

An Inventory for *The Library of Babel*

The Library is unlimited and cyclical.

The Library includes all verbal structures, all variations permitted by the twenty-five orthographical symbols, but not a single example of absolute nonsense.

The library

Space

Galleries

Closets

Light and Mirrors

Shelves

Books

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(Users of the library)

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The narrator's view

Lexical Origin of 'Babel'

Space

The Library is composed of an indefinite and infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons you can see the interminable upper and lower floors.

Galleries

The distribution of the galleries is invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling. One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest.

Closets

To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets for users to sleep standing up, as well as to satisfy one's fecal necessities.

Light and Mirrors

In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps. There are two, transversally placed, in each hexagon. The light they emit is insufficient, incessant.

Shelves

There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format;

Books

Each book in this library is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say.

The Library contained all books. All men felt themselves to be the masters of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal or world problem whose eloquent solution did not exist in some hexagon. The universe was justified, the universe suddenly usurped the unlimited dimensions of hope.

The Vindications:

NOTE: *This assumption is based on The fundamental rule of this library*

Books of apology and prophecy which vindicated for all time the acts of every man in the universe and retained prodigious arcana for his future. Thousands of the greedy abandoned their sweet native hexagons and rushed up the stairways, urged on by the vain intention of finding their Vindication. These pilgrims disputed in the narrow corridors, proffered dark curses, strangled each other on the divine stairways, flung the deceptive books into the air shafts, met their death cast down in a similar fashion by the inhabitants of remote regions. Others went mad...The Vindications exist but the searchers did not remember that the possibility of a man's finding his Vindication, or some treacherous variation thereof, can be computed as zero.

Book of *All The Rest*:

On some shelf in some hexagon there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest: some librarian has gone though it and he is analogous to a god. In the language of this zone vestiges of this remote functionary's cult still persist. Many wandered in search of Him. For a century they exhausted in vain the most varied areas. How could one locate the venerated and secret hexagon which housed Him? Someone proposed a regressive method: To locate book A, consult first a book B which indicates A's position; to locate book B, consult first a book C, and so on to infinity...

The Librarians

Before, there was a man for every three hexagons. Suicide and pulmonary diseases have destroyed that proportion.

A memory of unspeakable melancholy: at times I have traveled for many nights through corridors and along polished stairways without finding a single librarian.

The Inquistors

There are official searchers, inquisitors. They always arrive extremely tired from their journeys; they speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them; they talk with the librarian of galleries and stairs; sometimes they pick up the nearest volume and leaf through it, looking for infamous words. Obviously, no one expects to discover anything.

The Fundamental Law of *The Library of Babel*

All the books, no matter how diverse they might be, are made up of the same elements: the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. The Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite).

NOTE: This law is discovered following *Axiom #2*.

“Five hundred years ago, the chief of an upper hexagon came upon a book as confusing as the others, but which had nearly two pages of homogeneous lines. He showed his find to a wandering decoder who told him the lines were written in Portuguese; others said they were Yiddish. Within a century, the language was established: a Samoyedic Lithuanian dialect of Guarani, with classical Arabian inflections. The content was also deciphered: some notions of combinative analysis, illustrated with examples of variation with unlimited repetition. ”

In other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books.

Hexagonal space

The idealists argue that the hexagonal rooms are a necessary form of absolute space or, at least, of our intuition of space. They reason that a triangular or pentagonal room is inconceivable. Let it suffice now for me to repeat the classic dictum:

The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible.

Axioms

#1 The Library exists ab aeterno. This truth, whose immediate corollary is the future eternity of the world, cannot be placed in doubt by any reasonable mind.

Man, the imperfect librarian, may be the product of chance or of malevolent demiurgi; the universe, with its elegant endowment of shelves, of enigmatical volumes, of inexhaustible stairways for the traveler and latrines for the seated librarian, can only be the work of a god. To perceive the distance between the divine and the human, it is enough to compare these crude wavering symbols which my fallible hand scrawls on the cover of a book, with the organic letters inside: punctual, delicate, perfectly black, inimitably symmetrical.

#2 The orthographical symbols are twenty- five in number. This finding made it possible, three hundred years ago, to formulate a general theory of the Library and solve satisfactorily the problem which no conjecture had deciphered: the formless and chaotic nature of almost all the books.

One which my father saw in a hexagon on circuit fifteen ninety-four was made up of the letters MCV, perversely repeated from the first line to the last. Another (very much consulted in this area) is a mere labyrinth of letters, but the next-to-last page says Oh time thy pyramids. This much is already known: for every sensible line of straightforward statement, there are leagues of senseless cacophonies, verbal jumbles and incoherences. (I know of an uncouth region whose librarians repudiate the vain and superstitious custom of finding a meaning in books and equate it with that of finding a meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines of one's palm... They admit that the inventors of this writing imitated the twenty-five natural symbols, but maintain that this application is accidental and that the books signify nothing in themselves. This dictum, we shall see, is not entirely fallacious.)

People's views

A blasphemous sect suggested that the searches should cease and that all should juggle letters and symbols until they constructed, by an improbable gift of chance, these canonical books. The authorities were obliged to issue severe orders.

Others believed that it was fundamental to eliminate useless works. They invaded the hexagons, showed credentials which were not always false, leafed through a volume with displeasure and condemned whole shelves: their hygienic, ascetic furor caused the senseless perdition of millions of books.

Their name is execrated, but those who deplore the "treasures" destroyed by this frenzy neglect two notable facts. One: the Library is so enormous that any reduction of human origin is infinitesimal. The other: every copy is unique, irreplaceable, but (since the Library is total) there are always several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles: works which differ only in a letter or a comma. Counter to general opinion, I venture to suppose that the consequences of the Purifiers' depredations have been exaggerated by the horror these fanatics produced. They were urged on by the delirium of trying to reach the books in the Crimson Hexagon: books whose format is smaller than usual, all-powerful, illustrated and magical.

The impious maintain that nonsense is normal in the Library and that the reasonable (and even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception. They speak (I know) of the "feverish Library whose chance volumes are constantly in danger of changing into others and affirm, negate and confuse everything like a delirious divinity."

The Narrator's view

I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite. . .

Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have wandered in search of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues; now that my eyes can hardly decipher what I write, I am preparing to die just a few leagues from the hexagon in which I was born. Once I am dead, there will be no lack of pious hands to throw me over the railing; my grave will be the fathomless air; my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall, which is infinite.

I venture to suppose that the consequences of the Purifiers' depredations have been exaggerated by the horror these fanatics produced. They were urged on by the delirium of trying to reach the books in the Crimson Hexagon: books whose format is smaller than usual, all-powerful, illustrated and magical.

In adventures such as these, I have squandered and wasted my years. It does not seem unlikely to me that there is a total book on some shelf of the universe;

In truth, the Library includes all verbal structures, all variations permitted by the twenty-five orthographical symbols, but not a single example of absolute nonsense.

The methodical task of writing distracts me from the present state of men. The certitude that everything has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms.

I suspect that the human species - the unique species - is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret.

The Library is unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder(which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order).

‘Babel’

“The Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1–9 is an origin myth and parable meant to explain why the world's peoples speak different languages. According to the story, a united human race speaking a single language and migrating eastward, comes to the land of Shinar. There they agree to build a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Yahweh, observing their city and tower, confounds their speech so that they can no longer understand each other, and scatters them around the world.”

“The native, Akkadian name of the city was Bāb-ilim, meaning ‘gate of God’. According to the Bible, the city received the name ‘Babel’ from the Hebrew verb לָלַךְ (bālal), meaning to jumble or to confuse.”

Reference

Wikipedia contributors. (2023, October 24). Tower of Babel. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:01, November 1, 2023, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tower_of_Babel&oldid=1181588195