

## Introduction

The major geographical shifts in Julio Cortázar's life are emblematic of the nature of his writing. Though the youthfulness of his work would suggest a later date, he was born in Brussels in 1914<sup>1</sup> of Argentinian parents. In 1918 he 'returned' to Argentina, to live in Bánfield, a suburb of Buenos Aires, where, for our purposes, his main activities seem to have been reading, translating, and teaching English and French literature. In 1951, having published only one play and a collection of short stories, he returned to Europe and still lives in Paris. It was in Paris that the first of his four novels to date was produced: *Los premios* (*The Winners*), published in 1960. Here for the first time he wrote directly about Argentina, its people, its problems and (its) metaphysics. The very Latin American phenomenon of Peronism precipitated his departure from Argentina; he claims to have come to an understanding of its significance only by living in Europe.

Cortázar, then, is an expatriate Latin American writer, a central figure in the 'mafia' of writers in a similar position who participated in the editorial 'boom' of the sixties and seventies, 'commercially manipulated' from Barcelona. As such, he incurs the tedious, self-righteous wrath of many non-expatriate writers and critics. A reasonably balanced account of the reasons for the exodus of Latin American writers from their respective countries to Paris, Barcelona and London is given by the Chilean José Donoso in *Historia personal del boom*; a characteristic, if unusually venomous, exchange on the subject provoked by the remarks of José María Arguedas in *El zorro de abajo y el zorro de arriba* and answered by Cortázar completes the picture.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside prescriptive formulae, I believe one can safely say that cosmopolitanism is an important component in the best Latin American literature. Argentina, with its high percentage of rela-

tively recent European immigrants and its lack of any real indigenous culture, is an extreme case. Ernesto Sabato puts it dramatically: 'Perplexed and anguished, we are the actors of an obscure tragedy, in that we neither have the backing of a great indigenous culture (like the Inca or the Aztec), nor can we claim as completely our own the tradition of Rome or Paris.'<sup>3</sup> Were Argentinian writers to obey the nationalist detractors of Europeanism, he adds in a different tone, they would be confined to writing about ostrich hunts in the language of the Pampa Indians.<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges is more concise: the Argentinian tradition is 'the whole of Western culture'.<sup>5</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa is positively jubilant about the cultural void of Latin America:

The lack of a cultural tradition implies a void which is also the ultimate freedom. Not only because the 'barbarian', that orphan, can plunder all the cultural reserves of the earth with equal ease (which is something the 'civilized' writer, limited towards other cultures by a view of them imposed by his own, cannot), but, especially, because his being a sort of Adam or pioneer in the field of creation is a strong incentive to his ambition.<sup>6</sup>

This Latin American dualism is probed in the shifting perspectives of Cortázar's second, most influential and best-known work, *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*), published in 1963. Its tripartite structure is symbolic of the dilemma: one part takes place in Paris, another in Buenos Aires, and a third (optional!) section is generally devoted to the culture which links and separates the two main sections, the two continents.

Intertextuality and parody, an important element in all (modern) literature, becomes for Severo Sarduy the defining characteristic of the Latin American: 'Only in so far as a work of the Latin American baroque is a deformation of a previous work, which must be *read like a watermark* (*leer en filigrana*) for it to be fully enjoyed, will it belong to a major genre.'<sup>7</sup> Obsessive quotation from Chateaubriand's *Atala* and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* gave Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867) a very characteristic structure. Exactly the same tradition is followed in Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* (1975), in the extensive quotation and paraphrase of pieces by Poe, Kafka, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and others. When combined, however, by writers like Borges, Carpentier, Fuentes, and Cortázar with an acute critical consciousness of their language, this tendency creates a literature which, far from being imitative or derivative, gains a special density

and expressiveness. In Carpentier's *El recurso del método*, for example, the quotation of Proust in a phrase like 'in the shade of the flowering cannons'<sup>8</sup> concisely and ironically demonstrates the Latin American dependence on European discourse, and the frequent incongruity of the latter. The classical appeal to the idealism and spirituality of Latin American youth against the materialism of their Northern neighbours in Rodó's *Ariel* is similarly travestied and inverted by the account of the arms deals done in Washington by Ariel, the son of the dictator in the same novel.

62. *Modelo para armar* (62: *A Model Kit*), published in 1968, represents the furthest point of Cortázar's experimentation in this direction. The literal quotation of *Rayuela* goes underground. A set of European texts and myths, only summarily mentioned, dictate the course of the novel and the lives of the characters, whom they lead either to destruction or to liberation, according to the honesty or bad faith of the narrator towards his material.

Cortázar's interviewers have noted that more space is occupied on his bookshelves by French and English texts than by Spanish ones. On compiling a list of the influences on his own work, Cortázar's *alter ego* in *Rayuela*, Morelli, sensibly crosses out various names because they are too obvious (*R* 412, ch. 60). The names of Joyce, Beckett, Proust, etc. should clearly be treated in the same way. One general 'influence', however, might be noted: that of surrealism. The coincidence is more one of outlook and philosophy than of adherence to any Bretonian dogma: a preoccupation with the unconscious, a hope of reconciling the dualisms of modern man, an interest in causality, word play, and evil.

This filiation, which develops into a humanistic concern for the recovery of a unity of being threatened or destroyed by rationalism and technology, is shared by Cortázar with his Argentinian contemporary Ernesto Sabato, for whom art, and especially the novel, is 'the instrument which will recover the lost unity'.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps even more than Sabato, he claims to have bridged the gap between the two traditionally opposite tendencies in Argentinian literature, symbolically Florida and Boedo, i.e. between sophisticated, elitist writers such as Borges, Mallea, Macedonio Fernández, and more popular ones such as Roberto Arlt.<sup>10</sup> There are traces of all these writers in his work: the messianic madness of Arlt, the mysticism of Mallea, the humour and philosophical paradox of Macedonio; and of others: the macaronic combination of Buenos Aires *lunfardo* slang

with the constant use of phrases from languages other than Spanish characteristic of the Cambaceres of *Silbidos de un vago*. But the father-figure is without doubt Borges, though the tone and purpose of their work is very different. From Borges, Cortázar learns the structural sophistication which culminates in the *figura*, and shares with him an initially similar treatment of the barbarous and violent.

The successful Cuban revolution of 1959 was a fundamental event in the life of Cortázar and of many other Latin American writers. He visited post-revolutionary Cuba for the first time in 1963. The Cuban experience, he claims, 'woke him up to Latin American reality'.<sup>11</sup> The 'events' of May 1968 in Paris constitute a second, lesser, but important landmark. Cortázar wrote enthusiastically of them in the essay 'Noticias del mes de mayo' from his collage work *Ultimo round*. So did Benedetti, and Carlos Fuentes dedicated a whole book to the subject: *París: la revolución de mayo*, which his enemies have claimed contributed to the tragic 1968 student revolts in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> For the first time, one senses, the wider aims of surrealism and Marxism finally coincide. The 'Padilla affair' in 1971 was a bucket of cold water. The Cuban poet Herberto Padilla was imprisoned for counter-revolutionary attitudes. Latin American and European writers wrote a letter of protest and talked of Stalinism, Castro made a vehement attack on them, and while they reaffirmed their adherence to the revolution, there was a second letter of protest which Cortázar, significantly, did not sign. Instead, he published an anguished piece entitled 'Policrítica a la hora de los chacales', asking to be let back into the fold, while insisting on his commitment to a wider, freer, more critical type of writing than that demanded by Castro, Portuondo and Haydée Santamaría.<sup>13</sup>

His fourth and latest novel, *Libro de Manuel*, published in 1973, two years after Padilla, takes a radically new direction from his earlier novels and stories. The result is not of the same literary standard, though the work is a brave and vital experiment in writing serious literature with an important component of experimentation, while at the same time reaching a wider public, communicating information of a political nature, and expressing an ideological commitment which his previous work tended to relativize and fragment. There is, however, no yielding in his expression of the importance of eroticism, play and fantasy in the revolutionary process.

*Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales*, published in 1975, follows the same synthesis of genres, combining the comic strip with

political message, and gives little insight into where a next novel might go, only a guilty apprehension that the halcyon days of *Rayuela* and *62* are past.

Since the mid-sixties, Cortázar's work has attracted such a deluge of critical response that it is impractical to attempt to review (or read) it in its entirety. A few landmarks might be mentioned. The year 1968 brought two important studies. Graciela de Sola's *Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo* is a good, wide-ranging study which stresses Christian attitudes in Cortázar. García Canclini's *Cortázar: una antropología poética* is not a detailed work, but one of the most convincing, especially in its intuitive understanding of the monsters of Cortázar. David Viñas in *De Sarmiento a Cortázar* (1971) offers a radically politicized reading of Argentinian literature; his analysis of various escapist myths is extremely stimulating. The year 1973 was good. Davi Arriguci's *O Escorpião encalacrado* is one of the best-documented and most serious studies, but is seldom quoted, one assumes, because it is in Portuguese. Saúl Sosnowski's *Julio Cortázar: una búsqueda mítica* is a detailed and penetrating study of the mythical and primitive vision in Cortázar. In 1974 Joaquín Roy published *Julio Cortázar ante su sociedad*, informative and interesting both on Argentinian themes in general and on their presence in Cortázar. Marta Paley Francescato's 'Bibliography of Works By and About Cortázar' in *The Final Island*, edited by J. Alazraki and I. Ivask, is the most complete compiled to date.

What this book tries to do is, to define at least, simple: to understand the four novels of Cortázar, *Los premios*, *Rayuela*, *62*, *Modelo para armar*, and *Libro de Manuel*. Its methodology consists in laying hands on anything that will help. My starting point was one of incomprehension and perplexity at the whole phenomenon of the novels rather than a desire to prove a theory or analyse any one aspect of them. My presentation necessarily reflects this process of understanding, which was gradual and is almost impossible to formalize. I believe that any more formal or 'definitive' presentation would betray the nature of Cortázar's literary experiment, itself a living process rather than a series of finished and closed works of art. The space devoted to each novel has, unconsciously, expressed an evaluation of their relative literary worth. *Los premios* is used basically to introduce and illustrate the genesis of the principal themes and structures considered; *Rayuela* and *62* are dealt with in some detail;

*Libro de Manuel*, in less detail, as a continuation of previous structures and, one hopes, a prelude to a new direction rather than a coda.

The initial focal point has been the nerve centres of contradiction and tension in the texts. In this, I have tried to live up to the demands Cortázar explicitly makes on his reader, when he asks that the latter should be his 'accomplice' or 'lector cómplice' (R 454). The *lector cómplice* is that reader who does not avoid the complexity, obscurity and tension of the 'materia en gestación' (R 453) by focusing on one level of experience or reading – the human, intellectual, humorous or textual – in order to bypass the tension between them. This tension is perhaps the fundamental quality of Cortázar's prose. A combination of different modes of writing in one episode causes different possible readings to be cancelled out, or rather held in abeyance. Human tragedy, for instance, is insinuated in a basically humorous episode; symbolic readings of the same episode are suggested which clash with its human content; explicit meaning is contradicted by a system of meaning developed throughout the text. The writing creates, more than a meaning or a set of meanings, a 'space' in which the *lector cómplice* can fully and creatively internalize the issues, problems, aspirations and impossibilities posed. Thus the understanding, on the part of the critic, as to how this 'space' is created is of as great an importance as the enumeration of actual readings generated.

At a certain point when working on a series of texts of the same author there develops a swing or dialectic between an emergent general structural theory and the defining differences and particularity of the individual texts. The thorny question thus arises of whether the texts should be presented separately, as organisms which can only be seen to work with all their constituent parts, or together, thematically and structurally. I believe it would be possible, by starting with an almost abstract deep structure and a limited set of elements (situations, character types), to build a sort of Cortázarian grammar which, through a series of transformations, could account for or explain the production of the texts. But much immediacy and excitement would be lost in such an account which would, moreover, be difficult to follow and, no less importantly, to organize. Cortázar's statement that 'no hay mensaje, hay mensajeros y eso es el mensaje' (R 453) suggests that the text itself is both message and messenger. I have worked on the general premise that no reading is valid if, once it has been 'extracted', the text can be

discarded. It is this all-important 'textuality' that decided me to present the texts individually.

The strong structural homogeneity of the texts has, nevertheless, been illustrated by the use of two myths which can be considered as the deep structures behind them, that is structures which are not necessarily conscious, or clearly actualized, but whose logic dictates the course of the action. These myths are introduced in the first chapter and their evolving utilization is followed from chapter to chapter. They centre around what seems to be of fundamental importance in the novels: the feeling of a lost presence or force, and the attempt to recover this presence. This loss and quest can be contained, without excessive arbitrariness or violence, in the myths of the imprisonment of the Minotaur in the Labyrinth (with the Minotaur seen as a natural but rebellious and dangerous force), and the descent of Orpheus (or any other similar figure) to Hades to recover a Eurydice which may be associated with the lost force of the Minotaur.

This pattern makes it possible to link together the basic elements of the work: monsters, doubles and dualism, *figuras*, the 'centre'. Very schematically at this point, these elements may be defined and linked in the following manner: An original presence, or unity of man with himself and his world (Eden), has been lost. This loss is represented and repeated in the novels in the repression by the individual of parallel forces in himself. Dualism is created by the splitting of the unity of man into, crudely, the represser and the repressed. The force, on being repressed, becomes taboo. The tabooed force is seen as a monster. The *figuras* are the patterns within the text and the lives of the characters through which the original presence returns, but which tend towards a repetition of its destruction as a monster. The laws (of society, language, superego, narrative, etc.) which are accomplices in this destruction must be transgressed if the repetitive pattern is to be broken or reversed, and the presence recovered. This transgression will be counterproductive if the guilt involved is not overcome. The 'centre' referred to (elsewhere 'rendez-vous', 'unity') would be achieved by the recovery of the lost presence, i.e. man's reconciliation with the monster within.

There is a strict coherence in the search for 'presence' between the various levels of the text, and I have endeavoured throughout to express this. The presence is embodied principally in certain female characters, of which la Maga in *Rayuela* is perhaps the prime example,



themselves seen, in turn, as the lost or hidden part of the male protagonist; it is an elusive meaning which is fleetingly present in, yet escapes from, language; it is the origins of Argentina and the human race; the telluric force of the *pampa* and the Buenos Aires of Cortázar's youth; it is the force of many literary and mythological archetypes projected forward finally onto the freedom of a new socialist man. Similarly, on all these levels, there is a force antagonistic to those described above: a tendency in language to form rhyming patterns and phonetic analogies which negate the desired *signifié*; in the narrator to manipulate and censure facts and relationships; in officials to distort truth; in individuals to forget and repress; in the Argentinian to betray his 'destiny'.

This force and counterforce has been approached in three main ways, in three themes, some already mentioned. The first is that of the *doppelgänger*; the meaning, articulation and resolution of the relationship between double characters and sets of double characters. The clearest example is the relationship in *Rayuela* between Oliveira and Traveler, and between la Maga and Talita.

The second theme is ultimately a development from that of the double: the *figura*.<sup>14</sup> It might provisionally be defined as the structural relationship between episodes, between sets of characters in different places or times; the repetition of previous texts in the constellation of events or in the psychology of the characters.

The third manifestation of the opposition might be called the 'double text'. In all the novels, and in some of the stories, especially 'El perseguidor', there are two different discourses, two types of writing and logic: one critical, distanced and organized, the other more symbolic and irrational. There are often two opposed narrators, and thus this technique is closely connected with that of the double.

The single-minded search for 'presence' outlined above is paradoxically but characteristically articulated through a variety of cultural references and literary discourses difficult to equal in their eclectic range: Schopenhauer, Raymond Roussel and Sarmiento in *Los premios*; Merleau Ponty, Sheridan le Fanu and Wagner in *62*; Marcuse and St John of the Cross in *Libro de Manuel*. While such combinations, creating a multiplicity of readings and nuances, preclude uniformity of treatment and analysis, I have tried to bring out that within them which is orientated towards what I consider the central pursuit of the author. Determining the nature of the raw cultural material of the novels and the measure and significance of



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its transformation and utilization has been one of my main concerns. Such material has often proved the only way in which I have been able to approach certain problems posed by the texts and has not been introduced *a posteriori* in order to establish a respectable pedigree for any interpretation, nor, with a few exceptions, to point out influences for their own sake.

The translations from the Spanish are my own. They tend deliberately towards the literal rather than the interpretative. Simple page references in brackets in the text refer to the novel dealt with in the chapter in which they appear. The editions of works by Cortázar used are listed in the bibliography.

This study is based on a doctoral thesis (Cambridge, 1978). A research fellowship at the Centre for Latin-American Studies, Liverpool, provided the time and support for its actual writing. I am much indebted to the patience, attention, and generosity with which Mr J. T. Boorman of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, supervised the original work. My thanks go too to Mrs L. Close, and to Professor D. Shaw for their encouragement and advice in later stages. I might also put out a *saludo* to the flesh-and-blood Julio Cortázar, who must exist somewhere beyond the pile of novels on my desk.

# I

## Los premios

### INTRODUCTION

The qualities which most immediately make *Los premios* an enjoyable and even gripping novel are not those for which Cortázar has come to be admired. The latter elements are, however, present in an embryonic or not totally satisfying manner, and it is on these more basic aspects of the work that coherence obliges one to focus. *Los premios* is a hybrid work, metaphysical and existentialist, romantic and objectivist, with an exciting story of sinister happenings on board an ocean cruiser, and a mutinous attempt by the passengers to break through to the ship's telegraph. Its treatment of adolescence is extremely sensitive, which rarely commends a novel, unless, as in this case, it is an essential part of a wider framework. The sympathetic and subtle satire of Argentinian class relationships and a sharp ear for cliché in conversation make it fascinating reading, and Cortázar already displays skill in depicting conformism, bad faith, and rebellion compromised by the manipulations of authority.

The lack of integration, however, of its two principal components – the main narrative and the monologues of Persio which are inserted between chapters – make it a less successful novel than those which follow. Even a committed reader is tempted to skip the monologues in a way he would not with the 'dispensable chapters' of *Rayuela*. They contain some excellent, experimental writing, but their density does not gel with the very fluid narrative of the rest of the novel, nor create the tension between different tones of writing which is present even in early stories such as 'Las puertas del cielo', and cleverly orchestrated in the novels from *Rayuela* onwards.

Like all Cortázar's novels, *Los premios* begins with an image of chaos and chance. An extremely heterogeneous group of Argentinians have won a national lottery prize and are gathered together to enjoy