Sounding the Dream:
Crosscultural Reverberations
between Can Xue and Jorge Luis Borges

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Though her writing style is strikingly individual, critics often compare the work of Can Xue (née Deng Xiaohua, 1953-) to that of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) (Bachner 170; Chen; McCandish 2), an author whose writing she has analyzed in detail in her monograph *Interpreting Borges* (解读博尔赫斯). This volume is itself a textual chimera, posing as a work of criticism yet possessing a similar literary style and freedom to Can Xue's creative writing. Borges approaches literary criticism and philosophical exegesis in a similar fashion in his works of non-fiction, many of which follow narrative patterns recognizable from his short stories in what Ned J. Davidson calls "a successful amalgam of fiction and essay" and proclaims as "an acknowledged contribution of Borges to the history of genres" (1). Both authors, then, display a disinclination to separate practices of reading and writing. This article uses Gaston Bachelard's aural metaphor of poetic reverberation to study how literary inspiration works in ways that are more complex than the causal relationship indicated by authorial inspiration or, in aural terms, by source and echo.

In his essay "A New Refutation of Time," Borges refers specifically to the dream sequence in Zhuangzi's butterfly parable, and this oneiric motif serves as the guiding image in the following analysis of the poetic reverberations between Zhuangzi, Borges, and Can Xue. Merely tracing the chronology of the dream as a literary motif from Zhuangzi to Borges to Can Xue would overlook the unique contributions of each writer, into whose texts *several* sources of conscious and unconscious inspirations blend and weave together. By contrast, the metaphor of reverberation demonstrates how literary imagery can resound in the instance of reading as a crosscultural and crosstemporal poetic experience. This article takes its cue from Wai Chee Dimock's aural understanding of literary dynamics that focus on texts as emerging phenomena, which fail to preserve any fixed shape due to the changing context of reading,

as well as her designation of the reading experience, rather than the end of the writing process or the date of publication, as the birth of the text (1061).[1] She asserts that "the literary […] is not an attribute resident in the text, but a relation, a form of engagement, between a changing object and a changing recipient, between a tonal presence and the way it is differently heard over time" (1064). It is this essential relation between practices of writing and reading as co-creating the text that I intend to explore by employing Bachelard's holistic approach to reading as a process in which the text reverberates between writer and reader in a moment of intersubjectivity (*Poetics of Space* 9).[2]

In his introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard uses two auditory terms to describe poetic affect. For him, the mindful appreciation of a poem is an instance of resonance, in which the poetic imagery resonates with the reader's own memories and prior knowledge. In contrast to this conscious aesthetics, he posits the immediate affect of a strong poetic image as "reverberation," in which the experience is not a subjective *response* to text but a precognitive and spontaneous *interaction* between reader and text: "The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes" (2). Unlike the aural linearity of resonance, with the poetic image as a catalyst that activates memory, poetic reverberation describes a melting together of author and reader in an instant of textual unity:

> In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberation, we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations' unity of being. (7)

The poetic image is not an object conferred from author to reader, but a "specific reality" (4) that they both momentarily share. The initial reverberation, then, is a holistic textual experience, followed by a conscious appreciation of the myriad resonances that this initial experience awakens on a subjective level. These two levels of experience work together in a "resonance-reverberation doublet," in which conscious analytical dissection and recognition of how an image resonates with our history/being is preceded by a pre-cognitive poetic immersion, in which the "poem possesses us entirely." Here, reading becomes an active engagement with the written in a situation where person and text are not completely separable (7). The following discussion seeks to expand Bachelard's notion of poetic reverberation to describe not only the affectual relationship between reader and image, but also the interaction between texts. Dimock's idea of the (re)birth of the text in every instance of reading significantly lessens the need to establish a dominant note and its resonance in other texts. In the following comparative reading, the shared motif of the dream activates the texts and lets them reverberate together in harmonies quite different from those emerging from reading each text individually. In short, I propose an understanding of literary inspiration and intertextuality as a "sounding together" of two texts,

rather than as a source-echo relation.

Sharing a Dream

The power of dreams and the functions of dreaming have played important, if slightly different, roles in many ancient cultures. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, dreams were regarded as messages from the gods, and though dream books with lists of common imagery and standard interpretations were widely used, the deciphering of especially complicated oneiric experiences required a professional dream interpreter to co-dream, and subsequently explain, the dream (Hughes 8). In ancient Greece,[3] dreams had several functions: they could be message-dreams from divinities, prophetic dreams foretelling the future, medical dreams diagnosing or healing the sufferer, or telesensory dreams helping the dreamer communicate with the dead or observe far-off events (Askitopoulou 74; Hughes 11). In Greek literature, the prophetic dream was prevalent, yet here the dreamer seldom managed to interpret her/his dream correctly until immediately before the predicted incident, and so the function of the literary dream was to provide the reader with a preview of coming events and help build up both suspense and the sense of the inevitability of fate that was so central to Greek drama (Hughes 12). In the Talmudic tradition, which informed the Kabbalist mysticism that Borges found so inspirational,[4] dreams were likewise prophetic and required interpretation to be understood. Interestingly, such interpretations could be diverse and contradictory and still be perceived to convey the truth (Kramer; Spero).

In pre-Han dynasty China, dreams were important tools of divination and integral parts of religious ancestor worship. Departed ancestors were believed to be able to communicate their wishes and demands through dreams (Fang and Zhang 11), and examples of divination by dream, as well as dream manuals, are recorded in the *Book of Odes* (詩經) and the *Zuo zhuan* (左傳) (Brennan 96). In philosophical texts such as the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) and the *Liezi* (列子), it is the process of dreaming and the implications of the oblique reality of the dream, rather than the dream's content, that are of interest (Li 36). In Chinese folklore, dreams often represented portals to the spiritual realm, which allowed the dreamer to travel in spirit to a different plane of reality (Giskin 80). Celebrated literary dream sequences include the sixteenth-century drama *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) and the Qing romance *Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦), in which oneiric motifs are used to express the emotional desires and existential deliberations of individual characters (Hegel 2-4; Ling 19-20).[5]

In his comparison of literary motifs in the works of Can Xue and Borges, Jianguo Chen treats their respective oeuvres as coherent wholes, each corresponding to the philosophical views of an author-persona and revealing how they both perceive writing as a "kind of metaphysical contemplation" (363). However, as he notes, the religious overtones found in several of Borges's texts appear to be completely absent from Can Xue's (372). Chen's approach can be characterized as *general* and holistic,

in that it compares and contrasts the use of two literary motifs—dreams and mirrors—between two bodies of literary works that are presented as separate entities, each defined and delineated by their origin with a particular author. As Bachelard's concept of poetic reverberation functions on the level of the detached poetic image rather than the authorial oeuvre (*Poetics of Space* 10), I propose in this essay a *particular* analysis of the dream motif as unfinished and unfolding, tracing the reverberations between the texts as they arise in reading.

The moment of sonic conception comes from a comparative reading in which two short stories—"A Dreamland Never Described" by Can Xue and "The Circular Ruins" by Borges—function as two strings plucked simultaneously and at intervals to discover how they sound together. To continue the aural metaphor, this essay constitutes a resonance box that amplifies the reverberations of the two strings as well as the interference and resonance between them. Furthermore, three other relevant texts are included as sympathetic strings: the dream passage from the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, Borges's direct reference to Zhuangzi in "A New Refutation of Time," and Can Xue's "An Interpretation of 'The Garden of Forking Paths' by Jorge Luis Borges." Using this mixture of primary and secondary reverberations and resonances, this article demonstrates how the dream motif travels both lucidly—in conscious adaptations and interpretations of other people's works, where reading mutates into writing in a metafictional mixture of fiction and criticism[6]—and more subtly in the continuation of the creative use of the dream motif.

Readers Dream of Writers

In "A New Refutation of Time" ("Nueva refutación del tiempo"), Jorge Luis Borges relates the butterfly parable from the chapter "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out" ("齊物論") in the *Zhuangzi*:

> Chuang Tzu,[7] some twenty-four centuries ago, dreamt he was a butterfly and did not know, when he awoke, if he was a man who had dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly who now dreamt he was a man. (286)

The short fragment reiterates Zhuangzi's philosophical point that the human condition is a pendulum of doubt and inability to distinguish reality from illusion, suggesting that, perhaps, there is no ultimate reality beyond this existential uncertainty. The original paragraph in the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes that the ontological distinction between man and butterfly, dream and reality, is solely a product of human cognition:

> He does not know whether he is Chou who dreams he is a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams he is Chou. Between Chou and the butterfly there was necessarily a dividing; just this is meant by the transformation of things (物化). (Zhuangzi 60)

Borges's text, however, has a slightly different focus. By adding a chronological modi-

fier that situates Zhuangzi "twenty-four centuries" in the past, the sentence traverses not only the boundary between dream and waking reality, but between past and present, bringing the question of temporality into focus.[8] This is not only a question of a dream and a reality in temporal proximity; this is an oneiric image, dreamt centuries ago, that reverberates with a writer in the 1940s.[9] The result is a textual manifestation of the kind of fusion between reader and writer that Bachelard envisioned when he wrote about poetic reverberation; the kind of "literary timeliness" Dimock writes about, which makes works written ages ago seem fresh and relevant today because they are reborn in the contemporary act of reading. The shared dream motif causes two texts to immediately *reverberate* together across distances of time, space, culture, and language, while the various philosophical implications, together with linguistic and narrative differences, create context-specific nuances that are open to further *resonances* and analyses. As with Bachelard's poetic reverberation, the relationship is reciprocal rather than causal. Borges's text is not merely an echo of Zhuangzi; in reading it, the *Zhuangzi* is reactivated as an echo from the present. It is this literary conversation across centuries that Borges's text brings to light. As part of its refutation of the existence of time, the text uses literature as a metatextual example of how time can easily be suspended in order to allow for the continuation of a thought experiment begun in the distant past.

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If the *Zhuangzi* concludes that there really is no way of knowing whether the dream or the waking state constitutes the true perception of reality and that this is a fundamental condition of existence (Ling 28; Wu 379), then Borges's text extends that argument to our understanding of the nature of time: "Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire" (290). As with Zhuangzi's dream reality, the conclusion is that since we can only experience time through bodily existence, to imagine time as an abstract phenomenon is meaningless. It is a poetic consequence of the philosophical understanding of time as change and entropy. In the *Zhuangzi*, this is referred to as "the transformation of things" and is characteristic of how human beings perceive reality: we are only able to fathom by division what is really a whole, to understand time only as change. Being unable to distinguish whether reality is but a dream or whether the dream world constitutes the true reality leads Zhuangzi to doubt that such a distinction really exists outside human consciousness. Borges understands this differently; since we cannot bypass our subjective perspective on the world, how can we know whether the world is outside or inside the self? In Borges's text, as in the *Zhuangzi*, the intertwining of the temporal world and the subject refuses to give precedence to either understanding and requires us to accept life in a state of existential ambiguity and metaphysical perplexity (Butler 157-58).

The *Zhuangzi* achieves ambiguity by immediately challenging its own philosophical conclusions and by suggesting that even as we become aware of the illusory nature of reality, that realization is itself another illusion: "You and Confucius are both dreams, and I who call you a dream am also a dream" (60). In a similarly convoluted

format, Borges's text presents a dream within a dream, a reading that transforms into writing and continues to read itself. Not only is the narrative "I" both swept along by the river of time and identical with it, but this "I" is also both the reader and the writer of the butterfly dream. Furthermore, the "old" refutations of time that Borges sets out to renew are not only those presented by the long line of philosophers from Zhuangzi to Hume, but also that of his former self, as the text itself is a revision of an earlier essay written two years previously. In the moment of textual reverberation, "the image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given to us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it" (Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* 8). As Borges puts it:

> let us imagine that one of its almost infinite readers dreams that he is a butterfly and then that he is Chuang Tzu. Let us imagine that, by a not impossible chance, the dream repeats exactly the dream of the master. Having postulated such an identity, we may well ask: Are not these coinciding moments identical? (330)

Here, the dream motif of the *Zhuangzi* has taken root in Borges's text; it reverberates, not as an echo or a copy of the original text, but as a new intertextual being, born in the moment when reading and writing converge.

In Can Xue's fictionalized interpretation of Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," the same convergence of reading and writing appears. Here, the text is portrayed as a labyrinth, a frequent topos in Borges's work, that may have been constructed by another person, *the author*, but which holds, at the centre, the answer to *the reader's* own enigma: "I want to accomplish it in the time that is left to me, to enter the centre of the maze, to guess my riddle right" ("An Interpretation" 1). The maze of the text, which at the outset looks like a finished construction prepared by the author, transforms through the paths taken in reading into a malleable structure, a trajectory that requires an *active reading* in order to find a satisfactory answer at the end. According to Bachelard, "all readers who have a certain passion for reading nurture and repress, through reading, the desire to become a writer" (*Poetics of Space* 10), and Can Xue plays with this desire when she allows her reading of Borges's short story to transmute into a short story of her own. Her narrator specifically points to literature and its material manifestation, the book, as a holistic space beyond temporal and subjective specificity, a space that is never finished, but always mutating and reborn with each new reading:

> So during the writing my great-grandfather found the channels to infiniteness and eternity. The book in his imagination can never be finished—in the book he creates many times and many futures, and this time is always expanding, forking. ("An Interpretation" 3)

The framing narrative of Borges's short story states that "the statement which follows" has been "dictated, reread and signed by Dr. Yu Tsun, former professor of English in the Hochschule at Tsingtao" (119). In her "Interpretation," Can Xue translates this

invented primary source into Chinese for the first time so that, in a strange manner, her essay constitutes a textual homecoming to a language present in Borges's text only in the transliteration of names and places. Both Borges's and Can Xue's narrators claim the labyrinth's constructor Tsui-pen (崔朋 in Can Xue's reversed translation) as their ancestor, uniting them by bonds of kinship—perhaps even identifying them as one and the same. In his analysis of Borgesian temporality, Elliot Wolfson points out that "reading, in particular, is an activity in which the modes of time can be inverted" (366). In her reading of "The Garden of Forking Paths," Can Xue reverts the textual chronology and wedges her own story in between Borges's diegetic world and its frame narrative, while creatively incorporating her own knowledge of the Chinese language and culture. By doing so, she is able to anchor her reading halfway between the world of fiction and the non-fictional realm of critical interpretation.

Both Borges's re-narration of the *Zhuangzi* and Can Xue's fictionalized interpretation of Borges are literary works in their own right as well as direct responses to other texts. By explicitly proclaiming their affiliation with specific texts by other authors **469** while formally refusing to differentiate themselves from short stories, these texts blend creative and analytical writing in a way that blurs the boundaries between reading and writing to produce textual hybrids. Just as Chou in the *Zhuangzi* had to accept ontological uncertainty with regards to his identity as man or butterfly, so too do the narrators in the texts by Borges and Can Xue display an unwillingness to give up being both writer and reader.

From the discussion of how the poetic reverberations and resulting intertextual resonances between Zhuangzi, Borges, and Can Xue produce hybrid texts with narrators that double as readers and writers, this article turns now to the realm of undisputed fiction. The following section uses the shared theme of the dream, and its kinship with fiction writing, as a resonance box through which to cross-read Can Xue's "A Dreamland Never Described" and Borges's "The Circular Ruins." By allowing the texts to sound together in this way, it explores how comparative analysis of a common literary motif can amplify the crosscultural reverberations between two texts.

A Place for Active Dreaming

Dream incubation, and the idea of actively applying oneself to the task of dreaming, became prevalent in both China and Greece around the sixth century BCE (Askitopoulou 72; Strickmann 40). In such instances, it was believed that dreams did not simply come of their own accord; one had to seek them out and invite them in. This often involved entering a specific dream-site and following the guidance of an oneiric specialist. The notion that dreaming is not a passive activity, but something that requires an effort on behalf of the dreamer, is present in both literary works under discussion here.

Borges's short story "The Circular Ruins" ("Las ruinas circulares") relates the experiences of a sorcerer who creates a human being by dreaming him meticulously one body part at a time.[10] After multiple nights of oneiric exertion, the dreamt man finally comes to life and manifests himself in the waking world, while the sorcerer slowly disintegrates. In "Ruins," dreaming is described as a committed and painstaking activity for which both the mental state and the physical surroundings of the dreamer require careful preparation: "The rice and fruit of their tribute were nourishment enough for his body, which was consecrated to the sole task of sleeping and dreaming" (97). Dreaming is transposed from a nightly diversion to a full-time occupation, something that must be pursued with all one's might. The same serious and purposeful attitude towards dreaming is present in Can Xue's short story "A Dreamland Never Described" ("从未描述过的梦境"). The protagonist of this narrative occupies the position of an official "dream describer" (描述者) who is required to write down the dreams of everyone in his village. Somewhat blasé due to overexposure to the dreams of others, the protagonist sets himself the task of seeking out an original dream, an oneiric space unlike anything he has ever set down on paper. Like Borges's sorcerer, the dream describer is in active pursuit of dream: "He was waiting for a dreamland that had never been described, one in which enough heat had been accumulated to tear and spoil human vision" (165).[11]

Although both protagonists are practitioners of active dreaming and set themselves the task of approaching a specific dream reality, their entry points into the oneiric world are fundamentally different. In "Ruins," the space chosen for its dream-inducing capacities—described as a "center of a circular amphitheater which was somehow the ruined temple" (97)—bears a strong resemblance to the remains of ancient Asclepian health resorts such as Epidaurus in Greece, in which sleeping and dreaming in consecrated areas formed part of the treatment, as did regular theatrical performances in huge amphitheatres that still dominate the archaeological site today. Here, a specific location is singled out as favorable; a place where the boundary between waking and dream realities is more permeable. This understanding of the dreamworld as a parallel reality—in particular, the understanding that dreams are not mere psychological events but are portals to a spiritual world beyond the physical and mental realm of the individual body—appears in texts from various cultures. In ancient Greece, dreams could function both as vessels for messages from gods and as diagnostic tools revealing the state of the body (Hughes 14); and in Han-dynasty China, Daoist medico-oneiric texts similarly integrated a cosmic pantheon into a bodily landscape. In both cases, dreams were believed to be populated by demons and spirits (Strickmann 26). On the other hand, Chinese dream-lore such as Wang Fu's (ca. 90-ca. 167) *Essays by a Hidden Man* (潛夫論) also describes "consecrated dreams" in which the dreamer "earnestly seeks a dream" (qtd. in Strickmann 27); whereas, in the Greek context, sleep, as the brother of death, was thought to reveal the divine aspects of soul (Hughes 12). It was, therefore, essential to dream in a space in which the boundary between reality and these other immaterial realms was porous.

In Borges's text, the ruin of an old amphitheatre epitomizes such a space. With its half-eroded structure, the ruin seems to possess only half an existence, its other half buried in the memory of a distant past. The ruin is a symbol of the passage of time that is, like sleep in Greek mythology, located halfway between life and death, providing a perfect twilight location for transcending the physical reality and entering the realm of dreaming.

In "Dreamland," the environment conducive to active dreaming is not a specific physical place or structure, but rather felicitous environmental conditions:

> At the moment when the dreaming stranger departed, the radiance of that never described dreamland caused his [the dream describer's] whole body to tremble […] Accordingly, he called that dreamland, which had never been described and which had never clearly appeared in his mind, "the wind." (166)

Here, the bodily reaction to an outer force constitutes the oneiric space. Although the identification of a dreamscape with something as temporary and elusive as the wind might at first appear counterintuitive, it makes sense when read in the context of classical Chinese philosophical and medical texts in which "winds foreshadowed change, exemplified change, caused change, were change" (Kuriyama 239). On natural, societal, and individual levels, the wind was seen as the invisible force of change, not unlike Borges's conceptualization of time in "New Refutation." Like diagnostic dreams in ancient Greece, the image of the wind connects, rather than separates, internal, external, and otherworldly realities: "The wind turns the senses into a nexus for transformations, both good and bad. With the wind sweeping through them, the senses expose the subject to a potential for radical change" (Geaney 18). The visualization of the sought-for dreamworld as a gust of wind in Can Xue's story emphasizes not only its elusiveness, but also its potential for radically transforming the dreamer. If even the hint of the approaching dream sends tremors through the protagonist's body, then entering that dreamworld is likely to effectuate an existential transformation.

Dream Doubles

Several scholars have commented on Borges's fascination with Kabbalah and its mystic understanding of God as the author of the world in a reality that is written into existence (Makeeff 168; Soud 751).[12] In "Ruins," this understanding of the creator as a writer is played out on both the diegetic level, which I will discuss here, and the level of reading, to which I will return in the following section. In the storyworld, the sorcerer laboriously dreams his successor into being: "It was only natural that the sorcerer [el mago] should fear for the future of the son he had conceived organ by organ, feature by feature, through a thousand and one secret nights" (100). Here, dreaming and writing share a creative force, and their kinship is further underlined

by the process of dreaming taking place over a thousand and one nights, recalling Scheherazade's lifesaving fictions. The objective here, however, is not to save a life, but to create one. In "Dreamland" the relationship between dreaming and writing is slightly different, if equally strong. Here, dreamers are unable to write down or even understand their own dreams, while the dream describer, who is required to write down each dream coherently and help the dreamer make sense of it, is himself utterly incapable of dreaming. Dreaming and writing then become two segregated parts of human experience, the former being a common unskilled practice that is useless unless confided to an oneirically handicapped specialist: "He had no way of writing such a dreamland directly into his black notebook. He had to wait for the appearance of a person, a person in whose dream it had manifested itself" (165). In his work on the philosophy of imagination, Bachelard envisions dreams as a kind of pre-thought poesis, taking place before the poetic image crystallizes and is given form. He differentiates between "kneading" and "modelling" in the creative poesis, in which the former represents the preconscious joy of free imagination and the latter the creative moulding of imagination into art (*Air and Dreams* 71). He further writes that "the council to see well, at the base of the culture realism, easily outweighs my own paradoxical advice to dream well, to remain faithful to the oneiric archetypes deeply rooted in the human unconscious" (2). The split between imagination as kneading with its affinities to dreams on the one side, and imagination as modelling and its affinities to writing on the other, are analogous to the split of dreamer and dream describer in "Dreamland." It displays the same concern that a realist method of mimesis somehow impedes creativity, a position not unlike Can Xue's description of her own approach to fiction writing, when she states that "I never edit my stories" (qtd. in Suher and Hua 3), "I write from the unconscious […] I'm not interested in the external world" (qtd. in McCandish 3). Although poetic kneading and modelling are doubtless difficult to separate in actual practice, and writers such as Can Xue often edit stories in their minds if not on paper, her attitude to the sacredness of "raw" creativity expressed in the interviews is also present in her fictional work, in which experiencing a dream and describing a dream form two entirely different methods of engagement with the dreamland of imagination.

Because dreams, as understood by contemporary neuropsychology rather than by early Chinese and Greek medicine, are created and played out within the individual consciousness, all dream characters are part of the dreaming mind. Just as an author cannot write a character that has not first existed in her/his mind, so do all dream beings originate with the dreamer and are, in a sense, her/his progeny. "Ruins" provides a concrete narrative of what this relationship would entail if the boundary between dream and waking were to burst. In this story, the dream son is brought from the dream world into the waking world by the conscious effort of the sorcerer and is given life by a kiss: "That night he kissed him for the first time […] the Adam of dream wrought from the sorcerer's nights" (99). The image of the kiss underscores the godlike creative force of dreaming, while the reference to the breath

of life momentarily reverberates with Can Xue's conceptualization of oneiric creativity as an aerial phenomenon manifesting itself as a wind.

It soon becomes evident that the dream son is his creator's mirror image: "A taciturn, sallow skinned young man, at times intractable, with sharp features that echoed those of the man that dreamed him" (97). This is no mere family likeness, but evidence that the dream man is really the sorcerer's dream double, in both actions and appearance; like the father, the "unreal son performed *identical* rituals in the other circular ruins, downstream" (100; emphasis mine). By methodically dreaming his oneiric other, the sorcerer has recreated himself in his own waking world. The sorcerer has succeeded, not in bringing a new individual into the world, but in duplicating himself.

In "Dreamland" the dream-other is not the describer's mirror image, but rather his opposite: an old woman "with snow white windswept hair, whose eyeballs within long narrow sockets had no sight [目光], yet she was not blind [盲人]" (101). While the dream describer has his eyes firmly focused on reality, the shrivelled eyes of the woman gaze upon a different reality.[13] Several scholars have noted that Can Xue's texts often feature split protagonists, with the "I" and the "you" of the text engaged in a libidinal relationship centring on a desire to become one (Chen 358; Bachner 161; Solomon 248). If the dream describer embodies the "culture of realism" with its call to "see well," as Bachelard has it, then the unseeing woman with the windswept hair is his dream-self incarnate. Where "Ruins" chronicles the act of dreaming as a creative practice by which one becomes two, "Dreamland" describes how two sides of the self, the realist describer and the half-blind dreamer, slowly fuse into one.

And I Who Dream of You Am Also a Dream

In both Can Xue's and Borges's short stories, the dream-other grows more and more real every day, encroaching on the area of reality formerly occupied by the dreamer. In "Dreamland," the old woman, who acts as the dream describer's oneiric antipode, begins to haunt his abode: "The white-haired old woman had come again several times, each time staying longer in the shack" (171). Where the dream describer is thus unwillingly pursued by his dream-other, the sorcerer in "Ruins" invites and actively introduces his oneiric son into waking reality. From the natal moment when, "in the dreaming man's dream, the dreamed man awoke" (99), the sorcerer helps him in his transition from one realm to the other: "Gradually, the man accustomed the youth to reality" (99). Despite their different attitudes to the dream-other, and to dreaming as a possession by wind in Can Xue versus a creative endeavour in Borges, the two stories converge in their accounts of the dream-reality inversion that ensues from breaking down the barrier between the dreaming and the waking world.

In both stories, the consequence of successfully inviting in the dream is that the dreamer himself becomes superfluous. In "Ruins," the dream son takes over not only

his creator's physical appearance, but also his practice of performing rituals in the circular ruins, until the sorcerer himself slowly disappears from the world and the narrative circles round to begin again:

> For what had happened many centuries before was repeating itself […] For a moment, he thought of taking refuge in the water, but then he understood that death was coming to crown his old age and absolve him from his labours. He walked towards the sheets of flame. They did not bite his flesh, they caressed him and flooded him without heat or combustion. (100)

The image of immersion in fire and light is reminiscent of the dreamscape with "enough heat to tear and spoil human vision" for which Can Xue's protagonist longs, and can be read as a return to a pure oneiric or imaginary existence before being written into existence.

The two stories' different conceptions of active versus passive engagement with the dream world come into focus again when, unlike Borges's sorcerer who *chooses* to slip away and remove himself from reality, Can Xue's dream describer simply fades away as people around him stop seeking his professional help and gradually cease to acknowledge his existence altogether: "People all said that the dream describer was a fabrication [虚构] because he had no way of verifying his own existence. They were all right […] Hardly anybody could remember any details about him" (106). Not only do the townspeople doubt his existence, but the authorial narrative voice also tells the readers that their conclusion is correct. The kinship between dream and fiction is highlighted on both intra- and extradiegetic levels when the dream describer is pronounced a "fictitious" being. At the same time, the reader is abruptly reminded of the story's fictionality by the sudden entry of the otherwise absent third-person narrator. After pursuing his dreamland for so long, the dream describer is suddenly banished to it, himself becoming a creature of imagination.

In "Ruins" the reversion of dreamer and dream brings with it an echo of the existential uncertainty found in the *Zhuangzi* as "with relief, with humiliation, with terror, he [the sorcerer] realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him" (100). The oneiric transposition from dreamer to dream reiterates Zhuangzi's conclusion that, while "you and Confucius are both dreams, [I] who call you a dream am also a dream" (60). Unlike Buddhist texts, which describe dreaming as a pathway to a deeper reality beyond the material (Strickmann 37), the *Zhuangzi* has no solution to the question of which came first: the dream or the dreamer. Similarly, in Borges's story, the chain of dreamers and dreams, of writers and readers, can be continued *ad infinitum*, with no certain end or beginning. That is why reverberation, rather than unidirectional aural phenomena such as echoes, seems an apt metaphor for describing the dialogic and overlapping interactions between reading, dreaming, and writing.

Dream Reverberations

If the relationship between dreamer and dream in Borges's text can be envisioned as a tonal transposition[14] of endless displacement, then that relationship takes on the shape of an aural vortex in Can Xue's story, in which dreaming is not an act of duplication, but an encounter between two poles of a split self. Here, the worlds of dreaming and waking fold onto each other with no discernible boundary between perception and imagination. In a diegetic universe of pure subjectivity, the individual mind dreams up and narrates everything that takes place, including that mind itself: "Every single thing about him existed only in his own narration [叙述], and that narrative was hazy and lacking in temporal structure" (169).

Bachelard explains poetic reverberation as the moment when, even before we recognize its resonance with our own lived experiences, we are so wholly possessed by a poetic image that we feel it originated within ourselves. It is this momentary fusing of writer and reader that Borges recognizes when he states that "each writer creates his own precursors" (qtd. in Soud 741) in a movement of literary consonance that is not unidirectional from a source of inspiration to its echo but activates the past and lets it reverberate in the present. If literature has this potential to transgress causality, then the role of the reader must also be reenvisioned as an active component in the process of creating fiction. Just as the stories narrate the active pursuit of a dream, so too do they require, on behalf of the reader, the active pursuit of a text. As Can Xue puts it, "every reader must stand up and perform in order to enter the realm of experimental literature" (qtd. in Suher and Hua 7). This discussion examined first the conscious resonance between Borges's rendering of Zhuangzi and Can Xue's fictionalized interpretation of Borges, and then the reverberations produced by a comparative reading of two texts from the perspective of a shared literary motif. It has sought to repeat formally the reversion and final dissolution of any causal relationship between dreamer and dream described in both stories, by tracing the oneiric theme not as a chain of inspiration from writer to reader, but as an acoustic dialogue between texts. In this analysis, dreamers are also dreams, and authors double as readers, to form an understanding of literary comparativism as a reverberation between texts brought about by participating in a multidirectional process of active reading.

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Notes

1. I take issue, however, with Dimock's description of language as an "echo chamber" (1062), which, though emphasizing the semantic patterns of interference created by change over time, relies on an image of a closed linguistic space and risks ignoring the fundamental role of linguistic borrowing and translation in language evolution.

2. Bachelard goes on to describe this as a "transmission from one soul to another," and although I do not agree with his use of the elusive and undefined term "soul," I do agree that the experience of immediate possession versus conscious contemplation is apt and interesting.

3. Most of the texts pertaining to dreams and dreaming to which Hughes refers, such as those written by Hippocrates, Heraclitus, and Pythagoras, were written in the late Archaic and early Classical periods.

4. For an overview of scholarship on Borges and Kabbalah, see Wolfson 362, note 2.

5. For more on dreams in Ming and Qing dynasty literature, see Ling and Yu; in modernist and socialist Chinese fiction, see Chan; in contemporary Chinese science fiction, see Song.

6. In his introduction to the anthology *Metafiction*, Mark Currie suggests a definition of the metafictional novel as one that "dramatizes the boundary between fiction and criticism" (3).

7. Chuang Tzu, Zhuangzi, and (Chuang) Chou are all names for the same philosopher, who, according to the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian, lived in the Warring States period (403-221 BCE) and who is credited with having written (at least parts of) the body of text known today as the *Zhuangzi*.

8. Other philosophers on whom Borges draws in his discussion of time and temporality include David Hume and George Berkeley; see Butler and Makeeff.

9. Borges repeats this line of reasoning on the level of format when he includes two overlapping versions of the same argument supposedly written two years apart. Again, the changes between the two versions act as "proof" that time has passed between writing one and writing the other, yet their publication together as one essay dissolve that temporal disunity and present them as one. This suggests that time is only visible in, and perhaps only exists in, its effects and that such effects can be easily transcended by, for instance, creative writing.

10. This story appears to be inspired by the Golem myth and by Gustav Meyrink's fictional exploration of the human mind's inability to distinguish reality from illusion in his novel *Der Golem* (Makeeff 174; Soud 742).

11. All translations from Can Xue's text are my own. Interestingly, the "*mengjing*" (梦境, dreamscape) of the title is frequently exchanged for another word, "*yijing*" (意境, artistic ambience or creative concept) within the text. To avoid confusion, I translate both as "dreamscape," but this indirect suggestion of a connection between dreaming and creative imagination is worth keeping in mind.

12. In a Chinese context, dream and text likewise share a kinship; as Strickman notes, "incubation became a prominent part of the cult of the God of Literature, Wen-ch'ang [文昌王 Wenzhang Wang]" (40).

13. For an analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre's "gaze" and scopophobia in Can Xue, see Cai.

14. Transposing a melody means playing the same pattern of notes in a different key.

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