

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO UQBAR

By [Jonathan Fleck](#) On 19 August 2013 In [Main](#), [What We're Reading](#)



After reading recent posts by [Megan](#), [Frank](#), and [Hannah](#), I've found myself once again on the beckoning road of Borges. Hannah's artificially-generated prose draws on text from "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". In "Tlön," a fictionalized Borges happens across an encyclopedia entry on Uqbar, a country that cannot be located on any map. The plot thickens as we learn of the existence of an entire *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*. By the end of the *ficción*, the encyclopedia has managed to oust reality, as "el mundo será Tlön."

Re-reading "Tlön" got me thinking about my other favorite fictional encyclopedia, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, from Douglas Adams's (1952-2001) five-novel series of the same name. The disclaimer for the encyclopedia comes off as quite Borgesian:

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is an indispensable companion to all those who are keen to make sense of life in an infinitely complex and confusing Universe [...] In cases of major discrepancy it's always reality that's got it wrong."



Borges



Adams

Both stories – the 1940 *ficción* and the 1980 novel – share the premise of a grand encyclopedia that promises to supersede reality. In Borges's universe, the encyclopedia starts out as an intellectual conspiracy but ends up invading the real world. In Adams's, the *Guide* claims to help "make sense of life," but undermines the primacy and the very autonomy of that life.

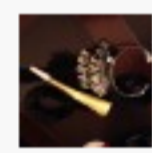


Adams's fictional encyclopedia

Should we credit the Argentinean author for the inspiration of a British series that has sold over 14 million copies to science fiction enthusiasts worldwide? Adams mentioned Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" in a letter, but we don't know if the novelist read Borges more widely. A quick [Google Scholar search](#) cross-referencing Adams and Borges comes up with 17 unique books and articles ranging from ethnography to metaphysics and from semiotics to photography. This strange mix of fields bespeaks the wide influence of the two authors' imaginations: images like Adams's [Babel Fish](#) or Borges's [Pierre Menard](#) seem to turn up all over the academic Universe.

As someone who grew up enchanted by Adams's series, and who now spends his time immersed in Latin American literature, I'd love to do a more thorough comparative reading. What would Pierre Menard's entry in the *Guide* look like? Where could we locate the Library of the Babel Fish?

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