



ENGAGED EMANCIPATION

Mind, Morals, and Make-Believe in the
Mokṣopāya (Yogavāsiṣṭha)

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Vasiṣṭha and Borges

In Quest of Postmodern Enlightenment

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Invoking Borges and Vasiṣṭha in the same breath demands a serious consideration of the idealistic thoughts of India and the West. As the narratives of Vasiṣṭha synthesize Advaita, Yogācāra, and other parallel thoughts in India, Borges draws upon a wide range of philosophical and literary sources throughout the world. Rather than time and space posing a divide between the esoteric worlds of Borges and Vasiṣṭha, they are quite close, one could even say identical. Their writings are grounded on theology and mysticism, composed by creative writers of fiction who rigorously argue through their metaphors. Just as Borges often questions his subjective identity or casts the identified Borges as a fiction, Vasiṣṭha is a fictional character borrowed from Vedic myths, invoked by the author of *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (YV), who himself appears to be a fictional Vālmīki. Searching for the personal history of the author is meaningless in either case. This deconstruction of subjectivity is pivotal in addressing any writing that may establish parallels between the thoughts of these two writers. Following the formalist claims, they both least care for "writer as subject matter" as a topic worthy of inquiry: our concern is the work itself and not the authors' lives. While Borges explicitly makes this claim in *The Nothingness of Personality*, both the character Vasiṣṭha identified as the author of the YV and the YV's rejection of the reality of subjectivity

bring these authors parallel to each other. Just as we can find multiple references to "the other" in Borges' writing, Vasiṣṭha appears again and again as a fictional character in his own writing, with the narrator and the imposed character often colliding in their world of virtual reality. We cannot reduce these authors to their historical time and space, categories for which they both care little.

The fictionality of time and that of history allows these two writers to shatter the permeable membrane separating "sacred" and "profane." The narratives of Vasiṣṭha and those of Borges cannot be categorized either as "sacred" or "profane." The sacred relates to truth claims; the profane deconstructs it. The same content found in fiction and in sacred texts aims in two opposite directions: while the first cherishes its fictionality, the second tends to support its reality. The philosophical argument and mythical statements incline to make a truth claim, whereas allegorical narratives or poetic depictions refer to reality without asserting their inherent reality. However, one cannot survive without the other. In the absence of truth claims, their demise and the subsequent carnivals are not possible, and in the absence of the imaginary, truth claims cannot emerge. The boundary between absolutes and imaginary realms collapses in the stories of Vasiṣṭha and Borges, as they both defy these claims. Vasiṣṭha, a Vedic seer, supposed by one Vālmiki to be the narrator of the stories, is a spiritual master, a mystic of the Upaniṣadic tradition, who is describing the nature of reality to prince Rāma. The use of narratives as an instrument to depict reality, a strategy applied in the YV, parallels the underlying philosophy, wherein all that is cognized is merely the pulsation of consciousness, comparable to dreams, and the duality perceived in the world is parallel to the plurality of counter-images found in mirrors. Confirming the statement of Saint-Marine that "all mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country,"¹ Borges utilizes the craft of storytelling to describe his philosophy. Just as the stories like *Tlon*, *Uqbar*, and *Orbis Tertius* are incomprehensible without engaging their philosophical parameters, so also are the narratives of *Lilā*, *Gādhi*, and *Cūḍalā* found in the YV. As historical and fictional are interwoven in the stories of Borges, so also is the case in the stories of Vasiṣṭha, explicitly in the story of *Dāma*, *Vyāla*, and *Kaṭa*, where the fictional monsters and real kings and ministers inhabit the same realm. The interchangeability of the fictional and the real, common to both the writings of Borges and the narratives of Vasiṣṭha, facilitates the claim that the binary of the sacred and profane is nothing more than imagination, yet another fiction, to both of these visionaries.

Interestingly, both Borges and Vasiṣṭha place themselves in their narratives. The tension, co-creation, momentariness, and illusive nature of the I-sense and the socially constructed and phenomenal self are evident in *Borges and I*, wherein the author causes events to happen to the phenomenal Borges, who falsifies and magnifies "things" in the process of being Borges. This meta-Borges who created Borges is now shadowed and defined by the fictional Borges. This meta-Borges is creative and is fond of the game of time and eternity, which now is taken over by the Borges of social construction. This metanarrator within Borges laments that everything belongs to this other Borges, one of his creations.

In the story of *The Sage From Outer Space*, Vasiṣṭha creates a hermitage in the most solitary realm by the power of his imagination and returns to it after visiting the world within a rock, to find in turn that the hermitage created out of his dream is now occupied by another hermit, and his body is decomposing. As soon as he no longer desires to live there, this hermitage of his fancy collapses, and Vasiṣṭha finds himself alongside the other hermit on earth. Now, Vasiṣṭha has the body only of mind. With this mental body, Vasiṣṭha wants to be seen, perceived by gods, and he finds his corporeality. At this point, Vasiṣṭha says that the corporeal Vasiṣṭha is the creation of his mind, the mental Vasiṣṭha. Likewise, in the story of *Lilā*, Vasiṣṭha fancies himself to be a king and immediately finds himself as King Padma, who in turn finds himself to be king Vidūratha.

For both Vasiṣṭha and Borges, the self is the foundation for the rise of subjectivity in which the cognition of externality or objectivity arises. For both Vasiṣṭha and Borges, there is a metadreamer. Though they both are creators of their own fictional world, they both find themselves often occurring within another dream, which Vasiṣṭha calls "the golden embryo" (*Hiranyagarbha*), or the "self-manifest" (*Svayambhū*), and Borges identifies as God, or the dreamer.

As the subjects of narration, they are both absent; neither do they have their independent existence. The identified authors, or the narrators of the fictions are, for both of them, external projections, manipulated by the metasubjects. As Borges demonstrates a slight discomfort towards this projected ego-self, Vasiṣṭha narrates in his story of *Dāma*, *Vyāla*, and *Kaṭa* that these demons, imagined by the metademon Saṃvara to defeat the gods, conquer paradise and the gods, and the metagods alike are unable to defeat the demons due to their lack of ego-sense. Gods hide and wait till the rise of ego among these demons, and victory and fame eventually give rise to the demons' ego-sense, and they fall prey to gluttony and self-glorification. Finally,

they are introduced to fear, and they are easily defeated with the rise of fear.

In the stories of Vasiṣṭha, the imagined selves crumble with the recognition of the dreamer, the state that Vasiṣṭha calls enlightenment. Nevertheless, there can be lower or limited awakenings, wherein one wakes from one dream only to find oneself in another dream, not emerging from dreams in totality. For example, in the story of one hundred Rudras, Jīvaṭa moves from one dream to another, finding his self-identity in various animals and plants and finally returning to the awareness of the metadreamer. Along the lines of the Upaniṣadic dictum of "Thou Art That," the subjects in the narratives of Vasiṣṭha attain enlightenment through recognition of the imagined character of the various self-identities. This peculiarity of superimposed identities can be found frequently in Borges's stories as well. The recurrence of multiple, dreaming subjects is explicit in *The Circular Ruines*, wherein the dreamer recognizes himself as a dream creature, existing in the mind of fire. The recognition of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz in his fight against Martin Fierro and the experience of Senora de Borges when confronted by the Indian English girl are typical examples wherein there is a sudden recognition and the dissolution of distinctness in which subjective boundaries collapse.

In these depictions of the self, the implicit philosophy found in the narratives of Vasiṣṭha range from Advaita Vedānta, Trika Śaivism, to Mahāyāna Buddhism. While the traces of multiple forms of mysticism are found in the writings of Borges, significant to this discussion are the influences of Buddhism and Schopenhauer's philosophy. The influence of Advaita Vedānta in the writings of Schopenhauer is evident, so even if Borges did not have particular expertise on Advaita, he is conversant with this philosophy through its Western iterations.² One of the concepts commonly shared by Schopenhauer and Borges is that the world is a vast oneness, and individuality found in the world is merely an illusion.³ Vasiṣṭha's philosophy, which can be identified in Western terms as subjective illusionism, relies on the same assumption, that the empirical self that is the foundation of all imaginations that consequently lead to suffering, in itself is nothing more than fiction, parallel to dream or illusion.

In many of the stories of Vasiṣṭha and Borges, the protagonists endeavor to escape from unsatisfactory circumstances only to find themselves ultimately in the same situation. In the story of Śikhidhvaja and Cūḍālā, Śikhidhvaja retires from kingship and goes into seclusion to meditate by controlling his senses. Like Siddhārtha, this king abandons his beautiful wife to find himself finally in her lap, being

enlightened by her instructions. Both Janaka and Rāma seek retirement from kingship only to find themselves better rulers. In these narratives, their role is as if predestined, and in this reading we can find these two writers quite close. While predestination is a topic shared by both, Vasiṣṭha often deviates from it, saying that these predestined roles are the dreams of the metadreamer, which, nevertheless, are convertible and changeable. Although the roles assumed by the characters, including the roles of Vasiṣṭha and Borges as storytellers, are products of their own action (*karma*), nonetheless, they remain in the hands of the dreamer. The tension between predestined fate and independent action comes to a climax in the story of the sons of Indu, who, recognizing that the creation of God is predestined to dissolve, assume the role of better creators, starting their own creation. In this depiction, individuals are not only capable of reversing predestined roles or roles given by the metadreamer; they can reconfigure the dream itself or become their own "programmers."

Behind the Screen of Metaphors

One needs to gaze behind the screen of metaphors to find the logic inherent in the writings of Vasiṣṭha and Borges. Neither hesitates to alter his metaphors time and again. Just as the reader may identify "magical realism" in metaphors such as the mirror, labyrinth, dream, aleph, and the fictional nature of cognition itself found in the writings of Borges,⁴ the narratives of Vasiṣṭha present metaphoric logic "in the sense that instead of producing inferences within an already known language game or paradigm, it heralds a new language game or a new paradigm."⁵ As Borges guides us through his essays to understand his mind, Vasiṣṭha often philosophizes upon the narratives and deconstructs narratives to initiate his argument. For example, in the story of the *Great Forest*, Vasiṣṭha describes a man with one thousand arms who beats himself, as he runs through a forest dense with thorny brush. Vasiṣṭha believes that the person with one thousand arms is the mind with countless manifestations, a well and banana grove represent hell and heaven, and the dense forest with thorny brush is the life of a worldly man. In *Nonexistent Princes*, Vasiṣṭha parallels the world that is conceived as real with a nanny's tale of nonexistent princes who quench their thirst in nonexistent rivers and enter nonexistent cities. In the case of either writer, the underlying philosophy is explicit, with their fictional and logical writings overlapping in the juncture of imaginary time and space.

Foremost among the metaphors found in Vasiṣṭha's description of reality is that of dream. The dreams of Vasiṣṭha often refute reality as conceived by Vālmīki, and they also confront it. Here, dreams not only describe the illusory nature of what is perceived but also demonstrate a creative nature of the self and by that, establish as parallel any other reality which does not bear a higher degree of reality than anything conceived by the self.

In the writings of Borges, *The Circular Ruins* and *The God's Script* are prominent in their exploration of dream. The protagonist of the first story is committed to dream a man and insert him into reality. In this, which one may say is the process of lucid dreaming, the protagonist first learns to dream properly and in due time brings his dream creation forward, complete in minute detail. Now this creator does not want his son or his dream creation to find out that he is merely a phantom. This fear comes to an end with the recognition by the protagonist that he himself is dreamt by another, as fire does not burn him but only caresses when he is engulfed in flames. In *The Other*, Borges brings to the surface a dilemma of two dreamers, one Borges, and the other, Borges. In this, the first Borges finds himself as a dream character of another Borges. The theme of creating something phenomenally real in the process of lucid dreaming is consistent in the story of *Dreamtigers* as well, wherein Borges fails to dream, or in another sense, to give life to his dream object.

The narratives of Vasiṣṭha remind us again and again of the parallel between the phenomenal and the dream world. A typical example is the story of Gādhi. Gādhi longs to know the magical power of Viṣṇu, renowned for his illusive power to project both subjective and objective realities. With this magical power, Gādhi faints briefly when bathing in a river, and awakes to find himself surrounded by his grief-stricken relatives mourning his death. He experiences his rebirth as the tribesman Kaṭaṅja, who one day finds himself appointed as king, renamed Gavala. Gādhi wakes up from his swoon when Gavala decides to kill himself and jumps into fire. To make the story even more interesting, Gādhi visits the place that he experienced in his dream only to confirm that it really exists and there indeed was a king Gavala. At the depth of these narratives is the shift in subjective identities. The multiple identities experienced by the subject in the story of Gādhi are equal, whether considered to be real or false.

The next significant metaphor in the stories of Borges is that of mirror. The profanity and illusiveness of mirror is explicit in Borges' stories such as *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. In this story, he cites from an imaginary reference that "mirrors and fatherhood are abominable

because they multiply and disseminate that universe."⁶ This mirror is again hanging in the *Library of Babel*, wherein one finds it in the hallway after passing a spiral stairway. Borges describes this mirror as faithfully duplicating all appearances, suggesting that the "Library" itself is finite, pointing out the duplication produced by mirrors. In the same paragraph, Borges claims that he prefers a mirror to the "dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite."⁷ A mirror is also the central theme of *The Draped Mirrors*.⁸ In this story, he describes the horror of mirrors that he felt as a child with their "spectral duplication or multiplication of reality."⁹ The story ends with Julia draping mirrors to avoid seeing the face of Borges, one of his former faces. Although not explicitly mentioned as "mirror image" in the stories such as *Borges and I* or in the poem *The Borges*, the conflict between real and projected self-identities is clear. These examples, while denying the reality of appearance and of plurality, nevertheless do confirm something foundational which is singular in essence.

Mirroring or multiplication of a singular reality to varied forms is the core of the philosophy of Vasiṣṭha. Commonly found in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Advaita Vedānta, and Trika Śaivism, this process of the duplication of reality into multiple forms is described in terms of counterimage (*pratibimba*), with the explicit example of a mirror (*darpaṇa*). Although the depiction of a mirror, mirror images, or reflection in these philosophies is not couched in the language of horror, these metaphors nevertheless are identified as the root of suffering, of bondage, and of death, caused by ignorance of the singularity of the reality beneath all these reflections. Both Advaita Vedānta and Trika Śaivism propound a school of thought identified as "the doctrine of the mirror-image (*pratibimbavāda*). A sentence that can represent both of these philosophies is: "The world is within the self, comparable to the city being seen in a mirror." This is being seen as if outside due to illusion like in a dream.¹⁰ With the unmistakable imprint of Yogācāra Buddhism, the depiction of the phenomenal in the YV is often described as "appearance" with ample reference to the erroneous cognition of the "hair net" perceived due to ophthalmic disorder.

This self-duplication is at the core of the story of Līlā. When Vasiṣṭha fancies himself to be a king, he finds himself as the king Padma without leaving his earlier form of Vasiṣṭha. In order to accompany the king, Vasiṣṭha fancies his wife, Arundhatī, who manifests as Līlā, to be his queen. This Līlā, in turn, finds herself duplicated in another realm that she enters through the process of abandoning her I-sense. She is actually able to bring her mirror-image Līlā to the

realm of the first Līlā with the counterimage of Padma, this time as Vidūratha. The first Līlā recognizes her true essence with instruction by the goddess of wisdom, while the second Līlā remains in her realm to please the king. Vasiṣṭha, the awakened one, is apparently also the king, the bound one, fancied by the enlightened one. At the end, the notions of the self, bondage, and even enlightenment get jumbled together, for Vasiṣṭha as Vasiṣṭha-who-does-not-have-the-ego-sense-of-Vasiṣṭha is the enlightened one, and the very Vasiṣṭha who fancies himself as the king is bound and is accompanied by his wife, who in her essence is liberated although still bound as Līlā.

In Vasiṣṭha's worldview, there is no essential being of the plurality of individualities. This allows for something that exists, or in essence experiences its being, to self-replicate and assume multiple subjectivities. This power, often associated with Viṣṇu, is also inherited by Saṃvara, a demon in the narrative of Vasiṣṭha. Correctly identified as the "concealer," this demon projects himself in the form of Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa, who are free from ego sense and also emanates in the form of another set of demons—Bhīma, Bhāsa, and Dṛḍha—who are endowed with self-knowledge. In light of these stories, Vasiṣṭha describes the nature of creation as something conceived by the self within itself. Comparable to the waves of the ocean, when the self is somehow stirred with emotions, it manifests itself in the forms of subject and object. In the ground where these dualities appear, there is neither perceiver nor perception. This ground, considered to be the "Creator" is supposed to be free from delusions in relation to its creation. This creator is also equated to mind, and his body, to mental body. Comparing the ornaments of gold and gold itself, the duality in the philosophy of Vasiṣṭha exists in the mind of the creator. While all appearances are precluded from having their own being in the absence of the mind of the dreamer, the ground of dream is changeless in these depictions. Borges also does not reject the ground of all appearances. The acceptance of the ground of the appearances as real and the rejection of the absolute nature even of that foundation are the points that distinguish Advaita Vedānta from Mahāyāna Buddhism. For Nāgārjuna and along the same lines as other Madhyamaka thinkers, appearance and the foundation of appearance are both equally false. Although momentary self-identities and their falsity are explicit in Borges's *The Draped Mirrors*, other stories such as *Library of Babel*, *Tlon*, *Uqbar*, and *Orbis Tertius* allow for the possibility of something existing beneath appearance. The philosophy found in the YV can otherwise be deciphered following the philosophy of Yogācāra Buddhism, but this changeless awareness as the ground of

multiple appearances is one core element that does not allow it to be completely identified with Buddhist philosophy. This could also be the reason for Borges to state that he does not consider himself a Buddhist, although his fascination with Buddhism is evident.¹¹

Borges is curious about magic. He says that as a child he failed to actualize a tiger in his dream, demonstrating a lack of magical power. This longing for magical power appears fulfilled in *The God's Script*, where he finds himself in a shell as Tzinacán, the "magician of the pyramid of Qaholom."¹² As a magician he is endowed with the power to materialize his dream, and he eventually fills the prison cell with the sand of his imagination. The dreamer in *The Circular Ruins* is often identified as a magician, with his application of dream parallel with magic. Either as a dreamer or as a magician, he maintains his distance from the characters of his fiction, although he often questions the reality of one or the other.

The story of Lavaṇa is the masterpiece of Vasiṣṭha that demonstrates subjective illusion with the application of magic. In this story, a magician causes the king to swoon, and the king finds himself in a desolate forest where he is rescued by a woman leather worker, whom he marries and with whom he has a number of children. Because of his inability to feed his children during a famine, he jumps into a fire and wakes up as Lavaṇa with a lapse of just a moment. In the same way, the magical power of Viṣṇu is explicit in the story of Gādhī, described above. In these narratives, "magic" (*māyā*) is the often-repeated term for describing the phenomenal, the cause that gives rise to plurality in terms of subject and object. Just as magic as found in the narratives of Vasiṣṭha is interchangeable with dream, so also with mirror images in the writings of Borges. In his *Fauna of Mirrors*, Borges describes two worlds—the world of mirrors and the world of men—wherein one could go through one world to the other through mirrors. When the mirror people invaded the earth, the Yellow Emperor, with his magical power, imprisoned them in the mirrors. The magic spell of the Yellow Emperor is described as reducing mirror people to "mere slavish reflections."¹³

The possibility of mirroring inside the mirror image, dreaming within the dream, and the circularity of time are themes that interweave the texts of Borges and the stories of Vasiṣṭha within other stories. Both Vasiṣṭha and Borges depict themselves as characters within the story. Borges is notorious for providing fanciful references and describing texts within texts. This genre is commonly found in Indian literature, including the major epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. The narratives of Vasiṣṭha and Rāma appear in the conversation between

Sutikṣṇa and Agastya, found in turn in the conversation between Kāruṇya and Agniveśya, which in turn is found in the conversation of Vālmīki and Ariṣṭanemi. This fabrication of the setting with layered narrators depicts confronting philosophies, as is explicit in the most external layer of the conversation the tension between action and knowledge, reproduced from the crucial dialogue between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Interweaving of philosophies in the process of metatextuality and metanarratives, in the case of Borges, is exemplary in *Tlon, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius*. The conflict of realism and idealism, with contrasting models of philosophy, is apparent in the tension among the characters of this narrative.

The Labyrinth of Time and Space

Neither Vasiṣṭha nor Borges believes in linear time. Time, in their depiction, does not occur when things happen, nor is it the foundation of reality. Instead, the conscious gaze is reality, wherein time can be found and is grounded. As this awareness is found in the present mode, all that exists is the present. Memory of the past and anticipation of the future both occur in the present. Borges draws the concept of eternity from Greek sources, and this concept is equally prevalent in India. In *A New Refutation of Time*, Borges relies on Buddhist sources as well, particularly the conversation of the Bactrian king Meander with Nāgasena. His deviation from linear and singular time allows him to introduce subjective time and the concept of cyclical time in his writings. This affirmation of subjective time is explicit in many of his writings. For example, in *The Other Death*, Pedro Damian dies a cowardly death only in turn to have it overturned. The subjective aspect of time prominently appears in *The Secret Miracle*, wherein Borges injects his own philosophical arguments while describing the death of Hladic. In this story, he is also explicit about the unity of time, space, and action.¹⁴ Hladic experiences one year's events within some fifteen minutes of phenomenal time, so compelling an adventure that he begged God to complete his drama.

Borges adopts some model of cyclical time, not in the literal sense where the same events keep recurring, but when similar events repeat in a generic sense, as the library he describes is unlimited and cyclical. He argues that "in an infinite amount of time the number of possible permutations must be reached, and the universe will have to repeat itself."¹⁵ The most explicit depiction can be found in his essay *Circular Time*, where he "seeks to define three fundamental versions of

the doctrine of the eternal return."¹⁶ This circularity is explicit in *The Circular Ruins* and *The Golem*. It is actually this understanding of time that underlies his philosophy of history. The series of metanarratives interwoven in the Chinese doll-within-doll style found in *The Garden of Forking Paths* brings the same notion of time with certain particularities. A sentence found in this story, "the future already exists," exactly presents the Buddhist Sarvāstivāda position that all three modes of time, past, present, and future, exist at the same present moment.

The consideration of the doctrine of cause and effect and future events as the consequence of past events leads Borges to adopt a type of predeterminism. The subjects of his narrative face the predestined fate that is determined at the very moment of the first action. This is explicit in *The Garden of the Forking Paths*, where Borges states that "the author of an atrocious undertaking ought to imagine that he has already accomplished it, ought to impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past."¹⁷ As this suggestion may appear to countenance a single predestined future, Borges clarifies his philosophy in depth in the last section of the story, where he states, "He believed in infinite series of times, in a growing, dazzling net of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. This network in times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embrace all possibilities of time. We do not exist in a majority of these times; in some you exist and not I; in others I, and not you; in others, both of us."¹⁸

Both the cyclical and subjective aspects of time are at the core of the stories of Vasiṣṭha. Several of the stories demonstrate the illusory nature of time as a pedagogical tool for enlightenment. As found in the story of Gādhi, Vasiṣṭha instructs Rāma to "live in the present," saying that "when the mind stops linking itself to the past and to the future it becomes no-mind."¹⁹ This "no-mind" is the enlightened state of Vasiṣṭha, as it is the mind which is identified as the hub around which the vicious cycle of rebirth revolves. Playing with the double meaning of the term *kāla* as time and death in Sanskrit, the YV depicts time in three different ways. The first is the time in which events occur. When describing this time as the creator and destroyer of everything, the statements depict a vivid image of time as magician, and mighty like a lion, rooted in the absolute Brahman. The second type of time depicted in the YV is as the God of death. This depiction of time grants it more subjective freedom than the previous concept of time. The third aspect of time, identified as *kṛtānta* or the end of action, is the inevitable result of action. This mode of time is similar to the concept of predestination found in the writings of Borges.

The stories of Lavaṇa and Gādhi are the best examples demonstrating the subjective nature of time. In a single moment, Lavaṇa experiences more than a decade of time. Even longer than that, Gādhi experiences in the same amount of time his death and rebirth as a tribesman and his appointment as a king and the death of that king. As is the time described, a magician appears in the palace of Lavaṇa to bring him to this nightmarish experience. The stunning similarity with the time experienced by Hladic in the story of Borges is explicit. The magical nature of time is somehow related to God, as is demonstrated when Gādhi requests proof of the magic of God and Lord Viṣṇu gives Gādhi a vision of his death and afterlife. The same occurs for Hladic.

The story of Līlā, complex in its depiction, can be compared to *The Garden of Forking Paths*. Here, there is not one predestined future, as a double of Līlā concurrently appears. The multiple manifestations of Līlā and the transmigration of Padma as Vidūratha depict different layers of time experienced by these two subjects, while all of these modes are predestined with a single desire of Vasiṣṭha to find himself as king. It can be said that all the events in the future, if there really is that, are predestined at the very moment the sage desires to be a king. As he is the one endowed with desire, his desire creates the double of his wife Arundhatī, who in one form of Līlā attains enlightenment but remains ignorant in another form. The complexity of time and the concept of predestination resurface in the story of Bhuṣūṇḍa, where the bird-sage experiences many cycles of creation in his single lifetime.

The stunning similarities in the depiction of time, the role of predestination, and the recurrence of time found in the narratives of Vasiṣṭha and Borges can be attributed to an idealism shared by both authors. The philosophical concept of Bishop Berkeley, *esse est percipie*, and one of the understandings of the concept of *dr̥ṣṭisr̥ṣṭi* found in the YV are identical, leading to the denial of entities out of the domain of experience. Time has been a crucial point in this discussion, as it is frequently described in common conversation as relative. Borges appears to be less emphatic about the unreality of space compared to Vasiṣṭha, than he is about time. In either case, the nonsubstantial nature of time and space, or of timespace as a singular entity, relates to the concept of the illusory manifestation, magical appearance, or multiple replications of reality. As we find fictitiousness of time and space in the stories of both Borges and Vasiṣṭha, this raises another question: Is the subject that experiences modifications of time real, or is this the foundation for all other appearances?

The Dreamer: In Quest of the Real Self

Borges consistently presents the self with counterparts or multiple images, as found in *Borges and I* as well as *The Draped Mirrors*, where he reminds the reader of his multiple faces, and he treats himself, the individual, as a type. The first concept parallels the Buddhist concept of person, in which what is conceived to be self is nothing but a series of concepts simultaneously arising and dependent upon their cause. This cause-and-effect relationship is depicted as the twelvefold wheel of existence, demonstrating the circularity of the chain of events. In the second concept, Borges advocates some type of *avatar*, explained with a plethora of examples of mirrors with the underlying concept of infinity. A subtle distinction requires exploration, as circular causality of nonsubstantial entities is explicit in the first model, whereas the concept of *avatar* is similar to the example of mirror where the essential being of one entity is a requirement for duplication.

Borges appears bewitched by the concept of infinity, to the extent that he finds this concept to corrupt and perplex all other concepts.²⁰ According to Borges, "infinity" affects our perception of the world, specifically of time. For him, infinity completely envelops eternity and the concept of space and is interlinked with his understanding of the circularity of time. His metaphor of the labyrinth is somehow related to this encircling, not leading to one single point.²¹ The self, in this argument, is eternally circling around the same patterns of behavior, of ideas, and eventually of the concepts of the phenomenal world that are archetypal in nature and essentially devoid of their own self-nature. He concludes the series of entertaining arguments in the *Avatars of the Tortoise* by citing Novalis: "[T]he greatest sorcerer would be he who bewitched himself to the point of taking his own phantasmagorias for autonomous apparitions."²² Invoking an idealistic claim that the world is hallucinatory, he concludes that the world as we conceive of it is what we have dreamed it to be. This conclusion allows us to interpret the concept of the self in the writings of Borges as endowed with replication and forgetfulness so that forgetfulness of its own other manifestations ensues.

The other side of this discussion is enlightenment, in light of changing shifting personalities and the archetypal nature of the person under consideration. Borges claims that "the idea that a man may be many men is, of course, a literary commonplace . . ."²³ If we apply this statement to cosmology, it leads to the worldview with a singular center of experience, the source, or primal cause that gives rise to infinite counterimages. It is explicit in his *God's Script*, where Tzinacán's

moment of highest rapture can be compared to religious ecstasy, with the essence described as "the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate."²⁴ The description is first unitary, as Borges describes Tzinacán having union with the divine. But he immediately relates that Tzinacán also experiences union with the universe. The perception of the wheel, which again suggests circularity and infinity, the disc of Lord Viṣṇu, and the Buddhist symbol of dharma which is described in negative terms by Nāgārjuna and here by Borges, is immediately followed by the all-confirming experience occurring at "every place at one time." The final mode of rapture comes with the statement, "I, Tzinacán, would rule the lands Moctezuma ruled. But I know I shall never say those words, because I no longer remember Tzinacán."²⁵ The experience of Tzinacán embodies seemingly contradictory elements such as fire and water; it harnesses opposites in nature; and there is the obliteration of time. Bell-Villa parallels the description of Tzinacán in terms of repeated "I saw" with the description of Arjuna's encounter with the divinity in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.²⁶ This affirmative description of the mystical experience of Tzinacán reminds Bell-Villa of the Upaniṣadic description of the unity with all that exists, found in the discussion of Śvetaketu and Āruṇī and confirmed by sentences such as "Thou art That."²⁷

This mystical encounter of Tzinacán in his *Avatars of the Tortoise* gives a glimpse of the reality as Borges conceives of it: "It is hazardous to think that a coordination of words could resemble the universe. It is also hazardous to think that of those illustrious coordinations." He concludes this discussion by invoking Schopenhauer for the statement that the world is a factory of will, in which Borges says that he has "glimpsed some trace of the universe." In this gaze where the cosmic and individual merge, and distinctions of the subject and object dissolve, the remnants of difference in the phenomenal are no more real than those of imagination, and in this world, the fictional parallels the external. Although Borges may himself be in the dream of someone else—perhaps that someone is God—he nonetheless has the same power to dream, create characters and give them life, and breathe through them, as they are also nothing but avatars, avatars of Borges, or may be, to entertain the formalist claim, in the mind of the reader, in myriad forms.

The *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali at one point describes that a yogin in his highest state of creativity, gained through prolonged meditation, can generate himself as multiple persons and experience different karmas simultaneously as a way of attaining a shortcut to

salvation.²⁸ Following the *Ekajīva* model of Advaita, there indeed is a single mind conceiving plurality in the form of both subject and object. Vasiṣṭha prefers this single mind to be the primordial mind, the first ripple of "being only" or "consciousness only" that is identified as Brahman, although this naming is not really describing the thing in itself but only satisfies our need of language for dialogue. This mind, for Vasiṣṭha, is Hiranyagarbha or Svayambhū, the cosmic embryo or the self-manifest. Pertinent here is the Upaniṣadic depiction of Hiranyagarbha as the archetypal mind that collectively refers to all individual minds in their dreaming state.²⁹ In this picture, what we may call God is actually the collective dreamer, or the first dreamer, who dreams to become many, and multiple subjects consequently arise. One may call this cosmic projection self-emanation or *avatāras*.

This very power of the self to create its mirror image allows Vasiṣṭha to manifest as King Padma in the story of Līlā without abandoning his previous form or leaving the possibility to retrace his previous identity. This allows Līlā to not only meet her counterpart, but also to recognize that all identities are equally fictitious, including that of Arundhatī. The doctrine of *pratibimba* or counterimage not only describes the potency of the self to be many; it further confirms this self-emanation and depicts this as somehow haunting and hallucinating, binding and mesmerizing, tormenting and trembling.

In *The God's Script*, Tzinacán experiences mystical oneness with everything and then says that now he can be the king, but he also says that he is no longer Tzinacán. In Vasiṣṭha's narratives, king Janaka faces the same situation, for he is king but no longer has the ego sense of Janaka. The earlier Janaka is suffering and bound with ego sense, whereas the latter Janaka is free, endowed with self-experience, which one may call a mystical state of unity with totality. The very discourse of Vasiṣṭha with Rāma is grounded upon the same platform, with Rāma depressed because of the dissatisfactory world that culminates in suffering no matter what we do. The intention of the text itself, through the instructions of Vasiṣṭha, is to awaken Rāma to the experience of totality or to enter into the mind of the primordial dreamer. It is not to create individual dreams and be haunted by their creatures. At the end, Rāma wakes up to reality and says, "There is nothing that I should or should not do. However, your words should always be honored" (CYV, 420).

The experience of Tzinacán and that of the magician in *The Circular Ruins* resemble the narrative of Bhuṣuṇḍa. In the opening of the story, Vasiṣṭha describes his own genesis, that in the infinite and invisible consciousness there is a mirage-like appearance of the world

in a corner, if it exists, where the Creator dwells. Vasiṣṭha says that he is the mind-born son of this Creator. Vasiṣṭha describes that creation arose out of the notion of creation that causes division between light and world, where light refers to consciousness and the world, to matter. The circularity of time and events is confirmed through the experience of Bhuṣuṇḍa, who is an everlasting enlightened crow. This immortal crow claims in this narrative that whatever is happening in the present creation has happened in exactly the same order in three previous creations. He claims to have the memory of the events of ten previous creations. While describing the cyclical nature of events and time, this also suggests a noncyclical aspect as well: creations sometimes do recur, and other times, do not. Bhuṣuṇḍa, the hybrid of a crow born of the goddesses' lustful orgy, claims to have witnessed multiple creations wherein different gods, human beings, or demons initiate creation. The focus of this bird is only in the present moment, as he claims to not contemplate past or future. He also claims to have no consideration for being or nonbeing. The existence or the eternity of being experienced by Bhuṣuṇḍa coincides with his freedom from the concept of time and of death. There actually is no death to be experienced if the subject of one's gaze is focused only in the present, the moment that is immediately given. In this pure awareness, or the awareness of being or the being of awareness, time is not cognized but felt, and since death is not felt, it does not exist.

This bird instructs Vasiṣṭha to realize this world as a long dream or a long-standing mass hallucination. Bhuṣuṇḍa, confirming the experience mentioned by Vasiṣṭha, further claims that he is born of the mind of the creator. He also says that the world arises in the mind as a notion. But what is significant in this discussion is the claim Bhuṣuṇḍa makes, that the Creator is but a notion in the cosmic mind, just as the world appearance is. This depiction is found earlier in this text, particularly in the section on creation, where Vasiṣṭha describes that, just as many forms are latent in gold, to be molded in the forms of various items of jewelry, so also are the creations conceived of in the mind of the creator. This mind of the creator is identified with the infinite self. The world appears in this mind, just as a mirage appears in the form of a real river. This creator, the mind, is free from the notions of subject and object, but nevertheless these concepts arise in the process of creation. These are the thoughts that pulsate in the mind of the creator, giving rise to duality. Although this primordial mind is considered to be free from delusions, this mind nonetheless dreams. The explicit reference found in this section confirms that the creator is the mind, with mind being his body. Just as thoughts are

inherent to the mind, so also are the worlds in reality merely thoughts in this mind.

This demonstrates circularity and the way Vasiṣṭha resolves it is by imagining the cosmic mind as singular, as the substrate of imagination or dream. In this depiction, dreaming appears to be the mind's inherent nature, as no reason could justify the purpose of dreaming in this endless cycle. This circularity is further depicted in the metaphor of consciousness as a vine that sprouts with the sprinkling of latent tendencies and is endowed with the buds of desire wherein past creations are described as filaments. The concept of cause and effect, or that of karma and rebirth, as found in the discussion of the *Avatārs of the Tortoise* in the story of Borges, likewise has the consequence of circularity. His argument of infinity appears to surround this consequence of circularity. The inward flash, or the experience of the dreamer, if that happens, gives the awareness that the subject is in hallucination, and the appearance of the world becomes parallel to a dream in this esoteric experience.

This "self" is realized by Vasiṣṭha when he claims that he himself is a mere fiction of the Creator and by Bhuṣuṇḍa, the crow who gives two different accounts of genesis (he is the mind-born of Go; he is born of the orgy of the goddesses engaged in beastiality). Although Bhuṣuṇḍa does not describe his other dreams, he nevertheless maintains a dialogue with another dream-creature, Vasiṣṭha. Somehow the exchange of language is maintained in this metahallucination. This realization of the self, exchanged in conversation, confirms that the self is not the identity of either of the selves; neither is this the dilemma in which a particular identity is perceived as real. It is the realization that none of the faces is real, as Borges describes in the story of the draped mirrors.

After king Lavaṇa awakens from the swoon, he goes out on an expedition, only to find out that what he dreamt was in fact real. When Gādhi wakes up from the magical slumber, he confirms the same paradox, that he was simultaneously Gādhi and the tribesman. But was there Gādhi when there was an absence of Gādhi-consciousness? The Gādhi of the flesh cannot confirm its inherent being, and the self that finds its identity did not confirm the existence of the form of Gādhi. As in the story of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz in his fight against Martin Fierro, Gādhi does not maintain double identities. In the case of Señora de Borges, she finds self-identity when confronted by the Indian English girl.

The circularity of creation is evident in the story of the sons of Indu. In this paradigm, the ability to dream vividly creates worlds.

In the metafiction of the Creator, the characters, the sons of Indu, create their own fictions. Are the sons of Indu able only to dream of creation, placing themselves parallel to the Creator, or are they able to imagine the Creator who can carry out creation? Vasiṣṭha escapes from this circularity by maintaining the singularity of the primordial dreamer, although there is nothing mentioned about the limit or the scope of dream.

Unlike the stories of Borges when the realization of oneself as fictional dramatically ends the story, Vasiṣṭha's stories do not end that way. Knowing that it is a dream does not end the dream; it merely provides self-realization, whatever that realization may be. The god or the first dreamer, as maintained by Vasiṣṭha, is endowed with the knowledge of the self, which does not stop him from dreaming, although sometimes this Creator appears to have the arrogance of Creatorhood, and when confronted by parallel creators, is found tormented. This god is once enlightened by the Sun, in the story of the sons of Indu, who instructs the Creator to not imagine himself as anything more than someone whose nature is to keep creating. As the sun says, to be sun implies to shine, to give light. The sun cannot be the sun and not be shining. With this maxim, the sun instructs the Creator to keep creating, although cautioning the Creator to have no self-pride in doing something that one cannot do otherwise. This depiction also indicates that enlightenment is not some only once-in-a-lifetime type of experience, nor is the case of falling into a dream. Dreaming and waking up from a dream are the eternal processes of consciousness that cannot do otherwise.

While maintaining the hallucinatory nature of the world that appears, Borges tends to accept the fictionality of the phenomenal as that of fiction, whereas, in the case of Vasiṣṭha, the focus appears to be to maintain the reality of fiction, of imagined space and time. The stories of Lavaṇa and Gādhi do not appear to reject commonsense experience, but rather they confirm the experience of hallucination. This, however, does not make a categorical distinction between the two writers, as both accept the nonsubstantiality of there being either Borges or Vasiṣṭha.

Notes

I am grateful to Bill Nariccio, Arindam Chakrabarti, and Christopher Chapple for their inspiration and insight in writing this chapter.

1. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 80.
2. Borges's development of thought can be found in the essays "Forms of a Legend," "What Is Buddhism" written with Alicia Jurado, and "Bud-

dhism," in *The Seven Nights*. He discusses Sāṃkhya and Vedānta as antecedents to Buddhism.

3. Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fictions: A Guide to His Mind and Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 38.

4. See Lois Parkinson Zamora, "The Visualizing Capacity of Magical Realism: Objects and Expressions in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges," *Janus Head* (Fall 2002): 21–37.

5. Bruno Lo Turko, "The Metaphorical Logic of the *Mokṣopāya*," in *The Mokṣopāya, Yogavāsiṣṭha and Related Texts*, ed. Jürgen Hanneder (Aachen, 2005), 138.

6. George Luis Borges, *Labyrinth: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), 4.

7. *Ibid.*, 51.

8. George Luis Borges, *Dreamtigers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 27–28.

9. *Ibid.*, 27.

10. *Dakṣiṇāmūrttistava* 1.

11. *Seven Nights*, cited by W. H. Bossart, *Borges and Philosophy: Self, Time and Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

12. Borges, *Labyrinth*, 169.

13. For discussion on magical realism, see Zamora 2002.

14. See Borges, *Labyrinth*, 91.

15. In "The Doctrine of the Cycles," cited in Bossart, *Borges and Philosophy*, 104.

16. Bossart, *Borges and Philosophy*, 105.

17. Borges, *Labyrinth*, 22.

18. *Ibid.*, 28.

19. Swami Venkatesananda, *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 1984), 208.

20. *Avatārs of the Tortoise*, para 1.

21. For interrelatedness of circularity and infinity, see "The Garden of Forking Paths," by Jorge Luis Borges.

22. *Avatārs of the Tortoise*, last paragraph.

23. In *The Approach to al-Mu'tasim*. Cited in Bossart, *Borges and Philosophy*, 143.

24. W. T. Stace, *Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 14. For discussion on Tzinacan's experience, see Bell-Villada, *Gene H. Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to his Mind and Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 211–19.

25. Borges, *Labyrinth*, 173.

26. Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fictions*, 213–14.

27. *Ibid.*, 214–15.

28. *Nirmānacittāny asmitāmātrāt* |.

29. See *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad. And the Kārikās of Gauḍapāda* for further discussion.