



## Constructive Rereading: Incompletion, Assemblage, and the Virtual in Postmodern and Digital Literary Cultures

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### Abstract:

The study investigates the culture of incompletion in postmodern and contemporary literature through the prism of constructive rereading. Examining the works of Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, and Julian Barnes, it demonstrates how rereading functions as a playful, rhizomatic process of assemblage that disrupts linear narrative closure and prefigures the virtual multiplicities of new media environments. Drawing on Roland Barthes' conception of rereading as play rather than consumption, the analysis reveals these authors' shared rejection of pre-established novelistic forms in favor of fragmentation, metafiction, and intertextual distortion. Borges' translations and forking paths, Calvino's combinatorial literature machines, and Barnes' fabulations of history and replicas collectively embody textual emancipation, where incompletion becomes a generative force.

This study bridges print-based literary theory with digital paradigms, engaging concepts such as hypertext, cybertext, ergodic literature, and N. Katherine Hayles' cognitive assemblages. It argues that constructive rereading virtualizes the printed page, enabling momentary hybrid spaces that blur real/virtual boundaries and foster collective, ongoing narrativization. In an era of blogs, wikis, electronic literature, and AI-mediated texts, this practice sustains literature's vitality as a relational, desiring system always in production. Ultimately, the article posits constructive rereading as essential for navigating epistemic flux, offering pathways for future scholarship in digital humanities, decolonial studies, and ecolinguistics.

**Keywords:** constructive rereading, incompletion, assemblage, virtuality, postmodern literature, new media, Borges, Calvino, Barnes

## 1. Introduction

Before arriving at a fitting conclusion for this culture of incompletion, it is essential to recognize that the most modern form of writing the novel has always been manipulated and created for reading. Unlike other prose narratives, the novel reaches beyond the finitude of the written page. From its inception, the novel form has been a hybridization. A common thread binding the authors examined here is their shared admonishment of any pre-established notions of the Novel and their preference for narrating through short fragments rather than a "full-fledged bigot form." It was always understood as a process of accumulation and restructuring. In this study, relations are drawn primarily to prose works such as novels, short stories, and essays, with the focus fixed on these categories. Literary genres cannot be limited to the narrative/fictive dichotomy. The artificial intelligence built into digital systems can exponentially scatter the positioning of narrative/fictive logic (Hayles, *Postprint* 3).

The Novel emerged from different forms of prose narratives like "Romance" and "Epistolary" traditions. The concept of the collective was present from the beginning. The "Short Story" gained fame for its crisp and unfinished effect on the reader's mind. These forms expressed the reconciliation of space-time with the nuances of language. Borges loved the short story form and despised its lengthy predecessor. He was perhaps one of the first to write short stories on imaginary unending novels and to critique the aspect of completion (Borges, *Collected Fictions* 3-4). Apart from being

a mediated spatial form, the Novel has served as a mediator between the public and the private sphere from its moment of origin, similar to the essay form in its relation to far-reaching digital forms like blogs and wikis.

Mixing of genres, including reality and fiction, was integral to methodologies of writing. The plateau of literature has always been porous. Forms no longer entice us, nor did they deter these writers. What we now know as the Creative Commons was inherent from the beginning. Literature has always been a product of the so-called Creative Commons. How this culture of writing/reading came into effect can be traced through the histories of reading. Literature has always been “The Other” and does not yield easily to relentless theoretical probing. In our unwillingness to read literature *as* literature, we have often used it for the extraction of knowledge. Readers, as part of the social circle, function as recognizers of textual truth. Their responses reveal much about the construction of social identity. This politics of textual interpretation divulges narrative concerns on a superior intellectual plane of narrativity.

As noted earlier, the reader exploring their own self and other subjective concerns is not the primary root of this research, nor are the power structures and identity politics within words and word preferences. The reading culture has been probed by techniques examining the construction of textuality, subjectivity, and re-cognition. The imbalance in these activities has produced a new engagement the disruption in knowing. Psychoanalysis, Reader-Response, and Reception theories have approached the textual form through the subject of study. Sometimes the reader seeks to discover “The Other,” or reimagines themselves within historical position. Rereading came hand-in-hand with reading, and this has been the primary concern here (Barthes, *S/Z*).

What this culture of rereading portends for the future is not fully in our hands, but we can observe its progression within the current tempo of internet mania. From Robert Scholes’ introduction and William H. Gass’s definition of metafiction as an imposition on other forms of fiction, postmodern and postcolonial rewritings have turned toward metafictional representations of uncertainties. Although engaging, this cannot be the sole solution for the narrative tension of the new age. Genres like Electronic Literature and Cybertext involve a motley of theories and have shifted rewriting toward more entertaining rereading. These genres hint at nothing definitive or final; instead, they emphasize exploration. Here, the reality of the fictional world is superseded by the virtual space of the new medium and its connective links. This virtual reality offers escape from the rigid constraints of earlier narratives. In this study, only one way of reading is explored seeking asylum under the readings of posterity.

New Media Studies provides theories of Hypertext, Cybertext, Virtual Reality, and Ergodic Literature. These question the relation between earlier reading practices and those in new media, advancing beyond conventional theories of reading and the procrastination of meaning. While elements such as Ludology and Cyberspace address Immersion along lines of earlier narrative fiction, they have often disregarded rereading as a key factor. Constructive rereading looks beyond textual limitations into the assemblage of forms that constitutes our new reality with the changed medium. Like Borges’s “Hrönir,” the world of fiction appears out of nowhere, nested in reality through literature (*Collected Fictions* 68-81). Theorists like N. Katherine Hayles connect the two cultures, hoping for a future where human cognition is extended by computational media rather than restricted. What we witness is a “cybersymbiosis,” where biological, algorithmic, and connective contexts form “Cognitive Assemblages” (Hayles, *Postprint* 14, 8). Neither subjective nor objective takes precedence. Literature falls within assemblages without one form dominating, relocating the book/world dichotomy. The extension of media through the printed page expands cognitive capabilities to experience literature’s fantastic conjugation: “the difference is emphatically not between the materiality of print and the immateriality of digital forms . . . but rather between different kinds of material instantiations and diverse kinds of textual bodies” (Hayles 3).

This introduction establishes the theoretical foundation for examining constructive rereading across Borges, Calvino, and Barnes, and its implications for digital futures. Subsequent sections analyze each author before connecting their practices to the anarchy and extensions of the new medium, culminating in the productive potential of incompleteness.

## 2. Borges and the Art of Rereading

“Reading, meanwhile, is an activity subsequent to writing more resigned, more civil, more intellectual” (Borges, Preface to the First Edition, *Collected Fictions*).

What Borges refers to as the intellectual activity is, in reality, not mere reading but a form of rereading. In the same preface, he acknowledges that the production of the book came from rereading the works of others (*Collected Fictions* 3). For Borges, reading meant nothing but rereading, as he believed that actual reading and writing are impossible tasks temporally and spatially flawed. He admits in multiple instances that he is constantly rereading others’ works rather than constructing his own. In the “Preface to the 1954 edition” of “A Universal History of Infamy,” he describes the impossibility of writing, characterizing the Baroque as the “irresponsible sport of a shy sort of man who could not bring himself to write short stories, and so amused himself by changing and distorting . . . the stories of other men” (Borges 4).

The use of language places one under a fascist regime that dictates the world with fixed meanings. Borges sought to escape these oppressive ideas by upholding the free art of rereading. This rereading serves as an escape from the temporal and spatial imprisonment of language and the written page. The reader, for Borges, cannot escape the labyrinths of language. He plays with this idea by always admitting to fetching tales from another’s story. This retelling is itself a form of rereading a unique distortion of individual events to the rhythm of the present, yet never complete.

As Efraín Kristal notes in *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*, translation and reading stand as central activities in Borges’ creative process (Kristal xiv). Borges treats translation as the major process of creation, rereading the works of others freely to enhance possibility and scatter the seeds of creativity into the infinite space of rereading. Translations function as versions, each richer than the last. Many of his tales open with translations drawn from distant texts. He viewed translation as an incomplete act that questions creation in the same way rereading does. It grants freedom to use other works and misattribute them. This dilemma of ownership recurs throughout his oeuvre.

Without directly referring to the text or author, Borges’ appropriation cannot be reduced to mere intertextual or postmodern play. His vast reading and the influence of European works led him to concepts of circularity and the inner deficiencies of Western philosophy. He devised an escape from this incongruity: all works of literature are reread into being. They do not exist in the proper sense, and there is no such thing as a fixed work of art. The work must be constantly questioned, manipulated, and reread to carry it into the future. None of his stories can be called complete, as he believed the work of art unimaginable and inseparable from the real world by any medium. All mediums intersperse into spatial confusion.

Borges rereads tales from his childhood as much as the physical/geographical images of Argentina and other places. These may be considered Ur-texts of his intertextual creation, yet he meant something more profound. He believed the proper inter-text can never be found, and textual relativity cannot be established. The author cannot properly position the work of art; rather, the work positions and repositions the author. In a Deleuzoguattarian sense, Borges saw literary assemblages systematically associating and dissociating with otherworldly assemblages. Languages combine in infinite ways, as they translate into infinite languages, and rereading is a continuous process.

For Borges, there is no original work. All are imperfect creations or, as Kristal suggests, translations. No translation achieves perfection, and no single reading/rereading is complete. They are all versions of the same tale. A good translator “might choose to treat the original as a good writer treats a draft of a work in progress” (Kristal, *Invisible Work* 2). Rereadings relate to a work in progress. Translation calls for a pretext where the new work replenishes the old. Borges took the liberty to quote philosophers and writers directly, sometimes misattributing them. He considered the art of writing a practice that does not require a specific name for a writer. These translations offer another way of viewing the postmodern predicament of re-writing.

Instead of focusing solely on rewriting and translation, this analysis centers rereading as the main source of Borges' inspiration. This rereading is constructive: different paths lead to it, sometimes through anonymity of production, and at others through the invasion of a distant world forking into numerous assemblages with the written page. Even his non-fictional works are filled with such rereadings not as secondary ideas but as answers to the creative dogma. They question the validity of a text by displacing it from its spatio-temporal structure and creating flux.

When Borges looks at spatiality, it is not a creative faculty but a puerile sense of non-linear progression. Rereading has been examined mainly to relate Borges' reading to the nuances of the text he is writing. Evelyn Fishburn explores it as "Creative Misreading" linked to the Kabbalah ("Borges, Cabbala and 'Creative Misreading'" 401-418). Borges disliked creativity; a work of art can never be created, so the next best act is to reread earlier works already reread by others. He upholds a universal idea of literature, devoid of rigid tradition something that, in modern print culture, might be called plagiaristic. No creation is complete, and the list of contributors is infinite, like the library or the mirror both reproductive aberrations.

Just as the text produces language infinitely, mirrors replicate and libraries copulate to infinity in Borges' world. His childhood influences and vast reading shaped this vision. Rereading, even Borges' own, becomes a tool for questioning and continuation. The web and new media realize what he envisioned: a pool of knowledge where contributions float at random, and new ones are created or destroyed easily. Literary blogs function similarly, with progression gaining priority over plagiaristic concerns. Borges foresaw literature as discussion and analysis of prior works (real and imaginary).

In sum, Borges' art of rereading replicates the progression of a blog strip, displaying contributions of many hands. The reader decides what to keep. Stories admit the impossibility of writing and the constructive nature of every narrative. They come after referential tales, often falsely attributed a form of rereading Borges admired. In cyberspace, stories cannot originate from one source or complete themselves. They remain in construction, forming assemblages with other stories and physical spaces, transformed by the changing medium. Borges' history is a rationalized input process rearranging the past. Like blogs, they are diary entries with random thematic continuations. There is no hierarchy; all stories exist simultaneously in a virtual plane of multiplicities. History becomes a virtual body without organs, escaping territorialization. False sources and disappearing stories replicate web writings where lies cannot be separated from truth. These histories are imaginably unending.

### **3. Calvino's Tales from the Future: The Rereading Machine**

Italo Calvino talks about rereading as traveling within and without the boundaries of a text. He never denied his similarities with Borges, but like any anxious writer, he always wanted to differentiate himself from his precursors. Like Borges, he believed in the influence of rereading in constructing narratives and saw creation as an incomplete project (Cavallaro 6). When the thermometer of postmodernism was burning with the fever of rewriting older texts, Calvino challenged the medium of production itself. To him, writing is as challenging as reading, and hints of passion for rereading are evident throughout his work. Dani Cavallaro notes that the "[t]wo recurrent images in Calvino's writings that faithfully encapsulate his outlook are the kaleidoscope and the labyrinth" (Cavallaro 6). The uncanny predilection toward the infinite was a sought-out medium for this scientifically minded writer. The postulation of genres infected with too much realism disgusted him. He was an experimental writer who loved to play with the medium. He viewed writing as non-conformist to the views of life. He devised early in his career that plague-inflicted language can only simulate the concerns of a writer and perceptions are only half-gauged by the ruler of language. He saw history, historiography, and literature as constructive in nature, as a simulation of lightness. His *Arcadia* of lightness stands against the diatribe of modern concerns reflected in the literature of the period. Like Borges, he wanted to build a universe beyond the perversion of language, an incomplete cosmicomic of metaphors. One essential quality of his works is a form of constructivism that takes everything into account. The use of language is always constructive.

He explored language immaterially, and behind this was a fondness for a way of reading the universe that can be called a rereading. The totality of reimagined history stands mutilated; a series of cognitive acts that despise the idea of singular reading. The play of absence and presence guides his writing and shares with Borges the belief of different assemblages formed by the text machine. Instead of seeing writing as the main thrust in his narratives, rereading functions as the life force behind his imaginative constructions.

Most of his non-fictional works deal with the notion of language recreating our world through its imagined realm. In “Cybernetics and Ghosts,” from *The Literature Machine: Essays*, Calvino reveals the idea of the contemporary reader at the very beginning:

The combinatorial play of narrative possibilities soon passes beyond the level of content to touch upon the relationship of the narrator to the material related and to the reader: and this brings us to the toughest set of problems facing contemporary fiction. (Calvino 6-7)

He is baffled by the numerous methods, incomplete in themselves, to garb the narrative with meaning as writing has become more mechanical. Too much preoccupation with language has produced a backlog of narrative interpretations. The literary composition has been corrupted and he states that “[o]nce we have dismantled and reassembled the process of literary composition, the decisive moment of literary life will be that of reading” (Calvino, *Literature Machine* 15). The reader will play a vital role in destroying and relocating the work. The literature machine will explore all the permutations/combinations possible and devise a play of words. These moves cannot be traced as finite. Meaning comes from an order of words. Calvino wanted to break this finitude as he says that the “struggle of literature is . . . to escape from the confines of language . . .” (18). “[T]he whole mosaic in which man is set,” as he calls it in “Two Interviews on Science and Literature,” was his playground (34).

This rhizomatic explanation of the cast of language that mingles with the mind and the unfathomable reality of storytelling makes his stories come alive. Dante’s cosmology fascinates him as Dante wanted to “construct an image of the universe by means of the written word” (32). These maps of the world along with the inherent anthropomorphism highlight his will to connect the spheres of science, philosophy, and literature through life and art. Signs are not interpreted in his stories but are carefully designed to portray a total system that becomes infinite in itself. For him, the labyrinth is the microcosm of society and every reader needs to challenge this labyrinth. He rejected authorial intention altogether and valued the reader in his work as he saw the reader playing a crucial role in this literature in the making. He sees science and philosophy as no less a combinatorial play than literature itself.

In “Literature as Projection of Desire,” he talks about criticism as part of the exploration of meaning and says that, “[e]very true book of criticism may be read like one of the texts it deals with, as a web of poetic metaphors” (59). The apocryphal idea of the library by Borges is reflected in another dimension in Calvino’s statement that “[l]iterature is not composed simply of books but of libraries,” in a play of canonical and the apocryphal creations of mankind (60). This unfathomable system, in trying to codify the whole universe, makes it more complex as it grows infinitely and egregiously. The view of literature cannot be a singularity; it is the desire of mankind for an extension, a hand outstretched toward the world. It is always a search for the finishing line through running the gauntlet of one’s rereading. He makes this his punchline as he says, “[l]iterature is a search for the book hidden in the distance that . . . [pulls] toward the new apocryphal text still to be rediscovered or invented” (61). The mission of the writer is not to write but to initiate, as the words and the rereading of the work will do the rest. Behind his science and poststructuralist thoughts lay a treasure trove of data that tries to reposition the concept of literature to its proper place.

In rereading Northrop Frye, Calvino looks back to the concept of desire as it plays a key role in constructing the sociological sphere of man as well as the literary world as the relations among the human, the non-human, and the material world have changed (50-61). In “Whom Do We Write For? Or The Hypothetical Bookshelf,” he testifies that he will not write for the lay reader after symbolic meaning (*Literature Machine* 81-88). He writes for the reader “who has finally understood that he no longer has to read novels” (84). Literature should look beyond its limitations. A

particular reading can dismantle a text, but rereadings can share the same page with the texts. In “Levels of Reality in Literature,” the pangs of writing proper come out as we try to write (101-121). The world of art cannot be considered on its own but “in its relation to the outside world,” as a performance beyond the binaries of language (103). To write signifies an empty space, an incomplete gesture that pretends to tell more than there is. He says that the self “is a phantom ‘I,’ an empty space, an absence” (113). From this fragmentation he arrives at the dissolution of the so-called work.

In “Why Read the Classics?,” he prosecutes the ideal of reading and states his idea of rereading (*Literature Machine* 125-34). He makes it very clear that one cannot read all books in a lifetime (125). Books cannot limit the way we read and he chooses classics specifically as he sees them as infinitely rereadable. He does not see any difference between reading and rereading. Classics renew themselves at every rereading.

Calvino’s fiction, such as *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, *Invisible Cities*, and *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, dramatizes these ideas. Readers confront interrupted narratives, blank sheets, and card-based story machines that generate infinite permutations. Rereading becomes the ideal position elusive, constructive, and balanced where signs evade fixation and stories pile upon stories. The ideal reading is as elusive as finding the right position, and Calvino’s humor underscores that “the ideal position for reading is something you can never find” (Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night* 3). Expectations are challenged; targeted reading is biased.

In *Invisible Cities*, memory plays a vital role, yet Calvino obliterates it: “[m]emory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist” (Calvino). Cities, like books, are never constant. In *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, tarot cards serve as a machine for constructing stories, with the same cards read and reread with different meanings. The omission of words and distortion of temporal structures highlight the failure of signs and the triumph of rereading.

Calvino saw himself as a writer without contexts, borders, or boundaries. His retellings are inconspicuous arrays within the oral world of rereading. He answers the position of reading with narrative-building that acknowledges failure: the more we try to establish a relation, the more we fail. We only dwell on the periphery of narrative possibilities. His masterpiece attests to that. The comparison between a traveler and a reader becomes prominent. The pleasure cannot be derived by reading, but by the recognition of rereading. The fragments that Calvino chooses are penumbras of miscellaneous literary genres, reread infinitely through infinite narrations.

#### **4. Barnes, the Postmodern Rereader**

Julian Barnes, addressed by Mira Stout as “The chameleon of British letters,” is still considered a backbone of British postmodern literature (Stout). His rewritings of history have been case studies for various theories and exist between fiction and reality. For him, history is always a playful concept. Either through misplaced documents or eccentric ideology, history is rampant with gaps. Barnes tries to explore these forbidden territories with a grandeur matched by only a few. He views literature, much like Borges and Calvino, as an ongoing project composed of small endeavors. He sees fiction and reality as part of linguistic exploration with different patterns intervening; without the social cause and free from any bindings. Instead of exploring binarisms, he goes straight into the heart of the matter. The problem of narration has been a predominant one for these writers. Barnes, in comparison with the earlier authors, also highlights the difference in approach to literature as he is seen as an essential part of the Postmodern project of narrative construction. I chose his works specifically to show that even in stringent Postmodernist writings the nuances of rereading could be found. With an optimal enquiry into writing and history, Barnes upholds the typical postmodern trend but the nuances of earlier concerns are still visible in his works.

Writing as an art does not need an aim but should be seen as an exploration of new unwritten pages. Constant vacillations show how this task of writing is impossible. He feels that a chronological survey of history is impossible. Exploring the crevices of stories, he vandalizes the stability of a text, whether a historical document or a biography. The novel form before him tended to declare that it must have a purpose. Barnes views it as a space for exploration, rereading, and continuation. He has been called a novelist of ideas, and a moralist, but what he does is more than that.

Historical assumptions are arbitrary as they pronounce a certain truth. Barnes snatches this truth value from the snares of history. He sees history, personal or impersonal, as a documented entity that can be regulated in other ways. A novel is an enclosing form, a barrier. In the garb of novels, his stories are fragments of tales that depict infinite rereadings. For him, the loquacity of language overpowers the writer. Instead of saying one thing, the writer ends up saying a thousand others. It is always a constructive endeavor as the book relates to the world. Even the novel, for that matter, is always at the incomplete end as most of his works remain temporally unstable. One's concern with truth leads to more truths. This duplicity of form is what Barnes aimed at. Writing is always a form of duplicity, and his works are well-made efforts at deception. A complete novel can never exist as we go on constructing narratives through the art of rereading.

Unlike Borges who felt that writing is impossible, Barnes feels that writing, in its proliferated form, is futile. For both, writing has no sacred destination. In *Conversations with Julian Barnes*, in an interview with the *Observer*, Barnes says that "[he] wanted to be a good reader" (Barnes 29). His vocation as a writer is only a social one, a secondary phase. He doesn't see any difference between the greatest historians and narrative artists as they all place well-measured lies within the blank pages. Barnes' interest is in fabulation, a form of metafiction where imagination infiltrates the pores of historical narrative and subverts its purpose. New tales can be added only because history forgets itself and its place as a narrative. In a session with Susha Guppy, he admits the essential difference between journalism and literature as the latter reflects "the fullest complications of the world" and talks about a second reading that unearths another layer of truth (65). These readings are reflections on rereading. He would love to see something more than "a reader, an interpreter, a consumer of art" (65). Barnes confesses that art comes out of life as the book becomes a description of the world (80). For him, novel writing was more like versions as we play with the creative side. This is how we should relocate old lines into our contemporary art.

Another point of admiration is his love for the essay form. He is not a believer in the commercial novel and most of his journalistic etchings seem to incorporate the essay form. Rereading, for him, is also a voyage of rediscovery; it is the way against death. Here, death could also mean the death of creation, a stalled stage.

In the "Preface" to *Through the Window: Seventeen Essays (and One Short Story)*, Barnes talks about how fiction expands on life and the position of the reader, as he says, that they are "[a]lone and yet in company: that is the paradoxical position of the reader" (ix). He looks at fiction as it expands life (x). For him, the branches of science and fiction deal with life and we can explore both of them through assemblages (ix). The theme of this work is the clarity of perception between the reader and the writer and the clarity of language. There always remains a hindrance. In talking about the works of Penelope Fitzgerald, he mentions that "[n]ovels are like cities" and some can "throw you into the city itself, and life itself . . ." (13). This thrownness is the true essence of literature. He admires Ford's novels, as they play "with the reader as it reveals and conceals truth" (47). He shows us how the old concept of the reader was changed by Ford, as he "plays . . . on the reader's desire to trust the narrator" (47). He talks about the extermination of language and individualisms (62). Ford's novels are also filled with nuances of rereading.

In "The Profile of Félix Fénéon," Barnes talks about influence (123-34). He reads his influence derived from modernist works but inside these assumptions always lies another reading. His fragmentary "journalistic format," according to Barnes, only often creates a proper thread of narrative as these could also be seen as momentary assemblages only (130). His reading of Fénéon, as he admits, is only one reading (134). The truth eludes the reader as there are several truths. Influences can be discovered, new influences can be read or reread to construct art. While discussing his influences, he relates to his growth as a reader. A reader must always have new material to read and losing this reality unbalances his mind as we saw with Calvino's reader. The distinction between reading and rereading is evident.

In "Translating *Madame Bovary*," he talks about the pangs of a faithful translation (146-63). All translations fall short of the original like all reading fail to reach the truth. As we reread these translations, we reread the novels too. The several different versions of *Madame Bovary*, as Barnes discusses, are only presumptions and accumulations, not definite conclusions (161). In "Wharton's *The Reef*," he shows us how we play with texts, how we approach them,

and read them (164-74). He also shows us how to read novels by identifying metaphors and specific words that lead to greater understanding. Our present predicament is either devoid of metaphors or proliferation of them. The readers look for nuances to trap the text within a temporal binding. There can be no perfect reading as there is no perfect understanding. The reader is always in search of the plausible whereas rereading problematizes the stability of reading. The truths of fiction seem easy in reading, but the particulars of rereading get one confused. The professor of arts in the short tale, "Homage to Hemingway: a Short Story," is confused and baffled in the end (175-192). Literary judgment is redundant as "there is no final truth in literary judgement" (186). The reader and the writer are both joint partners in the deception which is also evident in his reference to Updike (199). In the second part of the essay, he says that "[w]hen a writer you admire dies, rereading seems a normal courtesy and tribute" (209). Through rereading, we keep up the process of construction alive and admire the life world of literature.

For Barnes, deception means a Flaubertian world of irreducible truths. His admiration for the writer is conceived by the elusive character of the writer and the characters he created. He cannot be pinned down by the reader. He was the rewriter who loved to rearrange, sometimes his own work. Flaubert's book on the adventures of Bouvard and Pécuchet is a perfect example of incompleteness. Through Barnes' writing, it is clear which qualities he admired in Flaubert. Just like encompassing the world, encompassing the whole of literature requires rereading.

In *England, England* and *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes dramatizes these concerns. History becomes a puzzle of arranged facts and replicas. The new medium offers random arrangements, infinitely rearranging the puzzle. Barnes' *England* is one version among multiplicities. Replicas are often preferred to originals. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, the greased piglet that the past symbolizes leads the author through simulated images and incomplete research. The whole work becomes an assortment of documents and notes. Modern literary techniques in the web world assort miscellaneous facts at random order. Barnes' writing technique can be compared to a blogroll with notes and passages co-existing. The parrot symbolizes the age of simulated reality where the original forms numerous assemblages with the replicas.

Barnes shows that history cannot be explained and should be left alone to explore different versions. The journey from history to fictional biography that accommodates random facts is his way of viewing the changing nature of writing and reading.

## 5. The Anarchy of the New Medium

From its inception, the culture of reading and writing has been a culture of the "center." Only a few could master the techniques as it was considered the culture of the elite. The new medium has opened it up to the masses as the written culture never could. "New Textuality" has tried to break this prejudice but Blogs and the new computer technologies have come forward in a new way. Many of these ideas can be related to Borges' universe, for example, one being an unending progression just like the advancement of a Blog roll. Many articles have salvaged the essence of a new universe from Borges' works. In *The Lost Art of Reading: Why Books Matter in a Distracted Time*, David L. Ulin infers that the vast universe of the library in Borges' story is the reality we are also looking at with the new world of the web and electronic media (Ulin 147). Borges' unimaginable textuality compliments the world of the web. Many feel his legacy and his presence in the creation of this new world. What many refer to as a creative form of reading/rereading in Borges insinuates a serendipitous rereading. It seems quite logical that he has been called the most important writer of the last century. His connections with our culture and the age of computers and his dissociation with the earlier culture of stagnant theorization seem to direct toward our times. As for the progression of Blogs, Borges' analysis of works can be taken as a Blogpost, a discussion forum where continuation gains priority over plagiaristic issues. His works are mostly discussions and analyses of prior literature (real and non-existent). He foresaw literature as a pool of knowledge where earlier contributions can float at random, and new ones can be created as easily as they can be destroyed. A literary blog works similarly. Blogposts highlight the newest discussion at the front as the older ones recede into the background. The idea of the progression of literature is similar. Another

similarity is the folding of the virtual within the flat pages as everything exists simultaneously in a garden of forking paths. In his works, the socio-political and the fictional, like the real and the virtual, cannot be separated.

In the “Preface” to “A Universal History of Inequity” from *Collected Fictions*, what Borges calls “exercises in narrative prose,” seems to have an uncanny predilection towards the practice of blogging (Borges 3). It can also create a sense of community like Borges imagined readers to be. A Blog tends to be informal and indirect, and Borges confesses to taking the works of others forward. He does not profess to be a writer but a faithful rereader, constantly exercising his rights in the progressive act of narrative prose. The best thing about these short sketches is that they conjugate fictional and real lives with history and storytelling as we find in the construction of social media. In the preface to the second edition, he makes his intention clear. He aims to critique and add, but not to create anything new. It is the “irresponsible sport of a shy sort of man” before a computer screen, exploring multiple possibilities of this new medium (4). It is primarily an activity to amuse oneself. The emptiness he refers to is the emptiness of images as they map the surface of writing (5).

According to Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, one medium gives way to another as one age progresses toward a new one, and what McLuhan called “the extensions of man” are the technologies that extend our reach, bringing together aspects of the media (McLuhan 8). The following discussion looks at how the idea of rereading has informed the new medium through its rhizomatic inking and placed itself in the world of the web and electronic media through numerous assemblages. The advent of the New Media and the Internet has changed the way we address literature. Beginning from the oral culture, literature has always been influenced by the flexibility of concepts and has always been a communal endeavor. The change in medium has always been another reason for its flexibility. The eloquence of the poet sort of acted as a touchstone for the refashioning of materials. These poets were, in a way, rereaders as they saw literature as a constantly developing pursuit. My first argument rests upon this communal origin of literature which is best expressed on the World Wide Web. It happens through its common goal for a form of world literature that is kept alive by a community of readers. For an Oral community, readers were the storytellers. Telling as an activity can never be sufficient as the Oral culture retold a story in a thousand different ways. The new medium of the web has been described as a co-mixture of both oral and written cultures. The interconnected community of the Internet has provided for a new boom in literary construction and a new way of storytelling. Blogs, wikis, and private online publications have given literature new plateaus to explore.

Even before the advent of the net, theorists have been challenging the concept of literature from a classical ontological perspective. New theories on narratology became what is now known as “postclassical narratology” which was first coined by David Herman as an umbrella term for theories of narratology beyond the classical ideas. Theories of Transmediality, Transmedia storytelling, and Intermediality have been contesting terms for many years as it shows how our culture transforms and recreates an object across different mediums. The concept of “intermental thought” or “intersubjectivity” by Alan Palmer has also influenced our approaches. The essential quality of this new branch is the assessment of cognitive as well as constructivist principles. What Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture is another coinage that fights for supremacy in the new era (Jenkins 4). Thus, only one medium cannot produce a work of art; it is always a confluence of different media acts through different mediums. This is how our culture has advanced from literacy, through film and television media, to a form of narrative that demands the understanding of different mediums coming together. The web is a reconstruction of not just one but many such mediums. It is what we can call a mixed medium without giving primacy to one particular perspective. So, this makes the analysis of narrative endeavors even more difficult, including the theorization of narrative logic. My primary concern is to show how older narrative theories can be connected to the web and virtual forms. The difference between fiction and simulation has reached a new level. Literature is no longer limited to a handful of critics to fight over. In the world of the web, stories are endless. The concept of virtualizing the written page can be practically achieved in this new age. In this relation, we must take into account the recent trend of interdisciplinarity. History stands witness to this change in medium as well as the development of an interdisciplinary approach to everything including literature. No branch of knowledge stands

purely on a single platform from where it can dictate its judgment. Humanities have also branched out into different sects as our view of things becomes more complicated. Whereas the rational pursuit of the narrative was the primary goal for developing concepts of literature, the web rationalizes the irrational.

Fiction has superseded the grasp of individual story spaces and embraces a plural mode of production. Constructive rereading, the way I see it, still is the marker for the hybrid culture of the web and the electronic media. Rereaders work as interpolators, actors, and distributors as anonymous hands influence the work freely. Anyone with access to a computer can create a jargon of poetic beauty as the enterprise need not be vast and production tiresome.

## **6.2 / 7.2. The Polyphony of the Web**

The new electronic media and the web does not distinguish between a regular author and a non-frequent. We live in an age of simulation in which reality can easily be part of the web. From the virtual turning of the page in an Amazon Kindle to a virtual library, everything simulates the age of books. Reading, in this age, becomes a habitual and unnerving act as the universal library becomes an overload of informative chambers saying too much about everything. Literary theories have taken into account the silent and overflowing spaces of the web as the new electronic media and the new medium have incorporated literary techniques within its vastness.

It is obvious from the demarcation of terms such as Hypertexts, Cybertexts, and Ergodic literature that one single form cannot be enough. In this research, many connections have been found between rereading, which is a literary concept, and reading in the tangled world of the Web along with modern computer media. Borges, Calvino, and Barnes viewed the world of the text as an inexhaustible entity which I have shown in the earlier chapters and can be explored through what I call Constructive Rereadings. Borges realized early on that the word must bear something more than a simple form with which it is endowed, and meaning is not something obligatory for narration. Calvino, on the other hand, reviews the scientific progression of our times and mixes up literary, scientific, and narrative techniques with the exploration of a new medium. They were limited by their time but felt the need for a new medium for literature. Many netizens tend to see Borges nowadays as the father of the World Wide Web, but this concept seems farfetched as the internet was years to come. To explain this, we must take into account the limitations of the text that he saw and the possibility of a new medium that remains throughout his writing. The possibilities of the text and this new medium, as seen by these authors, are endless. Borges saw an intricate relationship between all forms of creation and envisioned them as created by the written word, seemingly unending. He felt disturbed and confused about how to incorporate so many worlds within the pages of the written text. Many pieces of research show his Kabbalistic origin and thought that show the world engendered through the word much like the hypertext simulations of Storyspace. Many of Borges' stories have been deciphered as an early version of the envisioned world of the web, electronic media, and the present sense of the world where multiple realities can exist simultaneously. Intertextuality, although a characteristic of this new medium, cannot account for the vastness of written material available on the internet and how they connect to each other. There can be an endless series of readings incorporated into his works.

The new medium does not propose a theory but a motley of factual information that runs down to the history of textuality. Reading has been seen as a performance and with the advent of the new media, this performativity has also changed. This sense of performance can be better described with the term rereading than reading. The incompleteness of writing culture can be apparent from the techniques undertaken by authors to question the capacity of literature. Literature, as a cultural form, has evolved through the ages to take different forms at different intervals. Literature cannot exist without a medium for its delineation, whether it is written or oral. The new medium and its umpteen tools cannot be considered retrograde to the development of literature and its evolution in our age. Our age is the media age where literary techniques need to be rethought to propagate a sense of relevance. Rereading, as I have asserted before, is only a temporary process, a necessity for the propagation of what we know as the long-standing reading culture. Rereading has always been considered a mature act, something that reconciles the abrasive act of reading. For our times, rereading becomes as natural as breathing. Blogging, Wikipedia, electronic literature, and games may be different fields for exploration, but there still remains the basic literary concern for literary production the question of

reading. The World Wide Web has been viewed as the perfect example of intertextual/hypertextual reading, but we must look for a tissue of quotations that go beyond the written page and connect with life.

Textuality can only be achieved if there is a text to begin with. Textuality is a difficult thing to explore, especially within the new medium. The process always has to be social for the text to come forward. The web provisions this unclaimed space where secret readers/rereaders come up with new lines to engage the old tale. The telling of the tale is never-ending, so is the movement of the user/rereader. That is the reason the new culture has been called the new orality. The freedom of the web allows us to become more attached to the process of telling and not the tale itself. Rereaders serve as mirrors to produce umpteen reflections of the tale, as the original loses its grip over the narrative process. Continuity seems to be the order of the day as positioning the text is not possible within this spatio-temporal flux we perceive as existing in-between the virtual and the real.

The Postmodern play with chance creations comes forward, and we are now allowed to rethink the concept of chance itself. Chance creation happens to take place at every turn. Textuality can be explored from different angles. Some do it through questioning the impossibility of writing; some through the vulnerability of the reading process; and others through questioning the historicity associated with writing. All have one thing in common they question the process and order of constructing narratives. The web and the new media question the very being of narrative and what it stands for in our mediated world. Narratives cannot be built but realized through the process of constructing formations. By construction, earlier methods of construction were nothing but a construction. The gallantry and novelty of narrative construction give way to a conglomeration of miscellaneous data and facts. Corrupted data and false facts are as much a part of the writing culture as it is of the virtual world of the Web. Our civilization has stepped up a rung in the ladder and narrative construction should be reviewed from new dimensions. Commentary, false treatment of the original, misappropriation, plagiarism, and anachronism are all part of this narrative plateau. The dimension of physical objects and the objective reality cannot be seen as separate either. The hardware and the software part of the computer diagram forms the assemblage called the virtual and cannot be separated. The fantastic in literature is nothing but the virtual reconstruction of this world. What has been done is only to connect the two cultures, thought to be very different. Even the concept of identity formation through writing is quintessentially questioned as it is also constructive. The web propagates this same concern.

Constructive rereading simply delays the textuality of the narrative. The recent media culture gives vent to the recreation, reconstruction, and readjustment of the past as the main composition rests on the fanciful movements of the rereader. To view literature as a collective work is to support the claims of the new medium where one form cannot be the dominant. Opposing McHale's ideals, the web culture does not expose one dominant form through different ways of expression but disperses the idea of the dominant through different forms. Thus, Writing is never an act of finalization or creation.

### **The Ending in Incompletion: Relating the Future of Rereading**

Rereading still remains as the dark side of reading. Even in the digital environment heralding the twenty-first century, we still have not connected well with this idea. Adriana de Souza e Silva, in Hayles' book *Nanoculture: Implications of the New Technoscience*, talks about the "Hybrid spaces [that] fold the virtual as potential into the nearby physical space, blurring the borderlands where the virtual transforms into the actual" (38). These hybrid spaces can seriously distort our perception and can also be imagined as flows that can form momentary assemblages. Imagining literature in terms of nano technology can transmute the boundaries between real and virtual, and could be a way of relocating the binary between humans and machines. This co-evolution is, perhaps, the ultimate goal for our needs. In this study, the aim was to see how this same virtuality could be imagined within the limits of the printed page through the process of a constructive rereading where different material realities come together. This form of rereading is not just a process; it was for these authors the replica of a textual/virtual method to overcome the linear suppression of the text and the linearity of physical existence. This constructive rereading replicates for these authors some of the characteristics of the virtual environment. Every form of reading in the virtual world is a form of rereading that constructs momentary

assemblages through endless ways of narrativization; it is a nano space for cognitive actions, virtual reactions, and endless storytelling.

The difference between Baudrillard's hyperreal and the virtual has been well defined by C. J. Keep, as referred to by Mark Poster's essay in Marie-Laure Ryan's book *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, as the former is "constituted by the play of surfaces, by a paralytic fascination with exteriority . . . [the latter] with depth, images which one can enter, explore, and, perhaps most importantly, with which one can interact" (qtd. in Ryan 47). To many theorists, virtuality is more immersive than the Hyperreal, more constructive and independent. The participation of the reader is mostly seen as a simulation of the virtual, and this participation is different from the normal reading of a fixed text.

Baudrillard and Derrida called for a new form of exploring virtual reality where older forms, although present, cannot account for the change of ideas completely. We must also understand the fact that the whole of internet media acts as a rhizomatic structure of partial communicative acts that are never realisable without each other. In this imbalance of structural propriety and meaningless bombarding of connections, we can assert many ways of theorizing. Virtual reality is not a sudden theorizing of something new, but a topographical description of spatiality to map the complexity of production, although not completely possible. A motley of effects, such as internet communities, websites, blogs, wikis, online reading clubs, cataloguing digital libraries, games, and virtual reality come together to form the virtuality of the web and the electronic medium. The mutilation or mutation of text to the virtual space has been a topic of discussion for Cyberspace theorists. Cyberspace has not only multiplied the concept of narrativity but also the concept of space. Earlier, myths, rituals, supernatural, and fantastic expressions were used to manipulate our desire to live in a fictional world. These methodologies, popularly known as "Genres of Fiction," were a way of connecting the world of the book to the world outside, an extension of the real through the fantastic. Instead of a subjective textuality, we can now visualize the assemblage of narrative construction as different machinic flows connect through language to the world outside. Now the virtual world gives us endless tools for mystification. Thus, Cyberspace has also changed the way we view fiction.

The reason behind categorizing these theories is to share the final predicament of this study. If we assume the writing of Realism, Supernaturalism, and others to be categorizations of fictional systems that connected to literature at those intervals in time, we can also relate to rereadings as a technique for textual emancipation as they form systems at a juncture where neither modern nor the postmodern can take precedence. The world of fantasy and reality, if imagined as systems, can connect with the literary plateau through forms of a Constructive Rereading. The authors who used it belong to that time frame. Calvino, in *The Path to the Nest of Spiders*, sees books having an intricate relationship to real life. According to his philosophy, reading and the experience of life are interlinked and books cannot be visualized as something separate from the reality we experience every day. He wanted to create a form of literature that was not merely limited to the literary universe, as the lives of the earlier authors and their works were also entangled with the desire for a productive system of the book. He saw writing as a failure and not the only possible means of production. His anonymous scribbles are not just the penumbra of one single author but all who came before and will come after. The oldest predilection for authors and readers alike was the infinite relation between life and art. These authors have done justice to the idea, and even established a novel relationship between the two from a viewpoint least explored. The individual positions the past in relation to the present readers, as the worlds of the book and the worlds of the universe interact in a greater number of ways than Postmodern theories could come up with. Everything remains in a form of Constructive Rereading. It can form a thousand assemblages through different forms of textualities, including cybertextuality. The question of the position of the medium in exploring textuality is also looked at, manipulating the concept of the medium as an active process along the way. All are incorporated within the multiplicities of literary constructions. Rereading can easily virtualize the concept of the written page without the intervention of the new medium.

Finishing this study, it is important to remind readers that Borges was not only a writer but an inspiration. His way of dealing with art has inspired a lot of writers over the ages and becomes a critic's favourite. His writing seems to represent every form of anomaly that postmodernism deals with, but there is a need to go beyond the limitations of Postmodern literature. Borges can still inspire us and will continue to do so as he not only weaved stories but "Possible Futures," and that is the highest possible definition of literature that we can have. Calvino and Barnes were chosen not because they were both inspired by Borges but for their close connection to the idea of excavating reading and the problem regarding the medium of writing. Their exploration cannot be simply dubbed postmodernist or post-humanist. Funnelling the concerns of narrative construction into the new medium, these authors have topped the list of postmodernists. No matter how far we advance, reading will always remain a complicated idea, perhaps necessarily, for therein lies its myriad explorations. In this age, literature might not be as moving as the epics, but day-to-day conversations as meager as a WhatsApp message string or a Tweet can show how our culture thrives with narratives and periodically reconstructs them. What has been presented is only one facet of that narrative construction. This does not necessarily change the imagination of older forms as in the worlds of the Web multiple forms co-exist and combine. Jonathan Basile, for instance, has a curious example of a Cybertext he calls "Library of Babel." Examples like "Mapping Borges" by Nora Benedict and a game named after Borges' library show a futuristic textual entourage. These are only a few examples to make us realize that the age of literary techniques is not completely over but a new era has announced itself where we can look at new forms of cohabitation rather than dynamic elitism. One thing is certain, that representation has always needed tools for manipulating the world outside, and at different times, different tools have enticed mankind, but none of them can be taken as the ultimate tool for construction. The viability of tools also depends on the mode of construction. In this study, only one aspect of construction has been looked at through questioning the medium and the culture of reading. Calinescu asserts a kind of poetics. This assertion of a poetics is a way of seeing it as a signified for the reading culture. We can go beyond Calinescu's categorizing of rereading and see its momentary flows, as it plugs into different assemblages and becomes a constructive entity always desiring production. Literary construction as well as the nature of reality are nothing but a smooth surfaces with hidden multiplicities as we establish a new relation between the world and the book. Whereas Postmodernism was limited by the theories of Form/Content, Description/Narration, and the fallibility of Language Games, the notion of an assemblage that can connect many ideas in a relational ontology that constantly seeks production is something that can be looked into in this age. Roland Barthes' system waged war against the totalization of Language, and through small progressive acts, we have moved further than that. Instead of the plurality of texts, we must look into the plurality of worlds forming and dismantling within the text and the multiplicity of the text forming assemblages. Truth and interpretation cannot be the final effect that the literary system produces. We must look at new ways of how literature is produced or always is in production, not simply through linguistic signs but how it interacts with the world. The system of literature can think of an outside beyond the construction of meaning and force into existence a new relation. Language as a tool cannot connect until the tool becomes a desiring machine and Constructive Rereading acts as that philosopher's stone that weaponizes the tool into a relational system of bytes, pixels, codes, spaces, and alphabetical jingles along with the objective nature of reality.

## **7. Conclusion**

Finishing this exploration of constructive rereading, it is worth recalling that Borges was not only a writer but an inspiration. His way of dealing with art has inspired generations of writers and remains a critic's favourite. His writing seems to represent every form of anomaly that postmodernism deals with, yet there remains a need to move beyond the limitations of Postmodern literature. Borges continues to inspire us as he not only wove stories but "Possible Futures," and that is perhaps the highest possible definition of literature that we can have. Calvino and Barnes were chosen not merely because they were inspired by Borges, but for their profound connection to the excavation of reading and the persistent problem of the medium of writing. Their explorations cannot be simply labelled postmodernist or post-humanist. By funnelling the concerns of narrative construction into the new medium, these authors stand among the most vital postmodernists.

No matter how far we advance technologically, reading will always remain a complicated idea perhaps necessarily so, for therein lies its myriad explorations and inexhaustible potential. In this age, literature may not move us with the grandeur of the ancient epics, but even day-to-day conversations as seemingly meager as a WhatsApp message string or a Tweet reveal how our culture thrives on narratives and periodically reconstructs them. What has been presented here is only one facet of that vast narrative construction. This does not negate or replace older forms; in the worlds of the Web, multiple forms coexist and combine in ever-new assemblages. Projects such as Jonathan Basile's cybertext "Library of Babel," Nora Benedict's "Mapping Borges," and games inspired by Borges' infinite library demonstrate a futuristic textual entourage. These examples remind us that the age of literary techniques is far from over; rather, a new era has announced itself in which we can look toward new forms of cohabitation rather than dynamic elitism.

One thing is certain: representation has always needed tools for manipulating the world outside. At different historical moments, different tools have enticed humanity, but none can claim to be the ultimate instrument of construction. The viability of any tool depends on the mode of construction itself. In this study, only one aspect of construction has been examined through questioning the medium and the culture of reading. As Calinescu asserts a kind of poetics, this assertion of a poetics offers a way of seeing rereading as a signified for the reading culture. We can go beyond such categorizations to perceive its momentary flows: rereading plugs into different assemblages and becomes a constructive entity always desiring production. Literary construction, as well as the nature of reality, consists of smooth surfaces with hidden multiplicities as we establish a new relation between the world and the book.

Whereas Postmodernism was limited by the theories of Form/Content, Description/Narration, and the fallibility of Language Games, the notion of an assemblage that can connect many ideas in a relational ontology one that constantly seeks production is something that demands attention in this age. Roland Barthes' system waged war against the totalization of Language, and through small progressive acts, we have moved further. Instead of the plurality of texts alone, we must attend to the plurality of worlds forming and dismantling within the text and the multiplicity of the text forming assemblages. Truth and interpretation cannot be the final effect that the literary system produces. We must look at new ways in which literature is produced or is always in production not simply through linguistic signs but through its interactions with the world. The system of literature can think of an outside beyond the construction of meaning and force into existence a new relation. Language as a tool cannot fully connect until the tool itself becomes a desiring machine, and Constructive Rereading acts as that philosopher's stone that weaponizes the tool into a relational system of bytes, pixels, codes, spaces, and alphabetical jingles alongside the objective nature of reality.

In the end, constructive rereading offers no final closure only productive incompleteness. It is the bridge between the printed page and the virtual, between individual authorship and collective assemblage, and between the past of literature and its possible futures. This culture of rereading, far from being exhausted, continues to open new plateaus for exploration, ensuring that literature remains a living, evolving force in our hybrid world.

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