

## CORTAZAR, TAKING NOTES (*TEORIA DEL TUNEL* AND *DIARIO DE ANDRES FAVA*)

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**Abstract:** In his 1947 book-length lecture notes *Teoría del túnel*, Julio Cortázar summarized the state of contemporary European literature as a dialectic between existentialism and Surrealism; but a closer examination shows that he is far more engaged with Surrealism than existentialism, and in both cases he evokes much older traditions than one might imagine from these terms. His interest in the "lyric novel" goes beyond Surrealism, to include writers such as Rilke and Gide. It's useful to compare his *Teoría* with his practice, specifically the Gidean small book that accompanies *El examen* (1950), the also posthumously published *Diario de Andrés Fava*. Fava, the novelist character in *El examen*, performs in his diary an extreme isolation and inwardness, typical of the young Gide and Rilke's young Malte Laurids Brigge, that goes well beyond the alienation felt by all the characters of *El examen*. Uncannily, Cortázar predicts that this work will (always, only) be read as an "immature" work by a future old master—a fate guaranteed by its posthumous publication; meanwhile, the text simultaneously elaborates on and protests this treatment, a supplement that stubbornly bears witness to a time and place he wishes to put behind him but also memorialize.

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The vast amount of posthumous material that Cortázar's literary executors published after his death in 1984 was categorized and hierarchized in various ways. Some of these ways are obvious: the nine-volume Galaxia Gutenberg edition, begun in 2003, follows traditional distinctions between short stories, novels, plays, "poesía y poética" (in order to combine Cortázar's relatively limited verse output with his unpublished 500-page essay on Keats), "obra crítica," letters, interviews, and a volume entitled *Prosa varia*, which will no doubt be the least satisfying to those who think of the necessary visual elements of the original versions of *La vuelta al día*, *Ultimo round*, *Prosa del observatorio*, *Fantómas contra los vampiros multinacionales*, or even *Territorios* and *Silvalandia*. But in fact much of Cortázar's *prosa* is *varia*: dozens of tiny compromises have already been made to make some of Cortázar's generically recalcitrant texts fit into these categories.

Another way in which the works have been categorized is through a mix of chronology and hierarchy. When Cortázar left Argentina in 1951, he had only just published two works under his own name, the mythological closet drama *Los reyes*, of very small circulation, and the far more impressive short story collection *Bestiario*. A huge amount of the work of the executors, therefore, has been to unearth and send out the various works that Cortázar wrote before the age of thirty-seven but did not publish: the creation of a "Julio argentino" to complement the cosmopolitan Cortázar of *Rayuela* and of the political turn in support of Cuba and Nicaragua and against the Southern Cone dictatorships. Besides the long essay on Keats, Cortázar's executors have published a volume of stories from before *Bestiario* with a title that indicates its interest in the supernatural, but also implies that they are not an addition to his European oeuvre: *La otra orilla*. These stories did not surface immediately; nor did the Keats book; what came out first was the novel *El examen* (1950/87), which in this way and through other signs is considered to be the very best of the "Julio argentino" we did not see. The editor's introductions of *La otra orilla* and of the other unpublished novel *Divertimento* (1949/88) have at times the apologetic air of someone selling flawed goods, but not *El examen*, where what needs to be explained is not why the executors are publishing it posthumously, but why it was not published during Cortázar's lifetime.

In the realm of critical essays, another work was "promoted" posthumously: *Teoría del túnel*, Cortázar's long essay of lecture notes on recent philosophy and literature for the college courses he had been teaching in the Argentine interior, which he wrote up in 1947; as it is often summarized—and what good collection of lecture notes cannot be summarized?—it makes the argument that the main lines of modern thought and literature are Existentialism in philosophy and Surrealism in literature, and that both proceed by destroying while they create, as one moves forward by burrowing a tunnel; that both are trying to solve the problem of the inadequacy of form to capture and communicate experiences and what lies beyond experience. Published separately among the 1994 Alfaguara complete works, by the 2003 Galaxia Gutenberg complete works it has been placed out of chronological order at the very front of the *Obra crítica* volume, where Saúl Sosnowski refers to it half-seriously as "el aleph de la obra de Cortázar y acceso anticipatorio al taller del escritor" (12).<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, *Teoría del túnel* has received more praise than another aesthetic work of this period, *Diario de Andrés Fava* (1950/1986). This slim work is a fictional diary-notebook kept by one of the main characters of *El examen*. To my knowledge, before the Galaxia Gutenberg Complete Works the text had never been incorporated into editions of *El examen*. This suggests that the executors do not think that the text particularly complements the text of *El examen*; indeed, I tend to agree. Perhaps one ought to pass it over (not a single article has been published about it in academic literary journals); but perhaps also we might take it as a bellwether for how a "minor text" fares in a literary

1. Following Sosnowski's suggestions, recent readings that deploy *Teoría del túnel* to interpret *Rayuela* include Díaz de León Ibarra (2011) and Pérez (2020).

World dominated by (seemingly always in capital letters) Existentialism and Surrealism. Reading *Teoría del túnel* along with *Diario de Andrés Fava* can show that at times Cortázar wrote along with, and at other times at cross-purposes with, his own aesthetic. If *Teoría del túnel* is an “aleph,” then *Diario de Andrés Fava*, although written three years later, belongs to another alphabet altogether, an even older one, one that the young nostalgic in Cortázar was reluctant to abandon entirely.

### Tunnel Visions

*Teoría del túnel* is a much more interesting, much quirkier, text than the above summary would imply. Although supposedly written up in order to give order to lecture notes for students studying European literature, it has as a protagonist an “escritor rebelde” whom Cortázar leads through the various possibilities of solitude and commitment. It is the work of an almost terrifyingly well-read *litterateur*, and amateur philosopher, who is remarkably free of both the Argentine national discourses of the day and the “official” cosmopolitan discourse of the day, the authors gathered by Victoria Ocampo and Borges’s journal *Sur*.<sup>2</sup> His specific take on those two contested terms of our summary above, “Surrealism” and “Existentialism,” are all his own.

The first of these terms to be set up for “el joven escritor de 1915 para quien el libro debe culminar en lo universal, ser su puente y su revelación” [the young writer of 1915 for whom the book must end in the universal, must be his bridge and his revelation](57), is Surrealism, which by 1947 has already undergone its own series of vicissitudes. (Latin Americanists have been aware for decades of Cuban Alejo Carpentier’s 1949 contrast of an ossified French Surrealism with a living American “real maravilloso.”) Surrealism is the most successful solution to the problem of world literature as Cortázar saw it: the end of “el culto del Libro” (subtitle of the book’s first section), the faith that the contemporary forms of literature are adequate to capture and communicate human reality; exempla of such faith are Mallarmé in poetry and Flaubert in narrative, although each is understood, on closer inspection, to question this same faith. Precursors to the Surrealist rejection of the cult of the book are Lautréamont and Rimbaud, both of them emphasizing man’s anguished solitude in a world without God, Rimbaud notoriously rejecting literature altogether at the age of twenty-one. The next generations explored near-solipsistic elements of the Self; the authors of these novels, a strain of which moves into the present day (D’Annunzio to Alain Fournier to Kafka to Woolf among many others) are called “novelistas poéticos, o poetistas”; in a tight relationship with them are writers engaged in the destruction of inherited forms such as the Dadaists; only the Surrealists practiced a simultaneous destruction and creation, just as it is necessary to dig and haul dirt while one is moving forward as one digs a new tunnel. The essay makes some gestures towards sketching out a nineteenth-century dichotomy between romanticism and realism, and Cortázar throughout this essay feels fully at home in the idealist vocabulary of the Romantics, distinguishing between the everyday communicative *palabra* and the metaphysically charged *Verbo*. The Surrealists’ activity, for Cortázar, continues a century-long search for transcendent experience, where words are incantatory, instrumental, but not communicative in the first instance, the Surrealist using words to go beyond words. It is not hard to see why Sosnowski and others would see such ideas as the intellectual foundation of the project of *Rayuela*. And although the argument towards the end declares that existentialism and surrealism are on equal footing as contributors to the task of the writer in the present, in reality much more space is devoted to the elaboration of the lineage of the *poetistas’* search for forms and language that will not betray the radical incompleteness of human experience, with the result that it is clear that the “escritor rebelde” will have much more of the surrealist than the existentialist in him.<sup>3</sup>

2. By 1950 and *El examen/Diario de Andrés Fava*, he will have had enough contact with the personalities of *Sur*, mostly through his job working at the Cámara Argentina del Libro, that he can at least tell a few anecdotes about them.

3. It would be witty but unfair to label *Teoría del túnel*’s turn to Existentialism an act of *mauvais foi*. For an essay that does a careful and sympathetic job of examining the final two of the eight chapters of *Túnel*, in which Cortázar finally makes the ethical and political turn away from the Surrealists and the lyrical novel and towards (his own understanding of) Existentialism, see Relva (2022). Relva’s essay is especially interesting for working through the concept of community as expressed in the texts of Blanchot and Nancy of 1983, i.e., texts informed by but also somewhat in retreat from the revolutionary aspirations of mai 1968.

Indeed, Cortázar's idea of existentialism is also somewhat nineteenth-century. He has read Sartre, alludes to Heidegger's concept of *Sorge* or care, and quotes a novel by André Malraux; but his constant repetition of Kierkegaard's pivotal concept of angst, *angustia*, and his emphasis on human solitude in a world without God strike notes more characteristic of an era well before Sartre's turn towards existence as a Being-in-History. For Cortázar, existentialism means that we seek moving out of the isolating solipsistic self not through a search for a transcendent Being, but through engagement with other people, what he calls the movement "del Yo al Tú" [from the I to the You] (117), as well as through a thinking that moves out into action, and existentialism is essentially ethical, not political, certainly not Marxist (he explicitly rejects the Russian Revolution as ushering in a new relationship between people). All this makes for a philosophical stance whose idealism assimilates into humanism, hence the concluding chapter's title, "Humanismo mágico [i.e., Surrealism] y heroico [i.e., existentialism]."

"Magical and heroic humanism": it is all a fascinating mix of radical, centrist, and conservative thinking. Centrist: the renegade Surrealists whom Cortázar would also find interesting, such as Artaud and Georges Bataille —Cortázar wrote Artaud's obituary for *Sur* in 1948, and in the '60s cited Bataille's essays on eroticism from the late '50s—were renegades because they questioned whether any project of humanism, in its Surrealist form or not, was worthwhile; Cortázar will not pursue these arguments on an intellectual plane here in 1947, and indeed throughout his career post- or anti-humanist elements may appear in his creative writing but not in the formal occasions of his non-fiction voice. Radical: Cortázar speaks of the Surrealist's interest in magical thinking with only the most minimal irony: he straightforwardly believes that there are other realities beyond or behind or before what we can perceive and express in declarative prose, and that the imaginative artist can gain a fitful access to them. And conservative: while duly honoring Rimbaud and Lautréamont, some of the other "novelistas poéticos, o poetistas" whom Cortázar seems to find most engaging are the most backward-looking writers of their historical moment.

### Gateway Drugs, Lonely Aristocrats, and Other False Coins

Sosnowski and the executors of Cortázar's posthumous oeuvre want to see *Teoría del túnel* as a sort of aleph for Cortázar's future writing. In his first international celebrity interview, "Julio Cortázar, or the Metaphysical Slap in the Face" from Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann's *Into the Mainstream* (1967), Cortázar proposed an earlier aleph for his career as a reader:

"I changed radically as a result of reading certain French writers—for instance, Cocteau. One day when I was about eighteen I read Cocteau's *Opium*. It was a flash of lightning that opened a new world for me." He threw out about half of his library and "plunged headlong into the world Cocteau was showing me ... all that world between 1915 and 1925, and Surrealism: Breton, Eluard, Crevel." (Harss and Dohmann 231)

What was there about Cocteau's *Opium* to intoxicate an eighteen-year-old in Buenos Aires? As the conversation continues, Cocteau is left behind for other more prestigious names ("Breton, Eluard, Crevel") and "Surrealism" is dutifully offered as the master term. True enough: and the idea that Cocteau's book allows Cortázar to participate belatedly in an intellectual and artistic community—all those cenacles, from the friends of *Divertimento* and *El examen* to the Serpent Club of *Rayuela* through to the Joda of *Libro de Manuel* and, why not, the "club de Glenda"—is certainly borne out by the text of *Opium*, which is liberally scattered with tantalizing name-dropping.

But Cocteau's circles in *Opium* are wider than those of most Surrealists (he is a man of the theater; he visits Proust), and Cocteau is not the intellectual polemicist and radical that Breton and Aragon were in the glory days of Surrealism. There are certainly large elements of the book which the young Cortázar seems to discard (he shows no interest in opium or any other drugs in the letters or texts of the first part of his career, for instance); but he seems to have imbibed Surrealism from Cocteau not as the rebarbative propaganda of the Bretonian manifestoes which he duly praises as such in *Teoría del túnel*, let alone the anti-humanist strains of Artaud and Bataille who are not mentioned at all in 1947, but as a softer, dreamier extension of the fin-de-siècle.<sup>4</sup> Andrés Fava, character in *El examen* and supposed author of *Diario de Andrés Fava*, is the Surrealist as late Symbolist.

Cocteau's book is one of an important handful of books during high modernism which refuse the grand gesture of the tome—Mann, Joyce, Proust—in favor of a much humbler form, the notebook. In the case of Cocteau (as it would be for important parts of Breton's *Nadja*), the notebook is multimedia, with reproductions of Cocteau's own drawings, and self-referential comments on why he was drawing as well as writing during his opium addiction and subsequent cure. Indeed, the power of the non-fiction "I" in a text of fragments is a crucial element of Cortázar's oeuvre, especially the multi-media almanac books of the '60s. Although this voice is constituted in prose, it is essentially a lyric "I," and while a personal voice comes unproblematically to many writers it is evident that Cortázar first wrote poems of high impersonality and began his career as a short story writer rigorously avoiding the autobiographical.

Of course, the lyric "I" in prose is not ineluctably non-fictional; for every *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire* of Rousseau there is a *Sorrows of Young Werther* of Goethe. Another crucial early influence on Cortázar's sensibility is Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, which he read in French translation before he learned German: indeed, "Yo he estudiado alemán para leer a Rilke" [I studied German in order to read Rilke], he tells his friend Mercedes Arias (4/15/42, *Cartas*, 129). There are over a dozen references to Rilke in Cortázar's collected letters from the '40s, almost all in letters to various women who were friends and colleagues in the provinces. Rilke seems particularly suitable for presenting to these women the themes of existentialism that do not require either rigorous philosophy or Nietzschean or Unamuno-esque grandstanding:

Es que, en el fondo, ¡estamos tan solos! Rilke—un grande y admirable poeta, Marcela, [...] —lo vio con desoladora profundidad, en un libro que ustedes leerán alguna vez con emoción que se llama *Los cuadernos de Malte Laurids Brigge*. [...] Rilke, como todo poeta, midió el abismo de soledad que disfrazamos con el nombre de corazón humano. El se dio cuenta de que si los hombres no tuvieran la mano de Dios que los sostiene, caerían como un plomo dentro de sí mismos... Y llegó, en sus últimos años, a considerar como una dignidad del ser esa soledad absoluta de la condición humana. (4/10/40, a Lucienne y Marcelle Duprat, *Cartas* 77)

[It is because, in the end, we are so alone! Rilke — a great and admirable poet, Marcela ... saw it with a devastating insight in a book that you will read sometime with great emotion, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* ... Like any poet, Rilke measured the abyss of solitude that we disguise under the name of the human heart. He realized that if men were not holding God's hand, they would plummet into themselves... And in his later years he came to consider this absolute human solitude to be something like a dignity of the self.]

4. For a different project one might compare this brief text, with no narrative separate from its parent text *El examen*, with Colombian José Asunción Silva's fin-de-siècle diary-novel *De sobremesa* (1896/1923). However, *De sobremesa* is not one of the very few Spanish-language texts mentioned in *Teoría del túnel*, whose poetistas are Jarnés and Gabriel Miró and whose committed writers are Gallegos and Neruda.

We might say that Cocteau and Rilke are the Surrealist and Existentialist that the young Cortázar found suitable for his older female friends, his first “lectores hembras.” But while Rilke also peppers his text with opinions about contemporaries or set pieces about writers and other artists of the past, he also creates a fictional character for his notebooks, the young Danish aristocrat who needs to come to Paris (where he has a mental breakdown) in order, first, to assume the reality of his present as cultured but impoverished and alone, and then to engage in the arduous task of remembering his childhood, his genealogy, and his unrequited loves. (*Diario de Andrés Fava* seems to me most Rilkean in its evocation of the power of childhood imagination, although that is hardly a theme unique to *Malte Laurids Brigge*.) In the larger argument of *Teoría del túnel* Cortázar finds that this necessary concentration of self must be followed by a moving out of self, which Rilke the poet achieves in his *New Poems* and *Duino Elegies*, although it is not in the *Notebooks* itself.

A third writer of notebooks who is praised in *Teoría del túnel* as another “poetista” is André Gide. Gide is harder to place than Cocteau or Rilke on the axis that Cortázar has established of “poetistas” and “existencialistas,” because of the length of his career, a point to which we will return: author of late-Symbolist fiction at the beginning of his career in the 1900s, he moves from the “I” to the “you” in non-fiction writing attacking colonialism in Africa and then, in the ‘30s, rejecting the commitment to Stalinist Russia that other French (and Latin American) anti-Fascists felt necessary to make. Generally Gide is praised in *Teoría del túnel* as the author as technician, who sees the inherited forms as not living up to the realities of the present and relishing the challenge of updating these forms to produce harmonious works.

If Cortázar could not find a more prominent place for Gide in his story of existentialism meeting “poetism/Surrealism,” it might be because he would not be willing to grant a separate status to one of Gide’s “technical” solutions to a narrative problem in his most celebrated novel, *The Counterfeiters* (1926), written between his “poetist” youth and his statesmanly sixties. Indeed in that novel the very young and the middle-aged interact. A novelist, Edouard, becomes interested in the scandalous activities, including passing along counterfeit coins, that are taking place in his upper-class nephew’s school; as we occasionally see in such art novels (such as the end of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*), Gide includes excerpts from Edouard’s diary and journals. But Gide went a step further, and also published a *Diary of The Counterfeiters*, where he himself had kept a record of his thoughts as he was writing the book, and the technical problems he encountered while writing it. Gide would go on, beginning in 1939, to publish four volumes of the journals he would keep for sixty years, which accompany his other autobiographical writings over his career.

Gide’s combination of metafiction and paratext is a practical way to break the “cult of the Book”: there is a book within the book, giving away some of the secrets of the book, and a book outside the book, giving away other secrets while aspiring to be a literary work in its own right. The mature Cortázar would take this Gidean technical solution to extremes in *Rayuela*, with its *Morelliana*; and he not only kept a logbook while writing *Rayuela*, which he gave to critic Ana María Barrenechea even before the novel became a runaway hit and which was eventually published in 1983, but he also swiftly compiled and published *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), which includes paratexts, not all serious, which also help to read *Rayuela*. But even this “less mature” Cortázar of 1950 wanted a try at writing his version of metafiction and internal paratextual commentary. It might be that Cortázar was sensitive to such technical decisions in Gide thanks to concomitant readings of Borges which emphasize metafiction and the blurring of layers of reality. But *Diario de Andrés Fava* doesn’t sound



like an intellectual skeptic like Borges: it sounds like the novel of an impassioned *poetista* like Cocteau, Rilke, or Gide.

#### Andrés Fava: The Porteño in the Tower

"Me revientan estos mocos mentales," [These mental trails of snot disgust me] so Andrés Fava mocks himself at the beginning of his *Diario* (extending the metaphor of "mocos" literally, he adds that "También los japoneses se suenan en papeles" [the Japanese also blow their noses into paper] (9)). This frequent return to self-mockery or self-criticism is perhaps the tonal note of *Diario* that is least characteristic of Cocteau, Rilke, or Gide, who each behave as if theirs is the only journal of its kind ever embarked upon, and a worthy place for their worthy reflections. But the first entry in Andrés's diary ends with a line that could have been taken from any one of the writers in the "poetista" tradition: "Lo que se da en llamar 'clásico' es siempre cierto producto logrado con el sacrificio de la verdad a la belleza" [What one terms as 'classic' is always a certain product achieved by sacrificing truth for beauty] (9). A diary is a discourse of truth, not of beauty; it is fragmented, not classically complete; it is therefore not beautiful—or rather, since there is obviously a literary tradition of such diaries whose prose style is indeed beautiful, Andrés creates a text, and Cortázar tries to create a character, that is unaware of its/his own beauty. Indeed, after the next entry, which describes a moment of perfect melancholy beauty when a trick of the perspective lets a stone angel seem to hover above the trees of Chacarita cemetery before the smoke and noise of the buses and their passengers outside the cemetery gates spoil the harmony, Fava then mocks his own prose style, or the way a scene can generate a lyric response: "(La tierna idiotez de algunas frases. Suspiros verbales)" [The tender idiocy of certain expressions. Verbal sighs] (10).

Andrés continues to question the worth of writing a journal, making national and cultural comparisons to his own detriment:

Tal vez este diario sea ocupación de argentino; como el café—diario oral de vida—, las mujeres en cadena, los negocios fáciles y la tristeza mansa. Qué difícil parece aquí una construcción coherente, un orden y un estilo. Además, para escribir un diario hay que merecerlo. Como Gide, o T.E. Lawrence. [...] Si hubiera vivido bien, si hubiera muerto bien, [...] entonces sí; entonces poner en palabras las cosas que quedaban por decir, las espumitas, los surplus de guerra. (12-3)

[Perhaps this diary is an Argentine's occupation; like the daily coffee – an oral diary of life – serial girlfriends, easy jobs and tamed sadness. How hard it seems to get here a coherent construction, an order or a style. Besides, to write a diary, one has to deserve the privilege. Like Gide or T.E. Lawrence [...] If I had lived well, if I had only died well [...] then I would deserve to put into words the things that remained to be said, the foam, the war surplus.]

The implication is that, by the very fact of being a (mere) Argentine, Fava/Cortázar does not deserve to keep a journal, since he is neither a hero like Lawrence of Arabia nor a dedicated and well-published writer and traveler such as Gide. (Much later in the novel, he will ambiguously paraphrase the famous Goya line: "Un Journal como el de Gide enteramente de vigilia, sin rastros de sueño. Ay, este cuaderno es la jaula de monstruos; afuera está Buenos Aires" [A Journal like Gide's, entirely for vigil, with no traces of sleep. Oh! this notebook is the cage of monsters; Buenos Aires lies outside] (67). In Buenos Aires, it is the vigil of reason that produces monsters. Certainly the idea of a diary as leftovers implies that the text is paratextual, to the side either of an

active life or of a more prestigious text.

Diary entries are “war surplus”: what is the war in 1950 Buenos Aires? The earlier lyric response (“Suspiro verbal”) was a meditation that some day the cemetery will protect his corpse from the buses, and a repeated theme in both *El examen* and *the Diario*, besides Andrés’s awareness of his own mortality, is the pressure of other people, whether individuals or crowds – the *monstruos* of the above quote –, upon the sensitive poet-diarist. Still, they are far more often individuals than crowds. A half-mad homosexual in a boardinghouse in Mendoza (15-18); an abrupt conversation with a stranger when telephone lines cross (63-64); even his own family and friends (78-80): each encounter reminds him of his solitude, a solitude he makes worse by emphasizing that both seduction and close friendship –for him, at any rate—are best when they preserve some kinds of distances (“Sólo duele verificar, en plena compañía, tanta isla insalvable” [It only hurts to recognize, among this company, so many lonely islands] (72-4) –the passage began with the description of the physical decline and death of a friend, which I presume is the death of Paco Reta, to whom he dedicated *Bestiario* in 1951).

This sense of the isolated self, in an Argentina at the end of the world, is epitomized in the first half of *Diario de Andrés Fava* in an image that resonates with the fin-de-siècle individualism of the “poetista” strain of lyric fiction:

Pienso en un monje de la decadencia romana, perdido en alguna provincia fronteriza, solo, con perros e imágenes, y que hubiera dejado testimonio escrito de los rumores que le llegaban después de años, de ríos, de hombres. [...]

He sido un poco este monje, y puedo imaginarlo tan claramente. Desde esta torre austral he escuchado las voces del tiempo. Empiezan a ordenarse, a tomar altura, a situarse en profundidad. (45-6)

[I am thinking of a monk at the decline of the Roman empire, lost in some border province, alone, in the company of only dogs and images. That monk would have left a written testimony of rumors that reached him after years, rivers, men...

I have been, a little, this monk, and I can imagine him so clearly. From this austral tower I have heard the voices of time. They begin to fall into an order, to reach their height, to locate themselves in the depths]

The passage continues with a range of allusions to moments in politics, history, the arts, and so on (what Fava/Cortázar earlier calls an “inventario” (26)), ending with reflections on the role of such a monk, such an attitude towards the world:

Si recordé (o inventé) al monje, era por otras razones. Hay un día en que la oreja alcanza su educación, en que la caracola aprende a distinguir los rumores. Es muy triste tener otro destino personal que no tenerlo, pero en la emergencia se puede ser al menos una buena oreja, una oreja que entienda los tonalismos y los atonalismos de su tiempo. Si el Teseo de Cuverville dice: Viví, el monje de Buenos Aires murmura Oí.<sup>5</sup> Incluso hay un día en que se aprende a escuchar, en que se desdeñan rumores. (47-8)

[If I remembered (or invented) that monk, it was for other reasons. There comes a day when one's ear completes its education, when the seashell learns to pick out the rumors. It

5. The “Theseus of Cuverville” is Gide’s 1946 play *Thésée*; Gide wrote it at his family home in Cuverville, and there is a confrontation between Oedipus (protagonist of a Gide play in 1931) and Theseus, between mystic sufferer and man of action.



is very sad to have no other personal destiny than not to have one, but in times of emergency one can at least be a good ear, an ear that can pick out the chords and discords of the time. If the Theseus of Cuerville says, "I lived," the monk of Buenos Aires whispers, "I heard." There even comes a day when one learns to listen directly, when one can discard the rumors.

Cortázar/Fava again privileges one kind of listening over another, a search for some truer or more potent Verbo rather than the mere palabra (or *rumores*).

Of course we expect this inward listening to be opposed dialectically with some outward action over the course of the rest of the *Diario*. It seems to; there is something of a tonal change two-thirds of the way in, in a section that begins, "Lo cierto es irse. Quedarse es ya la mentira, la construcción, las paredes que parcelan el espacio pero que no lo anulan" (89) [The true thing is to leave. To stay is now the lie; the walls divide the space but they do not cancel it]; but in fact, the movement outward is not fully achieved. Consonant with the ideas of *Teoría del túnel*, Andrés Fava sees his ethical goal (not a political goal; he repeats his defense of a Sartrean vocabulary against a Marxist political commitment (41-2)) as the movement from the *yo* to the *tú*; however, the movement out from the self in the larger novel is the action of protecting his two friends Juan and Clara from being attacked by the ghost of an ex-friend; this constitutes an insular, almost incestuous moving-out, not so much from the *yo* to the *tú* but really from the *yo* to the *nosotros*, although a sacrificial one (it is presumed that Andrés dies in the confrontation with the ghost Abel). And indeed the passage that began "lo cierto es irse" (which could after all be interpreted as "irse de Buenos Aires para París": Juan and Clara at the end of *El examen* are saved from a rotting Buenos Aires when Andrés places them on a boat to Paris) ends with a defense of suicide, a very different sort of *irse* than the Malrauxian commitment. Here in this diary, and perhaps also within the larger project of *El examen*, the *poetista* remains within the self, or within the extended self of the small group of friends, while Buenos Aires looms all around them.

If there is any dialectical turn at the end of this monk's tower of a short novel, it is from its autonomous space of reflection to its dutiful return to its service in the plot, characterization, and mood of its parent text *El examen*. (Actually, it makes no contribution to the plot, but at least some later passages can be related chronologically to the events in the other novel's plot; otherwise this "diario" has no dates.) Aesthetic debates which had been expounded by Andrés alone—mostly about language as an instrument for expression that takes on its own meaning and drive, so that it writes the poet more than the poet writes it—give way to writing down conversations between Andrés and Juan; Andrés begins to collect epigraphs for "la novela que me gustaría escribir" [The novel I would love to write] (119); and finally, addressing a topic that is virtually taboo among him and his friends in the larger work, Andrés remarks on the mist that has overcome the city, while at the same time declaring it a "truco," a "trick," and saying that to describe it further would be to "continuar, sustitutivamente, una descripción que reemplaza lo otro" [to continue, as a substitution, with a description that takes place of something else] (124). Many of the paragraphs and sentences of the last ten pages remain unfinished; the last word of the last sentence is "aunque" [despite].

But if "Andrés Fava" is dragged back to his status as a fictional character who will soon sacrifice himself for his friends, it is with a remark on Gide that he insists on the way this novel mixes levels of reality: "Frase a deslizar, para sorpresa, delicia, o escándalo (según el lector) en cualquier nota de las influencias: La obra más lograda de Marc Allegret [Gide's young lover who served as the basis of the protagonists Bernard and Olivier of *The Counterfeiters*] es una novela, *Les faux-monnayeurs*"

(111) [A sentence to quote to the surprise, the delight or the scandal (depending on the reader) when discussing the matter of influences: the best work by Marc Allegret is a novel, *Les faux-monnayeurs*]. Andrés Fava may be fictional, but he can claim to be the author of *El examen* just as much as he “is” the author of *Diario de Andrés Fava*.

### **Conclusions: (How) Minor (Literature) Works; Instructions for Lingering on a Staircase**

After so many accusations from Argentina’s nationalist left wing (and even statements in later interviews by Cortázar himself) that the young Cortázar was no more than a haughty aesthete, it is nice to find that as early as 1947 Cortázar was yearning to move out of his “torre austral” in existentialist calls to action, to move from a *yo* to a *tú*. But a closer look at *Teoría del túnel* suggests that the older Cortázar was right to see his actual commitment as not occurring until much later, and that his heart was more firmly placed in the works of late-Symbolist aesthetes who were perhaps only borrowing labels like Surrealist and Existentialist to complete the Symbolist program. Cortázar saw this as a phase that he had to grow out of, as other novelists grew out of their youthful works.

Given that the constant complaint among the nationalist left (such as David Viñas and Ricardo Piglia) is that Cortázar saw the Peronist masses as monsters, it is nice to conclude this examination of the young Cortázar’s poetics and praxis with a passage from Andrés Fava where he has written along its side “le monstre”:

Lo admirable en la “carrera” de un escritor como Gide, es el desarrollo progresivo, armonioso, de las partes que un día integrarán frondosamente el árbol dado al viento. [...] Ir advirtiéndolo, al leer cronológicamente su obra, cómo el convertirse en un escritor (doy a la palabra todo el sentido humano) es menos escribir ciertas cosas que resignarse a no escribir muchas otras. [...] Gide escribe a los veinte años lo que debe escribirse a esa edad y solamente a esa edad; de sus cuarenta nace la justa fragancia del fruto; sus sesenta son hondos, estilizados, lujosos; su muerte le llega como la última página del libro que los contiene a todos; previsible, necesaria, casi cómoda. (91-93)

[What is admirable in the career of a writer like Gide is his progressive and harmonious development of the independent parts that one day will come together as a luxuriant tree blowing its leaves in the wind ... [it is impressive] to realize as one reads his works chronologically, how he became a writer (and I use this term in its full human sense) less by writing about certain things by resigning himself to stop writing about many other things... At the age of twenty Gide writes what should be written at that age and only at that age. In his forties, the fair fragrance of the fruit is born; his sixties are deep, stylized, luxurious; his death comes to him as the final page of a book that contains its previous stages. It is predictable, necessary, almost comfortable]

Apparently in 1950 for Cortázar such an approach to a literary career is both admirable and makes Gide a monster.

In 1947 Cortázar proposed a theory of Western literature of the twentieth century, and it too tended to propose that young writers should write young works, mature writers mature ones, and complete writers complete works. The works of young writers should be in the Romantic tradition of questioning inherited language to hear inner voices and *lo otro*; this may give these books a solipsistic air which will render them the minor works of a fuller career. But not to worry: in a

next move the author will move out into the world of men. The successful older writer will have the privilege of seeing his own career as the individual's movement from adolescence to maturity as well as seeing how the history of literature has moved with him, indeed, perhaps, how the history of Man has moved with him.

Cortázar, then, laid something of a trap for his readership, and his executors, when he postponed the publication of his earlier work until after his death. No one ever had the opportunity of reading *Diario de Andrés Fava* as the work of a thirty-two year-old; it could only be read in retrospect, as part of an oeuvre. Therefore we are likely, if we are not careful, to see it as existing, first, only in relation to *El examen*, which is often itself read only as the all-porteño first draft of *Rayuela*. Andrés Fava's diary entries are *El examen's* "dispensable chapters," which are indeed dispensed with (published separately at first), insofar as they do not actually tell us more about the mysteries of the ghost of Abel and the mist of a decaying Buenos Aires. It is noble that Cortázar wrote them, just as it is noble for Andrés to fatally confront the ghost of Abel in the novel's penultimate page, but our author-monster must move on to the next phase of his career, where the aesthetic paratext is no "monje austral" whose ear mostly has picked up the detritus at the end of Western Civilization, but the gnomic yet down-to-earth philosopher-metaphysician Morelli of *Rayuela*.

Secondly, we could fall into the trap of reading *Diario de Andrés Fava* as no more than an exemplification of Cortázar's "theory of the tunnel," which argues that all great twentieth-century novelists should start out sounding like Andrés Fava, but then they should snap out of it and make the movement from the *yo* to the *tú*. Such a reading tends to underestimate the lopsidedness in *Teoría del túnel's* own argumentation, whereas a close reading shows that it vastly favors the Surrealists and even less antagonistic, more late-Symbolist *poetistas* over their dialectical counterpart the existentialists. Over the course of his oeuvre, the author-monster Cortázar gives himself many chances to move out to the *tú*. If the austral monk doesn't snap out of it at the end of writing *Diario de Andrés Fava*, perhaps he will do so at the end of *Rayuela*, or perhaps at the end of *Libro de Manuel* in 1973, a novel one of whose protagonists, an aesthete who slowly achieves a truly political commitment, is also named Andrés Fava. All these moves towards other texts of the oeuvre of the author-monster Cortázar play down the tentative, multi-layered, and self-contradictory nature of each one of Cortázar's novels, which cannot be reduced to the neat dialectical chronology of his 1947 notes because each one in a different way makes a case for nostalgia, for letting the search for a present and future be imbued with, possibly even stalled by, a search for the past. And in a different challenge to dialectical chronology, the practices of metafiction and paratextuality keep on splitting messages, allowing for second thoughts, redefining the present of the text. Unlike that monster Gide, Cortázar never fully resigns himself, while writing certain things, to stop writing many others.

These moves towards seeing the *Diario* as (merely) part of an oeuvre also, most simply, draw attention away from the work itself. This would be a pity, even though the work acknowledges itself as a minor work. But then, that's how minor works work: as the fill-ins of panoramic arguments (just as, in some ways, entire minor literatures fill in panoramic arguments about world literature), it is hard to appreciate them without invoking some transcendental concept that may give them meaning ("novelas poetistas") but also render them invisible. In one of the longer passages of the *Diario*, Andrés writes a praise of the small, the secondary, the minor:

Pienso en el demasiado famoso "To see the world in a grain of sand". Tal vez lo que importe sea ver el grano de arena como un grano de arena; adquirir una apreciación de lo pequeño, de

6. The poet character in Cortázar's *Divertimento*, written in 1949, shows off some prose poems whose aesthetic is identical to the "Materia plastica" section of *Cronopios*, which was not published until 1962.

lo menor, de lo —si se quiere— innecesario. Es fácil amar una abeja cuando se la piensa recipiente de Dios, su criatura; ya no es tan fácil amarla sólo como abeja, grano de arena del aire.

Le digo a un camarada: “Tú concibes que a mi edad me pueda seguir emocionando un disquito donde hay dieciséis compases que guardan el gran corazón de un hombre que se murió y se llamaba Bix?” Me dice: “No”.

[...] Lo peor es ver cómo las grandes ideas—democracia, moral, etcétera; fascismo, poderío, etcétera—no sólo condicionan la circunstancia inmediata del hombre, sino que lo inducen a escamotearla, a sacrificar el pequeño círculo al grande. Cuando se piensa en la Música malo para las pobres músicas.

Me dirás (estoy escribiendo a lo Horacio): “Por las músicas, se asciende a la Música.” Razón de más para no olvidar que una escalera es una suma de peldaños. (83-84).

[I think of the famous “to see the world in a grain of sand.” Perhaps what is important is to see the grain of sand as a grain of sand, to have an appreciation of the small, the minor, the -- if you will-- unnecessary. It is easier to love a bee when one thinks of it as a recipient of God, as God’s creature. It is not so easy to love it just as bee, as a grain of sand in the air.

I say to a friend: “Can you believe that at my age I can still be moved by a record where sixteen bars bear the heart of a man who is now dead but who went by the name of Bix?” He says “No”]

... What is worse is to see how the big ideas – Democracy, Morality, etc; Fascism, Power, etc. – not only condition the immediate circumstances of man but also induce him to whisk them away, to sacrifice the small circle of life in favor of the big circle. When one thinks of Music too bad for the poor little musics.

You will tell me (I am writing in a Horatian manner) “Through the musics one ascends to Music.” All the more reason to not forget that a staircase is a sum of stairs.]

To read *Diario de Andrés Fava* is, among other things, to read the protest of the *poetista* who is obliged to let the monster of his future self use this minor work to finish his Complete Work. In a different minor work that he was slowly composing over these same years, *Historia de cronopios y de famas*,<sup>6</sup> Cortázar famously defamiliarizes a staircase, “Instrucciones para subir una escalera.” Now that we have the corpus, the oeuvre of Cortázar in the beautiful staircase of the Alfaguara and Galaxia Gutenberg complete works, we should pause as we climb from the *yo* to the *tú* and listen carefully to the creak of the stair.

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6. The poet character in Cortázar’s *Divertimento*, written in 1949, shows off some prose poems whose aesthetic is identical to the “Materia plastica” section of *Cronopios*, which was not published until 1962.

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