RAYUELA'S CONFUSED HERMENEUTICS

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JULIO Cortázar's *Rayuela* is or was at one time infamous for two things: its self-conscious metafictionality and its sexist nomenclature. The following selection from chapter 34, with the lines broken here as they are in the Cátedra edition of 1992, serves as a helpful introduction to both:

> Esto y otras cosas que observé después en sociedad, hicié-
> ... ¿De qué está hablando el tipo? Por ahí acaba de
> ronme comprender los bruscos adelantos que nuestra capital
> mencionar a París y a Londres, habla de gustos y de fortu-
> había realizado desde el 68, adelantos más parecidos a saltos
> nas, ya ves, Maga, ya ves, ahora estos ojos se arrastran ió-
> caprichosos que al andar progresivo y firme de los que saben
> nicos por donde vos andabas emocionada, convencida de
> adónde van; mas no eran por eso menos reales. En una
> que te estabas cultivando una barbaridad porque leías a un
> palabra, me daba en la nariz cierto tufillo de cultura europea,
> novelista español con foto en la contratapa, pero justamen-
> de bienestar y aun de riqueza y trabajo.
> te el tipo habla de tufillo de cultura europea. (343)

Eventually, a reader comes to make sense of the chapter. After a long struggle to help Horacio Oliveira, the protagonist, overcome his cancerous hyper-self-consciousness, his lover, La Maga, has finally abandoned him. Horacio is now reading a novel, Galdós' *Lo prohibido*, that La Maga left behind. Cortázar represents Horacio's typi-

cally self-conscious thoughts with a clever typographical gimmick: he writes the chapter in alternating narrative strands, the odd-numbered lines recording Horacio's rote, aloof reading of the novel's words, the even-numbered lines relating his thoughts as he mocks the writing style for being old-fashioned and La Maga for being so unsophisticated as to let it win her over.

The chapter exemplifies the metafictionality characteristic of *Rayuela* because the alternating strands do not just represent the self-consciousness of the character, they also impose this self-consciousness on the reader: we cannot read this chapter without becoming painfully aware of the reading process. The chapter introduces us to the sexism of Cortázar's novel because Horacio's amused contempt for La Maga's mode of reading anticipates the basic theoretical premise of the notorious "second book" of the novel: that there are two kinds of reader, the "lector-hembra" and the "lector activo" or "lector cómplice." The distinction is explained by a character named Morelli, himself a writer of radical novels, who serves as *Rayuela*'s internal theorist: the *lector-hembra* reads a book passively, a mere witness to the creative production of the author; the *lector activo*, by contrast, consciously participates in the creation of the novel he reads. On the basis of this distinction Cortázar offers us two options for reading his novel, which he explains in a page called the "Tablero de dirección." In the first option, we read the first fifty-six chapters straight through, from 1 to 56. This "first book," with its mostly conventional chapters, is for supposedly feeble-minded and passive *lectores-hembra* like La Maga. In the second option, we also read the chapters of the first book, but with additional chapters 57–155 interpolated into the order according to a list printed at the bottom of the page: "73–1–2–116–3–84–. . . .–58–131." Some of these additions, which Cortázar ironically entitles "capítulos prescindibles," could pass for one of the "inexpendable" chapters of the first book; others are scraps or fragments of apparently unrelated materials: newspaper excerpts, poems, or scraps from Morelli's notebooks. This second book, in which metafiction reigns, is for sophisticated, aggressive *lectores activos* like Horacio. The structural foundation of *Rayuela*, then, rests on stereotypical assumptions more outdated even than a novel by Galdós.

Cortázar has apologized repeatedly for the first term, and he retained the labels as they were originally coined as a kind of

penitential testimony to his former ignorance.[1] He seems to have been forgiven generally. What remains to be regretted about this opponentless debate is the fact that both the author and his critics took exception only to the implication that women are passive by nature, not to the implication that passivity is inherently inferior, particularly with respect to good reading. This puts us in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water. Properly assured that women can be *lectores activos*, too, we let the matter drop, and thus tacitly assent to the machismo behind this disdain for passivity.

What I argue here is that amends more important than Cortázar's public apologies are made in the novel itself, on both the narrative and the metafictional planes. On the narrative plane, the amends are conscious and intentional: the stereotypical female's mode of understanding is portrayed as generally superior to that of the stereotypical male. Specifically, La Maga's intuition beats Horacio's hyperintellectuality. Moreover, La Maga's "passivity" is revealed as the condition of her strength: her self-forgetfulness, even self-effacement, is inseparable from her receptivity to the world. Horacio's hyperactive intellectuality is revealed as the condition of his weakness: his perpetual self-consciousness and desperate self-assertion make him unreceptive to the world. A quirk of the novel is that while on the narrative plane Cortázar respects the value of passivity, on the metafictional plane he disdains it. Nevertheless, amends are made again—accidentally: when put to practice, the novel's theory of reading and writing fails. This failure suggests that what the theory dismisses as "passivity" is in fact indispensable to reading and writing. Thus while unwitting amends have been made, passivity is still owed a formal apology. Perhaps we critics can submit one on Cortázar's behalf.

In doing so, we call to our aid a great apologist for passivity, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Those critics of *Rayuela* who accept Cortá-

[1] See Picon Garfield 117: "pido perdón a las mujeres del mundo por haber utilizado una expresión tan machista y tan de subdesarrollo latinoamericano, y eso deberías ponerlo con todas las letras de la entrevista. Lo hice con toda ingenuidad y no tengo ninguna disculpa, pero cuando empecé a escuchar las opiniones de mis amigas lectoras que me insultaban cordialmente, me di cuenta de que había hecho una tontería. Yo debí poner 'lector pasivo' y no 'lector–hembra,' porque la hembra no tiene por qué ser pasiva continuamente; lo es en ciertas circunstancias, pero no en otras, lo mismo que un macho."

zar's conception of reading naturally turn to the work of reader-response theorists, who emphasize the reader's active role in reading.[2] Gadamer, too, recognizes the reader's activity, but he also argues that far from impeding understanding, passivity makes understanding possible. Through a contrast of Cortázar's and Gadamer's conceptions of reading and writing, I plan to show that *Rayuela*'s second book is premised on the confused idea that the reader's participation in a novel is inversely related to the writer's, when in fact the finite conditions of understanding make it possible for both to increase as one.

I

First we should describe Cortázar's portrayal of male and female modes of understanding as they are embodied in the characters of Horacio and La Maga. Horacio is the post-modern, analytical male paralyzed by his compulsion to think; in short, a descendant of Hamlet. Horacio says, "Parto del principio de que la reflexión debe preceder a la acción" (144), "siempre me costaba mucho menos pensar que ser" (135), and "Pero todo era escindible y admitía en seguida una interpretación antagónica" (582). But the excessively educated Horacio is not self-conscious in the way Hamlet is self-conscious; he is self-conscious in the way only a reader of *Hamlet* and the *Hamlet* tradition of literature could be, hyper-self-conscious.

La Maga is the pre-modern, intuitive female who can help the troubled male transcend his inner conflicts; in short, a descendant of Beatrice.[3] La Maga's mode of understanding is expressly identified as typical of her gender: "para-ser-hembra-la-Maga-se-las-traía" (148). The male members of Horacio's ostentatiously cerebral "Club de la Serpiente" regard her intuition as merely a disappointed intellect. "Era insensato querer explicarle algo a la Maga," they complain, "para gentes como ella el misterio empezaba precisamente con la explicación" (150). Horacio's understanding of La Maga goes deeper. After having tried only half-successfully to explain to her the con-

[2] Percival makes use of Wolfgang Iser's theories. Stone applies the theories of Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, and Umberto Eco.

[3] See Ibsen for a discussion of the women in *Rayuela*, with an emphasis on La Maga.

cepts of unity and plurality, he throws up his hands and asks her, "tu vida, ¿es una unidad para vos?" (212). Her denial—"No, no creo. Son pedazos, cosas que me fueron pasando" (213)—ironically, is proof that her life really is a unity: little capable of abstractions or self-analysis, she lives in brute self-union. Horacio understands. Looking at her necklace, he says, "Pero vos a tu vez pasabas por esas cosas como el hilo por esas piedras verdes" (213). So close to her life that she can't see it coming, La Maga is identical to her progression through the events of her life: she immerses her whole person in each of them, like a string through its beads.

Ultimately, Horacio comes to regard La Maga's intuitive mode of understanding as superior to his own intellectual mode: "Solamente Oliveira se daba cuenta de que la Maga se asomaba a cada rato a esas grandes terrazas sin tiempo que todos ellos buscaban dialécticamente" (150). For a time, Horacio is ready to believe that La Maga can become his redeemer:

> Hay ríos metafísicos, ella los nada como esa golondrina está nadando en el aire. . . . Yo describo y defino y deseo esos ríos, ella los nada. Yo los busco, los encuentro, los miro desde el puente, ella los nada. Y no lo sabe, igualita a la golondrina. . . . Ah, dejame entrar, dejame ver algún día como ven tus ojos. (234)

But in the end, Horacio cannot bring himself to take advantage of La Maga's redemptive possibility. He confesses: "me atormenta tu amor que no me sirve de puente porque un puente no se sostiene de un solo lado. . . . Dadora de infinito, yo no sé tomar, perdoname" (592–93). Thus the traditionally redemptive power of the intuitive woman fails.

In his theories about reading and writing, Cortázar projects this failure of traditional womanly virtues onto the metafictional plane. Passivity is portrayed as the impediment to genuine understanding, and thus the *lector-hembra*, el "tipo que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falsos problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo" (611), becomes a marked man. Morelli's goal is "quebrar los hábitos mentales del lector" (615), and thereby "acabar con el lector-hembra, o por lo menos al menoscabarlo seriamente" (619). Morelli's new kind of novel would refuse to provide the *lector-hembra* with what he wants most, the role of subordinate: the new novel is to be "un texto que no agarre al lector pero que lo vuelva

obligadamente cómplice" (559). Instead, the new novel would be rather shapeless, "algo así como una arcilla significativa" (561), which would call upon the *lector activo* to give it shape: we active readers should *feel* the novel "como sentiríamos el yeso que vertemos sobre un rostro para hacerle una mascarilla. Pero el rostro debería ser el nuestro" (658). In short, it is the reader, not the novel, who must wear the pants.

For a demonstration of the difference between active reading and female reading, we return briefly to chapter 34. Horacio directs his thoughts to La Maga as he reads:

> En setiembre del 80, pocos meses después del fallecimiento
> Y las cosas que lee, una novela, mal escrita, para colmo
> de mi padre, resolví apartarme de los negocios, cediéndolos
> una edición infecta, uno se pregunta cómo puede interesarle
> a otra casa extractora de Jerez tan acreditada como la mía;
> algo así. Pensar que se ha pasado horas enteras devorando
> realicé los créditos . . . [Mi tío] don Rafael Bueno de
> esta sopa fría y desabrida . . . me imagino que después
> Guzmán y Ataide, quiso albergarme en su casa; mas yo me
> de tragarse cinco o seis páginas uno acaba por engranar y ya
> resistí a ello por no perder mi independencia. Por fin supe
> no puede dejar de leer, un poco como no se puede dejar
> hallar un término de conciliación, combinando mi cómoda
> de dormir o de mear, servidumbres o látigos o babas. *Por*
> libertad con el hospitalario deseo de mi pariente; y alqui-
> *fin supe hallar un término de conciliación*, una lengua hecha
> de frases preacuñadas para transmitir ideas archipodridas . . .
> lando un cuarto próximo a su vivienda . . .
> [Mi fortuna] me lo permitía con exceso.
> te encontraba pegada a la ventana, con un
> Mis primeras impresiones fueron de grata sorpresa en lo
> novelón espantoso en la mano y a veces hasta llorando, sí,
> referente al aspecto de Madrid, donde yo no había estado
> no lo niegues, llorabas porque acababan de cortarle la cabeza
> desde los tiempos de González Bravo. . . .
> a alguien. (341–42)

Horacio's reading displays just the qualities Cortázar's second book demands: an abundance, even excess, of intellectual energy, more than can be occupied by the modest demands of a premodern novel; an ironic detachment that defends him against the potential emotional seduction of a traditional narrative; and a willfully defiant

attitude toward the author. As for La Maga, we might say that "para-ser-*lector*-hembra-la-Maga-se-las-traía." Her intellectual energies are wholly absorbed by the task of reading; she suffers comfortably in her chair, so won over by the story that she cries for its less fortunate characters; and she allows the novel's author to take her by the hand and lead her, a docile child, where he will. She is the prototype of the reader who must be done away with or, at the least, severely damaged. But before we commence damaging him, we should permit a defense on his behalf, and so we turn to Gadamer's conception of reading.

II

Gadamer is one of the few major twentieth-century philosophers whose name Horacio Oliveira does not drop, and one suspects that this is only because *Truth and Method* was published in 1960, too late for Horacio (the action of the novel takes place in the 1950s) and probably too late for *Rayuela* (1963). It is not, however, that Horacio is ignorant of the general thrust of Gadamer's philosophy. He has read Dilthey and Husserl, two of Gadamer's precursors,[4] and besides, Horacio knows everything. Or almost everything, because if we believe a fundamental claim of Gadamer's philosophy there is at least one thing that Horacio doesn't know, a thing he, as a human being, can never know: the depths of his own preconscious understanding. Yet just such a total knowledge of oneself is the only foundation for understanding that Horacio could accept.

Earlier we identified Horacio as a descendant of Hamlet. Now we should add that he is equally the offspring of Descartes, even though he and many of *Rayuela*'s critics would protest to the contrary.[5] Horacio shares Descartes' acute awareness that historically particular forms of bias shape our understanding of the world:

Oliveira tendía a admitir que su grupo sanguíneo, el hecho de haber pasado la infancia rodeado de tíos majestuosos, unos amores contrariados

[4] Concha (p. 143, note 24) detects the influence of Heidegger in Horacio's philosophy and argues that Heidegger's thought was available to Cortázar.

[5] The editor of the *Cátedra* edition of *Rayuela*, for example, glosses a reference to Descartes as follows: "*Cogito ergo sum.* A Descartes se alude varias veces, en la novela, como símbolo del racionalismo que Oliveira intenta superar" (135, note 12).

en la adolescencia y una facilidad para la astenia podían ser factores de primer orden en su cosmovisión. Era clase media, era porteño, era colegio nacional, y esas cosas no se arreglan así nomás. (141)

He also shares Descartes' conviction that such historically-biased subjectivity clouds the reason and makes objectivity impossible:

le parecía tramposo y fácil mezclar problemas históricos como el ser argentino o esquimal, con problemas como el de la acción o la renuncia. Había vivido lo suficiente para sospechar eso que, pegado a las narices de cualquiera, se le escapa con la mayor frecuencia: el peso del sujeto en la noción del objeto. (141)

The Cartesian project was to raze the biased consciousness in order to build it up anew on a purified foundation. Horacio refers to it as "el higiénico retroceso de un Descartes" (621) and seems determined to put it into practice. Shunning any conviction inherited rather than achieved independently, Horacio rejects all traditions of philosophy and morality, all commitment of any kind: "Tus nociones sobre la verdad y la bondad son puramente históricas, se fundan en una ética heredada," he tells a friend. "Pero la historia y la ética me parecen a mí altamente dudosas" (315).

For Gadamer, Descartes' hygienic retreat is a myth born of modern hubris. Gadamer fully agrees with Descartes that all understanding is grounded in the cultural, political, religious, and other forms of bias particular to a given place and time, that is, in the "preunderstanding." "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination," Gadamer writes, "we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live"[6] (*TM* 276). But Gadamer disagrees with Descartes that we could ever fully excavate our prejudices, or even that we could fully bring them to light, because human understanding is "inescapably more *being* than consciousness, and being is never fully manifest"[7] (*PH* 38). "The self-awareness of the individual," Gadamer writes, "is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the*

[6] Gadamer's texts are abbreviated as follows: *Truth and Method = TM; Wahrheit und Methode = WM; Philosophical Hermeneutics = PH; The Relevance of the Beautiful = RB.*

[7] The specific subject of Gadamer's sentence here is "wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein," translated by Weinsheimer and Marshall as "historically effected consciousness."

prejudices [Vorurteile] *of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being*" (*TM* 276–77). Thus "history does not belong to us; we belong to it" (*TM* 276). The null point which Descartes sought—the cogito of the present instant, stripped of its prejudices—is a fantasy: "the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates" (*TM* 276). Descartes reasons that if he thinks, he must exist; true enough. But he overlooks another insight that is at least as important: that every time the *cogito* demonstrates its existence, it also demonstrates the priority of being over knowing. When consciousness turns upon itself, being is always already there. By the time Horacio's self-divided self-consciousness arrives, La Maga's self-unified existence is always already there, awaiting him. Self-consciousness can enter the ontological scene only *in medias res.*

In its attempt to achieve full self-consciousness, the cogito is limited by two paradoxes. Because new understanding adds to the preunderstanding, it furthers being, and thus all attempts at self-understanding only carry the self beyond the reach of full self-consciousness: the self that we are is always becoming.[8] More importantly, the present action of understanding calls into play the depth of our historical being, and it is impossible to make this depth fully an object for our understanding even as we put it to work. Thus we can never step outside of our own being in order to get a proper look at it:

> The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished. . . . *To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.* (*TM* 301–02)

Yet in denying us the possibility of "*any* objective knowledge"[9] Gadamer seems to retain the very Cartesian standard of objectivity

[8] Cf. Weinsheimer: "Understanding makes the traditions of which it is made; and since it is productive, understanding—even if it is understanding of the whole—adds itself to the whole that is to be understood. For this reason self-understanding is always to be achieved" (195).

[9] The translation is true to the original: "kein gegenständliches Wissen" (*WM* 285).

that he purports to reject. Horacio himself expresses Gadamer's point with greater restraint and thus greater precision: "Lo absurdo es creer que podemos aprehender la totalidad de lo que nos constituye en este momento, o en cualquier momento, e intuirlo como algo coherente, algo aceptable si querés" (313).

Yet the priority of being over conscious knowing is to be lamented only if we insist on the Cartesian standard for certainty. If instead we accept the historical, finite nature of human knowing, we recognize prejudice as the condition of our understanding, not its impediment: "Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us" (*PH* 9). For understanding does not spring upon us unawares, but rather answers, affirmatively or negatively, to our (generally unconscious) anticipations of meaning. This cyclic process of question and answer, which constitutes the well-known "hermeneutic circle," is more easily understood if we turn from understanding generally to reading in specific. Gadamer explains,

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. (*TM* 267)

The meaning we discover in the text, of course, is rarely a perfect match for the meaning we anticipate, and thus we revise our anticipations according to what we discover as we read. In this way we come to understand not just the subject matter of what we read but also ourselves, indeed, the most deeply embedded, most unconscious parts of ourselves, because our prejudices are brought to our attention most forcibly when they are countered, that is, when the text "gives offense" (*WM* 252): "It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked" (*TM* 299). This is what hermeneuticists mean when they say that "the book reads the reader"[10]: as our anticipations of meaning rub against the book's

[10] See Weinsheimer's discussion of the hermeneutic circle and "taking offense" (166-67).

responses, friction is produced, and the prejudices of our preconscious understanding are brought to our attention by the burning.

Reading therefore humbles the Cartesian mind by perpetually revealing the priority of being over self-consciousness and the inadequacy of Descartes' vision of the elemental self: "The subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the *cogito:* rather, he is a being who discovers . . . that he is placed in being before he places and possesses himself" (Ricoeur 11; qtd. in Weinsheimer 163). In his approach to a text, then, a reader must submit to this fact of his historical nature and—provisionally—trust in his own preunderstanding; there is no other option. More humbling still, in addition to the subordination to one's own prejudices, reading also requires a subordination to the voice of the text. In its initiating step, reading must be less an act of self-assertion than of self-effacement, or rather, an act of self-opening. Gadamer writes, "We have the ability to open ourselves to the superior claim the text makes and to respond to what it has to tell us" (*TM* 311). A reader must recognize his primary role as that of listener: "We cannot understand without wanting to understand, that is, without wanting to let something be said" (*PH* 101); "a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something" (*TM* 269; also see 465). Gadamer goes further, and perhaps too far, when he writes that hermeneutics "consists in subordinating ourselves to the text's claim to dominate our minds" (*TM* 311). If Gadamer's language is too strong here, it is instructive for that reason. It is true that in any encounter with a text, we must eventually acknowledge the friction between our own prejudices and those of the text, and ultimately we may very well reject the text's voice in favor of our own. But without an initial act of subordination, understanding cannot even begin—and it is just this that is intolerable to the reader who disdains passivity.

Would Gadamer's hermeneutical reader then share the reputed "passivity" of the *lector-hembra?* No, because according to Gadamer, neither would the *lector-hembra:* there is in fact no such thing as a truly passive reader, if by "passive" we mean idle or unproductive. Even when the *lector-hembra* does no more than understand the literal sense of the author's language, he is not "passive" in the most limited sense of the word. Because understanding occurs only by means of the hermeneutic circle, any reader who understands is necessarily active, constantly projecting meanings, revising his pro-

jections, and projecting anew. Female reading is thus not a mindless ingestion of information but an endeavor: "assimilation is no mere reproduction or repetition . . . it is a new creation of understanding" (*TM* 473); "Reading with understanding is always a kind of reproduction, performance, and interpretation" (*TM* 160).

We should also note that when the *lector-hembra* embraces the limited passivity entailed in subordinating oneself to a text, he shows a strength, not a weakness. In so opening himself, he risks his own prejudices by making them vulnerable to the challenge of the text. Such a relinquishment of power will be objectionable to a reader whose prejudices are so weak that he dares not put them at risk, but the *lector-hembra* is not always and everywhere afraid of passivity. Moreover, he takes for granted Gadamer's common-sensical argument that authority is not always to be distrusted. Deference to authority, in fact, is reasonable as long as it "is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own" (*TM* 279).

Gadamer would of course be satisfied with neither La Maga's female mode of reading nor Horacio's active mode, but surely he would prefer La Maga's. The ideal hermeneutical reader would be capable of far greater self-critical awareness than La Maga, but he would also be as capable as she of opening himself to a novel. We have no evidence that La Maga comes to understand herself better as a result of her reading, but at least she reads with the predisposition that makes self-understanding possible. She knows by intuition that we cannot understand without wanting to let something be said, and thus she defers to Galdós when she reads his novel. Rather than fight with him for control, she yields to the will of the other. Horacio, by contrast, exemplifies the self-conscious alienation that precludes understanding: he is determined *not* to let anything be said. He does not trust the text enough to submit himself to it, and this defensiveness reveals a lack of trust in himself. As a consequence, he denies himself the opportunity to let the text bring his prejudices to light; he reads, but he does not let himself be read. His "activity" is a kind of hyperactivity, a confused assertion of the self where it ought not to be asserted.

III

If Gadamer's characterization of reading is at all right, then Morelli's equation of "active" reading with good reading is sorely confused. Yet the majority of *Rayuela*'s critics praise the novel precisely for freeing up the *lector activo* to take full advantage of his active nature. Ana María Barrenechea writes that the possibility of two readings "deja a la novela ese estado de materia en gestación, de creatividad y colaboración ofrecida al lector, y de potencialidad liberada que busca Cortázar" (204). Anthony Percival writes that "it is perfectly true that the second 'book' (altogether an appropriate text for the 'lector-cómplice') is incomparably richer and more complex than the first 'book,' " with the result that "the 'reader's share' is increased" (244–45). Juan Loveluck calls it simply "ficción en libertad" (85).

If the second book of *Rayuela* increases the reader's share, then how does it do it? Because the novel's theories about reading are scattered throughout the *capítulos prescindibles*—here presented in the form of Morelli's private notes, there presented second-hand by one of the Club members—we have no formal exposition on which to rely, and the various formulations we do get are often contradictory. But all of them tend toward one logical extreme: the author relinquishes his creative authority in order to allow the reader to create the novel for himself. In the theory's most modest formulation, the author retains creative control of his novel, but he allows the *lector activo* to become a kind of apprentice. Interpretive insights have been conceived in advance, and the reader is compelled to flesh them out: "El libro debía ser como esos dibujos que proponen los psicólogos de la Gestalt, y así ciertas líneas inducirían al observador a trazar imaginativamente las que cerraban la figura" (647). Yet we cannot grant that this modest version of *Rayuela*'s theory would afford the reader a greater share in the novel, at least not in novels as they had long been written by 1963. James Joyce tells Frank Budgen in 1918, "I want the reader to understand always through suggestion rather than direct statement" (Budgen 21), so by the time *Rayuela* is published ellipticality has long been a hallmark of modernist writing.

If there is anything new in *Rayuela*, it lies in the most extreme formulation of the theory, according to which the writer removes himself altogether from the interpretive field. In this case, the text

"no engaña al lector, no lo monta a caballo sobre cualquier emoción o cualquier intención" (561), Morelli explains. "No se proponía actitudes magistrales desde las cuales guiar al lector hacia nuevas y verdes praderas" (601). This strong version of the theory is the one the critics embrace. They say that *Rayuela* is "independiente en cierta medida del artista" (Villanueva 61); that it "refuses to be complicit with the smug project of supplying answers to its own questions" (Cosgrove 78); that the reader "is not pushed into arriving at this or that meaning, only expected to experience, re-create and discover" (Percival 250); and that "la novela de Cortázar tiene que ser reescrita cada vez que es leída" (Figueroa 266).

But how does Cortázar manage this transfer of creative control? The novel's most apposite internal explanation is a passage in which Morelli likens the new novel to a series of photographs from his characters' fictional lives and the reader's work to filling in the gaps between them: "Los puentes entre una y otra instancia de esas vidas tan vagas y poco caracterizadas, debería presumirlos o inventarlos el lector" (647). In application to *Rayuela*, then, the increase in the reader's share would come from bridging the gaps unique to the second book, that is, those between an inexpendable and an expendable chapter, or those between two expendable chapters.

Although our concern here is with the theory behind the second book rather than its practice, we should examine a few examples of these gaps in order to see what portion of the interpretive work is actually yielded to the reader.[11] It turns out that the task of connecting many chapters, even many of those odd textual scraps that would seem least to fit into the primary story, has not been left to the reader: the chapters are obviously connected, and for just the reasons they would be connected in a traditional novel. In the sequence 15–120–16, for example, La Maga recounts her rape in the first chapter and reflects on it in the third. In between we read the story of a boy named Ireneo, who feeds a grub to ants and delights in its suffering. The connection between rape and the boy's cruelty is clear well before we learn in chapter 16 that this Ireneo grew up to be La Maga's rapist. In the sequence 14–114–117, the first chapter tells how a Club member named Wong shows around his photos of torture, the

[11] Holsten (686-87) discusses some of the same sequences.

second offers us an Associated Press release about a US execution in the 1950s, and the third is an excerpt from Clarence Darrow about hangings. These chapters juxtapose cultural, political, and historical perspectives on capital punishment. The reader is obliged to interpret the connections between these chapters with the proper nuance, but not with significantly more freedom than that required in any novel, much less one written in this century.

If there are preconceived links between other chapter sequences, however, they are not transparent. Take the sequence 40–59–41: sandwiched between chapters that develop the relationship between Horacio and a married couple is a passage from Lévi-Strauss about a people who catch an excess of fish and bury them in the sand to stifle the rot. The passage about fish has no obvious relevance to the main narrative, though surely as *lectores activos* we can create a connection all our own, free of the obligation to dig for the one Cortázar may have planted down deep. There are many sequences like this one, without an obvious connection but amenable to our ingenuity. The question is what effect they have on the reader's share. If there are preconceived connections in such sequences, then they are simply less apparent than those of a more traditional novel. In this case, Cortázar's *lector activo* is not unusually independent, but merely faced with an unusually reticent book. But suppose that Cortázar has carried his theory to its extreme, and these chapters have no preconceived links. In this case, the reader's share is increased indeed: the entire burden of interpretation falls to him.

As we have seen, Cortázar did not practice this extreme formulation of his theory for the entirety of the second book. But the consideration of this possibility helps us to flush out the odd premise of all versions of the theory: that the degrees of participation of reader and writer in a novel are inversely related. That is, for the reader's share to increase, the author's share must decrease, as if they were struggling to capture a territory on which only one of them could stand. One critic collapses this idea into the following pithy formula: "The text's inadequacy is always the reader's opportunity" (Cosgrove 82).[12]

[12] Cosgrove's remark comes in the context of a discussion of Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* as well as *Rayuela*.

Cortázar's assumption that the author must withdraw in order for the reader to emerge reflects his overestimation of the traditional author's control and his underestimation of the traditional reader's independence—or in Gadamerian terms, his underestimation of the event of understanding that is reading. The critics who praise *Rayuela* often adopt Cortázar's misestimations. Cosgrove calls omniscient narration a "straitjacket" that "would control our knowledge" (82). Loveluck writes that a reader traditionally accepts a novel as "un *orden cerrado*, estático" against which the reader "no puede rebelarse" (85). Percival believes that a reader can reflect on what he has read only when the author allots him free time to do so (245).[13] With this idea of the traditional relationship between reader and writer, it is no wonder that *Rayuela*'s second book sounds liberating and Cortázar's *lector activo* sounds like an overman. We see that the theories behind *Rayuela*, often taken to anticipate reader-response theories,[14] are in fact based on the intentional fallacy: the author controls meaning absolutely.

IV

According to Gadamer, neither a reader nor an author could ever be in complete control of the reading experience, and it is not because one is crowding the other, but simply because both are finite. We recall the premise of *Rayuela*'s second book, that the text's inadequacy is the reader's opportunity. On Gadamer's behalf, Joel Weinsheimer would counter: "The infinite fecundity of the work as it is interpreted again and again is motivated by human finitude and indigence, the hollowness at the center" (98). That is, it is not the inadequacy of the text that is the reader's opportunity, but the

[13] Percival's comment merits full quotation: "Whereas in the standard kind of novel, as one reads, the eye scarcely ever has to leave the page, except in that split second when the page is turned over, in *Rayuela* locating the first page of a new chapter can take several seconds, during which time mind and imagination can play on what has just been read in the previous chapter. When the eye turns away from the page, the mind is freed from the printed word and, theoretically, the 'reader's share' is increased."

[14] But Iser, for one, did not consider revolutionary methods necessary to spur a reader's activity. In the article cited below, for example, Iser begins his discussion of the activation of the reader not with Cervantes or Unamuno but with Jane Austen.

inadequacy of the reader himself. To this we might add the inadequacy of the author. Because an author's understanding is finite, he is only the first interpreter of his work, not the last: "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well" (*TM* 296). Yet we do not mean the artificial, willed inadequacy Cortázar sometimes affects. We mean rather the ontological inadequacy definitive of finite beings. An author is limited by what we might think of as a "deep" account of the intentional fallacy: whereas the concept is usually taken to mean that an author may fail to make the case for his intended meaning, we might take it to mean that no author could ever understand the whole of what is expressed in his text. A writer's writing, like a reader's reading, inevitably owes more to his preunderstanding than to his self-consciousness. To write his best novel, then, an author must trust in that part of his being which precedes his conscious knowing: "the artist enjoys no privileged status over those who experience his work. Precisely because he has expressed what he has to say, he keeps back nothing for himself, but communicates without reserve" (*RB* 28). In other words, an author must immerse himself in his novel like a string through its beads.

Robert Brody calls our attention to an irony of *Rayuela* that Cortázar himself seems to have missed: that in his attempt to make his readers more active, Cortázar makes himself more passive (35). And this is not the passivity necessary for greater understanding, but mere idleness. Cortázar's strategy thus perfectly defies his goal, since the writer's decline is also the reader's. Consider that if Cortázar had in fact carried out his theory to the extremes routinely claimed by his critics (though as we have seen, he did not), *Rayuela* would have confronted its readers with no intended meaning, offered no offense, and failed to challenge its readers' prejudices, that is, to read its readers—and how "active" would such readers be? Yet even had Cortázar entirely vacated the textual premises, there is one means by which the novel would still have given offense: the premise behind the metafictional format of the second book, which tells us that traditional reading is timid, lazy, and devoid of curiosity (Figueroa 263), fit only for those who haven't the least interest in analyzing themselves (Villanueva 61), who prefer premasticated products (Cortázar, "Sobre" 3; qtd. in Villanueva 60). In so doing, the novel makes us

aware of our prejudice that traditional reading is in reality something more than that. Since most readers will judge this an instance in which an uncovered prejudice deserves to be reaffirmed, *Rayuela* is less likely to undermine our confidence in the way we have always read than to fortify it. For all the talk of revolution, then, Cortázar's novel reveals itself as the most conservative of books.

As it turns out, it is those who uncritically accept the theory of *Rayuela* who like their food pre-chewed. Anthony Percival, however, a critic we have had cause to cite several times, is not one of them. A final passage from his essay offers us a striking example of a reader reaffirming a prejudice in the face of textual friction, though perhaps with imperfect self-awareness. In encouraging us to read *Rayuela* according to Cortázar's rules, Percival has recourse to the following argument:

> Is there something bogus, even patronising about Cortázar's attitude, and worse still, is his whole endeavour a mere indulgence in novelty and literary anarchism? This was my own early response to the text. But as one reads on, becoming more and more drawn into the novel and finding oneself—almost unconsciously—taking up the challenge of trying to read the book on the author's terms, one comes to see that the novel is an *exposé* of authenticity. . . . To talk of reading the book on the author's terms should not imply prescription and restriction, rather it calls for open-mindedness, independence and self-awareness on the part of the reader. (Percival 250)

The irony is severe. In order to defend his appreciation of *Rayuela*, Percival must endorse precisely the orientation to reading that the novel purports to make obsolete, that of the *lector-hembra:* an ability to let oneself be drawn, "almost unconsciously," into the book; a willingness to subordinate oneself to the authority of the author, the reader's senior partner in this dialogue; and most importantly, a confidence that none of this—which might be called passivity—implies a loss of independence or a diminution of freedom. Percival approaches La Maga. It appears, then, that when the *lector activo* learns to read perfectly, it will only be because he has learned to emulate the strengths of the semi-fictional character he most despises and most envies—the stereotype of the traditional female. The redemptive woman sneaks in through the back door.

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