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Imitation and Transgression: Ge Fei's Creative Use of Jorge Luis Borges's Narrative Labyrinth

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Abstract This paper attempts to trace the influence of Jorge Luis Borges on Ge Fei. It shows that Ge Fei's stories share Borges's narrative form though they do not have the same philosophical premises as Borges's to support them. What underlies Borges's narrative complexity is his notion of the inaccessibility of reality or divinity and his understanding of the human intellectual history as epistemological metaphors. While Borges's creation of narrative gap coincides with his intention of demonstrating the impossibility of the pursuit of knowledge and order, Ge Fei borrows this narrative technique from Borges to facilitate the inclusion of multiple motives and subject matters in one single story, which denotes various possible directions in which history, as well as story, may go. Borges prefers the Jungian concept of archetypal human actions and deeds, whereas Ge Fei tends to use the Freudian psychoanalysis to explore the laws governing human behaviors. But there is a perceivable connection between Ge Fei's rejection of linear history and traditional storyline with Borges' explication of epistemological uncertainty, hence the former's tremendous debt to the latter. Both writers have found the conventional narrative mode, which emphasizes the telling of a coherent story having a beginning, a middle, and an end, inadequate to convey their respective ideational intents.

Keywords Ge Fei · Jorge Luis Borges · Narrative gap · Narrative labyrinth · Freudian psychoanalysis · Jungian archetypes

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1 Introduction

Ever since his works were first translated and published in China in 1979, Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges has exerted tremendous influences on Chinese avant-garde writers, among whom are Ma Yuan (马原), Hong Feng (洪峰), Yu Hua (余华), and Ge Fei (格非), to name just a few. It cannot be far wrong to suggest that Chinese avant-garde writings in the last 15 years of the twentieth century were to some extent initiated by these writers' imitation of Borges's narrative techniques, if not his vision of knowledge and of the world. Ge Fei is considered one of the major avant-garde writers in China, largely due to his experiments on the narrative structure, e.g., his use of narrative gap, a technique he has taken from Borges. Ge Fei's early narrative works, published from 1986 to the early 1990s, were under the heavy influence of western literature. Borges is one of his favorite writers, the other two being William Faulkner and Alain Robbe-Grillet (Ge Fei and Zhu Wushuang 2006: p. 3). His experiments on the narrative form coincide with the avant-garde writers' preoccupation with how to write a story, rather than what to write about.

However, the merit of Ge Fei's fiction is by no means limited to literary form only. A question worthy of being asked is: What will be left if those narrative devices, such as metafictional techniques, narrative cycles (or labyrinths), the fusion of history and fiction, which Chinese avant-garde writers grabbed all too hastily from Borges, are removed from their works? Experimenting on narrative forms is one of the key pursuits of avant-garde writers, but is there any ideational intent that informs these new narrative forms?

Although many of Ge Fei's stories share Borges's narrative form, this paper argues that they do not have the same philosophical premise as Borges's to support them. Hence, the twofold purpose of this paper: to trace the influence of Borges on the narrative form of Ge Fei's fiction and to explore its unique thematic expression. It argues that while Borges's creation of narrative gap coincides with his intention of demonstrating the impossibility of the pursuit of knowledge and order, Ge Fei borrows this narrative technique from Borges to facilitate the inclusion of multiple motives and subject matters in one single story, which denotes various possible directions in which history, as well as story, may go. Borges is known for his avoidance of erotic love and politics in his fiction. What underlies Borges's narrative complexity is his notion of the inaccessibility of reality or divinity and his understanding of the human intellectual history as epistemological metaphors. Mirrors, chess games, and libraries are images Borges uses to denote his metaphysical thinking on the relationship between space and time, history and fiction, reality and fantasy. In contrast to Borges's metaphysical concerns with the archetypal patterns of human behaviors and thoughts, Ge Fei's fiction is pivoted more on an epistemological pursuit and shows a keen interest in the conflicts between the libido-driven individual desires and the interest of the collective. The recurrent theme of the Eros in Ge Fei's fiction, this paper argues, is adeptly used as a disruptive, or liberating, force to demythologize some abstract collective goal based on "universal" truth that fails to accommodate individual needs.

2 Ge Fei's Explorations of and Experiments with the Borgesian Narrative Labyrinth

To trace even the rough contours of literary and ideological influence on Ge Fei is a difficult, if not an impossible attempt; this is not only because Ge has been such an omnivorous reader, but also because he seldom mentions how he has been influenced by other writers. Indeed, Ge Fei has never openly acknowledged the influence of any one particular writer on his writing. He certainly has the same kind of "anxieties of influence" as Ma Yuan did when the latter lied about his knowledge of and the influence of Borges on his work in a lecture given at East China Normal University in 1986, when Ge Fei was still an undergraduate student there. After he finished his speech, a student asked Ma Yuan to what extent Borges had influenced his writing. Ma replied: "I've never heard of Borges, not to mention being influenced by him."[1] A few days later Ma Yuan admitted he had lied. Ge Fei's comment on Ma's lie is as follows:

> …As early as in 1986, there were not many people who could see the important connection between Borges and Ma Yuan's fiction. The student's question really surprised him. On the other hand, he seemed profoundly alert to the critics: once a writer acknowledges the influence of a certain writer (though such influence is absolutely normal), critics will delve into such a connection, so much so that some psychological hints will be imposed on the writer in question, which will in turn impede his creativity (Ge Fei 2001: p. 65).

From this explanation, we can guess how Ge himself would respond to questions of this type. Although he did in fact mention in passing the influence of three foreign authors on his writings, including that of Borges, he has never explained in what ways. It goes without saying that Ge Fei's enquiring mind would allow him to draw on a multitude of writers, all of whom must have influenced him in one way or another. However, our present task is to discuss the influence of Borges.

Among the twenty-nine essays included in his book *The Sirens' Songs* (赛壬的歌声), several have comparatively lengthy discussions of Raymond Carver, Garcia Marquez, Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Kafka. But it does not follow that these writers have exerted more influence on him than other writers. The three writers who he acknowledges have influenced his writing have not been given equal length of discussion as the above-mentioned writers. He has discussed, either in detail or in passing, many foreign writers in the volume, among whom are Ovid, Homer, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Milan Kundera, Italo Calvino, Dickens, Joyce, Faulkner, Hemingway, Salinger, Nabokov, Chekhov, Bulgakov, Baudelaire, Proust, Balzac, Hugo, Stendhal, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Marguerite Duras, Camus, Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar, Alejo Carpentier, Vargas Llosa, and so on. In this vast storehouse of foreign literature, it is difficult for us to sort out a clear picture of influence.

Ge Fei took to foreign literature during his undergraduate years at East China Normal University (1981–1985) where he was a student majoring in Chinese

[1] Ge Fei (2001, p. 64). All translations from Chinese to English are mine unless specified otherwise.

literature. His first encounter with Borges's works was unquestionably during this period. In an interview, he said:

> The Chinese Department set a demanding task for every student: read 100 canonical works. I read every issue of *Foreign Literature and Art* (外国文艺) and *World Literature* (世界文学) in which many modernist literary works from the West were published [in translated form].
>
> …At that time, modernist works were hardly available [to Chinese readers]. It's only natural that one desired all the more ardently those works which were difficult to lay hands on and one's extolment for them was therefore as profuse as they were difficult to find. Among them, Faulkner's fictions about rural life as well as works by Robbe-Grillet, Borges and so on had profound influences on my writings (Ge Fei and Zhu Wushuang 2006: p. 3).

The fact that Ge Fei was brought up in the countryside (Dantu County, Jiangsu Province) partly accounts for his interest in Faulkner's depiction of rural life and for the reason why most of his own fictions have rural settings. The influence of Robbe-Grillet is observable from Ge Fei's a-psychological or objective depiction of characters and situations without showing much trace of emotion. But the most obvious influence has come from Borges's narrative structure.

Four of Borges's stories (i.e., "The Garden of Forking Paths," "The South," "Blue Tigers," and "The Gospel of Mark") were first translated into Chinese and published in *Foreign Literature and Art* (No. 1, 1979); in 1981, another three, "Man on Pink Corner," "Emma Zunz," and "The Shape of the Sword," were translated and published in *World Literature* (No. 6, 1981). Apart from these seven stories, Ge Fei also had access, during his university days, to thirty-five other stories by Borges included in a volume titled *Selected Stories by Borges* published in 1983 by Shanghai Translation Press (上海译文出版社). The forty-two stories in the volume, comprising more than forty percent of Borges's one hundred and one short stories, were selected chronologically from *A Universal History of Iniquity* (1935), *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), *Artifices* (1944), *The Aleph* (1949), *The Maker* (1960), *Brodie's Report* (1970), and *The Book of Sand* (1975). Ge Fei published his first experimental work—a short story titled "In Memory of Mr. Wu You" (追忆乌攸先生)—in 1986. Most of his other experimental works were published in the next few years. Beginning with his novella *The Periphery* (边缘, 1992), Ge Fei's interest in experimenting with the narrative form started to dwindle, and he returned to a more conventional way of writing.

Borges's narrative patterns are perceivable in some of Ge Fei's short stories. In fact, Ge Fei's own analysis of Borges's innovations in the short story as a genre has confirmed Borges's influence. That Ge Fei holds Borges in high esteem can be seen from his quoting Shi Tiesheng's comment on Borges, which is also his own: Borges is to twentieth-century fiction what Einstein is to modern physics. He adds, "If Dostoevsky has attempted to build a heavenly kingdom on the hellish earth, then Borges has created a universe in a linguistic sphere. He discovers and records many a miracle, but these miracles are helpless. They are meaningful only in our imagination" (Ge Fei 2001: p. 86). In Ge's book *The Sirens' Songs*, Borges's name

appears more than a dozen times. His stories "The South" and "Blue Tigers" are discussed at some length. Commenting on Borges's narrative skill in "The South," Ge writes:

> There are at least two ways of reading the story. One has already been mentioned above; the other is that Dahlmann did die in the sanatorium. Before his death he had a fantasy, for he couldn't accept the fact that he should die in the hospital and therefore imagined a different death – killed in a knife fight in the south while grappling with his adversary (Ge Fei 2001: p. 50).

Ge Fei is amazed by Borges's creation of a sense of uncertainty about the story's ending, and by the freedom Borges gives to his reader to interpret, or rather, rewrite the story in their own ways. In Borges's fiction, fantasy and reality are interwoven to create both puzzlement and fascination. Ge Fei's own early experimental works, such as "Flocks of Brown Birds (褐色鸟群)," "The Trap (陷阱)," "The Richly Painted Zither (锦瑟)," and "No One Sees the Grass Grow (没有人看见草生长)," show a similar tendency to fuse a dreamed world with a realistic one, creating both narrative and epistemological uncertainty and intricacy. Ge's method has been carried to such an extreme that the two worlds under depiction are almost entirely indistinguishable, thus perplexing the readers more than they arouse their interest. In the last of the above-mentioned stories, Ge Fei depicts, in a dream-like language, the attraction of a friend's wife to the narrator "I." The fatal woman Plum (梅) steals into his bed one night and tells him about the adultery between his wife and her husband. At the very end of the story, the narrator questions the truth of Plum's story:

> It occurs to me that Plum might have cooked up a story. She might have felt remorse about what she did in the past and made up a bizarre fantasy, as a pretext for the gratification of her youthful passion (Ge Fei 1996b: p. 57).

We are left uncertain about the relationship between the narrator's wife Qi (棋, or "chess") and Plum's husband Gongzi (宫子, or "the last moves" in *weiqi* [围棋], originally a Chinese chess game), and indeed about the actual relationship between the narrator and Plum, for the scenes depicted in the story are so dream-like that they may well be the narrator's own conjectures. The characters' names, i.e., Qi and Gongzi, elicit a sense of unreality, which reminds one of the recurrent image of chess game in Borges's narratives.[2] Rather than a realistic situation, Ge Fei's story depicts a scene more like a chess game that takes place only in the players' minds.

Ge Fei's great interest in Borges's narrative pattern is also shown in his analysis of the latter's "Blue Tigers." He summarizes Borges's innovations of the traditional story pattern as follows, which is worthy of quoting at length:

> … In the traditional story, the plot normally consists of three parts: the purpose of a task, the barriers to the fulfillment of the task, and the completion of the task. Borges follows this narrative pattern in most of his stories, but he has completely changed the three constituent parts.

[2] For a detailed discussion of Borges's use of the image of chess game, see Irwin (1993) in which he points out that the recurrence of this image in four of the eight stories collected in *The Garden of Forking Paths* "reflects some central concern of the volume as a whole" (425).

> First, the purpose [of a task] does not lead directly to its realization. A book, a legend, or even an idea would lead to a series of actions by the protagonist. In the above mentioned story, the reason why the blue disks drive the protagonist to the verge of a nervous breakdown is at the most a philosophical or metaphysical question.
>
> Second, in the process of fulfilling the purpose of the task, the original motive is often replaced by yet another and stronger motive. The so-called "barriers" are not much more than a modification of the original motive. The process of fulfilling the purpose does not entail the solution to a "problem"; instead, it often means the emergence of a new problem. This kind of cyclical progression of the narrative constitutes a narrative circle….
>
> Last, the fulfillment of a purpose or the solution to a problem is always realized on a different plane. The protagonist gives all he has to the beggar, but the beggar thinks he has really given him nothing at all. The beggar, on the other hand, seems to have given the protagonist no alms at all, but he has actually given him everything: days, nights, wisdom, habits, and the world—i.e., his everyday life. Here, the original motive of the protagonist, i.e. to go to Punjab to observe the blue tigers, has become meaningless (Ge Fei 2001: pp. 84–86).

Ge Fei's exegesis of Borges's narrative pattern, that is, the replacement of one motive by another, reveals a lot about his own narratives. In Borges's story, the mystery of blue tigers is what urges the protagonist to visit Punjab, but in the course of the protagonist's investigation this motive gives way to a new one: his discovery of some miraculous blue disks capable of multiplying and reducing themselves on their own, which has created another puzzlement he needs to tackle. At the end of the story, he is so perplexed and so psychologically burdened with the inexplicable power of the blue disks, as well the confusions and disorders it has caused, that he seeks help in the mosque of Wazil Khan. It seems only a divine being can relieve him from his epistemological confusion. The God-Allah-beggar in the mosque delivers him by taking over his problem as well as the blue disks. Though the mystery itself has not been solved, the protagonist's bewilderment has been removed; with the disks out of sight, he can now relax. The mystery can be said to have been solved on a different plane. It should be noticed that in the process of narrating the mystery of the blue disks, the author has completely forgotten the mystery of the blue tigers.

Such irresolution or postponement of resolution to a motive (e.g., "Blue Tigers" and "The Garden of Forking Paths") creates a puzzling but intriguing narrative gap that awakens the reader to the existence of multiple possibilities or courses of development in narratives. Critic Allene M. Parker (2011) borrows Douglas Hofstadter's term "the strange loop" to describe this formal feature of Borges's narratives, which well captures the structural trait and the metaphysical implications of Borges's narratives. I prefer the term "narrative gap," because it better shows the effects such a narrative form has achieved on the reader. The puzzlement caused by the irresolution of a motive will urge them to think further about what such a pattern

implies. The term also better represents Ge Fei's perception of Borges's unique contribution to the narrative form: the introduction of multiple motives in one single story, some of which are either not resolved or resolved on a different plane. The significance of this difference in emphasis, which will be demonstrated in the discussion of the thematic expression in Ge Fei's stories, lies in Ge Fei's intention to question the "official" and "authoritative" version of history.

Ge Fei's own stories exemplify the Borgesian labyrinth, or narrative riddle marked by a multiplicity of motives and narrative events interwoven in a puzzling, but thought-provoking fashion. It is not uncommon to find in Ge Fei's stories the shifts of motive and the juxtaposition of multiple narrative events that breaks the narrative continuity and produces a narrative gap. "The Mysterious Boat," which bears some structural resemblance to Borges's narrative labyrinth, is a war story usurped by a lovers' romance. On the surface, Ge Fei's story narrates the civil war (1926–1927) between the Northern Expeditionary Army and Sun Chuanfang's local forces. Coincidentally, the protagonist Xiao is a brigade commander of Sun Chuanfang's troops, while his elder brother works for the opposing Northern Expeditionary Army. The wrestling between two rival forces, which stand, respectively, for counter-revolutionary and revolutionary ideologies in the official historical record of the event, is embodied in a curious way by an imaginary contest between two blood brothers. But this expected line of plot development comes to an abrupt stop when Xiao, during his reconnaissance trip to Xiaohe Village (his hometown), meets his cousin Xing, now Sanshun's wife, with whom he has fallen desperately in love. The war story therefore turns into a lovers' rendezvous, and the battlefront between the progressive and reactionary forces, or that of the brothers' wrestling match now becomes a lovers' tryst.

The ending of the story is as surprising as Borges's "Death and the Compass," which ends with the detective being trapped and shot by the criminal. Xiao is also shot, not by his mistress' husband, but by his own bodyguard who announces to him before shooting, "On the eve of our departure from Qishan to Xiaohe, I received a secret order from our division commander: if you go to Yuguan, I must kill you" (Ge Fei 1996c: p. 84). The Northern Expeditionary Army is then stationed at Yuguan, Xing's hometown. When Xing's husband Sanshun, who is a veterinarian by profession, discovers her love affair with Xiao, he maims her sexual organ and sends her back to her parents' home in Yuguan. Xiao's trip to Yuguan to comfort her is interpreted as an act of betrayal (i.e., meeting with his brother who works for the Northern Expeditionary Army).

Apparently, the story is based on the conflict between two spaces, i.e., the public space represented by the civil war and a private space embodied by the illegitimate love affair, one stiflingly abstract and absolute and the other dangerously sensual. In the narrative, the "momentous" history, i.e., the civil war, is usurped by the "insignificant" love story. The narrative structure accords with Borges's innovation, i.e., the replacement of one motive with another as a narrative device to include multiple events or subjects in a story. Xiao's bodyguard's gunfire brings the reader back to history (i.e., the civil war) from the love story, but with the death of the protagonist, both the lovers' romance and the historical fiction are over. We can perhaps say that the juxtaposition of the two different sets of space–time and their

synchronization serve to cancel out each other's development and effects. Xiao's bodyguard's shooting his boss has completed a narrative cycle, for this brings the reader back to the starting point of the story. But the mystery about whether or not Xiao's trip to Yuguan, which causes his death, is connected with his brother, or with Xiao's betrayal, remains unexplained. Curiously enough, it is what has been left out in the story, which produces the narrative gap, that has made Xiao a victim and the story an epistemological tragedy. Ge Fei's intention is to posit a moral situation in which individual pursuit conflicts with the interest of war. Xiao dies for a crime he probably has not committed.

The irony in Xiao's execution by his own bodyguard reveals the horror of transient fate in the reversion of roles. The author obviously predicates the protagonist's death on the incompatibility of his roles as a hero and a traitor, which, interestingly, parallels his bodyguard's as a protector and a murderer. In a somewhat similar case, Borges's protagonist Vincent Moon, who betrays his fighting companion and savior, has lived to tell the story to the narrator in the name of his victim. Not only does he survive, he has pardoned himself on the ground that betrayal is a common human defect inherited from Adam and Eve. Borges tells us, in the words of his protagonist, "Whatever one man does, it is as though all men did it" (Borges 1998: p. 141). Borges' aloofness from moral judgment comes from his obliteration of the boundaries between heroism and betrayal by taking both as coexisting in any man.

"The Lunar New Year" (大年), another story by Ge Fei, follows a similar pattern: A story about the revolutionary New Fourth Route Army led by the communists is usurped by a murder mystery, in which a respected agent from the NFRA has secretly plotted against a member of the country gentry. He tricks a foolhardy young man, Leopard, into killing the gentry so that he can elope with the landlord's concubine. The story does not develop as the reader expects. The motive of revolution is left in abeyance, and the narrative comes to focus on the secret scheme of "dethroning the King and marrying the Queen," though the reader does not know this until the very end of the story. At last, Leopard, the poor Hamlet in Ge Fei's story, so to speak, dies at the hands of his much respected "uncle" without even noticing the latter's ulterior motive. Like "Missing Boat," the story has a surprise ending. Its structural secret also lies in the creation of a narrative gap: What appear to be revolutionary activities Leopard and others participate in under the leadership of NFRA turn out to be nothing more than a secret conspiracy. The theme of revolution in the public space (civil war) is usurped by a display of individual Eros in the private space.

The narrative form of "Qinghuang" (青黄, literally "green-yellow") also exemplifies the Borgesian narrative labyrinth. It conforms to Borges's innovation of the three elements of the traditional story as Ge himself has explicated it. First, the purpose of the protagonist's task, i.e., an investigation on the meaning of "Qinghuang," which Tan Weinian, in his *The History of Prostitution in China,* suggests is the title of a lost chronicle about the life of prostitutes in the Nine Fishermen Families who lived on boats, is of no avail, and cannot possibly lead to successful realization. The narrator "I" has doubts about Tan's explanation and decides to investigate it on his own. As the trips to the village Maicun, where the

last family of the Nine Fishermen Families has settled down after getting on shore, turn out to be fruitless, the investigator–narrator knows clearly his investigation is going nowhere. "I have lost all interest in the name which is very likely to be Professor Tan Weinian's own coinage" (Ge Fei 1996d: p. 164). He continues to visit Maicun, but his motive is no longer the same. Second, the barriers to the completion of the primary task lead to its modification: The task is now replaced with another: the tracing of the secret history of the Nine Fishermen Families, particularly how the last family, the Zhangs, eventually got on shore and started a new life. Third, the problem which occurs in the beginning of the story, i.e., the mystery of "Qinghuang," is solved on a different plane. It turns out that "Qinghuang" has multiple meanings, which is in effect tantamount to having no fixed meaning at all. The narrator can neither prove Tan Weinian's hypothesis right nor prove it wrong. "Qinghuang," in the last analysis, can be an alias for prostitutes, for "they are like bamboos—which are green when young and turn yellow as they become older" (Ge Fei 1996d: p. 158); or it can be the name of a dog (Ge Fei 1996d: p. 173); or it can be the name of a plant (Ge Fei 1996d: p. 174). So the solution to the problem turns out to be a non-solution. While the story makes no contribution to Tan Weinian's question, it does, in a sense, unfold, through narrative fragments, the secret history of the last survivors of the Nine Fishermen Families.

So far the structural similarity between Ge Fei and Borges's narratives has been demonstrated in Ge Fei's own terms, for the above-mentioned structural feature of Ge Fei's stories coincides with what Ge Fei has shown to be Borges's innovations of the traditional story. This suggestion would probably annoy him, for he would not like to be considered an imitator of Borges. However, Ge Fei is of course more than a mere imitator. He is an imitator only in the sense that all writers are. In Borges's eyes, all writers are one man.[3] Ge Fei would probably agree with Borges in this, for he writes:

> As regards Kafka's precursors, Borges had mentioned three: a Dane named Kierkegaard, an Englishman named Browning and a Chinese named Han Yu. This convinces us that there in fact exists only one writer in the world. Although the natural and the human worlds depicted by numerous outstanding writers are varied, they all point to one common mission: to provide a metaphor that both transcends reality and transports us to an unknown world (Ge Fei 2001: p. 187).

3 New Wine in an Old Bottle

Ge Fei's notion of the world having only one writer is different from Borges's, for the former sees the sameness in their common purpose for writing, i.e., "providing a metaphor that transcends reality and transports us to the other unknown world,"

[3] Jason Wilson in his biography *Jorge Luis Borges* thus describes Borges's denial of man's individuality and particularity: "Underneath our apparent differences we are archetypes, one person, nobody. Borges often cited Paul Valéry (more as thinker than poet) that all literature is written by one pluri-named person, the human spirit." See Wilson (2006, p. 9).

whereas in Borges, that sameness comes from a denial of the literary ego, the individuality and particularity of the author. In "The Immortal," Borges states, "No one is someone; a single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, hero, philosopher, demon, and the world—which is a long-winded way of saying that I *am not*" (1998: p. 191). In explaining his relationship with the other Borges in his "Borges and I," he expresses the same reductionist idea: "I willingly admit that he has written a number of sound pages, but those pages will not save *me*, perhaps because the good in them no longer belongs to any individual, not even to that other man, but rather to language itself, or to tradition. Beyond that, I am doomed—utterly and inevitably—to oblivion, and the fleeting moments will be all of me that survives in that other man" (Borges 1998: p. 324). Apparently, that other man is the immortal Borges who is, in turn, all writers.

Ge's more utilitarian perception of literature, the philosophical foundation of which being epistemological, contrasts with Borges's profound doubt about the intelligibility of the world as it is.[4] Borges's skepticism is based on the belief that the world, including man, is an emanation of God, and therefore, man, as a product of God, cannot possibly see through God's device. Ge Fei, on the other hand, holds a different view. He mentions many a time that "all great books attempt to bring the reader to an unknown world" (Ge Fei 2001: p. 3; 14), which points to the intelligibility of the world and the function of literature as unfolding the unknown aspects of the world to the reader. What Ge Fei believes to be "an unknown world" is in fact quite different from Borges's agnostic understanding of the world. Ge's "unknown world" has more to do, as will be discussed in the following pages, that part of the psychological and historical world that has been deliberately filtered out in official history and literature.

Despite some similarities in the two writers' narrative pattern, we cannot take Fei's stories as duplicates of Borges's. Ge's early experiments on narrative forms to some extent damaged the clarity of his thematic expression, e.g., "Flocks of Brown Birds" and "Background," but most of the stories he tells are intelligible, despite the shift of perspective, the use of stream of consciousness, and the use of multiple motives in them. A recurrent theme of Ge Fei's narratives is the role of carnal desire in the shaping of history and character. Ge Fei often situates his characters in a dilemma in which they have to decide between carnal gratification and observation of moral/ideological principles. His characters, as a rule, choose the former, which contradicts not only traditional moral values but also Buddhist warning against lust.

If Borges's art of writing is in essence Jungian, in the sense that he is concerned with the archetypal patterns of the human mind,[5] then Ge Fei's is characterized by

[4] Summarizing Borges's understanding of the world, his biographer Jason Wilson writes: "You can only know your contingent self in time, but you cannot know the objective, empirical world. The world you think you are getting to know is a projection of your own enigma." See Wilson (2006, p. 11).

[5] Shumway and Sant (Fall–Winter, 1980) hold that Borges "combines a doctrine of the particularity and primacy of individual perception and a skeptical attitude toward language…with a notion of archetypal patterns in art." "Those repeated forms that give an apparent pattern to experience Borges call archetypes, and he sees them everywhere—in everyday living as well as in art" (p. 47). Agheana (1984) rejects the critical consensus that Borges systematically negates the individual for the archetype and advocates an existentialist reading of Borges characters. Though he has demonstrated with some success that Borges depicts acts of individuation which is associated with his protagonists' unique personalities, Agheana

an obsession with the Freudian libidinal power that wields tremendous impacts on both the individuals and the sociopolitical forces involved. Ge Fei's portrayal of the erotic nature of man is often situated in the context of the interplay between private and public spheres of life, which unravels how institutional power may be maneuvered to achieve personal gains. Interestingly, Ge Fei often uses the Borgesian narrative pattern to disclose, behind the apparently erotic story itself, the hidden exercise of power that may escape the notice of the protagonists themselves, e.g., Xiao in "The Mysterious Boat" and Leopard in "The Lunar New Year." Here Foucault's notion of knowledge and power and his conception of history as being contingent rather than linear and progressive would be a useful theoretical frame for analyzing the thematic expression of Ge Fei's fiction. Ge Fei usually allows two results for his protagonists' impulsive lust for women: either they victimize others or are victimized. In either case, the "normal" story line, and, more importantly, the course of history (which in the context of modern China is often mistakenly perceived as necessarily progressing from lower to higher stages), are disrupted. A Foucauldian reading of Ge Fei's stories reveals a lot about his ideational intention behind his adoption of Borges's labyrinthal narrative pattern, which better fits his narration of the complexity of history and human nature. In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault gives a remarkable analysis of the exercise of power on the body. The human body is disciplined, subjected, broken down and rearranged so that it becomes docile and useful. The political and religious investment of the body, which obtains docility and renunciations, takes the form of coercions. Schools, prisons, hospitals, asylums, monasteries form a machinery of power that trains and disciplines the bodies, turns them into tools or machine parts capable of doing what one wishes them to do. Foucault (1984) sees the "soul" as "a correlative of a certain technology of power over the body" (1984: p. 176). He states: "The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (1984: p. 177). Foucault's remarks shed some light on the thematic expressions of Ge Fei's stories.

Power has a hold on the bodies of Ge's characters, although they themselves may not realize this. I think Ge's adept use of the Borgesian narrative pattern serves a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it facilitates his revelation of the conspiracy of power that is by no means easily discernible. He first creates in the reader a wrong impression, an impression that they are reading, say, a traditional historical fiction and then thwarts their expectation by digressing into a different story. This creates the effects of startling them into awareness of the secret operation of power behind

Footnote 5 continued
does admit the coexistence of symmetry (knowledge gained from disciplines) and asymmetry (individuality) in Borge's works. Shumway and Sant, too, notice Borges's paradox: "combining the various features of his skeptical relativism with a notion of archetypal patterns," which allows a work to be "simultaneously unique and universal" (p. 48). To mediate the paradox, it is perhaps not a bad idea to look at the various forms of individual action and expressions as an external manifestation of the universal cognitive core of the archetypes. Borges's leaning toward archetypes can also be observed in his essay "Circular Time," in which he states that "universal history is the history of a single man." After explaining Marcus Aurelius's notion of "the analogous…nature of multifarious human destinies," he adds: "It becomes no more than an affirmation that the number of human perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and vicissitudes is limited, and that before dying we will exhaust them all" (1999, p. 228).

the scene. On the other, it also awakens his reader to the possibility of multiple ways of writing and interpreting a story or history. By introducing an alternative way of writing and interpreting history and reality, Ge attempts to dismantle the rigid and hardened belief in historical development based on the sacrifice or postponement of individual wellbeing, as well as the chronological sequence of plot development in a story.

In Ge's stories, the body is often shown to exceed the mind in terms of their influence on the historical process, which accords with the notion that history is contingent. Human activities, as shown in most of his heroes, are controlled by both communal forces and individual desires. In "The Mysterious Boat," he tells, on the surface, a story about the civil war. It begins with a mystery which is not solved until the very end of the story: Brigade Commander Xiao's disappearance from Sun Chuanfang's army just a few days before an important battle. The whole story revolves around Xiao's reconnaissance trip to Xiaohe Village, where he has a love affair with his cousin Xing. The story then digresses into a different one, one of adultery, with the war narrative giving way to a love affair and the battle between ideologies becoming a duel between Xiao and Xing's husband San Shun. As mentioned earlier, the "momentous" history of the civil war is usurped by an "insignificant" love story. What Ge Fei wants to show in the story is that the body has an edge over the mind that inhabits it. Eros reigns over reason in affecting the course of history. Ge Fei uses the Borgesian narrative gap to introduce two intersecting but conflicting lines of plot development. The original storyline concentrates on an ongoing war between two wrestling ideologies, which are abstract and inhuman, but it is replaced by another, which focuses on bodily passions. The digression itself reflects success of the hero's libidinal energy over his sense of duty. It is not until Xiao's own bodyguard kills him that the mystery about Xiao's disappearance is solved.

"The Lunar New Year" also depicts the conflict between the "sacred" ideal and the "degraded" body. In this story, Tang Jiyao, an agent of the New Fourth Army disguised as a local doctor, engages in the mission of requisitioning supplies, mainly from Ding Bogao, a member of the local gentry. He secretly lusts after Ding's pretty concubine Mei. Leopard, a thief, becomes the tool he uses to help him get rid of Ding Bogao and to facilitate his secret plan. And yet all this has been maneuvered in the most discreet way. Neither the dull-witted Leopard nor the "enlightened" Ding Bogao can detect any trace of Tang's plan. Ge Fei's narrative reveals no trace of the maneuver until the end of the story. Only from the ostensible contradiction between what actually happened and the account given by the written announcement of Leopard's execution by the New Fourth Army, and from Mei's subsequent elopement with Tang Jiyao, does the reader awaken to a startling realization of Tang's ulterior motive.

Tang's seemingly respectable personality—his "erudition," his "consideration," and his affiliation with the New Fourth Army—is an impression being reinforced as the plot develops. This creates an illusion of the kind of "historical truth" as is often told in revolutionary history. Yet what makes the story striking is that Ge Fei's explanation of the historical process reveals something fundamentally different from what the historiographers have to say: the "sacred" cause of revolution is

smeared by the hideousness of Tang Jiyao's selfish motive. By first creating an illusion of an "upright" character, or rather the "sacred" cause of revolution, and then laying bare this illusion, Ge Fei apparently intends to alert his audience to the discrepancy between what happened in reality and the official accounts of what happened. Whereas historians are in the habit of constructing a continuous and homogeneous narrative, the actual process of life, which the body has much sway on, may move in a different direction, or rather, in many different directions.

Earlier known as an inveterate thief, Leopard's joining the New Fourth Army not only turns him into a man of power, but also his wretched mother into a respected villager. But deep down, he is the same ignorant, foolhardy and egotistic ruffian knowing no "principle of revolution" at all. The looting of Ding Bogao's house and the subsequent execution of the country landowner, which is carried out via Leopard's hands, is actually Tang Jiyao's strategy to stage a coup d'état for the purpose of, so to speak, "dethroning the King and taking over the Queen." To complete his secret plan, Tang now needs only to kill Leopard, the last barrier to his secret lust for Ding's concubine, for Leopard has revealed his desire for the same woman. It is not until this point in the story that the reader realizes what Tang Jiyao discretely seeks. Again, Ge Fei's use of a narrative gap helps to deconstruct revolutionary history by turning it into a murder story.

In "The Verses of a Fool," Ge Fei depicts the transformation of a psychiatrist, Du Yu, into a psychotic. In the story, Du Yu has newly become a doctor in an asylum. His treatment of a female patient, Lili, turns out to be successful. He has been able to build a rapport with the patient and has succeeded, with the assistance of his familiarity with Freudian psychoanalysis, in inducing her to retrieve some repressed memories of her patricide, which cures her mental disease. Ge Fei, on top of this story, introduces another, i.e., one about how psychoanalysis has been turned against the psychoanalyst himself—an irony in itself. Lili's beautiful body, momentarily exposed while several nurses are forcing her to wear a uniform upon her arrival at the asylum, becomes a captivating and lasting allure to Du Yu. When he later reads her poems mourning the death of someone she calls "Fool," he knows he has a rival. In one of them, she writes:

> Oh, Fool
> My noble King!
> Let your colossal tears cover my body
> I want to die in pain, in your profuse fluids (Ge Fei 1996e: pp. 15–16).

In another:

> I wonder how a cheerless winterly scene suddenly appeared
> In the joyful season of spring
> You died at the window of April
> In rays extending infinitely, like snows.
> If I die, I'll lose nothing.
> Oh, Fool
> When you died, you took with you an entire future (Ge Fei 1996e: pp. 18–19).

Du Yu's jealousy urges him to investigate the identity of Fool. One night, Du Yu takes Lili to his office for what is disguised as a "talk-cure," during which he seduces and copulates with her. Their coitus, it turns out, helps Lili recover miraculously, due perhaps to her regained memories of a painful past experience: upon discovering her father's slaughtering and eating of her pet dog Fool, Lili, in desperation, put a large dose of sleeping pills in her father's drink, which killed him.

Lili's recovery, which puts their "romance" to an abrupt end, and Du Yu's endless contrition and guilt caused by his violation of professional ethics are not sufficient in explaining his subsequent madness. It is Lili's story of her patricide that actually triggers his own repressed memories of his parents' death during the Cultural Revolution, which causes his insomnia and nervous breakdown. Du Yu recalls that some red guards came to his house to search for his father's manuscripts, when Du was still a primary school student. Unable to find what they wanted, they looked very depressed. Du Yu pitied and offered to help them, on condition that they gave him one of those red armbands they wore. One of them quickly took one down from his arm and handed it to Du Yu. He then put it on his arm and took the red guards to his father's bedroom, where he removed a few bricks from a wall corner and produced his father's manuscripts. The tragic result of this, which he was too young to realize then, was his father's being shot to death by the red guards—obviously due to what he wrote. Three months later, he saw his mother, now mad, jump down from the balcony of their apartment. The connection between him and his parents' death is more than he can bear.

Ge's story recalls Borges's "Death and the Compass" in which detective Erik Lonnrot, in the process of investigating a case of chain murders, falls into the trap designed by the criminal Red Scharlach, whose brother was sent to the prison by Erick Lonnot 3 years ago. In the end, the pursuer, instead of catching and punishing the criminal, is trapped in a belvedere, hunted down and, therefore, becomes the pursued. He is shot by Scharlach. In a curious exchange of roles, the detective becomes the victim and the criminal the detective.[6] In Ge's story, a psychoanalyst's success in curing a patient does not make him a more successful doctor; it deprives him of his sanity. An ironical question Ge's reader is likely to ask is: Why should the psychoanalysis that cures Lili's psychosis cause Du Yu's?

Perhaps the answer is hinted at in Lili's prophetic verse line: "No story, for your sake, does not turn into another story" (Ge Fei 1996e: p. 31). As it turns out, the story of one mad person (Lili) leads to another (that of Du Yu's mother) and to yet another (that of Du Yu himself). The seemingly endless succession of one mad person, or story, to another creates a sense of infiniteness. This, interestingly, has a subtle relation with Du Yu's earlier research project: a study of the contagion of psychosis, which is regarded as "nonsensical" (Ge Fei 1996e: p. 7). Du Yu's hypothesis echoes Lili's notion of one story leading to another, but there is an irony in it: the psychiatrist Du Yu has, with the example of his own madness, proved his hypothesis that psychosis is contagious. As the contagion of psychosis through

[6] In Ge Fei's story (Ge 1996c, p. 85)," there is a similar exchange of roles in Xiao's bodyguard, who eventually becomes Xiao's murderer. Notice also that the story ends in a strikingly similar way as Borges's story: "Xiao's body guard, standing three steps away from him, carefully shot all six bullets into Xiao". Borges's story ends with this: "Then, very carefully, he [Scharlach] fired" (1998, p. 156).

physical contact is nonsensical, one is required to reason out a solution on a different plane. Indeed, memories, either repressed or not, individual or collective, of a traumatic event, such as the Cultural Revolution, can be contagious. The mad reality of the Cultural Revolution has caused the madness of Du Yu's mother, who in turn spreads her madness to her son, even though he is now a psychiatrist. Du Yu's madness, compared with Lili's, carries with it more political significance, regardless of the narrative's lengthier depiction of the latter. For what follows Ge Fei's superficial psychoanalysis of a mad college coed is a more substantial, though obscure, study of the effects of the Cultural Revolution on people's sanity.

Borges, in "Borges and I," tells of his two at once separate and unified selves, one being the living individual that he is and the other the public self which has acquired a life of its own. He mentions in this short piece that his taste for "hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typefaces, etymologies" and his taste of "coffee, and the prose of Robert Louis Stevenson" are turned into "the accoutrements of an actor" in the other Borges (1998: p. 324). In "The Shape of the Sword," the narrator tells the story of a fighting companion, an Englishman named Vincent Moon, who was saved by but who betrayed him in their failed cause to win Ireland's independence. At the end of the story, the narrator reveals that he was the traitor, Vincent Moon, not the victim. Here, the traitor has become the betrayed and the betrayed is in fact the traitor. But beneath the reversion of subjects in the story is Borges' reduction of all individuals to a universal identity. Any one man is all men and any one thing is all things; hence, a man can at once be a hero and a traitor. In the middle of the story, the narrator, now being aware of the hopeless cowardice in his fellow fighter, says,

> I was embarrassed by the man and his fear, shamed by him, as though I myself were the coward, not Vincent Moon. Whatever one man does, it is as though all men did it. That is why it is not unfair that a single act of disobedience in a garden should contaminate all humanity; that is why it is not unfair that a single Jew's crucifixion should be enough to save it (Borges 1998: p. 141).

Ge Fei's depiction of the internal conflict between the private self and the public self is probably inspired by Borges's explication of the delicate and complex dimension of the human personality. The dual identities in Ge Fei's protagonists, e.g., Xiao as a lover and Xiao as a Brigade Commander, Tang Jiyao as an adulterer–murderer and Tang Jiyao as a commander of the New Fourth Army, Du Yu as a psychotic and Du Yu as a psychiatrist, reveal a lot about what lies underneath the "accoutrements of the actors" in the public sphere of life. In unfolding the coexistence of paradoxical qualities, i.e., the good and the evil, in one personality, Ge exposes the illusive nature of the public self, which coincides with Borges's claim that "a crowd is an illusion" (Borges 1982: p. 74). Also, in Borges's story "The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," an Irish rebel, Nolan, collaborates with Fergus Kilpatrick, the traitor, in turning the traitor's execution into "an instrument for the emancipation of the country." He proposes that the condemned man be shot on stage by an assassin in dramatic circumstances—a scene he plagiarizes from Shakespeare's *Julia Caesar*. The performance lasts several days. "Hundreds of actors collaborated with the protagonist; the role of some was complex, the role of others a matter of moments on the stage. The things they did and said endure in

Ireland's history books and in its impassioned memory" (1998: p. 145). Borges's story reveals the illusive nature of the hero–traitor and the contribution of the crowd (all of whom depicted as actors) in the generation of that illusion. But the two writers seem to have different points of departure. While Ge Fei's purpose in juxtaposing the two opposite selves is epistemological, with an aim to demythologize the abstract and monophonic collective cause in modern Chinese history, Borges's concern is ontological:Borges's recognition of the coexistence of the opposites in one personality derives, according to Jaime Alazraki, from his "pantheistic idea" that the theme of world is a dream of God, that "everything is everywhere and any one thing is all things" (Alazraki 1971: p. 21).

4 Circularity, Reincarnations, and the Tower of Emanations

In the following pages, I discuss Ge Fei's story "The Richly Painted Zither" (锦瑟) in the hope of illustrating in more detail how he employs Borges's narrative pattern for a usurious interest. While Borges's circular narrative fits in with his attempt to illustrate the supernatural power of multiplication and emanations, Ge's use of the pattern serves to amplify the illusions of earthly pursuits viewed from the perspective of the Buddhist notion.

"The Richly Painted Zither" not only takes its title from Li Shangyin (李商隐), an eighth-century Tang poet, but also borrows the images from Li's renowned poem. A translation of the poem is:

> The richly painted zither, for no reason, has fifty strings;
> Each string, each bridge, recalls a burgeoning year.
> Master Chuang, dreaming at dawn, was confused with a butterfly;
> Emperor Wang consigned his amorous heart in spring to the cuckoo.
> By the vast sea, the moon brightens pearls' tears;
> At Indigo Field, the sun warms jade that engenders smoke.
> This feeling might have become a memory to be cherished,
> But for that, even then, it already seemed an illusion.
> (Tr. James J. Y. Liu)[7]

In this poem, Li Shangyin makes four allusions, three of which have to do with metamorphosis. The third line, "Master Chuang, dreaming at dawn, was confused with a butterfly," is an allusion to Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream. When the dreamer woke up, he was not sure whether it was he that dreamt of becoming a butterfly or a butterfly that was dreaming of becoming him. In line 4, "Emperor Wang consigned his amorous heart in spring to the cuckoo," the poet alludes to a legend about Wang Di, King of Shu in the Zhou Dynasty (sixth century B.C.), who metamorphosed into a cuckoo which in spring coos so desperately for mating that its throat bleeds. There are two different accounts of the King's death and metamorphosis: in the first, Wang Di had an affair with his prime minister's wife and died of shame; in the second, he

[7] The translation is from Liu and Lo (1975: p. 240).

abdicated his throne and became a recluse, but later he metamorphosed into a cuckoo lamenting the fall of his country to the hands of its enemies. In line 5, "By the vast sea, the moon brightens pearls' tears," the poet refers to a tale of a mermaid living at the bottom of the South Sea whose tears turn into pearls. "At Indigo Field, the sun warms jade that engenders smoke" (line 6) is an allusion to a miraculous scene in Lantian (蓝田), or the Indigo Field, which is reportedly capable of emanating a light cloud of smoke that becomes invisible at close quarters. Metaphorically, the smoke may also refer to the specter of the poet's deceased wife.

Li Shangyin's poem is known for its ambiguity, for the four allusions are wildly different in origin and meaning, which leads to semantic ambiguity and a myriad of controversial interpretations. Ge Fei's homonymous story corresponds symmetrically to the four allusions in Li Shangyin's poem, telling four completely different stories, despite the fact that the protagonist in each has the same name, Feng Zicun. Ge Fei's deliberate construction of stories within a story contributes to the structural complexity as well as the thematic ambiguity of his fiction. The first story, subtitled "The Butterfly," which is reminiscent of Chuang Tzu's dream of becoming a butterfly, tells how Feng Zicun, now a recluse living a self-reliant life in the vicinity of a village, is eventually put to death by the villagers. The schoolteacher, the only person in the village Feng has talked to, is eager to know why the erudite Feng did not take the Imperial Examination. To explain why, Feng tells him a seemingly irrelevant story, which forms the second story of the fiction. In this story, which is titled "Bewilderment," Feng Zicun is a young student who, accompanied by his sister, goes to the Capital City to take the Imperial Examination. He fails the examination, partly because the topic of the examination, "The Richly Painted Zither," which is the title of Li Shangyin's poem, gives him no inspiration at all as to what to write about. Another reason is that just before the Imperial Examination he visits a prostitute whose beauty and charms have completely swept him off his feet; while he is taking the examination, his mind wanders away. The shame of his own moral degradation as well as of his failure in the examination deprives him of the courage to live.

Before he hangs himself that night, his sister, to comfort him, tells him a story she heard from a tea merchant, which constitutes the third story "The Tea Merchant's Story." It's about how Feng Zicun, now a rich merchant owning 20 textile mills, 13 cloth stores, and a pawnshop, meets his tragic death. As the story goes, one day the Emperor invites Feng to a performance in the imperial palace. Feng feels so excited and honored that he celebrates the news by making love with his seventh wife, and during the act he catches a fatal typhoid fever. On his deathbed, he tells his wife a dream, which constitutes the fourth story entitled "The Dream in a Dream." It describes how Feng Zicun, now King of Canghai (沧海, literally "vast sea"), leads tens of thousands of his subjects to Indigo Field, abandoning the Capital City which has been besieged by his enemies for months. Though they live a peaceful and happy life in the Indigo Field, his son, angered by his surrender, kills him in the end.

So far Ge Fei's narrative would have been a less than bizarre combination of four different stories about the same character living four different lives, for his metamorphoses into, or rather his reincarnations in, characters of different

professions and roles are what weave the narrative events together to form the frame of the story. However, before King Feng Zicun dies, he reveals to his gardener a dream he has just had. What is in his dream is exactly the same scene in the first story, a repetition that not only completes a narrative circle, but also suggests that the first story is very likely to be but a dream.

This surprising ending recalls Borges's story "The Circular Ruins," which is structurally circular: the protagonist of the story, a magician–priest, engages in a "magical objective" to "dream a man" and "impose him upon reality" (Borges 1998: p. 97). He eventually succeeds, only to find himself to be the product of someone else's dream. This realization makes the dreamer-protagonist only one in a chain of dreamers, each being at once the creator-dreamer and the creation of other creators-dreamers. The circularity, according to Stephen E. Soud, parallels the Gnostics' postulation of "a tower of emanations." That is, they postulate an indeterminate god from whom another god emanates, and from that emanation another, and another, thus forming a tower of emanations (Soud 1995: p. 748).

It should be noticed that only at the very end of his story does Borges reveal the surprising fact of the dreamer himself being the creation of yet another dreamer. This delay creates a narrative gap that runs through the whole story and facilitates the insertion of multiple themes and/or multiple narrative events not necessarily logically related to one another. Take for example "The Garden of Forking Paths." The narrative gap, which is created by the author's deliberate delay in the divulging of Yu Tsun's secret plan of transmitting a military message to his boss, enables the author to describe at length a mysterious perception of time, a topic not directly relevant to the detective story. This is a brilliant narrative device without which any narration that deviates from the main plot or theme would irritate the reader and therefore becomes less practicable. In other words, it is the narrative gap that makes the reader more willing to tolerate the author's idiosyncratic arrangements of narrative details whose relevance the reader cannot judge until the end of the story. Borges's reader is kept in the dark as to why Yu Tsun, a Chinese working in England as a spy for Germany, wants to rush to a Sinologist's house to kill him. Due to this narrative gap, the author gets another story told: a story about Albert's remarkable decipherment of a mysterious concept of time Yu Tsun's ancestor Tsui Pen put down both in a novel and in his blueprint of a labyrinth. Tsui Pen "believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times" (Borges 1998: p. 127). To him, time is capable of bifurcating endlessly, which refutes the notion of absolute, uniform, and linear time. By the same token, Borges's detective story also bifurcates to include something not related to the main plot, something that is epistemologically more interesting than the detective story itself. Obviously, Borges's introduction of digressive narrative events has complicated the narrative structure of his story, but this has to do with his idealist conception of reality, time, and the cosmos. The form and the content are coherently weaved together to make an organic whole.

Ge Fei's story borrows Borges's "tower of emanations" as a narrative technique. One story emanates another, creating an effect of infiniteness. At the end of the first story, a new story is told which replaces the first and becomes the narrative focus. At the end of the second, a third will be told and then a fourth. In theory, the story-

telling process can go on infinitely, recalling the Arabic tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. But Ge Fei, like Borges, reveals the status of the first story as a dream by the protagonist in the last story, which strikes us as a structural duplicate of Borge's "The Circular Ruins." However, Ge Fei's intention for taking over Borge's circular narration, or tower of emanations, is not to tantalize the possibility of turning what is in a dream into reality, as Borges's does. Rather, Ge aims at demonstrating the illusive nature of earthly pursuits. Ge Fei's "The Richly Painted Zither" may well be understood as a Buddhist exegesis of Li Shangyin's poem, for the death of all the four protagonists, who embody "reclusion," "scholarship," "wealth," and "power," respectively, obviously hints at the failure of Confucianism and the meaninglessness of earthly pursuits.

Ge Fei's account of the failure of these earthly pursuits is also Freudian: The deaths of the young scholar, the recluse, and the merchant are directly related to the protagonists' inability to "sublimate" their erotic desires, and the King is the oedipal victim of a patricide. Unlike his other stories discussed earlier, which employ the body as an active force to cancel out the effects of the dominant ideology, "The Richly Painted Zither" appropriates the body as an obstacle to Confucian ambitions.

5 Conclusion

As can be seen from the above analysis, Ge's debts to Borges are enormous. His construction of the Borgesian narrative labyrinth thwarts the ease of old reading habits and prods his reader always to search for alternative ways to interpret stories and history. He takes over Borges's technique of creating narrative gap to facilitate the inclusion of multiple motives and subject matters in one single story, which serves to throw light on the multiple directions in which history, as well as story, may go. In addition, he also uses Borges's perception of nonlinear time and his conflation of reality and illusion for the purpose of breaking the conventional narrative mode which is premised on the causality of events, telling a coherent story having a beginning, a middle, and an end. Ge's purpose, on the other hand, is to expose the contingence of history.

In a conversation with Richard Burgin, Borges said: "In Jung you feel a wide and hospitable mind. In the case of Freud, it all boils down to a few rather unpleasant facts" (Borges 1969: p. 109). Borges's preference of the Jungian dream world of collective unconscious contrasts sharply with Ge's implicit use of the Freudian Eros to explain historical process as well as human behavior. Borges's denial of the ego and the particularity of individuals are based on the Jungian concept of archetypal patterns of human actions and deeds. For Borges, all human destinies become merged in one archetypal destiny, and all histories are part of a universal history. His narrative labyrinth lends support to his construction of a metaphysical labyrinth, which symbolizes an irrational world whose complexity and multiplicity exemplify the lack of order. It goes without saying that Borges's creation of narrative gap, a prominent feature of his narrative labyrinth, coincides with his intention of demonstrating the impossibility of the pursuit of knowledge and order.

Ge Fei, however, has made use of Freud's psychological theory to demonstrate in his writings an alternative view of history, history as the unforeseeable result of the confrontation between various sociocultural/military forces and the individuals' pursuit of the comfort and pleasures of the body. His concern with the real world and the process of history, as opposed to Borges's preoccupation with an ideational and fantastic world, distinguishes him from Borges.

Ge's characters are unable to transcend their libidinal stage through a process Freud calls "sublimation." They remain forever imprisoned in their own erotic fantasies. However, Ge's writings are certainly not intended to depict lust as an incorrigible human weakness. He uses it as a subversive element, situating it, in a subtle way, in the context of the interplay of political and sociocultural forces. Borges mentioned somewhere that he never gave erotica a place in his fiction because it would distract the reader's attention. By contrast, Ge Fei has demonstrated how the body, as opposed to the mind, has a sway on man's life and the course of history. His writing of the body in the last two decades of the twentieth century has helped to demythologize the "lofty" origin of revolution, which chimes in with Michel Foucault's notion that "historical beginnings are lowly" (1984: p. 79). Ge Fei, like a Foucauldian genealogist, sees history as a constellation of multiple possibilities rather than a linear and progressive path leading to perfection.

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