

Across the water, in Sierra Leone, bougainvillea hang in profusion from the walls of the city, their reds deeper even than those of the fuchsia in Couville. I can also see through my binoculars blacks working on the docks. They are glossier than the captain's dusty melon-eaters and smoky panther men. They glisten. It is hot here. Tomorrow the new captain arrives by plane. The same plane will fly Garrett to Couville to face his accusers. I offered to slip him ashore here to fend for himself among his fellow blacks, but he refused. The jungle frightens him. He prefers, as a white, to face the Dutch court. They will eat him alive. So in the end the captain was wrong. Garrett did not refuse to take up the white man's burden. Thus we have lost one black to the whites and one white to the blacks. *Ave atque vale*, my gallant, my sacrificial miscegenators.

The new captain will hold an inquiry. I will tell him that my captain was captured by evil natives, panther men, and that I barely escaped with my life. I will tell him that I set sail as ordered by my captain against my better judgment but in passionate respect (shall I say reverence?) for his final words. In short, I will play the fool, addled by African mysteries. They cannot court-martial me. But neither can they ever again trust me at sea. They will find me serviceable in, say, the communications office of some out-of-the-way base, an auxiliary air station in Florida, where the windows are wreathed in morning glories. I will be a man of mystery, career wrecked by curious occluded events in Africa—best left alone.

So, I have had heroic moments: walking to the edge of doom with the captain, sailing with a fugitive under the guns of the Dutch. Naught availeth. I leave them to their destinies in hut, in prison, in black maw. I have only a few years of service remaining. However uneasy the peace, I savor it, knowing that the ages of cannibalism are in the offing.

Circle

"I saw Eternity the other night / Like a great ring of pure and endless light," says Vaughan in "The World." And no doubt the shells of atoms are equally luminous. But spectroscopy and microscopy notwithstanding, the Pascalian declaration of our disproportion remains true: neither stars nor mites are truly within our ken. We seek protected intimacy, run from womb to cave. "For when it is experienced from inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round." ("The Phenom-

enology of Roundness” in *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard) Maw and mouth, womb and tomb, hut and house, these are our spaces. And the hero of the round is, of course, the slain god, he of endless vegetative vitality. Borne on the wind from what other world we know not, consumed (like little Jens in Dinesen’s “The Dreaming Child”) by recollections of other fathers and other mansions, buried, harrowed and harvested, sacked and cellared, swallowed at last, he never fails us with the multiplicity of his members.

Line

At the end of Borges’ fascinating Euclidean fiction “Death and the Compass,” the Parisian mobster Red Scharlach shoots and kills the detective Eric Lönnrot. “Red Red” kills “Red Line-red.” Or, through a punning on the Indo-European roots and a more attractive arrangement of word order: “Red Red” meets “Red-line Red-line.” The assassination comes after an illusory rhombic chase and the simple animadversions of Lönnrot’s assistant, Treviranus, the Christian, whose trinitarian principles determine his plainness.

Therefore the universe is not, according to Borges, in essence a quaternity, though he will not require us to sacrifice Jung’s mandalas. Nor is it a trinity, though we may preserve the endless ingenuity of the Council of Nicaea. Least of all is it a duality, that most unsuppressible of heresies against which most recently Levi-Strauss has arrayed whole galaxies of symphonic myth. No, the universe is a line, itself illusory, showing at its two ends the mirror images of a single entity which has been separated temporarily for we know not what purpose, most easily rejoined by a bullet. The assassin with his gun is the hero of the line.

Selections from the Assassin’s Memoirs, or a Shard of the History of the World Since World War II

[Patterns]

I killed him in Barcelona just after the war. I detected his afterimage by a fountain under a plane tree on the Ramblas. Later, I saw the stain