

Friday 17 February 2012

- Come to class prepared to discuss Professor Madera Allan's lecture. Complete a lecture response form.
- Read the two assigned stories at least twice. Highlight passages that you find confusing, interesting, etc. Think about responses to the questions below, but come to class prepared to initiate other topics for discussion that these stories raise.
- Discussion questions for *The Library of Babel*
  - What is the story of the tower of Babel and how does it relate to Borges' story?
  - Describe/sketch the structure of the library. Is there enough detail to form a precise picture of the library? Is the structure important?
  - Who built the library? What does it mean to say that the structure is infinite? Who wrote the books? Why are they so hard to decipher?
  - How big is the library?
  - How has the narrator spent his life and how does he feel about impending death?
  - It seems as if there are many conflicts and differences of opinion among the librarians. What do they fight about? And would there really be any way for them to stop fighting? What is the most appropriate response to these warring librarians? Pity? Ridicule? Sympathy?
  - In what spirit does the narrator offer his final statement?
- Discussion questions for *The Garden of Forking Paths*
  - What are we to make of the layers of text we find in this story? Why does Borges use this kind of structure? Compare it to the structure of *Man on Pink Corner*.
    - there's the ancient novel by Ts'ui Pen . . .
    - described for us by Stephen Albert . . .
    - in an excerpt from a memoir by Yu Tsun . . .
    - edited by someone who seems to be an expert on WWI.
  - What about the amazing work of Ts'ui Pen—the novel in which all possible futures are included? Could something like that ever really exist?
  - Does the experience of Yu Tsun reinforce or undercut the idea of forkings in time? Are we supposed to imagine another version of the story—in which he doesn't have to kill Albert? Or are we to say that, no matter how much we may like to imagine otherwise, time only runs one way and only has one outcome? In other words, does this story tell us that once events are set in motion, the end result is almost pre-determined?
  - What is the result of all this for Yu Tsun? Does the story have a happy outcome, or a tragic one? Why does he go ahead with his plan to kill Albert? After all, his capture by Madden is inevitable, right?