

We Don't Talk about Cortázar Anymore

Brantley Nicholson

Georgia College

Abstract: This article draws upon the ebbs and flows of Julio Cortázar's literary celebrity, ranging from academic centrality to lay cult status, to examine the cultural milieu surrounding 1968. My analysis draws upon world literary theory, literary markets, and the quirks of Julio Cortázar to explore why he is simultaneously central to the Boom and a misfit within it. This exegesis of Cortázar's oeuvre analyzes his wane in popularity and what it says about both the staying power of cultural icons and us as readers today.

Keywords: Julio Cortázar – Literary Markets – World Literature – 1968 – The Boom – The Generation of '72.

Depending on your perspective, the Boom of the Latin American novel was a matter of talent, global politics, or luck. Most likely, as the case in any major artistic movement, it was a combination of all of the above. From the 1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century, practically all Latin American literature and literary criticism occurred in conversation with, or in the shadow of, the Boom. Sometimes this happened with a triumphalist zeal, as is the case with Gabriel García Márquez; sometimes it happened through shadowboxing for sales, as is the case with José Donoso or Mario Vargas Llosa; and sometimes it happened with a raised fist, as is the case in the excluded-from-the-boys-club (even if the club was founded by Carmen Balcells), Elena Garro and Rosario Castellanos. While the subsequent Generation of '72 benefited from the political explosion of 1968, and female writers had a writerly explosion of their own, the Boom, as such, was on the precipice of a rapidly changing sociopolitical milieu, both in their host Europe and Latin American home countries. 2018, fifty years after 1968, and the years that followed have hosted a similar eruption of political movements and consciousnesses that make it worth revisiting the authors that practically invented Latin American literature as an international icon, authors who tried to grapple with new literary celebrity among shifting sands (Nicholson and McClennen 15). Of particular note is Julio Cortázar, who has paradoxically always been central to the Boom canon and a misfit within it. His formal experimentalism does not lend itself to the mass audience of magical realism. His politics were more wavering than the at odds with each other and constantly feuding in public García Márquez and Vargas Llosa. And he simply

did not seem to care as much about being part of the group as Carlos Fuentes and Donoso. Perhaps, it is this misfit quality and lay cult status that made him so avidly explored by scholars until recently. Neither “cancelled,” continuously studied, nor celebrated by major international prizes, he has simply fallen to the cutting room floor. But why don't we talk about Cortázar anymore, and what did his difficult-to-place oeuvre and personality presage for the contemporary period?

For at least the past fifteen years it has been common parlance to state that Cortázar “has not aged well.” Perhaps what scholars mean to say is that the Boom has not aged well, using Cortázar as synecdoche. Arguably, letting Cortázar stand in for criticism of the Boom has been easy because no one has lionized him except the lay public. He never reached formal consecration by major prizes, like García Márquez who won the Nobel Prize in 1982 or Vargas Llosa who won in 2010. These writers are not without their critics, but the structure of world literature has, at least, codified them as worthy of part of the collective conversation. By the same token, Cortázar neither taught at North American universities like Donoso who taught at the influential University of Iowa from 1965-1967, nor did he write textbooks for an international student body, as Fuentes did in the *Buried Mirror* (*El Espejo enterrado*, 1992). As Juan Poblete points out, Cortázar did write essays that acted as “how to” guides for aspiring short-story writers that played off of the Borges-based Argentine brand of *cuentistas* (Poblete). And many of the maxims that Cortázar wrote in these essays still circulate among his fan base, such as “When writing a novel, you can win by points. When writing a short-story, you have to win by knockout” (“Algunos aspectos del cuento” 403). But quoted maxims are nothing compared to Nobel addresses, Borgesian pantheon status, or actual textbook authorship.

Cortázar's rise and fall within academia and literary institutions is emblematic of the circulation of literary icons when they enter global systems. Cortázar lived in Paris and famously came to speak Spanish with a French inflection. But he is also a hyper-local Argentine, or Porteño (Buenos Aires based) writer. One may even argue that speaking Spanish with a French lilt is the most Buenos Aires of affectations. The city's aesthetic history is one of laying Parisian aesthetics over the strata of a Latin American country, whose immigration patterns were more from Southern Italy than anywhere, as Beatriz Sarlo has long argued (*Wordswithoutborders.org* Sarlo). These “systems of images more than blueprint,” to quote Sarlo, who herself expounds on Georges Sorel, highlights the lack of a “there-there” in the Argentine (literary) brand; and few encompass this more than the simultaneously Buenos Aires-infused and holographically Parisian Cortázar. This sort of suspension, or trapping, between local and global circulations reveals the problematics of world literature, while also highlighting the difficulty for writers whose oeuvre comprises rich experimentalism to continue to consistently find an audience. It is difficult for such a writer, in other words, to be stripped down to an icon to be marketed in multiple languages, for myriad cultures, and for the expectations of passing generations. Complexity, ambiguity, and a body of work that was often high literary, momentarily political (*62: Model Kit*, *62: Modelo para armar*, 1968), and occasionally childish (*Cronopios*

and *Famas*, *Cronopios y famas*, 1962) was not a model for lasting institutional support. The question is: what does our stopping to talk about Cortázar reveal about the machinations of world literature and the passing of aesthetic time?

What bookended the Boom was a stark contrast with their existential and aesthetic work. Viewed from one vantage point, Cortázar was one of the last *americanos* (taken to mean pan-Americans) in Paris. He understood the rules of the global aesthetic economy had dictated from the inter-War period through the 1960s that New World writers, but especially Latin American writers, had to move to Paris to hone their craft and gain exposure. While *modernista* (denoting Latin American modernists) such as Alfonsina Storni, Rubén Darío, and José Martí, to name just a few, tried to maintain a strong tie to Latin America, the Avant-Garde poets made Paris their fully fledged home, in every sense of the word. César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda may have kept their subject matter on Latin American terms, but poets like Vicente Huidobro practically broke ties with his home country of Chile, altogether. Huidobro would arguably presage Cortázar's head-first leap into cosmopolitanism when he wrote poetry and a play strictly in French; and both Vallejo's and Huidobro's attempt to dissolve and degrade language to unearth a meaning that straddles their experiential existences, one in Europe and the other in Latin America, does act as a precursor to Cortázar's work. When Vallejo splices and creates new words in *Trilce* (1922) he shows that national and regional languages are not enough to capture the way the artistic world had become; and he offers Cortázar a formal nudge in the right direction. Similarly, when Huidobro resorts to simple sounds in *Altazor* (1931), images in place of language in his "Painted Poems (1921)," or as he uses metaphors such as sea foam from crashing waves as most-representative of trans-continental symbolic existence, he is giving Cortázar a beginners set of tones and themes from which to pull. Put more simply, the Boom writers inherited an aesthetic topography with Paris at its center and with all intellectual momentum pointing them in the direction of explorations of clashes between the global and the local. No Boom writer took this more seriously and at its word than Cortázar. The problem was that this was a style and set of considerations that was about to be upended by the Cold War, shifts in aesthetic expectations from the political movements of 1968, and a globalization of culture that went beyond what he had expected. Cortázar was about to learn that part of the problem of being the apogee of an aesthetic movement meant that gravity was about to pull in the other direction.

While the avant-garde writers that preceded Cortázar and the Boom took Paris to be their natural literary home, the group of writers that would follow the Boom, the Generation of '72, had a much different experience with literary cosmopolitan "centers". The Generation of '72 is a group of writers born between 1935 and 1949 who write with allegory based in the sustained residue of melancholy that marks a break from the *novela de la dictadura* that is more narrowly concerned with the apparatuses of power and the textual characterization of the cult of dictators on one generational side and the benefit of the literary navigation of the cosmopolitan marketplace from home on the other. This generation stands in contrast to Cortázar and the Boom in many ways, some positive and

some negative. On one hand, they had more ready access to, and subsequently embraced popular culture in a way that Boom writers other than Cortázar only tiptoed around. In embracing the post-'68 political awakening, the Generation of '72 is also female heavy, with some of its most prominent writers including Cristina Peri Rossi, Diamela Eltit, and Luisa Valenzuela. Yet, this generation also had to deal with the negative implications of global cosmopolitanism in a way Cortázar and the Boom did not. They are presented with the task of mourning while questioning the very limits of a literature that undergoes a double affront through the strict control of symbolic systems by authoritarian regimes and by the influx of new cultural referents that the abrupt liberalization of Latin American economies causes. They struggle to find and maintain a literary identity in the wake of the *Boom* writers and publishing houses' expectation of them to reproduce *realismo mágico*, on one hand, and to maintain regional and national identities while in exile, or to perform the regional while increasingly becoming global citizens, on the other. And beyond Latin American precedent, they are forced to express the exposure and fragility of a life in exile while their literary vocabulary experiences the turbulence of exile itself. When this generation travels to Paris, it is under duress, not to attempt to fulfill their home country's aesthetic promise. The prevailing thesis, agreed upon by critics, is that the *Boom* consolidated an unprecedented regional literary identity in Latin America that paralleled and, in the light of recent criticism, appears to have piggybacked off globalizing trends. It benefited from Cold War politics and early globalizing economic projects as much as the cultural revolutions of the time, in a climate in which the majority of canonical writers traveled abroad willingly – Cortázar, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa – rather than went global due to political exile. The Generation of '72, in other words, marks the end of the line of an aesthetic economy taken as de facto; and Cortázar's work sits at the odd crossroads of not benefiting from prizes to the extent of his peers while most typifying the embrace of Paris that was about to go out of fashion. Arguably the best description of this paradoxical aesthetic terrain comes from Donoso, when he writes, “Nos dio una gran libertad, y en muchos sentidos el vacío [...] fue lo que permitió la internacionalización de la novela hispanoamericana” (Donoso 17). The liberating capacities of the international aesthetic sphere opens up avenues of potential, while simultaneously hollowing out meaning. Without Paris, Cortázar is unimaginable. But with Paris, under the updated terms of culture, is he more than a Latin American writer who strikes more the chord of privileged writer abroad naval-gazing while the political world spins?

Cortázar's most famous work, *Hopscotch* (*Rayuela*), is irreducible to a single theme. Implementing another one of his own rules of writing, Cortázar used the work to invoke what he referred to as an “active reader.” The novel is structured to be read either straight through, from chapter one to chapter fifty-six, or in any order the reader chooses with ninety-nine extra chapters beyond the fifty-sixth to tempt the reader into creating their own story. There are practically endless versions of *Hopscotch* and a fervent fan base exchanges their own versions in reading groups, bars and cafés, and more recently in online fora. If one might venture to choose a single theme on which the novel pivots,

however, it is that of being suspended between two geographies and aesthetic economies. This existential suspension undergirds the novel, whose main body is split into two halves: “From the Other Side (Del lado de allá)” and “From this Side (Del lado de acá).” The first half of the work describes the intellectual life of the protagonist Horacio Oliveira while in Paris and the second while in Buenos Aires. The shift in space takes on more weight than simple travel would imply. Melding the flaneur-styled walking literature of Charles Baudelaire with the existential novels of Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus but cut with a highly Argentine vernacular and grammar, if the novel had no other value, it would be notable as an icon of what Mariano Siskind has referred to as the Latin American intellectual’s “desire for the world” (Siskind 3). It is also emblematic of navigation of the “systems of images” referred to by Sarlo. What better way to capture the essence of a city, Buenos Aires, or region, Latin America, that only thought of itself, at the time, as in reference to elsewhere than to set the first half of a novel on another continent?

It is part and parcel of the Latin American novel, especially during the Boom and even moreover of an Argentine writer during the Boom, to suspend the work spatially and aesthetically between the notional center and peripheries of global letters. It is because Latin America, and the Boom in particular, exemplified the intersections of aesthetic globalization and peripheral geography that it is key to the theorization of world literature itself. Pascale Casanova whose book, *The World Republic of Letters* (2004) pulled Goethe’s early fascination with global literary aesthetics out of the archive and made it a dominant theme in literary studies, places the baseload of her argument on Boom writers. (Casanova 85). There is something to this group of writers who are fluent enough in European and North American aesthetic traditions, but whose home space and existential coming of age either clashes or melds with them, depending on the theorist’s perspective. What we have here is the literary manifestation of the experience in the overlaid “system of images”. It is an affect that is experienced massively but that does not fit typical registers of either the “European” or “Latin American” literary tradition; and it is one that, for Casanova, is all the richer and more powerful for it. Not simply imitating an aesthetics of the cosmopolitan “center” from the “periphery,” the work of Boom authors adds and advances world literature. In Casanova’s words, more specifically, the Boom writers’ “geography is based on the opposition between a capital, on the one hand, and peripheral dependencies whose relationship to this center is defined by their aesthetic distance from it” (12). Despite a peripheral economic status, a subjectivity can use this aesthetic distance to create a novel buildup of literary and cultural capital, becoming in a sense, aesthetically centered on the global scale by capitalizing on its peripheral state. But, there is also an economy of literature, literary capital, and literariness, that is weighed by the geographical areas ability to sustain writers and the capital of their home language. David Damrosch goes one step further, when he describes this suspended status between literary traditions as being liberatory: “The provincial writer is thus at once cut off but also free from the bonds of an inherited tradition, and in principle can engage all the more fully and by

mature choice, with a broader literary world” (12). Navigating the murky symbolic terrain of global archives, systems, or desire (depending on your chosen vocabulary) laid over local traditions gives the author an affective experience that translates more globally than that of authors born in “central” spaces. It is, in other words, an advantage for the Boom writer to have one foot in Paris and one foot in Latin America and facilitated their global translation.

As the misfit within a misfit group, one could argue that Cortázar was either doubly privileged by this status or doubly hampered within his cohort. Here the critic could delve into notions of cascading identities and hierarchies and intersectionalities of privileges intrinsic to them. For the sake of this article, the parameters of world literature and global aesthetic systems keeps the conversation in broader terms. Yet, there has been a lot written about world literature zoomed in on the Latin American tradition. These have ranged from Ignacio Sánchez’s allusions to a “strategic occidentalism” that effectively plays the game of cosmopolitan aesthetics, even occasionally pandering to them, in order to have a broader impact on the wider aesthetic economy, through Hector Hoyos’s analysis of the way even post-Boom writers are prone to distort global expectations of Latin American letters to the more rotund critique of the sine qua non erasure of meaning and form as local literature enters into global circulation by Emily Apter (Sánchez Prado 11, Hoyos 8, Apter 6). Some hit writers of their respective generations seem to have understood the friction at the points where artistic output and global expectation converged. Huidobro and Vallejo, as noted above, worked through these issues formally. Later in the post-Boom context, Roberto Bolaño would use his final work to comment on his own sociological reception. Cortázar would do both. He experimented with language and form to try to work through this tension formally; and he used themes of suspension, distortion, and labyrinthine existential maps to give representation to this confusing aesthetic space. Borges’s garden of forking paths comes across as strictly philosophical. Part of what makes Cortázar so difficult to place, arguably why he “has not aged well,” is that it is difficult to say whether his works are intellectual games, if politics can be read into them, or if he was simply a highly talented post-modern writer *avant la lettre*.

Letting his work speak for itself, two pieces encircle the anxiety of Cortázar’s place in the writerly world. *Rayuela* is his undisputed masterpiece, the work that within Latin America is considered talismanic for generations. Internationally he may be better known for his short stories, but it is the dense and complicated novel that is considered his showpiece both critically and by fans in the Spanish language. The joke is that Borges would have won a Nobel Prize if he had written a single novel. One could wager that not only would *Rayuela* have been that novel but that Cortázar, himself, would have won the Nobel had he had Borges’s international connections and cachet. That half of the novel is set in Paris and the other half in Buenos Aires is fitting. That the semi-autobiographical narrator, Horacio Oliveira, spends his time meandering around both cities in flâneur-like fashion in search of an aesthetic experience that he hopes will give him meaning is also

natural. The Argentine literary canon practically turns on the attempt to square circles, sublimate existential geographies, and rise above particularities through a fundamental aesthetic experience. Going back as far as the foundational Argentine, if not Latin American, philosophical treatise par excellence, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento sought (highly problematically) to meld rural and urban Argentina through a forced high European aesthetics. It was similarly José Hernández's attempt to meld the two, focusing more on a romanticized version of the *gaucho* in *Martín Fierro* that attempts to redraw the nation through a rurally inflected aesthetic. More pessimistically, and around the same time, Eugenio Cambaceres would focus on the dissonance of when a "highly lettered and educated" subject tries to live in the Argentine Pampa. What Cortázar does in *Rayuela* is both update the terms to the post-War period and complicate the paradigm by explicitly adding Paris as a nodal point, whereas previously it was taken as synecdochally linked to Buenos Aires.

Rayuela can be read as more optimistic than Cambaceres's nineteenth century equivalent, but the fact that the reader has to actively finish the novel themselves implies a similarly murky path. Cortázar's more semi-optimistic turn comes through the exploration of this theme through the format of the "love story." Intertwining existentialism, a floating national signifier, and a romantic relationship is not without its problems. Arguably the most well-founded criticism of *Rayuela*, and by extension Cortázar, is that the other end of the romantic entanglement, the character La Maga, does the simultaneous duty of mythologizing the female character in a way that denies her any actual psychology or realism and generally flattening her. One could retort that practically all of the characters in the novel receive a similar treatment and that the narrator's intense introspection that drives *Rayuela* causes all other characters to collapse under his gravity. Setting this debate aside and treating the use of characters as analogous to the complexities of Argentine existentialism, the use of the always on the verge of both failing and working amorous struggle works. This is not a simple value judgement. Argentines themselves have spoken to this. It is true to the extent of cliché that Argentines know practically to the letter the "Bridge Chapter" of *Rayuela* by heart. Like Chileans who can quote at least one strophe of Pablo Neruda, it is tied into a superficial nationalism to have something to say about, or be able to quote, Chapter 93 of *Rayuela*. It is also evident in the song "Puente (Bridge)" by one of the best-known songs by one of the best-known Argentine pop icons, Gustavo Ceratti. So the famous chapter begins: "But love, that word... Horacio the moralist, fearful of passions without some deep-seated rationale, out of place and disagreeable in the city where love is called by all the names of all the streets, of all the houses, of all the floors, of all the rooms, of all the beds, of all the dreams, of all the memories or all the forgetting (Cortázar 425)." While the rest of *Rayuela* is more prosaic, Chapter 93 shifts to a poetic stream of consciousness. It stands out and acts as a tonic note. Thematically it covers similar terrain to Borges's *El fervor de Buenos Aires* in that it tries to totalize Buenos Aires and the Argentine experience by allowing it to embody all signifiers, which itself gets lost in its own abundance. The chapter continues:

I'm tormented by your love that doesn't work as a bridge because a bridge doesn't hold itself up on just one side, neither Wright nor Le Corbusier are ever going to build a bridge balancing on just one side, and don't look at me with those bird's eyes, for you the operation of love is so easy, you'll be cured before me even though you love me like I don't love you. Of course you'll be cured, because you live healthy, after me it will be any other... (425)

These lines are the most quoted of the novel, and they sum up Cortázar's style, concerns, and poetics in a few lines. Simply quoted in isolation they seem naïve, almost adolescent. Yet, taken within the context of the novel's constant attempt to existentially and aesthetically *bridge* the gap between the modes of being that revolve around a notional Paris and a notional Buenos Aires (or Latin America more broadly), the impossibility of the bridge resonates. It says out loud what the rest of *Rayuela* gestures toward. The project will never work, and the narrator, or the Argentine citizen, will never find stable meaning, no matter how sophisticated the writer, or architect according to the metaphor. Its attempt at existence is an unrequited love.

The naive sentimentality of the chapter is also part of its centrality to Cortázar's paradoxical reception. In trying to isolate what Argentines would take to be practically explicit (and literal if we go back to Sarmiento), they attempt to found an existence based on a hypothetical aesthetic experience that can only be summed up through an emotion; and the emotion best suited to capture the roundly experienced yet ineffable and unquantifiable is love. But this is not the only reason that it is so exemplary of Cortázar or arguably why we have sidelined him in recent decades. Part of what makes the chapter soppy or almost cheesy is that it makes an attempt at broad appeal; and this attempt works. It is not the densely philosophical ruminations that were influenced by the birth of French existentialism in *Rayuela* that receive such wide acclaim. It is the chapter that can be fumbled over by people who have not even read the whole novel. It can be discussed haphazardly but at the same time meaningfully. It can also be used as the entry point to the far more complex novel. Cortázar's interest in, if not obsession with, nascent popular culture put him at odds with the rest of the Boom. It was occasionally considered bad politics to take the American-inspired jazz or boxing culture that drew him in so obsessively. We have to remember that this was a period in which Fidel Castro declared jazz as "counter-revolutionary." It makes Cortázar difficult to place politically and aesthetically. If he had been born a decade later and had been part of the Generation of '72, his use of American-inspired popular culture would have been considered "subversive" by critics. His use of sentimentality would have been considered pitched to a wide audience intentionally. But that the complexities and richness of Cortázar's work make him difficult to immediately digest on one hand and that his most quoted chapter is arguably too accessible on the other makes him fall within a critical grey area. He is

neither consistently quantifiable as high Borgesian philosophical writer, nor Manuel Puig-styled painter of everyday sentimentality.

Cortázar's concern with aesthetic geography runs through his life's work, occasionally appearing bluntly, as is the case the short-story "Carta a una señorita en París" ("Letter to a Young Lady in Paris"). Among the pantheon of Cortázar's greatest hits and coming early in his career in the collection *Bestiario* (1951), the short story pulls on his tried and tested techniques. It contains an element of the fantastic (lo fantástico) that takes ruptures in everyday reality to be blasé. It layers elements of history and philosophy imagistically to create rich metaphors. And the theme is an attempt to bridge the experiential gap between Paris and Buenos Aires. The story uses language, in this case an epistolary relationship connecting Paris and Buenos Aires. The narrator housesits for the titular señorita, Andrée, at her apartment in Buenos Aires while she is in Paris. The details and scene setting are important in the story. Andrée has a francophone name, and given her ornate oak and Louis XV styled furnishings, it is clear that she is a member of the historically French facing, if not obsessed, Argentine bourgeoisie. Cortázar dexterously does not simply let the story fall into either the uncritical celebration of the mastering of high French culture in Argentina or a routine class-conscious takedown. What Cortázar angles at is something far more complex. What he achieves is the Argentine paradigm in images.

As is central to Cortázar's, especially early, style, the scene is set to be a placid and pleasant setting. Soon after the ambience is laid out, irregularities that are occasionally surreal and occasionally altogether fantastical begin to disrupt the narrator and his surroundings. In the case of "Carta a una señorita en París," this happens bluntly. The narrator settles into the apartment and the affectations of the Argentine, taken to be global, upper-middle class. He is living Sarmiento's dream by being "cultured" and "lettered" as much in Buenos Aires as any city in the world. Yet, his body begins to react strangely to the space. The reaction is not a subtle dissonance that grows between the Argentine subject and high global affectations. Nor is it lightly biological. The reaction is otherworldly. The narrator begins to vomit bunnies.

The metaphor and imagery are not simply there to shock. One could take this to be a gimmick of using striking images to draw attention to himself early in his career. This is not a philosophical problem laid out in the Borgesian style of an explicit mind game. It also does not quite square with the high surrealism that would have preceded Cortázar's generation. The break in cause-and-effect reality is taken to be natural, and what drives the rest of the story is not the unfolding of contrasting and illogical images but the narrator trying to explain the situation rationally. This has resonance of André Breton's inclination that Latin America did not need artistic intervention to unearth surreal qualities, because it was *naturally* surreal ("The Surrealist Continent"). The quality that for Breton was set as a natural overlay of contrasting images, of life and death, of reason and unreason, of conscious and unconscious, did not come spilling out of art, but is naturally on display in Latin America. Cortázar, in this context, mines the unconscious that is

already present consciously. In a culture whose natural state is suspension between a cultural elsewhere and an experiential local has an essence whose negative is always present. The contrasts of superimposed images are what the local culture is. What could be more surreal than Sarmiento's celebration of gauchos dressed like Regency period English gentlemen? It is not Cortázar's task to expose the reader to metaphors and language that will open up their unconscious but to show in spare realism that this, for him and his fellow porteños, and by extension Argentines, and by further extension Latin Americans, is simply how it is.

When the narrator's body reacts to his local space, it draws upon the natural friction between the local corpus and the high cultural affect of elsewhere. The rabbits come from his body and begin to devour the apartment. Yet, the narrator's reaction is not to flee the apartment. At first, he attempts to stuff them in a wardrobe, or to dislocate the outlier from the surface. This is short lived, and the rabbits burst out of concealed spaces. Here we have the dyad that is a continuous trope in Cortázar's work and is part and parcel of what Ben Lerner has called the "modularity" of Cortázar's work that is "haunted" by the "present absences ("Ben Lerner Reads Cortázar")." There is the cultured subject and his surroundings, imbued with letters and the arts; and then there is the devouring impulse of nature. The story turns on trying to square this circle, or to sublimate the dyad. Like the bridge chapter in *Rayuela*, "Carta a una señorita en París" is a meditation on how to become comfortable with the contrast. As home becomes the suspended space of fleeting emotion in *Rayuela*, in "Carta a una señorita en París," the natural state and governing logic of the story is one in which a human can vomit rabbits and the only response is to act calmly and use rational language to look for explanations as the rabbits devour the fine furnishings that decorate the apartment. This is the liminal state of being Latin American for Cortázar, and it is the mercurial state of being Cortázar himself.

This ever changing and difficult to place representation of Latin American culture that so fascinated Breton and is embodied by Cortázar himself is arguably what so ruffles contemporary critics. He has fallen to the wayside because we seek a simpler, clear-cut understanding of the world that is either simply the nice apartment or the devouring bunny. The nebulous in between, or the sustained presence of both conscious and unconscious, libido and destrudo, ego and super-ego has fallen out of favor for a more strident times that call for us to eliminate one and adhere to the other. Cortázar would have argued that we are simply stuffing rabbits in a wardrobe. Our bodies will not stop producing them, and their bodies will not stop devouring. To take the fantastic world to be our natural world may be closer to the truth for Cortázar, and that does not sit easily at any historical moment, but especially one in which assuredness and ignoring the outlier is prized above all else. Maybe it is bad luck. Maybe it is the machinations of world literature. Maybe it is because a trans-linguistic global culture craves simplicity. No matter the perspective, Cortázar still maintains a large lay fan base, outside of the academe, and the quality of his work is beyond reproach. Tastes do come and go. It was only a decade

ago that it seemed that Roberto Bolaño had created the new road map for Latin American literature, only to be quickly swept away by subgenres (this is not necessarily a bad thing). Fifty years prior, García Márquez went through a similar trajectory, though his was a more prolonged affair. If we reduced it to nothing else, it is that Cortázar's complexity unnerves us. Every time we think we are in a pleasant setting, an outlier bubbles up. Sometimes we slip into another reality or perspective and sometimes our bodies unleash a dissonant reaction to our surroundings. We crave stability and assuredness. Cortázar was not built for simple times, which is why we should be talking about him now more than ever.

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