

All the Islands the Island: The Crafting of Cortázar's 'La isla a mediodía'

Delos y Mykonos, donde creo haberme acercado por un momento a una zona que rebasaba lo humano [...] ese pulso del mundo que siempre me pareció Delos a mediodía.

JULIO CORTÁZAR.¹

Introduction

This is the latest in an ongoing series of essays whose principal aim is to explore in detail how and why Julio Cortázar came to write certain of his most iconic stories as and when he did by identifying previously overlooked literary sources and tracing the various ways in which he drew on and adapted them, often carefully modifying elements of the original texts in ways that reveal much about his own particular aesthetic principles and purposes.² From these investigations there emerges a picture of the writer very much at odds with that of the Romantic-cum-Surrealist myth of Cortázar as a wholly intuitive, spontaneous creator of or entranced conduit for *cuentos*, a myth which he himself was always keen to cultivate.³ What we find instead is a meticulous craftsman, whose finest, most disconcertingly immersive stories are often the product of subtle and evidently quite conscious processes of selection, assimilation and transformation of specific source material – however instinctive and unformulated his initial enthusiasm for the latter may have been.

'La isla a mediodía'

¹ Julio Cortázar, letter to Carlos Fuentes (May 4, 1966), in *Las cartas del Boom*, ed. Carlos Aguirre, Gerald Martin, Javier Munguía and Augusto Wong Campos (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2023), 13137 (pp. 133, 135). This letter does not appear in the five volumes of *Cartas* (see note 4 below).

² Previous pieces include 'Straight from *The Horse's Mouth*? On the Origins of Cortázar's "El perseguidor"', *BSS*, 94:9 (2017), 1601-22; and 'Why Enghien? A Note on Cortázar and Proust', *BSS*, 97:2 (2020), 235-57.

³ The *locus classicus* of Cortázar's self-portrayal as a sort of unconscious medium through which stories would emerge unheralded and seemingly fully formed remains 'Del cuento breve y sus alrededores', in *Último Round* (Barcelona: Destino, 2004 [1969]), 42-55 (especially pp. 46-47).

In the case of ‘La isla a mediodía’ (the focus of the present study) no such inquiry into the story’s origins would appear to be necessary, as Cortázar provided a vivid description of its genesis in a letter to his editor, Francisco Porrúa, dated November 1, 1965, shortly after he had written it:

En el aire, entre Teherán y Viena, tuve un minuto maravilloso; a mediodía, desde un cielo límpido, vi las Cícladas o las Espóradas, el Egeo casi negro rodeando esas tortugas pedregosas. Pensé ... Bueno, lo que pensé o viví se tradujo en un cuento breve, de unas 7 páginas.⁴

This account would make ‘La isla’ a classic product of that quasi-daemonic process of possession and imaginative exorcism or ‘translation’ that Cortázar deemed essential to the creation of ‘todo cuento plenamente logrado, y en especial los cuentos fantásticos.’⁵ Formally and expressively too, ‘La isla’ exhibits all those qualities which, according to Cortázar, raise the finest stories above the level of the merely ‘literary’ and imbue them with a seemingly irresistible, almost visceral force, i.e. the systematic suppression or concealment of all traces of extradiegetic narration and the radical stripping away of merely decorative description and circumstantial detail (‘lo meramente accesorio’) so as to create an impression of ‘autarquía’; an imperceptibly quickening narrative rhythm building to an irresistible crescendo; a dénouement that is at once unexpected, disconcerting and yet seemingly inevitable. Yet for all its undeniable immediacy of impact, ‘La isla’ also furnishes the reader with sufficient cultural and literary coordinates to signal what might be at stake

⁴ Julio Cortázar, *Cartas*, ed. Aurora Bernárdez and Carles Álvarez Garriga, 5 vols (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012-2013), III, 193. The story was first published in *Primera Plana*, 171 (April, 1966) and subsequently included in *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, which appeared that same year. The edition to which I will be referring throughout appears in *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2014), 123-33.

⁵ ‘Del cuento breve y sus alrededores’, 46. Cortázar uses the same term (‘traslado’) to describe this process in the essay as he does in the letter (46).

both existentially and ethically in the story, and thus a basic philosophical framework within which to interpret it. Perhaps most obviously, both the title and the setting point to the influence of Nietzsche. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1884/5), Nietzsche (in)famously heralded the ‘great noontide’ which allegedly marked the emblematic watershed at which the *Übermensch* would leave a depleted, morally rotten Western humanity definitively behind, whilst in the earlier *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) he had celebrated pre-Socratic Greece as the repository of a vital, Dionysiac energy that, he claimed, had been fatally banished from modern life by an ever more stultifying and ultimately lethal rationalism.⁶ These twin notions are surely (and, I would suggest, consciously) echoed in ‘La isla’, in which the protagonist, Marini, determines to slough his benumbed, hyper-civilised self (referred to, with obvious symbolic overtones, as ‘[el] hombre viejo’ [‘La isla’, 131]) when he encounters an Aegean island seemingly untainted by modernity whose origins, Cortázar is careful to inform the reader, lie in the remote, pre-Hellenic past.⁷

Despite Cortázar’s insistence on textual autonomy, context of different sorts also proves helpful. The story’s central theme—that of the seductive but potentially fatal allure of antique forces associated with Ancient Greece, too long and too forcefully repressed—is also explored in ‘Las Ménades’ and ‘El ídolo de las Cícladas’ (also from *Final del juego*) making of the three tales a loose but mutually enlightening triptych.⁸ Meanwhile, its final, perplexing

⁶ Given that few times of day have been as culturally and metaphorically overdetermined as noon, I am far from suggesting that Nietzsche is the only source for Cortázar’s title and subject matter, but rather simply the most immediately relevant one. It is clear from all Cortázar’s writings, both fictional and other, that he was closely acquainted with Nietzsche’s work. His enduring interest in an often idealized Ancient Greece, meanwhile, is evident from his earliest writing, not least the posthumously published *Imagen de John Keats* (1950).

⁷ When researching the island, Marini discovers that ‘huellas de una colonia lidia o quizá cretomicénica’ have been discovered there, indicative of a culture that predates Socratic Greece by a millennium or more (‘La isla’, 126). Cortázar’s fictional Xiros may well be based on the real Cycladic island of Syros, whose history has been traced back at least as far as the early Bronze Age, and where many of the figurines of the type which features in ‘El ídolo de las Cícladas’ (from *Final del juego* [1956/64]) were discovered.

⁸ Also apposite here is the long, trilingual poem ‘Gre / cia / ce / ece 59’, and especially its disillusioned final section, which features a ‘vuelo de reconocimiento’ over the Greek islands which reveals ‘*Ningún dios, todos muertos. Nada que señalar*’. See Julio Cortázar, *Salvo el crepúsculo* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2009 [1984]), 159-69 (p. 169). Gustavo Pellón provides a superb, detailed reading of this poem, of obvious relevance to the present study, in his ‘Cortázar and the Idolatry of Origins’ (in Carlos J. Alonso (ed.) *Julio Cortázar: New Readings*

twist is strikingly reminiscent of the shattering conclusion to Ambrose Bierce's 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' (1890).⁹ Other possible literary antecedents include Borges's story 'El milagro secreto' and perhaps even Hans Castorp's dream in *The Magic Mountain* (1924), involving as it does an ultimately double-edged vision of what, initially at least, appears to be an age-old Mediterranean idyll. Both works play on the sometimes yawning discrepancy between clock time and, broadly speaking, psychological time, which may also figure in 'La isla'.¹⁰ Cortázar was, of course, also familiar with the 'island' stories and novels of Verne, Stevenson, Wells and Poe, and his personal library includes an edition of Melville's *Typee* (1846) published as recently as 1960.¹¹

It is also worth recalling that as early as 1945 Cortázar had made a somewhat eccentric translation (still in print) of that paradigm of 'island literature' *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a novel he later rehashed as bludgeoning postcolonial critique in the form of the radio play *Adiós, Robinson* (1970s), in which Crusoe and Friday return to a now heavily developed Juan Fernández by plane - Marini's mode of transport. One or two brief references, as well as certain elements of the plot, suggest that he may knowingly have been reworking, indeed sometimes inverting aspects of Defoe's novel in the story.¹²

[Cambridge: CUP, 1998], 110-129). However, I find his brief comments on 'La isla' itself (125-26) and his somewhat abrupt conclusions concerning Cortázar's Hellenism in general (127) more questionable.

⁹ Indeed, Cortázar had already, and quite explicitly, glossed Bierce's famous tale in one of his earliest *cuentos*, 'Profunda siesta de Remi' (1939) (one of a series of 'Plagios y traducciones' from the posthumously published *La otra orilla* [1945]), somewhat contrivedly adding a further, knowing twist to that of the original.

¹⁰ The Borges story, published in *Ficciones* (1944), is an obvious 'local' source, but Cortázar clearly knew Mann's novel well, indicating that, in part at least, he had written *Rayuela* specifically as 'una especie de anti-Thomas Mann', citing *The Magic Mountain* (which he repeatedly mischaracterizes as a 'didactic' work) as his particular target. See *Clases de literatura*, ed. Carles Álvarez Garriga (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2013), 211-12, 224. For Castorp's dream, which contains various features that recur in Cortázar's story, see Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1995), 480-89.

¹¹ The library is held at the Fundación Juan March in Madrid and may be consulted online. For the Melville, see www.march.es/es/coleccion/biblioteca-julio-cortazar/ficha/typee--5603.

¹² For example, aside from the broad similarities between the core scenarios of the two works, Crusoe reports that, shortly after being shipwrecked, 'for a while I run about like a Mad-man', whilst the increasingly obsessed Marini is referred to mockingly by the pilots as 'el loco de la isla' ('La isla', 127). Later, Crusoe discovers the sole, unidentified survivor of a shipwreck on the beach, whereas in the story Marini's seems to be the body that the locals discover. See Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* ed. J. Donald Crowley (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 47, 188-89.

Yet, whatever the pertinence of the various possible antecedents and intertexts outlined above, in what follows I shall endeavour to show that, irrespective of its anecdotal origin, ‘La isla’ is in fact overwhelmingly indebted to a number of English literary sources, which are themselves variously and illuminatingly interlinked: a story by D. H. Lawrence published almost forty years previously, and near contemporary works by Aldous Huxley and, above all, William Golding, whose influence I consider decisive and ubiquitous, running to the level of fine textual detail. As we shall see, these texts share, borrow, transform and redeploy a panoply of ideas, literary precedents, narrative syntagms and scenarios, structural devices and motifs, all of which to a greater or lesser degree inform Cortázar’s story.¹³

Lawrence

We do not travel to go from one hotel to another, and perhaps see a few side-shows. We travel to get away from a world we hate, which is the world of man as we have made it. We travel, maybe, with a secret and absurd hope of setting foot on the Hesperides, if only for half an hour: of running our boat up a little creek and landing in a Garden of Eden. No good! There is no garden of Eden on this commercial and predatory earth. The Hesperides never were. Abandon all hope of a quick trip to paradisaical places. There aren’t any.

D. H. LAWRENCE.¹⁴

The only volume by Lawrence remaining in Cortázar’s personal library is a 1959 edition of *Sons and Lovers*, but it is evident from both his critical writings and especially his correspondence that he knew the English writer’s work well.¹⁵ In both of Cortázar’s major essays on the short story Lawrence is cited as a paragon of the genre, whilst *The Plumed Serpent* is mentioned in *Teoría del túnel* (1947) and ‘Situación de la novela’ (1950) as an

¹³ Huxley’s admiration for Lawrence and his work, and the immense (though far from unquestioned) influence of the latter on his own, have been copiously documented. Huxley, in turn, was one of the young Golding’s favourite writers, and his influence is detectable in many of Golding’s novels, not least *Lord of the Flies*. Cortázar, as we shall see, was familiar with all three.

¹⁴ D. H. Lawrence, review of H. M. Tomlinson’s *Gifts of Fortune*, in *Introductions and Reviews*, ed. N. H. Reeve and John Worthen (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 291-96 (p. 288).

¹⁵ See www.march.es/es/coleccion/biblioteca-julio-cortazar/ficha/sons-and-lovers--3701.

example of both the *poetismo* and the radical existential critique which he saw as defining features of the contemporary novel (*Teoría* also makes a passing reference, in the same vein, to *Kangaroo* [1923]). His ‘Vida de Edgar Allan Poe’, meanwhile (originally the prologue to an edition of Poe’s complete prose works, which Cortázar translated in the early 1950s), shows that he was familiar with Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). He had also read at least some of Lawrence’s poetry.¹⁶ Perhaps even more significantly, a letter to Mercedes Arias from Mendoza (where Cortázar was teaching at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo), dated as early as August 21, 1945, reveals that he was planning to work on a seminar series on Lawrence, Wolf and Huxley at the end of that year.¹⁷ As far as I have been able to ascertain, no record of that particular course remains, but the outlines of those that have survived all testify to the remarkable breadth of his reading of both primary and critical sources and the meticulousness of his preparation.¹⁸ Cortázar also shared the English writer’s fundamental conviction that Western Civilization as a whole had been veering fatally off course since the rise of Socratic reason.¹⁹ Thus, four years later, writing to his friend Fredi Guthman, he refers more extensively to Lawrence in a passage of obvious relevance to ‘La isla a mediodía’ as well as cognate stories such as ‘El ídolo de las Cícladas’:

¹⁶ ‘Del cuento breve y sus alrededores’, 43; ‘Algunos aspectos del cuento’ (1962-63), in Julio Cortázar, *Obras completas* (henceforth *OC*), 6 vols, ed. Saúl Yurkievich with Gladis Anchieri (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2003-2007), VI (*Obra crítica*), 370-86 (p. 381); *Teoría del túnel*, in *OC* VI, 45-125 (p. 110); ‘Situación de la novela’, in *OC* VI, 268-90 (p. 280); ‘Vida de Edgar Allan Poe’, in *OC* VI, 304-69 (pp. 349, 355-56); ‘Poesía inglesa contemporánea’ (review), in *OC* VI, 195-96 (p.195).

¹⁷ *Cartas* I, 228-31 (p. 231). Nor is this Cortázar’s first reference to Lawrence. In a much earlier letter to Luis Gagliardi, dated Chivilcoy, November 9, 1941, he speculates on ‘la influencia de Sigmund Freud y D. H. Lawrence’ on the work of Sartre, specifically the latter’s story ‘La Chambre’, which he had read in translation (as ‘El aposento’) in *Sur* (*Cartas* I, 135-39 [p. 137]). This suggests that he may already have been familiar with Lawrence’s highly idiosyncratic works on psychoanalysis, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922).

¹⁸ These are listed in Jaime Correa’s *Cortázar en Mendoza* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2014), 235-42.

¹⁹ Like Cortázar, Lawrence, in both life and literature, often sought refuge from what he viewed as the catastrophe of Western modernity in an idealized, ‘pagan’ Mediterranean, which features prominently in the travelogues *Twilight in Italy* (1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) and the posthumously published *Etruscan Places* (1932), as well as poems such as ‘Sicilian Cyclamens’, ‘The Greeks Are Coming’, ‘The Argonauts’, ‘Middle of the World’ and ‘For the Heroes Dipped in Scarlet’. For the latter see D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Penguin, 1993), 310, 687-89.

Pienso que será magnífico saltar hacia atrás, desde Europa siglo XX a las mesetas originales, fuera del tiempo, a salvo de la historia. ¿Se despertarán en el occidental las resonancias de contacto, las armónicas, frente a su escenario primitivo, su punto de partida? Creo que sí; por lo menos, algunas experiencias como las de D. H. Lawrence en Taos, y las de ese americano que vivió veinte años entre los indios de Nuevo Méjico, hasta aprender no solo el idioma y las costumbres, sino llegar a pensar como ellos y sentir como ellos... El extremo desarrollo espiritual del hombre puede coincidir mejor con su extremo primitivismo, que los términos medios estilo ‘misionero’ o ‘antropólogo’.²⁰

How Cortázar came to learn of Lawrence’s alleged ‘experiencias en Taos’ (they were, in fact, very different than he imagined) remains unclear, but the most likely sources were the essays of *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) (especially ‘Indians and Entertainment’, ‘The Dance of the Sprouting Corn’ and ‘The Hopi Snake Dance’), the novella *St. Mawr* (1925) and the titular story of *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (1928), itself written in Taos in 1925.²¹ This latter work relates the experiences of a Californian woman in present-day New Mexico who, weary of modern life, flees her home and her failing marriage and ends up as the delirious victim of a ritual sacrifice at the hands of an age-old, indigenous tribe.²² The essentials of the plot are so similar to those of Cortázar’s ‘La noche boca arriba’ (from *Final del juego*) that one suspects a direct influence. And that might be of significance to the

²⁰ *Cartas I*, 296-99 (p.297). Lawrence’s possible influence on ‘El ídolo de las Cícladas’ will be the subject of a future study.

²¹ Lawrence’s other pieces relating to his time in and around Taos (‘Taos’ [1923], ‘Pan in America’ [1926] and ‘New Mexico’ [1928]) were initially published independently in journals and gathered and edited after Lawrence’s death in 1930 by Edward D. Macdonald in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (1936). This collection would almost certainly have been less accessible to Cortázar but, given his insatiable reading habits, it is entirely possible that he had come across it.

²² D. H. Lawrence, *The Woman Who Rode Way and Other Stories*, ed. Dieter Mehl and Christa Jansohn (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 39-71. The collection also includes another story, ‘Sun’, which involves an only partially successful and temporary flight from the horrors of industrialized modernity (in the form of New York) to an idealized Mediterranean (19-38).

present study, since the story on which, I shall argue, Cortazar is drawing in ‘La isla a mediodía’, comes from the same collection. I am referring to the redolently titled ‘The Man Who Loved Islands’, which also charts a man’s complete and ultimately fatal withdrawal from contemporary society and its myriad perceived ills.²³ The protagonist, Cathcart, is, in certain respects, a hyperbolized, caricatural incarnation of a type of (exclusively male) character illustrated and explored more earnestly in many of Lawrence’s later novels, essays and poems, the most developed examples of which are perhaps Birkin, from *Women in Love* (1920), Somers, from *Kangaroo*, and Mellors, from *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928).²⁴ All are intent on cultivating a deep, isolate sense of selfhood, sheltered from and untarnished by the anonymizing rituals and routines of an increasingly automated and insensate mass society but intimately attuned to the greater rhythms of the Cosmos.²⁵ Cathcart shares their abhorrence, but takes their quest for restorative apartness to what are ultimately self-destructive extremes, the story as a whole reading like an extended, often sardonic gloss on Donne’s famous dictum. Indeed, Cathcart’s debacle has been viewed by at least one critic as an example of what J. G. Ballard termed ‘reverse Crusoeism’, putting him in stark contrast with a character such as Birkin who, despite envying Alexander Selkirk (the model for

²³ *The Woman Who Rode Away*, 151-73. The story (first published independently in 1927) initially appeared only in the American edition (the one Cortázar is most likely to have encountered), since Compton Mackenzie, on whom the often ridiculed protagonist was clearly (though not straightforwardly) based, threatened to sue Lawrence were the work to be published in book form in England. The threat was later dropped, and it was published posthumously in *The Lovely Lady* (1933), being repeatedly anthologized thereafter. For details of the spat see *The Woman Who Rode Away*, ‘Introduction’ (xxi-lxv). xxxv-xxxix.

²⁴ There is a substantial critical bibliography on the story, and many other interpretations of Cathcart’s character and fate have been offered. For example, a number of commentators have viewed it as an exercise in self-critique and its protagonist as a damning self-portrait of his creator and the latter’s own, repeatedly adumbrated but ultimately abortive attempt to found a Utopian community, which he initially named Rananim but later referred to simply as ‘the Island’. See, for example, Stefania Michelucci, ‘A Man Who Loved Islands: D. H. Lawrence and the Paradox of Rananim’, in *Vite di Utopia*, ed. Vita Fortunati and Paola Spinuzzi (Ravenna: Longo, 2000), 27-38; Jill Franks, “‘The Man Who Loved Islands’: D. H. Lawrence and His Island Scheme”, in her *Islands and the Modernists: The Allure of Isolation in Art, Literature and Science* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 105-38 (especially pp. 107-21). For a clear and detailed summary of Lawrence’s uniformly disastrous attempts at establishing Rananim see George J. Zytaruk, ‘Rananim: Lawrence’s Failed Utopia’, in *The Spirit of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Gamini Salgado and G. K. Das (London: Macmillan, 1988), 266-94.

²⁵ I have written extensively on this aspect of Lawrence’s work in relation to Pablo Neruda’s poetry, and to avoid excessive recapitulation I would refer the reader to my ‘Caballero solo’: Eliot, Lawrence ... Porter?, *MLR*, 113:1 (2018), 117-29 (especially pp. 119-22).

Defoe's character) his solitude, like Mellors craves seclusion only in order to cleanse himself before, at least in principle, reconnecting with his fellow men.²⁶

The story relates Cathcart's departure from the mainland and his successive sojourns on three, increasingly remote and hostile islands. The first two he abandons at least partly because they retain too many of the trappings of and ties with his former, enervatingly civilized life.²⁷ On the third, the text intimates, after becoming too weak and disoriented to flee, he dies in a snowstorm in what, finally, is absolute, inhuman isolation.²⁸ There are obvious parallels here with Marini's quixotic trajectory in 'La isla'. Like Cathcart, Marini craves a total break, both physical and spiritual, with the dehumanizing protocols of twentieth-century life (symbolized, as all the story's commentators note, by the plane and its programmed, endlessly repeated flight paths), even if the latter is drawn towards what he imagines as a sun-drenched, pre-Hellenic idyll rather than a barely habitable lump of rock in the freezing waters off Britain.²⁹ Both characters, in sum (albeit in quite different ways), embody that categorical rejection of Western modernity and yearning for some imagined sense of primal, spontaneous 'being-in-the world' shared by their creators, and both seem to end up dead as a consequence. These broad overlaps in theme and plot alone are worthy of

²⁶ See Frederick R. Karl, 'Lawrence's "The Man Who Loved Islands": The Crusoe Who Failed', in *A. D. H. Lawrence Miscellany*, ed. Simonetta de Filippis and Nick Ceramella (Napoli: Loffredo Editore, 2004), 265-79; D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (London: Penguin, 1995), 108. Tellingly, Birkin first tells Ursula Brangwen of his loathing of the 'huge aggregate lie' of a contemporary humanity that obliterates all individuality in a chapter (Ch. 11) titled 'An Island' (*Women in Love*, 123-33 [p.126]).

²⁷ On the first island, in marked distinction to Marini, he sets himself up as a sort of benign patriarch of an autonomous, quasi-feudal community that he is singularly ill-equipped to govern, and it is here that he is most obviously the butt of the narrator's irony. Subsequently, however, and particularly on the third island, the caustic humour recedes and a more (bleakly) philosophical tone emerges.

²⁸ As Karl points out, the increasingly misanthropic and solipsistic Cathcart is in fact much closer in character to Birkin's friend, the egotistical industrialist Gerald Critch, whose icy fate Lawrence perhaps deliberately has him share ('The Crusoe Who Failed', 269).

²⁹ There are, initially at least, classical Utopian echoes in Lawrence's story too, though they are treated with sometimes blunt irony. Once settled on the first island, for example, Cathcart sets about compiling a 'book of reference to all the flowers mentioned in the Greek and Latin authors', absorbed in the process of 'tracing flower after flower as it blossomed in the ancient world' as an antidote to ugly, capitalist modernity. And he wonders, rather deludedly in the context, 'why it should not be the happy Isle at last [...] the last small isle of the Hesperides, the perfect place' ('The Man', 153, 156).

note, but more striking still are what appear to be the specific, conscious echoes of Lawrence's story in Cortázar's, several of which I shall now examine.

Both stories refer explicitly to the rise of mass tourism and its pernicious effects on unspoiled wildernesses and/or changeless, ancestral ways of life. The hapless Cathcart, increasingly beset by financial worries (throughout the first two sections of the story, money acts as a sort of synecdoche for all of contemporary society's malaises), is forced to sell his first island to 'an hotel company who were willing to speculate in it' by turning it into a 'handy honeymoon-and-golf island' ('The Man', 160).³⁰ The phrase, twice repeated (161), drips with irony, and Cortázar is equally scathing. The island on which Marini becomes fixated is said to remain unsullied, 'al margen del circuito turístico', but a stewardess warns him 'No durará ni cinco años [...] Apúrate si piensas ir, las hordas estarán allí en cualquier momento, Genghis Cook vela' ('La isla', 151).³¹ Even more suggestive are the similarities between the respective protagonists' relationships with women. On the second island, Cathcart begins an affair with a girl called Flora, his widowed housekeeper's daughter, but does so out of a 'kind of pity' (164) so that the union is a disaster, 'mechanical, automatic', governed by the 'automatism of sex' rather than the 'fresh new delicacy of desire' that he hoped might arise from the 'new stillness of desirelessness' which he had been nurturing within himself (164).³²

³⁰ Money plays a comparable though less prominent role in 'La isla', where Marini's fetishization of the island as a pre-capitalist Arcadia causes him to downplay the fact that the subsistence of its inhabitants depends on trade with the mainland, in which he plans to participate ('La isla', 126, 131). Similarly, paying for his lodging is his primary concern upon arrival (131).

³¹ Thomas Cook is similarly maligned in 'Gre / cia / ce / ece 59' (164). Lawrence himself refers to Thomas Cook with equal contempt ('the great adventure of death, where Thomas Cook cannot guide us') in the poem 'Glad Death' (*The Complete Poems*, 676-77 [677]). The description of Xiros cited above also recalls Lawrence's evocation of an unblemished, archaic Sardinia, on the cusp of being swallowed up by the 'railroads' and 'omnibuses', which, he says, 'has no history, not date, no race, no offering [...] It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilization.' See *Sea and Sardinia*, ed. Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 9.

³² Here Cathcart momentarily sounds much more like Birkin or Mellors, or indeed the speaker of a poem such as 'Manifesto', perhaps providing evidence of Lawrence's claim, made in a letter to his publisher in response to McKenzie's threat, that the story is not merely an extended piece of mockery but that 'the Man who Loved Islands has a philosophy behind him, and a real significance' (quoted in *The Woman Who Rode Away*, 'Introduction', xxxvii). Something similar might be said of Marini, who himself initially cuts a somewhat ridiculous figure – at least in the eyes of those around him. For 'Manifesto' see *The Complete Poems*, 262-68 (especially pp. 266-68).

Consequently, ‘the island was besmirched and spoiled’ (165). Flora duly becomes pregnant and Cathcart feels obliged to marry her, even though throughout the pregnancy he is ‘meditating escape’ (166). When their daughter is born, he settles his remaining property on Flora and pays her to leave (which, he tartly notes, ‘did arouse her interest’ [166]) before fleeing unannounced and unaccompanied to the final island. We find an analogous, though far more tersely articulated narrative embedded in ‘La isla’. Marini has a fiancée, Carla (even the bisyllabic, Italian(ate) names are similar), whom he increasingly neglects as a consequence of his obsession. When, having moved back in with her family, she writes to tell him that she has decided to abort their child, like Cathcart he gives her two months’ wages before she pointedly has a friend inform him that she is considering marrying a presumably wealthy dentist (‘La isla’, 126-27). Unmoved, he initially replaces her with a series of empty and repetitive sexual encounters, mostly with seemingly indistinguishable stewardesses and determined solely by the flight schedules, and this soulless carnal merry-go-round only heightens his desire to visit the island. Both characters, then, attempt to leave behind capitalist modernity by spurning one of its cornerstones – the bourgeois family and its exigencies.

There are further, less developed but still significant links between the stories. Just as Cortázar provides us with certain markers to indicate the pre-Hellenic antiquity of Xiros, so Lawrence deliberately locates his islands in ‘the celtic sea’ in order to lend them an air of untrammelled, ‘primitive’ vitality, and makes reference to ancient, Druidic religious rites, including ritual sacrifice (‘priests, with golden knives and mistletoe [...] old men of an invisible race, around the altar stone’) (‘The Man’, 153, 161). Now, whereas Marini is drawn towards this sense of the primordial, Cathcart is initially repelled by these remote historical ghosts, though for a reason which again connects the two characters – his fear of and

subsequent attempt to elude ‘the terrors of infinite time’ (152). Both protagonists share a revulsion at the chronometric hell of contemporary Western life and of the tyranny of time more generally, but whereas Cathcart’s progressive and ultimately vertiginous loss of temporal coordinates contributes to his eventual demise, Marini seems unable completely to overcome his ingrained reliance on strict routine, symbolized by the automatic checking of his watch when he hears the plane, an episode carefully foreshadowed at the start of the story (‘La isla’, 124, 125, 131).³³ This repudiation of measured, clock time gives way, in both works, to a celebration of what is imagined as pure space. Lawrence is characteristically expansive:

Only he still derived his single satisfaction from being alone, absolutely alone, with the space soaking into him [...] No other contact [...] Only space, damp, twilit, sea-washed space! This was the bread of his soul! (‘The Man’, 170)

Cortázar, once again, is far more economical. Immediately after Marini has torn off his watch, in frustration at his continued dependency on it (though, tellingly, he does not discard it, merely putting it in his pocket), he muses ‘No sería fácil matar al hombre viejo, pero allí en lo alto, *tenso de sol y espacio*, sintió que la empresa era posible’ (‘La isla’, 131, my emphasis).³⁴

³³ In Cathcart’s case, having fled the ‘otherworld of undying time’ on the first island, on the second ‘the years [blend] into a soft mist’ and, prior to his entanglement with Flora, he felt that he had reached ‘the rare, desireless levels of Time’. On the third, now utterly alone, ‘he kept no track of time’, and we are told that, just before he dies, ‘Time had ceased to pass’ (‘The Man’, 152, 163, 165, 170). The phrase ‘No llevaba demasiado la cuenta de los días’ also appears in Cortázar, but to describe the hazy limbo between Marini’s sightings of the island rather than his experience on/of the island itself (‘La isla’, 128).

³⁴ The increasingly nightmarish ticking of a watch also features at a critical moment in ‘An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge’, just before the noose is released. See *The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce* (London: Picador, 1988), 9-18 (p. 11). We also find a comparable reference in Huxley (see below).

Both writers also progressively blur the boundary between subjective and objective experience. Cortázar does this in especially dramatic fashion, and the ambiguity he generates is central to the overall effect of the story and our capacity to make sense of it (I shall say much more about this in the following sections), whereas Lawrence's treatment of and references to this perceptual confusion are more sporadic and less pivotal. Nevertheless, his influence may still be detectable. On the first island Cathcart is increasingly prone to 'Uncanny dreams, half-dreams, half-evocated yearnings', whilst on the second 'his spirit was like a dim-lit cave under water' and he begins to feel that 'I am turned into a dream'. On the third, 'he felt as if he were dissolving' and, 'barely conscious [...] no longer realized what he was doing', mistaking the heads of seals for 'the black heads of men swimming in his bay'. At the close, now a sort of sickening 'wraith', he can no longer even distinguish the seasons ('The Man', 159, 163, 169, 173). Cortázar, meanwhile, prefigures the manifold, tantalizing uncertainties which permeate the concluding section of his story with Marini's rather less subtle thought that 'volar tres veces por semana a mediodía sobre Xiros era tan irreal como soñar tres veces por semana que volaba sobre Xiros' ('La isla', 125). There are also correspondences, though they may be fortuitous, between the episodes in which the respective protagonists react to the unwelcome return of civilization towards the close of the stories. When a boat unexpectedly arrives on the third island (interestingly, it is said to arrive 'suddenly, swooping down', rather like the plane in 'La isla'), Cathcart experiences the intrusion as 'repulsive', a 'violation', 'an uncleanness on the fresh earth' ('The Man', 169). Marini, meanwhile, on hearing the whirring of the plane's engines, 'se dijo que no miraría el avión, que no se dejaría *contaminar* por lo peor de sí mismo' ('La isla', 160, my emphasis).

Huxley

'Where are you now?', Susila asked.

Without turning his head in her direction, Will answered, 'In heaven, I suppose,' and pointed at the landscape. 'In heaven – *still*? When are you going to make a landing down here?'

ALDOUS HUXLEY.³⁵

Huxley was, from early on, an important writer for Cortázar.³⁶ As indicated above, he was already planning to lecture on Huxley's work in 1945. In 1947, meanwhile, he wrote an enthusiastic review of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) for the magazine *Cabalgata*, in which he also singled out *Point, Counterpoint* (1928), *Brave New World* (1932), and *Eyeless in Gaza* (1939) as 'ápices intelectuales de nuestras cuatro primeras décadas' (OC VI, 166). Huxley is also mentioned twice in *Teoría del túnel* (OC VI, 73, 116), whilst in his review of *Adán Buenosayres*, published two years later in *Realidad* (OC VI, 253-60), he compares Huxley favourably to Marechal as a philosophical novelist (257-58). In 'Situación de la novela' he describes Huxley as a 'magnífico novelista', albeit one of the 'continuadores de la línea tradicional' rather than a pathbreaker (280). *Los premios* (1960) was likened by one early critic to *Point, Counterpoint*, while Huxley is alluded to directly in *Rayuela* (1963) in his capacity as a creator of dystopias. A number of critics have also remarked on his deeper, compositional influence on that novel, especially its metafictional dimension.³⁷ *Point, Counterpoint* also features memorably in one of Cortázar's final stories, 'Diario para un cuento', where the narrator recalls the scene in which Spandrell awaits his killers while listening to his favourite Beethoven quartet.³⁸ His library includes a 1959 edition of the essays *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), written in the wake of

³⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Island* (London: Vintage, 2005 [1962]), 271.

³⁶ In 'Los pescadores de esponjas' (OC VI, 540-45), an essay dedicated to Ramón Gómez de la Serna published in *Clarín* in 1978, he looks back and recalls 'los primeros panatallazos sobrecogedores' he experienced on reading Huxley 'a los veinte años' (541-42).

³⁷ On the inside cover of the first French edition of the novel, *Les gagnants* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1961), Henri Hell claims that 'ce roman remarquable évoque le meilleur Aldous Huxley, celui de *Contrepoint*'. For the possible influence of the same novel on *Rayuela* see Elizabeth Escalante Herrera, *The Novel Within a Novel: Gide, Huxley, Cortázar* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1977). The key parallel is that of the embedded novelist figures, Edouard, Quarles (also coopted by Borges in 'Examen de la obra de Hebert Quain') and Morelli, who offer a sort of running commentary on the text as it unfolds.

³⁸ 'Diario para un cuento' in *Deshoras* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2017 [1983]), 111-42 (pp. 137-38).

Huxley's experiments with mescaline.³⁹ In the former, Huxley details the radically liberating effects of the drug on the subjective experience of time, which seemed to lose all rational measure, so that minutes and centuries became indistinguishable. He remarks at one point, 'I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe.'⁴⁰ This particular reflection surely brings Marini's dilemma to mind. In the latter, he compares the visionary experiences induced by mescaline to the 'Other Worlds' of the 'heavens and fairylands of folklore and religion', the 'lovely islands' where man might allegedly exist in 'his primal state of innocence', citing, amongst many others, the Garden of the Hesperides and the Islands of the Blest as examples (*The Doors of Perception*, 72-74). These observations, of obvious relevance to 'La isla a mediodía', were subsequently revisited and amplified in Huxley's final novel, *Island* (yet another!), whose plot is triggered when Will Farnaby, an initially cynical journalist in the pay of a rapacious oil barren, runs his boat aground in a squall on the shore of Pala (yet another variation on the Crusoe narrative), an island whose inhabitants have formed a purportedly Utopian community grounded philosophically in precepts culled from various Eastern religions (principally Buddhism) and related meditation techniques, but also in the controlled use of an hallucinogen, named (after the Buddhist/Hinduist notion of liberation from the cycle of birth and death) moksha.⁴¹ Schoolchildren learn, via induced trances, how to distort or telescope time, so that minutes of clock time can be experienced as hours. When Farnaby, increasingly sympathetic to the islanders, asks a teacher how this is achieved, the latter replies:

³⁹ See www.march.es/es/coleccion/biblioteca-julio-cortazar/ficha/doors-perception-and-heaven-and-hell--3673
The hard copy is heavily marked and annotated.

⁴⁰ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception / Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 10.

⁴¹ The novel opens with him 'lying ... like a corpse', caught between fitful wakefulness and prolonged, delirious dreams, which replay painful episodes from his past. Initially the reader, like the character, cannot easily distinguish the two (*Island*, 7-12). It will end in comparable fashion.

Nobody knows how [...] but all those anecdotes about drowning men seeing the whole of their life unfolding in a few seconds are substantially true. (*Island*, 205)⁴²

Later, Farnaby himself is suddenly engulfed by ‘a vision as brief and comprehensive and intensely circumstantial as a drowning man’s’ in which many the horrors he has witnessed on his extensive travels as a journalist seem simultaneously to return (*Island*, 232). In the final chapter, he takes moksha and has an ecstatic trip very similar to the one recorded by his creator in *The Doors of Perception*, before returning abruptly to reality to find the island in the grip of a violent, foreign-backed military coup which, the reader suspects, heralds his own, imminent demise.

There are obvious parallels with ‘La isla’—some broadly thematic or structural, others more concrete— in all of the above, but it is the idea of the unaccountably expanded consciousness of the drowning man that is perhaps most relevant and leads us directly to the last and, I would argue, principal source of the story.

Golding

This is an island. At least I think it’s an island.

WILLIAM GOLDING.⁴³

The most memorable feature of ‘La isla a mediodía’ is surely the sudden, disorienting shift in focalization which occurs in the final sentences and forces the reader to re-evaluate the nature

⁴² In fact, Huxley had already experimented with such ideas in the earlier novel *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), in which the consciousness of a character, Eustace Barnack, who apparently dies of a heart attack in Ch. 12 (of thirty) lingers in a sort of timeless limbo until Ch. 28, inexplicably (and often comically) aware of relatives trying to contact him via a series of séances. He had also treated the ‘drowning man’ scenario in largely comic mode in *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), where one of the central characters, Chelifer, is knocked unconscious in a boating accident in Italy and eventually washed up on a beach to find ‘sympathetic spectators surrounding my corpse’ (*Those Barren Leaves* [London: Vintage, 2005], 133-40 [p. 135]).

⁴³ William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997 [1954]), 2.

of Marini's experiences on the island and indeed question whether and in what manner he visited it at all. For almost the entire narrative we have remained very close to Marini's perspective on events, but now fleetingly view the scene from that of the islanders who surround an unidentified corpse on the beach and who, disconcertingly, are said to be 'como siempre ... solos en la isla' ('La isla', 133), before the story concludes abruptly in a classic instance of *saber callar a tiempo*.⁴⁴ Now, Cortázar had frequently employed this type of stratagem in earlier stories in order to deliver that 'knockout blow' which he identified as one of the indispensable features of the genre, but the precise form it takes here suggests the direct and, it turns out, pervasive influence of a specific literary precedent.⁴⁵ I am referring to William Golding's novel, *Pincher Martin* (1956), which follows in minute, harrowing detail (Golding also uses an intensely concentrated form of free indirect discourse to keep the reader in claustrophobic, often repellent proximity to his protagonist's agonized consciousness) the tribulations of the titular character who, thrown overboard somewhere in the North Atlantic when his destroyer is torpedoed by a German U-boat, struggles to a remote, rocky outcrop where he spends six days clinging to life before finally succumbing.⁴⁶ Or so the reader initially supposes. Then, however, in the final chapter, the focus changes dramatically, just as it does in Cortázar's story. The scene now shifts to an unnamed island,

⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, almost all the story's commentators dwell on this climactic sequence, with several pointing out that the ambiguity here results from a much earlier transitional passage, which begins with Marini's face pressed almost erotically against the inside of the plane window ('Con los labios pegados al vidrio'). Here a series of conditionals (supposedly detailing what Marini *would* do in order to reach to the island) are suddenly interrupted by a preterite ('Desembarcó'), which seems to indicate that he has actually arrived ('La isla', 129). What none mentions, however, is that any of sense of the 'fantastic' that arises here is wholly the product of Cortázar's subtle manipulation of that staple mode of *realist* prose narrative, *style indirect libre*, which blurs 1st and 3rd person viewpoints (Cortázar himself referred to it as a 'primera persona disfrazada' ['Del cuento breve', 44]) and prevents the reader from acquiring any reliable external viewpoint on the action. It is a further irony, also passed over by critics, that a story which places so much emphasis on the visual depends entirely for its final effect on the reader's complete *inability* to see what is going on 'behind' the printed text. For a lucid summary of Cortázar's narrative strategy here, see Peter Standish, *Understanding Julio Cortázar* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2001), 63-64.

⁴⁵ Aside from 'Profundo sistema de Remi' (cited above), these include 'Carta a una señorita en París', 'Lejana' (from *Bestiario* [1951]), 'Continuidad de los parques', 'El río' and 'La noche boca arriba' (from *Final del juego*). Cortázar uses the boxing analogy in 'Algunos aspectos del cuento', 375.

⁴⁶ Like Lawrence's story, Golding's novel is, *inter alia*, a sort of hellish anti-Robinsonade, and indeed includes multiple, sometimes blackly comic references to Defoe's original.

where a naval officer, Davidson, has come to recover a body that has washed ashore. It is revealed on the final page that the body is Martin's, but an even greater surprise awaits the reader. When the islander who discovered the corpse tentatively asks whether Martin would have suffered, Davidson reassures him, in what are the novel's final words, 'Don't worry about him. You saw the body. He didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots.'⁴⁷ Just as in 'La isla', this closing revelation obliges the reader to reassess the nature and significance of everything that has come before. If Martin died right at the start of the novel, what are we to make of the experiences related over the subsequent two hundred pages? Were they, as in Bierce's story (a common literary precursor, which is unequivocal in this respect), the horrendously protracted and increasingly incoherent meanderings and hallucinations of his fading consciousness in the moments preceding death?⁴⁸ Or do they rather invite a supernatural, metaphysical, or other type of allegorical reading? I shall return to these crucial interpretive questions presently. For the moment, I wish merely to underline the remarkable similarity in both the central narrative premise and its structural manipulation in the two works - a similarity which even extends to the characters' names, with Cortázar's reading like a minimally Italianized anagram of Golding's. All this, I would argue, is anything but coincidental, since it turns out that Cortázar had almost certainly read *Pincher Martin* shortly before he wrote 'La isla'. Originally published by Faber in 1956, it appeared in two Penguin editions in 1962 and 1964, and Cortázar owned a copy of the latter.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he also possessed a 1960 edition of *Lord of the Flies*, another island novel which features a plane crash (though in this case one that occurs prior to the commencement of the narrative proper

⁴⁷ William Golding, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber, 1984), 208. Martin had apparently freed himself of his boots three pages into the novel (p. 10), and they feature as a motif throughout.

⁴⁸ A number of early reviewers identified Bierce's story as a specific source for the novel. For a summary, see Arnold Johnston, 'The Miscasting of Pincher Martin', in James R. Baker, *Critical Essays on William Golding* (Boston: Hall, 1988), 103-16 (p. 104).

⁴⁹ See www.march.es/es/coleccion/biblioteca-julio-cortazar/ficha/pincher-martin--5876.

and is referred to only in flashback) and culminates with a scene on a beach involving another abrupt alteration of narrative viewpoint.⁵⁰

And the resonances of Golding's novel in Cortázar's story do not end with the basic narrative set-up and dizzying final twist. They range from specific plot details to a series of shared motifs and even particular turns of phrase, and I shall address the most important of these in turn. Regarding plot, Cortázar prepares the ground for the unsettling dénouement via a seemingly innocuous but, in retrospect, vital piece of foreshadowing, when Marini, peering down on the island from the plane, imagines its inhabitants looking up with equal fascination at the alien reality on high ('los pescadores alzarían apenas los ojos para seguir el paso de esa otra irrealidad' ['La isla, 125]).⁵¹ Shortly afterwards, immediately before he decides to visit the island, he again picks out 'un pescador que debía estar mirando el avión' (128), but at the close *he* will apparently be the one looking up at the plane as it crashes. In the novel, on the other hand, the shipwrecked Martin imagines how his island might look from a plane and consequently makes a pattern with stones to attract attention (*Pincher Martin*, 107-8, 126). Cortázar has effectively inverted that scenario for his own purposes. Certain key sentences further link the two texts. So, as soon as Martin conceives of the possibility of being rescued by air:

His ears began to fill with the *phantom buzzing of planes*. He kept *looking up* and *fell at once*, cutting himself. (*Pincher Martin*, 110, my emphasis)

⁵⁰ See www.march.es/es/coleccion/biblioteca-julio-cortazar/ficha/lord-flies--3838. Golding was, of course, consciously re-writing, in darkling mode, what he viewed as ludicrously romanticized island novels such as R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857), to which he has the mysterious captain somewhat improbably allude on the final page. Golding's second novel, *The Inheritors* (1955), concludes with an even more remarkable switch of narrative perspective, though I have no evidence that Cortázar had read it.

⁵¹ This is one of several instances in the story of that surreptitious, cumulative 'softening up' of the reader which paves the way for the killer punch to which Cortázar, extending the boxing metaphor, alludes in 'Algunos aspectos' (375).

In 'La isla', meanwhile, we read:

Se dejó caer de espaldas, entre las piedras calientes, resistió sus aristas y sus lomos encendidos, y miró verticalmente el cielo; lejanamente, le llegó el zumbido de un motor.

Cerrando los ojos, se dijo que no miraría el avión ('La isla', 131, my emphasis)

Much of the wording is so close here that it is difficult to believe that this is not a direct borrowing, though again there is a significant transposition: Martin is so desperate to get away from his island that he thinks he hears a plane; Marini, equally anxious to remain on his, struggles to suppress every trace of his former existence.

When it comes to motifs, we are told repeatedly that the ailing Martin appears to perceive everything on the island distortedly, as if through an increasingly blurred window. So, for example:

Sometimes a pebble would be occupied entirely by a picture as though it were a window, a spy-hole into a different world or other dimension. (*Pincher Martin*, 26)

He looked at the sea. All at once he found that he was seeing through a window again [...] He *leaned to peer round the window frame* but it went with him. (*Pincher Martin*, 82, my emphasis).

The hallucination sat on the rock and at last he faced it through his *blurred window* [...] He bent forward until his *bleared window* was just above his right instep. (*Pincher Martin*, 194-95, my emphasis)⁵²

Marini, of course, initially glimpses the island through the plane window, which simultaneously enables and restricts his vision:

Al enderezarse la isla *se borró* de la ventanilla. ('La isla', 124, my emphasis)

Se inclinó sobre una ventilla de la cola. ('La isla', 124, my emphasis)

Pero Marini siguió pensando en la isla, mirándola cuando se acordaba o cuando había una ventanilla [...] Todo estaba falseado en la visión inútil y recurrente. ('La isla', 125)

Todo era también *borroso* y fácil y estúpido hasta la hora de *inclinarse* sobre la *ventanilla* de la cola, sentir el frío cristal como un límite del acuario, donde lentamente se movía la tortuga dorada en el espeso azul. ('La isla', 128, my emphasis)

Again, the precise phrasing, especially the detail of the respective protagonists leaning over in order to pursue a moving image beyond an obstructive limit, looks too close to be fortuitous, and although Martin's window is primarily metaphorical and Marini's physical, the latter is clearly freighted with symbolic significance, functioning as one of those many thresholds or interfaces in Cortázar's work which connect different planes or facets of reality,

⁵² For further, increasingly this skewed perceptual window see *Pincher Martin*, 45, 67, 97, 102, 130, 138-39, 182.

offering, to borrow Golding's own phrase, 'spyhole[s] into a different world or other dimension'.⁵³

These observations concerning the inherent inadequacies and frustrations of particular modes of perception are further extended in both works via a series of allusions to pictures, photography and film. When Martin appears to be regaining his bearings, initially he is only able to perceive in the form of isolated, seemingly arbitrary 'pictures that came and went inside his head [...] small and remote' (*Pincher Martin*, 25).⁵⁴ Later, now actively endeavouring to piece together the elusive shards of his past which sporadically flash through his lurching, splintered consciousness, Martin laments that 'I am an album of snapshots, random, a whole show of trailers of old films' (132-33) – static, disconnected snippets or truncated excerpts rather than a coherent, continuous self.⁵⁵ In Cortázar's story, the same media constrain or cloud Marini's view, whether figuratively or materially. On his second sighting of the island, he makes out what is described as 'el *dibujo* de unos pocos campos cultivados' ('La isla', 124, my emphasis). Subsequently he 'sacó una foto de Xiros pero le salió borrosa' (127) and later considers filming 'el paso de la isla' so as to be able to 'repetir la imagen en el hotel' (128), but ultimately deems these partial, ersatz views to be no substitute for first-hand experience of the island.⁵⁶

⁵³ To take just one, parallel example, the comparison of the plane window to the glass of a fish tank cited above clearly and perhaps consciously recalls the *mise-en-scène* of 'Áxolotl' (from *Final del juego*), where the aquarium wall that separates man and axolotl is as symbolic as it is concrete. Interestingly, Golding makes use of the aquarium in a very similar way in *Pincher Martin*, when Martin, staring at fish in a rockpool on the island, suddenly and seamlessly finds himself transported to a scene from his past, looking at 'bottles at the back of the bar [...] through the aquarium' (134).

⁵⁴ For further, related references, see *Pincher Martin*, 50, 93. After this, analogies involving photography and film take over.

⁵⁵ For further, related references, see *Pincher Martin*, 159, 162, 173, 190.

⁵⁶ Here Cortázar is surely referring back to the interplay between photography and film which formed the basis of 'Las babas del diablo', from *Las armas secretas* (1959). For a detailed analysis of the limitations of and sometimes paradoxical relationship between the two media in that earlier story, see my *Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), Ch.2 (especially pp. 85-106). Interestingly, Lawrence makes a very similar observation in *Etruscan Places*, when he refers to the need to see 'not as a camera does when it takes a snapshot, not even as a cinema camera, taking a succession of instantaneous snaps; but in a curious rolling flood of vision, in which the image itself seethes and rolls; and only the mind picks out certain factors which *shall* represent the image seen.' See *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Essays*, ed. Simonetta

Golding's text is replete with often —and increasingly— grotesque references to Martin's eyes and especially his mouth, which are also replicated in 'La isla'. As he is cast against what turns out to be the rock, his eyes are said to be 'needlessly open' (*Pincher Martin*, p. 22), and there are several further allusions to their either being wide open or opening, especially in the early part of the text when he is struggling to orient himself (43, 46, 58, 91-92, 124).⁵⁷ Cortázar makes subtle and sparing use of the same motif. When Marini appears to reach the island he is greeted by Klaios, whom he takes to be 'el patriarca', and who 'le habló lentamente, mirándole en los ojos' ('La isla', 129). This seemingly trivial detail proves to be of paramount importance since, shortly afterwards, Marini, after hearing the plane approaching and initially trying to ignore it by 'cerrando los ojos', suddenly opens them at the precise moment at which it plunges into the sea. Then, at the close, when the islanders surround the body, a woman implores 'Ciérrale los ojos', though they remain hauntingly open (133).⁵⁸ The intimations remain inconclusive, but they all point to the possibility that, if Marini reaches the island at all, it is only as he somehow drags himself, dying, out of the wreckage and onto the beach.⁵⁹ The rest of the story, from just after the point at which we see

de Filippis (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 127.

⁵⁷ In Bierce's story the protagonist also closes his eyes (to picture his family) and then opens them immediately prior to what the reader assumes will be his execution; then, just before the close, we are told that his eyes 'felt congested; he could no longer close them' ('An Occurrence', 11, 17). The repeated opening and closing of the eyes, blurring the frontier between inner and outer experience, imagination and concrete perception, is also a pivotal feature of both Farnaby's initial return to consciousness and his concluding trip in *Island* (9-10, 263-65, 269-70, 274, 276, 278-79) and, though used more sparingly, of Chelifer's near death experience in *Those Barren Leaves* (136-38).

⁵⁸ The women in the story may provide yet another link with Golding, though in the context they also have a more diffuse, faintly atavistic air about them. As Martin descends into delirium, he repeatedly thinks he sees a ghostly old woman whom he associates with a terrifying cellar from his childhood (*Pincher Martin*, 175, 192-93). On the island, Marini encounters two women who, disconcertingly, 'lo miraron asombradas antes de correr a encerrarse' ('La isla', 130). They later fleetingly reappear speaking 'animadamente' to Klaios and his son while 'lo miraban de reajo' (131). It is one of these women who asks for his eyes to be closed, suggesting that the two scenes might in fact be almost simultaneous. For the origins of the motif in Golding, see John Carey, *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber, 2009), 15-17, 193.

⁵⁹ This is further suggested (but, again, never confirmed) by the fact that the islanders cannot comprehend 'cómo había tenido fuerzas para nadar a la orilla y arrastrarse desangrándose hasta ahí' ('La isla', 133). The reader, witness throughout to Marini's obsession, can.

him with his lips pressed against the window, would occur in his distended, ‘drowning man’s’ consciousness after the crash, which he himself had precipitated.⁶⁰

When it comes to the motif of the mouth, Golding’s text is deliberately, distressingly relentless, whereas Cortázar is at his most compellingly succinct. Its treatment and implications, however, are remarkably similar in both works. From the outset and throughout, Martin’s mouth is described, via a series of increasingly grotesque, defamiliarizing periphrases, as a sort of autonomous, alien appendage operating independently of its owner, uncontrollably pouring out an often incomprehensible stream of bubblings, gurglings, quackings, spluttering and snoring noises rather than articulate speech.⁶¹ The sole reference to the mouth in ‘La isla’ is figurative, but it is equally graphic and perturbing and also implies an uncanny *dédoublement*. When Marini appears to drag the dying man from the water he sees that he is ‘*sangrando por una enorme herida en la garganta*’ which is likened to a ‘*boca repugnante que llamaba a Marini [...] le gritaba entre borbotones algo que él ya no era capaz de oír*’ (‘La isla’, 133, my emphasis). This is the last we see of Marini in the story, which further implies that the body he seemingly recovered was in fact his, the choked cries his own death throes.⁶² The specific terms employed in this passage are almost identical to some of Golding’s. Early in the novel, for instance, we are told that ‘The sound began in the *throat*, *bubbled* and stayed there. The *mouth* took no part but lay open’

⁶⁰ This was certainly one of the ways in which Cortázar initially conceived of the ending. While correcting the proofs he informed Francisco Porrúa, in a letter dated December 6, 1965, that he had intended to imply that ‘Marini vivió sus horas de dicha en un plano que ya no es el de la realidad cotidiana, o también que le fue dada la recompensa de vivir esas horas mientras su cuerpo terrestre caía al mar junto con el avión y moría en la playa.’ (*Cartas*, II, 206-10 [208]).

⁶¹ See for example *Pincher Martin*, 7-8, 13, 17-19, 22, 25, 28-30, 34-37, 46, 67, 78, 80, 90, 93, 102, 129, 138-40, 144, 145-46, 167, 171-73, 178, 180, 186, 188-94, 197-98. Martin’s mouth is referred to variously as a ‘gate in the lower part of the globe’, ‘the hole under his window’, ‘the opening under his bristles’ etc. (93, 138, 140).

⁶² There is also an interesting resemblance here with a line from Lawrence’s long poem ‘New Heaven and Earth’, in which the world-weary speaker, looking on at the ravages of the First World War, laments ‘When I saw the torn dead, I knew it was my own torn dead body’. The entire poem explores the possibility of completely abandoning the ‘old world’ and ‘the old life’ so as to become a reinvigorated ‘madman in rapture’ who, ‘my hand flung like a drowned man’s hand on a rock’ is ‘thrown upon the shore’ of ‘a new world of time’ (*The Complete Poems*, 256-61 [257, 259-60]). The parallels with the story are patent and multiple, though they may be entirely casual.

(*Pincher Martin*, 34, my emphasis), whilst towards the close ‘His *mouth said things but he could not hear them* so did not know what they were.’ (171, my emphasis).

In addition to all of the above, there are also various isolated phrases and descriptive passages common to both texts. Particularly noteworthy are the deliberately mystifying depictions of the sinking of Martin’s ship and the plane crash, which include a number of common elements, albeit differently configured:

He searched the circle for wreckage or a head, but *there was nothing*. She had gone *as if a hand had reached up that vertical mile and snatched her down in one motion*. (*Pincher Martin*, 18, my emphasis)

Vio [...] *la caída vertical* sobre el mar [...] *no se veía más que la blanda línea de las olas*, una caja de cartón oscilando absurdamente cerca del lugar de la caída, y casi al final [...] *una mano fuera del agua*. (‘La isla’, 132, my emphasis)

In both cases the unaccountable absence of debris suggests that all may not be as it seems. We also find in Golding a comparably pointed reference to the confusion of dream and wakefulness experienced by Marini (see above):

How difficult it was to distinguish between sleeping and waking when all one experienced was a series of trailers. (*Pincher Martin*, 173)

And finally, both texts feature a moment when it dawns on the protagonist that, for reasons he is unable fully to comprehend (and which prove especially ironic in Marini's case), he will never leave the island:

The thought became words that tumbled out of his mouth: 'I shall never get away from this rock!' (*Pincher Martin*, 162)⁶³

Supo sin la menor duda que no se iría de la isla, que de alguna manera iba a quedarse para siempre en la isla. ('La isla', 130)

There are, of course —besides the fundamental one of genre— many differences between the two works, only the most obvious being that whereas Martin (closer to their common ancestor, Crusoe, in this respect) yearns to escape from an island he views as a sort of hell, Marini longs to visit one that he imagines as a prelapsarian paradise. Perhaps the most intriguing of these relates to the degree of ambiguity operative in the texts. In particular, the novel ultimately makes it clear that Martin has died and that his is the body recovered by Davidson, whereas Cortázar only ever hints that the corpse is Marini's. So, in the story we are left with unresolved possibilities which no re-reading can entirely reconcile, whereas in the novel the reader is seemingly compelled to try to make at least some sense of the text, given that we *know* that Martin died within minutes of his being thrown overboard. Or at least so its author thought. Indeed, Golding, rebutting all discrepant readings, was adamant that almost the entire novel is a *post mortem* narrative that unfolds in a sort of personal purgatory, making it essentially a fable or, to use his own preferred term, myth.⁶⁴ Many early

⁶³ On just one occasion Marini refers to his island as 'un peñón solitario' (158), echoing Golding's description of Martin's rock, which in turn seems knowingly to hark back to the 'Piece of a Rock' to which Crusoe clings when his ship is wrecked (*Robinson Crusoe*, 45).

⁶⁴ See, for example, his letter to the *Radio Times* of March 21, 1958, quoted in Carey, *William Golding*, 195-96. John Peter identified Golding as essentially a fabulist in 'The Fables of William Golding', *The Kenyon Review*, 19:4 (1957), 577-92. Golding welcomed the designation in principle but preferred the term 'myth', as 'I think a

reviewers and critics balked at this ‘supernatural’ dimension to the narrative and its ‘trick’ ending but in fact, as Carey and others before him have pointed out, Golding does not hold an hermeneutic monopoly on his novel, and the text itself is considerably less clearcut than his interpretation suggests.⁶⁵ Not only does the sheer, suffocating profusion of often gruesome sensory and psychological detail mitigate against narrowly allegorical readings, the text also provides at least one major clue that all Martin’s experiences on the rock may be hallucinated *in extremis* rather than literally purgatorial, in the form of a decaying tooth whose contours correspond closely to those of the rocky outcrop (*Pincher Martin*, 174).⁶⁶ Indeed, bizarre though it may seem, I would not be surprised if Cortázar, who had a predilection for inserting the most extravagantly recondite of literary jokes or acknowledgements in his stories, were paying tacit homage to Golding’s technical virtuosity here in his seemingly throwaway reference to the ‘dentista de Treviso’.⁶⁷ Conversely, if what Golding conceived of as a theological allegory is enriched by the injection of radical ambiguity, Cortázar’s ostensibly more worldly narrative is perhaps intermittently compromised by the inclusion of glaringly symbolic elements, though perhaps in the context of his work as a whole a quest such as Marini’s could hardly remain entirely free of more generic resonances. So, whilst the name

myth is a much profounder and more significant thing than fable’, which he saw as ‘an invented thing on the surface’ (quoted in Arnold Johnston, ‘The Miscasting of Pincher Martin’, 9).

⁶⁵ For a useful summary of the early, predominantly negative critical responses see Norman Page (ed.), *William Golding: Novels 1954-67* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 24-26. Interestingly, Angus Wilson commented that Golding’s concluding coup was more appropriate for a short story than a novel, and Cortázar evidently agreed. See Jack I. Biles, *Talk: Conversations with William Golding* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 69. Coincidentally, Golding, who later became much more open to alternative interpretations of his work, initially insisted on the primacy of authorial intention in trenchant opposition to Lawrence’s recommendation to trust the tale, not the teller, which he dismissed as ‘absolute nonsense’ when the notion was put to him by Frank Kermode in a BBC interview (Biles, *Conversations*, 54).

⁶⁶ This is by far the most extended and explicit passage, but Golding, very like Cortázar in this respect, has in fact subtly prepared the reader for this apparent revelation via a series of earlier references to teeth and the toothlike shape of the rock (*Pincher Martin*, 16, 30, 77-8, 90-1, 139, 154). Cortázar provides what retrospectively become identifiable as multiple hints (Marini’s oddly instantaneous friendship with ‘los jóvenes’, his inability to ‘pensar o elegir’, his jumping into the sea from a rock, his being borne by ‘corrientes insidiosas’, his swimming to the shore, his ‘golpeándose en las rocas y desgarrándose un brazo’ – there are many more) which suggest that, when he appeared to be settling into life on the island, he may in fact have been dying amongst the wreckage (‘La isla’, 129-30 132).

⁶⁷ See, for example, my comments on his use of the ‘bola de cristal’ as a deceptively Proustian leitmotif in ‘Las armas secretas’ (‘Why Enghien?’, 249-50). In fact, Golding also makes just a single reference to ‘the dentist’s chair’ in *Pincher Martin* (139).

Marini may be an oblique nod to Golding's character, it also points directly to the sea, which plays so prominent a role in the story.⁶⁸ Similarly, Marini initially thinks that the island is called Horos, which is rather crudely suggestive of time, escaping whose stranglehold is his principal motivation.⁶⁹ The cases of Lawrence and Huxley are pertinent here too. Despite the former's professed loathing of allegory, 'The Man Who Loved Islands' clearly draws on elements of fairy tale or fable, both structural and stylistic, though here it is perhaps the form itself that is treated ironically, at least at the outset.⁷⁰ Huxley, meanwhile, freely conceded that the narrative action of *Island* was crushed under the weight of its relentless expositional philosophizing.⁷¹ Perhaps, given its intrinsic peculiarities and history, the island genre necessarily entails at least a suggestion of allegory, more or less (de-)emphasized by its practitioners. If so, Cortázar's tale, despite its occasional missteps, is unusually successful in eschewing the types of excess and/or limitation associated with the more conventional or, to use Northrop Frye's term, naive manifestations of the form so roundly condemned by Lawrence (*Apocalypse*, 61).⁷²

⁶⁸ As Golding indicated to Kermode, his character's full name, Christopher Hadley Martin, was chosen deliberately for its (ironic) echo of St. Christopher, the Christ-bearer. See Frank Kermode, *Puzzles and Epiphanies: Essays and reviews, 1958-1961* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 208. Martin was also formerly a professional actor, a fact which Golding manifestly uses to create a sense of his being an Everyman in the *Theatrum Mundi*, and furthermore likens himself to Atlas and Prometheus, thereby explicitly endowing his predicament with a mythical dimension (*Pincher Martin*, 164). Additionally, his six days and nights on the rock clearly (and ironically) mirror those of the Creation in Genesis. Excepting Marini's name, Cortázar avoids all such emblemizing.

⁶⁹ Peter Beardsell has suggested that the name Xiros is itself symbolic, echoing the Spanish verb *girar* and thereby suggesting a critical turning point. Conversely, Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupe indicate that the name 'Xiros' has acquired symbolic status as a consequence of its role in the story, of which they provide an oddly inaccurate summary. See Peter Beardsell (ed.), *Siete cuentos* (Manchester: MUP, 1994), 84; Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999 [rev. ed.]), 718-19.

⁷⁰ For Lawrence's wholesale dismissal of allegory see *Apocalypse* (1931), ed. Maria Kalnins (London: Penguin, 1995), 61. His critical champion, F. R. Leavis, reads the story as a *märchen* in his *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978 [1955]), 324ff.

⁷¹ See his letter to Myrick Land in Grover Smith (ed.), *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), 929-30 (p. 930). Interestingly, given his considerable indebtedness to Huxley and his own acknowledged penchant for the fabular, Golding also considered the former's chief weakness (one, he felt, that he shared, though perhaps to a lesser degree) to be his privileging of ideas over character, i.e. his tendency to allegorize, even in novels such as *Point, Counterpoint* (Biles, *Conversations*, 5-8).

⁷² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020 [1957]), 90ff.

Conclusion – No Island is an Island

That's the kingdom one would like to live in – the kingdom of Ancient Greece, purged of every historical Greek that ever existed, and colonized out of the imaginations of modern artists, scholars and philosophers.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.⁷³

None of the above is intended to give the impression that Cortázar wrote 'La isla a medodía' by sitting at his desk with copies of Lawrence, Huxley and Golding and assembling a montage of strategically tweaked borrowings and allusions, or indeed that he always drew on those sources consciously. What I would argue, rather, is that if the chance sighting of one of the Cyclades provided the germ of the story, it fell on particularly rich and abundant literary ground, and what ended up as a single, supposedly pristine island has in fact been fashioned out of an entire archipelago. A work of thoroughgoing assimilation and reinvention, it offers a prime illustration of Eliot's maxim that it is better to steal than to imitate, or of that combative cannibalization of one's forebears which, for Harold Bloom, offered a potential release from the 'anxiety of influence'.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is worth comparing 'La isla' in this respect to two other stories in the same collection, 'Reunión' and 'El otro cielo', which draw explicitly and at times reverentially on specific literary works and can seem contrived and stilted as a consequence, curbed by their overt indebtedness. Here, by contrast, Cortázar's range of reference is both broader and more artfully synthesized and camouflaged. And that receptivity and eclecticism is revealingly at odds with the tunnel vision and monomania of his protagonist. Marini, in his way, is as much a Puritan as his predecessor Crusoe, but, in terms of its compositional principles, the text in which he features is considerably more Catholic.

⁷³ *Those Barren Leaves*, 177-78.

⁷⁴ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: OUP, 1973). As it happens, Cortázar's creative larceny is as nothing compared to Golding's, whose primary source was a novel with almost the same title and an identical narrative premise – Henry Taprell Dorling's *Pincher Martin O.D* (1916), published under the pseudonym 'Taffrail'. Crucially, In Dorling's novel Martin is saved, but otherwise Golding plunders it for material.

Neither, needless to say, is or ever could have been remotely pre-Hellenic, but that, intentionally or otherwise, may ultimately be at least part of the story's point.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ But not, perhaps the whole point, as Pellón assumes when he describes Marini's apparent death as a 'mercy killing' perpetrated by his creator to put his delusional character out of his misery ('The Idolatry of Origins', 126). That Marini's attempt to 'return to the source' may founder does not render the story's critique of the world which he flees any less potent. And even Lawrence, in a coda to the seemingly desolate passage used as an epigraph above, notes that 'Yet, *in our very search* for [the Hesperides], we touch the coasts of illusion and come into contact with other worlds' ('*Gifts of Fortune*', 288, my emphasis). Which, as Derrida might have said, is not nothing.