Why Enghien? A Note on Cortázar and Proust

Introduction

The germ of the present essay lies in a seemingly trivial question that I was unable to answer when writing a doctoral thesis on Julio Cortázar in the early 1990s: in the story 'Las armas secretas', what led the author to decide on Enghien as the location where his character, Michèle, is raped by a vengeful Nazi officer before the latter is summarily executed by her friends Roland and Babette? [1] Was it selected more or less casually, as one more plausible detail in the realist backdrop from which the increasingly uncanny events of the story gradually and alarmingly depart? Did he choose it strategically because of its partial phonetic/graphic resemblance to 'Greene', thus providing an early link in the ever more ominous chain of associations which seem to ensnare and unhinge Michèle's boyfriend, Pierre, as the story unfolds, and which ultimately link him to her former assailant in the most appalling of ways? Or was there more (or perhaps less) to it than this? I now suspect that, unlikely though it must initially seem, Cortázar's choice originated in the meticulous re-reading of Proust which he undertook in 1952, shortly after his permanent relocation to Paris, and that it is anything but arbitrary. [2] Although 'Las armas secretas' was not published until 1959, Cortázar's correspondence indicates that it was completed at least as early as 1955 and, furthermore, that he viewed the story as 'un *estudio*, un trabajo de transición', an important juncture in the

[1] The edition of the story to which I shall be referring throughout appears in *Las armas secretas*, ed. Susan Jakfalvi (Madrid: Cátedra, 2010 [1959]), 207-33.

[2] That re-reading can be traced through his letters, which were yet to be published when my *Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), the book which eventually emerged from that thesis, went to press. Writing to Eduardo Jonqières on May 16, 1952, Cortázar informs his friend, 'Leo aplicadamente a Proust, del que mi ya lejano recuerdo de 1940 no me daba más que una sombra'. A fortnight later (May 30) he tells the same correspondent 'Leo a Proust', and on June 14 reports that he has embarked on the final volume. By August 24 he has finished. See Julio Cortázar *Cartas*, ed. Aurora Bernárdez and Carles Álvarez Garriga, 5 vols. (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012), I (1937-1954), 374, 378, 382, 402.

thoroughgoing aesthetic reorientation on which he embarked after he had left Argentina and his early *cuentos*, which he had come to view as increasingly formulaic and inhuman, behind.[3] Interestingly his then wife, Aurora Bernárdez, criticized this particular story because, as she saw it, 'se notaba el esfuerzo por hacer hablar a los personajes como franceses, y que daba la impresión de ser cosa traducida', and Cortázar himself admitted to Jonquières that 'No es fácil cambiar de temas (país, psicologías, lenguajes) cuando se había llegado a cierto dominio en otro terreno' (*Cartas*, II, 82), further suggesting that it was written closer to the period during which he re-read Proust than to its eventual date of publication.[4]

The Starting Point

Two episodes in particular, both from *Le Temps retrouvé*, point to Proust as a source for certain key elements in the story. Crucially, both take place during the First World War. In the first, Charlus, in response to the narrator's concern that injudicious remarks that the former has made in public might lead to their being taken for defeatists, facetiously remarks:

> Avouez que ce serait bien drôle … Aprés tout … on ne sait jamais, chacun de nous risque chaque soir d'être le fait divers du lendemain. En somme porquoi ne serai-je fusillé dans

[3] Letter to Jonquières dated February 11, 1956, in Julio Cortázar, *Cartas* II (1955-1964), 82 (my emphasis). In an earlier letter to Jean Bernabé (31.10.1955), Cortázar says that he has recently finished 'dos cuentos muy largos, que ocurren en París' (*Cartas* II, 67). These were very likely 'Los buenos servicios' and 'Las armas secretas', given that 'Cartas de mamá', also inlcuded in *Las armas secretas*, is considerably shorter than either and is not mentioned in the correspondence until 1958, whereas Cortázar first mentions 'Los buenos servicios' in a letter to Jonquières and his wife María Rocchi dated June 6, 1955 (*Cartas* II, 45).

[4] Although considerable caution should be exercised when drawing on the chronology internal to a fiction for evidence, towards the end of the story Babette recalls that Michèle's ordeal took place almost seven years earlier, putting the narrative present in the late 1940s or very early 1950s ('Las armas secretas', 232). *Las armas secretas* is also the only one of Cortázar's collections in which all the stories are set in and around Paris, which might also indicate that they were composed in direct response to his new circumstances.

> les fossés de Vincennes? La même chose a bien arrivée a mon grand-oncle le Duc d'Enghien.[5]

Aside from the mention of Enghien itself, the wartime setting and the specific manner in which Charlus's royal forebear met his end, all of which are replicated or reworked in one way or another in the story, the passage also alludes, albeit flippantly, to the notion of unconnected individuals repeating the same story over time and to the theme of betrayal, both of which are integral to Cortázar's narrative.[6] The second episode involves the narrator's recollection of the last time he saw his friend Saint-Loup before the latter's heroic death at the front:

> Jamais homme n'avait eu moins que lui la haine d'un peuple […] Pas de haine du germanisme non plus; les derniers mots que j'avais entendu sentir de sa bouche, il y avait six jours, c'étaient *ceux qui commencement un lied de Schumann* et que sur mon escalier *il me fredonnait, en allemand*. (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 425 [my emphasis])

Here too, questions of wartime patriotism and cultural attachment are touched upon but, more significantly, it is the opening words of Schumann's Heine setting, 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' (the first piece in the *Dichterliebe* of 1840), that Pierre repeatedly seems to hear or sings or hums to himself in German throughout 'Las armas secretas', even though 'solo traducidas tienen pleno sentido para él' ('Las armas secretas', 211, 217). Cortázar twice uses the verb

[5] Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89), IV, 378.

[6] The Duc D'Enghien in question, Louis Antoine de Bourbon (1772-1804), after being falsely suspected of conspiracy to overthrow Napoleon, was unofficially tried and executed on the latter's orders. As Charlus recalls, he was shot in the moat of the Château de Vincennes, beside a grave that had been dug in advance. The unnamed Nazi officer is shot dead, without recourse to justice, in a roadside wood. In the story we eventually discover that the latter was, as he saw it, exacting deserved punishment on Michèle for being a 'perra delatora' ('Las armas secretas', 232), though how she is supposed to have informed on or betrayed him is never revealed. It is never made wholly clear whether the Enghien in the story is the suburb to the north of Paris (now Enghien-les-Bains) or the Belgium city/municipality from which the name derives, but there is every reason to assume that it is the former.

tararear, the closest Spanish equivalent to Proust's *fredonner* (217, 229) to describe this distracted humming, and on various occasions Pierre seems to hear the song while imagining himself ascending a staircase as he unwittingly repeats the actions of the German officer (215, 219).

There may be one further incident in the story that is directly derived from Proust, though, even taking into account its distinctiveness, in this final instance the provenance is much less certain. It occurs when Pierre asks Michèle to peel a peach for him (on the avowedly childish grounds that 'las mujeres siempre le han pelado los duraznos'), despite feeling a 'leve asco' when she does so, a brief sense of relief when she subsequently drops it and 'los pedazos de piel se vuelven a pegar a la pulpa', and then further revulsion when she takes the knife to it again (223-24). His reaction recalls that of Proust's bashful narrator when his childhood sweetheart Gilberte calls him by his Christian name for the first time:

> Et me souvenant plus tard de ce que j'avais senti alors, j'y ai démêlé l'impression d'avoir été tenu un instant dans sa bouche, moi-même, nu sans plus aucune des modalités que appartenaient aussi, soit à ses autres camarades, soit, quand elle disait mon nom de famille, à mes parents, et dont ses lèvres […] eurent l'air de me dépouiller, de me dévêtir, *comme de sa peau un fruit dont on ne peut avaler que la poulpe*.[7]

In both passages the same analogy is employed to suggest a male character's uncomfortable sense of being denuded, exposed, even devoured by a woman he desires. The scene is significant insofar as it forms a particularly striking link in a whole series of more diffuse but similarly Proustian allusions in the story, the purpose of which is evidently to portray Pierre as

[7] Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I, 396 (my emphasis).

a pampered child whose often crass opinions of and interactions with women are shaped decisively by his early relationship with a doting mother, and who from the first exhibits a troubling insistence on luring Michèle to his room, just as Proust's pathologically jealous narrator does with respect to Albertine ('Las armas secretas', 208-11).[8]

Yet even if we are willing to entertain the notion that the location and the recurrent motif of the Schumann lied in particular have their origin in Proust, do they constitute anything more than a covert acknowledgement of one writer's indebtedness to another for having unwittingly provided him with the rudiments of a plot for a story set during and after a World War, an extradiegetic literary wink likely and perhaps intended to go unnoticed by the majority of readers? Or is there something more pervasively Proustian about the internal workings of Cortázar's story? In what follows I shall argue that there is, but in order properly to address that larger question we need first to examine Cortázar's ongoing and sometimes ambivalent engagement with and assessment of Proust and the latter's place in the history of the novel in his critical writings of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Proust in the Early Essays

Understandably, the few critics who have considered the question of Proust's possible influence on Cortázar have focused almost exclusively on the novels, and especially *Rayuela*, which contains a number of explicit allusions to *À la recherche*, exhibits loose but unmistakable structural parallels with Proust's novel (principally the division of the text into interrelating 'lados'), includes one or two markedly Proustian episodes involving something akin to

[8] For a reading of the story which focuses closely on Pierre's consistently generic view of women and attempts to link that view with the psychosexual underpinnings of Nazism, see Moran, *Questions of the Liminal*, 159-74. For comments on the episode involving the peach, though not in relation to Proust, see 169-70.

involuntary memory, and shares a number of the French author's abiding concerns, not least his sustained criticism of mechanical habit in all its guises and his suspicion of rational, abstract intellection as a valid means of apprehending the world.[9] Yet by the time he completed *Rayuela* Cortázar had, in key respects, worked through and reframed a number of the central philosophical and aesthetic issues which Proust's work—as well as that of a number of other modernist or proto-modernist novelists—raised, and felt able to treat his model with an arch and often breezily irreverent irony, manifest from the opening paragraphs of the novel, wherever one chooses to begin it.[10] Over the course of the previous fifteen years or so, however, he had been thinking and writing about Proust both more earnestly and in broader literary-historical and indeed metaphysical terms, in a sustained attempt to gauge both the contribution of *À la recherche* to the development of the modern novel and the degree to which Proust's re-conception of the mechanisms and functioning of consciousness might be deemed to break with the Western rationalist tradition against which Cortázar's own work was, in principle at least, so resolutely pitted.[11] In *Teoría del túnel*, the revelatory, book-length essay completed in 1947 but published only posthumously, he comes to view Proust, despite the

[9] See for example Steven Boldy, *The Novels of Julio Cortázar* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 65; Herbert E. Craig, 'La memoria proustiana en *Rayuela* de Julio Cortázar', *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 1 (1989), 237-45, and *Marcel Proust and Spanish America: From Critical Response to Narrative Dialogue* (Lewisberg: Bucknell UP, 2002), especially Ch. 4 (161-64), Ch. 5 (186-89, 202-5), Ch. 6 (234-37), Ch. 7 (274-79) and Ch. 8 (307-10). This latter work is seriously compromised by a number of factual errors and basic misinterpretations of the Spanish text. An exception to the general trend is Jérôme Dulou, who, in his 'De las experiencias y cruces en el discurso de la memoria: de la involuntaria en Proust a la del Polidor en *62: modelo para armar* de Cortázar' (*Kamchatka*, 2 [December, 2013], 225-40) compares the 'coágulo' experienced by Juan at the start of the later novel to Proust's ideas concerning the workings of involuntary memory.

[10] If we begin conventionally, in Ch.1, we soon encounter a playfully insouciant reference to Proust's theory of memory ('Convencido de que el recuerdo lo guarda todo y no solo a las Albertinas y a las grandes efemérides del corazón y los riñones … '), whilst if we embark on the alternative route suggested in the 'Tablero de dirección', starting at Ch. 73, we find a diatribe at once impassioned and ludic against 'la Gran Costumbre', a prime target of Proust's criticism throughout his novel. See Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, ed. Andrés Amorós (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997 [1963]), 126, 544-46.

[11] The fundamental shift in Cortázar's aesthetic attitude toward Proust is aptly summarized in a remark from a letter to Francisco Porrúa dated Paris, January 21, 1967, in which he expresses his (presumably feigned) incredulity that Lezama Lima should have discovered in *Rayuela* a 'deuda con Proust, of all names!' (in English in the original) (*Cartas* III [1965-1968], 539). He is referring presumptively here to Lezama's essay 'Cortázar y el comienzo de la otra novela', which acted as the foreword to the first Cuban edition of *Rayuela*, though in fact Lezama's comments on the relationship between the two writers are to be found in 'Discusión sobre *Rayuela*', in Ana María Simo (et al.), *Cinco miradas sobre Cortázar* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1968), 7-82 (pp. 12-14).

latter's own avowal to the contrary, as one of the last in line of the nineteenth-century realists for whom the world, even the Protean inner realm of consciousness, remained susceptible to verbal representation in an inherited literary language whose fundamental expressive capacities were never radically called into question and a genre, the novel, the core conventions and underlying assumptions of which remained essentially intact. In Cortázar's view, Proust merely refines rather than rebels:

> Los depositarios de la antorcha del siglo XIX, los Proust, Gide, Shaw, Mann, Wells, Valle-Inclán, Claudel, D'Annunzio, *continúan dentro de un ordenamiento estético personal los ordenamientos estéticos tradicionales*, la filiación novecentista […] *La noción tradicional de género, de conservación de valores retóricamente entendidos como literarios, no se quiebra siquiera en un Marcel Proust*. *Ninguno de ellos intenta romper las formas estilísticas, se limita a someterlas a las torsiones más agudas, a las más sutiles insinuaciones*. No se tarda en ver que sus aventuras más osadas quedan siempre simbólicamente contenidas entre las tapas del Libro. Se hace allí gran literatura, pero siempre la tradicional, la que resulta del uso estético de la lengua y no alcanza a salirse de él porque no lo cree necesario o posible. Advierte uno [...] cómo las dificultades expresivas que les plantean las limitaciones idiomáticas y aun estilísticas, se traducen al modo valeryano en ejercitación fecunda; cómo un Proust, un Gide, se complacen en encarar las dificultades por el placer estético de resolverlas armoniosamente.[12]

[12] Julio Cortázar, *Teoría del túnel*, in *Obras completas*, ed. Saúl Yurkievich, 5 vols (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2003-2007), VI (vol. V remains unpublished), 45-125 (pp. 59-60 [my emphasis]).

Further regarding the particular literary language of those novelists and its implications, he comments:

> Ese lenguaje es siempre expresión—es decir, símbolo o analogía verbal—mediatizadora. Es formulación estética de órdenes extraestéticos. *Aun lo irracional (en Proust, por ejemplo) aparece racionalmente traducido*. Y ello supone lejanía, traspaso (alteración), valencias análogas. Todo lo cual explica, crea y exalta una Literatura, pero desespera al joven escritor 'bárbaro' que quiere estar en su novela con la misma inmediatez con que estuvo en las vivencias que generaron la novela. (*Teoría del túnel*, 77 [my emphasis])

In other words, Proust's tacit assumption that the language he was using could, at an 'aesthetic' remove, faithfully transmit even those intuitive, evanescent psychic experiences which ostensibly pre-empted or slipped through the mesh of rational, analytic thought, effectively brought those same, precious experiences back within the fold of the very reason over and against which he had prized them. It is, of course, this recalcitrantly proxenetic function of language and the consequent loss (at least as he imagined it) of 'inmediatez' with which the mature Cortázar would grapple throughout *Rayuela*, but the 'joven escritor bárbaro' of 1947 had already identified overcoming it as perhaps the fundamental challenge for contemporary poetics.

Cortázar also cites Proust in relation to a similarly intractable philosophical (as opposed to purely literary) problem, namely the existence of what he views as a seemingly insuperable 'hiato' between subjective and objective experience which, he claims, the French author's work exacerbates rather than resolves (*Teoría del túnel*, 114). In a lengthy and involved passage, Cortázar highlights the contradictions which arise from attempting to take the inner world as a

starting point for an understanding of the outer or *vice versa*, since the two seem to be fundamentally co-implicated and the endeavour inevitably results in a 'círculo vicioso' (*Teoría del túnel*, 115). The existentialist 'solution' to the apparent impasse and its gloomy consequences, which he summarizes in the first instance in ironically cavalier fashion (as if implementing it were somehow straightforward), involves a rejection of Proust's alleged retreat into the innermost confined of the self:

> Es entonces que la actitud existencialista se apoya con firmeza en la autoconciencia, en el *Cogito, ergo sum* inalienable. Con todas las dudas, con todas las incertidumbres, el Yo me está dado, es en el soy, vale como base e instrumento […] Por eso, basta ya de hacer el buzo, desde que mi autoconocimiento parece satisfactorio y facultativo. *Basta ya, Marcel Proust. Es el momento de superar el hiato y completar la dimensión humana en y con lo no-humano; es la hora de lanzarse a la conquista de la realidad con armas eficaces*. (*Teoría del túnel*, 115 [my emphasis]).[13]

There is, then, no place in the elemental Existentialist drama for languid Proustian navel-gazing, for secreting oneself away on one side of a divide which it is our primary ethical duty to bridge. In sum, in *Teoría del túnel*, despite Proust's reputation as a literary innovator, Cortázar seems finally to regard him as a crowning exemplar of the entire order of things against which his essay was written – a culmination rather than a genuinely new departure. Yet at the same time he clearly continued to consider Proust a writer whose work repeatedly *hinted at* ways of seeing and experiencing the world the ultimate consequences of which it failed to

[13] The essay as a whole, which in retrospect reads as a non-fictional trial run for many of the philosophical problems explored imaginatively in *Rayuela*, attempts to fuse the visionary 'poetismo' of Surrealism with the ethical engagement of Existentialism in order to shake the very bases of what Cortázar saw as the obsolete and destructive ontotheological order that had (mis)shaped Western man and all his cultural and political manifestations and institutions.

explore, or was perhaps prevented from exploring as a consequence of the still classical literary language and concomitant aesthetic assumptions that its author, consciously or otherwise, continued to espouse. Thus in 'Situación de la novela' (1950), in many respects a précis of the earlier essay, he highlights the importance of Bergson's influence on Proust, demonstrating as it did 'hasta qué punto la novela esperaba y requería las dimensiones de la intuición pura, el paso adelante que fuera fiel a esa intuición.'[14] Proust's attempted incorporation of Bergsonian intuitionism into his narrative marks 'el avance de la poesía dentro de la novela', betokening an 'actitud poética' manifest not in the use of poetic forms or language *per se*, but rather 'en la negativa a mediatizar, a embellecer, a hacer literatura' ('Situación de la novela', 279). This claim might appear to contradict his prior contention that Proust's literary language was still defined by an 'expresión mediatizadora', but he goes on to say, referring both to Proust and certain of his contemporaries, that 'en buena parte de su obra los logros valen como producto formal, *están indisolublmente amalgamados al lenguaje que permitió alcanzarlos*' ('Situación de la novela', 283 [my emphasis]). In other words, the expressive 'paso adelante' remained incomplete. Similarly, and crucially in the present context, in relation to the presence and nature of the irrational in Proust he says that the latter is one of a number of novelists (Joyce, Gide, and Lawrence are the others) who 'extreman … [la] tendencia a ceder el primero plano a una atmósfera o a una intuición marcadamente irracional' ('Situación de la novela', 283). Again, however, although this appears to negate the assertion made three years earlier that in Proust 'hasta lo irracional … parece racionalmente traducido', in fact Cortázar leaves open the question of whether 'lo irracional' here is anything more than a surface effect, an intriguing but ultimately insubstantial aura. Nevertheless, these oscillating reflections and enthusiasms suggest that he continued to grapple with Proust's legacy and to identify in his writing elements

[14] Julio Cortázar, 'Situación de la novela', *Obras completas* VI, 268-290 (279). The essay was originally published in *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 9:4 (1950), 223-43.

or tendencies which, if further explored and exploited, might finally allow the bounds of realism which it intermittently probed finally to be breached.

We find no further discussion of Proust in Cortázar's non-fictional prose writings prior to the composition of 'Las armas secretas', and just a handful of fleeting allusions in his correspondence.[15] However, the next significant reference that we do encounter is both the most straightforwardly affirmative and occurs not in relation to the novel but rather, and surprisingly given the colossal dimensions of Proust's work, to the short story. In 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' (1963) he cites Proust's narrator's transformative experience of tasting the madeleine as an analogy for the way in which a writer is abruptly captivated by a 'tema' which, however apparently banal, is surcharged with an implicit significance with radiates far beyond its anecdotal limits, just as certain photographs seem somehow to encompass the entire scene of which they are a discrete, circumscribed fragment. That vertiginous sensation of *explosante-fixe* will subsequently be re-created in the reader. Thus:

> Así como para Marcel Proust el sabor de una magdalena mojada en el té abría bruscamente un inmenso abanico de recuerdos aparentemente olvidados, de manera análoga el escritor reacciona ante ciertos temas en la misma forma que su cuento, más tarde, hará reaccionar al lector.[16]

[15] See the letters to Juan José Arreola (20.9.1954) and Jean Barnabé (31.10.1955) in *Cartas* I, 548 and *Cartas* II, 67.

[16] Julio Cortázar, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento', in *Obras completas* VI, 370-86 (p. 379). For a detailed discussion of the aptness of this analogy and the paradoxes to which it gives rise, see Moran, *Questions of the Liminal*, Ch.2 ('Frames of the Text'), 85-128.

Yet, arresting though the comparison may be, what do it, or indeed any of the preceding considerations, have to do with 'Las armas secretas'?

The Story

The brief answer to that question, albeit one that requires considerable shading and amplification, is that all those 'Proustian' elements and episodes in the story which his predecessor would, in Cortázar's view, in the last instance have treated and accounted for rationally, are ascribed an irrational, indeed seemingly supernatural origin. As we shall see, this fundamental shift in emphasis is detectable in many specific textual details, but it is most immediately evident in the basic mechanism of the plot, which hinges on the spontaneous, unbidden and, in this case, devastating return of the past. Pierre himself identifies the phenomenon, perhaps a little too explicitly, when he remarks to Michèle 'Los recuerdos vuelven a veces' ('Las armas secretas', 223), an echo of his earlier reflection that 'A veces el pensamiento parece tener que abrirse paso por incontables barreras, hasta proponerse y ser escuchado' ('Las armas secretas', 209), which itself reads like a conscious allusion on Cortázar's part to the Proustian notion that involuntary memories must struggle violently, almost physically to break through the hardened carapace of habit and reason which contians them.[17] Yet whereas the past that suddenly re-emerges at certain exceptional moments in Proust is always and can only be that of formerly lived, personal experience, such that, however unexpected and disorienting its return may initially be, the causative link between a particular

[17] For example, In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator says that a memory of the dining room in Balbec, personified as a 'lutteur', 'avait cherché à ébranler la solidité de l'hôtel de Guermantes, à en enforcer les portes' (453). Particularly noteworthy here is the reference to hearing ('para ser escuhado'), since Proust often uses the same verb employed by Cortázar (*écouter*) to describe our instinct's capacity to 'hear' the call of memories struggling to resurface (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 457-58).

memory and the present experience which prompts its recurrence is susceptible to *ex post facto* reconstruction and logical explanation, in Cortázar's story the earlier experiences which haunt Pierre belong, or at least appear to belong, to *another*, and thus elude all such ratiocination. This haunting also and increasingly breaches and blurs the boundaries of Pierre's sense of self, and by extension the aforementioned 'hiato' that separates inner and outer worlds. And whilst in Proust temporal sequence, however subtlized, remains fundamentally conventional, in the story Pierre's sudden recollections of an alien past are simultaneously glimpses of his own future, thereby violating the orthodox conception of temporal succession in a way that Proust's novel never does.[18] Similarly, whilst Charlus refers only jokingly to the possibility of meeting precisely the same violent end as his great uncle, never believing that the latter might actually shape his own fate, Pierre's actions seem actively to be determined by those of the dead officer via an act of ghostly metempsychosis. The situation of Michèle with regard to the past is different in the critical respect that it was she who suffered the original trauma and as a consequence dreads the prospect of any subsequent sexual encounter, but she too comes to believe that Pierre is literally possessed by the ghost of her former attacker, saying on the phone to her friend Babette, 'Era la misma voz […] No es una alucinación' ('Las armas secretas', 230). In short, whilst Proust refers quasi-metaphorically to the 'résurrections de la mémoire' (*Le Temps retrouvé,* 456), given that it is not people and things themselves that return to inhabit us, but only our recollections of them, Cortázar gives those 'resurrections' a concrete form.

Certain of Pierre's other vacillating and contradictory views on the nature of memory, almost always glibly articulated, also recall both Proust and Bergson. In particular, his lurching

[18] Something similar might be said of the markedly Proustian 'coágulo' which opens *62: modelo para armar* (1968), which irretrievably confounds *any* logical temporal ordering (and consequently any orthodox sense of causality) of the entire narrative.

seemingly insensibly between Funes-like specification (illustrated by his assertion that 'en el fondo de la memoria' he must know exactly how many cigarettes he has smoked in his lifetime ['Las armas secretas', 208]) and often crude abstraction or synthesis clearly and perhaps deliberately brings to mind Bergson's nominalist/conceptualist distinction, of such central importance to Proust, between 'pure' memory (the heterogeneous totality of our recollections, always unconsciously preserved) and memory as it is shaped and contracted by need, convenience and habit.[19] The opening of the story is particularly noteworthy in this respect:

> Curioso que la gente crea que tender una cama es exactamente lo mismo que tender una cama, que dar la mano es siempre lo mismo que dar la mano, que abrir una lata de sardinas es abrir al infinito la misma lata de sardinas. 'Pero si todo es excepcional', piensa Pierre alisando torpemente el gastado cobertor azul. 'Ayer llovía, hoy hubo sol, ayer estaba triste, hoy va a venir Michèle. Lo único invariable es que jamás conseguiré que esta cama tenga un aspecto presentable'. No importa, a las mujeres les gusta el desorden de un cuarto de soltero, pueden sonreír (la madre asoma en todos sus dientes) y arreglar las cortinas, cambiar de sitio un florero o una silla, decir sólo a ti se te podía ocurrir poner esa mesa donde no hay luz. ('Las armas secretas', 207).

Pierre's rather self-satisfied observations here are reminiscent of Proust's rejection of the idea that 'la réalité était … à peu près identique pour chacun, parce que quand nos disons: un mauvais temps, une guerre, une station de voitures, un restaurant éclairé, un jardin de fleurs, tout le monde sait ce que nous voulons dire', in favour of the explicitly Bersgonian notion that 'Une image offerte par la vie nous apport[e] en réalité a ce moment-là des sensations multiples et différentes' (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 467-68). And it may not be purely fortuitous that Cortázar,

[19] See Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Félix Alcan: 1903 [1896]), especially Ch. 3 ('De la survivance des images – La mémoire et l'esprit').

like Proust, chooses to open his narrative in a bedroom with a lone male character thinking (albeit less consciously and more formulaically in Pierre's case) of his mother and her consoling ministrations. In Pierre's insistence that making a bed is always a unique experience there may even be a faint echo of Proust's narrator's distinction between the purely generic notion of waking and the many particular bedrooms and myriad sets of circumstances in which he has done so throughout his life (*Du côté de chez Swann*, 7-8).

The particular instances and forms in which these unfamiliar/unrecognizable memories resurface confirm the general picture outlined above. Each seems to be triggered by precisely the sort of sensory stimulus which rekindles the past in Proust and initially points to the possibility of a purely associative explanation which, in the case of the story, ultimately proves inadequate. The first example occurs when Pierre suddenly finds himself picturing an 'escopeta de doble caño', an image accompanied by a 'sensación de extrañamiento' (209). The vision occurs as he is reflecting on what he sees as Michèle's strange reluctance to accompany him to his room, but any underlying connexion between the image and her behaviour is quickly obscured by the fact that it arises 'justamente cuando traga el humo del cigarillo' (209), the physical resemblance between the barrel of the gun and the smoking cigarette providing a logical explanation for an otherwise unaccountable occurrence. Shortly afterwards, it is as he kisses Michèle while simultaneously sensing that 'huele a algo fresco, a la sombra bajo los árboles' (211) that he seems to hear the words of the Schumann song for the first time. Again, what at first might strike the reader as a disturbingly arbitrary intrusion seems much less so when we recall that the song celebrates the coming of spring and with it new love. It thus seems natural that it should enter his thoughts at that particular moment, and once more that plausible affective link seems designed to encourage the reader, as well as the character, not to dwell on the much less readily explicable fact that he so clearly ('distintamente') recalls words

in a language he does not understand (211).[20] As in the case of the shotgun, it is only in retrospect that we realize that the seemingly innocuous allusion to the shade beneath the trees is fact relates to the scene of the German officer's execution and consequently acts as an oblique portent of Pierre's own, apparently inexorable demise.[21] The final disquieting motif to enter the story is that of the 'hojas secas' which, we eventually discover, also act simultaneously as a flashback to the officer's death and a premonition of Pierre's. On this occasion, however, Cortázar subtly undercuts the sort of concrete, logical support which has thus far allowed both character and reader to fall back on common-sense interpretations of such abrupt and seemingly unprompted breaches of the everyday order, offering us no obvious sensory or psychological prop. Yet even here a 'natural' explanation, however tenuous, for Pierre's apparently feeling imaginary leaves brushing against his face is perhaps tacitly offered, insofar as when the sensation occurs he is daydreaming in the hot summer sun, surrounded by the laughter of a group of girls and the shrill, prolonged whistling of a passing cyclist, sounds which, given his distracted state, might distantly evoke those of leaves rustling in the breeze.[22] Nevertheless, the plausibility of such reasoning is being gradually and strategically eroded, and Cortázar concludes this section of the narrative by having Pierre link two previously discrete instances of what might appear to associative memory in a way that is no longer obviously susceptible to rational elucidation: 'Como si él no supiera que no hay hojas secas en el Pont Neuf, que las hojas secas están en Enghien' (218). How could Pierre possibly *know* that?

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[20] In these first two instances of what are initially made to look like spontaneous association Cortázar may again be drawing directly on Proust, and in particular on the narrator's experience in the final volume when the rattling of a spoon on a plate causes him suddenly to feel 'une grande chaleur … mêlée d'une *odeur* de *fumée*, apaisée par *la fraiche odeur d'un cadre forestier*' (*Le Temps retrouvé* , 446 [my emphasis]).

[21] The kiss itself is a classic Proustian catalyst, with the narrator's kissing of Albertine reawakening the sensations he felt when being kissed by his mother as a child. In *Rayuela*, Cortázar would again give this Proustian precedent a 'fantastic' twist when the presence or spirit of La Maga seems *actually* to be revivified in Talita as she kisses Oliveira in the morgue (*Rayuela*, 481). In *62: modelo para armar*, meanwhile, he makes abundant, similarly 'fantastic' use of the kiss between Kundry and Parsifal in Wagner's final opera, a work (and an episode) which also exerted a profound influence on Proust (see Note 34 below).

[22] Even this familiar Parisian mélange of sensory stimuli is perhaps vaguely reminiscent of Proust's 'jeunes filles en fleur', one of whom, Albertine, is first spotted by the narrator pushing a bicycle with which he often associates her in later recollections.

It is particularly appropriate that this particular unexplained association should prove pivotal to Pierre's eventual undoing, since it is in the role played in the story by Enghien that we find the most developed and nuanced example of Cortázar's counterpoising of a Proustian and a very different sort of explanation for the violent irruption of the past in the present. In general terms, he may be playing on the supreme importance that Proust accorded proper names, especially place names, which, far from being empty linguistic labels, were capable in certain privileged circumstances of acting as keys that could unlock the vault of memory and cause the past to come flooding back with all its original vigour.[23] Again, however, in the case of 'Las armas secretas' it is not Pierre's past to which the name Enghien gives access, but rather the officer's. Yet it is the detail which proves most illuminating. It is introduced matter-of-factly and without comment, in one of several revealing instances in which Pierre makes gross generalizations about women ('Las mujeres siempre serán las mismas, en París o Enghien, jóvenes o maduras' [209]), but the reader quickly becomes aware that he is disconcerted by the seemingly uncaused emergence of a place name which means nothing to him and which he immediately links to the earlier vision of the shotgun because the apparent absurdity of both demands clarification:

> Claro que tampoco hay ninguna razón para pensar en una escopeta de doble caño, o decidir que en este momento Michaux sería mejor lectura que Graham Greene. La elección instantánea preocupa siempre a Pierre. No puede ser que todo sea gratuito, que un mero azar decida Greene contra Michaux, Michaux contra Enghien, es decir contra

[23] On hearing certain names, the narrator says, 'Brusquement nous sentons l'entité originale tressaillir et reprendre sa forme et sa cisélure au sein des syllables mortes aujhourd'hui', citing as an example the name 'Guermantes' which, 'comme un de ces petits ballons dans lesquels on a enfermé l'oxygène ou un autre gaz: quand j'arrive à le crever, je respire l'air de Combray de cette année-là, de ce jour-lá'. See *Le Côté de Guermantes,* in *À la recherché du temps perdu,* II, 312.

> Greene. Incluso confundir una localidad como Enghien con un escritor como Greene … (210)[24]

Once more the text first intimates the possibility of a purely associative explanation in the form of the rhyme between 'Greene' and 'Enghien', but the name soon recurs in the absence of such a link when Pierre starts to think about accompanying Michèle to her parents' house on the outskirts of Paris (212). It next figures, again without comment, when Pierre is waiting for his friend Xavier, this time embedded in a more extended passage which draws together for the first time a number of the recurrent images and sensations which have accosted him discretely up to that point (215). Xavier is a scientist, and in this story as practically everywhere else in Cortázar's work science (in this case biology, though medicine is most often the culprit) acts as a sort of synecdoche for all that is most normative, reductive and numbingly instrumental in Western thought.[25] Consequently, when Pierre asks him '¿Te ocurre pensar de golpe en cosas completamente ajenas a lo que estabas pensando?', Xavier replies, 'Completamente ajenas es una hipótesis de trabajo y nada más' (217), the implication being that, since we live in an essentially rational universe, there simply *must* be some logical connection, however recondite, between even the most apparently incongruous word, phrase or image and the thought process on which it seemed randomly to supervene. To reassure Pierre, he mentions a similar case of repeated phonetic slippage of his own ('yo confundo siempre Le Mans con Menton') adding a trite psychological explanation ('La culpa será de alguna maestra, allá en le lejana maestra') which, ironically, turns out to be peculiarly pertinent in the context, given Proust's emphasis on the centrality of early experience to the workings of involuntary memory and the

[24] For further comments on the significance Pierre's tendency to generalize in relation to women see Moran, *Questions of the Liminal*, 164-66.

[25] The bibliography on this subject is unsurprisingly vast, but for a recent study which draws on that scholarship see Dominic Moran, 'Heath and/as Sickness in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar', in Patricia Novillo Corvalán (ed.), *Latin American and Iberian Perspectives on Literature and Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2015) 163-82.

determining role played by the narrator's mother in his early affective life (217). Here Xavier perfunctorily attributes the bizarre recurrence of the name Enghien to some now forgotten intervention of a substitute mother figure during Pierre's formative years. And Pierre ends up accepting Xavier's rationalist premise when Michèle later tells him that she spent the war years at her uncle and aunt's house in Enghien, assuming that he must have heard her mention the name many times before:

> *Todo tiene una explicación si se la busca*, cuántas veces Michèle habrá mencionado a Enghien en las charlas de café, esas frases que parecen insignificantes y olvidables, hasta que después resultan el tema central de un sueño o un fantaseo. ('Las armas secretas', 223 [my italics])

As with the unheralded re-emergence of deeply buried memories, the initially unfathomable contents of dream and fancy, those classical repositories of 'lo irracional', are assumed to have an everyday, reassuringly banal explanation – one that the story will subsequently and shockingly overturn.[26] The broader reflections on the nature and significance of apparently random occurrence may also have their origins in Proust's insistence on the centrality of chance in the activation of involuntary memory, though, as ever, the latter always furnishes a logical explanation of why seemingly fortuitous triggers function as they do.[27] Cortázar, unlike his characters, quite deliberately does not.

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[26] Again, it may be worth noting that Pierre's relieved conclusion closely echoes Bergson's claim that when we are immersed in dreams or fancy ('rêve', 'rêverie'), unimpeded by the exigencies of immediate necessity, we gain access to the totality of pure memory, so that 'Un être humain qui *rêverait* son existence au lieu de la vivre tiendrait sans doute ainsi sous son regard, à tout moment, la multitude infinite des détails de son histoire passée' (*Matière et mémoire*, 110). Dreams, then, give us access to *seemingly* random détails which the constraints and protocols of daily life cause us to forget. Interestingly Proust, who devotes many of his narrative asides to the phenomenon of dreaming, toys with the more extravagant notion that the dreamer and his waking self may not be the same person (*Le Côté de Guermantes*, 387). Typically, Cortázar puts what in Proust remains a mere hypothesis into practice when he has Pierre haunted by the officer's memories during his dream later in the story (*Las armas secretas*, 218-19).

[27] See for example *Du côté de chez Swann*, 43; *Le Temps retrouvé*, 457, 497.

There is perhaps one further, albeit minor and perhaps predominantly extra-textual observation that might be made with regard to Pierre's disorienting 'recollections' of Enghien. By far the most frequently reiterated of the motifs associated with the house there is that of a 'bola de vidrio' at the bottom of the bannister. We will likely never know for certain why Cortázar chose to accord this apparently superficial detail such precedence, but it may be worth noting that this same feature can be found, in precisely the same place, in the house at Illiers which belonged to Proust's aunt and uncle (just as the house at Enghien belongs to Michèle's), is supposedly the model for Tante Léonie's house in *À la recherche*, and became the Musée Marcel Proust in 1954 – just before Cortázar started work on the story. In the novel itself a glass ball is never mentioned in the narrator's lengthy description of the fictional 'éscalier détesté' which he must ascend each night, wrenching himself from his mother's side, so any 'borrowing' here is practically undetectable. Marginally more perceptible is a possible Proustian echo in the description of Michèle's parents' house on the outskirts of Paris, which Pierre continually confuses with Enghien. The dwelling is repeatedly described as a 'pabellón' ('Las armas secretas', 209, 212, 219, 221, 226). The term is unusual in Spanish in this context and appears to be calqued on the French 'pavillon', used to refer to a detached house in the suburbs, but it is also the word used by Proust's narrator to describe *his* parents' house when the taste of the madeleine relumes his childhood experiences at Combray (*Du côté de chez Swann*, 47).[28] Yet even supposing these echoes to be conscious, the overlaying and substitution of real and fictional abodes in these two instances may amount to little more than an example of Cortázar's playing with literary sources for his own amusement - though it would offer further evidence of what those sources were.[29]

[28] The 'pavillon' is described as 'donnant sur le jardin' (*Du côté de chez Swann*, 47), and Pierre twice refers fondly to the 'jardín' in Michèle's parents' house ('Las armas secretas', 220-21).

[29] It would also add a further layer of shading to the theme of haunting and alien memory that runs throughout the story. In fact, there may be a further example of such buried allusion (also relating to notions of both the self and

What can be said of the story itself and its particular modifications of Proust is also applicable to Cortázar's recourse to the Proustian madeleine as an analogue for the sudden emergence and explosive effect of certain 'temas'. Whereas in Proust the consequences of tasting the cake, however unexpected and overwhelming, can be accounted for *a posteriori* in psychological terms, Cortázar, in both 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' and the later 'Del cuento breve y sus alrededores', describes the vertiginous advent of poetic inspiration in terms that deliberately resist such rationalization, speaking instead of alien forces, trances, possession, hallucination, haunting, exorcism etc. And whilst readers might reasonably elect to interpret his account psychoanalytically, he preferred to leave the origin of the obscure 'criaturas invasoras' which heralded a *cuento* a mystery, referring to it only as a 'territorio indefinible y ominoso' from which an entire story would, he claimed, suddenly materialize 'sin *razón* alguna'.[30] Significantly, in the later essay he cites 'Las armas secretas', despite its relative length, as a prime example of a story which arose seemingly fully-formed from such an experience of 'possession', the 'angustia' produced by which compelled him ('me obligó') to type it out in a single sitting before 'sin cuidarme de releerlo, bajar a la calle sin Pierre, sin Michèle' ('Del cuento breve', 47).

More concretely, it is the elliptical form of the short story itself, and in particular its sustained focus on a 'single effect', which facilitates Cortázar's endeavour to render irrational all that

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the home or, perhaps better, the *unheimlich*) in the dream sequence, which seems, appropriately given the context, to reference Lorca's 'Romance somnámbulo' (('verdes, verdes, yo mismo y tú misma, tronco de savia y hojas verdes: verdes, verdes') ['Las armas secretas' 218]). Both poem and dream also involve the ascent of a staircase in pursuit of a woman, but it is the *unquoted* lines 'Pero yo ya no soy yo / ni mi casa es ya mi casa', with both their concrete and more existential intimations of unhousedness, which are most applicable to Pierre and his increasingly fragile sense of self. Less speculatively, in the repeated reference to the colour we finally get, albeit in translation, an associative analogue to the name 'Greene' – though one far more sinister than any imagined by Pierre.

[30] Julio Cortázar, 'Algunos aspectos del cuento', 377; 'Del cuento breve y sus alrededores', in *Último Round* (Barcelona: Destino, 2004 [1969]), 42-55 (pp. 45-49).

Proust ultimately explains away.[31] Whilst the latter's necessarily 'cinematic' approach to narrative (despite his narrator's firm rejection of the commonly made comparison of the novel to the cinematograph) brings with it a tendency to constant, conscious contextualization, digression and elucidation, the 'photographic' *découpage* of the story proceeds via occlusion, omission and a refusal to explain which leaves deliberately unresolved precisely the sort of phenomena whose mystery Proust's narrator tends to diffuse even as he endeavours to foreground it.[32]

A Note on Form

In fact, the considerable formal intricacy of 'Las armas secretas' (it ranks alongside 'Las babas del diablo' as one the most meticulously crafted of his earlier stories) renders Cortázar's account of its spontaneous genesis and transcription rather suspect, or at least suggests that he must have subjected that feverishly composed first draft to substantial revision.[33] I have already commented on his organization of the *récit* so as effectively to meld or render indistinct analepsis and prolepsis and thereby disrupt the conventional flow of time in a way that Proust never does, but equally noteworthy is his use of what I have referred to both here and my earlier study of the story as 'motifs' in order to structure the narrative. In that study I pointed to Wagner as a perhaps conscious source of both this motivic patterning itself and its relation to

[31] The term is borrowed from Poe's …. Proust's narrator acknowledges that the epiphanies which he so prizes, 'ces impressions que nous apporte hors du temps l'essence commune aux sensations du passé et du présent', are 'trop rares pour que l'oeuvre d'art puisse être composée seulement avec elles' (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 477), but the short story, at least as Cortázar understands it, is built wholly and strictly around these singular 'fragmento[s] de la realidad' ('Algunos aspectos', 373).

[32] I am drawing on the analogy employed by Cortázar himself to distinguish between the differing aesthetics of the two genres in 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' (see especially p.374). Proust's narrator dismisses cinema as a superficial parade of empty images which lacks the complex interiority evoked and explored in his own novel (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 461, 468), and yet his gargantuan narrative simply cannot avoid being 'cinematic' in the general sense designated by Cortázar, namely that 'una película es en principio un orden "abierto", novelesco' which 'acumula progresivamente sus efectos en el lector' ('Algunos aspectos', 373-74).

[33] The same might be said of his designation of the study as a 'study', which implies that it was written with clear conscious intent.

the subject matter of the story (*Questions of the Liminal*, 173), and here I would merely add that Proust's novel, with its vast web of continuously recycled and fastidiously modulated themes and episodes, explicitly indebted and likened to musical processes, as well as the recurrent use of music (most famously the 'petite phrase' of Vinteuril's sonata) as a spur for involuntary memory, is itself closely modelled on Wagnerian operatic form and the idea, or ideal, of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a colossal, multipartite totality.[34] Cortázar seems to be mirroring the Proustian approach to structure in microcosmic form so as to produce his own, concentrated 'forma cerrada' ('Del cuento breve', 42), albeit one that is quite different in nature and intent.

The Author's View

The long-running and often sterile debate concerning whether and how to categorize Cortázar's stories in relation to one or other theory of the 'fantastic' has been reinvigorated by the publication over the last two decades of increasingly substantial tranches of his correspondence, as well as of a number of other important documents, not least the transcripts of the classes he gave at Berkeley in 1980.[35] If throughout this essay I have referred in what may appear to be questionably assured fashion to Cortázar's desire to disqualify rational interpretations of the story, however nuanced, in favour of purely irrational ones, it is because that is precisely what these newly available sources reveal he had set out to do. In particular, they make it abundantly clear that he thought of 'Las armas secretas' first and foremost as a

[34] For a clear and detailed account of Proust's formal indebtedness to Wagner and in particular to the latter's use of the leitmotif and his conception of the work as an overarching totality, see Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust, musicien* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Editeur, 1984), especially Ch.2 ('*Parsifal* comme modèle redempteur de l'oeuvre rédemptrice').

[35] The latter appeared as *Clases de lieratura, Berkeley 1980*, ed. Carles Álvarez Garriga (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2013).

ghost story. He origianlly says as much in the previously cited letter to Jonquières, when responding to the latter's (unspecified) criticisms of the story:

> Coincido un poco contigo pero no en todo; no creo, por ejemplo, que todo esté preparado en función de un golpe final de efecto (como en mis antiguos cuentos, que tú mencionas comparativamente); probablemente no he sabido transmitirlo, pero mi intención era que desde el principio se dibujara el inevitable final, es decir *la venganza de ultratumba del nazi que poco a poco toma posesión del protagonista para poder desquitarse al final contra la mujer*. (*Cartas*, II, 82 [my emphasis])

In a letter of July 24, 1964 to director Miguel Antín he is even more explicit:

> Mis cuentos (no todos, pero en todo caso los dos que te han gustado ahora ['Las armas secretas' and 'Continuidad de los parques']) *presuponen inalienablemente una aceptación de fuerzas ocultas*. *El mal, en ellos, no es solamente el producto de traumatismos, formas patológicas del sentimiento, etc., sino que es una intervención activa y deliberada de fuerzas malignas que invaden y habitan a los protagonistas*. El punto más alto de esta línea está en el cuento 'Las armas secretas', en el que *un muerto se posesiona de un vivo para vengarse de una mujer*. (*Cartas* II, 537 [my italics])

In other words, psychological trauma might act as plausible foil or even a catalyst for Michèle's ordeal, but its ultimate source is entirely other, and it was Cortázar's express intention to insinuate as much in the narrative. The final and perhaps most revealing instance in which he comments on the story in detail is to be found in a letter to Alain Sicard, dated August 26, 1970,

where he again rejects, in surprisingly categorical fashion, the latter's more elaborate psychological reading:

> Tu interpretación es muy hermosa pero no es lo que yo viví cuando escribía el cuento. Pierre no está 'hanté par les fantasmes de Michèle'; *para mí la cosa era más directa y casi grosera: simplemente el fantasma del nazi (que yo acepto como fantasma, dotado de una existencia ultraterrestre y maléfica, dentro de la mejor tradición del género) toma lentamente posesión del cuerpo de Pierre, para poder vengarse de la mujer que lo había entregado al enemigo*. La diferencia de nuestra idea del cuento es que vos no te explicás bien la escena final, y vacilas entre 'simple délire o bien réalité'; *para mí es la realidad, el fantasma ha completado la posesión de Pierre y dispone de su cuerpo y sus manos para estrangular a Michèle y vengarse*. *Sé que esta interpretación es menos rica y sutil que la tuya, pero ocurre que es la que inspiró el cuento,* y me parece justo decírtelo.[36]

What he wrote, he insists, is essentially a conventional ghost story in which autonomous, supernatural forces are responsible for an event for which he will countenance *no* rational exegesis.[37] There is considerable irony here in the fact that, although Cortázar strongly opposed Todorov's attempt to define or at least delineate the literary fantastic, his own reading of the story which, as he readily concedes, is more rudimentary than many of those which have attempted to explore its underlying tangle of psychological and sexual tensions, would fall squarely within Todorov's far less discomfiting category of the 'marvellous'.[38] Whereas the

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[36] Julio Cortázar, *Cartas* IV (1969-1976), 164 (my emphasis). Cortázar is referring to Sicard's 'Figure et roman dans l'oeuvre de Julio Cortázar', a 21-page typed copy of which was sent to the author and can be viewed in the on-line archive of the Fondo Julio Cortázar at Poitiers (www.mshs.univ-poitiers.fr/crla/contenidos/Cortázar, code 2.02). On p.4 Cortázar has written in the margin, next to Sicard's claim that Pierre is 'hanté par les phantasmes de Michèle', 'Yo creo que el Nazi vuelve y posee a Pierre'.

[37] In a letter to Paul Blackburn of February 13, 1969, he further underlines this view of 'Las armas secretas' as a generic ghost story when he says that it would make a '*horror film* de primera clase' (*Cartas*, IV, 31).

[38] For further comments on Cortázar's views on Todorov's theory of the fantastic and its attendant sub-categories see Moran, *Questions of the Liminal*, 9-15.

fantastic, in its purest form, entails an unresolved and hence troubling hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation of a particular event or phenomenon, the marvellous can be accounted for entirely by the latter. Yet paranormal interpretations of the type espoused by Cortázar in the case of both 'Las armas secretas' and a number of other iconic stories in fact serve to dispel mystery precisely by attributing it to some arbitrary superhuman agency.[39] They are, in that sense, just as conventional and ultimately reassuring as rational ones, and run the additional risk of undermining any semblance of verisimilitude in a genre which, paradoxically, depends wholly on the suspension of readerly disbelief if it is to be effective. In the present instance such a reading, which assumes the characters to be no more than hapless puppets entirely at the mercy of malign occult forces, impoverishes the story by nullifying its ostensibly psychological core, as well as foreclosing the critical and unsettling question of how far the seemingly innocent Pierre might be deemed responsible for his actions. According to Cortázar, he is simply and ineluctably possessed, and thus, presumably, absolved of all complicity. Fortunately, the story as we actually have it, as opposed to the version of it that was 'experienced' or intended by its creator, *is* far more subtle and ambiguous than the latter's unapologetically 'crude' account might suggest, and does leave room for the sort of psychological or psychoanalytic readings which Cortázar rejects.[40]

Conclusion

[39] See, for example, the remarkable series of letters to Manuel Antín in relation to the latter's proposed cinematic adaptation of 'El ídolo de las Cícladas', a story comparable to 'Las armas secretas' in many key respects, in which Cortázar remains adamant that events are dictated by the goddess Haghesa, whose spirit is awakened when the characters unearth a figurine of her (*Cartas*, II, 534-36, 536-39, 543-47, 552-61, 574-77). In *Clases de Berkeley*, meanwhile, in order to conserve what he imagines to be 'lo fantástico' in the story, he offers a bizarrely convoluted reading of 'La isla a mediodía' dependent on a simultaneous 'desdoblamiento del personaje' and 'desdoblamiento del tiempo' which, were we to accept it as the definitive interpretation, would completely undermine its disquieting credibility (55-56).

[40] My own, earlier reading of the story (see note 8) constitutes just such an attempt to assess whether and to what extent Pierre might be judged independently accountable for his actions. That possibility is far more disturbing than the paradoxically reassuring conclusion that he is a mere plaything of fate.

Yet why *was* Cortázar so insistent on what he imagined to be a 'fantastic' reading of the story? The answer, I have attempted to demonstrate, lies at least in part in his desire to venture beyond the various narrative modes and models the perceived limits and limitations of which he had been mulling over in his essays of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the case of 'Las armas secretas' the model, irrespective of the enormous discrepancies in genre, scale and prose style, was Proust, and in particular the latter's conception and representation of involuntary memory which, as Cortázar saw it, the French writer had, perhaps despite himself, recouped for both reason and literary realism, even though it offered a tantalising glimpse beyond both. Hence, I would argue, his description of the story as a study – a literary laboratory in which he could isolate a specific aesthetic and/or phenomenological precedent and experiment with ways to recast or surpass it. And it may not be the only story in which he wrestles in this way with his illustrious forbear, both prior to and even after his adoption of a more mischievous attitude to Proust in *Rayuela*. Perhaps the most striking example is 'La salud de los enfermos' from his next collection, *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966), which revolves around the comic-grotesque charade of a family fabricating letters from a dead son in order to persuade his doting mother that he is alive and well and thus, in principle at least, to safeguard her increasingly fragile health. Whilst there is undoubtedly a significant biographical underpinning to this later story, its narrative premise and the ensuing psychological drama are both traceable to Proust.[41] The same core scenario also features in *Le Temps retrouvé*, when the narrator learns that, in order to conceal the news of her husband Saint-Loup's death, Gilberte's family 's'était cru obligé de lui cacher pendant plusieurs jours, sous les plus fallacieux prétextes, les journaux qui lui

[41] Cortázar's own letters demonstrate the quite extraordinary lengths to which he would go to shield his aging, hypochondriac mother (who, ironically, outlived him by almost a decade) from bad news, not least that of his own declining health. Particularly revealing in this regard is the parallel correspondence with his sister and his mother herself, in which he routinely confides in the former what he withholds from the latter. The issue of the latter's health is addressed in all of them. See, for example, *Cartas* V (1977-1984), 70-71, 132-33, 216-17, 272-73, 303-4, 350-52, 390-91, 393-94, 438-40 (in which he finally and reluctantly tells his mother about the near fatal gastric haemorrhage he had suffered six months earlier), 450-52, 518-19, 555-56.

eussent appris cette mort', so as to spare her the shock of discovery, since she was already ill when he was killed (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 430).[42] Still more remarkable, however, is the role played in Proust's novel by letters in relation to the return of the dead. The two key instances involve Albertine. In the first, immediately after the news of her death is broken to him, the narrator receives what have become in effect two posthumous letters from his former love.[43] The immediate effect is uncanny, but the reader is left in no doubt as to the cause (i.e she posted them before she died). The second episode is, at least initially, far more disconcerting. Many months later, in Venice, the narrator is handed what appears to be a telegram from the supposedly dead Albertine indicating that she is ill and that they ought to marry. He seems unquestioningly to accept this apparently impossible occurrence, which elicits a long meditation on different modes of survival, both physical and in or as memory. Proust deliberately leaves the reader mystified for many pages, but finally resolves the enigma when the narrator realizes that the telegram was in fact from Gilberte, who was informing him of *her* forthcoming marriage to Saint-Loup. It was her idiosyncratic handwriting that had resulted in the misprision, which was, the narrator confesses, the consequence of his seeing what he wanted to see in the message rather than what was actually there (*Albertine disparue*, 220, 234). And whilst letters from beyond the grave are a general narrative device in 'La salud de los enfermos', Cortázar incorporates this specific form of interpretive equivocation into 'Cartas de mamá', another story which revolves around the unsolicited and calamitous return of a past that has been too hastily buried.[44] In this case Luis and Laura assume that the former's mother has, in her grief, mistakenly informed them in one of her regular letters that her dead son, Luis's brother Nico, is going to pay them a visit, when the name that she presumably meant to write

[42] The family has recourse to precisely the same ruse in Cortázar's story, when the doctor recommends that the mother 'por unos días se abstuviera de leer los diarios'. See 'La salud de los enfermos', in *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2014 [1966]), 47-69 (p. 51). Even the wording here is similar.
[43] Marcel Proust, *Albertine disparue*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, III, 59.
[44] Julio Cortázar, 'Cartas de mamá', in *Las armas secretas*, 69-91.

was that of her nephew, Víctor. Again, however, Cortázar effectively inverts the sequence found in Proust by *beginning* with a logical explanation for the confusion of names upon which the story proceeds to cast ever more doubt. The same is true of 'La salud de enfermos'. The nature of the family's subterfuge is seemingly laid bare at the outset, but the narrative (and particularly the haunting ending) subsequently manages to create the unnerving impression that the dead might really be operating independently. In other words, Cortázar prefers to leave disturbingly ambiguous, or hint at an entirely irrational explanation for, everything that Proust ultimately chooses to clarify, and even though the reader may feel inclined to interpret both stories psychologically, the texts themselves do not in the last instance sanction such a definitive reading.

None of the above is intended to suggest that Proust was the most important or pervasive literary influence on Cortázar during the period immediately following the latter's move to Paris, or that it is time to embark on a wholesale re-evaluation of his work along Proustian lines. Rather, and much more modestly, I hope to have shown that his intensive re-reading of Proust may have played a more significant role in that difficult process of 'transición' than has previously been thought to be the case, and that the influence of the French writer is to be found in some unexpected and hitherto entirely overlooked places – not least a ghost story featuring a reincarnated Nazi officer seeking revenge from beyond the grave which takes place in the suburbs of what, at the time of writing, was contemporary post-war Paris.

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