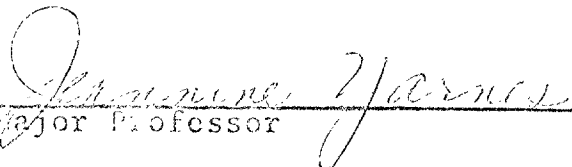
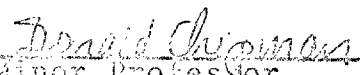
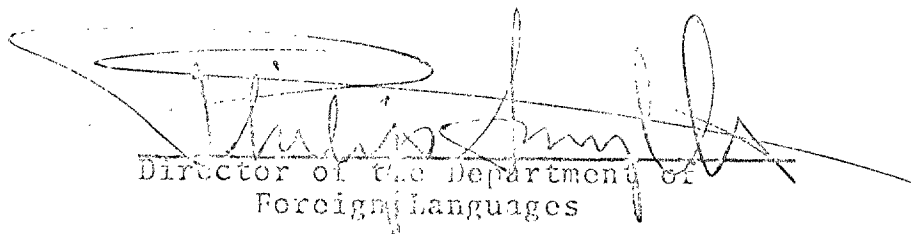


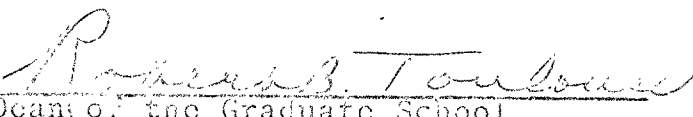
TEMPORAL, SPATIAL, AND IDENTITY DISPLACEMENT
IN THE SHORT STORIES OF JULIO CORTAZAR

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The purpose of this study is to analyze the techniques through which Julio Cortázar presents and explores the literary concepts of temporal, spatial and identity displacement. The author's radical departure from the more traditionally structured view of these notions is certainly one of the most perplexing and controversial aspects of his literary style. Indeed, the major part of critical material dedicated recently to this author indicates that his unique view of time, space and character treatment is one of the most innovative presently found in Spanish American literary circles.

Through radical and unexpected transports in time Cortázar has challenged man's constant awareness of time and its limitations upon him. To achieve this temporal displacement Cortázar has utilized various techniques. Through trips in time as in the story "La noche boca arriba," the protagonist is whisked from a twentieth century hospital bed to fifteenth century Mexico where he is the sacrificial victim to the Aztec gods. In "El otro cielo" the protagonist lives simultaneously in two time periods. At any given moment he can be strolling in downtown Buenos Aires in the twentieth century and suddenly,

without any break in continuity, find himself in Paris in the year 1870. Another example of the destruction of the temporal continuum is seen in "Autopista del sur," where motorists find themselves immobilized on a freeway leading into Paris for an undetermined length of time. It is through the rejection of the limits imposed by time that man can come to an ultimate understanding of his nature as he takes an inner look at himself and his relationship to others.

Cortázar presents new spatial dimensions through sudden shifts of locale often in the brief space of one sentence. An example of this spatial displacement is seen in "Todos los fuegos el fuego," where the action shifts from a Roman circus arena to a modern day Paris apartment. The fire that occurs at both places is the only unifying factor in the story. In "La isla a mediodía" the protagonist transports himself mentally and envisions himself as part of the life on an island that he sees from an airplane. For the protagonist in "Las babas del diablo," a blowup of a photograph becomes a window through which he views the actions of the subjects as if they were alive. Not only can the protagonist observe what is taking place in the photograph but is able to enter into the picture and become involved in the action. Cortázar again attempts to subvert rational barriers that comprise the fragmented world which plagues modern man.

To achieve identity displacement Cortázar utilizes a shifting point of view which involves the self and the other, a play of doubles in almost endless variety. In "Lejana," "Las armas secretas," and "Casa tomada," for example, the protagonists are overtaken by an indwelling self, or doubles which ultimately identify with each other and become a single character. In "Una flor amarilla" the relationship between self and the other explores the concept of reincarnation. In "Axolotl" the protagonist gradually becomes transfixed by the Mexican salamanders that he stares at daily; suddenly he becomes a salamander and is on the other side of the glass looking out at himself.

A careful analysis of the recurring techniques by which he achieves temporal, spatial and identity displacement and how such displacement affects structure, characterization, and thematic content, is essential to the meaningful understanding of the works of Julio Cortázar. This study includes an analysis of these techniques, and the author's experimental manipulation of them, based on selected stories from the author's entire works in the short story genre, five volumes to date.

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TEMPORAL, SPATIAL, AND IDENTITY DISPLACEMENT
IN THE SHORT STORIES OF JULIO CORTAZAR

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Julio Cortázar is generally considered one of the outstanding prose writers of contemporary Spanish American literature. He is perhaps the only Argentine author privileged to be compared in literary caliber to Jorge Luis Borges and has, indeed, been classified as Borges's "hijo espiritual."¹ Described as among the best prose writers to emerge in Spanish American literature between 1940 and 1950, Cortázar's literary stature has risen steadily in recent years: "Julio Cortázar es estrella de primera magnitud en la constelación de 'best sellers' de los últimos años. . . ."²

Cortázar began his literary career in 1949 when he published Los Reyes, a dramatic poem which never received much recognition and is now out of print. He has been more prolific in the area of the short story and has published five volumes to date: Bestiario (1951), Final del juego (1956), Las armas secretas (1959), Historias de cronopios

¹Alexander Coleman, editor, Cinco maestros: Cuentos modernos de Hispanoamérica (New York, 1969), p. 59.

²Enrique Anderson Imbert, Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana, Vol. II (México, D. F., 1961), p. 430.

y de famas (1962), and Todos los fuegos el fuego (1966). Among his other literary endeavors are three novels, Los premios (1960), Rayuela (1963), 62. Modelo para armar (1968), as well as a few poems and essays. He has also translated into Spanish the works of such writers as Keats, Poe, and Defoe. In 1967, he published La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos, a work of miscellaneous content in which he incorporates poems, short stories, and essays. La vuelta al día has been described by one critic as a sponge which absorbs all "para crear, imaginar, abrir puertas, abolir fronteras";³ the same can be said of almost all of Cortázar's writings, for he opens doors to new dimensions through his creative interpretation of life by abolishing all conventional barriers. Like Borges, Cortázar departs from the traditional patterns in which Latin American literature was so firmly encased until the post World War II period and dedicates his interest to new themes which are of universal interest.

Prior to the 1940's, Spanish American literature was characterized by an isolation from international literary and philosophical currents. The stultifying result was that the majority of South American prose fiction was virtually limited to two themes: social protest and regionalism. The

³Graciela de Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo (Buenos Aires, 1968), p. 73.

writers of this period, escritores responsables, felt that they had a moral obligation to uphold political freedom by voicing their opposition to unending dictatorships, opposing corruption, and defending the American masses, los de abajo, in general.

La literatura latino-americana ha sido casi siempre combativa y el escritor un hombre comprometido con causas de liberalismo político y de oposición convencida a las interminables dictaduras, tan corrompidas como incapaces, que obligan desde hace un siglo la vida de esas sociedades y deforman de manera inquietante sus posibilidades de desarrollo moral, cultural y cívico.⁴

The interminable dictatorships which plagued the Latin American countries further isolated writers from the outside world and led them to turn inward and to concentrate on subjects to which they were intrinsically linked, the immediate, the local--la realidad americana. The resultant regionalism explored such themes as the Mexican Revolution, the mystique of the gaucho in the River Plate area and the llanero of the Venezuelan plains, the Indians in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, and the devouring jungle in the tropical regions.⁵ Whatever form their writings took, regionalist authors downgraded man to a secondary position, that of the victim caught in an unequal

⁴Juan Liscano, "El cuento hispano-americano," Revista Nacional de Cultura, XX (1958), 7-14.

⁵Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream (New York, 1967), p. 7.

struggle with the overwhelming forces of nature: "Más que en el hombre y en el ambiente se interesan en el paisaje o, mejor dicho, parecen sentir por primera vez la acción monstruosa de la naturaleza salvaje frente a los conatos civilizadores del hombre."⁶

However, the old isolationism began to give way in the 1930's when such events as the world-wide economic depression, the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of Nazi Germany were keenly felt in Latin America. With increased international trade and development of national resources during World War II, Latin America entered the mainstream of international affairs. Regionalism began to lose its appeal for a new generation of readers, better informed, more sophisticated in their literary tastes, and most importantly, readers with a new life-style:

. . . el estilo de los regionalistas de principios de siglo, forjado en el modernismo de Darío, no interesa ya a las nuevas generaciones ni les sirve en su búsqueda de una expresión más auténticamente relacionada con el mundo que les preocupa. De modo que la novedad no ha de buscarse en las circunstancias anecdóticas o temáticas, sino en un nuevo estilo de escribir novelas que corresponde, en verdad, a un nuevo estilo de vivir.⁷

The new generation of readers demands a more penetrating and personal view of today's world. Contemporary writers do not "skim surfaces" as did the writers of "la novela

⁶Fernando Alegría, Historia de la novela hispano-americana (México, D. F., 1966), p. 170.

⁷Ibid.

regionalista de viejo cuño, al modo de La Vorágine, Don Segundo Sombra, Doña Bárbara . . . ,"⁸ works which merely mythologized and externalized local realities instead of penetrating them.

European and North American literary techniques began to manifest themselves around 1930, as the psychological novel emerged. From the 1940's, and continuing to the present day, existentialism has provided the philosophical focal point for Spanish American literature's view of man, of the anguish of modern man who finds himself in perpetual spiritual and physical tension against the backdrop of a society in a state of flux. Man's search for self-identity and harmony in an increasingly impersonal, mechanized, and hostile environment is the recurring theme to be found in contemporary Spanish American literature. With the death of "super-regionalismo, . . . concluído definitivamente,"⁹ the view of reality turns inward to the mind of man himself. The deemphasis of paisaje, then, becomes the first major step in the achievement of a universality in contemporary Spanish American literature:

El proceso narrativo hispanoamericano produce hacia 1940 una variación básica para su curso: empieza a lograrse la sustitución de la imagen de la geografía por otra más apetecible para el lector de

⁸Carlos Fuentes, "La novela latinoamericana," México en la cultura, Suplemento de ¡Siempre!, 128 (July 29, 1964), 220-225.

⁹Alegría, op. cit., p. 205.

hoy: la imagen del hombre de todas partes, de ese que tras la mudanza de cielos y constelaciones se reconoce en los mismos problemas y angustias y apetencias semejantes. . . . Mudada de geografía la creatura queda común denominador de lo que hoy a todos en distinto grado, nos mueve o inquieta.¹⁰

Cortázar is a member of the vanguard group¹¹ of Spanish American writers who express a rejection of the previous fascination with nature, or landscape, and its exterior reality. Cortázar's works exemplify the desire to transcend the limits of time, space and physical reality and to explore a new or "magical" reality, "a kind of twilight zone, eerie and timeless."¹²

The man and the world, then, that Cortázar creates and explores are not necessarily the same that the reader has previously encountered, since "Cortázar delights, like Borges, in manipulating a playful world of his own creation. In this world, where the sense of life is a function of sprightly speculation on the part of the author-maker, man is more of an archetypal figure than a rough-and-ready figure drawn from life. . . ." ¹³ The actions of Cortázar's modern man are depicted through games and labyrinths that

¹⁰Fuentes, op. cit., p. 221.

¹¹Other members include Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Carlos Onetti, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Alejo Carpentier. Harss and Dohmann, op. cit.

¹²John E. Englekirk, et. al., An Outline History of Spanish American Literature (New York, 1965), p. 173.

¹³Coleman, op. cit., p. 59.

"often seem nonsensical but that constitute like all nonsense, a powerful system, a special world where the rules are different from those we are used to."¹⁴

It is precisely a breaking of the rules, a refusal to adhere to norms, that allows Cortázar the freedom to depart from the conventional concepts of time, space, and character treatment. The result has been a series of stories which are elaborate exercises in intellectual ingenuity aimed at sweeping the reader's equilibrium off balance with the constant swinging of the reality-fantasy pendulum.

Cortázar's writing represents such a departure from previous Spanish American literary styles that critics have found it difficult to classify his works. As with many experimental or vanguard authors, his style and techniques are both personal and clearly indebted to his literary predecessors, most especially, perhaps, to Borges.

A large part of the difficulty of classifying contemporary authors is that both literature and literary criticism are in a state of flux and experimentation. Terminology, the semantics of criticism, races to keep pace with new "literary schools," and new terms--quite often indistinguishable for all practical purposes--exist simultaneously. The application of these terms to a particular

¹⁴Ibid., p. 60.

author becomes, then, a matter of personal preference on the part of the critics, who, reflecting the contemporary changing state and breakdown of all previous values in evaluating art forms, often cannot agree upon definitions and terminology.

In the case of Julio Cortázar, the literary labels which have been applied are neo-realist, supra-realist, and, most frequently, magical realist. All these terms stem from a new view, a new treatment, of reality and man's relationship to this reality. All, in a general sense, represent a refinement and continuation of the basic principles of the Surrealistic movement in literature and share Surrealism's reliance on the elements of distortion, surprise, mystery, and rejection of the traditional concepts of time, space, causality, and individual identity. Of these terms, magical realism seems to be taking precedence in literary discussions of the vanguard treatment of a reality so unique in comparison with anything that has gone before that it marks a "new phase of Latin American literature."¹⁵

The term magical realism was first employed by the German critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe the post expressionist period. Arturo Uslar Pietri, in 1948, was the first to apply the term to Spanish American literature

¹⁵Angel Flores, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction," Hispania, XXXVIII (May, 1955), 187-201.

in describing a new type of fiction for which there was no literary classification:

Lo que vino a predominar en el cuento y a marcar su huella de una manera perdurable fue la consideración del hombre como misterio en medio de los datos realistas. Una adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad. Lo que a falta de otra palabra podría llamarse un realismo mágico.¹⁶

The movement received its greatest impetus with the publication of the famous Antología de la literatura fantástica (1940), edited by Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo. Since the appearance of this work, the movement has flourished, particularly in Mexico, Cuba and Argentina¹⁷ and has received increasing critical and scholarly attention.

As with any relatively new literary movement, there are divergent views regarding (1) the definition of magical realism and (2) the principal novelists and short story writers who should be placed within the movement.¹⁸ Furthermore, the very term is problematical in that it juxtaposes two seemingly incompatible concepts, magic and realism. Perhaps the most succinct and meaningful

¹⁶Arturo Uslar Pietri, Letras y hombres de Venezuela (México, D. F., 1948), pp. 161-162.

¹⁷E. Dale Carter, Jr., Antología del realismo mágico (New York, 1970), p. xii.

¹⁸Divergent opinions concerning the definition of magical realism and the authors who belong in the movement are expressed by two leading Latin American critics: Angel Flores, op. cit., and Luis Leal, "El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana," Cuadernos Americanos, CLIII (July-August, 1967), 230-235.

definition is that which appears in the introductory essay of a recent anthology dedicated to magical realism in the Spanish American short story:

Como indica el carácter paradójico del término, el realismo mágico es ante todo la combinación de la realidad y la fantasía; segundo, es la transformación de lo real en lo irreal; tercero, el realismo mágico crea un concepto deformado del tiempo y del espacio; y finalmente, es una literatura dirigida a una minoría intelectual.¹⁹

The ultimate goal of the magical realists is to present, to penetrate and explore the "new and magical reality" that results by freeing the mind from the restraints of logic and rational control: "En el realismo mágico el escritor se enfrenta a la realidad y trata de desentrañarla, de descubrir lo que hay de misterioso en las cosas, en la vida, en las acciones humanas."²⁰ This goal is accomplished by placing stress on penetration into "another reality" of the dream world, the unconscious, primal self, with all its mystery, fantasy and magic. The underlying principle of finding this "new reality" is by distorting, changing (slightly or radically) traditionally accepted reality. Once distorted or changed, a new entity is then transformed out of the old. This magical reality is achieved primarily through experiments in fantasy and techniques with which the author can obliterate the usual measurements or

¹⁹Carter, op. cit.

²⁰Leal, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

conceptual evaluations of time, space, and even individual identity, measurements which form barriers separating the writer from the awesome and mysterious "other reality." A breakdown of these barriers, then, allows the magical realist to penetrate this other world--to explore it, describe it, and seek within it the answers to man's eternal questions in his search for self identity.

It is this awesome and mysterious world that Cortázar reflects in his short stories as he employs ingenious techniques for rejecting those traditionally accepted conceptual evaluations of the three most basic notions of reality: time, space, and character identity. To the inexperienced reader, Cortázar's treatment of these conventional concepts seems abnormal, irregular, and inconsistent; to Cortázar it is a means by which he can free himself and his reader from the restraints of logic and rational control. He accomplishes this primarily through the technique of distortion in every conceivable aspect: reversals, transpositions, fragmentations and inversions. The most recurring distortion device employed by Cortázar is displacement. This displacement affects the basic realities of time, space and character identity, all of which are radically reversed, transposed from the usual and proper place, inverted, fragmented, or somehow distorted in a way that is both illogical and inexplicable. Cortázar's goal is clearly to attack the reader's logic and

usual perspective of reality, "to shake him [the reader] up a bit, shift the ground under him."²¹

Temporal displacement in the short stories of Cortázar is less perplexing when the reader is acquainted with the author's feelings toward the reality of time. Cortázar is well acquainted with Oriental philosophy and is especially impressed by Vedanta,²² a philosophy which rejects the notions of time and space as they were conceived by the Greeks and have been accepted universally. As seen by Cortázar, the invention of time was "the greatest mistake man ever made,"²³ and his hatred of time is evidenced by the artichoke clock in his Historias de cronopios y de famas on which one hour is equivalent to all hours.

Cortázar depicts temporal displacement in several variations, all of which defy the reader's traditional notions of time. One variation is characterized by radical transports in time, "viaje en el tiempo,"²⁴ in the story "La noche boca arriba," where the protagonist at the onset

²¹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 241.

²²Vedanta is an orthodox system of Hindu philosophy that deals with the nature of ultimate reality. It denies reality as we understand it and declares that no one can know reality by direct experience, but must employ the philosophic systems in order to overcome ignorance and achieve union with the divine.

²³Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 219.

²⁴Carter, op. cit., p. xiv.

is a motorcyclist involved in an accident on a modern city street. He is taken to a hospital, placed on the operating table, and upon regaining consciousness finds himself whisked back 400 years to be offered as a sacrifice to the Aztec gods. Another deviation from the traditional concept of time employed by Cortázar is that of presenting an individual living simultaneously in two time periods, as depicted in "El otro cielo." The protagonist at a given moment is strolling in downtown Buenos Aires in the twentieth century, and suddenly it is the year 1870 and he is in Paris; the change occurs without any break in continuity, as if it were a perfectly natural occurrence.

The temporal continuum is completely destroyed in "Autopista del sur," a story in which motorists find themselves immobilized on a freeway leading into Paris. Cortázar again ignores the natural continuity of time as the motorists witness the changing of the seasons while, for some unknown reason, they remain unable to continue their journey.

Just as the conventional reality of time has been an object of Cortázar's imaginative speculation, so has he also experimented with new concepts of spatial reality. Cortázar has said, "I detest classic itineraries--at every level."²⁵ Consequently, Cortázar will suddenly transport

²⁵Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 239.

the reader not only mentally but physically as well. The geographical settings in his short stories are usually bifocal and the reader may quickly lose his bearings as the scene shifts rapidly, often in the brief space of one sentence. An example of this spatial displacement can be seen in "Todos los fuegos el fuego," where the action shifts from a circus during Roman times to a modern day apartment in Paris, with only a punctuation mark separating the two scenes. The only unifying factor is a fire which ends the lives of the characters at both locations.

Another type of spatial displacement employed by Cortázar is seen in "La isla a mediodía," a story in which the hero transports himself mentally and becomes a part of the life on an island that he sees from the airplane on which he is a steward. In another instance, "Las babas del diablo," a picture on the wall is seen by the protagonist as a window through which he views the actions of the subjects as if they were alive, and he becomes involved in their problems.

Along with his departure from the conventional notions of time and space, Cortázar has also attempted to bear arms against the traditional reality of character treatment, where, no matter how radical the personality change a character may undergo, his single, unique, identity is never fragmented in the reader's mind. Identity displacement is utilized by Cortázar in infinite

variations and can take the form of doubles who ultimately identify with each other and become a single character. In the story "Lejana," a woman on her honeymoon trip in Hungary meets herself coming the other way on a misty bridge, just as she had previously dreamed she would. Identity displacement may also serve as the basis for a meditation on immortality as in "Una flor amarilla," where the protagonist encounters a young boy whom he claims is the reincarnation of himself. There is also the change that involves man turning into animal and vice versa, as in "Axolotl," where the hero turns into a salamander and looks at himself from the inside of an aquarium. However, in spite of this endless play of doubles, of self and the other, "Cortázar never loses the unified drama of the existence of the individual, the sense that each man's life is an allegory of a single experience from which he comes and to which he is destined to go."²⁶ To this end Cortázar employs identity displacement and offers the reader a different, even startling view of the world and its inhabitants.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the techniques through which Julio Cortázar presents and explores the literary concepts of temporal, spatial and identity displacement. The author's radical departure from the

²⁶Coleman, op. cit., p. 61.

more traditionally structured view of these notions is certainly one of the most perplexing and controversial aspects of his literary style. Indeed, the major part of critical material dedicated recently to this author indicates that his unique view of time, space and character treatment is one of the most innovative presently found in Spanish American literary circles.

A careful analysis of the recurring techniques by which he achieves temporal, spatial, and identity displacement and how such displacement affects structure, characterization, and thematic content, is essential to the meaningful understanding of the works of Julio Cortázar. This study includes an analysis of these techniques, and the author's experimental manipulation of them, based on selected stories from the author's entire works in the short story genre, five volumes to date.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

Among Latin American literary circles it is not uncommon to encounter displaced individuals, authors who find it necessary to exile themselves in order to escape the restrictions imposed upon them by political leaders. One of these writers is Julio Cortázar, an Argentine who resides in Europe because of the political pressures in his own country.

Cortázar was born in Brussels on August 26, 1914,¹ while his parents were residing there. The author explains his foreign birth in this way: "Mi nacimiento fue un producto del turismo y la diplomacia; a mi padre lo incorporaron a una misión comercial cerca de la legación Argentina en Bélgica, y como acababa de casarse se llevó a mi madre a Bruselas."²

¹Biographical data concerning Julio Cortázar has appeared primarily in conjunction with critical studies of his works; no definitive biography of the author has yet been published. Among the major critics and correspondents who have dedicated studies to this author are the following: Luis Harss, Barbara Dohmann, Graciela de Sola, Fernando Alegría, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and Ana María Barrenechea.

²De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 9.

The author's birth coincided with the occupation of Brussels by the Germans, and the family was unable to leave the country until he was four years of age. By the time young Cortázar arrived in Banfield on the outskirts of Buenos Aires he was speaking mostly French, and because of his foreign birth and his inability to communicate in Spanish, his peers called him belgicano.

Cortázar led a most unhappy and sickly childhood: "No guardo un recuerdo feliz de mi infancia."³ His statement gives an idea as to the nature of his family life during this period, which he recalls as a time of "demasiadas servidumbres, una sensibilidad excesiva, una tristeza frecuente, asma, brazos rotos, primeros amores desesperados."⁴

When he was in the fifth grade he would write love poems inspired by Edgar Allan Poe to the girls in his class. However, in those early compositions as well as in his recent writings there has been "agony in his constant inward migration between physical roots and spiritual affinities. The displaced persons in his books testify to the length and depth of a conflict that has never been satisfactorily settled."⁵

He graduated from normal school in Buenos Aires, completed studies for a teacher's degree in 1935, and

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 209.

entered the Liberal Arts School of the University. He would have continued his studies there had he not felt the responsibility of helping his mother, who had been the sole supporter of the family since the father abandoned them when Cortázar was very young, At the age of twenty Cortázar left his studies to take a teaching position which, according to the author, allowed him to relieve his mother of her financial burden:

I'm a schoolteacher. I graduated from a normal school in Buenos Aires, completed the studies for a teacher's degree, and then entered the Liberal Arts School of the university. I passed by my first-year exams, but then I was offered a job teaching some courses in a town in the province of Buenos Aires, and since there was very little money at home and I wanted to help my mother, who'd educated me at great cost and sacrifice--my father had left home when I was a very small child and had never done anything for the family--I gave up my university studies at the first chance I had to work, when I was twenty years old and moved to the country.⁶

Between 1934 and 1941 he lived in small country communities such as Bolívar and Chivilcoy, where he served as a high school teacher. Since he preferred to be alone, along with the fact that there was not much social activity in the small communities where he worked, Cortázar spent much of his time reading.

. . . 'when I left for the country, I was completely isolated and cut off. I solved that problem, if you can call it solving it, thanks to a matter of temperament. I was always very ingrown. I lived in small

⁶Ibid., p. 214.

towns where there were very few interesting people, almost none. I used to spend the day in my room in my hotel or boardinghouse, reading and studying. That was very useful to me, and at the same time it was dangerous. It was useful in the sense that I consumed thousands of books. I certainly picked up a lot of book knowledge in those days. It was dangerous,' he adds, looking back with indulgence on those years of encyclopedic erudition, 'in that it probably deprived me of a good share of vital experience.'⁷

It was during these long hours of solace that he became acquainted with many writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Roberto Arlt, Horacio Quiroga, James Joyce, and Alfred Jarry, who were to influence his writing in later years. An especially important work that opened a new world for him was a Spanish translation of Jean Cocteau's Opium, Journal d' une Desintoxicacion: "One day. . . I read Cocteau's Opium. It was a flash of lightning that opened a new world to me."⁸ It was through this work that Cortázar became acquainted with the techniques of the Surrealist movement, a movement which has had a marked influence in the author's mature writings.

After seven years as a high school teacher, he went to Mendoza where he was given the opportunity to teach French literature at the University of Cuyo. During his two years in Mendoza, he taught courses on Rimbaud, Mallarmé and a special seminar on his favorite poet, Keats.

In 1941, Cortázar published his first work, a small book of sonnets under the pseudonym of Julio Dénis; he

⁷Ibid., p. 215.

⁸Ibid., p. 231.

considers it "very Mallarmean" and a work "that he no longer cares to talk about."⁹

In 1946, he was involved in the anti-Peronista movement and when Perón won the presidential election, Cortázar resigned his position at the University of Cuyo. He then returned to Buenos Aires after a ten year absence.

In 1945-46, at the time of all the Peronista troubles, since I knew I was going to lose my job because I'd been in the fight against Perón, when Perón won the presidential election, I resigned before I was backed against the wall as so many colleagues were who held onto their jobs, and found work in Buenos Aires.¹⁰

Cortázar describes his life between 1946 and 1951 as follows:

. . . vida porteña, solitaria e independiente; convencido de ser un solterón irreductible, amigo de muy poca gente, melómano lector a jornada completa, enamorado del cine, burguesito ciego a todo lo que pasaba más allá de la esfera de lo estético. Traductor público nacional. Gran oficio para una vida como la mía en ese entonces egoístamente solitaria e independiente.¹¹

In this brief passage Cortázar stresses that his life was "solitaria e independiente," a life style reflected in his writings. The ability to create his own version of life, depicted by his lonely characters, and the freedom to manipulate the time span and geographical region in which these characters find themselves comes as a result of his many hours spent withdrawn from the rest of the world.

⁹Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 214.

¹¹De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 10.

Having remained silent for eight years, he then published a second poetic work, Los Reyes, in 1949. It was "a series of dialogues ('a dramatic poem,' he calls it) on the subject of the Cretan Minotaur, rather stately in style, abstract, intellectual, overrefined, reflecting his bookish addiction to classical mythology."¹² Los Reyes did not receive any more recognition than his sonnets, but this did not seem to discourage Cortázar:

Los Reyes was not exactly received by acclamation, says Cortázar. It was hardly noticed.

.....
 But he was not discouraged. By then he was looking well ahead. 'I was completely sure that from about, say, 1947, all the things I'd been putting away were good, some even very good. I'm referring, for example, to some of the stories of Bestiario. I knew nobody had written stories like that before in Spanish, at least in my country.' He was in no hurry. A short novel that he had finished at the time, which some friends had tried to get published for him, had been turned down for 'its nasty words,' a rejection that did not bother him in the least.

.....
 He was satisfied to have a small but distinguished audience. . . .¹³

In 1951, Cortázar was granted a literary scholarship by the French government and was able to go to Paris. At this time, Cortázar had compiled a small volume of short stories which he titled Bestiario. The eight selections in the volume reflected the influence of such writers as Poe, H. G. Wells, Quiroga, and above all, Borges.

¹²Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 210.

¹³Ibid., pp. 216-217.

Bestiario was "lean and luminous, and struck a keynote: the fantastic, suddenly revealing a master sorcerer."¹⁴ This, Cortázar's first volume of short stories, is filled with symbolic elements created by the author as a result of an everyday experience lived by all and enriched by Cortázar's fantastic version of reality.¹⁵

Thus, "on the eve of his trip to Europe, . . . a few close friends who knew the stories of Bestiario in manuscript form snatched them from his hands to show to the Editorial Sudamericana, which published them immediately but without success."¹⁶ Having followed the same course as Los Reyes, Bestiario also seemed to be a failure. The only favorable comment that was expressed even as late as 1957 was published in La literatura fantástica en Argentina by Ana María Barrenechea and Emma Susana Speratti Piñero:

. . . Julio Cortázar está realizando una obra literaria vigorosa. Desde el poema dramático Los Reyes, pasando por sus cuentos de Bestiario, hasta Ilegar a las producciones aparecidas únicamente en revistas y periódicos, la evolución no se ha detenido.¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁵José Amícola, Sobre Cortázar (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 21.

¹⁶Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

¹⁷Ana María Barrenechea and Emma Susana Speratti Piñero, La literatura fantástica en Argentina (México, D. F., 1957), p. 75.

In the early 1950's Cortázar's audience was small and "aside from Borges, a staunch supporter to whom he acknowledges a special debt of gratitude, included his friends and the few readers of the little magazine (Los Anales de Buenos Aires) that had printed Los Reyes."¹⁸ The literary critics simply were not impressed with Cortázar, a fact clarified by the following incident told by José Durand, one of Cortázar's few supporters at that time.

When Anderson Imbert, the writer and student, for instance, came through Mexico in 1952, he was surprised at our admiration for Cortázar. Years later, in 1959, we ran across one another at the gates of the University of Buenos Aires. By that time Anderson Imbert had not only accepted our view with pleasure but even told an anecdote about how Daniel Devoto¹⁹ had considered Cortázar one of Argentina's leading figures since 1950.²⁰

When his literary scholarship, granted a year earlier, expired in 1952, Cortázar worked as a translator. In 1953, he married a life long friend, Aurora Bernárdez. Shortly thereafter both began working as free-lance translators for UNESCO, a position they have held to the present, "where their job, as he says somewhat wryly, is to help 'maintain the purity of the Spanish language.'"²¹

¹⁸Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 217.

¹⁹Daniel Devoto, a close friend of Cortázar's was the one who published Los Reyes in a limited edition in 1949. Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁰José Durand, "Julio Cortázar: Storytelling Giant," Americas XV (March, 1963), 39-43.

²¹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 212.

In 1959, Cortázar published Las armas secretas, a collection of short stories which marked a departure from his previous work: "Without sacrificing the imaginary, he had begun to draw live characters taken from real life with their feet on the ground. His style had also become more muscular, less 'aesthetically pleasing.'"²² With the publication of this collection came the recognition that was long overdue. One short story in particular, "El perseguidor," led the critics to examine Cortázar's works more closely and to classify him as "uno de los mejores prosistas que surgieron de 1940 a 1950."²³

In 1962, Cortázar published Historias de cronopios y de famas, written between 1952 and 1959. The work is "an assortment of loose sketches, brief insights into hidden dimensions that demonstrate the author's fondness for fruitful improvisation."²⁴

'In 1951, the year I came to Paris,' he tells us, 'there was a concert one night in the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. Suddenly, sitting there, I thought of some somewhat extravagant creatures that I didn't see very clearly yet, a kind of microbes floating in the air, shapeless greenish blobs that gradually started to take on human traits. After that, in cafés, in the streets,

²²Ibid., p. 211.

²³Enrique Anderson Imbert, "Julio Cortázar: Final del juego," Revista Iberoamericana, XXIII (January-July, 1958), 173-175.

²⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 211.

in the subway, I started writing stories about the Cronopios and the Famas, and the Esperanzas, which came later.'²⁵

His cronopios and famas are names given to these "shapeless greenish blobs" which exist in a bubble world that seems unreal yet suggestive of our own world, which though real is as absurd as the world of the cronopios.

Included with the experiences of the cronopios and famas there are also to be found "Manual de instrucciones," "Ocupaciones raras," and "Material plástico," essays or philosophical sketches in which the author voices his opinions of the conventionalisms that govern our world. He shows his hatred for these conventionalisms by attacking them, by replacing the "normal" situation with the unusual, the contrary-to-nature, the unexpected, the whimsical. Among the topics included in these sections are the ironic instructions for mounting a staircase, for winding a clock; a sketch about a man who loses his head and learns to detect sounds, smells, and colors with his sense of touch; and a warning against the dangers of zippers.

. . . 'The Manual of Instructions,' I wrote after I got married, when Aurora and I went to live in Italy for a while. You have Aurora to blame for these texts. One day, mounting an endless staircase in a museum, out of breath, she said suddenly: 'The trouble is that this is a staircase for going

²⁵Ibid., p. 240.

down.' I loved that phrase. So I said to Aurora: 'One ought to write some instructions about how to go up and down a staircase.' He did.²⁶

Having shocked the critics with his Historias de cronopios y de famas as a result of stooping to what they called "such unimportance,"²⁷ Cortázar then returned to his previous literary style and published Final del juego in 1964.

Final del juego was a compilation of eighteen short stories, half of which had appeared in Mexico in 1956 under the title, Los presentes. The selections contained in Los presentes were a continuation of the style already established in Bestiario, where symbols represented by variations in the manipulation of time, space and character treatment played an important part in the development of the story. The short stories that were added to the 1956 edition reflect the author's new style of writing, which had fully crystallized in Las armas secretas, but still retain his ingenious wielding of the traditional notions of time, space and character development.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷At this point Cortázar touches on what he calls "one of the worst things about Argentina: the stupid notion of importance. The idea of doing something just for the fun of it is practically nonexistent in our literature." His Historias de cronopios y de famas provides a cure for this ill. Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 240.

By the mid-1960's Cortázar was receiving the attention that was to lead critics to place him "en la primera línea de los narradores (no ya argentinos, sino mundiales) de su generación."²⁸

Julio Cortázar viene realizando una vigorosa literatura. Desde el poema dramático Los Reyes hasta Armas secretas, pasando por los cuentos de su Bestiario y Final del juego, la evolución no se ha detenido. Su prosa posee una notable fuerza en la definición del clima y las ideas.²⁹

In 1966, Cortázar published his most recent volume of short stories, Todos los fuegos el fuego, which continues the pattern of experimentation with traditional literary concepts already established in Final del juego.

Cortázar has also published three novels. The first, Los premios, appeared in 1960 and depicts "passengers on a mysterious boat who attempt to gain access to the stern following a staircase leading down into the hold, into darkness and confusion."³⁰

The subject, on the surface, is a holiday cruise--a tour offered to a number of otherwise generally unrelated people who have been thrown together on board by sheer coincidence, simply because they all happened to draw winning numbers in a lottery. On a primary symbolic level, it is an inner trip each passenger takes toward self-confrontation. But it is also the author's own

²⁸Pedro Gimferrer, "Notas sobre Julio Cortázar," Insula, XX (October, 1965), 7.

²⁹Carlos Horacio Magis, La literatura argentina (México, D. F., 1965), p. 305.

³⁰Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 218.

inner trip toward himself. The obstacles are many. The end remains equivocal and unattainable. Its physical representation is the stern of the boat, which for some unknown reason has been closed to the passengers. No one has access to it. Not even the author. 'I was in the same position as López or Medrano or Raúl,' he says. 'I didn't know what was happening astern either. It's a mystery to me to this day.'³¹

The need that the characters have to reach the stern of the ship is described by Cortázar as a desire "to become realized as persons, as human beings. That's why some make it and others don't."³²

Cortázar's second novel, Rayuela (1963), described as an antinovel, represents the climax of his literary career and has caused him to be one of the most widely discussed authors of the day.³³

. . . Rayuela . . . shows every sign of having represented a major breakthrough for him. Rayuela is a therapeutic book, intended as a complete course of treatment against the empty dialectics of Western civilization and the rationalist tradition. It is an ambitious work, at once a philosophical manifesto, a revolt against literary language, and

³¹Ibid., p. 225.

³²Ibid., p. 219.

³³"Cuando apareció Rayuela, de Julio Cortázar, se produjo en el mundo literario hispanoamericano algo así como un terremoto. Se elogió la novela, se la denostó, se la comparó con el Ulises, de Joyce, se la criticó duramente. Pero Rayuela, después de ser tan traída y llevada, después de siete años, está allí inconvencible, ya más calmadamente estudiada y aceptada como una de las mejores ficciones hispanoamericanas del presente, como la anti-novela por excelencia que lanza un desafío al lector, a la lengua, a la creación novelística." Angela B. Dellepiane, "62. Modelo para armar: ¿Agresión, regresión o progresión?," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, I (January, 1971), 49-72.

the account of an extraordinary spiritual pilgrimage. The Cortázar of Rayuela is a deep-sea diver who comes up with a full net. He is a man of many means, contorted, contradictory, exuberant, paradoxical, polemic: not only a great wit and humorist, outshining all others in our literature, but also--as he shows in a pithy appendix somewhat detached from the main body of the narrative--a brilliantly aggressive, if slightly pedantic, literary theorist.³⁴

The theme of Rayuela revolves around the protagonist's division between two different worlds, a theme very representative of Cortázar, who considers himself a "Frenchified Argentine."

'The attempt to find a center was, and still is, a personal problem of mine,' he says. All his life he has been injecting it into his work without finding a concrete solution for it. Even the inexhaustible Rayuela, which provides a sort of unending catalogue of available alternatives in the end can offer only partial subterfuges.³⁵

Cortázar's search does not end with Rayuela but continues even in his third novel, 62. Modelo para armar, which appeared in 1968 and is his most recent work.

62. Modelo para armar es esa inquietud, ese desasosiego, ese desarraigo, ese territorio en que la causalidad psicológica ha cedido desconcertada. Y si no se lo lee poniéndose en actitud de ¡jojo-estoy-pisando-terreno-desconocido!, no se lo podrá gustar en todas sus sutilezas y complejidad.³⁶

In this novel, Cortázar demands the readers' utmost attention as he depicts

. . . una serie de hechos pedestres, absurdos, entre seres corrientes manejados por un azar

³⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

³⁵Ibid., p. 220.

³⁶Dellepiane, op. cit., p. 57.

implacable que los usa, los mueve, los une o los separa determinando así figuras que integran un contexto impenetrable porque están predeterminadas por una fuerza superior. Ese 'armado' del título es el que se da por sí solo una vez que hemos finiquitado la lectura y del que resulta la 'figura' que nosotros mismos seamos capaces de formar.³⁷

The superstructure of Cortázar's novels and short stories is such that he is unable to confine himself to "una secuencia temporal lineal, ni tampoco puede limitarse a un determinado medio espacial" ³⁸ Consequently, he has had to rely on what he calls "abierta violación del equilibrio y los principios que cabría llamar morales del espacio."³⁹

Along with his novels and short stories, Cortázar has written La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos (1967), a work of miscellaneous content, which incorporates poems, short stories and essays. He has also translated into Spanish the works of such writers as Keats, Poe and Defoe.

Today, at 56, Cortázar and his wife reside in Paris during the time that they are involved with their work with UNESCO, then spend the remainder of each year in retirement in their summer house near Aix or in Venice.

Though Cortázar's acclaim has come late, his "unflagging inventiveness and imagination combined with

³⁷Ibid., pp. 57-58.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 53-54.

³⁹Julio Cortázar, Rayuela (Buenos Aires, 1965), p. 602.

sure marksmanship, have kept him steadily growing in stature through the years."⁴⁰

. . . este escritor argentino, radicado en París, acrecienta sobre su obra los juicios necesarios como para ser considerado uno de los mayores talentos literarios de habla española. Conoce ahora el halago de un éxito tan tardío como unánime, tan unánime como equívoco, y desde la situación de privilegio que le conceden el prestigio y el deliberado aislamiento con el que se sustrae a los espesos reclamos del mundo inmediato, se convierte en testigo de alguno de los acontecimientos más explosivos de su tiempo.⁴¹

Cortázar does not suffer from the creative fatigue that plagues so many authors toward middle age, and even today at the height of his career "his restless and inquiring mind tells him his work is more unfinished than ever."⁴²

The key to Cortázar's unquestionable success has been that in theory and in practice he continually strives for total renovation of traditional practices.

En teoría y en la práctica, Julio Cortázar postula una renovación total, no por el deseo de la originalidad sino por una necesidad interna: destrucción de los caracteres, de las situaciones, del estilo literario, de las fórmulas del lenguaje. Se pronuncia contra la engañosa facilidad narrativa ('novela rollo'), contra la literatura de relleno, contra los clichés verbales y pide

⁴⁰Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴¹Adolfo Prieto, Estudios de literatura argentina (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 159.

⁴²Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 210.

una literatura 'lo menos literaria posible,' una anti-literatura en suma, que se atreva a transgredir el hecho literario total. . . ."43

As Cortázar's literary fame continues to increase he constantly strives to give his writings "new intentions, new targets and points of departure."⁴⁴ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he reflects an increasing self-confidence and self-mastery as an author: "I think I'm approaching the point where perhaps I'll be able to start writing as I think one ought to write in our time."⁴⁵

⁴³Richard F. Allen, "Temas y técnicas literarias de Julio Cortázar," The South Central Bulletin, XXIX (Winter, 1969), 116-118.

⁴⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 245.

⁴⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER III

TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENT

To the inexperienced reader, Cortázar's anomalous treatment of the traditional concept of time may seem incongruous and create a feeling of ambivalence toward the author's writings. The reader may find himself whisked by the author from one time period to another, and although completely bewildered and doubtful of his sanity, forced to focus his attention on two different worlds existing simultaneously in two distinct time zones and their surrounding historical context. It is then that the reader must realize that temporal displacement in the works of Cortázar violates all the laws of commonly accepted chronology and that he must tread warily as the author challenges his perspicacity by introducing him to new facets of the concept of time.

Cortázar has said that "man made a mistake when he invented time"¹ and has reinforced this statement in various essays found in his Historias de cronopios y de famas (1962). In this volume alone Cortázar has included three short stories utilizing the word reloj as part of the title.

¹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 219.

These selections give an insight into Cortázar's fascination with the manipulation of time and present new concepts of it as he symbolizes his desire to destroy stereotyped time, represented by the clock. A passage found in his "Préambulo a las instrucciones para dar cuerda al reloj" reiterates Cortázar's belief that the invention of time was a mistake, for man becomes enslaved by the necessity of being constantly aware of the hour.

. . . cuando te regalan un reloj te regalan un pequeño infierno florido Te regalan la necesidad de darle cuerda todos los días, la obligación de darle cuerda para que siga siendo reloj; te regalan la obsesión de atender a la hora exacta en las vitrinas de las joyerías, en el anuncio por la radio, en el servicio telefónico.²

The description of the watch as "un pequeño infierno florido" humorously exposes the author's derogatory attitude for the "hellish" obligations which time imposes upon man. Man is enslaved by time as he is forced to wind his watch and be mindful of the hour so that the timepiece may serve its purpose. However, in the short story that follows, "Instrucciones para dar cuerda al reloj," Cortázar proceeds to inform the reader that he need not be bound by time but can heed the following advice:

Sujete el reloj con una mano, tome . . . la llave de la cuerda, remóntela suavemente. Ahora se abre otro plazo, . . . el tiempo como un abanico se va llenando de sí mismo y de él brotan el aire, las

²Julio Cortázar, "Préambulo a las instrucciones para dar cuerda al reloj," Historias de cronopios y de famas (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 27.

brisas de la tierra, la sombra de una mujer, el perfume del pan.
 . . . déjelo latir en libertad, imítelo anhelante. . . .³

Cortázar now creates images around time as he compares the flowing of time to the expansiveness of a fan from which emerge such intangible realities as a breeze, a shadow, a scent. The author's admonition to the reader is that he let the watch tick freely and that he imitate the freedom of movement that time can take. This can only be accomplished by rejecting the conventional concepts of time and being aware of the limitless possibilities of it. To simbolize this rejection of the traditional concept of chronology, Cortázar destroys the usual clock and introduces his surrealistic artichoke clock, "reloj alcachofa o alcaucil," on which "las innumerables hojas del alcaucil marcan la hora presente y además todas las horas . . ."⁴ in timeless fashion.

Cortázar's fascination with the manipulation of time has not been limited to any particular period of his writing. Temporal displacement is as prevalent in his brief sketches as in the complicated novel Rayuela and can be traced from his earliest works to those recently published.

³Cortázar, "Instrucciones para dar cuerda al reloj," Historias de cronopios y de famas, p. 29.

⁴Cortázar, "Relojes," Historias de cronopios y de famas, p. 124.

Temporal displacement, as both a thematic and structural device, abounds in all of Cortázar's short story collections. In many stories, this device plays a minor or marginal role, but in others temporal displacement is the crucial point to unlocking the meaning of the story. From an analysis of several stories in which temporal displacement plays a major role, it is possible to categorize certain recurring techniques through which the author presents and manipulates this theme, certainly one of his favorites.

The use of dreams and delirium is a device for attaining multiple and radical time changes. An example of this technique is "La noche boca arriba," a short story from the collection Final del juego (1964).

As "La noche boca arriba" opens every indication is that the time involved is the present, particularly since the unnamed protagonist is described as leaving his hotel on a motorcycle and the sights he sees include such modern concepts as skyscrapers ("los altos edificios del centro"), traffic ("tráfico"), traffic lights ("luces verdes"), and an ambulance ("ambulancia policial").

While the protagonist is driving along engrossed in his surroundings, a woman steps into the path of his motorcycle. In an effort to avoid hitting her, he swerves, is thrown off his vehicle and badly injured. The first portion of the story ends as the motorcyclist is taken to the

hospital. There, while lying in a prone position on the operating table, he experiences the following:

Lo llevaron a la sala de radio, y veinte minutos después, con la placa todavía húmeda puesta sobre el pecho como una lápida negra, pasó a la sala de operaciones. Alguien de blanco, alto y delgado, se le acercó y se puso a mirar la radiografía. Manos de mujer le acomodaban la cabeza, sintió que lo pasaban de una camilla a otra. El hombre de blanco se le acercó otra vez, sonriendo con algo que le brillaba en la mano derecha. Le palmeó la mejilla e hizo una seña a alguien parado atrás.⁵

The reader clearly envisions the protagonist on the operating table with an X-Ray plate across his chest anticipating surgery. He is unaware that the author is preparing him for the scene that follows by utilizing words with a dual interpretation. For, without any break in continuity, the injured motorcyclist is displaced in time. He is no longer on an operating table but rather about to be sacrificed in an Aztec ritual. The "placa" previously described becomes the flat sacrificial stone, the "lápida negra" represents the black onyx often used for sacrificial knives in Aztec rituals, and the "hombre de blanco . . . con algo que le brillaba en la mano derecha" becomes the Aztec priest with a knife in his hand ready to offer a sacrifice to the gods. However, the reader is not yet forced to reject traditional temporal reality, for the fantastic shift of scene

⁵Julio Cortázar, "La noche boca arriba," Final del juego (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 171. Italics mine.

can logically be interpreted as a nightmarish fantasy in the mind of the protagonist as he is being anesthetized for surgery.

The transition from the modern-day operating room to the fifteenth century in Aztec Mexico is presented as a recovery delusion after surgery. The protagonist is convinced that he is experiencing a curiously realistic dream:

Como sueño era curioso porque estaba lleno de olores y él nunca soñaba olores. Primero un olor a pantano, ya que a la izquierda de la calzada empezaban las marismas, los tembladerales de donde no volvía nadie. Pero el olor cesó, y en cambio vino una fragancia compuesta y oscura como la noche en que se movía huyendo de los aztecas. Y todo era tan natural, tenía que huir de los aztecas que andaban a caza de hombre, y su única probabilidad era la de esconderse en lo más denso de la selva, cuidando de no apartarse de la estrecha calzada que solo ellos, los mostecas, conocían.

Lo que más lo torturaba era el olor, como si aún en la absoluta aceptación del sueño algo se rebelara contra eso que no era habitual, Tener miedo no era extraño, en sus sueños abundaba el miedo.⁶

In this apparent dream state the injured motorcyclist finds himself being pursued by the Aztecs who plan to offer him as a sacrifice during the celebration of their guerra florida.⁷

⁶Ibid., pp. 171-172.

⁷"The idea that man is an indispensable collaborator of the gods, since the latter cannot subsist unless they are nourished, was clearly expressed in the sanguinary cult of Huitzilopochtli, a manifestation of the sun god. . . . The rising of the sun each day is the symbol of the warrior-sun, who armed with the serpent of fire, puts to flight his

Subsequently the time of the story alternates between the twentieth and the fifteenth century as the protagonist experiences intervals of post-operative wakefulness (in the twentieth century) and delirium (the scenes in ancient Mexico). The transition from one time period to the other is accomplished by details where words or sensations have a dual interpretation and allow the reader a logical explanation of the action as the feverish delirium of an injured man not fully in control of his senses as a result of the anesthesia. In his hospital room following surgery, the protagonist is "un poco incómodo, de espaldas. . . . El brazo, enyesado, colgaba de un aparato con pesas y poleas. Sintió sed, como si hubiera estado corriendo

brothers (the stars) and his sister (the moon). Each day this divine combat is begun anew, but in order for the sun to triumph, he must be strong and vigorous, for he has to fight against the unnumbered stars of the North and the South and frighten them all off with his arrows of light. For that reason man must give nourishment to the sun. Since the sun is a god, he disdains the coarse foods of mortals and can only be kept alive by life itself, by the magic substance that is found in the blood of man, the chalchíhuatl, 'the precious liquid,' the terrible nectar with which the gods are fed.

The Aztecs, the people of Huitzilopochtli, were the chosen people of the sun. They were charged with the duty of supplying him with food. For that reason war was a form of worship and a necessary activity that led them to establish the Xochiyaóyotl, or 'flowery war.' Its purpose, unlike that of wars of conquest, was not to gain new territories not to exact tribute from conquered peoples, but rather to take prisoners for sacrifice to the sun." Notes on 'la guerra florida' from Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs, People of the Sun, translated by Lowell Dunham from the original Spanish version, El pueblo del sol (Norman, 1958), pp. 12-14.

kilómetros. . . . la fiebre lo iba arrastrando blandamente. . . . "⁸ Paralleling this condition is the dilemma in which he finds himself after being seized by the Aztecs:

. . . dormía de espaldas, . . . el olor a humedad, a piedra rezumante de filtraciones, le cerró la garganta. . . . Quiso enderezarse y sintió las sogas en las muñecas y los tobillos. Estaba estacado en el suelo, . . . casi no podía abrir la boca, tenía las mandíbulas agarrotadas y a la vez como si fueran de goma y se abrieran lentamente con su esfuerzo interminable. . . . Su brazo derecho, el más fuerte, tiraba hasta que el dolor se hizo intolerable y tuvo que ceder.⁹

The motorcyclist is a man in pain who feels physical sensations which are identical both to his wakeful and to his dream state. In both time periods he is prone and has sensation of pain in his bound arm; his dry mouth indicates a feverish state. His extensive knowledge of the Aztec culture becomes apparent as the protagonist continues experiencing intervals of wakefulness and delirium and as he describes the celebration of the guerra florida. A detailed description of the ceremony is presented as the victim is carried to the pyramid to be sacrificed.

Lo habían traído al teocalli, estaba en las mazmorras del templo a la espera de su turno. . . . Vio abrirse la doble puerta, y el olor de las antorchas le llegó antes que la luz. Apenas

⁸Cortázar, "La noche boca arriba," Final del juego, pp. 173-174.

⁹Ibid., pp. 176-177.

ceñidos con el taparrabos de la ceremonia, los acólitos de los sacerdotes se le acercaron mirándolo con desprecio. Las luces se reflejaban en los torsos sudados, en el pelo negro lleno de plumas. . . . se sintió alzado, siempre boca arriba, tironeado por los cuatro acólitos que lo llevaban por el pasadizo. Los portadores de antorchas iban delante alumbrando vagamente el corredor. . . . Cuando . . . se alzara frente a él la escalinata incendiada de gritos y danzas, sería el fin. . . . en lo alto estaban las hogueras, las rojas columnas de humo perfumado, y de golpe vio la piedra roja, brillante de sangre que chorreaba, y el vaivén de los pies del sacrificado que arrastraban para tirarlo rodando por las escalinatas del norte.¹⁰

Thus far Cortázar has lured the reader into believing that all of the flashbacks to the fifteenth century have merely been the result of the protagonist's regaining consciousness from the influence of anesthesia. However, as the reader approaches the ending of the story, the author shatters this established set of assumptions by revealing that it is not the contemporary man who is dreaming but rather the victim of the Aztecs who is dreaming in reverse, that is, into the future. The reader's equilibrium is destroyed since he has not been prepared for this reversal, and he is forced to envision a new dimension of time completely contradictory to the one he had logically preconceived. This dilemma occurs in the final scene which describes the protagonist's last attempts to return to the security of his hospital bed only to find it is impossible to do so:

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 177-178.

Con una última esperanza apretó los párpados, gimiendo por despertar. Durante un segundo creyó que lo lograría, porque otra vez estaba inmóvil en la cama, a salvo del balanceo cabeza abajo. Pero olía la muerte, y cuando abrió los ojos vio la figura ensangrentada del sacrificador que venía hacia él con el cuchillo de piedra en la mano. Alcanzó a cerrar otra vez los párpados, aunque ahora sabía que no iba a despertarse, que estaba despierto, que el sueño maravilloso había sido el otro, absurdo como todos los sueños; un sueño en el que había andado por extrañas avenidas de una ciudad asombrosa, con luces verdes y rojas que ardían sin llama ni humo, con un enorme insecto de metal que zumbaba bajo sus piernas. En la mentira infinita de ese sueño también lo habían alzado del suelo, también alguien se le había acercado con un cuchillo en la mano, a él tendido boca arriba, a él boca arriba con los ojos cerrados entre las hogueras.¹¹

The author, in the closing lines of the story, artfully establishes the true identity of the protagonist as a fifteenth century victim of the Aztecs, not a traffic accident. His primitive nature is evidenced by key phrases which show that he is alien to the twentieth century and that, indeed, he does not even know its terminology: motorcycle ("insecto de metal que zumbaba bajo sus piernas"), electric traffic lights ("luces verdes y rojas que ardían sin llama ni humo"), the modern city ("una ciudad asombrosa"). His ultimate discovery, moments before his death, is that apparent reality (in the form of an absurd but realistic dream) is a "mentira infinita." The reality of his dream (escape to another time zone and the safety of a hospital bed there) is just beyond his grasp, but through

¹¹Ibid., p. 179.

it, for a brief period, he has lived an atemporal experience outside the superficial time of his own era.

In "La noche boca arriba" the author's utilization of temporal displacement has worked the reader into a dream world of total absurdity ("absurdo como todos los sueños"), a world imbued with "a kind of magic charm that gives . . . a glimpse of a dimension of existence other than the merely . . . chronological."¹²

The use of galleries constitutes another device employed by Cortázar in presenting the reader with glimpses of new dimensions of time. A short story which is representative of this device is "El otro cielo" found in Todos los fuegos el fuego (1966). In this selection the reader is transported into two time periods in which the protagonist resides "alternativamente, bajo dos cielos: el uno se cierne sobre Buenos Aires, alterada por las postrimerías de la segunda guerra mundial; el otro es el cielo artificial de las galerías y los pasajes del París del siglo pasado."¹³

Cortázar ignores stereotyped time as the innominate protagonist lives simultaneously in the present as well as in the past century. He acknowledges the twentieth century as he refers to such incidents as "la bomba . . . sobre

¹²Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

¹³Alejandra Pizarnik, "Nota sobre un cuento de Julio Cortázar: 'El otro cielo,'" La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, edited by Carlos Pérez (Buenos Aires, 1968), p. 55.

Hiroshima," "cuando los alemanes se rindieron," and "las elecciones" where he must decide to vote "por Perón o por Tamborini. . . ." To establish the time period involved in the protagonist's other world, references are made to "las amenazas prusianas" of the Franco-Prussian War of the 1870's.

The gallery employed by Cortázar to achieve a change in time has been described by the author himself as "a covered gallery--a sort of out-of-the-way territory I've always found very mysterious--."¹⁴ In a section of Buenos Aires, the protagonist finds that by walking through a covered gallery he is transported to the portals of a past era where he can enter and find freedom from the anxieties and insecurities that exist in the outside world.

. . . hubo una época en que las cosas me sucedían cuando menos pensaba en ellas, empujando apenas con el hombro cualquier rincón del aire. En todo caso bastaba ingresar en la deriva placentera del ciudadano que se deja llevar por sus preferencias callejeras, y casi siempre mi paseo terminaba en el barrio de las galerías cubiertas, quizá porque los pasajes y las galerías han sido mi patria secreta desde siempre. Aquí, por ejemplo, el Pasaje Güemes, territorio ambiguo donde ya hace tanto tiempo fui a quitarme la infancia como un traje usado.

.
 Todavía hoy me cuesta cruzar el Pasaje Güemes sin enternecerme irónicamente con el recuerdo de la adolescencia al borde de la caída; . . . y por eso me gustaba echar a andar sin rumbo fijo, sabiendo que en cualquier momento entraría en la zona de las galerías cubiertas, donde cualquier sórdida botica polvorienta

¹⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 237.

me atraía más que los escaparates tendidos a la insolencia de las calles abiertas.¹⁵

"El pasaje Güemes" simbolizes the transition from one century to the other and serves as an escape passage for the protagonist, who finds it perfectly normal to live concurrently in both periods.

In the twentieth century the protagonist lives with his mother in Buenos Aires and works as an exchange broker. He dates a young girl by the name of Irma for whom he some day expects to be "un buen marido." However, to him there is more to life than merely sitting on the living room divan chatting and drinking coffee, which seems to be Irma's conception of conviviality. "Para ella, [Irma] como para mi madre, no hay mejor actividad social que el sofá de la sala donde ocurre eso que llaman la conversación, el café y el anisado."¹⁶ The dullness of his daily routine as well as the pressures of the outside world lead the protagonist to justify his search for experiences other than those he encounters in the community in which he lives and works.

. . . de todas maneras el término de una larga ronda que yo mismo no hubiera podido reconstruir me devolvía siempre a la Galerie Vivienne, . . . por sus rejas protectoras, sus alegorías vetustas, sus sombras en el codo del Passage des Petits-Pères, ese mundo diferente donde no había que pensar en Irma y se podía vivir sin horarios fijos, al azar de los encuentros y de la suerte.¹⁷

¹⁵Julio Cortázar, "El otro cielo," Todos los fuegos el fuego (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 168-169.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 178-179.

In the Galerie Vivienne the protagonist especially values the opportunity to "vivir sin horarios fijos," as the author continues his rejection of the constant awareness of clocks and the passing of chronological time. In this protective world of galleries, of an age already passed, the protagonist is attracted to Josiane, a prostitute who offers him an agreeable relationship--that of having an affair without being seriously involved and committed to her. "El miedo ajeno me servía para recorrer con Josiane los pasajes y los cafés, descubriendo que podía llegar a ser un amigo de verdad de una muchacha a la que no me ataba ninguna relación profunda."¹⁸

However, the hours of ecstasy that the exchange broker experiences in the company of Josiane are not completely free of apprehension. Hovering in their midst is the imminence of war with the Prussians and the ever-present fear of Laurent, a vicious killer "cuya singularidad consiste en convertir 'mujeres de la vida' en mujeres de la muerte."¹⁹

Volvimos del brazo a la Galerie Vivienne, subimos a la bohardilla, pero después comprendimos que no estábamos contentos como antes y lo atribuimos vagamente a todo lo que afligía al barrio; habría guerra, era fatal, los hombres tendrían que incorporarse a las filas . . . , la gente tenía miedo y rabia, la policía no había sido capaz de descubrir a Laurent. . . . el terror seguía suelto en las

¹⁸Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁹Pizarnik, op. cit., p. 58.

galerías y en los pasajes, nada había cambiado desde mi último encuentro con Josiane, y ni siquiera había dejado de nevar.²⁰

These constant fears are further complicated by the inclement weather resulting from a premature winter in Paris. However, the extreme change in weather conditions between the two time periods does not seem to affect the protagonist in the least. It does serve the author as an effective device to further indicate that there has been a drastic time change. The only one who is surprised is the reader as he envisions the protagonist walking along "la calle nevada y glacial" at one point and, then, without any break in continuity, finds him "enemistado con el sol y los mosquitos" and complaining of "la humedad que me empababa la camisa."

The end of the excursions into the past century occurs when the protagonist begins to feel like a stranger in what used to be his place of refuge, and he discovers that ". . . algo me obligaba a demorarme . . . , una oscura certidumbre de que en el barrio de las galerías ya no me esperarían como antes" ²¹ What on other occasions he had considered his own world has become a region in which he feels alienated and fearful: "Cuando llegué al barrio de las galerías tuve casi miedo, me sentí extranjero y diferente como jamás me había ocurrido antes" ²²

²⁰Cortázar, "El otro cielo," Todos los fuegos el fuego, p. 184.

²¹Ibid., pp. 192-193.

²²Ibid., p. 193.

After a lengthy absence caused by his mother's cardiac condition and a busy working schedule, the protagonist again wanders aimlessly in an effort to re-encounter the entry to the world of Josiane and the artificial garlands which had brought him such happiness before. However, he soon realizes that this is no longer an easy task as he begins to feel that he has lost the facility for re-entering the other time period.

Una y otra vez me pregunté por qué, si el gran terror había cesado en el barrio de las galerías, no me llegaba la hora de encontrarme con Josiane para volver a pasear bajo nuestro cielo de yeso. Supongo que el trabajo y las obligaciones familiares contribuían a impedírmelo, y sólo sé que de a ratos perdidos me iba a caminar como consuelo por el Pasaje Güemes, mirando vagamente hacia arriba, tomando café y pensando cada vez con menos convicción en las tardes en que me había bastado vagar un rato sin rumbo fijo para llegar a mi barrio y dar con Josiane en alguna esquina del atardecer. Nunca he querido admitir que la guirnalda estuviera definitivamente cerrada y que no volvería a encontrarme con Josiane en los pasajes o los boulevares me digo que . . . cualquier día volveré a entrar en el barrio de las galerías y encontraré a Josiane sorprendida por mi larga ausencia.²³

Even though he has been unable to find the same point of re-entry into the past century the protagonist remains hopeful that he will locate it again. In the meantime, having married, he has become a part of the vacuous routine of his wife's world in which everything he does is "sin demasiado entusiasmo." As the story ends, the exchange broker merely stays home "tomando mate y mirando a Irma y a las plantas del patio."²⁴ Even though the protagonist

²³Ibid., pp. 196-197.

²⁴Ibid., p. 197.

continues to hope that he will someday be able to re-enter the past era, subconsciously he realizes that his loss of powers has come as a result of one "reality" becoming oppressive and dominant over the other--his marriage to Irma no longer allows him the freedom to wander through the streets and remain away from home at night as he had done when he was a bachelor living with his mother and did not have to give account of his whereabouts.

The protagonist has felt torn between two worlds, "and in a sense, this is the crucial point Cortázar has been trying to settle in all his work. . . . he is a rootless soul, inwardly divided between 'two worlds'--a 'Frenchified Argentine,' as he calls himself."²⁵ However, through his protagonist, Cortázar begins to settle this problem by illustrating how the reality of being an Argentine emerges dominant over that of his adopted country.

Certainly one of the outstanding examples of Cortázar's manipulation of time is found in "La autopista del sur," which has been classified as "uno de los cuentos más acabadamente logrados de Cortázar."²⁶ However, in this short story temporal displacement is not characterized by radical transports in time as it is in "La noche boca arriba" and "El otro cielo." In "La autopista del sur" the elapsing of time is depicted by the use of such verbs and expressions

²⁵Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 237.

²⁶Amícola, op. cit., p. 151.

as "ponerse al paso," "detenerse," "poner en marcha el motor," "avanzar tres metros," and again "detenerse," all indicating a gradual but constant passing of time.

"La autopista del sur" begins as do many of Cortázar's stories "in a disarmingly conversational way, with plenty of local touches,"²⁷ as the author describes the slow crawl of freeway traffic into Paris on a typical Sunday afternoon.

Al principio la muchacha del Dauphine había insistido en llevar la cuenta del tiempo, aunque al ingeniero del Peugeot 404 le daba ya lo mismo. Cualquiera podía mirar su reloj pero era como si ese tiempo atado a la muñeca derecha o el bip bip de la radio midieran otra cosa, fuera el tiempo de los que no han hecho la estupidez de querer regresar a París por la autopista del sur un domingo de tarde. . . .²⁸

As the story opens there is the preoccupation of time by the various motorists who become impatient with the immobilization of the traffic. There is the girl who is driving the Dauphine, "que mira a cada momento la hora," and the American driver of the De Soto, "que tenía que estar a las ocho en la Place de l'Opéra sin falta you understand, my wife will be awfully anxious, damn it. . . ." ²⁹ Then there are also the two nuns who are anxious to arrive in Milly-la Fôret "antes de las ocho, pues llevaban una cesta de hortalizas para la cocinera."³⁰

²⁷Coleman, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁸Cortázar, "La autopista del sur," Todos los fuegos el fuego, p. 9.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

However, as daylight turns to dusk and the vehicles have not moved much more than "unos cincuenta metros," the motorists are convinced "que ya ni valía la pena mirar el reloj pulsera para perderse en cálculos inútiles."³¹

The reader is conscious of the apparently logical passing of time from Sunday night until dawn of the following day as he encounters phrases such as "suavemente empezaba a anochecer," "ya era noche cerrada," "quizá ya era medianoche," "por la mañana." But as the traffic remains stationary on the freeway longer than would ordinarily be expected, he is made aware of a new concept of time, one in which "las horas acababan por superponerse, por ser siempre la misma en el recuerdo."³² Eventually the reader is as uncertain of the time that elapses as are the motorists. "Ya nadie llevaba la cuenta de lo que se había avanzado en ese día o esos días."³³

Except for various reports passed along from one motorist to another there is no reason given for the slow, sporadic movement of the traffic. It is assumed by all that "algún accidente muy grave debía haberse producido en la zona, única explicación de una lentitud tan increíble."³⁴ However, as time elapses the motorists are no longer as concerned with knowing the cause of their immobility as they are in organizing themselves to provide adequate food and

³¹Ibid., p. 12.

³²Ibid., p. 18.

³³Ibid., p. 32.

³⁴Ibid., p. 11.

shelter for all involved. A leader is chosen and tasks are divided among the various motorists. Food and water are collected in one place and rationed accordingly.

As the motorists await the moment in which they will be able to again move freely they experience various changes in the weather. At the onset they find themselves under a blazing sun, and even at five o'clock in the evening "el calor los hostigaba insoportablemente." The passing of time now incorporates a change of seasons. The nights begin to feel cooler and, eventually, "hacia las dos de la madrugada [of a day unknown to the reader] bajó la temperatura y los que tenían mantas se alegraron de poder envolverse en ellas."³⁵ With the cold weather comes the rain and snow. The rain is welcomed because the water supply is beginning to dwindle, but the snow creates problems as it becomes necessary to remove the piles that accumulate in order to continue the slow movement into Paris. "Todo ese día y los siguientes nevó casi de continuo, y cuando la columna avanzaba unos metros había que despejar con medios improvisados las masas de nieve amontonados entre los autos."³⁶

The elapsing of a long period of time is evidenced by the description of the motorists themselves as the author depicts them "bajo mantas sucias, con manos de uñas crecidas, oliendo a encierro y a ropa sin cambiar. . . ." ³⁷

³⁵Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 34-35.

³⁷Ibid., p. 35.

Yet another change of season occurs as the inclement weather begins to abate, and the warmer days revive the motorists' spirits as they again visit with those around them.

Pero el frío empezó a ceder, y después de un período de lluvias y vientos que enervaron los ánimos y aumentaron las dificultades de aprovisionamiento, siguieron días frescos y soleados en que ya era posible salir de los autos, visitarse, reanudar relaciones con los grupos vecinos.³⁸

It is on one of these sunny days, "al atardecer cuando un sol amarillento deslizaba su luz rasante y mesquina,"³⁹ that the cars ahead commence to move freely. Everyone begins scurrying to his own vehicle in an effort to follow those already in motion. Within a very short time "las agujas de los velocímetros subían . . . , algunas filas corrían a setenta kilómetros, otras a sesenta y cinco, algunas a sesenta."⁴⁰ The author allows his characters to depart the world he had created in which "todo sucedía en cualquier momento, sin horarios previsibles." Obsessed with meeting deadlines and enslaved by time, the characters hurry back to a world of "consumo masivo y mecanizado."⁴¹ And yet, in spite of the obsession with arriving at the city whose lights are visible in the distance, there remains an unanswered question in the minds of the motorists:

³⁸Ibid., p. 36.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 41.

⁴¹Luis Gregorich, "Julio Cortázar y la posibilidad de la literatura," La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, p. 127.

. . . y se corría a ochenta kilómetros por hora hacia las luces que crecían poco a poco, sin que ya se supiera bien por qué tanto apuro, por qué esa carrera en la noche entre autos desconocidos donde todo el mundo miraba fijamente hacia adelante, exclusivamente hacia adelante.⁴²

The motorists are travelling at high speeds but are not necessarily as enthusiastic about arriving in Paris as one would expect after such a long delay. One of the motorists who was involved in the slow moving of traffic through the four seasons expresses a desire probably shared by many of the others who were with him, that of not arriving in Paris but returning to the carefree routine that they had become accustomed to and in which the passing of time had ceased to be of any importance. For a second he envisions himself again forming a part of the tightly knit group that to him meant life itself: "Por un segundo . . . le pareció que el grupo se recomponía, que todo entraba en el orden, que se podría seguir adelante sin destruir nada. . . . Absurdamente se aferró a la idea Sí tenía que ser así, no era posible que eso hubiera terminado para siempre."⁴³ However, he ultimately realizes that "no se podía hacer otra cosa que abandonarse a la marcha, adaptarse mecánicamente a la velocidad de los autos que lo rodeaban, no pensar."⁴⁴ Thus he joins the others on the freeway who mechanically

⁴²Cortázar, "La autopista del sur," Todos los fuegos el fuego, p. 42.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 42.

continue to live in a world in which they are enslaved by time, its deadlines and the obligations that it imposes on man's daily living.

In "La autopista del sur" Cortázar has employed a technique which has been described as "la combinación de realidad y fantasía, la yuxtaposición de escenas extremadamente reales [a slowdown in traffic on a freeway due to an assumed accident] con situaciones completamente fantásticas [the cars remaining stationary through the four seasons of the year] ."45

Whether the device be dreams or apparent dreams, galleries, or juxtaposition of fantasy-reality, Cortázar's ultimate goal in achieving temporal displacement is accomplished by taking the reader on what has been called a "viaje en el tiempo,"46--not by means of a time machine, but rather through the disruption, distortion, and destruction of the temporal continuum.

Through a trip in time, by utilizing dreams or apparent dreams, Cortázar lures his reader into accepting the radical transports in time without question or hesitation. It is perfectly natural for the protagonist to dream or recall incidents which he has either experienced personally or has read about. It is not until the author is convinced that he has led the reader into establishing this set of

⁴⁵Carter, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. xiv.

assumptions, this "reality," that he then pulls the ground from under him and reveals that "esa realidad, por la intrusión del sueño, padece una metamórfosis y se convierte en irrealidad."⁴⁷

Just as dreams serve as a means by which the reader is transported radically in time, Cortázar also utilizes galleries as a passage "from one dimension into another,"⁴⁸ or as a bridge to gap the distance between time periods. In describing the point at which the protagonist manifests his metaphysical presence in another time zone, Cortázar prepares the reader for the abrupt change that is about to ensue. Having become acquainted with the mysterious passageway, the reader is then able to visualize the drastic change in the protagonist, the scenery, and the weather as he fluctuates from one time period to the other. It is by going through this passage that man eventually meets himself and is able to comprehend his inner self.

The ultimate in Cortázar's manipulation of time results in the total destruction of reality as the reader is completely unprepared for the inexplicable incidents in the story "La autopista del sur." Cortázar not only "juega con la relatividad del tiempo,"⁴⁹ but, indeed, "plays" with the reader himself as he takes "playful liberties with time and

⁴⁷Ibid., p. xiii.

⁴⁸Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 241.

⁴⁹De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, pp. 63-64.

space, bringing us a world of terror and anguish just below the world we think we know."⁵⁰

However, it is through this total loss of reality and time that Cortázar portrays man as an individual who has concern for his fellow man and who seeks acceptance as an individual in return. Needless to say, man finds himself so completely engulfed in a highly mechanized and fast-moving world that he is unable to retain his identity and becomes lost in the rapid pace of everyday living.

It is because Cortázar recognizes time as an obstacle to man's understanding of self that he continues his quest to solve the problem by displacing him temporally.

"Cortázar es un negador del tiempo, un buscador de la eternidad. Este rechazo . . . tiene indudables raíces afectivas, nace también del pensamiento mismo, que ve en el tiempo y su esencial irracionalidad el gran obstáculo para la comprensión del ser."⁵¹ It is in his effort to understand self that Cortázar plays with the relativity of time in order to "destruir las apariencias y revelar la escondida estructura de lo real."⁵² It is only in freeing himself and his reader from the restraints of logic and rational control that Cortázar is able to give man an

⁵⁰Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

⁵¹De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 110.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 63-64.

inner look at the hidden self, thus arriving at a better understanding of himself and others.

The work of Cortázar is depicted as "el viviente despliegue de una conciencia que busca su dimensión trascendente, el 'centro' desde el cual pueda sentir superadas las instancias del tiempo y del espacio, el 'eje' que le permita realizarse plenamente en la categoría del ser."⁵³ His fascination with the manipulation of time "configura una auténtica aventura interior, cuyas proyecciones . . . iluminan la reflexión de Cortázar sobre la ética, la acción y todo otro problema relativo."⁵⁴ By means of temporal displacement Cortázar takes the reader on an inner adventure in search of the unconscious and primal self with all its mystery, fantasy and magic.

It is only through an understanding of the important role that temporal displacement plays in the life of Cortázar himself that the reader may fully grasp the significance of this concept in the author's works.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 111-112.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 113.

CHAPTER IV

SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT

In performing a study on Cortázar's fascination with and manipulation of time, the reader must also peruse the author's departure from the traditional aspects of spatial reality, for it is through spatial displacement that temporal displacement is ultimately achieved. Upon examination of Cortázar's works the reader will find that the settings are usually bifocal and that he can easily lose his bearings as the scene shifts between two distinct locations without any warning of the upcoming change. Cortázar has said: "I detest classic itineraries--at every level."¹ Thus he "works with roads and maps devised by himself; they can carry us a considerable distance, but we have to be willing to make the trip in the first place."² The roads and maps in Cortázar's works are not those to which the reader is accustomed, but rather are characterized by radical changes and turns of events when least expected. These abrupt and radical changes constitute what one critic has classified

¹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 239.

²Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

as a "salto . . . un espacio dividido,"³ which leaves the reader with "la noción del desplazamiento."⁴

To the reader, Cortázar's radical transports from one location to another constitute two separate and distinct worlds. However, to Cortázar it is only an inward division experienced by a rootless soul in search of his place in society. In order to characterize this disjunction, Cortázar "ignora la escala de valores, invierte con frecuencia los signos del tiempo cronométrico del espacio y la dimensión matemáticos."⁵

According to the author in the "Prólogo" to his Historias de cronopios y de famas, the individual, in his search for identity, is plagued by the monotony of everyday living.

. . . la tarea de abrirse paso en la masa pegajosa que se proclama mundo, cada mañana topar con el paralelepípedo de nombre repugnante, con la satisfacción perruna de que todo esté en su sitio, la misma mujer al lado, los mismos zapatos, el mismo sabor de la misma pasta dentífrica, la misma tristeza de las casas de enfrente, del sucio tablero de ventanas de tiempo con su letrero HOTEL DE BELGIQUE.⁶

To Cortázar the ennui of everyday events in a world which he describes as a sticky mass, with the same wife,

³Néstor Tirri, "El perseguidor perseguido," La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, p. 143.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Guillermo Ara, "Cortázar cronopio," La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, p. 108.

⁶Cortázar, "Prólogo," Historias de cronopios y de famas, p. 11.

shoes, toothpaste, and dirty surroundings can only be relieved by variety. To accomplish this new outlook, he transports himself mentally to escape the monotony of the previous scene.

Cuando abra la puerta y me asome a la escalera, sabré que abajo empieza la calle; no el molde ya aceptado, no las casas ya sabidas, no el hotel de enfrente: la calle, la viva floresta donde cada instante puede arrojarse sobre mí como una magnolia, donde las caras van a nacer cuando las mire, cuando avance un poco más, . . . mientras avanzo paso a paso para ir a comprar el diario a la esquina.⁷

The individual need not change his location physically but merely envision himself elsewhere mentally. The scene immediately changes from "el molde ya aceptado" and "las casas ya sabidas," to a "viva floresta," alive with faces with which the individual can identify.

Like temporal displacement, spatial displacement also serves both as a thematic and structural device and abounds throughout Cortázar's collections of short stories. From an analysis of several stories in which the author presents a distortion of spatial reality it is possible to categorize his favorite techniques, one of which is depicted in "La isla a mediodía," found in Todos los fuegos el fuego (1966). The story develops "in a disarmingly conversational way, with plenty of local touches";⁸ however, the unusual twist that it takes at the end demonstrates the author's keen

⁷Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁸Coleman, op. cit., p. 59.

creative ability as he introduces the reader to new spatial dimensions.

The device employed by Cortázar in achieving spatial displacement in "La isla a mediodía" might be referred to as an escape fantasy which is experienced by the protagonist. The dream is presented, however, as an actual occurrence to the reader, so that when he is confronted with the surprise ending, he is completely unprepared.

"La isla a mediodía" revolves around Marini, a steward on an airline that flies the Rome-Tehran route over the Aegean Sea. While on a flight over some Greek islands, Marini becomes interested in one particular island which he later learns is Xiros.

. . . la isla era pequeña y solitaria, y el Egeo la rodeaba con un intenso azul que exaltaba la orla de un blanco deslumbrante y como petrificado, que allá abajo sería espuma rompiendo en los arrecifes y las caletas. Marini vio que las playas desiertas corrían hacia el norte y el oeste, lo demás era la montaña entrando a pique en el mar. Una isla rocosa y desierta, aunque la mancha plumiza cerca de la playa del norte podía ser una casa, quizá un grupo de casas primitivas.

. . . la isla tenía una forma inconfundible, como una tortuga que sacara apenas las patas del agua. La miró hasta que lo llamaron, esta vez con la seguridad de que la mancha plumiza era un grupo de casas; alcanzó a distinguir el dibujo de unos pocos campos cultivados que llegaban hasta la playa.⁹

Marini is overtaken by the beauty of the island as they fly over it at midday two or three times a week. Its

⁹Cortázar, "La isla a mediodía," Todos los fuegos el fuego, pp. 117-118.

definite shape, that of a turtle whose feet are barely seen out of the water, distinguishes it from the other islands. Keen scrutiny reveals that the island is inhabited and that the land on one side is suitable for cultivation.

Marini becomes so obsessed with the thought of visiting the island that he utilizes his free time searching for more information on it. As a result of a detailed study he learns that

. . . la costa sur de Xiros era inhabitable pero hacia el oeste quedaban huellas de una colonia lidia o quizá cretomicénica, y el profesor Goldmann había encontrado dos piedras talladas con jeroglíficos que los pescadores empleaban como pilotes del pequeño muelle. . . . los pulpos eran el recurso principal del puñado de habitantes, cada cinco días llegaba un barco para cargar la pesca y dejar algunas provisiones y géneros. En la agencia de viajes le dijeron que habría que fletar un barco especial desde Rynos, o quizá se pudiera viajar en la falúa que recogía los pulpos, pero esto último sólo lo sabría Marini en Rynos donde la agencia no tenía correspondencia. De todas maneras la idea de pasar unos días en la isla no era más que un plan para las vacaciones de junio¹⁰

Marini learns that the handful of inhabitants is dependent on the ships that come weekly to exchange food and other necessities for the cuttlefish that are plentiful near the island. Cognizant of the various aspects of life on the island and the available means of transportation to it, Marini considers it an ideal place to spend his vacation. However, Marini becomes so impatient that he cannot wait for his vacation any longer. He borrows money and resolves to

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 119-120.

leave sooner than previously planned. His trip to Xiros is vividly described as follows:

Nada era difícil una vez decidido, un tren nocturno, un primer barco, otro barco viejo y sucio, la escala en Rynos, la negociación interminable con el capitán de la falúa, la noche en el puente, pegado a las estrellas, el sabor del anís, y del carnero, el amanecer entre las islas. Desembarcó con las primeras luces, y el capitán lo presentó a un viejo que debía ser el patriarca. Klaios le tomó la mano izquierda y habló lentamente, mirándolo en los ojos. Vinieron dos muchachos y Marini entendió que eran los hijos de Klaios. El capitán de la falúa agotaba su inglés: veinte habitantes, pulpos, pesca, cinco casas, italiano visitante pagaría alojamiento Klaios. Los muchachos rieron cuando Klaios discutió dracmas; también Marini, ya amigo de los más jóvenes, mirando salir el sol sobre un mar menos oscuro que desde el aire, una habitación pobre y limpia, un jarro de agua, olor a salvia y a piel curtida.¹¹

Determined to succeed, Marini is able to arrange to be transported to Xiros on the small open boat that carries supplies to the islanders and returns with the cuttlefish from the island. Upon arriving early in the morning, he is introduced to Klaios, the patriarch and his two sons. He is welcomed in the home of Klaios and begins his first day of carefree living on the island. At about midmorning while Marini is enjoying his bliss, the reader is given a slight indication of the tragic ending of the story as Marini ponders the length of his visit. "Supo sin la menor duda que no se iría de la isla, que de alguna manera iba a quedarse para siempre en la isla."¹² However, at this point the reader is completely unaware of the significance of the foredoom implied in the protagonist's thoughts.

¹¹Ibid., p. 123.

¹²Ibid., p. 124.

Marini is convinced that he will never leave the island; once the supply boat has left, he begins to feel that he is really a part of the island and its inhabitants. He ponders the thought of waiting a few days and then, better acquainted with the inhabitants, suggesting that he be allowed to remain on the island with them. While musing these thoughts, Marini lies on a rock to dote on his dream come true. "Estaba en Xiros, estaba allí donde tantas veces había dudado que pudiera llegar alguna vez. Se dejó caer de espaldas entre las piedras calientes, resistió sus aristas y sus lomos encendidos y miró verticalmente el cielo" ¹³

It is now midday and while lying on the rock he becomes aware of "el zumbido de un motor." He knows it is the sound of the engines of the same airplane from whose window he has admired the island. He closes his eyes in an attempt to ignore the sound of the motor but finds it impossible to do so. When he opens his eyes he sees the airplane crash into the ocean close to the island. He immediately begins to swim in the direction of the sinking aircraft.

La cola del avión se hundía a unos cien metros, en un silencio total. Marini tomó impulso y se lanzó al agua, esperando todavía que el avión volviera a flotar; pero no se veía más que la blanda línea de las olas, una caja de cartón oscilando absurdamente cerca del lugar de la caída, y casi al final, cuando ya no tenía sentido seguir nadando, una mano fuera del agua, apenas un instante, el tiempo para que Marini cambiara de rumbo y se zambullera hasta atrapar por el pelo al hombre que luchó por aferrarse a él y tragó roncamente

¹³Ibid., p. 125.

el aire que Marini le dejaba respirar sin acercarse demasiado. Remolcándolo poco a poco lo trajo hasta la orilla, tomó en brazos el cuerpo vestido de blanco, y tendiéndolo en la arena miró la cara llena de espuma donde la muerte estaba ya instalada, sangrando por una enorme herida en la garganta. De qué podía servir la respiración artificial si con cada convulsión la herida parecía abrirse un poco más y era como una boca repugnante que llamaba a Marini, lo arrancaba a su pequeña felicidad de tan pocas horas en la isla, le gritaba entre borbotones algo que él ya no era capaz de oír. A toda carrera venían los hijos de Klaios y más atrás las mujeres.¹⁴

The reader is led to believe that Marini is helping a drowning survivor to shore. There are hints concerning the true identity of the dead man: he is dressed in white, the attire of a steward. Also there is a reference to the end of Marini's "pequeña felicidad de tan pocas horas en la isla." However, these clues are ambiguous, and it is not until the final lines of the story that their meaning is clarified:

Cuando llegó Klaios, los muchachos rodeaban el cuerpo tendido en la arena, sin comprender cómo había tenido fuerzas para nadar a la orilla y arrastrarse desangrándose hasta ahí. 'Ciérrale los ojos', pidió llorando una de las mujeres. Klaios miró hacia el mar buscando algún otro sobreviviente. Pero como siempre estaban solos en la isla, y el cadáver de ojos abiertos era lo único nuevo entre ellos y el mar.¹⁵

The reader is taken by surprise as he learns that the body lying on the shore of the island is that of Marini. However, it is not until the final sentence that he realizes that Marini was never on the island prior to the crash, at which time he has miraculously forced himself to swim to shore.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 126-127.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 127.

Throughout the story the reader has been led to believe, through the vivid description of the place as well as its inhabitants, that Marini has actually arrived on the island. It is not until the concluding line that the reader realizes how the author has lured him into a false set of assumptions and that Marini's visit on the island has really been just a figment of his imagination.

Marini's ultimate discovery immediately before his death is that the fulfillment of his dream is just beyond his grasp; he has been able to enjoy the enchantment of life on the island through a new dimension of spatial reality which is outside the superficial experiences of his monotonous daily routine.

Cortázar's utilization of spatial displacement is again evident in "Las babas del diablo" from Las armas secretas (1959). In this story Cortázar relates a peculiar occurrence in the life of the protagonist, Robert Michel, who is a translator and photographer. As Robert begins to narrate his unusual experience, he describes the scene as he remembers it on the day of his stroll in the square of an island in the Seine:

. . . seguí por el Quai de Bourbon hasta llegar a la punta de la isla, donde la íntima placita (íntima por pequeña y no por recatada, pues da todo el pecho al río y al cielo) me gusta y me regusta. No había más que una pareja No tenía ganas de sacar fotos, y encendí un cigarrillo por hacer algo; creo que en el momento en que acercaba el fósforo al tabaco vi por primera vez al muchachito.

Lo que había tomado por una pareja se parecía mucho más a un chico con su madre, aunque al mismo tiempo me daba cuenta de que no era un chico con su

madre, de que era una pareja en el sentido que damos siempre a las parejas cuando las vemos apoyadas en los parapetos o abrazadas en los bancos de las plazas. Como no tenía nada que hacer me sobraba tiempo para preguntarme por qué el muchachito estaba tan nervioso, tan como un potrillo o una liebre, . . . y sobre todo por que tenía miedo, pues eso se lo adivinaba en cada gesto, un miedo sofocado por la vergüenza, un impulso de echarse atrás que se advertía como si su cuerpo estuviera al borde de la huida, conteniéndose en un último y lastimoso decoro.¹⁶

When he first sees the two individuals in the small square, Robert does not notice them very closely. However, on taking a second look, he realizes that the couple is composed of a young boy (later described as being "al filo de los catorce, quizá de los quince") and a woman old enough to be his mother. To further arouse his curiosity, Robert perceives that the boy is uneasy and fearful.

While he is observing the couple, Robert is thinking of the various possible relationships that might exist between the boy and the woman. The most convincing to him is that the woman is attempting to seduce the young boy, who is undecided as to whether to go with her or run away. While waiting to see what the outcome will be, Robert prepares his camera and photographs the couple. Realizing what has happened, the woman is enraged and begins insulting Robert and insisting that he give her the roll of film. While the woman is occupied with Robert, the boy takes advantage of her distraction and runs away.

¹⁶Julio Cortázar, "Las babas del diablo," Las armas secretas (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 82-83.

The woman continues to insult Robert, and the scene becomes more complex when a man who had been sitting in a car nearby approaches them.

. . . [Robert] Michel tuvo que aguantar minuciosas imprecaciones, oírse llamar entrometido e imbécil, mientras se esmeraba deliberadamente en sonreír y declinar, con simples movimientos de cabeza, tanto envío barato. Cuando empezaba a cansarme, oí golpear la portezuela de un auto.¹⁷ El hombre del sombrero gris estaba ahí, mirándonos. Sólo entonces comprendí que jugaba un papel en la comedia.

Empezó a caminar hacia nosotros, llevando en la mano el diario que había pretendido leer. De lo que mejor me acuerdo es de la mueca que le ladeaba la boca, le cubría la cara de arrugas, algo cambiaba de lugar y forma porque la boca le temblaba y la mueca iba de un lado a otro de los labios como una cosa independiente y viva, ajena a la voluntad. Pero todo el resto era fijo, payaso enharinado u hombre sin sangre, con la piel apagada y seca, los ojos metidos en lo hondo y los agujeros de la nariz negros y visibles, más negros que las cejas o el pelo o la corbata negra. Caminaba cautelosamente, como si el pavimento le lastimara los pies; le vi zapatos de charol, de suela tan delgada que debía acusar cada aspereza de la calle. No sé por qué me había bajado del pretil, no sé bien por qué decidí no darles la foto, negarme a esa exigencia en la que adivinaba miedo y cobardía. El payaso y la mujer se consultaban en silencio: hacíamos un perfecto triángulo insoportable, algo que tenía que romperse con un chasquido. Me les reí en la cara y eché a andar A la altura de las primeras casas, del lado de la pasarela de hierro, me volví a mirarlos. No se movían, pero el hombre había dejado caer el diario; me pareció que la mujer, de espaldas al parapeto, paseaba las manos por la piedra, con el clásico y absurdo gesto del acosado que busca la salida.¹⁸

¹⁷Note that the author, beginning with "Cuando empezaba a cansarme . . . ," has changed from a third to first person narration. The change is effected abruptly and without any transitional device. This technique will be discussed on page 71.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 90-91.

Having been insulted by the woman, Robert must then also listen to the threats of the man who has approached them. Even though Robert had noticed the man pretending to read the newspaper in his car, it is not until now that he realizes what role this "payaso" plays in the situation. Robert guesses that the man is responsible for the activity that the woman is undertaking. He was the pervert, "el verdadero amo . . . ; no era el primero que mandaba a una mujer a la vanguardia, a traerle los prisioneros maniatados con flores."¹⁹ Nonetheless, on this one occasion the couple's plan has been thwarted by Robert.

As can be observed in the quoted passage, Cortázar maintains the reader alert by shifting points of view. At the beginning of the passage the scene involving the enraged woman and Robert Michel is narrated in the third person. Then the sentence that follows immediately shifts to a new viewpoint, where the first person is employed and Robert himself describes the scene and the action that develops. It is by means of this shifting viewpoint that the reader is prepared by the author for the unusual turn of events that is to occur later as he explains: "Michel es culpable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales. Nada le gusta más que imaginar excepciones, individuos fuera de la especie, monstruos no siempre repugnantes."²⁰ Indeed, were it not for this intervention by the third person, the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 96.

²⁰Ibid., p. 89.

reader would not learn of Michel's ingenious talent for creating "fabricaciones irreales" which ultimately explains the incredible occurrences that are upcoming.

A few days later Robert develops the film and makes an enlargement of the picture that he has taken on the island. He hangs the enlarged picture on the wall and glances at it periodically while he is writing. With every glance comes the satisfaction that he has helped a young boy escape the clutches of a pervert.

One day as Robert is looking at the photograph he notices something unusual--the woman's hand begins to move and the picture comes to life. Again, the man waiting in the car begins to approach the woman and the young boy as Robert realizes what is about to happen.

Cuando vi venir al hombre, detenerse cerca de ellos y mirarlos, . . . comprendí . . . lo que tenía que pasar, lo que tenía que haber pasado, lo que hubiera tenido que pasar en ese momento, entre esa gente, ahí donde yo había llegado a trastocar un orden, inocentemente inmiscuido en eso que no había pasado pero que ahora iba a pasar, ahora se iba a cumplir. . . . Y yo no podía hacer nada, esta vez no podía hacer absolutamente nada. Mi fuerza había sido una fotografía, esa, ahí, donde se vengaban de mí mostrándome sin disimulo lo que iba a suceder. La foto había sido tomada, el tiempo había corrido; estábamos tan lejos unos de otros, la corrupción seguramente consumada, las lágrimas vertidas, y el resto conjetura y tristeza.²¹

Robert is aware of all that is going to happen to the young boy but he feels powerless to help him; he is merely

²¹Ibid., pp. 95-96.

an onlooker unable to offer any assistance. However, just as all seems lost, Robert incredibly finds himself in the picture with the others.

Creo que grité, que grité terriblemente, y que en ese mismo segundo supe que empezaba a acercarme, diez centímetros, un paso, otro paso, el árbol giraba cadenciosamente sus ramas en primer plano, . . . la cara de la mujer vuelta hacia mí como sorprendida iba creciendo, y entonces giré un poco, y sin perder de vista a la mujer empezó a acercarse al hombre que me miraba con los agujeros negros que tenía en el sitio de los ojos, entre sorprendido y rabioso miraba queriendo clavarme en el aire, y en ese instante . . . me apoyé en la pared de mi cuarto y fui feliz porque el chico acababa de escaparse, lo veía corriendo, . . . huyendo con todo el pelo al viento, aprendiendo por fin a volar sobre la isla, a llegar a la pasarela, a volverse a la ciudad. Por segunda vez se les iba, por segunda vez yo lo ayudaba a escaparse, lo devolvía a su paraíso precario.²²

Robert transports himself into the picture and again becomes a part of the group. The man and woman are angry that he has twice interfered with their plans. Once the boy escapes, having been saved a second time, the scene returns to its original state: "un rectángulo purísimo clavado con alfileres en la pared," a mere picture on the wall which has served to give the reader a new insight into spatial reality.

"Las babas del diablo" has been described as a story that "alcanza una de las cimas expresivas de la obra del autor"²³ as "Cortázar se entrega, como en relatos anteriores al juego de una fantasía liberadora. . . ."²⁴ In this story

²²Ibid., pp. 97-98.

²³De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 55.

²⁴Ibid.

Cortázar has freed the reader from conventional spatial concepts and merged fantasy with reality as the protagonist is omnipresent in the picture hanging on his wall. Even after saving the boy for a second time from being destroyed by the corrupt couple, Robert himself does not fully understand what has happened and explains: "No describo nada, trato más bien de entender."

Robert Michel's transposition is evidence that "en 'Las babas del diablo' realiza Cortázar un prodigioso experimento de técnica narrativa para expresar una realidad que es a la vez fantasía."²⁵

The most complex example of spatial displacement is encountered in "Todos los fuegos el fuego," the title story of a collection published in 1966. Here the scene shifts alternately from an arena in Roman times to a modern day apartment in Paris. As the story opens the locale is a Roman arena on a hot summer afternoon; present are a proconsul, his wife and other Roman dignitaries awaiting the beginning of a gladiatorial joust.

Así será algún día su estatua, piensa irónicamente el procónsul mientras alza el brazo, lo fija en el gesto del saludo, se deja petrificar por la ovación de un público que dos horas de circo y de calor no han fatigado. Es el momento de la sorpresa prometida; el procónsul baja el brazo, mira a su mujer que le devuelve la sonrisa inexpresiva de las fiestas. Irene no sabe lo que va a seguir y a la vez es como si lo supiera, hasta lo inesperado acaba

²⁵Andrés Amorós, Introducción a la novela contemporánea (Salamanca, 1966), p. 183.

en costumbre cuando se ha aprendido a soportar, con la indiferencia que detesta el procónsul, los caprichos del amo. Sin volverse siquiera hacia la arena prevé una suerte ya echada, una sucesión cruel y monótona.²⁶

The proconsul is a proud, unpredictable and cruel man who dotes on seeing people suffer. He has arranged this match to subtly inform his wife that he is aware of her fond feelings toward one of the gladiators in the match. However, in spite of the proconsul's efforts to arouse his wife's anger, she remains calm and seemingly indifferent.

Having been introduced to all of the characters in the Roman arena, the scene shifts abruptly in the following paragraph to a modern apartment in Paris where Roland Renoir has just answered his telephone.

'Hola', dice Roland Renoir, eligiendo un cigarrillo como una continuación ineludible del gesto de descolgar el receptor. . . . 'Hola', repite Roland, apoyando el cigarrillo en el borde del cenicero y buscando los fósforos en el bolsillo de la bata. 'Soy yo', dice la voz de Jeanne. Roland entorna los ojos, fatigado, y se estira en una posición más cómoda. 'Soy yo', repite inútilmente Jeanne. Como Roland no contesta, agrega: 'Sonia acaba de irse.'²⁷

The reader is merely made aware of Roland's aloofness toward Jeanne as he indifferently "entorna los ojos, fatigado, y se estira en una posición más cómoda." With nothing more said than "Hola," "soy yo," and "Sonia acaba

²⁶Cortázar, "Todos los fuegos el fuego," Todos los fuegos el fuego, p. 149.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 150-151.

de irse," the scene again shifts to the Roman arena where attention is now focused on Marco, the gladiator.

Su obligación es mirar el palco imperial, hacer el saludo de siempre. Sabe que debe hacerlo y que verá a la mujer del procónsul y al procónsul, y que quizá la mujer le sonreirá como en los últimos juegos. No necesita pensar, no sabe casi pensar, pero el instinto le dice que esa arena es mala, el enorme ojo de bronce donde los rastrillos y las hojas de palma han dibujado sus curvos senderos ensombrecidos por algún rastro de las luchas precedentes. . . . El calor es insoportable, le pesa el yelmo que devuelve los rayos del sol contra el velario y las gradas. . . . todo su cuerpo se contrae y su mano se aprieta en el puño de la espada. . . . Marco ve dibujarse la gigantesca silueta del reciario nubio, . . . poco le importa lo que va a suceder entre el reciario y él, eso es el oficio y los hados, pero su cuerpo sigue contraído como si tuviera miedo²⁸

Marco wonders if Irene will smile at him as she has done on other occasions. He senses impending danger as he catches a glimpse of his adversary, a Nubbian retiarius. It is an unevenly matched battle since the traditional fighting equipment of a retiarius consists of a net and a trident, while Marco has only a sword. However, Marco is resigned to his fate as he rationalizes " . . . eso es el oficio y los hados."

Juxtaposed to Marco's thoughts are those of Irene, the proconsul's wife.

Como siempre, como desde una ya lejana noche nupcial, Irene se repliega al límite más hondo de sí misma mientras por fuera condesciende y sonríe y hasta goza; en esa profundidad libre y estéril siente el signo de muerte que el procónsul ha disimulado en una alegre sorpresa pública, el signo que sólo ella y quizá Marco

²⁸Ibid., pp. 151-152.

pueden comprender, pero Marco no comprenderá, torvo y silencioso y máquina, y su cuerpo que ella ha deseado en otra tarde de circo (y eso lo ha adivinado el procónsul, sin necesidad de sus magos lo ha adivinado como siempre, desde el primer instante) va a pagar el precio de la mera imaginación, de una doble mirada inútil sobre el cadáver de un tracio diestramente muerto de un tajo en la garganta.²⁹

Irene is able to appear happy even though she writhes within knowing that the proconsul has arranged this match so that she might see Marco defeated by his adversary. Her husband has detected her attraction toward Marco and is determined to make her suffer for it. The reader is made more aware of the vicious character of the proconsul who will stop at nothing to satisfy his own caprice. As Irene mentally pictures Marco dead as a result of a slashed throat, the scene again shifts to Roland's apartment as he waits for Jeanne to continue. The previous conversation between them is repeated and Jeanne senses Roland's disinterest. " 'Ah', dice Roland, frotando un fósforo, Jeanne oye distintamente el frote, es como si viera el rostro de Roland mientras aspira el humo, echándose un poco atrás con los ojos entornados."³⁰

Cortázar interrupts the dull conversation between Roland and Jeanne by returning the reader to the excitement of the match between Marco and the retiarius.

Un río de escamas brillantes parece saltar de las manos del gigante negro y Marco tiene el tiempo preciso para hurtar el cuerpo a la red. . . . Marco se mantiene

²⁹Ibid., p. 153.

³⁰Ibid., p. 154.

fuera de distancia, encorvadas las piernas como a punto de saltar, mientras el nubio recoge velozmente la red y prepara el nuevo ataque. 'Está perdido', piensa Irene sin mirar al procónsul Marco se ha encorvado un poco; siguiendo el movimiento giratorio del nubio; es el único que aún no sabe lo que todos presienten Hosco, espera otro momento propicio; acaso al final, con un pie sobre el cadáver del reciario, pueda encontrar otra vez la sonrisa de la mujer del procónsul; pero eso no lo está pensando él, y quien lo piensa no cree ya que el pie de Marco se hinque en el pecho de un nubio degollado.³¹

Marco, optimistic as to the outcome of the battle, is furiously attempting to defeat the Nubbian, but the spectators already sense his defeat. He still envisions himself as the victor who will again see the coveted smile of the proconsul's wife.

At the peak of the battle, the reader again finds himself in Paris as Roland becomes impatient with Jeanne.

'Decídete', dice Roland Jeanne calla todavía unos segundos y repite: 'Sonia acaba de irse'. Vacila antes de agregar: 'Probablemente estará llegando a tu casa'. A Roland le sorprendería eso, Sonia no tiene por qué ir a su casa. 'No mientas', dice Jeanne, y el gato huye de su mano, la mira ofendido. 'No era una mentira', dice Roland. 'Me refería a la hora, no al hecho de venir o no venir. Sonia sabe que me molestan las visitas y las llamadas a esta hora' Jeanne ha cerrado los ojos La pausa parece prolongarse '¿Estás ahí?', pregunta Jeanne. 'Sí', dice Roland dejando la colilla en el cenicero y buscando sin apuro el frasco de coñac. 'Lo que no puedo entender . . .', empieza Jeanne. 'Por favor', dice Roland, 'en estos casos nadie entiende gran cosa, querida, y además no se gana nada con entender. Lamento que Sonia se haya precipitado, no era a ella a quien le tocaba decírtelo' 'Pero tú', dice absurdamente Jeanne, 'entonces, tú'

³¹Ibid.

Roland bebe un trago de coñac. Siempre le ha gustado escoger sus palabras, evitar los diálogos superfluos. Jeanne repetirá dos, tres veces cada frase, acentuándolas de una manera diferente; que hable, que repita mientras él prepara el mínimo de respuestas sensatas que pongan orden en ese arrebató lamentable.³²

It is at this point that the reader becomes aware of Jeanne's dilemma. She has just been told that Roland is no longer interested in her and she is confirming this information. A glimpse of her desperation is acknowledged in the actions of her cat as it shies away after receiving a harsh pat. Attention is also focused on a bottle of tranquilizers with which the cat plays while Jeanne is talking to Roland. Through it all, Roland remains cold and indifferent as he smokes his cigarette and enjoys his cognac. His attitude is much like that of the proconsul for both seem to enjoy trifling with the lives of others. "Roland y el procónsul, indiferentes, buscan en el amor su propia y brutal satisfacción."³³

The action returns to the Roman arena where Marco begins to realize that defeat is imminent.

Respirando con fuerza se endereza después de una finta y un avance lateral; algo le dice que esta vez el nubio va a cambiar el orden del ataque, que el tridente se adelantará al tiro de la red. . . . Mal defendido, desafiando el riesgo de entrar en el campo de la red, Marco se tira hacia adelante y sólo entonces alza el escudo para protegerse del río brillante que escapa como un rayo de la mano del nubio. Ataja el borde de

³²Ibid., pp. 155-156.

³³De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 69.

la red pero el tridente golpea hacia abajo y la sangre salta del muslo de Marco, mientras la espada demasiado corta resuena inútilmente contra el asta. . . . El procónsul mira atentamente el muslo lacerado, la sangre que se pierde en la greba dorada. . . .³⁴

In spite of his efforts to remain free of the Nubbian's net and trident, he is unsuccessful in doing so. The prongs reach his leg and the blood begins to flow down his armor. The proconsul comments victoriously: "La suerte lo ha abandonado." Just as fate has dealt cruelly with Marco, so has it also done with Jeanne as she realizes that Roland prefers Sonia to her. As their telephone conversation ends, Roland turns to admire Sonia "que acababa de abrir la puerta y se ha detenido con un aire entre interrogativo y burlón." Roland and Sonia settle down to an evening together during which Roland dreads the possibility of a second phone call from Jeanne. However, his fears are unnecessary:

Acepta indiferente las caricias, incapaz de sentir que la mano de Jeanne tiembla un poco y empieza a enfriarse. Cuando los dedos resbalan por su piel y se detienen, hincándose en una crispación instantánea, el gato se queja petulante; después se tumba de espaldas y mueve las patas en la actitud de expectativa que hace reír siempre a Jeanne, pero ahora no, su mano sigue inmóvil junto al gato y apenas si un dedo busca todavía el calor de su piel, la recorre brevemente antes de detenerse otra vez entre el flanco tibio y el tubo de pastillas que ha rodado hasta ahí.³⁵

Combined in the same paragraph that tells of Jeanne's suicide there is also the description of the beastly death of the two gladiators.

³⁴Cortázar, "Todos los fuegos el fuego," Todos los fuegos el fuego, p. 159.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 161-162.

Alcanzado en pleno estómago el nubio aúlla, echándose hacia atrás, y en ese último instante en que el dolor es como una llama de odio, toda la fuerza que huye de su cuerpo se agolpa en el brazo para hundir el tridente en la espalda de su rival boca abajo. Cae sobre el cuerpo de Marco, y las convulsiones lo hacen rodar de lado; Marco mueve lentamente un brazo, clavado en la arena como un enorme insecto brillante.³⁶

Marco has succeeded in wounding the Nubbian fatally by inserting the sword in his stomach. In turn the Nubbian thrusts his trident in Marco's back as they both fall dead to the ground.

Having given the fate of three of the characters, Cortázar ends the story by focusing on the destiny of the remaining protagonists.

Roland agita el fósforo y lo posa en la mesa donde en alguna parte hay un cenicero. Sonia es la primera en adormecerse y él le quita muy despacio el cigarrillo de la boca, lo junta con el suyo y los abandona en la mesa, resbalando contra Sonia en un sueño pesado y sin imágenes. El pañuelo de gasa arde sin llama al borde del cenicero, chamuscándose lentamente, cae sobre la alfombra junto al montón de ropas y una copa de coñac. Parte del público vocifera y se amontona en las gradas inferiores; el procónsul ha saludado una vez más y hace una seña a su guardia para que le abran paso. Licas, el primero en comprender, le muestra el lienzo mas distante del viejo velario que empieza a desgarrarse mientras una lluvia de chispas cae sobre el público que busca confusamente las salidas. . . . Irene es la primera que huele el aceite hirviendo, el incendio de los depósitos subterráneos; atrás, el velario cae sobre las espaldas de los que pugnan por abrirse paso en una masa de cuerpos confundidos que obstruyen las galerías demasiado estrechas.³⁷

In the above passage Cortázar radically transports the reader from one locale to the other. The sentence that

³⁶Ibid., p. 162.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 164-165.

ends with "copa de coñac" places the reader in the Parisian apartment, while the remaining action occurs in the Roman arena. At this point the unifying factor between the two scenes is represented by the fire which engulfs both places simultaneously. In the apartment the fire has been caused by Roland's carelessness in extinguishing the match and cigarettes. In the arena, combustion has caused the awnings to go up in flames as the crowd runs madly in search of an exit. The scene is described by Irene as she tells the pro-consul, "No podremos salir, . . . están amontonados ahí abajo como animales."³⁸ In the Parisian apartment Roland and Sonia share the same fate as they call for help, "cada vez mas débilmente."

The deaths of the protagonists by the fire "parecería representar un castigo a la demagogía del procónsul, en un caso, y un castigo a la infidelidad en el otro."³⁹ It would appear that the tragic ending is merely representative of "un restablecimiento justiciero, vindicativo."⁴⁰

Throughout the story the scene has shifted from one location to the other without any connecting feature. However, it is at the end that Cortázar provides a unifying factor as the fire bridges the gap between the two places.

³⁸Ibid., p. 165.

³⁹Amícola, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁰De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 69.

In his effort to introduce the reader to new spatial realities Cortázar has taken "playful liberties with . . . space, bringing us a world of terror and anguish just below the world we think we know."⁴¹ Again, Cortázar has utilized dreams as a device for displacement. The reader is transported to an island by means of an escape dream, but the presentation is so vivid that he is unaware that it is not an actual occurrence. When the author has the reader convinced that he has actually arrived on the island Cortázar takes that "salto"⁴² which manages "to subvert rational barriers and collapse logical categories,"⁴³ and forces the reader into accepting this new spatial concept for which he is totally unprepared.

A second device employed by Cortázar in achieving spatial displacement is that of an enlarged photograph through which the reader is transferred to a distant location as easily as if he were going from one room to another. The photograph serves as "una descolocación desde la cual lo sólito cesa de ser tranquilizador porque nada es sólito apenas se lo somete a un escrutinio sigiloso y sostenido."⁴⁴ The photograph merely serves as a passageway or

⁴¹Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

⁴²Tirri, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴³Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 229.

⁴⁴Julio Cortázar, "Del sentimiento de no estar del todo," La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos (México, D. F., 1967), p. 25.

an opening through which the reader can surpass the limitations imposed by traditional spatial realities and experience a new or unusual dimension of these concepts.

The most intricate use of spatial displacement in Cortázar's works is found in "Todos los fuegos el fuego," in which he transports the reader from the Roman arena to a Parisian apartment by merely writing about both places simultaneously without any transitional references. In this instance the reader can only know which place he is reading about by the description of the surroundings. The punctuation mark at the end of a sentence is the only dividing factor between the two scenes. However, the author does provide one unifying factor as the fire ravages both places simultaneously and brings the story to a climactic ending.

Indeed, Cortázar is just as fascinated with new spatial realities as he is with temporal dimensions. In experimenting with these new concepts of space, Cortázar is attempting to change logical categories which are ingrained in the minds of men everywhere. "No se trata solamente de romper con los lugares comunes, . . . lo que él quiere es transgredir el hecho literario total."⁴⁵ He is desirous of "looking at the world as if it weren't an expression of Euclidean geometry"⁴⁶ but rather striving "to push across a

⁴⁵De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 88.

⁴⁶Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 236.

new border, to take a leap into something more authentic."⁴⁷ The solution to the problem "is not only to replace a whole set of images of the world but, . . . to go beyond imagery itself, to discover a new stellar geometry that will open new mental galaxies."⁴⁸ Cortázar has truly opened new mental galaxies as his "sudden shifts and dislocations . . . are put to work with inexhaustible versatility."⁴⁹ It is these sudden dislocations and chess-like moves, carefully devised by the author beforehand, which have led a critic to describe the use of spatial displacement as being "para lectores de mente alerta, enterados de metafísica, aficionados al análisis, disciplinados en las leyes de un juego refinado."⁵⁰ The reader must be prepared for the moves which have been carefully prearranged and which will carry him from one location to the other much as the moves made by a player on a chess board. This "literatura analítica, ajedrecista,"⁵¹ allows Cortázar the freedom needed to give his reader new spatial dimensions as reality and fantasy become one and the same.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁰Anderson Imbert, Historia de la literatura hispano-americana, Vol. II, p. 241.

⁵¹Ibid.

CHAPTER V

IDENTITY DISPLACEMENT

Just as Cortázar has succeeded in bearing arms against the conventional notions of time and space, so has he also done with new techniques in character development. His manipulation of characters is the result of his interest in "temas que confrontan al hombre contemporáneo: el conflicto por la búsqueda del significativo de la vida; el problema de la realidad contrapuesta al sueño; y el contraste violento, la metafísica en contra de lo material-real."¹ The problems of contemporary man as he searches for understanding of self and the problems involved in facing reality are Cortázar's primary concern.

However, in order to grasp Cortázar's treatment of character, the reader must first realize that the reality of man may not be as simple and uncomplicated as it appears at first glance. Indeed, Cortázar is so fascinated with the complexities of human behavior that he has created what one critic has called "una fauna mitológica y parahumana"²

¹Allen, op. cit., p. 116.

²De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 64.

in his Historias de cronopios y de famas. This unusual community "se caracteriza . . . por la invención de personajes irreales, . . ." ³ designated by Cortázar as cronopios, famas and esperanzas. These unintelligible names allow the author to create characters who are completely removed from the world with which the reader is familiar. However, "el mundo de sus cronopios, famas, y esperanzas es un mundo que aunque irreal, es sugestivo de nuestro mundo que, aunque real, es tan absurdo como el mundo de los cronopios." ⁴ Through his "hobgoblinish" characters Cortázar depicts the fallibilities and inconsistencies of human existence with all the ridiculous conventionalisms that govern his world.

Not only has Cortázar departed from the conventional treatment of characters in his Historias de cronopios y de famas, but he has also introduced new phases of man as a living, breathing being. This he accomplishes by placing the reader in a state of alertness prepared to see "el otro lado de las cosas como una parte integrante de la vida misma, o sea de la normalidad." ⁵

To Cortázar, seeing the "other side" is a way of displacing his characters in order to convey man's constant search. Throughout his works, characters are plagued by

³Luis Leal, Historia del cuento hispanoamericano (México D. F., 1966), p. 121.

⁴Ibid.

⁵José Blanco Amor, "Julio Cortázar," Cuadernos Americanos, CLX (September-October, 1968), 213-237.

the sensation that someone else other than self dwells within, always threatening to seize them.

Esta existencia se desenvuelve desgarrada entre opuestos: rebelión y conformismo, individuo y especie, acción y contemplación, racionalidad e irracionalidad, cuerpo y espíritu, tiempo y eternidad, memoria y olvido, soledad y comunión, realidad e irrealdad, anhelando siempre una unidad nunca alcanzada y una armonía quizá inalcanzable.⁶

The opposing factors dominating man make it difficult for him to reach the unity and harmony that will allow him to emerge victorious over the stranger within. To convey this pathos, Cortázar delves into the psychological nature of man and then assumes his role as creator, manipulating the lives of his characters as his stories revolve around a play between self and the other.

This endless play of self and the other is realized by Cortázar through several variants. One is the technique of employing double characters who ultimately identify with each other and become a single character. An excellent example of this technique is found in "Lejana" from Bestiario (1951), his earliest volume of short stories.

"Lejana" has been described as "el diario íntimo de una esquizofrénica,"⁷ and is a short story divided into sections which are headed by dates indicating entries by the protagonist in her diary. The entries in the diary begin on

⁶Allen, op. cit., p. 117.

⁷Amícola, op. cit., p. 22.

January 12, at which time the reader is given an insight into the disturbed mental state of Alina Reyes. Alina has difficulty sleeping and when she finally falls asleep she dreams of another Alina Reyes, "que será cualquier cosa, mendiga en Budapest, pupila de mala casa en Jujuy o sirvienta en Quetzaltenango. . . ." ⁸ Regardless of who the other Alina might be, it is evident "que tiene frío, que sufre, que le pegan." Because of the cruel treatment that Alina feels is being experienced by her other self, she expresses her displeasure toward her double. "Puedo solamente odiarla tanto, aborrecer las manos que la tiran al suelo y también a ella, a ella todavía más porque le pegan, porque soy yo y le pegan." ⁹

Not only does the protagonist feel that she is being cruelly mistreated, but she also finds herself crossing a frozen bridge as "la nieve me entra por los zapatos rotos." The punishment and the scene on the frozen bridge with torn shoes are recurring visions in the mind of the protagonist whether asleep or awake.

On the 28th of January, Alina Reyes records the following in her diary:

Pensé una cosa curiosa. Hace tres días que no me viene nada de la lejana. Tal vez ahora no le pegan, o pudo conseguir abrigo. Mandarle un telegrama, unas

⁸Julio Cortázar, "Lejana," Bestiario (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 36.

⁹Ibid., p. 37.

medias. . . . Pensé una cosa curiosa. Llegaba a la terrible ciudad y era de tarde Por el lado de la Dobrina Stana, en la perspectiva Skorda, caballos erizados de estalagmitas y polizontes rígidos, hogazas humeantes y flecos de viento ensorbeciendo las ventanas. Andar por la Dobrina con paso de turista, el mapa en el bolsillo de mi sastre azul (con ese frío y dejarme el abrigo en el Burglos), hasta una plaza contra el río, casi encima del río tronante de hielos rotos y barcazas y algún martín pescador que allá se llamará sbunaia tjeno o algo peor.

Después de la plaza supuse que venía el puente. Lo pensé y no quise seguir.

.
 Quien sabe si no me perdería. Una inventa nombres al viajar pensando, los recuerda en el momento. . . . Pero no sé el nombre de la plaza, es un poco como si de veras hubiese llegado a una plaza de Budapest y estuviera perdida por no saber su nombre; ahí donde un nombre es una plaza.¹⁰

On the day that Alina has recorded this entry in her diary she has seen herself arriving in Budapest where she is convinced that her double is suffering. On this cold winter day, Alina pictures herself walking the streets of the city with a map in her pocket in search of the bridge which she has imagined many times before. "Alina Reyes se ve a sí misma flagelada en Budapest y en esa visión es como si llevara en el interior de algo así como su conciencia a esa otra miserable" ¹¹

After experiencing some difficulty in finding the name of the bridge, Alina is finally able to identify it as "el

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 41-42. .

¹¹Noe Jitrik, "Notas sobre la 'zona sagrada' y el mundo de los 'otros' en Bestiario de Julio Cortázar," La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, p. 18.

puente de los Mercados" which is found in "la plaza Vladas." Having learned the name of the bridge that plagues her continuously, Alina then becomes obsessed with the idea that she must go there. "Más fácil salir a buscar ese puente, salir en busca mía y encontrarme como ahora, porque ya he andado la mitad del puente" ¹² Alina feels a need to go in search of herself in order to end the annoying dream that vexes her. To accomplish her goal, Alina marries Luis María, who agrees to take her to Budapest on their honeymoon. However, before leaving on her trip, Alina makes one last entry in her diary.

Y sin embargo, ya que cerraré este diario, porque una o se casa o escribe un diario, las dos cosas no marchan juntas--Ya ahora no me gusta salirme de él sin decir esto con alegría de esperanza, con esperanza de alegría. Vamos allá. . . . En el puente la hallaré y nos miraremos. . . . Y será la victoria de la reina sobre esa adherencia maligna, esa usurpación indebida y sorda. Se doblegará si realmente soy yo, se sumará a mi zona iluminada, más bella y cierta; con sólo ir a su lado y apoyarle una mano en el hombro. ¹³

Now that Alina is married she no longer has need of a diary, but before closing it permanently, she declares her intent to end the recurring vision whenever she encounters herself (her double) face-to-face on the bridge. With no other thought in mind, Alina closes her diary for the last time.

¹²Cortázar, "Lejana," Bestiario, pp. 43-44.

¹³Ibid., p. 47.

The section that ends the story is told by a third person narrator who describes Alina's honeymoon trip to Budapest. On the first day of her arrival, Alina concentrates her efforts on becoming acquainted with the city. It is not until the second day that she begins her search for the bridge that will unite her and her double. When she finds the bridge, Alina begins to relive the scene that she has previously envisioned in her imagination. The bitter cold that Alina has experienced in her dream now becomes real as she attempts to cross the bridge and the snow pushes her back. As she approaches the center of the bridge, she encounters the woman who has haunted her in the past. She has black, stringy hair and with a lithe face she beckons in her ragged clothes.

Llegó al puente y lo cruzó hasta el centro, andando ahora con trabajo porque la nieve se oponía y del Danubio crece un viento de abajo, difícil, que engancha y hostiga.

En el centro del puente desolado la harapienta mujer de pelo negro y lacio esperaba con algo fijo y ávido en la cara sinuosa, en el pliegue de las manos un poco cerradas pero ya tendiéndose. Alina . . . estuvo junto a ella y alargó también las manos, negándose a pensar, y la mujer del puente se apretó contra su pecho y las dos se abrazaron rígidas y calladas en el puente, con el río trizado golpeando en los pilares.

Ceñía a la mujer delgadísima, sintiéndola entera y absoluta dentro de su abrazo . . . Cerró los ojos en la fusión total, . . . segura de su victoria, sin celebrarlo por tan suyo y por fin.¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Alina embraces the woman confident that she will now be rid of her other self, but no sooner has she done this than a terrifying exchange of character occurs:

Le pareció que dulcemente una de las dos lloraba. Debía ser ella porque sintió mojadas las mejillas, y el pómulos mismo doliéndole como si tuviera allí un golpe. También el cuello, y de pronto los hombros, agobiados por fatigas incontables. Al abrir los ojos (tal vez gritaba ya) vio que se habían separado. Ahora sí gritó. De frío, porque la nieve le estaba entrando por los zapatos rotos, porque yéndose camino de la plaza iba Alina Reyes lindísima en su sastre gris, el pelo suelto contra el viento, sin dar vuelta la cara y yéndose.¹⁵

As Alina is still embracing the other woman, she herself begins to feel fatigue and pain. When she opens her eyes Alina realizes that she has been transformed into the ragged woman she was embracing. As she looks up, she sees her double walk away in her grey suit unmindful of the cold. Now the snow that she feels on her feet is really filtering through her torn shoes, "pues se produjo el transvasar de individualidades y la protagonista es ahora la pobre mujer del Danubio en Budapest."¹⁶

The reason for the change to a third person narrator in the concluding section is now clear, since it is evident that "Alina no puede escribir en su diario justamente porque se ha tornado otra diferente."¹⁷

In "Lejana," "Cortázar expresa el afán de la integración total, de lo consciente y lo inconsciente, del yo y

¹⁵Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁶Amícola, op. cit., p.121.

¹⁷Jitrik, op. cit., p. 25.

el ser que habita en el fondo del hombre. . . ."18 This was an adventure in which the protagonist's search for self presented a challenge with a risk from which she expected to emerge victorious over her faraway image. However, her self assurance has failed her, as she is overtaken by "la 'miserable' . . . forma lejana de su propio ser"19 and is left on the cold bridge to live the reality of what had heretofore been a dream.

Another example of the possession or overpowering of the protagonist by another individual is seen in "Las armas secretas." In this story Pierre, the protagonist, is plagued by a German tune whose words he does not understand: "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai, oye distintamente la melodía. Lo admira vagamente recordar tan bien las palabras, que solo traducidas tienen pleno sentido para él."20 Not only is Pierre confused by the German tune but is further intrigued as he continuously envisions a house in Germany. The German house is in Enghien and has one distinguishing characteristic that Pierre vividly remembers, "una bola de vidrio donde nace el pasamanos." Thirdly, there is the reference made to dry leaves falling on Pierre's face despite the fact that in France, at this season, "no hay hojas secas."

¹⁸De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 46.

¹⁹Jitrik, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁰Julio Cortázar, "Las armas secretas," Las armas secretas, p. 190.

All of these strange incidents tend to isolate Pierre from his friends, and even from the girl he loves, Michèle. Pierre's inexplicable personality is more evident when he is with Michèle. He smiles at her but yet, "sonríe a algo que no es Michèle y se queda como perdido en el aire."²¹

A conversation between Pierre and Michèle concerning the war with the Germans begins to give the reader an inkling as to the significance of the recurring scenes in Enghien and brings suspicions to Pierre's mind. As far as Pierre is concerned, the war was not so terribly bad: "Al fin y al cabo éramos niños entonces. Como unas vacaciones interminables, la guerra fue un absurdo total y casi divertido."²² However, to Michèle the war was an experience that she does not want to remember. She does not tell Pierre that she was raped by a German soldier while staying with relatives in Enghien, and yet he somehow knows that she has lived there: "No sé cómo, pero yo estaba enterado de que viviste en Enghien."²³

Indications that Pierre's personality changes when he is with Michèle are evidenced by the words and actions of the protagonists themselves. Michèle tells Pierre: "Me diste miedo, . . . estabas tan distinto." On another occasion Pierre is surprised that Michèle's dog has not

²¹Ibid., p. 204.

²²Ibid., p. 207.

²³Ibid., p. 209.

recognized him and he exclaims, "Parece que me desconoció igual que tú."

Pierre is very much in love with Michèle and on one occasion is returning to apologize for having offended her earlier. On his way to her home he is thinking: "Yo creo que me perdonará Los dos somos tan absurdos, es necesario que comprenda . . . nada se sabe de verdad hasta no haberse amado, quiero su pelo entre mis manos, su cuerpo, la quiero, la quiero. . . ."24 Pierre is very careful in entering Michèle's house not to alarm her. However, once he has entered her room, a change comes over him as the following scene ensues:

. . . se avanza hacia la puerta, se entra apoyando ligeramente el pie derecho, empujando apenas la puerta que se abre sin ruido, y Michèle sentada al borde de la cama levanta los ojos y lo mira, se lleva las manos a la boca, parecería que va a gritar (pero por qué no tiene el pelo suelto, por qué no tiene puesto el camisón celeste, ahora está vestida con unos pantalones y parece mayor), y entonces Michèle . . . lo mira y tiembla como de felicidad o de vergüenza, como la perra delatora que es, como si la estuviera viendo a pesar del colchón de hojas secas que otra vez le cubren la cara y que se arranca con las dos manos mientras Michèle retrocede, tropieza con el borde de la cama, mira desesperadamente hacia atrás, grita, grita, todo el placer que sube y lo baña, grita, así, el pelo entre los dedos, así, aunque suplique, así entonces, perra, así.25

When Pierre opens the door and sees Michèle sitting on the bed, he describes her as different from before, indicating that he has experienced this scene previously. He now finds Michèle older and in an old pair of pants rather than

²⁴Ibid., p. 219.

²⁵Ibid., p. 220.

the light blue gown with her hair down over her shoulders. The sincere love that Pierre had expressed for Michèle as he was on his way to her house becomes the lustful desire of the German soldier who in years past had raped her. "El es, inexplicablemente, Pierre pero también el soldado alemán que aterra otra vez a Michèle en esa casa que es y no es la de Enghien."²⁶

The closing scene is a conversation between two of Michèle's friends who are enroute to her house. From them the reader learns of the hideous fate that befell the German soldier who raped Michèle when she was very young.

La forma en que matamos al tipo no es de las que se olvidan. En fin, uno no podía hacer las cosas mejor en esos tiempos.

.....
 Me acuerdo de como cayó, con la cara hecha pedazos entre las hojas secas.

Se lo merecía, aparte de que no teníamos otras armas. Un cartucho de caza bien usado. . . .²⁷

Upon learning of the rape, Michèle's friends took her assailant into the forest and with the shot from a musket disfigured his face beyond recognition. The statement, "cayó, con la cara hecha pedazos entre las hojas secas," explains the significance of the dry leaves, leaves that Pierre constantly feels against his face, the same leaves that pressed against the face of the dying German soldier.

²⁶De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 60.

²⁷Cortázar, "Las armas secretas," Las armas secretas, pp. 221-222.

"El cuento objetiva una experiencia psicológica llevada a un grado de plena y estremecedora realización."²⁸ Cortázar has succeeded in masterfully superimposing the personalities of Pierre and the German soldier as the latter returns to haunt Michele for a second time. "Este relato prueba nuevamente la maestría expresiva de Cortázar, a la par que su audacia para bucear . . . en los fenomenos parapsíquicos, que escapan a toda explicación racional."²⁹

Another example of possession by the indwelling "double" is seen in "Casa tomada," a story from the collection entitled Bestiario. However, in this story the protagonists, a brother and sister, have inherited a large ancestral home and are eventually driven out by unknown forces.

Though the pair experiences a case of possession as do the protagonists in "Lejana" and "Las armas secretas," the identity of the overpowering forces is never clarified. The protagonists themselves do not understand and can merely identify the forces as intruders who "han tomado la parte del fondo," forcing them out of their home into a modern world; they are isolated from the past which they cherish and which is represented by the security of their ancestral home and its sheltering environment.

²⁸De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 60.

²⁹Ibid., p. 61.

The reader can merely speculate as to the identity of these driving and overpowering forces. They might simply be the forces of loneliness that the protagonists face day after day, or possibly "miedo a la muerte, . . . la neurosis que está pronta a atacar al morador."³⁰ Whatever they might be, the author has succeeded in leaving the reader perplexed, as in other stories, since were he to identify the intruders "toda la magia y sugerencia del cuento se derrumbaría."³¹

In his experimentation with character manipulation, Cortázar has also incorporated some short stories based on the theory of reincarnation. In "Una flor amarilla," which appears in Final del juego (1964), Cortázar

describe ese raro sentimiento que alguna vez hemos experimentado todos al ver u oír algo que nos resulta como ya visto u oído y que sin embargo--deducimos--es imposible que hayamos percibido; . . . es una experiencia . . . que los griegos organizaron en las teorías teológico-filosóficas de la reencarnación y reminiscencia³²

As the story opens an inebriate and his companion are sitting at a corner table "en un bistró de la rue Cambronne." The inebriate tells a story about the immortality of man, a story so incredible that "el patrón y los viejos clientes del mostrador se rieran hasta que el vino se les salía por los ojos."³³

³⁰Amícola, op. cit., p. 48.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 28.

³³Julio Cortázar, "Una flor amarilla," Final del juego, p. 85.

Contó que en un autobús de la línea 95 había visto a un chico de unos trece años, y que al rato de mirarlo descubrió que el chico se parecía mucho a él, por lo menos se parecía al recuerdo que guardaba de sí mismo a esa edad. Poco a poco fue admitiendo que se le parecía en todo, la cara y las manos, el mechón cayéndole en la frente, los ojos muy separados, y más aún en la timidez, la forma en que se refugiaba en una revista de historietas, el gesto de echarse el pelo hacia atrás, la torpeza irremediable de los movimientos. Se le parecía de tal manera que casi le dio risa, pero cuando el chico bajó en la rue de Rennes, él bajó también Buscó un pretexto para hablar con el chico, le preguntó por una calle y oyó ya sin sorpresa una voz que era su voz de la infancia.³⁴

While on the bus, the inebriate has noticed a young boy of about thirteen who reminded him of himself at that age, not only physically but in mannerisms as well. The man becomes so fascinated with the similarity that he follows the young boy and when questioning him about the location of a street is not surprised to hear that the boy's voice "era su voz de la infancia."

The inebriate continues to tell his companion how he became acquainted with Luc, the young boy, and his family. The more that he learns about Luc's background the more convinced he becomes that "Luc era otra vez él, no había mortalidad, éramos todos inmortales."

Some of the reasons given by the inebriate to indicate that he has been reincarnated in Luc are that at seven he had dislocated his wrist, while at the same age Luc had dislocated his collar bone. At age nine, one contracted the

³⁴Ibid., pp. 85-86.

measles and the other scarlet fever. Then there were those "recuerdos imprecisos" which were too closely related to be a coincidence.

En ese tiempo, quiero decir cuando tenía la edad de Luc, yo había pasado por una época amarga que empezó con una enfermedad interminable, después en plena convalecencia me fui a jugar con los amigos y me rompí un brazo, y apenas había salido de eso me enamoré de la hermana de un discípulo y sufrí como se sufre cuando se es incapaz de mirar en los ojos a una chica que se está burlando de uno. Luc se enfermó también, apenas convaleciente lo invitaron al circo y al bajar de las graderías resbaló y se dislocó un tobillo. Poco después su madre lo sorprendió una tarde llorando al lado de la ventana, con un pañuelito azul estrujado en la mano, un pañuelo que no era de la casa.³⁵

The incidents occurring in their lives, the prolonged illness, broken bones, heartbreak, are so similar that they almost follow a duplicate pattern, leaving the dipsomaniac totally convinced of his immortality. As a result of this belief, he is now concerned for all those in the vicious cycle who will eventually end their life as alcoholics just as he has done. Regardless of how much they might strive to better themselves, "el resultado sería el mismo, la humillación, la rutina lamentable, los años monótonos, los fracasos que van royendo la ropa y el alma, el refugio en una soledad resentida, en un bistró de barrio."³⁶

Because of his concern for the fate that awaits Luc and those that will follow him, the alcoholic is plagued by sleepless nights and the thought that "más allá hasta otro Luc, hasta otros que se llamarían Robert o Claude o Michel,

³⁵Ibid., p. 89.

³⁶Ibid., p. 91.

una teoría al infinito de pobres diablos repitiendo la figura sin saberlo, convencidos de su libertad y su albedrío."³⁷ All of these reincarnated souls will not be aware that they cannot become what they want; they are destined to be a result of the pattern already established by the lives of those they are replacing.

However, his apprehension soon comes to an end when Luc dies as a result of bronchitis "así como a la misma edad yo había tenido una infección hepática." The protagonist survived his illness because he was interned in the hospital where he received the best medical attention. However, Luc's mother refused to admit her son to the hospital, thus causing the boy's early death.

Luc's death brings an end to the cycle of reincarnation as far as the inebriate is concerned, and he now feels "felicidad . . . por la certidumbre maravillosa de ser el primer mortal. . . ."

However, this happiness is interrupted when shortly thereafter, while on a walk, a yellow flower attracts his attention. As he admires the beauty of the flower, he realizes that "siempre habría flores para los hombres futuros," but since he is mortal there will no longer be flowers for him when he dies.

Yo me iba a morir y Luc ya estaba muerto, no habría nunca más una flor para alguien como nosotros, no habría nada, no habría absolutamente nada, y la nada

³⁷Ibid.

era eso, que no hubiera nunca más una flor. . . .
 Toda la tarde, hasta entrada la noche subí y bajé
 de los autobuses pensando en la flor y en Luc,
 buscando entre los pasajeros a alguien que se pare-
 ciera a Luc, a alguien que se pareciera a mí o a Luc,
 a alguien que pudiera ser yo otra vez, a alguien a
 quien mirar sabiendo que era yo, y luego dejarlo irse
 sin decirle nada, casi protegiéndolo para que siguiera
 por su pobre vida estúpida, su imbécil vida fracasada
 hacia otra imbécil vida fracasada hacia otra imbécil
 vida fracasada hacia otra. . . .³⁸

The fear of death and its nothingness again sends him on a bus in search for someone else that resembles Luc or himself so that he can be assured that life for him is not coming to a complete end. The concluding scene, which leaves the dipsomaniac repeating himself in despair, depicts an aspect of humanity that can be described as being "como un rasgo de toda la humanidad, como testimonio de su debilidad, de su impotencia, de su dolor."³⁹

Man's quest for the reassurance that will allay his feelings of impotence, weakness, and fear of death is prominent throughout the story, for the inebriate is constantly plagued by the inability of man to change his destiny. At the same time, Cortázar's own views on the reality of death are evident as he portrays the need of man to accept it as do the followers of Oriental philosophy in which death is merely a metamorphosis from which he can raise himself "to a higher plane where total freedom begins."⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., pp. 93-94.

³⁹Graciela de Sola, "'Rayuela': Una invitación al viaje," La vuelta a Cortázar en nueve ensayos, p. 79.

⁴⁰Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 220.

In "Cartas a mamá," immortality is characterized by the reappearance of Nico, who had been dead for two years. His return from the dead comes as a result of guilt feelings experienced by his brother, Luis, after having married Nico's fiancée, Laura.

The first indication of Nico's visit to Paris, where Luis and Laura are living, is made by his mother in a letter to Luis. Luis and Laura both agree that the aging woman has mistakenly written Nico for Victor, another member of the family. However, subsequent letters contain the same information and finally there is a definite date and time of arrival. On this date both Luis and Laura go to the train depot where Nico is to arrive--but neither informs the other of his own intentions to go.

Arriving early at the depot, Luis remains hidden and observes Laura as she walks among the passengers in search of Nico. Luis is also mindful of the men that are passing before him, in an attempt to find one that resembles his deceased brother.

. . . puesto a buscar semejanzas por puro gusto, ese otro que ya había pasado y avanzaba hacia el portillo de salida, con una sola valija en la mano izquierda, Nico era zurdo como él, tenía esa espalda un poco cargada, ese corte de hombros. Y Laura debía haber pensado lo mismo porque venía detrás mirándolo⁴¹

The same individual attracts the attention of Luis and Laura because of his similarity to Nico. However, in spite

⁴¹Julio Cortázar, "Cartas a mamá," Las armas secretas, p. 33.

of his resemblance, Luis proceeds to clarify that "naturalmente el hombre era un desconocido, lo vieron de frente cuando puso la valija en el suelo para buscar el billete y entregarlo al del portillo."⁴² After allowing Laura sufficient time to leave, Luis returns to work as usual.

It is not until Luis returns home that evening that the true significance of the previous scene is made clear through a brief dialogue between husband and wife:

--¿A vos no te parece que está mucho más flaco?--dijo.
 Laura hizo un gesto. Un brillo paralelo le bajaba por las mejillas.
 --Un poco--dijo--. Uno va cambiando. . . .⁴³

They have both seen Nico, thus, "objetivando una realidad que estaba latente entre los dos."⁴⁴ Before Nico's appearance in Paris, his presence had only been felt by the couple without the other being aware of his presence. However, now Luis and Laura are faced with the reality of his immortality and must accept Nico as an everpresent intruder in their marriage.

Hasta ese momento Luis y Laura habían construido en Francia una realidad mentirosa, apoyada en el silencio cómplice de los dos. Las cartas de mamá al volver a mencionar a Nico denuncian que la realidad de Paris es una ficción, un modo de evadir la trampa que hicieron en Buenos Aires. Lo insólito, lo increíble, es a menudo el verdadero rostro de la realidad.⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁴De Sola, Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo, p. 53.

⁴⁵Nestor García Canclini, Cortázar, una antropología poética (Buenos Aires, 1968), p. 31.

Perhaps the most unique case of character displacement is represented by the transformation of man into animal. Indeed, one of Cortázar's most frequently recurring themes has been described as "lo bestial misteriosamente prendido al destino humano."⁴⁶ This view of man, as Cortázar sees it, reaches its culminating point in "Axolotl," Final del juego (1964), in which the protagonist is transformed into a salamander.

Hubo un tiempo en que yo pensaba mucho en los axolotl. Iba a verlos al acuario del Jardin des Plantes y me quedaba horas mirándolos, observando su inmovilidad, sus oscuros movimientos. Ahora soy un axolotl.⁴⁷

The unnamed protagonist relates how he first became acquainted with the axolotl, a member of the salamander family, by observing them in an aquarium in Paris. These amphibious creatures have such an overpowering influence over their observer that he returns daily, "a veces de mañana y de tarde," in spite of the fact that "les temía."

The two points of view from which the selection is told are clearly seen in the following passage in which the narrator is describing the immobility of the axolotl.

A ambos lados de la cabeza, donde hubieran debido estar las orejas, le crecían tres ramitas rojas como de coral, una excrescencia vegetal, las branquias, supongo. Y era lo único vivo en él, cada diez o quince segundos las ramitas se enderezaban rígidamente y volvían a bajarse. A veces una pata se movía

⁴⁶Anderson Imbert, "Julio Cortázar: Final del juego," p. 173.

⁴⁷Julio Cortázar, "Axolotl," Final del juego, p. 161.

apenas, yo veía los diminutos dedos posándose con suavidad en el musgo. Es que no nos gusta movernos mucho, y el acuario es tan mezquino; apenas avanzamos un poco nos damos con la cola o la cabeza de otro de nosotros; surgen dificultades, pelea, fatiga.⁴⁸

On either side of the animal the protagonist notices three protrusions which he assumes to be gills. Other than the occasional raising and lowering of these projections and the slight locomotion of the diminutive feet, there is apparently no movement at all. Immediately following this observation there is a shift in point of view as a salamander, speaking in the first person, explains the reason for their limited stirring in the aquarium.

From the very beginning, the protagonist has sensed a binding force between himself and the aquatic organisms: "Desde un primer momento comprendí que estábamos vinculados, que algo infinitamente perdido y distante seguía sin embargo uniéndonos."⁴⁹ This link enables the protagonist to gradually become transfixed by the salamanders that he is observing as "they begin to represent to him a new ideal of existential quietude and in that representation they suddenly become the man himself."⁵⁰

To the protagonist, the transformation was inevitable and he accepts it quite naturally.

Ahora sé que no hubo nada de extraño, que eso tenía que ocurrir. Cada mañana, al inclinarme sobre

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 162.

⁵⁰Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

el acuario, el reconocimiento era mayor. Sufrían, cada fibra de mi cuerpo alcanzaba ese sufrimiento amordazado, esa tortura rígida en el fondo del agua. . . . No era posible que una expresión tan terrible que alcanzaba a vencer la inexpresividad forzada de sus rostros de piedra, no portara un mensaje de dolor, la prueba de esa condena eterna, de ese infierno líquido que padecían. Inútilmente quería probarme que mi propia sensibilidad proyectaba en los axolotl una conciencia inexistente. Ellos y yo sabíamos. Por eso no hubo nada de extraño en lo que ocurrió. Mi cara estaba pegada al vidrio del acuario, mis ojos trataban una vez más de penetrar el misterio de esos ojos de oro sin iris y sin pupila. Veía de muy cerca la cara de un axolotl inmóvil junto al vidrio. Sin transición, sin sorpresa, vi mi cara contra el vidrio, en vez del axolotl vi mi cara contra el vidrio, la vi fuera del acuario, la vi del otro lado del vidrio. Entonces mi cara se apartó y yo comprendí.⁵¹

The man shares the suffering that he detects in the salamanders and through complete concentration is able to breach the gap that exists between them as "man turns into animal, animal into man, until he is on the other side of the glass, now a salamander, looking out at himself looking at himself."⁵² "Afuera, mi cara volvía a acercarse al vidrio, veía mi boca de labios apretados por el esfuerzo de comprender a los axolotl. Yo era un axolotl y sabía ahora instantáneamente que ninguna comprensión era posible."⁵³ Along with the transformation has come another point of view as the man, now inside the aquarium, refers to himself on the outside as another, as "él":

⁵¹Cortázar, "Axolotl," Final del juego, p. 166.

⁵²Coleman, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

⁵³Cortázar, "Axolotl," Final del juego, p. 167.

El volvió muchas veces, pero viene menos ahora. Pasa semanas sin asomarse. Ayer lo vi, me miró largo rato y se fue bruscamente. Me pareció que no se interesaba tanto por nosotros, que obedecía a una costumbre. Como lo único que hago es pensar, pude pensar mucho en él. Se me ocurre que al principio continuamos comunicados, que él se sentía más que nunca unido al misterio que lo obsesionaba. Pero los puentes están cortados entre él y yo, porque lo que era su obsesión es ahora un axolotl, ajeno a su vida de hombre. Creo que al principio yo era capaz de volver en cierto modo a él--ah, sólo en cierto modo-- y mantener alerta su deseo de conocernos mejor. Ahora soy definitivamente un axolotl, y si pienso como un hombre es sólo porque todo axolotl piensa como un hombre dentro de su imagen de piedra rosa. Me parece que de todo esto alcancé a comunicarle algo en los primeros días, cuando yo era todavía él. Y en esta soledad final, a la que él ya no vuelve, me consuela pensar que acaso va a escribir sobre nosotros, creyendo imaginar un cuento va a escribir todo esto sobre los axolotl.⁵⁴

The visits of the observer become less frequent as communication between himself as human and as animal is severed. "No se puede comprender lo no humano y seguir siendo un hombre; no podemos mantenernos instalados en lo que ya somos y llegar al mismo tiempo a lo que podemos ser. Todo crecimiento es primera una renuncia, luego una transformación."⁵⁵

When the protagonist has become a salamander he is unable to communicate with his shadow (his human self) which remains on the outside, since "no se puede comprender lo no humano y seguir siendo hombre."⁵⁶ The salamander is left

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 167-168.

⁵⁵García Canclini, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵⁶Ibid.

with the consolation that the protagonist "acaso va a escribir sobre nosotros, creyendo imaginar un cuento va a escribir todo esto sobre los axolotl."⁵⁷

Whether the device be doubles, reincarnation, or the transformation of man into animal, Cortázar's theme remains throughout "el misterio ontológico, el destino del hombre que no puede ser indagado ni propuesto sin la simultánea pregunta por su esencia."⁵⁸ Cortázar depicts this questioning and yearning inner self "como lo monstruoso que nos enfrenta pero que secretamente se muestra semejante y por eso nos seduce, nos llama a reconocer y vivir nuestra solidaridad con él."⁵⁹

The "monstruos" dwelling in man can be faraway images as is the case with Alina Reyes and Pierre, or they can be indwelling fears like those experienced by the protagonists in "Casa tomada" and "Una flor amarilla." Finally, they can be actual monsters as represented by the "axolotl" who slowly "nos va devorando hasta incorporarnos al acuario."⁶⁰

En todos estos casos la anormalidad del otro cuestiona la convicción de mi normalidad, la vuelve sospechosa, una ilusión de mi egoísmo. Por eso mi yo quiere matar a los monstruos, porque desafían mi autoafirmación, la

⁵⁷Cortázar, "Axolotl," Final del juego, p. 168.

⁵⁸García Canclini, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 106

pobre vanidad de creerme el centro del mundo. Pero no es posible extirpar a los monstruos. La realidad sigue alojándolos para recordar la trascendencia que nos negamos a afrontar, para que no sea cómoda la instalación del yo en lo que ya es y posee.⁶¹

The inner self is constantly vexing man by questioning his true worth. This continuous striving for self affirmation leads man to want to rid himself of these monsters that deprive him of facing reality and understanding of self. This uncertainty and inner conflict is perhaps "el sentido más hondo en que las situaciones narradas por Cortázar son representativas del hombre contemporáneo."⁶² Modern man has accumulated an abundance of knowledge in every conceivable field and yet is unable to really come to a true understanding of himself. It is in this attempt to understand man that Cortázar has been led to "cortar de raíz toda construcción sistemática de caracteres,"⁶³ and to introduce a new system which he choses to classify as "figures."

'It's the notion of what I call 'figures.' It's a feeling I have--which many of us have, but which is particularly intense in me--that apart from our individual lots we all inadvertently form part of larger figures. I think we all compose figures. For instance, we at this moment may be part of a structure that prolongs itself at a distance of perhaps two hundred meters from here, where there might be another corresponding group of people like us who are no more aware of us than we are of them. I'm constantly sensing the possibility of certain links, of circuits that close around us, interconnecting us in a way that defies all rational

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 108.

⁶³Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 452.

explanation and has nothing to do with the ordinary human bonds that join people.' He recalls a phrase of Cocteau, to the effect that the individual stars that form a constellation have no idea that they are forming a constellation. 'We see Ursa Major, but the stars that form Ursa Major don't know that they do. In the same way, we also may be forming Ursa Majors and Ursa Minors, without knowing it, because we're restricted within our individualities.'⁶⁴

Cortázar is interested in trying to take an over all view of problems; in order to accomplish this he has had to create a superstructure which "defies all rational explanation and has nothing to do with the ordinary human bonds that join people."⁶⁵

Says Cortázar: 'The concept of 'figures' will be of use to me instrumentally, because it provides me with a focus very different from the usual one in a novel or narrative that tends to individualize the characters and equip them with personal traits and psychologies. I'd like to write in such a way that my writing would be full of life in the deepest sense, full of action and meaning, but a life, action, and meaning that would no longer rely exclusively on the interaction of individuals, but rather on a sort of superaction involving the 'figures' formed by a constellation of characters. I realize it isn't at all easy to explain this But as time goes by, I feel this notion of 'figures' more strongly every day. In other words, I feel daily more connected with other elements in the universe, I am less of an ego-ist and I'm more aware of the constant interactions taking place between other things or beings and myself. I have an impression that all that moves on a plane responding to other laws, other structures that lie outside the world of individuality. I would like to write a book that would show how these figures constitute a sort of break with, or denial of, individual reality, sometimes completely unknown to the characters themselves.'⁶⁶

⁶⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 227.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 236.

Cortázar is parapsychological in his approach to character identity as he continually works against the grain to dispense with "mental obstacles that hamper true communications"⁶⁷ and ultimate understanding of self and others.

Regardless of his approach to character displacement, Cortázar "never loses the unified drama of the existence of the individual, the sense that each man's life is an allegory of a single experience from which he comes and to which he is destined to go."⁶⁸ His protagonists, whose displacement reflects the fragmented character of the world in which they live, experience a break with or denial of individual reality. The individual character serves a purpose that is fulfilling itself outside him without his being the least aware of it, without his even realizing that he is one of the links in the superaction or superstructure devised by the author-creator.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 235.

⁶⁸Coleman, op. cit., p. 61.

⁶⁹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., pp. 236-237.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Julio Cortázar has received international acclaim for the innovative and revolutionary techniques with which he has experimented and with which he has ultimately achieved his own fictional metaphysic. He has been described as having "a mind with as many facets as a diamond, as intricate as a spiderweb,"¹ a mind that is constantly in search of new and fantastic means of expressing his peculiar concept of the "real." In his stories Cortázar interweaves the "real" and the "fantastic" so intricately that the traditional dichotomy of these terms no longer exists; his is "a mode of presenting the 'real' that transfers it to the level of the 'unusual.'"² To achieve this end Cortázar has dramatically restricted the traditional concepts of time, space and character identity and has introduced his reader to new dimensions of these concepts by means of displacement.

Through radical and unexpected transports in time Cortázar has challenged man's constant awareness of time

¹Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 209.

²Roberto González Echevarría, "'La autopista del sur' and the Secret Weapons of Julio Cortázar's Short Narrative," Studies in Short Fiction, VIII (Winter, 1971), 130-140.

and its limitations upon him. To achieve this temporal displacement Cortázar has utilized various techniques. One of these has been described as a "viaje en el tiempo,"³ as in the story "La noche boca arriba," where the protagonist is whisked from a twentieth century hospital bed to fifteenth century Mexico where he is the sacrificial victim to the Aztec gods. In "El otro cielo" the protagonist lives simultaneously in two time periods. At any given moment he can be strolling in downtown Buenos Aires in the twentieth century and suddenly, without any break in continuity, find himself in Paris in the year 1870. Another example of the destruction of the temporal continuum is seen in "Autopista del sur," where motorists find themselves immobilized on a freeway leading into Paris for an undetermined length of time. It is through the rejection of the limits imposed by time that man can come to an ultimate understanding of his nature as he takes an inner look at himself and his relationship to others.

Cortázar presents new spatial dimensions through sudden shifts of locale often in the brief space of one sentence. An example of this spatial displacement is seen in "Todos los fuegos el fuego," where the action shifts from a Roman circus arena to a modern day Paris apartment. The fire that occurs at both places is the only unifying factor in the story. In "La isla a mediodía" the protagonist

³Carter, op. cit., p. xiv.

transports himself mentally and envisions himself as part of the life on an island that he sees from an airplane. For the protagonist in "Las babas del diablo," a blowup of a photograph becomes a window through which he views the actions of the subjects as if they were alive. Not only can the protagonist observe what is taking place in the photograph but is able to enter into the picture and become involved in the action. Cortázar again attempts to subvert rational barriers that comprise the fragmented world which plagues modern man. The devices employed by Cortázar in his stories serve as an opening through which the reader is allowed the freedom of transcending logical spatial categories to which he is accustomed and which encase modern technological society.

In his constant search for man's self identity, Cortázar has not only experimented with new dimensions of time and space, but has also experimented with new concepts of character identity as well. To achieve identity displacement Cortázar utilizes a shifting point of view which involves the self and the other, a play of doubles in almost endless variety. In "Lejana," "Las armas secretas," and "Casa tomada," for example, the protagonists are overtaken by an indwelling self or doubles which ultimately identify with each other and become a single character. In "Una flor amarilla" the relationship between self and the other explores the concept of reincarnation. In "Axolotl" the protagonist gradually becomes transfixed by

the Mexican salamanders that he stares at daily; suddenly he becomes a salamander and is on the other side of the glass looking in at himself.

Cortázar has presented situations where "the ordinary categories of understanding have either collapsed or are on the point of collapsing. Logical principles are in crisis; the principle of identity wavers."⁴ It is these brink situations that find the reader totally unprepared for the surprise endings but which allow him "to dissociate, to take a leap out of himself."⁵

Throughout his works Cortázar has offered a new or different way of looking at the world "by scrutinizing situations from radically different points of view."⁶ These new points of view can constitute an inner monologue by the protagonist or an inserted passage by the author as an outsider looking in. The shifting viewpoint not only accentuates the importance of what has been seen or said and allows the reader a look at the situation and the characters from an objective angle, but also prepares him for what might otherwise seem inexplicable.

Because of the extent and depth of his creative vision and his constant search for new modes of expression, Cortázar joins other contemporary writers who have placed man

⁴Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 241.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Coleman, op. cit., p. 60.

in a labyrinth in which he is constantly searching for an exit or a central point. It is Cortázar's ability to follow the many different threads of self that lead toward the center of being and ultimate harmony that has attracted the attention of not only critics but the masses as well: "Y un tipo de creación literaria nacida para minorías iniciadas alcanza una masa lectora de amplitud inesperada, una proyección que trasciende las actitudes snobistas, las modas momentáneas y supera las previsiones publicitarias y propagandísticas."⁷

Through an intermingling of the "real" and the "fantastic" by means of displacement, Cortázar reveals a deep sense of rebellion against those traditionally accepted concepts of time, space, and character identity that bind man and hinder him from a better understanding of self. Through temporal, spatial, and identity displacement Cortázar has not only succeeded in freeing man but at the same time has brought a dimension to Latin American literature so original and visionary that its full significance is, as yet, difficult to measure:

How Cortázar became what he is is a disconcertingly difficult question to answer. . . . His importance is hard to assess. He wonders himself what it all amounts to. 'I don't flatter myself that I'll be able to achieve anything transcendental,' he says, skeptically. But there is little doubt that he already has. He is perhaps the first man in our

⁷García Canclini, op. cit., p. 12.

literature to have built a complete fictional metaphysic. If, as all originals, he would seem to be a bit of an aside for the moment, the shock waves his work has spread may well be echoes of the future.⁸

⁸Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., pp. 208-209.

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