

Shamanic Dreams and Experiences in Jorge Luis Borges and José María Arguedas

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At first glance the creative universes of Jorge Luis Borges and José María Arguedas couldn't be farther apart. These two giants of Latin American literature have typically represented opposite ends of a very rich continuum of dreams, experiences and perspectives. Borges is often seen as the universalist through whose work many literary traditions can be read, almost as if—as some critics have said—he wouldn't belong to any particular country or region of the world. Arguedas, instead is seen not only as Peruvian, but, particularly, as a voice for the Indians, a writer trying to make known a rich tradition that was mainly oral, and which had been till then misunderstood by those writing from outside that culture.

Arguedas and Borges, though, have in common their interest in the poetic capturing of a reality they know is too vast to be rendered in language. They also share a fascination with the porous limits between the visible and the invisible and with forms of perceiving that are independent of hegemonic perspectives. Let's see first how being born on the same continent, they came to be so different; how the circumstances of their childhood and adolescence totally diverged; and how their paths began to converge at a deeper level, beyond nationalities and historical circumstances, into a common interest in the inner realities and the transcendence and immanence of the Spirit.

Jorge Luis Borges was born in 1899 in Buenos Aires, into an Argentine family whose roots went back to the founders of the nation, and grew up in a house where the swords and portraits of relatives that fought in the wars of independence still hung on the walls. Borges' paternal grandfather married an English woman who was visiting Argentina, and it was in the lap of his British grandmother that Georgie—who communicated with her in English and with the rest of the household in Spanish—learned to read first in English rather than Spanish. He spent the better part of his childhood reading the books of his father's large library as he recalls in one of his prologues:

For years I believed I had grown up in one of the suburbs of Buenos Aires, a suburb of adventurous streets and visible sunsets. The truth is that I grew up in a

