

**Nourished by Dreams, Visions and William James:  
The Radical Philosophies of Borges and Terence McKenna  
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*I try not to be dead* – Jorge Luis Borges

In the 1970 film *Performance*, screenwriter and co-director Donald Cammell makes abundant allusions to Borges, presenting a stoned Turner (played by Mick Jagger) reading Borges' tale 'The South', and showing the face of Borges pierced by a bullet in the film's enigmatic violent conclusion. *Performance* is an enduring testimony to the psychedelic era of the 1960s (it was shot in 1968), depicting the exotic and perturbing aesthetic typified by film and music of the time, casting Jagger and Anita Pallenberg, and portraying a mushroom trip in vivid detail. The plot is labyrinthine and contains Burroughs-inspired cut-ups; the editing is experimental; the set is sensuous and oneiric; and the narrative involves identity dissolution, mirrors, book references, labyrinths and the doppelgänger. Even were the film not to have overt references to Borges, one could still declare that 'the literary shadow behind *Performance* is perhaps Borges' (Sinyard 1991: 13).

Borges gained prominence with an English-speaking readership in the 1960s, and for many (novelist Peter Carey, for example, who first came across Borges' works in a Melbourne hippy bookshop called The Whole Earth Bookshop [Aizenberg 1990: 45]), Borges is integrally associated with the psychedelic cultures of the 1960s. There are manifest contradictions and conflicts in this association, given the political and social dynamics of countercultural movements during this period and Borges' outspoken disquiet of such movements. Nevertheless, there are many instances of Borges' appearance within psychedelic culture that could bear out further this association. But is Borges psychedelic? What does that mean? In this article I appraise Borges in the light of one of the foremost writers of psychedelic philosophy: Terence McKenna, who, whilst pertaining to an era posterior to the 1960s, was nevertheless nourished by the strong artistic and intellectual currents from the period. McKenna, who died in 2000, remains a prominent figure in ever-growing scholarship of psychedelic studies in the last decade. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, he toured and lectured extensively, though so widely disseminated are his practical – if at times outlandish – philosophies of psychedelic plants, ethnobotany and the acceleration of history, that his deep

understanding of hermetic philosophy, Gnosticism, alchemy, the Florentine Renaissance, modernist literature and Jungian psychology are often overlooked. It is in these domains that much parity can be drawn between McKenna and Borges.

McKenna was a reader of Borges, and often alluded to the tale 'The Aleph.' In particular, he likens the secret of 'The Sect of the Phoenix' to the ecstatic revelation of 'The Aleph': 'Borges never explicitly says what the Secret is, but if one knows his other story, The Aleph, one can put these two together and realize that the Aleph is the experience of the Secret of the Cult of the Phoenix' (1991: 44). In combining the two tales, McKenna interrelates the esoteric body of knowledge known by the 'sectarians' of the Phoenix, and the Jamesian moment of 'mystical intuition, [the] very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness' (James 1910: 85). Thus the two roots of McKenna's philosophical outlook are married in two of Borges' tales: esoteric traditions and individual mystical experience (predominantly mediated through psychedelics). We can chart how these two streams of thought play out in Borges and McKenna.

#### **Paradox of Knowledge**

McKenna habitually quoted the British evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane: 'My own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose' (Haldane 1927: 286). For McKenna, this was the articulation of the paradox of knowledge – we strive to gain answers to the deeper riddles of existence while intuiting that we will never gain this knowledge. In a lecture on alchemy he elaborates this, suggesting that to live with mystery and not to be defeated by its mystery is the supreme challenge:

That's a dizzying perception. It's one thing to think it's very strange. It's another thing to think it's stranger than you can suppose. You may suppose and suppose and suppose and you'll fall so short of the mark that it's absurd. That's what it means to be in the presence of a mystery. The modern word mystery translates out to unsolved problem. That's not what a mystery is. A mystery is not an unsolved problem. A mystery is a mystery

and ratiocination can exhaust itself and make no progress with it and that's what's at the core of our being and that was what was at the core of this ancient perception. These were thoroughly modern people. They were shoved up against the same things that tug at our hearts and our minds and our souls and beyond that there's not a whole hell of a lot that you can say about it. (1998)

Here we also find a striking parallel with Borges, who repeatedly discussed the essential mystery of existence and the perpetual paradox of how we seek to understand a mystery that we know to be essentially mysterious.

If life's meaning were explained to us, we probably wouldn't understand it. To think that a man can find it is absurd. We can live without understanding what the world is or who we are. The important things are the ethical instinct and the intellectual instinct, are they not? The intellectual instinct is the one that makes us search while knowing that we are never going to find the answer. (1998: 241)

One line of analysis of Borges' earlier works – especially the 1940s in which he composed the tales of *Ficciones* – suggests a Sartrean despair at the meaninglessness of existence. Two oft-quoted lines from this period may be considered synoptic of this worldview. The first, from the essay 'The analytical language of John Wilkens' summarises the conjectural and wholly anti-Platonic nature of categorised systems of thought: 'obviously there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural. The reason is very simple: we do not know what the universe is' (2000: 231). The other renowned expression is uttered by the pedantic narrator of 'Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*': 'There is no exercise of the intellect which is not, in the final analysis, useless. A philosophical doctrine begins as a plausible description of the universe; with the passage of the years it becomes a mere chapter – if not a paragraph or a name – in the history of philosophy' (1976: 70). In both cases, the systems are shown neither as being futile nor undesired, but rather merely provisory, relative only to the moment, true, in the sense that William James would understand, only insofar as they *appear* truthful to their authors and readers. Indeed, the Borges narrator of 'John Wilkens' qualifies his earlier assertion by stressing the necessity of such provisory systems: 'But the impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot dissuade us from outlining human schemes, even though we are aware that they are provisional' (2000: 213).

The very fabric of reality, indeed, is shown to be unstable and beyond the control of man's affairs. The dreamer of 'The Circular Ruins' understands 'with relief, with humiliation, with terror' (1976: 77) that he had been dreamt by another. The chess players in the poem 'Ajedrez' are unaware that they are mere pieces in a larger chess match. The inhabitants of Uqbar (from the tale 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius') would remain ignorant of the fact that they are ciphers in a fictional encyclopaedic entry. This radical iconoclasm, a defining feature of the Borges oeuvre, is reflected in Borges' depiction of the human capacity to be swept up in dramas that afford ontological reassurance, despite the fact that the philosophical, religious, political or ideological system upon which the individual has placed his faith, or to which he has pledged allegiance, refers only to contingent human affairs, and not to any cosmic or divine order. This is important when considering the allure of ideology upon the unwary, something outlined by the narrator of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius':

Ten years ago any symmetry with a semblance of order – dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism – was sufficient to entrance the minds of men. How could one do other than submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet? It is useless to answer that reality is also orderly. Perhaps it is, but in accordance with divine laws – I translate: inhuman laws – which we never quite grasp. (1976: 42)

Presented with the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, the seeker would inevitably be driven to despair; as it is the human condition to create structures in this void which grant us ontological security, and yet we fail to appreciate the contingent substance of this structure. 'Repeatedly', argues Evelyn Fishburn, 'Borges subverts any belief in a certainty, exposing the partiality of man-made limitations upon every explanation of the Universe, whether philosophical, theological, or mystical' (Fishburn 1988: 412). The many depictions of games in his poems such as chess and *truco*, perennial antagonisms between rivals, the Lottery of Babylon, political ideologies such as Nazism or Peronism; all such systems are shown to be fictions, structures built to provide order over the structure-less nature of existence. This is the conundrum identifiable in Borges and in McKenna: ordered human systems such as politics and schematised religions provide ontological security only through nullifying the sense of ineffable mystery. One is given sanctuary only at the expense of freedom. McKenna articulates this

position of the beauty of inexplicability in *Archaic Revival* (1991):

The myths of science and religion and shamanism all represent a polarity between the mystery of the Self and the mystery of the Other – and remember a mystery is not to be confused with an unsolved problem; a mystery is by its nature mysterious and will not collapse into a solution. We are unfamiliar with that kind of thing. We think that if there's a mystery, then experts of whatever kind can get it straightened out and issue a report. But this approach only works for trivia. And what's important – our hearts, our souls, our hopes, our expectations – is completely mysterious to us. (1991: 83)

Borges famously quipped that Catholics demonstrated the astonishing ability to reduce the baffling mystery of the afterlife to a simple article of dogma to the extent that they appear wholly unaware of its enticing oddity: 'Catholics (read: Argentine Catholics) believe in an ultraterrestrial world, but I have noticed that they are not interested in it. With me the opposite occurs: I am interested but I do not believe' (2000: 256). Interest, curiosity, amazement – these are the key attributes both of Borges and McKenna and the means by which the absence of concrete answers does not lead to despair, but to delight.

### **The Ecstasy of Bafflement**

Many of Borges' later poems, such as 'In praise of darkness' and tales, such as '*Undr*', depict the conversion of despair into the rapture of bafflement, mystery, mystification. Borges explains to Willis Barnstone the essential wonder at the riddle of the universe:

But this fact of wondering at life may stand for the essence of poetry. All poetry consists in feeling things as being strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as very obvious. Of course I *am* puzzled at the fact of my existing, of my existing in a human body, of my looking through eyes, hearing through ears, and so on. And maybe everything I have written is a mere metaphor, a mere variation on that central theme of being puzzled by things. In that case, I suppose, there's no essential difference between philosophy and poetry, since both stand for that same kind of puzzlement. Except that in the case of philosophy, the answer is given in a logical way, and in the case of poetry you use metaphor. [Through writing] I

was trying to find a foundation for my puzzlement. (1982: 15-17)

On repeated occasions in his later years he reiterates this joy of confusion. 'I think of the world as a riddle. And the one beautiful thing about it is that it can't be solved. But of course I think the world needs a riddle. I feel amazement all the time' (1982: 81); 'The world is so mysterious and so rich' (1982: 86); 'There is nothing in the world that is not mysterious' (1985: 28). The absence of revealed *telos* is not questioned; what Borges emphasises is the derivation of joy rather than despair from this predicament.

Herein also lies the central thrust of McKenna's philosophy of a psychedelic society – not a society of drug-users – but a community enraptured by this Borgesian sense of beatic bafflement. 'What I think a psychedelic society' declares McKenna, 'what that notion means or implies to me in terms of ideology, is the idea of creating a society which always lives in the light of the mystery of being. In other words, that solutions should be displaced from the central role that they have had in social organization. And mysteries, irreducible mysteries, should be put in their place' (1997: 57). McKenna reiterates the idea that awareness of mystery is of paramount importance for a more tolerant and harmonious society. This ethical consideration, whilst it may appear distant from Borges' reluctance to discuss ethics, is in fact remarkably close to Borges' position regarding philosophy as awareness of mystery. Borges declared in interview with Burgin:

I think that people who have no philosophy live a poor kind of life, no? People who are too sure about reality and about themselves. I think that philosophy helps you to live. For example, if you think of life as a dream, there may be something gruesome or uncanny about it, and you may sometimes feel that you are living a nightmare, but if you think of reality as something hard and fast, that's still worse, no? I think that philosophy may give the world a kind of haziness, but that haziness is all to the good. If you're a materialist, if you believe in hard and fast things, then you're tied down by reality, or by what you call reality. So that, in a sense, philosophy dissolves reality, but as reality is not always too pleasant, you will be helped by that dissolution. Well, those are very obvious thoughts, of course, though they are none the less true for being obvious. (1969: 142-3)

Borges and McKenna speak a very similar language here, most strikingly in their shared declaration that ideological or philosophical certainties, as rigid belief systems, are pathways to dogmatism and intolerance. Borges discusses the riddles of time and the ego, stating that they 'are the essential business of philosophy, and happily for us they will never be solved, so forever we can go on. We can go on making guesswork – we will call that guesswork philosophy, which is really mere guesswork. We will go on weaving theories, and being very much amused by them, and then unweaving and taking other new ones' (1982: 111). This is a powerful statement on the history of thought, and yet it is a generous principle, allowing for conflicting and competing systems of thought to inform and instruct without losing sight of the essential unsolvable mystery. Here again we see striking parity with the position that McKenna takes vis-à-vis the pretence to foundationalism within schools of thought:

I suggest that as we look back over human history every pinnacle of civilization [...] has believed that it was in possession of an accurate description of the cosmos and of man's relationship to it. This seems to go along with the full flowering of a civilization. But from the point of view of our present civilization we regard all those earlier conceptions as at worst quaint, at best half right. We congratulate ourselves that our civilization at last has its finger on the real description of what is going on. I think this is an error, and that actually what blinds us, or makes historical progress very difficult, is our lack of awareness that our beliefs have grown obsolete and should be put aside. (McKenna 1997: 57)<sup>1</sup>

Such a position leads to a shared outlook regarding the conflict between doctrine and experience. I argue elsewhere how central to Borges' reading of Swedenborg and other mystics were his misgivings towards doctrinally-inspired rather than experientially-inspired metaphysical and mystical texts (Rowlandson 2011). Experience is paramount, and indeed, reflecting the Jamesian stance of radical empiricism, Borges was keen to understand more of his own 'timeless' experiences whilst willing to discard Catholic doctrines of heavenly prize and punishment. 'And yet I am not a Catholic. I cannot believe in theology. I cannot believe in the idea of punishment or reward. Those things are alien to me. [...] I

cannot accept the story, for example, of God making man and then making Christ. All those things are beyond me. They really are' (1982: 93-4). For Borges, such theological systems simply failed to equate to his experience, and consequently, reflecting his Jamesian predisposition, he felt no compulsion to believe them. It is important to note that this does not constitute an outright rejection, which would itself be a declaration of faith, but merely a recognition that experience and doctrine fail to cohere. Rejection, as Borges emphasises, can itself be dogmatic – atheist rather than agnostic, whilst agnosticism can be generously accommodating: 'Being an agnostic means all things are possible, even God, even the Holy Trinity. This world is so strange that anything may happen, or may not happen. Being an agnostic makes me live in a larger, a more fantastic kind of world, almost uncanny. It makes me more tolerant' (in Shenker 1971).

Here again we find salient parallels with McKenna, who, rather more stridently, advocated greater epistemological value on individual experience (especially the extreme experiences) over culturally imposed belief systems. 'Much of the problem of the modern dilemma [is that] direct experience has been discounted, and in its place all kinds of belief systems have been erected. [...] You see, if you believe something, you are automatically precluded from believing its opposite; which means that a degree of your human freedom has been forfeited in the act of committing yourself to this belief' (1997: 58). This is, of course, an outlandish statement, as one cannot learn and develop informed only by personal experience, alone outside of culture – indeed personal experience is always acculturated. However, as is often the case with McKenna's presentations, this declaration is designed more as a provocative gesture than a philosophical truism. It does, nevertheless, reveal the problematic at the heart of the argument of belief systems, especially when belief conflicts with experience. Here, as Carl Jung perceived in his father and in so many of his analysants, the distance between faith and experience can cause disillusion and despair. Borges, as keen as McKenna to throw incendiary assertions to his audience, similarly revealed this problematic of belief systems, perceiving a causal relationship between belief and intolerance:

When the Church was strong it was intolerant; it went in for burning and persecution. It seems to me that the Church's present tolerance largely

<sup>1</sup> McKenna articulates this elsewhere: 'every ideological system that has been granted the status of being the official view of reality has always proclaimed that it had everything nailed down but the last 5 percent. Their best people were working on that. But I think that we know practically nothing' (1991: 87).

derives from weakness; it's not that it has become more broad-minded, because that's impossible. No church – whether Catholic or Protestant – has ever been tolerant, nor is there any reason for them to be tolerant. If I believe I am in possession of the truth there is no reason for me to be tolerant of those who are risking their own salvation by holding erroneous beliefs. On the contrary, it's my duty to persecute them. I can't say: 'It doesn't matter that you are a Protestant because we're all brothers of Christ in the end.' No, that would be a proof of skepticism. (1998: 73-74)

For both Borges and McKenna experience must be primary, and should be aligned to cultural patterns only where such patterns accommodate experience, such as Borges' ease with Schopenhauer's shifting philosophy and McKenna's endorsement of the practical principles of shamanism. This position, though, does lead into the more turbulent waters of both writers' relationship with 'popular' (as opposed to perennial or archaic) cultural forms, and in this case neither is free from bombast and controversy.

#### **Archaic Philosophy**

Borges courted controversy in his repeated statements about neither reading newspapers nor contemporary writers, in his criticism of popular poets, of art of political content, and of any form of mass media advertising or political propaganda. Whilst for some this attitude reinforced the image of the ivory-tower elitist out of touch with reality, and whilst for others it was a *faux-naïf* gesture on behalf of a man who knew far more than he was revealing and was aware of certain blunders with regards his political and cultural assertions,<sup>2</sup> nevertheless I would argue that it demonstrates a keen understanding of the limitations of corporate-driven, politically-compromised artistic and cultural forms, and the relationship between politics, marketing, mass hysteria, intolerance and the very belief systems that he habitually criticised. In particular, Borges presents a poetic and Swedenborg-inspired vision of the emptiness of following 'mechanical' systems of action or thought which proscribe oneself the vital force of wonder and mystery.

I think that one is dying all the time. Every time we are not feeling something, discovering something, when we are merely repeating something mechanically. At that moment you are dead. Life

may come at any moment also. If you take a single day, therein you find many deaths, I suppose, and many births also. But I try not to be dead. I try to be curious concerning things, and now I am receiving experiences all the time, and those experiences will be changed into poems, into short stories, into fables. I am receiving them all the time, although I know that many of the things I do and things I say are mechanical, that is to say, they belong to death rather than to life. (1982: 13)

We can see, therefore, that when Borges declared to Jorge Oclander that: 'I don't think I have read a newspaper in my life' (1982: 1), he is on the one hand making a challenging statement about the illusory nature of time and the fictional nature of journalistic representation, and on the other he is alluding to the deadening nature of mechanical, uninspiring, mundane exercises that fail to enliven wonder in the intellect and imagination. In the light of other comments in interviews and essays, we can also intuit that he is alluding to the ill-concealed political ideology that the reader unwittingly absorbs in such popular media. Borges stresses that 'poetry consists in feeling things as being strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as very obvious' (1982: 15), and that rhetoric is the language of politics. As such, politics and its representation through the news troubled Borges as embodying no mystery, no sense of wonder, and that consequently the experience of reading the newspaper 'belongs to death rather than to life.'

In a markedly different context, but revealing a similar basis, McKenna also railed against the stultifying hollowness of popular cultural forms, though true to style he spoke in a hyperbolic and provocative fashion:

So one of the ideas I'd like to put out is that – and it may seem strange, in this menu, but perhaps not – the idea that ideology is not our friend. It is not a matter of choosing from a smorgasbord of ideologies and rejecting the flawed, the self-contradictory, and the over-simple, in favour of the unflawed, the complex enough. Where is it writ in adamant that semi-carnivorous monkeys can or should be capable of understanding reality? That seems to me one of the first illusions – and one of the more prideful illusions – of human culture: that a final understanding is possible in the first place. Better, I think, to try and frame questions which can do it – and leave off searching for answers,

<sup>2</sup> See Monegal, Santi, & Alonso (1978); Franco (1981); Louis (2008).



because answers are like operating systems: they're being upgraded faster than you can keep up with it. (1999)

McKenna's 'culture is not your friend' rap has become an internet meme over the last few years and has incited the expected inflamed reactions from certain commentators. Nevertheless it is important to examine the thrust of his argument in the light of Borges' comments on enlivening or deadening experiences and of philosophical systems as chapters of human thought.

We have to create culture, don't watch TV, don't read magazines, create your own roadshow. The nexus of space and time where you are now is the most immediate sector of your universe, and if you're worrying about Michael Jackson or Bill Clinton or somebody else, then you are disempowered, you're giving it all away to icons, icons which are maintained by an electronic media so that you want to dress like X or have lips like Y. This is shit-brained, this kind of thinking. That is all cultural diversion, and what is real is you and your friends and your associations, your highs, your orgasms, your hopes, your plans, your fears. And we are told 'no,' we're unimportant, we're peripheral. 'Get a degree, get a job, get a this, get a that.' And then you're a player, you don't want to even play in that game. You want to reclaim your mind and get it out of the hands of the cultural engineers who want to turn you into a half-baked moron consuming all this trash that's being

manufactured out of the bones of a dying world.  
(McKenna 1994)

McKenna's position is uncompromising. Fervent adulation of celebrities and fashion, slavish enrolment into political programmes, unthinking repetitions of ideological slogans, and the culture of ceaseless purchase and consumption – all these activities are for him a surrender of autonomy and an enslavement in the structures of 'The Pentagon and Madison Avenue.' And whilst McKenna ostensibly promoted the psychedelic experience as a means to reclaim the autonomy of individual experience, the psychedelic experience entails also reading Gnostic literature, exploring alchemical symbols, losing oneself in *Finnegans Wake* or, if we were to stray into Borges' interests, reading Dante, Swedenborg, Angelus Silesius, and J.W. Dunne.

### **The Ontological Challenge of Dreams and Visions**

Borges was an inveterate reader of Swedenborg (1688-1772. Swedish scientist, theologian, visionary and mystic who recounted his voyages to heaven and hell and his dialogue with angels and demons), and wrote many pieces – poems, essays, and a biography – about the Swedish visionary. The experience of reading Swedenborg is, indeed, a tremendous challenge to our ontological security. As Borges identified, Swedenborg's works are not the ravings of a manifest psychotic, nor are they theological speculation: Swedenborg was adamant in the reality of his experiences. To read Swedenborg, even to allow the possibility of his experiences, is to disassemble structures of thought that are consensually held to be the only valid and permissible ones. If he *did* talk with angels, if he *did* talk with the dead, if he *did* physically inhabit these heavenly and infernal landscapes, well, in the language of Coleridge, 'ah, what then?'

The ability both of the psychedelic experience and radically otherworldly texts to dissolve rigid thought structures is precisely the element that both McKenna and Borges respectively seize upon. Whilst Borges sanguinely claims in the whimsical work *Atlas* (1985): 'Asleep, in my dreams, I see or converse with the dead. None of these things surprises me in the least' (54), McKenna offers the psychedelic experience as an equally improbable yet tangible enterprise. Indeed, he suggests that inscribed in the structure of hegemony is the prohibition of such awareness; and that, similar to the Church's misgivings about individual mystical experience owing to the fact that it is unmediated through the clergy and hierarchy, so, argues McKenna, the individual in society is discouraged from such a shattering of the social

mores: 'Psychedelics are illegal not because a loving government is concerned that you may jump out of a third story window. Psychedelics are illegal because they dissolve opinion structures and culturally laid down models of behavior and information processing. They open you up to the possibility that everything you know is wrong' (1987).<sup>3</sup> In McKenna's analysis, the audacious psychedelic experience presents a vision of reality as outlandish as Swedenborg's depiction of the land of the dead. As such, we should be careful not to downplay the entheogenic experience that McKenna proposes in our attempts to see affinities between Borges and McKenna. Reading *Finnegans Wake* is clearly a challenging experience, but for McKenna nothing is as challenging as the 'heroic dose' of a psychedelic. Nevertheless, from a phenomenological perspective, we can build bridges between the dream/nightmare as experienced by Borges, the psychedelic trip as experienced and recounted by McKenna, and the otherworld journeys as documented by Swedenborg.

Here we find ourselves in the perennial debate concerning not only the phenomenology and the ontology of the dream, the vision and the hallucination, but the question of the epistemological value of these experiences. Borges placed great epistemological significance on the dream, the nightmare and, importantly, the fiction, declaring that dreams are as much a part of experience as waking, and that 'dreams are an aesthetic work, perhaps the most ancient aesthetic expression' (1984a: 40). Consequently it was of great significance to Borges that literature and art are in so many traditions inspired by dreams – that Stevenson, for instance, dreamt the plot of *Jekyll and Hyde*. 'Literature is a dream', Borges explains, 'a controlled dream. Now, I believe that we owe literature almost everything we are and what we have been, also what we will be. Our past is nothing but a sequence of dreams' (1984b: 34). He examines the aesthetic creativity that animates dreams:

The essential difference between the waking experience and the sleeping or dreaming experience must lie in the fact that the dreaming experience is something that can be begotten by you, created by you, evolved out of you [...] not

necessarily in sleep. When you're thinking out a poem, there is little difference between the fact of being asleep and that of being awake, no? And so they stand for the same thing. If you're thinking, if you're inventing, or if you're dreaming, then the dream may correspond to vision or to sleep. That hardly matters. (1982: 29)

Similarly, the true nature of identity is revealed to Borges' characters (both 'real' and fictional), such as Hladik ('The Secret Miracle') and Dante, in dreams. They are condemned to be unable to recall the revelation upon waking:

Years later Dante lay dying in Ravenna, as unjustified and as alone as any other man. In a dream God declared to him the secret purpose of his life and his work; Dante, filled with wonder, knew at last who he was and what he was, and he blessed his bitter sufferings. Tradition has it that, on waking, he felt he had been given – and then had lost – something infinite, something he would not be able to recover, or even to glimpse, for the machinery of the world is far too complex for the simplicity of men. (1970: 50)

Nightmares, also, are the source of aesthetic creativity, and are thus also sources of knowledge: 'Unhappily, I know nightmares only too well, and they have been very helpful to literature. I remember the splendid nightmares – were they dreams or were they inventions? It's all the same – the splendid nightmares of De Quincey' (Borges 1982: 8). Similarly, the visions of Plato about transmigration of the soul inform Borges' metaphysical speculation, and Swedenborg's depictions of the angelic realms influenced Borges to perceive the ethical dimension of his own life, suggesting, for example, 'No pasa un día en que no estamos, un instante, en el paraíso' ['Not a day passes in which we are not, for an instant, in Paradise'] (2005: 7). Thus dreams, nightmares and visions inform literature; and literature, for Borges, is not simply an expression of reality, it *is* reality, and thus the oniric, visionary landscape is as phenomenologically – if not ontologically – real as the physical landscape.

<sup>3</sup> McKenna's position regarding legislation is strikingly similar to Alan Watts: 'Psychedelic drugs are feared, basically, for the same reason that mystical experience has been feared, discouraged, and even condemned in the Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic orthodoxies. It leads to disenchantment and apathy toward the approved social rewards of status and success, to chuckles at pretentiousness and pomposity, and, worse, to disbelief in the Church-and-State dogma that we are all God's adopted orphans or fluky little germs in a mechanical and mindless universe and the consequent mistrust in the institution of state and social power. No authoritarian government, whether ecclesiastical or secular, can tolerate the apprehension that each one of us is God in disguise, and that our real inmost, outmost, and utmost Self cannot be killed. That's why they had to do away with Jesus' (1962: 15).

McKenna equally pays great attention to the relationship between dreams, poetry and literature, suggesting, for example, that *Finnegans Wake* 'was conceived of as a dream, [but] whose dream is it?' (1995). Like Borges, he writes not only of art's debt to dreams, but to the aesthetic act that is the dream, and like Borges, he likens dreams and visions; though for McKenna the emphasis lay with the visions induced by psychedelic plants. 'The psychedelic experience is hard to remember, dreams are hard to remember. [In a dream] empires fall, dynastic families unfold themselves, power changes hands, princes are beheaded, a pope disgraced. [...] That's the reality of life, but we suppress this chaotic, irrational side' (1995). McKenna distinguishes dream and visionary experiences, describing, for example, the heightened cognitive functions under the effects of cannabis, the encounter with the intelligible 'Logos' under psilocybin, and the astonishing dialogue with radically alien entities under the effects of DMT. He approaches such experiences through a methodology akin to Borges' approach to dreams and mystical vision: not only are they strikingly 'real' for the experiencer, but, crucially, they are noetic – vital sources of knowledge about man's position within the cosmos. 'A hallucination is a species of reality, as capable of teaching you as a videotape about Kilimanjaro or anything else that falls through your life' (1992a). McKenna's comment is notably akin to Borges' vision of the experience of literature: 'I think of reading a book as no less an experience than traveling or falling in love' (Borges 1998: 14). In both cases, the experience of a state of consciousness or non-material reality is as (in)formative as a materially empirical one. Furthermore, as with Borges' reading of Swedenborg, McKenna displays a Jamesian pragmatism in evaluating the psychic value of the experience of the vision before evaluating its specific ontological nature.

McKenna contemplates dreams as the most commonly accessed entrance into this otherworld landscape, suggesting that the dream is cognate with the psychedelic experience: 'I think dreaming and states of psychedelic intoxication, possibly the after-death state, possibly the postapocalypse state for the collectivity, all these are related to each other. Certainly dreaming is the natural access point, because it's part of everyday experience' (1991: 77). This perspective is similar to Borges' own profound interest in dreams (which he described to his 7 year old nephew as 'a hobby' [1984: 29]), and the dream's symmetry with mystical vision. Note that he paid great attention to the fact that Swedenborg's visions were precluded by dreams, and that all through Swedenborg's three decades of spiritual

journeys he maintained a detailed dream diary. Borges, referring to J.W. Dunne, even suggests that, 'each man is given, in dreams, a little personal eternity which allows him to see the recent past and the near future' (1984: 28).

### Daimonic Beings

The nature of such experiences leads us into a consideration of the particular entities encountered in this *mundus imaginabilis* (Corbin). Borges paid close critical attention to the perennial depiction of 'imaginary beings'; in particular, he demonstrates a Jungian approach towards beings whose perennial presence within the human imagination grants them archetypal status. Borges' sister Norah painted angels, and Borges himself published in 1926 an essay entitled 'History of Angels' in which, demonstrating the influence of Swedenborg, he assesses this ancient imaginal being: 'I always imagine them at nightfall, in the dusk of a slum or a vacant lot, in that long, quiet moment when things are gradually left alone, with their backs to the sunset, and when colors are like memories or premonitions of other colors' (2000: 19). Borges evaluates the perennial appearance of such imaginary beings within literature, paying particular attention to them as inspiration for poets. He pays attention to the ancient Muse, and laments her conversion through the language of psychology into 'the unconscious' (1993: 21), and he spoke with fascination about the Brownies whom Stevenson accredited with the inspiration for much of his major fiction: 'Stevenson said he had trained his Brownies in the craft of literature. Brownies visited him in his dreams and told him wondrous tales' (1974: 32). McKenna also reflects this understanding of art and entities, suggesting that 'If we examine the history of early modern science, we discover that some of the major movers and shakers were in fact being guided and directed in the formulation of early science by disincarnate entities' (McKenna 1989). Borges, in particular, appears fascinated by the commerce that Swedenborg maintained with the angels, and gauges the noetic value concerning the world of the dead that Swedenborg gained in this exchange. As with dreams, nightmares and other visions, Borges was not concerned with establishing specific ontological locations for the angelic beings, but with assessing the aesthetic and psychological value of the encounter.

McKenna, in addition to being a reader of mystical and folkloric texts about such meetings, habitually encountered otherworldly entities himself whilst tripping, especially with DMT. He defiantly maintained that such experiences were psychically, if not physically, astonishingly real, and that the sheer outlandishness of



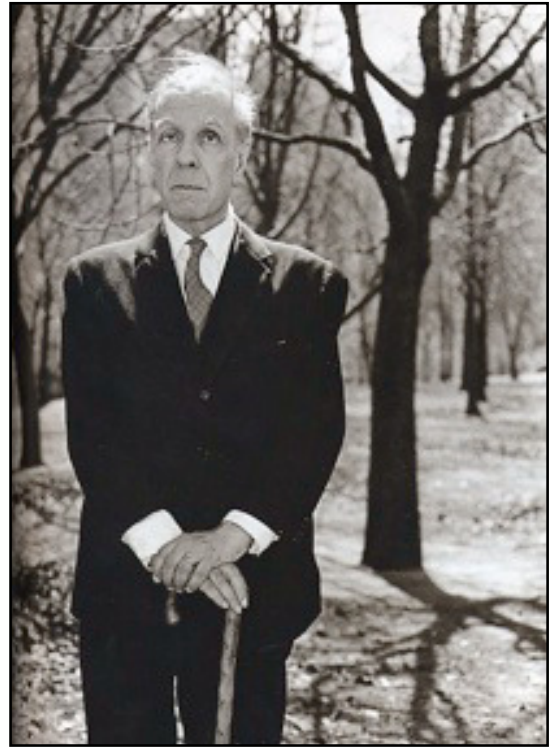
the experience was such that he disavowed his own powers of imaginative creativity in evoking the scene.<sup>4</sup> As such, he reflects Borges' comments that the nightmare could be an aesthetic act that, owing to its sheer oddness, could *not* be begotten by the dreamer. Borges, exhibiting the 'tolerance' of his agnosticism, considers the ancient tradition that dreams and nightmares may have a demonic or infernal origin.

We also have the French word, *cauchemar*, which is probably linked to *nightmare*. In all of these words there is an idea of demonic origin, the idea of a demon who causes the nightmare. I believe it does not derive simply from a superstition. I believe that there is – and I speak with complete honesty and sincerity – something true in this idea. [...] We also have the possibility of a theological interpretation, one that would be in accord with etymology. Take any of the words: the Latin *incubus*, the Saxon *nightmare*, the German *Alp*. All of them suggest something supernatural. Well, what if nightmares were strictly supernatural? What if nightmares were cries from hell? What if nightmares literally took place in hell? Why not? Everything is so strange that even this is possible. (Borges 1984a: 41)

Borges and McKenna also both consider the ancient form of the incubus as the creature that appears in such nightmarish scenes. Borges considers the etymology:

In Greek the word is *ephialtes*: Ephialtes is the demon who inspires nightmares. In Latin we have *incubus*. The incubus is the demon who crushes the sleeper, causing the nightmare. In German we have a very curious word, *Alp*, which has come to mean both the elf and the torment brought by elf – the same idea of a demon who inspires nightmares. (1984a: 41)

McKenna also considers the relationship between the incubi and the modern phenomenon of UFO encounters:



The incubi and succubi of medieval mythology. These were male and female spirits that were thought to come to people in the night and have intercourse with them. This was thought to be very bad for one's health, and general wasting diseases were often explained by invoking this phenomenon. (1991: 72)

Borges was a reader of Jung, and in the 1957 preface to *The Book of Imaginary Beings* makes a firm distinction between 'the zoo of reality [and] the zoo of mythologies, to the zoo whose denizens are not lions but sphinxes and griffons and centaurs' (1974: 14). Within this second-order zoology, however, the distinction lies between creatures that are creations of a specific author, such as the Eloi and the Morlocks of H.G. Wells, and those of collective human imagination, such as angels, fairies, elves and mermaids. Borges' assessment of these archetypal beings is mirrored by McKenna, who, like Borges, is unable to dismiss the entities as being mere

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<sup>4</sup> Such an appraisal of sheer astonishment is common amongst those patients whom Rick Strassman (2001) analysed following their experiences of intravenous DMT, with many respondents suggesting that the experiences were far beyond their own creativity or powers of invention.

textual creations, owing to their persistence across time and their diversity across cultures. McKenna, like Borges, explores this ancient lineage: 'When you start looking at the question of these discarnate entities, the first thing that strikes you is their persistence in human experience and folklore. This is not something unusual or statistically rare' (McKenna 1989). In relation to the evidently fictional (the Morlocks) there is no ontological confusion: they are literary inventions. Concerning the putatively nonfictional, however, such as Swedenborg's angels, Borges suggests that their repeated psychic appearance grants them some undefined ontological status, what Jung would call *psychoid*.<sup>5</sup> If we then consider Borges' enthusiastic interpretation of Swedenborg's visions, we are presented with a radical question about the nature of these psychoid beings. Here is where we find a correspondence with McKenna, whose repeated experiences of the 'self-transforming machine elves' (1991: 16) led him not to question his own sanity (although that is also the case!) but to question whether his own imagination could possibly invent such a vivid and manifestly 'real' landscape populated with 'real' beings. Resistant to the term 'hallucination' McKenna proposes that with the plants 'you are conveyed into worlds that are appallingly different from ordinary reality. Their vividness cannot be expressed enough. They are more real than real. [...] They establish an ontological priority. [...] This is a tremendous challenge to the intellectual structures that have carried us so far during the last thousand years' (1991: 79). Whilst McKenna departs from Borges in experiencing – rather than merely reading about – such a conversely *non-imaginary* landscape, we can nevertheless imagine the scenario wherein Borges reads McKenna's depiction of the elves alongside Swedenborg's depiction of the angels and presumes in his reading a shared experience of both authors.

At this juncture, therefore, we can perceive a similar enterprise carried out not, in this case, by McKenna and Borges, but by McKenna and Swedenborg; and the impression that links them is that of lucid and personal (i.e. non-textual) exploration of otherworldly landscapes. Ralph Waldo Emerson described Swedenborg as a 'Viking,' evoking the sense of epic adventure into the unknown, a term that Borges repeats in his biography of Swedenborg (2000: 449-458). Borges elucidates further, suggesting that Swedenborg 'energetically and

lucidly traveled through this world and the others. [...] that sanguine Scandinavian who went farther than Eric the Red' (2000: 449). Borges places great value upon these voyages of exploration, displaying a curiosity and gleeful wonder in the face of Swedenborg's extraordinary journeys. Here, again, Borges and McKenna depart from each other, as whilst Borges maintains that mystical flights of such magnitude are not available to most people, McKenna would argue precisely the opposite: that they *are* accessible, if only people would avail themselves of the plants. However, McKenna, like Borges, sees a similar methodology and set of objectives of such endeavours, evoking also the metaphor of voyages of exploration. Note that such a metaphor is found also in Huxley: 'antipodes of the mind' (1959: 71), in Leary & Alpert: 'ecstatic voyage' (Watts 1962), and not least in the word 'trip.'

People in the confines of their own apartments are becoming Magellans of the interior world, reaching out to this alien thing, beginning to map invisible landscapes and to bring back stories that can only be compared to the kind of stories that the chroniclers of the New World brought back to Spain at the close of the fifteenth century. Stories of insect gods, starships, unfathomable wisdom, endless realities. (McKenna 1991: 75)

McKenna also proposes that the destination of such voyages is, like the angelic landscapes of Swedenborg, so removed from our everyday conceptual schema of reality, that the trip constitutes a new exercise separate from the scientific method.

I call myself an explorer rather than a scientist, because the area that I'm looking at contains insufficient data to support even the dream of being a science. We are in a position comparable to that of explorers who map one river and only indicate other rivers flowing into it; we must leave many rivers unascended and thus can say nothing about them. (1983)

It is far from my intention to compare Swedenborg and McKenna, as their social, political and religious contexts are widely divergent. It is, however, of interest to perceive

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<sup>5</sup> The real impact in Jung of this distinction between creatures of the imagination and ontologically distinct beings was made clear in 2009 with the long-anticipated publication of *The Red Book*. Jung's dialogues with discarnate souls, with Old Testament prophets and with his guru Philemon display a tension regarding their specific location. Elijah, for example, is adamant that he and Salome: 'we are real and not symbols' (Jung 2009:246). The dead with whom he converses, likewise, are discarnates who were formerly incarnate, and they 'exist' somehow extrinsic to Jung's psyche.

phenomenologically Swedenborg's angels and McKenna's elves: both inhabit a time-space that is separate yet interconnected with ours, both communicate telepathically amongst themselves and to the explorer, both reveal knowledge about other dimensions, the world of the dead and the ancestors, both impart knowledge about the physical impact of man upon the earth. With such considerations, we return to the old debate comparing mystical states and psychedelic states (Watts 1962, Pahnke 1966, Smith 2000), as it is clear from even this perfunctory assessment that we are not dealing with two radically separate or opposed experiences or epistemologies.

### Conscious Reality

'Psychedelic Society,' Terence McKenna expressed, 'is the idea of creating a society which always lives in the light of the mystery of being' (1997: 57). This putative society, as he describes it, is motivated by a Jamesian radical empiricism in which experience is given greater value than it has hitherto (in McKenna's eyes) been given: 'a kind of intellectual anarchy where whatever was pragmatically applicable was brought to bear on any situation' (1997: 58). When we correlate McKenna's statement with Borges' claims for agnosticism – a cognitive and intellectual state that allows even the most outlandish idea 'even God, even the Holy Trinity' to be possible – we can perceive firstly the presence of William James behind both; but more importantly, an epistemological position apropos the non-ordinary states of consciousness and the entities encountered therein. Not only would both Borges and McKenna give great value to their own mystical experiences, but they would not discredit others' experiences *a priori* based upon allegiance to a belief system. McKenna is clear about this. Living psychedelically 'means taking a position *vis-à-vis* the emergent hyper-dimensional reality. It does not necessarily mean becoming a psychedelic drug user yourself; but it does mean admitting to the possibility'; and that in such a position, 'you orient yourself toward the psychedelic experience as a source of information' (1997: 59). It is about giving credence to others' experience – especially their psychedelic experiences – and not denying them as phenomenologically impossible or morally impermissible. In this sense McKenna can be considered agnostic in the sense that Borges elaborates.

'The world is so mysterious and so rich' (1982: 86), writes Borges, reflecting on the fantastical nature of reality. Consequently one need not make a rigid distinction between the wondrous in fiction and the wondrous in life. He declares this very unitive element to

Richard Burgin, explaining that a writer need not be so much inventive as observant: 'It's almost an insult to the mysteries of the world to think that we could invent anything or that we needed to invent anything. And the fact that a writer who wrote fantastic stories had no feeling for the complexity of the world' (1998: 31). From this particular perspective, one can understand how Borges comes to include Wells' Eloi and Swedenborg's Angels in the same compilation (*Book of Imaginary Beings*), as whilst the former is a literary invention and the latter a supposed experience, both nevertheless reflect the extraordinary prevalence of phenomena that defy scientific principles and moral codes. Borges revealed an intuitive understanding of Jung's idea of synchronicity, reflecting it in his discussions of 'symmetries' and 'patterns'. He explained to Burgin that 'I'm on the lookout for symmetries' (1969: 110) describing the statistically improbable occurrence of a miss-translated line of Montaigne appearing in different texts: 'Coincidences are given to us that would involve the idea of a secret plan, no? Coincidences are given to us so that we may feel there is a pattern – that there is a pattern in life, that things mean something [...] a more subtle kind of pattern, no?' (1969: 110). It is from this perspective that Borges derives knowledge from the dreamworld, from visions, and from the revealed patterns of everyday reality. Yet in maintaining that 'coincidences are given to us', and that there is a pattern, 'that things mean something', he is revealing sympathy with Jung's articulation of a conscious universe, or *anima mundi*. In this sense meaning is not arbitrarily ascribed to inanimate features of reality extrinsic to the psyche, but is somehow derived from and interconnection between the individual and the world. Reality is thus in some measure conscious. McKenna also derives knowledge from the dreamworld and the visionary landscapes, and in a similarly subtle fashion, suggests that this meaning is not purely subjective and arbitrary. 'I think the entire message of the psychedelic experience, which is basically the *sine qua non* of the rebirth of alchemical understanding, the very basis of that understanding is that nature seeks to communicate' (1996a).

Here we arrive at a radical vision of the relationship between art and reality, and here the Cervantine riddles that Borges weaves at the level of author, narrator, character and reader assume a more uncanny aspect. Literature operates through symbols whose significance lies with their status as artifice. This is the bedrock of literary criticism. Elements in earlier chapters may allude to those of later ones, dreams may be meaningful or precognitive, and names of characters or locations may encode aspects of the character's personality. In these

matters there is reassurance that the author of such wizardry is the writer. As such there is no cognitive challenge to the reader to permit textual precognitive dreams or symbolic names or locations. Indeed social taboos can be easily broached within the fiction owing to it being fictional; and in this sense a divinatory reading may be depicted – tarot, astrology, I Ching, etc. – and the relationship between the divination and the character’s narrative is permissible owing to its confines within the pages of a novel. Where the boundaries between author, narrator, character and reader are broken down, however, the delineation of fictional and real is likewise blurred and the symbolic aspects of the fiction can interpenetrate the putative solidity of reality. This is a mainstay not only of Borges’ fictions – most famously ‘*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*’ – but was the focus of so much of his literary scholarship, where, for example, he suggests in the poem ‘*Sueña Alonso Quijano*’, that Don Quixote was a dream of Cervantes as much as Cervantes was a dream of the knight. He recognises, for example, the textual and the meta-textual Dante; or the Walt Whitman author, the Walt Whitman character, and the Walt Whitman reader, all of whom interact within the fictional space. As Borges repeatedly argues, fiction is reality and reality is fictional.

Here lies the possibility for the symbolic attributes of the meta-text – the world around us – where names may also be considered representational and dreams and divinations may reveal aspects of the future. Cognitive dissonance may be avoided if God or gods are invoked as the authors of such matters, but in the spiritual agnosticism prevalent in Borges and McKenna, there is a stranger, more puzzling layer present in reality. Both Borges and McKenna critique scientific or philosophical certainties; Borges, for example, calling philosophy mere guesswork (1982: 111), and declaring that ‘there is nothing in the world that is not mysterious’ (1985: 28). McKenna habitually lambasts the ‘scientific’ perspective that assumes that explanations to all of realities phenomena are forthcoming:

The world is not an unsolved problem for scientists or sociologists. The world is a living mystery: our birth, our death, our being in the moment – these are mysteries. They are doorways opening on to unimaginable vistas of self-exploration, empowerment and hope for the human enterprise. And our culture has killed that, taken it away from us, made us consumers of shoddy products and shoddier ideals. We have to get away from that. (1994)

The scientific method would concern itself with seeking eventual concrete answers to these mysteries where the psyche and the world interconnect; and as the answers are not forthcoming, such approaches are at best not considered epistemologically valuable, at worst taboo. McKenna encapsulates this perspective: ‘The intellectual tension that seems to work its way through this society almost like fat through meat is the tension between scientific reductionism and the deeply felt intuition of most people that there is a spiritual dimension, or a hidden dimension, or a transcendental dimension’ (1996b). Art and poetry, however, are the operations of magic and imagination, and as such it is the artistic method that is the most appropriate for exploring these fields of experience at the boundaries of rationality, summarised by McKenna: ‘The imagination is a dimension of non-local information’ (1996b). This is the poetic nature of reality that Borges admired in Blake: ‘Blake also affirms that the salvation of man demands a third requirement: that he be an artist’ (Borges 1995: 13). McKenna ceaselessly attributed this power to art and artists: ‘Art’s task is to save the soul of mankind, and that anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. Because if the artists, who are self-selected for being able to journey into the other, if the artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found’ (1992b).

Borges and McKenna explored the rich traditions at the limits of rational thought – Gnosticism, hermeticism, alchemy, poetry, depth psychology and mysticism – and they shared the epistemological value of ecstasy and mystical states. Borges focused throughout his life on the writings of mystics, such as Swedenborg, Eckhart, Silesius and Blake, whilst McKenna concentrated on the varieties of shamanic experience. Borges was critical of countercultural movements of the 1960s, and consequently would have treated with discretion the psychedelic explorations inherent in many such movements. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the perennial discussion concerning mystical and psychedelic states – William James, Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Huston Smith, etc. – we must consider the related aspects between mysticism and psychedelics rather than the differences. As such, it may be determined that Borges and McKenna were fascinated by similar fields of ecstatic experiences. McKenna writes of shamanism:

The shamanic plants allow the healer to journey into an invisible realm in which the causality of the ordinary world is replaced with the rationale of natural magic. In this realm, language, ideas, and meaning have greater power than cause and effect. Sympathies, resonances, intentions, and personal

will be linguistically magnified through poetic rhetoric. The imagination is invoked and sometimes its forms are beheld visibly. Within the magical mind-set of the shaman, the ordinary connections of the world and what we call natural laws are deemphasized or ignored. [...] The rational, mechanistic, antispiritual bias of our own culture has made it impossible for us to appreciate the mind-set of the shaman. We are culturally and linguistically blind to the world of forces and interconnections clearly visible to those who have retained the Archaic relationship to nature. (1992c: 6-8)

This relationship to nature is precisely what so intrigued Borges about, for example, the otherworld journeys of Swedenborg – this latter-day Viking who voyaged further ‘than Erik the Red.’ Whilst McKenna does not appear to write about Swedenborg, his interest in the otherworld journeys and the beings encountered is manifest in his admiration of John Dee and the magico-chemical individuals of the Elizabethan era. They, he argued, with or without plant-based techniques of ecstasy, were able to enter the same ‘invisible realm’ in which the shaman is familiar.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, therefore, I would argue that there is great value in appraising Borges’ shifting metaphysics alongside McKenna’s. Whilst some scholars of Borges may recoil at the idea of associating Borges with the radical countercultural figure of McKenna I would argue, firstly, that Borges, whilst conservative in some outward manifestations, was deeply radical in his challenges to the very ontological certainties that his reader may hold. As I have hoped to demonstrate in this article, Borges and McKenna share far more than they differ, and that what binds them beyond anything else is a tireless – and always humorous – drive to explore the further reaches of human cognition and experience, all the while knowing that mysteries will remain mysteries. McKenna emphasises the genesis of such an exploration as motivated by a curious and critical mind: ‘You claim this higher level of freedom by the simple act of applying attention to being’ (1997: 63); a position reflected by Borges in his comment that many people are dulled by the world because ‘they take the universe for granted. They take things for granted. They take themselves for granted. That’s true. They never wonder at anything, no?’ (1969: 6). From this position of curiosity, of being puzzled, and of being enthused by such puzzlement; and armed with the pragmatic values of William James in which experience is primary, Borges

and McKenna weave their own paths through traditions of philosophy, religion, theology, literature and poetry, sometimes sharing interpretations, sometimes differing. In particular, their trajectories intertwine in their understanding of the limitations of dogma and doctrine and the fictional and mutable construction of culture. From this their attention is drawn towards the heretical fringes of culture’s traditions: archaic Gnosticism, neo-Platonism, Renaissance hermeticism, alchemy, mysticism, esotericism, and Jung. They share an interest, again reflecting James, of the noetic and ineffable experiences of mystical (and psychedelic) visions, and a fascination with the entities encountered upon these visionary journeys (McKenna’s elves, Swedenborg’s angels). Importantly, they they critique the limitations of post-Enlightenment rationality, and they recognise the importance of art, dreams and the imagination as the true catalysts of cultural development. Plato, according to Borges, did not distinguish between dreaming and thinking.

With Plato, you feel that he would reason in an abstract way and would also use myth. He would do those two things at the same time. But now we seem to have lost that gift. I mean, you have gone from myth to abstract thinking. But Plato could do both at the same time. [...] I suppose at that time it could be done. But nowadays those things seem to be in watertight compartments. Either we are thinking or we are dreaming. But Plato and Socrates could do both. (1998: 160)

Jorge Luis Borges and Terence McKenna, pioneers in their respective cultural fields, were not restricted by the division of reason and myth. Both were thinking and both were dreaming.

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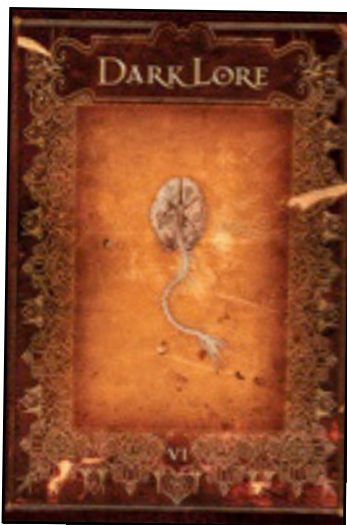
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