





I dream of bookstores.

I dream of finding the perfect bookstore, the oneiric storehouse of all the volumes which I knew existed just beyond my fingertips. When I explore corporeal bookshops, I always compare them (unfavorably) to my bibliophilic dreamscapes.

Like *déjà vu* or a faintly remembered conversation there are a few stores which hint at the possibilities: Montréal's The Word, Vancouver's Pulp Fiction, Toronto's The Monkey's Paw, Calgary's Pages Books on Kensington, and Washington, DC's Bridge Street Books all suggest the antechambers of my imagined bookshops. But these are merely appetizers for my yearned-for main course.

Jorge Luis Borges in "Poemes de los Dones" famously said that he "imagined that Paradise will be some kind of library." I agree with him though bookstores haunt my dreams. It not unusual for me to dream of nondescript doors that open onto disheveled stacks and shelves, piles of maps and chapbooks, garret rooms of obscure titles and rarely seen folios. While Borges said, "I cannot sleep unless I am surrounded by books," I often dream that books surround me.

But the bookstores of my dreams are not filled with the stock of your average retailer. Instead, they inevitably contain eccentric books I've heard of but never held (bill bissett's *Th Jinx ship and other trips* for example); fantastic tomes mentioned in literature (Silas Haslam's *History of the Land Called Uqbar* for example); and unlikely volumes (previously unpublished editions by

Italo Calvino for example). Each of these volumes are gathered in impossible bookshops that populate my dreamed streetscapes.

Of course, the ironic thing about dreaming of bookshops and impossible oeuvres is that it is impossible to read in dreams. In dreams books are merely the shells of themselves; they point to "bookness" but do not hold the texts for which my mind searches. In our oneiric nighttime escapades, we can accomplish a myriad of impossible feats, but we cannot read. Text is just beyond the threshold of our mind's eye (the next time you recall your dreams, try to focus on any text you encountered).

I am also drawn to libraries.

Small or large, a collection of books will no doubt attract my eye. Whenever I am at someone else's house, I am drawn—like so many of my colleagues—to my host's bookcases and the evidence of their reading. Authors, scholars, and academics are often socially awkward, and I find myself discovering more about a host's personality from their bookcases than I do from their conversation. How are the books arranged? What subject matters (and authors) are represented? What periods are reflected? How are the books kept? I have a friend whose library consists solely—as a means of limiting the size of his collection—of first editions. He does not loan his books and believes that they are best preserved for posterity under UV-protective glass. Another colleague's books were rearranged by his spouse from a random array into a more aesthetically pleasing arrangement

Based upon colour and height...the books soon wandered back to their original randomness reflecting his more idiosyncratic way of looking at the world.

My personal library threatens to overtake our apartment, and is arranged by genre, author's last name and then by height ... with a few nods to practicality (Joseph Campbell's indispensable *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork* is filed next to *Finnegans Wake*; *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* is filed between Gertrude Stein's *Ida* and *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*). There's a bookcase for visual art; two for graphic novels and comics; four for fiction, poetry, drama, and theory; and one for a further mix of additional visual art, graphic novels, typography, travel books, literary journals, and a hodgepodge of other genres and that doesn't include my daughter's growing collection, nor my partner's.

The juxtaposition of books upon a shelf is one of the thrills of wandering a library.