyperreal framing--- unstable in its quest for perfection/truth.

Where reliable information forks into "not any more reliable" and "seemingly reliable" at a given time, the whole process of overhauling it has just begun to produce what is desired.

Hyper reality cannot be deduced to an apparent concept without the image (the representamen) that dictates what it should be in several attempts to depict the "original" (if there is even one).

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