

THE VISION OF UNITY: EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S THEOLOGY

Chapter VII

Swedenborg in Hispanic Literature

Swedenborg and Unamuno

Emanuel Swedenborg has not been an author who has had much success in Spain. In contrast to France, England, or Germany, there has been practically no penetration of the Swedish philosopher's thought in the Spanish-speaking world. And so one cannot help but be surprised by the references that Unamuno made to Swedenborg in his work *The Tragic Sense of Life*.¹ However, this fact, while being unusual in itself and worthy of note, takes on even more significance if we realize the appropriateness and aptness of the references to Swedenborg made by Unamuno.

There are three explicit citations. The first deals with a primary theme in Swedenborg: personalization as the fundamental determination of reality:

We ought not be surprised, either, by the assertion that the consciousness of the Universe is composed of and integrated by the consciousness of all the beings that form the Universe, by the consciousness of all beings, and that at the same time it is a personal consciousness distinct from those which compose it. Only thus is it possible to understand how "in God we live, move, and have our being." That visionary Emanuel Swedenborg saw—or described—this in his book on Heaven and Hell (*De Cælo et Inferno*, § 52), where he tells us:

*...an entire angelic society sometimes appears in the form of a single angel, as I have been permitted by the Lord to see. When the Lord Himself appears in the midst of angels, He does not appear encompassed by a multitude but as One Being in an angelic form. Hence it is that the Lord in the Word is called an angel and also that an entire society is so called. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are only angelic societies so named by the functions they perform.*²

And further on, Unamuno says as a kind of interpretation of the above:

May we not perhaps live and love, that is, suffer and feel compassion, in this all-enveloping Supreme Person, all of us who suffer and feel compassion, all beings who struggle to achieve personality, to acquire consciousness of their suffering and limitations? And are we not, perhaps, ideas of this total Supreme Consciousness, which, by thinking of us as existing, makes us exist? Does not our existence consist in being perceived and felt by God? And this same visionary tells us, farther on, in his image-making manner, that each angel, each society of angels, and the whole of heaven contemplated as a single whole, appear in human form, and by virtue of this human form the Lord rules as if over a single man.³

What is most surprising in all this is not that Unamuno quotes Swedenborg, but rather the lucid exegesis he makes of the Swedish philosopher and the very aptness of the citation. Clearing away the narrative underbrush in Swedenborg (his “image-making manner”), Unamuno has caught sight of what is essential, the substantive core of Swedenborg’s system: the vision of the world in personalized terms.⁴ Effectively, this paragraph into which he inserts this reference to Swedenborg belongs to a chapter (“Love, Pain, Compassion, and Personality”) in which there is a debate over considering the universe as personalized. Few are the thinkers like Swedenborg who could exemplify this idea. For in this author there is not some sort of mysticism of the ineffable, nor is it some plunging into the abyss of the Absolute, but rather quite the opposite. Swedenborg proposes a mysticism of the “sayable,” of the “determinable,” a mysticism of naming. And this whole process, given that everything can be said, determined, and named, is a step or a degree in the acquiring of consciousness and personality. In Swedenborg’s language, all this represents an angel; it means coming to be an angel.⁵ Hence Unamuno’s citation, since he has grasped that the spirit of the letter of Swedenborg is the highest expression of a stage of reality that must be seen in terms of categories that are personalized and personalizing. This also means, among many other things, that reality fits into a context in which the determinations are qualitative and not quantitative, since it is precisely personalization that causes the unity of each consciousness (each angel, each determination) to be the parameter and paradigm by which totality is to be measured, inasmuch as it is consciousness. Each consciousness is the All and the All itself is a person.

This vision of Swedenborg's has been interpreted by Unamuno in a correct manner, and for this reason he knew that it should be inserted in the place where it is precisely the problem of the personalization of the universe that is being posed. The category of person, as applied by Swedenborg to questions of a transcendental or metaphysical nature, involves a whole series of derivations and consequences of which Unamuno was certainly aware. And one of these corollaries is the representative or figurative character of the system which maintains the theme of personalization as its fundamental basis, such as that of Swedenborg; for in him the very idea of person is *represented* by the figure of the angel. Also in this respect Unamuno has succeeded in capturing the essence of the Swedish author's narrations. For it is true that representative or figurative thinking implies that a greater value is placed on the concrete over the abstract, on image over concept, since what is personal or what can be personalized is always someone concrete, imaginable (capable of being represented with an image, a figure), living and existing. The determinations that ontological categories take on in Swedenborg—and which Unamuno recaptures here—are not so much categories as they are *persons*, living and existing. This is the role played by the angel in Swedenborg. An ontology formulated in terms of person is not an ontology of separate beings, ideas, or essences; it is an ontology of persons having their own names, of concrete representations, of existences, to put it succinctly. Unamuno was personally interested—and this term has never been more aptly used—in elucidating that conception, as is shown by this other insightful reference to Swedenborg:

If there is life in heaven, there is change. Swedenborg observed that the angels change, because the delight of the celestial life would gradually lose its value if they always enjoyed it in its fullness, and because angels, like men, love themselves, and he who loves himself experiences changes of state; and he adds that at times the angels are sad, and that he, Swedenborg, conversed with some of them when they were sad (cf. *De Coelo et Inferno*, §§ 158, 160).⁶

This citation would carry us far afield, were we to comment on it and draw out from it all its meaning. Let us simply emphasize once again how appropriate it was for Unamuno to cite Swedenborg to support his point, because Unamuno has seen how the theme of the angel corresponds to

the motivations behind the existentialism he himself proposes. The exegesis of the angel is none other than the phenomenization of inner time as the movement and existence of the soul, the determination of a transcendental ontology characterized in terms that are personal, vital, concrete, and capable of representation. Ultimately, the exegesis of the angel is a response to the questions Unamuno had posed immediately before that point:

How can a human soul live and enjoy God eternally without losing its individual personality, that is, without losing itself? What is the enjoyment of God? What is eternity as opposed to time? Does the soul change or does it not change in the other life? If it does not change, how does it live? And if it changes, how does it preserve its individuality through so vast a period of time?⁷

These are the explicit references made by Unamuno in *The Tragic Sense of Life*. But we believe that the Swedish philosopher is implicitly present in other places in this work, and always in relation to the complex problem we have just alluded to. What Unamuno gathers from thinkers like Swedenborg is the dynamic and vital—i.e., existential—conception of the transcendental, and the personalizing conception—along with all its implications—of both ontological and theological categories, with the deliberate *preeminence* of the existential and concrete as opposed to the essentialist and abstract. Therefore we maintain that Swedenborg's presence can be detected in the work of Unamuno that we are commenting on. There is an obvious Swedenborgian flavor in these words of Unamuno:

May it not be, I say, that all souls grow ceaselessly, some in greater measure than others, but all of them having, at some point, to go through the same degree, whatever it may be, of growth, without ever arriving at the infinite, at God, whom they continually approach?⁸

And especially, bearing in mind that we have taken this quote from a context in which concepts such as *apokatastasis* [re-creation] and *anakephaleôsis* [recapitulation] are being discussed, the presence of Swedenborgian influences is rather obvious. Naturally, we do not mean to say that Swedenborg was the creator of these terms, nor that these terms came to Unamuno through the Swedish visionary. Many are the authors, from Saint Paul onward, who have spoken of these concepts. But it is certainly true

that a conception that takes up *anakephaleôsis* is possible only in a personalizing system of the universe and of all reality; it is possible only in a dynamic and existential vision of reality itself, which thus continuously receives its personalizing determinations—all of which is found precisely in Swedenborg. Moreover, we can place Swedenborg within the framework of that line of thinkers in the West who, although in a discontinuous and diffuse manner, have proposed an ontology of figure rather than concept, of person rather than essence. Thus, it is pertinent to call upon Swedenborg—and this is how Unamuno has seen it. For there are various places that, as we have been saying, we could relate to Swedenborgian motifs. Thus:

Paradise, then, according to many, is society, a more perfect society than that of this world; it is human society made into a person. And there are people who believe that all human progress tends to make our species into one collective being with a true consciousness.... When this collective being has achieved full consciousness, then all who have ever existed will come alive again in it.⁹

Anyone who has even a limited familiarity with Swedenborg will see in these words a reference to the basic ideas of the Swedish thinker, and more specifically to the vision—already mentioned above—of the society of the angels as representing a superseding of the quantitative by virtue of the preeminence of personalizing and qualitative categories: “human society that has been made a person,” or what amounts to the same thing, the All is replicated and is determined in each one. It could also be argued that the preceding quotation is found in a Pauline context, where the terms *anakephaleôsis* and *apokatastasis* are recurrent themes; but in actuality, it is Swedenborg’s thought that is immersed in this ontological tradition. Therefore, it only follows that he would be explicitly quoted and implicitly included in the text we are commenting upon. Let us again reiterate the guiding idea of our book: Unamuno has performed a flawless exegesis of Swedenborg, since he has managed to see what is at the core and what is more on the surface. Moreover, this exegesis done by Unamuno could be extended to all thought of an esoteric cast, for there is little doubt that it is not merely by chance that Unamuno cites authors such as Jakob Boehme and Friedrich Christopher Oetinger, for the latter theologian was the first to translate Swedenborg into German and was Swedenborg’s most accurate interpreter in Germany. All of this adds weight to

our assessment of Unamuno's interest in Swedenborg in particular and esoteric thought in general. All of this can lead us to wonder about the role that philosophy of a mystical esoteric cast may have played in Unamuno. We are not claiming that a direct line of influence can be established in terms of that kind of philosophy and Unamuno, but there is no doubt our philosopher was familiar with that philosophy and, what is more significant, was a lucid interpreter of it. For if authors like Boehme, Swedenborg, or Oetinger have been studied by Unamuno, it is because they all exhibit a sort of mystical existentialism whereby transcendental realities (God, soul, supernatural life) are not resolved into abstract categories, but rather in personalized terms, or even anthropologized terms. In any case, they presuppose a direct experience of those realities that is concrete and that can be represented. This was a deeply felt yearning on Unamuno's part, which could only be fulfilled by the kind of philosophy that we earlier termed the "mysticism of naming."

As a final reflection in this short study, we must once again mention Unamuno's hermeneutics with respect to Swedenborg. This hermeneutics has shown us how profound the import of this thinker appears to us. We could then pose the question of the possibility of extending this hermeneutics to all thinkers having these same characteristics. In some ways Unamuno himself does extend it to Boehme and Oetinger, thus providing us with a path of religious influence that is operative in Unamuno, one that is different from the works that are usually cited (Saint Augustine, Spanish mysticism, Pascal, Kierkegaard). Moreover, Unamuno proposes and carries out a faithful hermeneutic that restores meaning. With Swedenborg, this has certainly been the case.

Swedenborg and Eugenio D'Ors

It is certainly surprising that, although Emanuel Swedenborg is so little known in Hispanic cultural circles, two thinkers among us have had such lucid insights into the Swedish philosopher. We are referring to Unamuno and D'Ors. We have already dealt with Unamuno.¹⁰ Let us now turn to D'Ors. An earlier book of his, entitled *Introducción a la vida angélica*,¹¹ has been republished. We were already familiar with this book through the many references made to it by Henry Corbin. Since they are perhaps the most important, we will cite two of them:

All these connections have been admirably indicated in a little book with which we do not entirely agree on all points but

towards which we feel sympathetic because it is one of the rare treatises on angelology written in our time and because it is for the most part inspired by heartfelt daring.¹²

I do not think that there can be found any better basis, either in fundamental or in experiential terms, for justifying this than a short quip written in a treatise on angelology by a contemporary Catalan author with perceptive and clear insight, countering a well known statement by Teresa of Avila: No, it is far from certain that God alone suffices.¹³

There is no better author to introduce our subject than Henry Corbin, since these citations will serve as a point of entry into this consideration of Swedenborg, the angel, and D'Ors.

We shall not attempt to demonstrate the influence Swedenborgian angelology had on that of D'Ors. Rather, we intend to point out the degree of comprehension D'Ors had of the Nordic thinker, which indirectly makes clear, in our judgment, the relevant role Swedenborg plays in D'Ors' conception of the angel. It is a fact that traces of Swedenborg in the philosophy of D'Ors are not limited to matters of angelology alone. Rather, they touch upon other themes, while it is true that the question of the angel implies a whole series of notional correlations, in such a way that they relate that question to the system as a whole, as we shall see. It can be said that the theme of the angel is an emblem that defines and represents a certain kind of philosophy. The angel, which is the very essence of the emblematic, generates an emblematic philosophy. Now let us turn to specific references D'Ors makes to Swedenborg. Xenius states:

From the outset I want to make clear that, if I happen to speak to you about the Angels, it is in a spirit and tone very different from what most people imagine, when they recall Swedenborg or Dionysius the Areopagite... and this apart from the fact that neither the Areopagite nor Swedenborg were what people think they were."¹⁴

First, it must be noted that for D'Ors, Swedenborg is not some marginal, fanciful, or anecdotal author. He has already stated that Swedenborg is not what people imagine, doubtlessly referring to the host of misunderstandings that linger on about the Swedish thinker. First and foremost, it is plainly indicative that D'Ors has placed Swedenborg in a book

on angelology, which shows not only his opinion of Swedenborg's importance for this subject, but also Swedenborg's presence in the works of D'Ors as a whole, either because of influence, or because the questions they dealt with coincide. The second explicit reference to Swedenborg is the following:

For unimaginative minds, Emanuel Swedenborg was a naturalist thinker up to a given moment of his existence, and when he arrived at that moment, his brains melted down, and he began to talk nonsense about celestial matters. . . . But if you check the dates, you will see how the author, who is explaining what he has seen and heard in heaven and hell, is at the same time the creator of modern crystallography and the one who discovered the connection of the sun and the solar system to the Milky Way. Thus there is compatibility between *Divine Love and Wisdom* with scientific knowledge of the most concrete kind and even combined with pragmatic discretion in the exercise of technical functions and political offices.¹⁵

Actually, all of paragraph 30 is devoted to Swedenborg, and it evidences an uncommon understanding for bringing into focus the series of problems posed by the Scandinavian writer. D'Ors has managed to see how there does not exist in Swedenborg some break in continuity between his scientific writings and his spiritual writing, but rather that Swedenborg's holistic vision consists precisely in extrapolating or extending scientific conceptions (proper to the world of matter) to the world of the spirit, in such a way that reality presents itself as a continuum that, as D'Ors himself asserts, is manifested as being "compact, without cracks or gaps." There are few phrases more expressive to define what Swedenborg's system is. D'Ors has clearly seen that there are not two Swedenborgs, one scientific and rational and the other visionary and daydreaming. Contrary to what is usually said, there is no radical separation between Swedenborg the scientist and Swedenborg the theologian, simply because, as we will say it again, there never was any duality in thought, but rather continuity. Swedenborg's universe is a universe in which the structures of what is material and the structures of what is spiritual correspond to one another; and in order to account for this correspondence, Swedenborg makes use of his scientific training to extrapolate the realm of the spiritual by applying a law of universal analogy. As D'Ors so expressively puts it,

“between the physical world and the spiritual there is no room to imagine any separation or hiatus.” In this way Swedenborg reads in what is material its spiritual imprint, its Divine trace, its symbol of the intelligible. Thus, he can be added to the list of Neoplatonists and Christian exemplarists in the history of philosophy. Another one of the merits of D’Ors consists in conceiving Swedenborg to be a genuine philosopher and not a mystic (which he certainly is not, despite what Emerson might have said).

What is of greatest interest to us here is to check out the insightful interpretation of Swedenborg that D’Ors develops, in contrast to an “unimaginative judgment” that dismisses Swedenborg’s speculations as merely ecstasies. D’Ors shows himself to be a penetrating exegete of Swedenborg when he succeeds in distinguishing the Swedish philosopher from the legion of his Romantic followers, who have often given a distorted image of Swedenborg’s thought.¹⁶ By this we do not intend to minimize the role that Romanticism played in the spread of Swedenborg’s ideas; in any case, Swedenborg’s echo among Romantic writers can be explained in sociological terms. For us what is important is that D’Ors has not been satisfied with reiterating preconceived ideas about Swedenborg; instead, he has succeeded in deciphering the deep meaning of the Swedish philosopher.

However, D’Ors’ understanding of Swedenborg is not centered on an overall vision of the Scandinavian thinker; as much as his perceptive vision is indeed on the mark, his understanding, in our judgment, takes its direction and has its explanation in the work of D’Ors itself. We are referring, of course, to angelology, and, by extension, to a particular character that the figure of the angel takes on in every system of thought in which it has a place. To dwell on the angelology of D’Ors would be to dwell on his entire work, which would be impossible here. But Swedenborg’s influence seems obvious to us, particularly on this subject. The very fact that D’Ors devotes significant space to Swedenborg in a book on angelology proves this, since it is uncommon for a thinker with the mindset and training that D’Ors had even to take Swedenborg into account. In fact, when we look deeply at the conceptions of both D’Ors and Swedenborg, they coincide in many respects. Most basically, in the ontology of determination; determination that presents itself as a rejection of what is abstract and impersonal, in order to affirm what is figurative and personal; in short, everything that is summed up in the image of the angel—the emblem and

symbol of this kind of philosophy, or better still, the theology of that which can be named. For “God alone does not suffice;” in other words, an abstract or apophatic notion of God is not enough. Rather, for us (who inhabit images as our specific place) there exists the mediation of the angels, who are the ones who make accessible to us and represent to us that abstract and impersonal notion of the Divine which, while it is absolute, is not beyond our grasp. The angels are the consequence of a theology of what can be named and determined (are not the angels the god-bearers of the Divine names?), in which the absolute is relativized *for us*.

Without entering into a discussion of the figure of the angel itself in D’Ors, a subject that would take us too far afield, we will sum up the principal traits in which the presence of Swedenborg can be glimpsed in the work of the Spanish philosopher:

In the first place, the very consideration of the angel as a transcendental and spiritual projection or dimension of man. In the second place, and as a corollary to the first, the concept of the marriage or syzygy of man with his angel; in other words, the obtaining by the human person of that heavenly part or dimension of himself that is his angel, which can be expressed philosophically by saying that each angel is the unique genus of each individual—his archetype or form. In the third place, also closely related to everything that has been said up to now, note should be taken of the anthropological tripartition that both authors carry out in terms of angelology: for Swedenborg, man is natural, spiritual, and celestial; and for D’Ors man is composed of body, soul, spirit or angel. In both cases the angel represents the personalization of man; the fact that each individual acquires his or her *own* angel is tantamount to that individual’s acquiring his or her true personality. To sum up, what distinguishes the systems of both D’Ors and Swedenborg is their common interest in figurative or emblematic thinking, in which conceptual categories are transformed into persons, in which the universal emblems become symbols of each one. In each case the angel—symbol, genus, emblem—is presented as a being that is directed to each one of us; metaphysically speaking, the principle of individualization of *each one* is *his* or *her* form, which is expressed here as: it is *his* or *her* angel, the angel of *each one*.

However, it does not seem that the commentators and interpreters of D’Ors have been very sensitive to this Swedenborgian presence. None of the authors we have consulted even mentions the Scandinavian philosopher: José Luis L. Aranguren does not; nor do Díaz Plaja, Alian Guy, López Quintás,

or P. H. Michel; nor does José Jiménez in his otherwise excellent prologue to his edition of the *Introducción a la vida angélica*. Obviously this is to be attributed not to any ignorance of the works of D'Ors on the part of these authors, but rather to the lack of understanding with respect to Swedenborg that persists in certain circles.

Despite all this, we cannot discount the differences that exist between these two thinkers. We can see certain contradictions between the acceptance of certain themes from Swedenborg on the part of D'Ors and this author's system as a whole. The "classicism" of D'Ors prevented him from seeing that the development of Swedenborgian angelology would lead to the study of the Iranian world, as we can see in Corbin.¹⁷ Despite all this, we must emphasize the interest that Swedenborg aroused both in D'Ors and in another great Spanish philosopher, Unamuno. Doubtlessly, this interest was justified by the kind of spiritual existentialism and metaphysical individualism and personalism that mark Swedenborg's thought, all qualities that also served as a vital and intellectual grounding for both these Spanish philosophers, no matter how much they may have differed from one another. It is in this sense that D'Ors was a profound exegete of Swedenborg's work: for him—as well as for Unamuno—over and above anything else, Swedenborg is a thinker who focuses on the person, on what is concrete and individual (and is not the angel the figure that represents these characteristics to their highest degree?). In the end, where D'Ors and Swedenborg coincide is in what we could call emblematic philosophy, a philosophy that is synthesized in this phrase from D'Ors: "The eon is an idea with a biography."

Swedenborg and Jorge Luis Borges

It is quite possible that Jorge Luis Borges is the Spanish-speaking author who has written the most about Swedenborg.¹⁸ This fact is in itself worthy of consideration. Moreover, this relationship brings up another subject: the connection that may exist between philosophy and literature. In the specific case of Swedenborg and Borges, the problem can be posed as follows: what contribution does the Argentinian author bring to a better understanding of the Swedish philosopher, and to what extent do Swedenborg's theological writings shed light on Borges' works?

We should not really be surprised by the repeated citations of Swedenborg in Borges, since Borges is a writer who makes frequent use of philosophers (Plato, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, etc.) and since Swedenborg

was a thinker who particularly influenced literary writers. Without attempting to make an exhaustive listing of all of Borges' references to the Prophet of the North, we will point out the most significant and obvious ones, since these will tell us what elements in Swedenborg were of greatest interest to Borges, and perhaps also what the Argentinian writer might add to our knowledge of the Swedish theologian.

There are two texts in which Borges attempts a kind of synthesis of Swedenborgian doctrine: one of them is a prologue to an English-language edition of Swedenborg;¹⁹ the other (practically identical to the first, except somewhat abbreviated) is the text of a lecture he gave at the University of Belgrano in 1978 and recorded in the volume *Borges Oral*.²⁰ These brief summaries, despite some inevitable inaccuracies due to their brevity, are well crafted and also give us a precise idea of what in Swedenborg might have been of interest to Borges: above all the lucidity of the Swedish visionary (in contrast to the clichés on the subject) and Borges' rejection of any claim that Swedenborg was mad. Borges' observation of Swedenborg's lucidity is the necessary prerequisite for any transition to Swedenborg (it is only because Swedenborg has something to say that any subsequent investigation becomes possible); in the second place, it establishes the need for a determined interpretation of Swedenborg's Writings, which is to say that a correct understanding of the Scandinavian theologian is not possible without a hermeneutics for this particular purpose. After this, there are various interesting notes that Borges managed to pick up in the Nordic thinker, such as the mention of the formal, concrete, individual character of the supra-tangible worlds; but we are especially interested in that which affected what we might call Borges' religiosity: "according to Swedenborg, Hell and Heaven are in man, that likewise includes planets, mountains, seas, continents, minerals, trees, grasses, flowers, thistles, animals, reptiles, birds, fish, tools, cities, and buildings."²¹ This may well be the key to Borges' attraction to Swedenborg: in short, it would be a matter of the internalization of realms and categories that are usually projected toward the outside. Swedenborg's work (and religiosity) would then be a process by which the soul experiences within itself that which others place outside the self. All those "planets..., etc." are now the movements, the flows, the transformations and explanations of consciousness. It is in the soul that all those things reside, for they are events of the soul—in other words, that which the soul experiences. In the impressive sonnet that Borges dedicates to Swedenborg the same idea is recaptured:

Sabía que la Gloria y el Averno
 en tu alma están y sus mitologías.²²
 [He knew that Glory and Hades
 are in your soul along with their mythologies.]

Thus, what Borges intuited in Swedenborg's works is what Henry Corbin developed at length: a phenomenology of visionary consciousness, in which the journeys, the epic, and the worlds described are metaphors and images of the realities of the spirit.²³ Borges' reading of Swedenborg is to a certain extent comparable to that of Strindberg, since for the latter author, Swedenborg's heaven and hell are internalizations of the consciousness that experiences heaven or hell.²⁴ In other words, each one is his or her own heaven or his or her own hell. Heaven and hell are thus representations of inner experiences, in the same way that the mansions of Teresa of Avila or the castles of Sohrevardi represent processes and events of the interior life and its stages. Another reference to Swedenborg emphasizes the interest this Hispanic writer had in what we could call interior religiosity or the internalization of religious images and figures: "For Swedenborg, as for Boehme, heaven and hell are states that man seeks in freedom, not some penal establishment or some devotional establishment."²⁵ Perhaps the conclusions that Borges was able to draw from this interpretation of Swedenborg were of both an æsthetic and a philosophical or spiritual nature: æsthetic, on account of the latent possibilities presupposed by an assertion of the pre-eminence of the interior life; philosophical or spiritual, on account of the particular mode of religiosity implied by inner experience. Perhaps it might be an overstatement to include Borges within what we would call Swedenborgian spirituality, but it is undeniable that Borges felt an attraction toward Swedenborg that went beyond cultural interests.²⁶ Borges intuited that what Swedenborg is saying to us makes reference, above all, to realities of the soul. Accordingly, the Buddha of the North would end up proposing an internalized, spiritualized religiosity; in a certain way, a demythologized religiosity, in which the images and representations come to be seen as experiences of the soul. This demythologizing aspect of Swedenborgian hermeneutics, in the very substance of any allegorical exegesis, has been clearly perceived by Borges, who catches a glimpse of the fundamental idea that underlies the thinking of the Scandinavian visionary. Thus, while for Unamuno, Swedenborg would be a kind of precursor of the philosophy of existence, and while for D'Ors he was a theoretician of angelology, Borges would highlight Swedenborg as a thinker of the interior life of consciousness.²⁷

Without any doubt, the philosophical and theological consequences of this Swedenborgian conception have enormous possibilities for development. But we have already stated that Borges remains at the point of intuiting these ideas; in addition, we must realize that he himself is not a Swedenborgian in the strict sense, nor is he a philosopher or a theologian; thus, we should not expect from him any complete and detailed exposition of the theories of the Swedish thinker. Nonetheless, the interest Swedenborg awakened in Borges is unmistakable. This is proved by the inclusion of six texts from Swedenborg (more than from any other author) in *El libro del cielo y del infierno*,²⁸ in addition to another text from Heine that includes an interesting reflection on Swedenborg, also along the lines that see in the Prophet of the North a thinker in whom priority is given, above all, to concrete individuality, the interior life of consciousness, the thrust toward form. Likewise, in *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios*²⁹ we come upon another reference to a text of Swedenborg's. Finally, in "Otro poema de los dones" ["Another poem on the gifts"] we find something like an overall acknowledgement of the figure of Swedenborg.

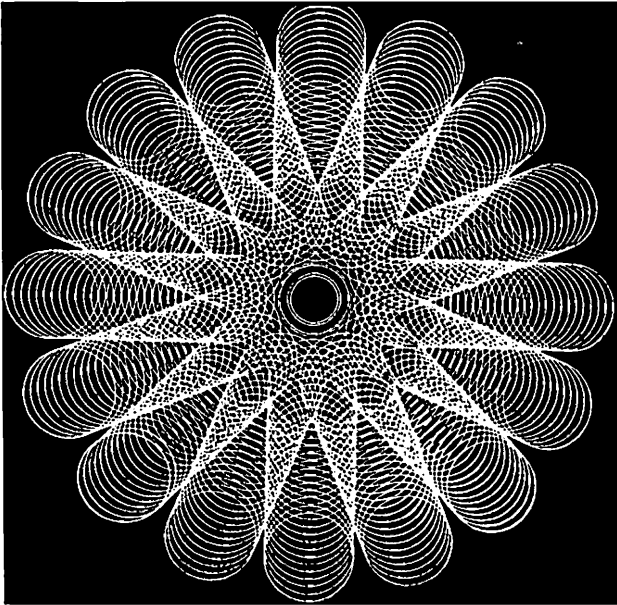
Por Swedenborg,
que conversaba con los ángeles en las calles de Londres.³⁰
[On account of Swedenborg,
who used to converse with angels on the streets of London.]

In summary, we believe that Swedenborg inspired Borges with a certain manner of experiencing religiosity. We leave that word in all its ambivalence, because it is far from clear whether the Argentinian artist would have taken a stand on any given religion. But it does seem evident that he shared in feelings and experiences marked by genuine religiosity. And in these feelings and experiences, Swedenborg's role looms large: a process of internalization, demythologizing exegesis, spiritualization of categories formulated in projections from without, religious life in terms of spontaneity of the consciousness... In all these expressions of the activity of the soul Swedenborg's imprint lies just below the surface. However, while the influence of a certain spirituality on Borges is significant, no less significant is the fact that Borges has managed to interpret and to draw such intelligent insights from an author like Swedenborg, who has often not benefited from such lucid readings. Therefore, what is important here is not only what Swedenborg's works may have meant for Borges, but also what light Borges may have been able to shed for a better understanding

of the Swedish thinker. If Swedenborg's presence can help us to know better not only the literature but also the innermost religiosity of Borges, then certainly Borges' insights can allow us to make some contribution when called upon to interpret an author who is as open to misinterpretation as is Swedenborg.

We have not found in Borges' books any other significant allusion to Swedenborg. If perhaps there is any other, then it is indirect and not explicit. We cite a beautiful poem with unmistakable Swedenborgian echoes, since it carries the meaningful title of "El Angel" and it ends as follows:

Señor, que al cabo de mis días en la Tierra
yo no deshonre al Angel.³¹
[Lord, at the end of my days upon the Earth
let me not dishonor the Angel.]



NOTES

1. Miguel de Unamuno, *Obras completas*, vol 3. Ed. by Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1967). English translation used: *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972; 1990).
2. *Ibid.*, 168-169.
3. *Ibid.*, 169.
4. In this sense, Henry Corbin's studies have been basic for a better understanding of Swedenborg, particularly his "Herméneutique spirituelle comparée (I. Swedenborg, II. Gnose Ismaélienne)," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXXIII (Zurich, 1964), 71-176; trans. Leonard Fox in *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995). Along these same lines is our article "Hacia Swedenborg," *Cielo y Tierra*, 2 (1985), 55-61.
5. The phenomenon of the angel has been treated at length by Corbin in a great number of places, and so I will not dwell on this point. This same author has correctly traced the spiritual lineage to which Swedenborg belongs. It would be appropriate merely to point out that our own Eugenio D'Ors also belongs to this lineage with his book *Introducción a la vida angélica*.
6. *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 246.
7. *Ibid.* There is another explicit reference to Swedenborg that also cites *Heaven and Hell* on page 244 of Unamuno's book under discussion. We shall not quote this reference in its entirety because it does not directly deal with the subject we are treating, but simply let it be noted.
8. *Ibid.*, 266.
9. *Ibid.*, 277.
10. "Swedenborg y Unamuno," *Pensamiento* 169 (1987), 53-57.
11. *Introducción a la vida angélica*, ed. José Jiménez (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1987). The first edition was published in Buenos Aires (Editoriales Reunidas, 1939).
12. Henry Corbin, *L'Homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris: Présence, 1971); English tr. Nancy Pearson, *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (New York: Omega Publications, 1993).
13. Henry Corbin, "Nécessité de l'Angélologie," in *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: L'Herne, 1981).
14. *Introducción a la vida angélica*, p. 14.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
16. Cf. Karl-Erik Sjöden: *Swedenborg en France* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1985).

17. Nonetheless, Aranguren asserts that D'Ors had great esteem for the Iranian way of life, although there seems to be scarcely a mention of the Fravashi in his angelology. Without any doubt, "classicist" prejudices account for this.

Finally we would add something that might seem to be a contradiction. In this article we have asserted that Swedenborg was not a mystic, while throughout this book we have maintained the term "mysticism of determination" for Swedenborg's thought. The fact that this article on D'Ors dates back to 1988 accounts for the variance with respect to the book as a whole. In any case, the question of Swedenborg's mysticism (or lack of it) remains an open question that we intend to revisit.

18. See our articles "Swedenborg y Unamuno," *Pensamiento* 169 (1987), 42-57; and "Presencia de Swedenborg en Eugenio D'Ors," *Heterodoxia* I (1988), 7-9.

19. *Prólogos*, ed. Torres Agüero (Buenos Aires: 1975), 153-62. The prologue in question is to the volume *Mystical Works*.

20. *Borges oral* (Barcelona: Editorial Bruguera, 1980).

21. *Prólogos*, 161.

22. *Obra poética* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1972), 222.

23. There is no work by Henry Corbin that treats solely of the figure of Swedenborg. However, his classic work on the Nordic thinker is referred to in note 4.

24. "Reading Swedenborg takes up my whole day; I am dumbfounded by the realism of his descriptions. In them everything can be found, all my observations, my sensations, my ideas, in such a way that to me his visions seem to be lived experiences, genuine human testimonies. There is no need to believe blindly; it is enough to read and compare them with one's own lived experiences." Cf. August Strindberg, *Inferno, Alone, and Other Writings in New Translation*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (Princeton, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1990); Spanish translation by José Rodríguez (Barcelona: Editorial Fontamara, 1961); [the citation is from page 185 of the Spanish translation]. In Strindberg the parallelism between Swedenborg's idea of internalization and his own is more existential. For Strindberg hell as described by Swedenborg was experienced through his own "*descensus ad infernos*."

25. *Otras inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1966), 137.

26. For Oswaldo Romero, Swedenborg's influence on the religiosity or spirituality of Borges is beyond question, as he states in "Dios en la obra de J. L. Borges, su Teología y su Teodicea," *Revista Iberoamericana* (1977), 100-101. This is part of a monographic issue dedicated to Borges.

27. There exists in Borges' writing a reference that, without pushing our conclusions to extremes, might well be a milestone in establishing Borges' spiritual

lineage. This sign or symptom is Gustav Theodor Fechner. We reiterate that it is not our intention to draw conclusions from something nebulous, but only to point to some indicators of a given attitude. In this vein, we cite Fechner—and more specifically his *Life after Death* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1943). [The author here cites page 142 of *Libro del cielo y del infierno*, which is a Spanish translation of a shorter work contained in the aforementioned English translation.] (This is Fechner's text "Extensiones," excerpted from his unusual *Zend-Avesta*). "Extensiones," the text listed by Borges and Bioy, fits completely, in our judgment, into that current proper to an inner-oriented religiosity for which statements about God and elements of mythology are resolved into movements and states of the soul, a kind of religiosity that Borges connects with Swedenborgian motifs. The paragraph from Fechner that is cited is indicative of what, following the terminology used above, might be termed Swedenborgian spiritual lineage. But it also turns out that Fechner is presented to us as a third element in a comparison in another author, also already cited, and for whom Swedenborg likewise occupied an important place: Henry Corbin. Indeed, in Corbin's book *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*, Fechner is cited at length in relation to a theme as typically Swedenborgian as the angel. A system of cross-references would place these authors in a similar sequence: Borges with Corbin, Swedenborg with Fechner, and all the possible combinations among them. Thus, when it comes to shedding light on Borges' religiosity, the intersection between Fechner and Borges reveals one more of these spiritual characteristics and particularly touches upon it: the life of the consciousness and its elucidation.

28. *Libro del cielo y del infierno* (in collaboration with Bioy Casares) (Barcelona: EDHASA, 1971), 40, 43, 61, 62, 155, 174. With reference to Heine, page 187.

29. *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* (in collaboration with Bioy Casares) (Buenos Aires: Ruda, 1967), 87.

30. *Obra poética*, pages 255. Given that this is a poem of thanksgiving to the "divine labyrinth of effects and causes," we can gather the importance that Swedenborg took on for Borges.

31. *La cifra* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982), 67. Might there be here some connection with Eugenio D'Ors? On this subject see his short work entitled *Oraciones para el creyente en ángeles* [Prayers for one who believes in angels] (Valladolid: Miñón, 1981).