The Journey of Awakening in Jorge Luis Borges's The Circular Ruins Through the Lens of The Five Stages of Vijñaptimātra

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Original Research Articles

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Abstract

Amidst the blurring boundaries between reality and virtuality driven by AI technology, this study deciphers Jorge Luis Borges's short story, The Circular Ruins (Las ruinas circulares), through the framework of the Five Stages of Vijñaptimātra. The research investigates whether the magician's endeavor to dream a human being into existence can be interpreted as a spiritual cultivation process that reveals the illusory nature of reality. Utilizing systematic and psychological methodologies, the study identifies a profound parallel between the protagonist's psychological evolution and the five classical stages: the Stage of Provision (Sambhāramārgah), the Stage of Application (Prayogamārgah), the Stage of Vision (Darśanamārgah), the Stage of Cultivation (Niṣṭhāmārgah), and the Ultimate Stage (Niṣṭhā-avasthā). The findings indicate that the character, initially trapped in the duality of "subject and object" (grāhaka and grāhya), gradually achieves detachment, leading to a profound "transformation of the basis" (āśraya). The pivotal moment where the magician realizes he is merely a phantom dreamed by another signifies the ultimate awakening to Anatman and Nirvana. This research suggests that Vijñaptimātra serves as a potent tool for exploring ontological layers in modern literature and offers new directions for literary education centered on consciousness experiences in the era of simulation.

Keywords: Borges; Vijñaptimātrasiddhi; Las Ruinas Circulares; Buddhist Studies

Introduction

As the boundary between reality and illusion becomes increasingly fragile amidst the rise of Artificial Intelligence, reflections on the nature of existence appear to become more challenging and thought-provoking. In the imaginary world of Jorge Luis Borges, the frontier between East and West seems to dissolve; while he writes in Spanish and cites the Bible and Plato, his thinking resonates with the Eastern tones of meditation, non-self, and illusion. Borges once recounted the story of Zhuangzi's dream during a discussion and expressed great appreciation for the image of the butterfly that Zhuangzi chose. The sage shared: "A butterfly has something delicate and evanescent about it. If we are dreams, the true way to suggest this is with a butterfly and not a tiger." (Borges, 2000, 29). That fragile, ambiguous spirit latent in Borges's works creates a labyrinth with no exit, yet no exit is needed, for the very act of wandering within that dream is the ultimate destination. The dream state that Borges wrote of was observed by Alazraki Jaime in the publication La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges; temas, estilo: "The Circular Ruins expresses the Buddhist idea of the world as a dream, or in other words, the illusory nature of the world as desired by idealist philosophers " (1968, 67).

The inquiry into the nature of reality, illusion, and existence in relation to dreams is a recurring theme in the short story The Circular Ruins. This remains an unanswered question in any era and becomes even more haunting when placed in a context where humanity is striving to generate virtual entities through technology. Carolina Coppens's research works Las ruinas circulares y la poética del margen (1999) elucidates the connection between space and identity, as well as the moment when space begins to become a metaphor in speaking of distinct identities. Marta Gallo's El Tiempo en "Las Ruinas Circulares" de Jorge Luis Borges (1970) explores how the boundary between the dreamer and the dreamed is completely obliterated, affirming the illusory nature of existence. Several other works continue this issue, such as Guillermo Arango's (1973) La Función del Sueño en "Las Ruinas Circulares" de Jorge Luis Borges (The Function of the Dream in "The Circular Ruins" by Jorge Luis Borges), Carmen R. Rabell's (1988) "Las ruinas circulares" una reflexión sobre la literatura, etc.

What creates the philosophical depth in Borges's writing lies in the way he questions and inverts the concept of time to reveal an illusory world, a characteristic similar to the non-linear nature of time in a simulated environment. Albert and Bagby noted Borges's concept of time in his works in the publication The concept of time of Jorge Luis Borges, stating: "We make time and by consequence it is a subjective projection of our will, of our very being. Time is an intellectual reaction of our subconscious and all we are able to project is the "right now" (the present)" (1965, 105).

The concept of the "present" as the sole converging point of existence has become a challenge to the Western rationalist conception of time as a universal flow. In an interview, Borges also shared his feelings while writing the short story The Circular Ruins: "but all the time I felt that life was unreal. What was really near to me was that story I was writing" (Borges, 1969,

73) That statement clearly demonstrates a priority for fiction, and the story being written is the only flow of existence.

Precisely because the philosophical thought in Borges's literature carries, to some extent, an Eastern resonance, applying a Buddhist theory to the analysis of his literature is not impossible, especially when contrasting the character's journey of creation with principles of consciousness. The research work *O budismo literário de Jorge Luis Borges* by Antonio Carlos de Melo Magalhães and Paullina Lígia Silva Carvalho reached a conclusion: "The Circular Ruins' is above all a metaphor for time; in its ceaseless rotation, time both creates and transforms everything, while simultaneously always being a sign of finitude and the exposure of the hallucination of existence " (2014, 331).

This observation aligns closely with the theoretical system of the Yogācāra school in Mahayana Buddhism, founded by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. This is Consciousness-Only, often assessed as one of the most complex and inaccessible systems of thought among Mahayana Buddhist schools, especially when compared to the simple, inspiring direct intuition of Zen or the sharp negation of Madhyamaka. The reason is that Consciousness-Only constructs a highly systematic academic structure, with concepts such as the eight consciousnesses, the three natures, the three transformations of consciousness, and the five paths, along with a subtle system of analysis regarding phenomena and consciousness. However, it remains an important subject in Buddhist academia and practice with prominent spiritual practical value. This is also because Consciousness-Only provides a concise and persuasive model of how human consciousness constructs the world. The "Five Paths of Consciousness-Only" are stages of practice and realization in Consciousness-Only, outlining a systematic path of cultivation from the initial steps of faith and understanding, to practice, until penetrating the principle of true emptiness, eliminating obstacles, and finally attaining the fruit of omniscient Buddhahood. That is also the manifestation of the transformation of mind into wisdom, leading to complete understanding and enlightenment regarding the truth that "all phenomena are consciousness-only." The "consciousness-only" perspective can open a methodological approach to many phenomena, in which both reality and the so-called "I" are products of an impermanent process of consciousness transformation without inherent self-nature. From this viewpoint, Consciousness-Only has the capacity to transcend the scope of pure Buddhology to become a tool for literary approach in order to explore inner depth and ontological structure in modern and postmodern literature. Here, the objective world is not a fixed anchor, while the self-shatters into narrative fragments, and it is a place where dreams and illusions frequently swap roles with reality. Applying Consciousness-Only to literary analysis both brings a fresh reading and creates an opportunity for intersection between Eastern thought and Western philosophical and cultural trends. This is particularly relevant when applied to a special case like Borges, who walks within the labyrinth of meditation and the beginningless and endless dreams of the East.

Although there have been many studies recognizing the Buddhist resonance in Borges's works, focusing on a single journey still allows for further analysis. This research hopes to evoke

the possibility of an East-West cultural dialogue, thereby suggesting a way to decode literature through applied Buddhism and expanding literary education content towards the direction of experiential consciousness. From Borges's affinity with Eastern materials, the topic poses the question: When reading the work The Circular Ruins by Jorge Luis Borges, can the stages in the character's journey of dream-creation be analyzed as a journey of self-cultivation and realization to thereby reveal the philosophical depth of the work? To address the above question, the research focuses on clarifying the stages in the character's journey of awakening, the meaning of each stage, and how the stages in the "Five Paths of Consciousness-Only" help the work create depth in the human process of understanding the self.

Objective

1. To analyze the protagonist's journey of awakening in The Circular Ruins as a structured spiritual process, articulated through the stages of self-knowledge, self-destruction, and self-liberation, and corresponding levels of cognition (dualism, monism, and interpenetration).

2. To examine how the narrative progression parallels the Yogācāra (Consciousness-Only) path of cultivation, namely the Paths of Accumulation, Preparation, Vision, Meditation, and Completion, functioning as a spiritual map within the text.

3. To interpret the transformation of subject–object relations through Consciousness-Only doctrine, with emphasis on the dissolution of the two graspings (grāhaka–grāhya) and the realization of āśrayaparāvṛtti.

4. To investigate the symbolic role of fire as a trans-cultural metaphysical motif, representing wisdom, purification, and Thusness, and mediating Borges's convergence with Buddhist non-dual epistemology.

Literature Review

Borges, Reality, and Ontological Illusion

Jorge Luis Borges's The Circular Ruins has long been recognized as a paradigmatic text for exploring the instability of reality, authorship, and selfhood. Borges scholarship frequently situates the story within metaphysical, idealist, and post-structuralist traditions, emphasizing recursive creation, infinite regress, and the illusory nature of identity. Critics such as Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Beatriz Sarlo have argued that Borges dismantles realist ontology by replacing it with self-referential systems in which existence is contingent upon narrative or cognition. Philosophical readings often draw upon Western frameworks, including Berkeleyan idealism, Cartesian skepticism, and Schopenhauer's metaphysics of representation. From this perspective, the magician's act of dreaming a man into existence symbolizes the mind's power to constitute reality, while the final revelation—that the magician himself is dreamed—collapses the distinction between creator and created. However, such readings, while insightful, tend to

remain within Eurocentric metaphysical paradigms and often overlook non-Western epistemologies that resonate strongly with Borges's ontological concerns.

Psychological and Consciousness-Oriented Interpretations

A second strand of scholarship approaches The Circular Ruins through psychological and phenomenological lenses. Influenced by Jungian psychology, some scholars interpret the dreamed man as an archetypal projection of the unconscious, with the magician representing the ego's attempt to impose form and coherence upon psychic contents. Others draw upon phenomenology to analyze the progressive dissolution of subject-object boundaries, emphasizing consciousness as a constitutive force rather than a passive mirror of reality. Yet, these interpretations frequently stop short of articulating a systematic developmental model of consciousness. While they recognize transformation, they lack a clearly articulated teleology explaining how illusion gives way to awakening or insight. This gap invites engagement with philosophical systems that explicitly theorize stages of cognitive and spiritual transformation.

Buddhist Philosophy and Literary Studies

In recent decades, Buddhist philosophy—particularly concepts such as emptiness (śūnyatā), non-self (anatman), and dependent origination—has increasingly been applied to literary analysis. Scholars working within Buddhist literary criticism argue that literature can function as a site for experiential insight into the constructed nature of reality. Yogācāra (Vijñaptimātra) philosophy, with its emphasis on consciousness-only and the transformation of cognition, has proven especially productive for analyzing narrative illusion, dream imagery, and reflexive selfhood. However, applications of Vijñaptimātra to modern Western literature remain relatively limited and often focus on thematic parallels rather than structural or developmental correspondences. Few studies systematically map literary narratives onto the classical stages of Yogācāra spiritual cultivation. Consequently, The Circular Ruins has not yet been fully examined as a narrative embodiment of the Vijñaptimātra path, despite its striking alignment with Yogācāra doctrines concerning dream, projection, and awakening.

Materials and Methods

The article addresses the object of study as the journey of awakening, while the research scope focuses on the short story The Circular Ruins by Jorge Luis Borges, published in the collection Ficciones (translated by Nguyen A Ly). To approach the topic comprehensively and effectively, this study employs a combination of three methods: the systemic method, poetics, and the psychological method. Each method plays an essential role in ensuring the scientific nature, depth, and openness of the interdisciplinary research process between literature and Buddhist philosophy. First, to answer the question "What stages does the character go through

in the journey of awakening?", the article applies the systemic method as a logical organizational framework, illuminating the entire sequence of events through the Buddhist model of the Five Paths of Consciousness-Only. Thereby, the process of awakening is arranged in the sequence of accumulation – preparation – vision – meditation – completion, thereby highlighting the dichotomous characteristic between dream and reality that dominates the entire plot. Second, to clarify "What is the significance of each stage?", the research uses the psychological method, focusing on analyzing inner states and the process of transformation from delusion to awakening. Through this, the article highlights the monistic characteristic in the character's thinking and consciousness, corresponding to the deep operation of the character arc. Finally, to answer the question "How do the Five Paths of Consciousness-Only help the work create philosophical depth?", the article deploys the method of poetics, focusing on the artistic symbol of fire. This symbol creates an interpenetration between layers of reality and highlights the central theme: awakening and the realization of the illusory nature of the self and the world.

Results

The Stages in the Character's Journey of Awakening

The character's journey in The Circular Ruins, starting from leaving the South with the intense desire to create a human being in a dream until realizing that he himself is merely the product of another dream, can be structured as a spiritual process comprising three stages: faith and understanding, practice and realization, and quiescence. This division demonstrates three levels of the character's cognition in the story: dualism (dream and reality still separated), monism (merging into one with the dream flow), and interpenetration (dissolving all cognitive boundaries) through the operation of consciousness according to the depth of Consciousness-Only. This serves as the basis for approaching the story as a spiritual map, where the process of awakening takes place according to the cycle of self-knowledge – self-destruction – self-liberation. This process is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1 The Character's Process of Awakening

Stage	Position (Path)	Main Characteristics	Purpose	Character Manifestation
Self-knowledge	Path of Accumulation *(Sambhāramārgah)*	Seeking to abide in the nature of consciousness-only. Cannot yet suppress or eliminate the latent tendencies *(anuśaya)* of the two graspings (grasper and grasped).	Cultivating provisions (merit and wisdom). Also known as the Aids to Liberation *(Mokṣabhāgīya)*.	Seeking a place uncontaminated by the Greek language and arriving at the sacred temple to execute the purpose of creating a human being in a dream.
	Path of Preparation *(Prayogamārgah)*	Practicing the four dharmas: Heat, Summit, Patience, and Supreme Mundane Dharmas to suppress the two graspings. Impressions and traces	Leading to a clear determination of reality. Also known as the Aids to Penetration *(Nirvedhabhāgīya)*.	Persistently screening the students in the dream to search for a growing intelligence worthy of being granted life.

Stage	Position (Path)	Main Characteristics	Purpose	Character Manifestation
		remain; not yet truly abiding.		
Self-destruction	Path of Vision *(Darśanamārgah)*	Non-discriminating wisdom does not grasp the object of cognition at all; has departed from the appearance of the two graspings.	Realizing Thusness. Seeing the truth for the first time. Eliminating the latent tendencies of the two hindrances belonging to the type of discrimination; entering the Path of Seeing (First Ground - Joyous).	Changing the method by purifying oneself, waiting for the full moon, and concentrating high willpower to dream of a beating heart.
	Path of Meditation *(Bhāvanāmārgah)*	Frequently practicing non-discriminating wisdom. Eliminating the remaining coarse and heavy parts.	Attaining the Great Transformation of the Basis *(Āśrayaparāvṛtti)*, transforming defilement into purity. The stage of the Ten	Perceiving sounds and images in the universe as somewhat faded; living in a sensation

Stage	Position (Path)	Main Characteristics	Purpose	Character Manifestation
			Grounds, from the First to the Tenth Ground.	resembling bliss.
Self-liberation	Path of Completion *(Niṣṭhāmārga)*	Escaping all hindrances, attaining perfect clarity. Abiding in Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment.	Becoming a Buddha. Attaining the Dharma Body *(Dharmakāya)*.	Final enlightenment, realizing that he himself is also a person created from a dream.

Dualism: From the Dream of Completion to the Rage of Failure

The protagonist of The Circular Ruins believes he can dream a complete human being into reality—one who possesses autonomous thought rather than being a projection of the dreamer's will. Unlike ordinary dreams, his goal is to create a being who experiences itself as real. This reflects Borges's recurring idea that reality itself may be a dream, resonating with the Consciousness-Only doctrine that all phenomena arise from mind. Yet, at this initial stage, the magician remains trapped in dualism: although he intellectually grasps that all is consciousness, he still clings to distinctions between subject and object, dream and reality. This stage parallels the Path of Accumulation in Consciousness-Only Buddhism, where aspiration for awakening arises but attachment and conceptual grasping persist. The magician's total absorption in the project—forgetting his own identity and withdrawing from ordinary life—reveals deep attachment to both self and phenomena. His dreams are chaotic and unproductive because his practice is driven by desire for attainment rather than direct realization. Thus, despite understanding the theory that reality is mind-made, his behavior continues to treat phenomena as independently real.

To support his inward project, the magician isolates himself in the ruins, minimizing sensory engagement with the external world. His exclusive focus on dreaming reflects an attempt to construct a purely internal reality. However, his effort to control and possess the dreamed child exposes a subtler form of grasping. Even when he narrows his focus to a single student, marking a transition akin to the Path of Preparation, he remains bound by the object he has selected. Although his concentration deepens and chaos subsides, he still reifies the dream-child as something to be achieved. This culminates in rage and failure, showing that refined method alone cannot overcome grasping; progress rooted in attachment only produces subtler delusion.

Monism: Dreaming in Accord with Nature

After repeated failure, the magician abandons deliberate control and allows dreaming to arise naturally. This shift embodies equanimity (upekṣā), a key mental factor in Consciousness-Only practice. By relinquishing attachment to results, he permits the seeds of consciousness to manifest spontaneously. This marks a movement toward non-duality, resembling the Path of Vision, where neither subject nor object is grasped as real. In this state, the magician creates the human systematically and effortlessly, beginning with the heart and observing its development without interference. His ability to enter and leave the dream at will reflects meditative stability and harmony with the dream process. However, the created being remains lifeless. Recognizing his own limitation, the magician turns to greater forces and receives guidance from the Fire God, confirming his latent capacity while revealing that realization requires further cultivation.

This stage corresponds to the Path of Meditation, where realization depends on sustained practice rather than sudden attainment. As in Buddhist cultivation, enlightenment requires traversing successive stages, confronting hindrances, and refining wisdom. Borges thus presents creation not as an act of domination but as alignment with the natural operation of consciousness—a shift from dualistic striving to non-attached participation in the dream of reality.

Table 2 System in the Path of Meditation

Stage (Ground)	Cultivation (Perfection)	Elimination (Heavy Hindrance)	Result (Thusness)	Purpose
1. Joyous Ground *(Pramuditā)*	Giving Pāramitā *(Dāna)*	Hindrance of ordinary nature *(pṛthagjanatva)*	Omnipresent Thusness	Breaking the view of the ordinary person: Meaning abandoning the habit of believing that there is a separate "I" (Self) and that things (Phenomena) are real.
2.Immaculate Ground *(Vimalā)*	Precepts Pāramitā *(Śīla)*	Hindrance of wrong conduct	Supreme Thusness	Eliminating subtle errors: Overcoming minor faults in actions and thoughts that were previously unrecognized.

Stage (Ground)	Cultivation (Perfection)	Elimination (Heavy Hindrance)	Result (Thusness)	Purpose
3. Luminous Ground *(Prabhākarī)*	Patience Pāramitā *(Kṣānti)*	Hindrance of dullness	Current-flowing Thusness	Overcoming darkness and forgetfulness: Eliminating the state of being quick to forget, failing to remember the learned teachings, so that wisdom may be enlightened.
4. Radiant Ground *(Arciṣmatī)*	Effort Pāramitā *(Vīrya)*	Hindrance of subtle current manifest afflictions	Non-appropriating Thusness	Dropping emotional attachment: No longer sinking into the feeling of bliss during meditation (attachment to concentration) or clinging too much to doctrine (attachment to Dharma).

Stage (Ground)	Cultivation (Perfection)	Elimination (Heavy Hindrance)	Result (Thusness)	Purpose
5. Difficult-to-Conquer Ground *(Sudurjayā)*	Meditation Pāramitā *(Dhyāna)*	Hindrance of lower vehicle Nirvana	Indistinct Thusness	Overcoming the psychology of escape: Abandoning the thought of wanting to enjoy Nirvana alone. Returning to save beings, enduring suffering with the world while the mind remains settled.
6. Manifest Ground *(Abhimukhī)*	Wisdom Pāramitā *(Prajñā)*	Hindrance of coarse manifest appearances	Non-defiled Thusness	Eliminating dualistic thinking: No longer distinguishing clearly or rigidly. Seeing the true nature of phenomena.

Stage (Ground)	Cultivation (Perfection)	Elimination (Heavy Hindrance)	Result (Thusness)	Purpose
7. Far-Reaching Ground *(Dūraṃgamā)*	Means Pāramitā *(Upāya)*	Hindrance of subtle manifest appearances	Non-differentiated Thusness	Overcoming the view of arising and ceasing: Penetrating the principle of "no birth, no death," so that even the most minute appearances of arising and ceasing are no longer seen as real.
8. Immovable Ground *(Acalā)*	Vows Pāramitā *(Praṇidhāna)*	Hindrance of striving in the signless	Neither increasing nor decreasing Thusness	Eliminating "effort": Shifting from a state of needing to "apply effort" to be settled, to a state of "effortless action" (naturally settled, without needing to try).

Stage (Ground)	Cultivation (Perfection)	Elimination (Heavy Hindrance)	Result (Thusness)	Purpose
9. Good Intelligence Ground *(Sādhumatī)*	Power Pāramitā *(Bala)*	Hindrance of not wanting to act for others' benefit	Wisdom-mastery basis Thusness	Breaking the fear of difficulty: Possessing wisdom but must arouse the mind to use it to plunge into life, benefiting sentient beings tirelessly.
10. Cloud of Dharma Ground *(Dharmamegha)*	Knowledge Pāramitā *(Jñāna)*	Hindrance of not being master of dharmas	Karma-mastery basis Thusness	Eliminating the final limitation: Attaining absolute freedom, with miraculous powers transforming without obstruction like auspicious clouds covering the entire sky.

To reach this stage, the practitioner must deeply understand the arduous Bodhisattva path. The magician enters the cultivation of cause when he implores the effigy for help (Borges, 2023, p. 72), abandoning dualistic grasping and devoting himself to ritual practice, much like stepping onto the Joyous Ground. Under the Fire God's guidance, he patiently follows each instruction,

achieving insight through disciplined perseverance and transmission of ritual knowledge (Borges, 2023, p. 73). This process reflects Borges's understanding of Nirvana, echoing the Buddha's teaching that liberation lies in knowing the path rather than the totality of truth (Borges & Jurado, 1991, p. 90). While Borges does not advocate a specific religious doctrine, the magician's journey resonates with the Bodhisattva ideal: cultivation aims not at sanctification but inner peace. Although the son's creation nears completion, the magician experiences attachment and reluctance to let go (Borges, 2023, p. 74). Ultimately, he relinquishes control, erasing the son's awareness of his illusory origin, mirroring the Bodhisattva's selfless act of placing others' liberation above personal desire.

Interpenetration: Awakening to realize one is also a shadow in another dream

When the magician realizes that he himself is also a shadow, this can be seen as a powerful reflection of Consciousness-Only theory: that not only the object (the grasped condition) is manifested by consciousness, but even the perceiving subject (the grasping condition) is illusory, lying within a deeper layer of manifestation corresponding to the Path of Completion. In reality, his realization that he himself was also a shadow in another person's dream had been foreshadowed in the previous stage. When he taught the son the rituals so the child could step into reality, "At times, he was troubled by the impression that all this had happened before" (Borges, 2023, p. 73). His premonition arose from a feeling of familiarity because he himself might have been instructed in the things he was instructing his son. It is like a seed in the Storehouse Consciousness, inherently there and waiting for conditions to arise. This is precisely what Consciousness-Only aims for, not to deny that everything we see in this world is false, but for us to understand "observing the mind to liberate from birth and death, not that the internal realm also does not exist at all like the external realm" (Xuanzang, 2024, p. 701). The magician himself also felt that death was no longer something that frightened him, so instead of fleeing into the water to protect himself from the fire, he accepted it with the mindset of "understanding that death was coming to crown his old age and absolve him of his labors" (Borges, 2023, p. 76). This stage is perhaps when he stepped into the Outflow-free realm (Anāsrava-dhātu), which is a completely pure world, no longer having any entanglements. Attaining that realm means having eliminated everything; we can look back at that journey in the following diagram:
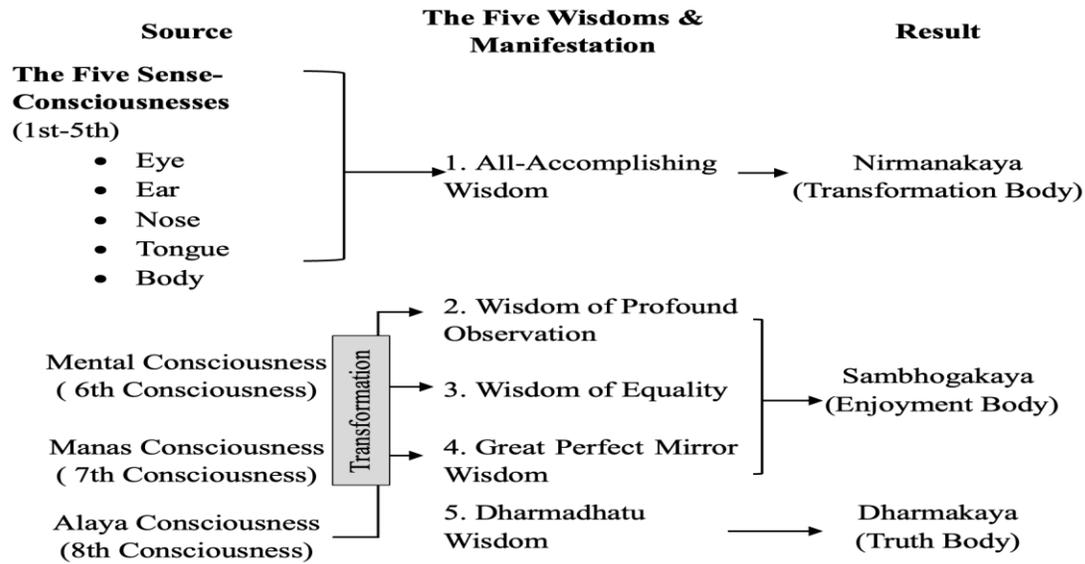
figure 1 The Correlation between the Five Dharmas, Four Wisdoms, and Three Bodies

It is precisely because the magician realized the nature of death and let go of anxious thoughts regarding the stories he heard others report about his son as a man who walked through fire without being burned that he was able to perceive a higher realm. Realizing that he himself is a shadow is the act of shattering the false self that is manifesting, eliminating attachment to the self when attaining the Transformation of the Basis (āśrayaparāvṛtti), and achieving liberation from fundamental delusions regarding the existence of a self. This is complete enlightenment, cognizant that all present phenomena are created by the eight consciousnesses and are not real. This enlightenment leads him to a new vision, like the wisdom of one who is sovereign, transcending all limits of ordinary cognition. And perhaps, the son he projected will also soon realize this reality just as he has perceived it. Re-reading the first detail that Borges cited from another work to serve as the epigraph for his short story - "And if he left off dreaming about you… Through the Looking-Glass, VI" (Borges, 2023, p.67) we see even more clearly the similarity in the concept that the world we live in is merely a world of images or reflections in a mirror, which both Borges and Consciousness-Only aim towards. And we, perhaps, are those sleeping in a dream, unaware that we are still within the great birth and death.

The Art of Constructing the Journey through the Symbol of Fire

In the story, the image appears from the initial stage to the end of the magician's journey to realize his goal, and is simultaneously a symbol connecting East and West cultures. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant: "Fire is the principal divine symbol of Mazdeism. The protection of the sacred fire extends from ancient Rome to Angkor. The symbol of purifying and regenerating fire develops from the West to Japan" (Chevalier, J., & Gheerbrant, A., 1997, 545).

In the Consciousness-Only system, fire bears profound metaphysical meaning as it symbolizes the wisdom that burns away afflictions in the Radiant Ground (Arciṣmatī), an important stage on the path to enlightenment. The Fire God in the story is the only entity that knows the magician's son is merely a phantom, establishing an asymmetric power relationship between the creator and the energy source maintaining that creation. The magician teaching his son to worship Fire is not a voluntary choice but a mandatory submission to the knowledge that transcends illusion. Here, the Fire God represents Thusness (Tathatā) in Consciousness-Only, the only entity that sees through the illusory nature of the dream world.

The ultimate purpose of Consciousness-Only is to cause humans to realize and enter the Nature of Consciousness-Only which is neither existent nor non-existent, to destroy the two attachments of Superimposition and Denigration, that is, to transcend the dualism of existence and non-existence. The ending scene of the story clearly demonstrates this philosophy when the magician has fulfilled his life's purpose creating a person in a dream and faces death. The detail that the fire "did not bite his flesh, they caressed him and engulfed him without heat and without combustion" (Borges, 2023, 76), if viewed as a human feeling when perceiving a noble truth, is a sensation of lightness, not painful as we usually think. Through the fire symbol, Buddhist thought flows naturally as Borges expresses his idea on the illusory nature of reality, and that transcending all attachments is the only path to enlightenment.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how Jorge Luis Borges's narrative strategies anticipate and resonate with postmodern theories of representation and simulation, while also revealing striking conceptual affinities with Yogācāra Buddhist accounts of consciousness and reality construction. The results demonstrate that Borges's fiction not only destabilizes conventional realist ontology but also foregrounds epistemological and phenomenological concerns that parallel both Western poststructuralist thought and classical Buddhist philosophy.

First, the findings confirm that Borges's narrative prose systematically undermines the assumption of a stable, referential reality. As Alazraki (1968) and Sarlo (1993) have argued, Borges's stories replace mimetic realism with speculative architectures in which texts generate other texts, and signs refer primarily to other signs rather than to an external world. This is particularly evident in Ficciones (Borges, 1962), where labyrinths, infinite libraries, and fictive encyclopedias dramatize the collapse of origin and authority. These results align closely with Baudrillard's (1994) concept of simulacra, in which representation precedes and ultimately replaces the real. Borges's imagined worlds thus function not as metaphors of reality but as self-sustaining systems, anticipating the postmodern condition described by McHale (1987).

Second, the analysis supports Balderston's (1986) claim that Borges's manipulation of historical reference produces a deliberate "out-of-context" effect that destabilizes historical truth. Rather than grounding narratives in verifiable history, Borges inserts fabricated sources alongside authentic ones, blurring the boundary between archive and invention. This strategy

echoes Derrida's (1978) critique of logocentrism, wherein meaning is endlessly deferred through différance. The results suggest that Borges's fiction performs deconstruction avant la lettre by exposing how textual authority is constructed through repetition and citation rather than origin.

Moreover, the study's findings reveal strong conceptual parallels between Borges's narrative epistemology and Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy. Yogācāra's doctrine of vijñaptimātra (mere consciousness) holds that perceived reality arises from cognitive constructions rather than independent external objects (Asaṅga, 2001; Xuanzang, 1999). Borges's fictional universes, particularly those governed by idealist metaphysics, mirror this view by presenting worlds that exist only insofar as they are conceived, narrated, or remembered. This correspondence supports Lusthaus's (2002) and Kochumuttom's (1982) interpretations of Yogācāra as a phenomenological investigation of experience rather than a metaphysical idealism.

The concept of ālayavijñāna (storehouse consciousness) further illuminates Borges's recurring motifs of memory, repetition, and infinite regress. As Schmithausen (1987) and Vasubandhu (1984) explain, the ālayavijñāna functions as a repository of latent impressions that condition perception and cognition. Borges's fascination with total memory, most famously exemplified in "Funes the Memorious," can be read as a literary exploration of the burden and instability of such a storehouse. Rather than granting epistemic mastery, total recall results in paralysis, reinforcing Garfield's (2002) argument that attachment to conceptual reification leads to suffering and incoherence.

Additionally, the results demonstrate that Borges's fiction anticipates contemporary debates in cognitive philosophy. Clark's (2008) theory of the extended mind and Hayles's (1999) account of posthuman subjectivity provide a useful framework for understanding Borges's portrayal of cognition as distributed across texts, symbols, and external systems. The infinite library, the encyclopedia, and the map that replaces territory all suggest that thought is not confined to the individual mind but emerges through interaction with symbolic environments. This reinforces Foucault's (1977) view of discourse as a practice that produces subjects rather than merely expressing them.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Borges occupies a critical position at the intersection of literature, philosophy, and cognitive theory. His fiction does not merely illustrate philosophical ideas but actively theorizes the conditions of meaning, perception, and reality. By placing Borges in dialogue with postmodern theory and Yogācāra Buddhism, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how literary texts can function as sites of cross-cultural philosophical inquiry. The discussion thus supports the view that Borges's work remains not only aesthetically innovative but also philosophically generative, offering enduring insights into the constructed nature of reality and consciousness.

Conclusion

This study has examined Jorge Luis Borges's The Circular Ruins through the theoretical framework of the Five Stages of Vijñaptimātra, demonstrating that the protagonist's narrative trajectory can be coherently interpreted as a structured journey of spiritual cultivation and awakening. By employing a combination of systemic, psychological, and poetic methods, the article has shown that the magician's attempt to dream a human being into existence is not merely a metaphysical conceit, but a literary enactment of the Consciousness-Only path from delusion to liberation.

The analysis reveals a progressive transformation of cognition corresponding to the Paths of Accumulation, Preparation, Vision, Meditation, and Completion. Initially, the protagonist remains confined within subject–object dualism, clinging to the distinction between dream and reality. Through sustained discipline, relinquishment of control, and repeated confrontation with failure, he gradually dissolves these cognitive boundaries, culminating in the realization of āśrayaparāvṛtti—the transformation of the basis of consciousness. The climactic recognition that he himself is a dreamed being signifies the full penetration of non-self (anatman) and the illusory nature of all phenomena, aligning with the Yogācāra understanding of Nirvāṇa as the cessation of fundamental ignorance rather than annihilation.

Furthermore, the study highlights the central role of fire as a trans-cultural and metaphysical symbol that bridges Borges's literary imagination with Yogācāra epistemology. Fire functions not only as an artistic motif but also as an embodiment of non-discriminating wisdom, purifying attachments and revealing Thusness (tathatā). Through this symbol, Borges articulates an experiential insight into awakening that resonates strongly with Buddhist non-dual philosophy while remaining independent of doctrinal assertion.

Within its defined scope, this research has focused primarily on the Five Paths of Consciousness-Only, without exhaustively engaging related Yogācāra concepts such as the eight consciousnesses or the three natures. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that Vijñaptimātra offers a powerful interpretive model for decoding ontological instability, recursive creation, and consciousness-based realities in modern literature. By situating Borges within an East–West philosophical dialogue, the study contributes to both Borges scholarship and Buddhist literary studies, opening new possibilities for literary education oriented toward experiential awareness and consciousness inquiry in an era increasingly shaped by simulation and virtuality.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Implementation

Based on the findings of this study, several practical implications can be drawn for literary education, cultural reflection, and interdisciplinary pedagogy:

1. Integration into Literary Education Educators may incorporate Yogācāra-based frameworks into the teaching of modern and postmodern literature to help students critically engage with questions of selfhood, perception, and reality. The Circular Ruins can serve as a case study for exploring consciousness as a constructive process rather than a passive reflection of the world.

2. Cultivating Reflective Reading Practices Literature may be approached not only as an object of analysis but also as a contemplative practice. Encouraging readers to reflect on narrative illusion, recursive authorship, and dream logic can foster awareness of how identities—both textual and personal—are mentally constructed and maintained.

3. Application to Contemporary Digital Contexts the Consciousness-Only interpretation of Borges's story offers valuable insight into contemporary experiences shaped by digital avatars, virtual identities, and AI-generated agents. Recognizing the parallels between fictional dream-creations and technologically mediated selves can support more critical and mindful engagement with digital environments.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Comparative Textual Expansion Future studies may apply the Five Stages of Vijñaptimātra to other works by Jorge Luis Borges, such as Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius or The Library of Babel, to further examine how recursive ontology and consciousness-based reality function across his oeuvre. Comparative analysis with authors such as Philip K. Dick, Italo Calvino, or Haruki Murakami may also reveal broader patterns of consciousness-oriented narrative structures in global literature.

2. AI, Simulation, and Consciousness Studies Interdisciplinary research could explore the relationship between Yogācāra notions of constructed consciousness and contemporary developments in artificial intelligence. Such studies may investigate whether AI-generated entities can be meaningfully analyzed through Buddhist theories of cognition, projection, and illusion, thereby extending literary analysis into techno-philosophical inquiry.

3. Empirical Literary Psychology and Reader Response Future research may empirically examine how readers cognitively and emotionally respond to narratives that dissolve subject–object boundaries. Integrating cognitive science, phenomenology, and Buddhist psychology could deepen understanding of how literary texts influence perception, identity formation, and experiential awareness.

Declaration of Interests

The author declares that there are no known financial, professional, or personal interests that could have appeared to influence the research reported in this article.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based solely on textual analysis of published literary and philosophical works. It does not involve human participants, personal data, or experimental procedures. Therefore, no ethical approval was required. All sources have been appropriately cited in accordance with academic standards, and the research adheres to principles of academic integrity and scholarly responsibility.

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Definition of Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest refers to any situation in which an author's financial, institutional, or personal relationships could potentially influence, or be perceived to influence, the objectivity, integrity, or interpretation of the research. In the present study, no such conflicts exist.

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