

Experiencing God in Borges' Short Stories

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【摘要】

本文旨在探討波赫士如何透過短篇小說描寫並詮釋神，包括小說主角們如何經驗神，雖然主流論者只知道他是魔幻寫實或後現代作家。第一部分給予神秘主義的定義，並進而指稱波氏是個神秘思想家。第二部份則判斷波赫士的閱讀與泉源乃是東西方皆具。第三部分則披露波赫士的神秘經驗如眼盲之體會、做夢、與「死亡」接觸。第四部份則探討波氏關於「經驗神」或「與神合一」的經典短篇小說，在其中小說結尾主角皆經驗到神。第五部分則讓波赫士的「神」與賽斯思想中的「一切萬有」相互解說，也證明波赫士的「神」如何迥異於傳統的神。第六部分則探討波赫士在作為神秘思想家之外，也可被視為賽斯所謂的「說法者」，藉由現代化的短篇小說來敘述神的實相。

【關鍵詞】

波赫士、神秘思想家、神秘主義、說法者、神的手跡、神、一切萬有

【Abstract】

This paper explores how Borges describes and interprets God with his short stories in which the protagonists experience God, aiming at the mystical characteristics of Borge, though the mainstream critics know him only as a writer of magic realism or post-modernism. Part I gives the definitions of mysticism and terms him a mystic thinker. Part II then judges that Borges has absorbed the essential knowledge of both eastern and western mystical traditions. Part III explores the mystical Borges by discussing his personal mystical experiences such as living as a blind man, dreaming and encountering “death”. Part IV explores Borges' classic short stories in which the protagonists have a direct experience with God or the “oneness” with God. Part V lets the Borgian God and Seth's “All That Is” explicate each other, proving how different “God” in Borges' writing can be from the traditional God. Part

VI then explores that on one hand how we can describe Borges as a mystic thinker, on the other how we may also term him as a Speaker (a term given by Seth) who keeps conveying the Reality of God to people.

【Keywords】

Borges, mystic thinker, Speaker, “The God’s Script”, God, All That Is, epiphany

Foreward: The Borgesian God: A Non-mainstream Study

Jorge Luis Borges (24 August 1899 – 14 June 1986) never wrote any novels, but established his position as a world master with his nearly one hundred short stories. He had already developed such new and unique literature with his short story collections such as *The Aleph* (1944), *Book of Sand* and *Ficciones* (1949) as early as in the 1940's. Almost every piece of his avant-garde classics breaks the lineal time and leads the reader into a labyrinthine world that transcends physical laws. However, the term “magical realism” or post-modern theories cannot limit him. When mainstream critics term him as “the father of magical realism” and a metaphysical writer of the post-modern time¹, they tend to ignore the mystical tendency of Borges.

What I am interested most, however, is how Borges expresses his ideas of “experiencing God”, the protagonists' oneness with God and how Borges' stories re-define “God”, at the same time deepening and broadening the meaning of what God is. In these stories the Borgesian heroes always have an epiphany or even an enlightenment in which their egos have died temporarily and, since they are in the oneness of God, he experiences infinite joy and understanding.

Of course this part of Borges is mystical, therefore in this paper I will first search his mystical background, reading and interpret his experiences to reveal that he is a mystic for whom the most important meaning of his life is to seek God, to quest for God and to re-write God for modern readers. When it comes to the mystical part of Borges, I usually think of him as a mystic who attained Truth or spiritual wisdom in a way. And thus he even became a “Speaker” to speak to ordinary people about what spiritual wisdom is. Let me say that the simple definition of “Speakers” is that they impart their inner wisdom through speaking or writing to help people experience their own enlightenment or at least to have a glimpse of what God is, though I will discuss it more clearly and strictly in Part VI. Though this opinion belongs to the non-mainstream, a few scholars share with me very similar views. For example, *The Quest for God in the Work of Borges*, a newer book on Borges published in 2012 by

¹ John Barthes, for example, in his “Literature of Exhaustion” discussed Borges' encyclopedic writing and modern expression that fit into the time of the 60s when these aspects of Borges emerge. According to Barthes Joyce and Kafka are not the writers of “our time” while Boges and Samuel Beckett are.

Annette Flinn, still argues that though largely unheeded by the critical canon, “the quest for God was a major and enduring preoccupation for Borges” (Flinn, 1). However, the comments of the scholar Alicia Jurado, a Borges critic and Borges’s biographer and friend, give a good definition of Borges that fits in this paper’s view:

Few people have noticed Borges’s connection with mysticism; one of them was Estela Canto. In a review of the tales in *El Aleph*, which she called narratives, essays and also legends, she said: “The universe, its apparent contradictions, its hidden meanings and man’s anxiety on being faced with it are clearly depicted in all of Borges’s tales. One of the characteristics of mystical thinkers is that they are inclined to express themselves by means of symbols. I would say that the best definition of Borges is that he is one of the greatest—and they are very rare—mystical thinkers of our time.”

Mystical thinker, naturally, not just *mystic*. (Jurado, 76)

Generally I agree with her, though in this paper I will also attempt to explore Borges from a “Speaker” tradition. The academic books that focus on Borges’ mystical tendency include those written by Giovanni de Garayalde, Alicia Jurado, Annette Flynn, Estela Canto, James Alaraki and Gene H. Bell-Villada. Giovanni de Garayalde’s *Sources and Illumination* is a well-organized book on this exploration. The other scholars either have at least one chapter devoted to Borges’ mysticism in their books or have published a related article.

I. Definitions of Mysticism

Deep and difficult as it may seem, the term “mysticism” is just one of the terms to describe how truth seekers find their Tao, Reality, God or wisdom. The reason why I adopt the term Tao here is only because it transcends and is free from all kinds of preoccupations or fix ideas of religions, cults or sects (emerging from larger religions) and other spiritual organizations. Even so, some people will think the idea of “Tao” refers only to Taoism and thus is limited to a smaller idea though for the modern usage Tao can be referred to as the Truth for all religions or spiritual understanding. After all, one of the definitions of mysticism is to lay stress on intuition and the understanding beyond reason, not limited by any religions, artificial organizations, sutras or scriptures.

To make my discussion clearer, the following are some definitions of

mysticism for us to see if Borges's writing and the themes of his fiction are indeed "mystical":

The essence of mysticism ought to be thought of simply as the experience of direct communion with the soul of God. As there are great variations of degree in the definiteness of the experience, it would be safer to say that in the mystical experience, one finds himself in a direct relationship with an Over-world, a transcendent reality of the same nature as his own inmost self, and with which he feels himself akin. (Carpenter, 114)

Mysticism is the art of union with reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in a greater or lesser degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment... It [mysticism] appears in connection with the endeavor of the human mind to grasp the Divine essence or the ultimate reality of things and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the highest. (Evelyn, 38)

The desire to comprehend the universe is all-pervasive in Borges' short stories, but it is not the same desire that motivates one to search for scientific or metaphysical knowledge. The distinguishing element is, in the end, a mystical desire to comprehend the universe in a holistic vision, in which a person becomes one with it, knowing the intimate relationship between the outward world and the inner reality. This theme reoccurs like a motif in important stories such as "The Aleph," "The Circular Ruins," "The Zahir," "The Immortal," "The Book of Sand," along with several mystical notions—detachment from the secular world, a view of the world as illusory, non-dualistic insights, and a deep interest in dream as a doorway to other realities.

The "Aleph" is a dot in physical space that contains the whole universe, and through which the protagonist sees everything in an ecstatic, enlightened state; the "Zahir" is a twenty-cent coin that obsesses anyone who possesses it, for it can contain, mirror or reflect within itself the whole universe. On the verge of madness the protagonist contemplates that "The sufis, attempting to lose themselves in God, repeat their own name or the ninety-nine names of the Divinity until they lose all meaning. Perhaps I shall manage to wear away the Zahir by dint of thinking of it and thinking of it. Perhaps behind the Zahir I shall find God." (Borges: 1964, 164)

In these stories Borges reveals the tendency to lose oneself in the majestic

presence of “God” or in the universe that contains all—a clear characteristic of almost all mystics in all times. In these mystical quests and contemplations Borges is not interested in presenting a realistic or immanent world but rather is inclined to depict a reality that transcends time and space. This non-realistic attitude is again a mystical quality, since a mystic tends to look into the spiritual reality rather than the actual, outer world.

II. Borges’ Mystical Sources and Reading

Several books note the sources of the mystical traditions incorporated in Borges’s short stories by presenting explicit evidence. However, most of them focus more on the study of mystical allusions, textual research and criticism than on the nature of Borges’s own mystical thinking; nor do they show any genuine interest in the essence of mysticism. Of the very few books which focus on the relationship between Borges’s mystical insights and the sources of mysticism, I have chosen three that provide a general overview. Giovanna de Garayalde’s *Sources and Illumination* spends a chapter explicating Sufi mysticism as a background for understanding Borges’s mystical traits. Gene H. Bell-Villada in one chapter “El Aleph III: The Visionary Experience” in *Borges and His Fiction* also sorts out different mystical sources in both eastern and western cultures without really analyzing Borges’ own central mystical conceptions or influence. While Ana Maria Barrenechea in *Borges, the Labyrinth Maker* describes several of the writer’s mystical “origins” in her exploration of some of Borges’s short stories, she does not analyze or classify the various kinds or “schools” of mysticism.

Of course, in all fairness to the above scholars, the problem is that it is almost impossible to clearly analyze Borges’s mystical background. This is because Borges is such a learned, comprehensive scholar who has acquired through study so many different kinds of mystical knowledge—which he uses to achieve a synthesized, complex “whole.” That is, he cannot be limited to any specific source of mysticism. Moreover, there is no point in attempting to find out what mystical source has influenced Borges most, since there is probably no single source which plays this role: as a creatively mystical thinker/writer Borges successfully integrates almost all traditional mystical sources to create his own innovative style of mystical thinking.

In his *Seven Nights*, a collection of lectures he delivered at the Teatro Coliseo in

1997, Borges spends a sixteen-page chapter to introduce and discuss Buddhism. In this essay (“Buddhism”) he not only speaks with a positive attitude “of the essence of the religion, the elements of Buddhism,” but also makes clear his concern with Zen Buddhism: “to my mind, the form of Buddhism most similar, practically identical, to what the Buddha taught is Zen” (Borges: 1980, 65). In his discussion of Zen, Borges asserts that Buddha has “awakened from the dream” of physical life.

Borges also talks about one of his favorite allegories, Chuang Chou’s “butterfly dream” —“is it I who dream of the butterfly or not rather the butterfly who dreams of me?”—at the end of Chuang’s second chapter, the *Chi Wu Lun* or “Discourse on Making Things Equal.” Jewish Mysticism, Christian mythology, Middle Eastern (e.g. Sufi) and other mystical traditions are also discussed in both his fiction and essays. With so many mystical sources in mind, we come to realize that Borges is too versatile to be limited to one specific culture, let alone one specific mystical doctrine or school.

There is another reason why we should not confine Borges to one particular mystical source—“All mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country.” This comment by the French visionary Saint-Martin (*Underhill*, 80) makes sense inasmuch as the goal of mystics is to find the divine reality through intuition instead of reason; that is, socio-political, cultural and historical divisions, which are also correlated with a kind of rationalistic discrimination (a “way that can be spoken of,” as Lao-tzu says, rather than a “constant Way”), do not really matter to genuine mystics. All mystical traditions thus have the same “core.” There are so many similarities shared by the major mystical cultures that we cannot clearly distinguish one form or school of mystical thinking from another.

Maria Barrenechea therefore claims that Borges has no fixed doctrine (which implies rational, systematic philosophizing) behind all the theories or philosophies that abound in his writing:

We should not search for the consistent development of a metaphysical conception throughout his works, nor should we try to find a doctrine that in his opinion is the only real key to the Universe. (Barrenechea, 144)

Alicia Jurado shares a similar opinion by pointing out Borges’s cautious and paradoxical approach in expressing his idea of the universe:

The metaphysical hypotheses that he propounds in his works do not

necessarily coincide with his beliefs. The proof of this is that sometimes in one and the same paragraph he offers two contrary though equally satisfactory interpretations of a single event, without choosing either. This is confirmed by the element of doubt that runs through his writings, which are strewn with maybes and perhaps, where verbs such as postulate, guess and surmise recur as if to warn us of the dangers of certainty. (Jurado, 61)

However, it is still important, given the nature of my investigation here, to discuss at the outset Borges's primary mystical traits by giving several sources for his "mysticism." By presenting some evidence that several mystical traditions do have a significant impact on Borges's short stories, we can probe into his mystical world more deeply. In this mystical world (inter)woven in his short stories, the author jumps around among various mystical traditions, combines them and even interweaves them into an even vaster vision.

In his discussion of Sufi mysticism, Giovanna de Garayalde asserts that "I found so many and so much concrete bibliographical data, that I could not but conclude that there was a foreshadowing of Borges's thought in Sufi thought." But he also notices the pitfall in making this connection:

If I am seeking to establish a link between the author and Sufism, my intention is not to affiliate him with Sufism nor to show a conscious attitude on his part, but simply to establish points in common between Borges's writing and this teaching—which is seemingly just as disturbing—in order the better to understand this mysterious man by drawing an analogy between him and Sufism. (Garayalde, 12)

Giovanna de Garayalde believes that the general teachings of Sufism throw light upon the meaning of Borges' writing. According to the Sufis, whose goal of life is to attain the divine reality, there are three principles which we must follow to achieve true understanding. First, one has to note that "The most complex inter-relation of cause and effect that would explain reality cannot be transcribed into the language of the mind in its present state." Second, "Man is in a state that is called 'dream'. Therefore he must 'awaken,' but this is not to be achieved through academic effort nor by exercising the intellect." Third, "Since the Sufis state that man is incapable of perceiving the truth at will, their objective cannot be to inculcate certain dogmas or beliefs." (14-15) Yet these principles of Sufism are basically no different from those

of other eastern mystical cultures. In fact we may say they are among the most basic “definitions” (or definitive terms) of mysticism. The notions that man has to be enlightened getting beyond his illusory perceptions (which are but a dream), and that this enlightenment cannot be achieved through human rational or objective knowledge or through (dogmatic) religious doctrines, are shared by Zen, Taoism and many other mystical “sources.”

Generally speaking traces of eastern mysticism are more apparent than those of western mysticism in Borges's short stories. Yet while Bell-Vellada indirectly asserts that Indian mysticism is an essential and comprehensive body of mystical teaching(s) that seems to underlie Borges's mystical thinking, in discussing “The Secret Miracle” Anna Maria Barrenchea finds Borges's mystical sources primarily in Christian, Middle Eastern and Chinese traditions. Barrenchea sees, tied to the underlying theme of time, allusions to at least four different mystical traditions in “The Secret Miracle”: the story of the Indian monk, the miracle of the seven Christians, the miracle of Mohammed and the Chinese legend of the man watching the chess game. This illustration again proves that Borges has the ability to integrate many mystical traditions in order to generate a new style of mystical writing. But here again, the traces of eastern mysticism are stronger than those of western mysticism.

Thus we know that there is no specific mystical origin that dominates Borges' fiction. This is a writer who can traverse numerous mystical systems, jumping from one to another easily, and who even combines two or more mystical sources in a single paragraph, not to mention an entire story. Indeed, sometimes one symbol or image in his writing can refer to more than one mystical source. However, the spirit and symbology in Borges' short stories tend to be closer in general to eastern than to western mysticism.

The three critics mentioned above—Giovanna de Garayalde, Gene H. Bell-Villada and Anna Maria Barrenchea—do relate, then, Borges's works more to the eastern mystical traditions. Traces of such eastern traditions as Sufism, Hinduism and Zen can be easily found in their interpretations of Borges's use of symbols, images and allusions. As Garayalde states:

In my mind these esoteric ways coincided with the metaphysical search contained in Borges's writings. The constant references throughout Borges's books to Eastern places, personalities and writers and the coincidences in

his approach to themes such as time, reality, destiny, the infinite, etc., were to my mind all very significant. (Garayalde, 11, 12)

Broadly speaking, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the whole range of eastern and western mystical traditions to which he refers, including Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism and western mystics like Jesus Christ, Saint John and Meister Eckart. Though Borges's mystical inclinations may be more toward the east, there are no clear, distinctive borderlines to different late "east" and "west", and one understanding of either eastern or western mysticism usually leads to a wholistic understanding that transcends all geographical boundaries.

III. Personal Mystical Experience: Blindness, Dreams and "Death"

In a mystical reading Borges' personal life experience has a symbolic meaning. He became totally blind in 1955 and had remained so until he passed away in 1986. For 31 years he stayed in total darkness and quiet meditation to create literary works like a Homer in the mystical world, and this is why he is better at constructing lines of poems and short stories rather than novels. However, he claimed that this life incident was not a frustration, but opened up a different window that led him to see the inner universe. Like a blind prophet he then moved to the inner realities more and more to discover the deeper meaning of life---to see light in the dark.

And in writing Borges speaks highly of dreaming. He said most of the inspirations were given to him when he dreams. He did not really sleep when he "slept", being aware of nothing, but he felt numerous words (some are poetic and already poems) and inspirations. He then recorded them down after waking up and made them into publishable words. This kind of "channeling"² seemed to fit Borges naturally. Without the distractions of his naked eyes and day-time worries, he could more easily concentrate on the dreams, remember and bring back the revelations.

Moreover, In his essay "*Sentirse en muerte*," Borges even recorded his "death" experience: he lost himself and became absorbed in eternity. Once when he

² "Channeling" is a new term in the 70s when New Age movement arose in America, describing how one can tune into another reality and get messages from a different source of inspiration.

took a walk around the out-of-the-way corners of the city he incidentally came face to face with a pink wall and a fig tree in a poor street. With this scene a fresh awareness suddenly shone through him and transported him to a sublime reality:

I felt I was dead—that I was an abstract perceiver of the world; I felt an undefined fear imbued with knowledge, the supreme clarity of metaphysics. No, I did not believe I had sailed up the so-called waters of Time; rather I supposed I was the possessor of the elusive or non-existent meaning of the inconceivable word eternity. (Borges: 1966, 180)

This personal experience once again proves that Borges does not only write with knowledge collected from elsewhere, but also with knowledge from within. This “death” of course is not a physical death but a temporary death of the ego or reason of Borges, a kind of intuitive “knowing” that is very characteristic of mysticism.

IV. Classic Stories of Experiencing God

This “death” or “near death experience” can be suitably compared to the experience of the Aztec priest in “The God’s Script” who “has seen the universe...”, who “cannot think in terms of one man, of that man’s trivial fortunes or misfortunes” for he is now “no one.” This death is a temporary cessation of one’s senses, reasoning and ego to allow intuition to come alive. This sort of direct, intuitive knowing is also an essential characteristic of mysticism.

In fact, “The God’s Script” can be called a classic and typical story of seeking God or Truth that not only refers to Borges himself but also relates to most Truth seekers or God seekers. This story is probably the most representative story in describing the mystical nature of Borges, for it embodies the most complete mystical elements—the quest for the secret of the universe, enlightenment, ecstasy, the transcendence of man’s reason, the renunciation of the secular world, the reality of God, etc. The plot of the story can be seen as the stages through which a mystical seeker of the truth will pass. The Aztec priest Tzinacan was imprisoned by his political enemy Pedro de Alvarado. His way of escape and revenge lies in finding a magical sentence that can activate the divine power to create and devastate. He believed that in the tiger’s stripes hid a line of God’s script that holds the most creative and destructive mantra of fourteen words, and he hoped someday he could take his revenge with this occult power on his enemy after he solved the tiger’s stripe

riddle. Through a long search in his own mind and sufferings, he incidentally saw a vision greater and more powerful than he had imagined. After he attained this vision of the universe, however, he gave up the idea of escape or revenge, since those were no longer his concerns—his ego had vanished after this union with the universe or God. The ending of the story reveals the state of self-transcendence—a basic characteristic of mysticism:

Whoever has seen the universe, whoever has beheld the fiery design of the universe, cannot think in terms of one man, of that man's trivial fortunes or misfortunes, though he be that very man. That man *has been he* and now matters no more to me. What is the life of that other to him, the nation of that other to him, if he, now, is no one. (Borges: 1964, 173)

This Aztec priest, like his many other protagonists, is a reflection of Borges himself. The priest yearns to seek the secret of the universe, and attempts to express the ultimate vision with language when he incidentally experiences it, though he seems to finally remain silent. As does Borges. No wonder Alicia Jurado asserts:

God appears frequently in Borges' writing, though in an abstract manner and devoid of theological attributes... His poem and tales often refer to experiences of a mystical nature. "The Zahir" and the "The Aleph" are well-known. Nearer yet to the authentic mystical experience is that which overtakes the Aztec priest Tzinacan in the story "The God's Script." He saw "infinite processes that made up a single happiness" and he was filled with the sensation of understanding it all, which is so characteristic of mystical rapture and which St. John tries to describe in an explanatory chapter of the "Spiritual Canticle"... (Jurado, 80)

Though the form of his works may seem complex, the end of the writing is always to lead the reader to transcend the form in order to reach an intuitive understanding.

In fact many of his other famous short stories are stories of seeking Truth or God. Almost each story has a mystical experience as an ending in an almost fixed pattern. First of all the protagonist, out of accidental misfortune or frustration, begins to question the meaning of physical life. He even begins to wonder if the physical world is a kind of illusion, a dream from which he must wake up. With the impulse to wake up from the dream, this protagonist starts his quest or seeking. During the seeking he realizes that no Reality can be found in the dualistic thinking of words or books. After

a dark, death-like experience, a sudden and ecstatic epiphany will dawn upon him---he experiences God.

Let's see another example. "The Circular Ruins" describes an old esoteric wizard who wandered to the ruined temple by the river---to create a man by "dreaming". This "dreaming" is in fact an intense visualization in which an abstract idea can be "actualized" into physical reality. The extent of the old wizard's success is that this dreamed young man can handle the practical, physical environment without knowing that he is an existence less real than ordinary men or is even a phantom. The old man's feelings for this child were like that of a father. He could not bear to let this child know that he was just a creature made in dreams. He wanted his "son" to be real. But then one day an accident came---there was a fire in the ruined temple. "For a moment, he thought of taking refuge in the water, but then he understood that death was coming to crown his old age." And when he died in the fire, "with relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he also was an illusion, that someone else was dreaming him."

Who dreamed and created the old wizard? The answer is God. In this enlightenment (with symbols of fire and light) or epiphany the wizard realized that his Father dreamed and created him. Even though this understanding cost him his death he felt a sense of satisfaction and relief.

"The Aleph" also describes the infinite reality of God. The protagonist in this story is called Borges as if it is a first-person point of view memoir. But the story is interwoven with facts and fictional contents. "Borges" discovered by chance there was this "Aleph" hiding in the basement of an old house. As long as he laid down in a certain position with a broken gunnybag under his head and counted to the nineteenth step of the ladder from the bottom, he would see Aleph. But what is the "Aleph"? Physically it is as big as a coin, but it is the total summation of all the spaces of the universe, hiding everything in the world. In this Aleph "Borges" saw everything: "I saw a sunset...I saw my empty bedroom... I saw tigers, pistons, bison, tides, and armies; I saw all the ants on the planet; I saw a Persian astrolabe...I saw the circulation of my own dark blood" and "in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth."

Again this "Aleph" is the reality of God. What "Borges" sees in Aleph is what God sees. In other words "Borges" has reached an enlightenment in which he is one

with God. He becomes God's eye in that particular moment. Moreover, similar topics can also be found in stories such as "The Book of Sand", "Zahir". These are generally stories of seeking Truth to explore the ultimate Reality of God or the Universe. Borges uses difficult and sophisticated ways to build up labyrinths of thoughts, but his purpose is to look beyond the labyrinths. He is a mystic thinker that always walks alone toward the Oneness of God. In Borges' eye, man's obsessions, morality, violence may be nothing but a bunch of sand in the wind in the desert.

Also in "Everything and Nothing" Borges expresses what he thinks God is by telling a story about Shakespeare. In this story Shakespeare always has a feeling that he is not himself since he had been concentrating in "being" or playing the role of someone else. The story certainly reminds us of the old wizard in "The Circular Ruins" who concentrates in dreaming a man. For twenty years Shakespeare persisted in "that controlled hallucination". However, "one morning he was overcome by the surfeit and the horror of being so many kings who die by the sword and so many unhappy lovers who converge, diverge, and melodiously agonize", so he decided to depose of his theater and returned to the village of his birth. The story goes that "before or after his death", he had an epiphany in which he saw God and God told him:

"I, who have been so many men in vain, want to be one man: myself." The voice of God replied from a whirlwind: "Neither am I one self; I dreamed the world as you dreamed your work, my Shakespeare, and among the shapes of my dream are you, who, like me, are many persons—and none."
(Borges: 1964, 186)

Moreover, in his one-page story "*Inferno, I, 32,*" a leopard and the great poet Dante both gain a mystical understanding of the meaning of life through a dream. Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy* around 1300, and at the opening of this great epic there appears a symbolic leopard mixed with the image of a tiger. In the beginning Borges tells this story by describing a leopard living in the last years of the thirteenth century. Once God spoke to him in a dream:

You live and will die in this prison so that a man I know of may see you a certain number of times and not forget you and place your figure and symbol in a poem which has its precise place in the scheme of the universe. You suffer captivity, but you will have given a word to a poem." God, in the

dream, illumined the animal's brutishness and the animal understood these reasons and accepted his destiny, but when he awoke, there was in him only an obscure resignation, a valorous ignorance, for the machinery of the world is much too complex for the simplicity of a beast. (Borges, 1964, 237)

Then the story turned to the destiny of Dante. The epiphany given to Dante is in a way parallel to that of the leopard:

Years later, Dante was dying in Ravenna, as unjustified and as lonely as any other man. In a dream, God declared to him the secret purpose of his life and work; Dante, in wonderment, knew at least who and what he was and blessed the bitterness of his life. Tradition relates that, upon waking, he felt that he had received and lost an infinite thing, something he would not be able to recuperate or even glimpse, for the machinery of the world is much too complex or the simplicity of men. (Borges, 1964, 237)

Here we have a parallel design but also a sort of variation on the Chinese-box structure adopted in "The Circular Ruin" inasmuch as the leopard will appear (as a character) within the narrative of Dante's epic poem. Though the leopard is a small part of the great scheme of a poem by Dante, the poet himself is a small part of an even greater scheme of the universe. God's words to both in their respective dreams help both to understand and accept their relative insignificance but also their destiny on earth. Like the magician in "The Circular Ruins" who stepped into the fire willingly, resigned to his fate, the poet "blessed the bitterness of his life"—and so does the leopard in accepting his mere bestiality and captivity. The magician "knew that death was coming to crown his old age and absolve him of his labors," just as Dante felt liberated from the "unjustified" pain of his life. The sense of attaining an epiphany, the glimpse of the great scheme of the universe, and the acceptance of one's own destiny are all achieved here through a dream in which God directly appears and speaks.

And when it comes to "Funes the Memorios", God's multidimensional realities are shown through a paralyzed man called Funes. Injured seriously in an accident, Funes became paralyzed but his brain or mind is much busier than ordinary men. He remembers not only all the details of everything he had seen but also all of his dreams. In short, Funes' memories are parts of God's memories in which nothing is lost or missed. And in a way Funes's memories are a metaphor of the collective unconscious

(C. G. Jung's idea) or even the universal mind that contains all in the universe in the mystical traditions:

He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once, and with the lines in the spray which an oar raised in the Rio Negro on the eve of battle of the Quebracho. These recollections were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstruct an entire day. He told me: I have more memories in myself alone than all have had since the world was a world. And again: My dreams are like your vigils. And again, toward dawn: My memory, sir, is like a garbage disposal. (Borges: 1971, 45)

In a way Funes became one with God in terms of the grandeur and infinite memories or the perceptions of all things in the universe. When the description of Funes's memories is levitated to the scale of the world or even the universe ("I have more memories in myself alone than all have had since the world was a world."), it becomes a revelation or epiphany of what God's Reality is.

Now let's sum up Borge's stories with such an "oneness" with God. At least six short stories written by Borges have an ending in which the protagonist experiences a revelation or epiphany from God: "The God's Script", "The Circular Ruins", "Aleph", "Everything and Nothing", "*Inferno, I, 32,*" and "Funes the Memorios". There are at least four short stories written by Borges that have an ending in which the protagonist experiences a revelation or epiphany from God when they are dying or facing their death: "The God's Script", "The Circular Ruins", "Aleph", "Everything and Nothing" and "*Inferno, I, 32,*". And interestingly all these protagonists are male. Though one can argue that the Borges' stories of such a quest for God is traditional or conventional since there are only heroes but no heroines, we can still interpret these heroes as the conscious part of human beings (usually presented by the image of the male, Jung's "Animus", or "Yang" in Taoism) that is trying to understand and to be united with the unconscious part (usually presented by the image of the female, Jung's "Amina", or "Yin" in Taoism)

V. Borges' God and All That Is

Why do the Borgian heroes yearn to experience God? Seth in his *The Eternal Validity of the Soul* gives one of the best answers here:

All personal contact with the multidimensional God, all legitimate moments of mystic consciousness, will always have a unifying effect. They will not, therefore, isolate the individual involved, but instead will enlarge his perceptions until he will experience the reality and uniqueness of as many other aspects of reality of which he is capable.

He will feel, therefore, less isolated and less set apart. He will not regard himself as being above others because of the experience. On the contrary he will be swept along in a gestalt of comprehension in which he realizes his own oneness with All That Is. (Roberts, 247)

The Aztec priest in "The God's Script" experienced this oneness with "All That Is". So are the old wizard in "The Circular Ruin", the protagonist in "The Aleph", Shakespeare in "Everything and Nothing" and Dante in "*Inferno, I, 32*". Here "All That Is" is a new term for "God". Seth created this new term in his *The Eternal Validity of the Soul* to give a new understanding of what God is by describing Him as omnipresent and forever being. The way to experience God is always mystical since no one can find Him in books or any preaching. Seth asserts:

The nature of All That Is can only be sensed directly through the inner senses, or in a weaker communication, through inspiration or intuition. The miraculous complexity of such reality cannot be translated verbally. (Roberts, 271)

Simply put, the inner senses are the senses we use in our dreams. When we remember our dreams we can only remember a part of our dream, feeling that we "see" and "hear" much more in our dreams. Though scientific appliances cannot detect the inner senses yet, many people believe that they get inspiration from their dreams because of these senses. However, inner senses contain more than the five senses such as seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. When we remember our dreams we can remember with our five senses, and what was sensed with the senses other than the five senses is forgotten.

Moreover, unlike "God" described in the Genesis story in the Old Testament who is somewhere out there to judge if man is doing right, All That Is lives within every

man to experience the physical world. He incarnates Himself into human forms to experience human lives. In other words, He is experiencing Himself and He keeps creating Himself. This idea can relate to Borges' imagination about how a man can be "dreamed" in "The Circular Ruins" and how a role can be played by Shakespeare in "Everything and Nothing." As Seth asserts:

On the other hand, He is human, in that He is a portion of each individual; and within the vastness of His experience He holds an "idea-shape" of Himself as human, to which you can relate. He literally was made flesh to dwell among you, for He forms your flesh in that He is responsible for the energy that gives vitality and validity to your private multidimensional self, which in turns forms your image in accordance with your own ideas.

(Roberts, 245)

However, what does the Aztec priest Tzinacan see in the oneness with God or All That Is who gives him so much joy and understanding that he will allow time to forget him and will no longer care about revenge? Borges tries to describe the reality of God here in terms of simultaneity, omnipresent and forever living:

Then there occurred what I cannot forget or communicate. There occurred the union with the divinity, with the universe (I do not know whether these words differ in meaning). Ecstasy does not repeat its symbols; God has been seen in a blazing light. . . . I saw a Wheel of enormous height, which was not before my eyes, or behind them, or to the sides, but everywhere at once. This Wheel was made of water, but also with fire, and although I could see its boundaries, it was infinite. It was made of all things that shall be, that are, and that have been, all intertwined... O bliss of understanding, greater than the bliss of imagination of feeling. I saw the universe and I saw the intimate designs of the universe. I saw the origins narrated in the Book of the Common. I saw the mountains that rose out of the water. . . . I saw the faceless god concealed behind the other gods. I saw the infinite processes that formed one single felicity.... (Borges: 1964, 172-173)

In this experience of what God is the protagonist understands that "I was one of the strands within that all-encompassing fabric, and Pedro de Alvarado, who had tortured me, was another." The mere sight of this Wheel enabled him to "understand all things, without end." In other words, Tzinacan became all-knowing in such an

enlightenment.

Because of the reasons above, Borges' stories maybe the most pertinent literature to understand what Seth says about All That Is. These Borgesian heroes---Tzinacan, Dante, the old wizard, "Borges" and Shakespeare are in fact the heroes described in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. These heroes are helped by God and given the power of God after their authentic experiences with God in which they feel a great joy and are liberated from all pains, terrors or worries.

VI. Not just a Mystic Thinker but also a Speaker

According to F. C. Happold³ there are two types of mysticism—the mysticism of love and union and the mysticism of knowledge and understanding, though these two are in no way mutually exclusive and are always combined in some degree. But one tendency will tend to be predominant. The mystical urge toward love and union is the urge to escape from a sense of separation and the loneliness of selfhood, and to be united with Nature, God or a Reality that brings love and peace. In the divine presence, the mystic can rest from restless searching. In this type of mysticism, the word Love (usually capitalized) or the idea of love appears quite often. Many ancient mystics are of this type. The beautiful prayer of Emily Dickinson's poem is a good example:

*My River runs to thee—
Blue Sea! Wilt welcome me?
My River waits reply—
Oh Sea—look graciously—
I'll fetch thee Brooks
From spotted nooks—
Say—Sea—Take me! (Dickinson, 162)*

This untitled poem does not describe much of the complexity or the attributes of God's reality, but expresses the urge to transcend human isolation and move into God's embrace. The writing style is short and simple in form.

But Borges is never simple, either in form or content, perhaps because he is more of a mystic of knowledge and understanding. The urge of this second type of mystic is

³ See works cited.

clearly expressed in Borges's tales and other writings. It is the urge to find the secret of the universe, to grasp it not in part(s) but in its wholeness. And the mystic's attitude in so grasping is both intuitive and experimental, leading to a more detailed observation. This type of mysticism can also be defined as "experimental wisdom" and "experimental knowledge of God," since it is an "intellectual intuition or formless speculation," "the endeavor of the human mind to grasp the Divine essence or the ultimate reality of things."

This feature of Borges may make him look like a philosopher, but he is not one in the strictest sense. A philosopher also attempts to make sense of the universe as a whole but tends to use logic more than intuition: his deductive reasoning from first principles, which limits him to dualistic thinking, will generally lead to rationalistic theories or to some form of philosophical skepticism. A mystic thinker, however, transcends deductive reason. He relies on his intuition in order to probe into the Reality first, and then—if he likes—gives his description of this Reality based on his epiphany or personal experience, using a symbol system.

Due to the nature of the mysticism of knowledge and understanding we may say that Borges is a mystical thinker, not just a mystic. Many mystics---most of them of the first type--do not even write or express their experiences in any other form, since they do not feel the need to do so, dwelling as they do in silence and peace. Borges, however, will not be satisfied with such silence. Instead he yearns to express his subtle and profound understanding through his writing. His urge to capture the secret of the universe and his desire to express his understanding of it are both very strong. His inclination toward knowledge and understanding makes him describe the universe with his writing—a complicated system of literary signs, symbols and images that reflect the even more complicated construction of the universe itself.

For Borges, to understand the universe is to see God, the divine reality. And the joy of this understanding is greater than any other kind. This understanding, however, is never expressed by general ideas or simple lines as we may find in other mystics' writing. Borges uses unique, amazingly sophisticated literary techniques to convey this "seeing" that reaches beyond man's naked eyes. We can easily know that Borges is a mystic thinker given his wide knowledge of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, his sophisticated philosophical understanding and his yearning to experience God; he is indeed able to integrate philosophy, psychology and theology in

his short stories. But his uniquely “mystical” side is perhaps something of still deeper significance.

Like Alicia Jurado, Giovanna de Garayalde also affirms Borges' identity as a mystical thinker rather than a mystic by emphasizing his literary techniques as a way of inspiring mystical contemplation:

I agree... that Borges is a mystical thinker rather than a mystic. I see in these stories a technique for stimulating thought rather than conveying literary meanings. Once we have lost our faith in reason as a means of seeking truth, Borges does not abandon us but opens up a new range of possibilities by following the path of intuition. By repeatedly bringing us face to face with perceptions of such extraordinary reach, in stories in which he himself often plays the part of the hero, Borges's intention is to bring us near to this type of experience, as well as to the minor intuitions that abound in his writing, for example to the knowledge of our real destiny, which is generally revealed in a direct way and where reason would least have expected it. Borges is trying in this way to familiarize us with intuition, a kind of knowledge that man no longer takes into account and which he has completely forgotten. (Garayalde, 27)

Furthermore, the fact that very few mystical thinkers write fiction—especially modern fiction—makes Borges unique. In western literature we can find a traditional heritage of mystical writing, which includes William Blake, the American Transcendentalists and the Beat Generation writers, but there is not one among them who writes short stories as sophisticated and “literary” as those of Borges. The Argentine writer sets forth his mystical understanding—indeed, a stunning range of mystical insights—with extreme complexity through narrative techniques both ancient and contemporary. Given the refinement and precision of his “labyrinthine” narrative designs, no mystical thinker or writer can compare to Borges. In other words, in the realm of mystical literature and tradition, his writing is unprecedented.

With his personal mystical experience, his desire to represent the universe with words, and his capacities as a mystic of knowledge and understanding, Borges often presents us with a self-portrait of a mystical thinker in his literary works. However, he does not write his mystical stories without any foundation. He reveals abundant sources for his traditional mystical thinking when he writes his short stories.

And with abundant knowledge background, this writer even opens new dimensions for the mystical writing tradition.

From a different angle, however, Borges can be seen as a “Speaker” of our time. Seth in *The Eternal Validity of the Soul* claims that there are numerous Speakers in the long history of east and west who use various kinds of expressions to help people keep the inner knowledge unforgotten. Christ and Buddha, for example, are two of the greatest among all the Speakers. But there are many smaller Speakers who express in their ways with their systems of symbols that fit in better their time. Some speakers only speak (orally) and never write. And vice versa. And some Speakers do both. “Speaking” can mean both oral speaking to the public and writing to the public. All Speakers are mystics with different personal styles to revive our spiritual vitality and help us open the door to other realities. Seth pointed out that Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the Speakers, though he did not mention Borges. As Seth claims:

The original source of the Speaker data is the inner knowledge of the nature of reality that is within each individual. The Speakers are to keep the information alive in physical terms, so to see that men do not bury it within and dam it up, to bring it—the information—to the attention of the conscious self... They speak the inner secrets, in other words. In some civilizations, as mentioned earlier in this book, they played a much stronger part, practically speaking. (Roberts, 350)

No one has discussed Borges in this aspect before, but I would like to describe the Argentine writer as a Speaker in the literary world. Spiritually speaking, like those Zen masters, Buddhist masters and Dharma imparters Borges has the strong urge and impulse to tell and to “speak” to the public about the inner secrets and the reality of God or All That Is. However, Borge’s mystical writing is different from traditional religious writings or any other previous mystical writing. His mystical short stories have created a rebellious meaning against the mystical writing traditions, while his new and unique expressions fits in our modern time. He usually attempts to avoid the word God so that readers will not think of God in the traditional way since Borges’ God is different from the conventional God. Instead he uses Universe, the Reality or deity to avoid preoccupied thinking. In one way or the other, Borges expands the multi-dimensions of God, deepens the meaning of God, rebels against the traditional God that punishes people, and redefines God. As a Speaker of modern time, Borges

looks remote and has maintained an image of a loner, but with all his writings he has yearned to tell the readers the secrets of the other realities outside of this physical world.

Great as they are, Christ and Buddha were Speakers in the past--two thousand or more years ago. Their languages and expressions were not made specifically for our time and might not fit in our modern society. When what we need is a new way of expression, Borges' writing offers a new voice "speaking" in the form of short stories. With these sophisticated short stories filled with mystical wisdom, Borges tries to convey to us what cannot really be told in words. Unlike the preachers or teachers who only repeat what the scriptures say, Borges is a creative Speaker using new and unique expressions that attract modern readers and keep refreshing our mind.

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