Straight from *The Horse's Mouth*? On the Origins of Cortázar's 'El perseguidor'

What moved Julio Cortázar to write 'El perseguidor' when he did, and why did he choose to put the troubled life of a creative artist at the heart of the story? An immediate response to these questions might be that they are superfluous, even embarrassingly so, since something like a standard narrative has long since been established to account for the genesis and subject matter of a work which has attracted more critical attention than perhaps any of Cortázar's other *cuentos*. In brief, once in Paris, Cortázar began to grow dissatisfied with the 'fantastic' mode of his early stories and what he came to view as their soulless, excessively technical contrivances, and consequently sought to imbue his work with a more identifiably 'human' dimension. Reading an obituary of jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker provided him with both the subject via which the latter might fruitfully be explored and the model for his protagonist, Johnny Carter. Thus, the argument goes, 'El perseguidor' came to constitute a key stepping stone towards the world and existential concerns of *Rayuela* (1963) and marked a crucial turning point in Cortázar's ethical and aesthetic development which would, at least as far as the author himself was concerned, culminate in the overt political commitment and accompanying fiction of his later years. It is a narrative, moreover, which seems to receive abundant support from a reading of Cortázar's letters, interviews and other non-fictional writings.[1] So, in a letter to Jean Bernabé (the first in which he alludes to the story), written as early as October 31, 1955, he reveals:

> Estoy encarnizado en un cuento que no acabo de escribir y que me está dando un trabajo terrible. Su tema es aparentemente muy sencillo: la vida—y sobre todo la muerte—de un músico de jazz. Concretamente se trata de Charlie Parker, que murió

[1] A useful compilation of extracts from these can be found in the appendix to *Las armas secretas* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2014).

> hace algunos meses en circunstancias bastante horribles. Siempre le tuve mucho cariño, y los datos que pude reunir sobre su vida me dieron ganas de intentar una 'biografía' ficticia (cambiando incluso el nombre, pero dejando los indicios suficientes para que todo amateur de jazz se dé enseguida cuenta de que se trata de Parker). Quiero presentarlo como un caso extremo de la búsqueda, sin que se sepa en qué consiste exactamente esa búsqueda, pues el primero en no saberlo es él mismo.[2]

He explained to the same correspondent on June 27, 1959:

> Un cuento es un sistema cerrado y perfecto, la serpiente mordiéndose la cola; y yo quiero acabar con los sistemas y los relojerías para ver de bajar al laboratorio central y participar, si tengo fuerzas, en la raíz que prescinde de órdenes y sistemas […] Si hoy siguiera escribiendo cuentos fantásticos me sentiría un perfecto estafador; modestia aparte, y me resulta demasiado fácil, *je tiens le système,* como decía Rimbaud. Por eso 'El perseguidor' es diferente … Ahí andaba yo buscando la otra puerta. (*Cartas* II, 188)

In his famous interview with Luis Harss, meanwhile, he said simply:

> En 'El perseguidor' quise renunciar a toda invención y ponerme dentro de mi propio terreno personal, es decir, mirarme un poco a mí mismo. Y mirarme a mí mismo era mirar al hombre, mirar también a mi prójimo. Yo había mirado muy poco al género humano hasta que escribí 'El perseguidor'.[3]

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[2] Julio Cortázar, *Cartas*, ed. Aurora Bernárdez and Carles Álvarez García, 5 vols (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012), II, 67-68.

[3] 'Julio Cortázar, o la cachetada metafísica', in Luis Harss, *Los nuestros* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2012 [1966]), 219-259 (237).

Years later, in conversation with Evelyn Picon Garfield, he went further, claiming that the writing of the story 'explica por qué yo entré en una dimensión que podríamos llamar política si quieres decir, empecé a interesarme por problemas históricos.'[4] In the recently published transcript of the series of lectures and classes he delivered at Berkeley in 1980, meanwhile, he is more schematic, periodizing his work into what he terms an 'aesthetic' phase (that of the early poetry, stories and related texts), a 'metaphysical' phase (that of *Los premios*, *Rayuela* and a number of the stories of the late 1950s and early 1960s) and a final, 'historical' phase, covering much of the fiction he wrote in the wake of his political *prise de conscience* which dates from his trip to Cuba to judge the Casa de las Américas prize in early 1963. These divisions are hardly watertight, but he unequivocally locates 'El perseguidor' as his first step into 'metaphysical' territory, the moment when stopped writing stories 'de tipo estetizante' and tried to create a work centred around 'una presencia humana, un personaje de carne y hueso.' It constituted, he claims, reiterating what he had said to Harss, his 'primer contacto con mi prójimo'.[5]

Could anything be clearer? One might think not, and yet this broad and somewhat reductive account leaves certain questions either unanswered or inadequately addressed. In particular, it fails to explain in any sort of detail why Cortázar elected to change aesthetic tack at precisely that point, and stops short of asking whether any more specific factors may have played a part in that reorientation. The impulse was clearly not, in the first instance, narrowly political, since we know from the letter to Bernabé cited above that he was working on the story from mid-1955 (indeed, its composition overlapped with that of a number of the

[4] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Cortázar por Cortázar* (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1978),
[5] Julio Cortázar, *Clases de literatura*, ed. Carles Álvarez Garriga (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 2013), 20.

'aesthetic' stories of *Final del juego* [1956/1964]).[6] Besides, in a letter to Emma Susana Speratti Piñero, dated October 27, 1961, some four years after the story's publication, Cortázar stressed that she should not imagine that he had written 'El perseguidor' (and subsequently *Los premios*) because he had been 'mordido por [el] bicho dialéctico-materialista'. 'Nada de eso', he makes plain (*Cartas* II, 256). So, what was the spur? Was it merely, as he continues in that same letter, the fact that 'Estoy más viejo, y descubro cosas que pasan en torno a mí y que cuentan más que las invenciones puras' (*Cartas* II, 256)? Was it simply a consequence of his having chanced upon the obituary of Parker? Doubtless there is no single, definitive answer to this question, and it would clearly be perverse to argue that there is not an important core of truth to the version of events outlined above, but what I intend to do in the present essay is propose and explore one possible and perhaps even crucial, but hitherto unacknowledged literary source of inspiration for the story, a work which had occupied Cortázar's thoughts and caused him to meditate on the figure of the artist and the nature and purpose of artistic creation long before Parker's death.

The Horse's Mouth

The source to which I am referring is the novel *The Horse's Mouth* (1944), by the once highly regarded Anglo-Irish novelist Joyce Cary (1888-1957). It forms the final part of a triptych, preceded by *Herself Surprised* (1941) and *To Be a Pilgrim* (1942). Just how important this novel was to Cortázar has become increasingly clear as more and more of his correspondence has been published over the last decade or so, culminating in the appearance

[6] The story was presumably completed in 1956, originally published in the *Revista Mexicana de Letras*, nos. 9-10 (January – April, 1957), 74-120, and subsequently included in *Las armas secretas* in 1959, a year which, in the context of Latin American prose fiction, has become indelibly linked with the Cuban Revolution. It is perhaps the common (and ongoing) but mistaken association of the story with that later date which has encouraged its 'politicization' within Cortázar's *oeuvre*. In what follows I shall refer to the text as it appears in *Las armas secretas*, ed. Susana Jakfalvi (Madrid: Cátedra, 1979), 141-205.

of the revised and significantly augmented 5-volume edition of the *Cartas* in 2012, but it was already evident in the original, 3-volume edition of 2000, where he champions the work in some remarkable places, not least in two letters to Carlos Fuentes (7.9.1958) and Mario Vargas Llosa (18.8.1965), in which he offers detailed views on *La región más transparente* and *La casa verde* respectively.[7] In the former Cary receives no more than a mention, albeit alongside Boris Pasternak (*Cartas* II, 166), but in the latter Cortázar unhesitatingly ranks him as the equal of Dostoyevsky and Malcolm Lowry, another favourite at the time (*Cartas* III, 159). Exactly when and in what circumstances Cortázar came across *The Horse's Mouth* remains unclear, but he had very likely read it in English before leaving Argentina for Paris in 1951, and had certainly done so by 1953, since he recommends the Spanish translation enthusiastically to Eduardo Jonquières in a letter dated Rome, October 27 of that year:

> ¡Ojo! Emecé, creo, publicó la versión española de *The Horses Mouth* de Joyce Cary. Léelo. Te hará saltar por el aire, una prueba de que Rabelais todavía vive … sobre el Támesis. (*Cartas* I, 469)[8]

In a letter to fellow writer Inés Manilow of July 10, 1958, he declares Cary an 'enormísimo cronopio', an epithet he did not bestow lightly, and describes the novel unequivocally as 'de lo mejor de estas décadas' (*Cartas* II, 161).[9] He would still be mentioning the Cary in letters of the mid 1970s, and a perusal of his library, now held by the Fundación Juan March,

[7] The letters, edited by Cortázar's widow, Aurora Bernárdez, were originally published by Alfaguara in 2000, followed in 2010 by the 500 + pages of the *Cartas a los Jonquières*, edited by Aurora Bernárdez and Carles Álvarez Garriga (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2010). The latter, along with many previously unpublished letters, would be included in the *Cartas* of 2012.

[8] In fact, the Spanish edition, mistranslated as *La boca del caballo* by Narciso Pousa, was published by Emecé in early 1954. *Herself Surprised*, translated by Guillermo Whitelaw as *Sorprendida*, had appeared the previous year. *To Be a Pilgrim*, translated by J. R. Wilcock as *El peregrino*, was also published in 1954.

[9] As it happens, readers of Cortázar's work are most likely associate the expression with a jazz musician, Louis Armstrong. See 'Louis, enormísimo cronopio' (1952), in *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, 2 vols. (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1967), II, 13-23.

suggests that he continued to read him throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[10] But what was it that drew Cortázar so powerfully to this novel, and what light does his admiration for it throw on 'El pereseguidor'? The protagonist and narrator of *The Horse's Mouth* is an experimental painter called Gully Jimson, who wreaks emotional and often physical havoc wherever he goes, drinks heavily, is periodically incarcerated and proves a hazard to anyone who has dealings with him, not least his estranged wife, Sara (who is the narrator of the first novel in the sequence, *Herself Surprised*, in which Jimson also plays a significant part), whom he beats, sometimes viciously, and for whose death he is ultimately responsible. It is, in short, the fictionalized life of a perpetually rebellious artist. Just how profound an impact the character of Jimson left on Cortázar is evident from a letter he wrote to Jonquières (himself an accomplished painter as well as a poet) in which he dwells at length on the nature of the creative personality and compares the fictional Jimson favourably to Sergio Castro, a flesh-and-blood Uruguayan painter well known to them both. The terms of the comparison are revelatory:

> Lo maravilloso en Gulley es su manera de llevarse todo por delante y *seguir siendo al mismo tiempo un ser profundamente humano, y no un monstruo sagrado*. Muchas veces lo he comparado mentalmente con la conducta de otros artistas, por ejemplo Sergio, de quien me has oído decir ya algunas cosas en ese sentido. El problema de los artistas del tipo de Sergio es que so pretexto de una entrega total a su arte, *terminan perdiendo contacto real con el mundo; creen estar hondamente metidos en la cosa, y en realidad se vuelven bizantinos y discuten sobre el Paracleto*. Sergio, como Gulley, es de un egoísmo feroz, arrasa con todo, no le importan ni amistades, ni amores, ni

[10] See the letter to Ana María Hernández (19.6.1974), in which he discusses *Libro de Manuel* (*Cartas* IV, 457) and the 'fonocarta' to Ricardo Bada (1976), included as an appendix to *Cartas* IV (610). The holdings of the Biblioteca Julio Cortázar in the Fundación Juan March list the following novels by Cary: *Aissa Saved* (1952 [1932]); *A Fearful Joy* (1955 [1949]); *A Spring Song and Other Stories* (1960); and *Mister Johnson* (1962 [1939]).

> convenciones; pero *Gulley acaba siempre riéndose*, y por la risa recobra el contacto con lo que estaba a punto de perder, y además *se olvida por largos periodos de su pintura y se mete en diversos líos personales*, con lo cual se salva de la tiranía exclusiva de la pintura. Gulley sacrifica a las mujeres, pero a la vez las salva, porque las exalta y las mete en una dimensión que no se imaginaban siquiera. Sergio—para seguir con el ejemplo—sacrifica sin dar nada, se encoge temeroso ante todo peligro de convivencia en que él tenga que compartir algo, aflojar una parcela de su tiempo. No, decididamente prefiero a Gulley. (*Cartas* II, 24 [my emphasis])

Whilst Cortázar's view of Cary's character, and especially his treatment of women, is decidedly benign, all the observations highlighted are as applicable to Johnny Carter as they are to Jimson. There are the obvious references to the latter's being 'profundamente humano' and his art's rootedness in lived experience, to his surpassing and often calamitous disregard for those closest to him (Johnny's own heedless womanising is a leitmotif in the story) and for all social niceties and protocols, but also to his disdain for all lofty, otherworldly conceptions of art, to his continual laughter (Carter is constantly laughing in 'El persesguidor', especially at the least conventionally appropriate moments, and the verb *reír* and its cognates pepper the text) and to his periodic bouts of obliviousness to his craft (just as Jimson continually misplaces or forgets his paints, brushes and even canvasses, so Carter repeatedly loses his saxophone out of sheer absent-mindedness). The timing of this letter is also significant. It is dated February 19, 1955, two months *before* Charlie Parker died (on March 12 of that year), and suggests that all the key facets of his future character were already at the forefront of Cortázar's thoughts, and were derived initially not from Parker, but

rather from Jimson.[11] Indeed, Cortázar later revealed in an interview with Omar Prego that, even before reading Parker's obituary, he had been thinking of writing a long short story about a creative artist 'desde hacía *varios meses*', further suggesting that Jimson may have been his original source of inspiration.[12] The obvious objection to this claim is that Johnny Carter is a jazz saxophonist, not a painter, but in fact Cortázar indicated to Picon Garfield that he had originally considered building the story around a 'pintor' or an 'escritor' (*Cortázar por Cortázar*, 106). He said the same to Prego, explaining that, after initially toying with the idea of having a protagonist who was a writer but rejecting the notion because it seemed 'aburrido … un poco tópico', he considered the possibility of making him 'un pintor'. He eventually discarded the latter option too, since 'tampoco me entusiasmaba mucho', but also because he could not find a way of bestowing a painter with the 'características muy especiales' which he required, namely a 'capacidad intuitiva enorme' combined with a near total intellectual ignorance (*La fascinación de las palabras*, 67). Yet, reading the letter to Jonquières, one wonders whether the primary and overriding reason for his reluctance to make a painter the centrepiece of the story was not rather the formidable precedent which, in his eyes at least, had been set by Cary. After all, painters and painting feature prominently in the rest of Cortázar's fictional work, and the latter is often viewed as a less cerebral, more intuitive form of art than writing. There was, in other words, no intrinsic reason to avoid it and besides, as we shall see, 'El perseguidor' itself is full of suggestive references to and

[11] Jimson may also have provided a model for Cortázar's next major 'visionary' character, Persio in *Los premios*, to whom he bears a striking physical resemblance. In *Herself Surprised* (*Triptych*, 7-174), upon meeting Jimson Sarah describes him as 'a little bald man [who] … was much older than we expected … very shabby too' (34), whilst in *Los premios* Medrano is surprised that Persio, whom Claudia describes to him as a 'mago de verdad', turns out be an 'hombre bajito y calvo' whose every item of clothing seems to have been 'comprado a última hora y en cualquier parte'. Perhaps significantly, he reminds Medrano of the poet and painter Max Jacob, and it is worth recalling that one of Persio's key points of reference when puzzling over the notion of *figuras* in the novel is Picasso's cubist painting. See *Los premios*, ed. Javier García Méndez (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005, 193-94).

[12] See Omar Prego *La fascinación de las palabras: Conversaciones con Julio Cortázar* (Barcelona: Muchnik, 1985), 66.

analogies involving painting.[13] If one is willing to entertain this argument, then it is easy to see how stumbling upon the obituary of Parker might have acted as a catalyst for a project whose fundamentals were already in place but the realization of which had, until then, been held in check by a particular 'anxiety of influence'.[14] Yet these are broad and thus far largely unsubstantiated claims, and the key question remains: the choice of protagonist notwithstanding, is there any concrete textual evidence in 'El perseguidor' to corroborate them? I turns out that there is a good deal, and it is to that evidence that I shall now turn.

Echoes and Parallels

I shall begin with a comparison of the two protagonists' underlying attitude towards their respective arts. Jimson, like Carter, is far more interested in the process and act(ion) of painting and the material nature of his medium that he is in actual pictures, and baulks at the idea of art as inert mimsis. He muses at one point:

> How lovely the stuff is when you've just put it down. When it's still alive and before it digs and sinks and fades. Paint, lovely paint. Why, I could rub my nose in it, or lick it

[13] Cortázar's first, posthumously published novel, *Divertimento* (1948), centres around a mysterious painting, whilst Étienne, one of the most astute and perceptive characters in *Rayuela*, is a painter. Painting looms large in stories such as 'Orientación de los gatos', from *Queremos tanto a Glenda* (1980) and 'Fin de etapa' from *Deshoras* (1982), whilst 'Grafitti', also from *Queremos tanto a Glenda*, depends on the non-verbal significance of painting for its impact. Cortázar's knowledge of painting was encyclopaedic and he collaborated fruitfully with painters (not least Julio Silva) throughout his creative life. Nor was he averse in principle to fictionalizing the lives of writers, as 'Los pasos en las huellas' from *Octaedro* (1973) demonstrates.

[14] Cortázar was equivocal about which obituary he had read, telling Picon Garfield that it appeared in *Jazz Hot* (*Cortázar por Cortázar*, 107) and Prego that came across a 'pequeña biografía' in 'un diario' written by Charles Delaunay, who founded *Jazz Hot* in 1935 (*La fascinación de las palabras*, 67). In fact, it was almost certainly Leonard Feather's 'Charlie Parker tel que je l'ai connu', which was published in *Jazz Hot*, 98 (April, 1955), 8-10, and from which a number of key elements in the story—not least the entire scene in which Johnny kneels before Bruno in a restaurant after the death of his daughter, Bee— have obviously been taken. Feather's note is preceded by a piece by Alain Hodeir, 'Le Bird n'est plus!' (8-9), on which Cortázar has also clearly drawn. Feather, Delaunay and Hodeir are all mentioned in 'El perseguidor', the two latter appearing fleetingly as characters.

> up for breakfast. I mean, of course, *paint that doesn't mean anything except itself*. (*The Horse's Mouth*, 650 [my emphasis])

He rarely completes a canvas and, when he does, he invariably destroys it because it seems to him to be 'dead' as an inescapable consequence of its completion (539). He spends much of the early part of the novel working feverishly on a painting titled 'The Fall', which he later demolishes because, as he puts it, 'The Fall is a frost … It's iced all over … It's something contemplated from the outside. It doesn't get under your skin … It's not an event, it's a tea party' (589) – that is, the chill, lifeless husk of the burning inspiration which gave rise to it. Later he describes the mere presentiment of 'The Fall' as a finished work as 'a curse' that left him 'no freedom to paint', because it imposed a numbing *terminus ad quem* on his labours, a distinct and thus fatally restrictive creative goal.

He subsequently has 'the biggest idea of [his] life' (705) for a work based on the Creation, but even before he has prepared his brushes he is already imagining it as a mere 'piece of art work, a put-up job … a jigsaw of the back room', in contrast to his notion of 'a real picture' as 'a flower, a geyser, a fountain' that 'hasn't got a pattern but a Form. It hasn't got corners and a middle but an Essential Being' (715). Jimson is, in short, a pursuer who prefers the adventure of artistic creation to any imaginable point of arrival, even if this necessarily entails perpetual frustration and what uninitiated observers might deem to be plain and simple failure. This notion, that the essence of genuine art lies in endless pursuit, is made explicit on a number of occasions. In a complex passage in which Jimson rejects the notion that art is ultimately designed to be contemplated, because 'Contemplation is not the doings', contenting itself rather with static surfaces (what he dismisses as 'THE OUTSIDE'), he sees the vital but elusive 'inside' of painting (what he terms 'the works'), as 'SOMETHING

THAT GOES ON GOING ON', evoking it in vital, essentialist terms as 'the ginger in the gingerbread… the apple in the dumpling … the jump in the OLD MOSQUITO … the kick in the old horse … the creation' (589).[15] In a conversation from the closing pages of the novel he is far more direct. When it is put to him that 'Art has a lot to answer for' he replies, 'Yes, and it doesn't answer, it only keeps on.' And in response to the question, 'Keeps on? Keeps on what?', he retorts simply 'Keeping on' (758).

That Carter's inchoate understanding of his playing and its purpose closely echoes Jimson's of his painting hardly needs stating. He too has a habit of smashing up his instruments and is far more interested in spontaneous improvisation than recording, since the latter process necessarily produces polished, changeless works which, as he sees it, ossify and thus betray the dynamic process from which they have been artificially extracted. The recording of *Amorous* is a case in point. It leaves those present awestruck, but for a drug- and drink-addled Johnny 'todo había salido como el diablo' and 'esa grabación no contaba para nada'. He insists on its being destroyed, threatening to tear down the recording booth if it is not ('El perseguidor', 169).[16] The description of Johnny's innovative style provided by Bruno, the narrator of the story, is even more revealing:

> Este jazz desecha todo erotismo fácil, todo wagnerianismo por decirlo así, para situarse en un plano aparentemente desasido donde la música queda en absoluta libertad, así *como la pintura sustraída a lo representativo queda en absoluta libertad para no ser más que pintura*. ('El perseguidor', 167 [my emphasis])

[15] In Bruno's otherwise gratuitous description of Johnny's response to painting ('Las pinturas se mueven cuando él las mira'), which he typically dismisses as a 'fantasma de la marihuana', we might espy an oblique but conscious allusion to Jimson's dynamic view of the artwork ('El perseguidor', 181).

[16] 'Amorous' is Cortázar's fictional version of Charlie Parker's 'Lover Man', and the whole episode is based closely on the third of the so-called 'Dial Sessions', which took place in Hollywood on July 29, 1946 and which is described at length in Feather's obituary (see note 14).

It is tempting to see in this allusion to abstract painting a direct borrowing from Carey (see above), all the more so, perhaps, given that in *The Horse's Mouth* Jimson likens the 'bright new shining vision' prompted by a 'clean canvas' to the 'coloured music of the mind' (650).[17] In Cortázar's story the analogy is reversed.[18] The remainder of Bruno's account perfectly encapsulates the notion of an art that 'goes on going on':

> En su caso, el deseo se antepone al placer y lo frustra, porque el deseo le exige avanzar, buscar, *negando por adelantado los encuentros fáciles del jazz tradicional* […] Incapaz de satisfacerse, vale como *un acicate continuo*, una construcción infinita *cuyo placer no está en el remate sino en la reiteración exploradora*, en el empleo de facultades que dejan atrás lo prontamente humano sin perder humanidad. ('El perseguidor', 166-67)[19]

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[17] Cortázar may also have had in mind the 'drip' painting of Jackson Pollock, which he admired and whose compositional method he compared to that of 'el Pajarito Mandón cuando creó este mundo' in letter to Eduardo Jonquières dated April 29, 1955 (*Cartas* II, 36). The humorous reference to God and the Creation are perhaps of some interest in the present context, given the title of Jimson's painting and the fact the Horse of Cary's title is itself an irreverent allusion to God. Pollock's action painting was often compared to progressive jazz improvisation, and specifically to that of Parker, though his own taste in jazz was notably conservative, and indeed he had no liking for bebop (see Evelyn Toynton, *Jackson Pollock* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012], 56-57). Despite this, Pollock and Carter were often portrayed as martyrs to the same existential cause. See for example the obituary of Carter in *Orkester Journalen*, cited in Ross Russell's *Bird Lives!* (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 363.

[18] There may also be another influence at work here. Towards the end of the story we learn that Bruno's second initial is 'V' ('El perseguidor', 202), suggesting that the character may have been partly inspired by Boris Vian, who wrote numerous pieces for *Jazz Hot*. In one of them, published in September 1952, he rails against the critical exegesis of jazz, dismissing it as an 'art stérile' akin to the attempt to 'explain' 'la peinture abstraite', in which 'il n'y a pas à comprendre'. See Boris Vian, *Chroniques de jazz* (Paris: Éditions Pauvert, 1979), 80. Vian, himself a jazz trumpeter, poet, novelist and painter, was a great admirer of Charlie Parker's music, which he repeatedly defended against the attacks of uncomprehending critics. Another piece, published in *Jazz Hot* 33 (May, 1949), 21, is unequivocally titled 'Charlie Parker: Le superman du jazz', and in it he refers to Parker as 'un demi-dieu qui descend sur terre'. Indeed, his contempt for arch-conservative Hugues Parnassié, a co-founder of *Jazz Hot* and outspoken critic of the bebop of Parker and his contemporaries, is shared by Bruno ('El perseguidor', 177 – the fictional Parnassié finds Johnny's music 'francamente malo'), further indicating that he is Cortázar's model. Vian knew Parker personally and even introduced him to Sartre in 1949. His staunch anti-intellectualism and anarchic playfulness (he joined the College of Pataphysicians in 1952) in fact make Vian much closer in spirit to Johnny than to Bruno, which may well be an authorial joke at his character's expense. Oddly, Jakfalvi refers to 'el malogrado Vian' as a contributor to *Jazz Hot* in a note ('El perseguidor', 165, note 20), but does not link him with Bruno.

[19] Cortázar himself had described 'el jazz negro' in very similar terms in his important early letter-cum-essay 'Elogio del jazz: carta enguantada a Daniel Devoto' (1948), where he views improvisation as a 'libertad profunda' which 'constituye la esencia primera y última del jazz', comparing it to 'el dibujo onírico y la escritura automática que llenaron la primera y más alta etapa del surrealismo'. He also refers to it as 'la

Yet this shared conception of their craft is not all that connects the two characters. Each also has what might be termed a tutelary poet, Blake in the case of Jimson and Dylan Thomas in that of Johnny. Both are alluded to and quoted from throughout their respective texts, and both artists intermittently declaim lines from one or the other in a manner that leaves those around them doubting their sanity. Now, although their status as latterday *poètes maudits* and their early deaths meant that Parker and Thomas were often linked at the time, not least by the poets and essayists of the Beat Generation, who viewed them as tragic scapegoats for contemporary capitalist society, one wonders whether Cortázar would have come up with the idea of twinning them in this particular way without the precedent of Cary's novel.[20] It is also surely significant that Blake and Thomas were 'visionary' poets, whose own sense of existential questing is linked to Jimson and Carter's search for some sort of experiential absolute, a search hedged around with religious imagery that is undercut even as it is employed, since both artists violently reject—or at least strive to reject—all inherited ontotheological notions of transcendence, viewing their art as a more vital, earthbound substitute.[21] Jimson's two major paintings, 'The Fall' and 'The Creation', are essentially

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creación por el acto mismo de crear, como me sospecho que habrá sido la Otra' (yet another refrence to the Biblical Creation in a secular artistic context), which produces 'el nacimiento continuo e inagotable de formas melódicas y rítmicas y armónicas, instantáneas y perecederas'. Jazzmen are 'músicos *irreductibles a toda mediatización*', active generators of a 'poetismo' rather than obedient interpreters and implementers of a preconceived 'estética' (which, significantly, is the term repeatedly used by Bruno to describe his overarching theory of Johnny's music ['El perseguidor', 191, 195]). This, says, Cortázar, lends jazz an existential dimension, so that 'el hombre como tal tiene en el jazz uno de los caminos ciertos *para ir a buscarse*, acaso a encontrase' - the very notion explored throughout 'El perseguidor'. See *Obras completas*, 6 vols., ed. Saúl Yurkievich (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2003-2007), VI, 204-216 (209-10, 213, 214-15 [my emphasis]).

[20] Perhaps the key work in this regard is Kenneth Rexroth's 'Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation', although this was not published until 1957. However, Rexroth, who knew Parker personally, also wrote a poetic elegy for Thomas, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill', which appeared in 1955 and which he performed with a live jazz band. Both it, and Thomas himself, had a profound influence on Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), which teems with jazz references. Cortázar certainly knew something of Rexroth (though the only work held by the Fundación Juan March in which the latter's poetry features, Volume 9 of the *Penguin Modern Poets* series, dates from 1967) and had read Ginsberg. The obituary referred to in note 16 above also adds Thomas's name to those of Parker and Pollock.

[21] Cortázar would also have appreciated what Cary was trying to do with Blake in the novel since he had taught a course on the latter's poetry at the university of Cuyo in 1944. See his letter to Julio Ellena de la Sota (*Cartas* I, 202) and also Jaime Correas's *Cortázar en Mendoza* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2014), which includes the relevant course programmes (238-39).

secularized re-workings of Biblical themes, whilst Carter's insistent, elliptical allusions to the Book of Revelation have been stripped of their conventional soteriological underpinnings.[22] Commentators have remarked on the series of deliberately contradictory references to Johnny (and indeed Bruno) as both angel and devil which run throughout 'El perseguidor' within this broader, metaphysical context, and it may be that these too are, in some measure, anticipated in *The Horse's Mouth*.[23] For example, Jimson refers to the sort of 'absolute' painting described above as 'The pure innocent song of some damn fool angel that doesn't even know the name of God' (*The Horse's Mouth*, 650). Later, atop his scaffold, he feels 'a sensation something akin to that of an angel let out of his cage into a new sky and a drunkard turned loose in a royal cellar' (742-43) and when, at the end of the novel, he makes a final, vain attempt to continue work on 'The Creation' he does so swinging from a patent rope 'like an angel' (759). In every case the divine element of the metaphor or analogy is qualified or undermined by something more obviously and often grubbily human, and this is precisely what happens throughout 'El perseguidor'. Johnny is described first as 'un ángel' and then, immediately afterwards, as he sits hunched over naked, revealing legs covered in 'raras manchas' which nauseate Bruno and with his 'sexo colgándole por el borde del sillón', he is compared to 'un mono en el zoo', ('El perseguidor', 155); Art Boucaya says that God seemed to be present in a '*condenada* sala de grabación' in which Johnny was recording and yet where, at the same time, 'hacía un calor de mil *demonios*' (160 [my emphasis]); his playing is

[22] Jimson's notion of the Fall, for example, is a quintessentially human one: 'what happens to any girl when she falls for the first time; what happens to a thousand Eves and Adams every night of the week somewhere under the willows or the palm tree shade – it's a long way from a tea party. It's not pleasure, or peace, or contemplation, or comfort, or happiness – it's a Fall. Into the pit. The ground gives way, and down you go, head over heels. Unless you know how to fly. To rise again on your wings' (589-90). It is art, 'joy that is always fresh and new because it is created', suggesting 'the revelation ever renewed, in every fall' (590), which might, in some sense, enable such restorative flight. Given the context, it is surely also worth recalling that Blake was profoundly influenced by the Book of Revelation, which inspired both his poetry and a number of his most famous paintings, not least the 'Great Dragon' watercolours of 1810.

[23] See especially Robin Fiddian's 'Religious Symbolism and the Ideological Critique in "El perseguidor" by Julio Cortázar', in *Revista canadiense*, 9:2 (Winter, 1985), 149-63. Jimson's repeated references to angels and the angelic are clearly derived from Blake's poetry.

said to be 'capaz de arruniar la misma armonía celestial' (169); within the space of a page Bruno refers to him as a 'un pobre diablo', 'nada del otro mundo', 'un ángel entre los hombres' and 'un hombre entre los ángeles, una realidad entre las irrealidades que somos todos nosotros' (176-77); just two pages later and he is a 'chimpancé enloquecido' again (179). And so it goes on.[24] The strategic confusion of terms leaves us with the sense that anything that might appear 'angelic' about Johnny is a consequence of what is most 'profundamente humano' about him. Perhaps the most memorable expression of that core humanity occurs when Johnny is struggling to explain to Bruno what it is that he is seeking out with his music, using the typically Cortazarian metaphor of a door which he is attempting to open in and through his playing.[25] He angrily spurns the idea that what lies on the other side is some form of divine transcendence, anything beyond the purely human:

> Sobre todo no acepto a tu Dios … Y si realmente está del otro lado de la puerta, maldito se me importa. No tiene ningún mérito pasar al otro lado porque él te abra la puerta. Desfondarla a patadas, eso sí. Romperla a puñetazos, eyacular contra la puerta … mear un día entero contra la puerta. ('El perseguidor', 200-201)

This passage directly anticipates the notion explored at length in *Rayuela*, metaphorically condensed in the figure of the hopscotch, that the 'reino milenario' or 'kibbutz de deseo' (the

[24] The first of these descriptions may be derived from Dylan Thomas's poem 'If I Were Tickled by the Rub of Love', which refers to 'The knobbly ape that swings along his sex/From damp love darkness'. See *Dylan Thomas: The Poems*, ed. Daniel Jones (London: Everyman, 1991), 96. Thomas's poetry is also replete with allusions both to angels and the Apocalypse

[25] This metaphor is also used in his obituary by Hodeir, who says 'N'oublierons pas qu'il nous a ouvert les portes d'un univers qui se situe à la limite de la folie musicale … et nous regretterons qu'il n'ait pas pu nous y entrainer a sa suite' ('Le Bird n'est plus', 7). That last notion is perhaps echoed at several points in the text, such as when Bruno muses 'Johnny siempre está tocando mañana y el resto viene a la zaga, en este hoy que el salta sin esfuerzo', and later 'Envidio … a ese Johnny del otro lado, sin que nadie sepa qué es exactamente ese otro lado'; or refers to Johnny's taking 'un salto imprevisible que nosotros no comprenderemos nunca' ('El perseguidor', 148, 161, 165).

analogue in both cases is theological) sought by Johnny's successor, Oliveira, must, if it exists at all, be immanent, rooted in the here-and-now:

> Ese mundo existe en este como el agua existe en el oxígeno y el hidrógeno. O como en las páginas 78, 457, 3, 271, 688, 75 y 476 del diccionario de la Academia Española está lo necesario para escribir cierto endecasílabo de Garcilaso.[26]

> No ya subir al Cielo (subir, palabra hipócrita, cielo, flatus vocis), sino caminar con pasos de hombre por una tierra de hombres hacia el kibbutz allá lejos pero en el mismo plano, como el Cielo estaba en el mismo plano que la Tierra en la acera roñosa de los juegos , y un día quizá se entraría en el mundo donde decir Cielo no sería un repasador manchado de grasa, y un día alguien vería la verdadera figura del mundo, patterns pretty as can be, y tal vez, empujando la piedra, acabaría por entrar en el kibbutz. (*Rayuela*, 369)

Yet Johnny's tirade may itself be presaged by a number of similar passages in *The Horse's Mouth*. For example, Jimson describes Blake's constant questing thus:

> Old Randipole Billy on the ramp. Embracing the truth. Through generation to generation. The *door of paradise*. The way to the Holy Land. Fall to rise again. For everything that lives is holy. Life delights in life. (*The Horse's Mouth*, 531 [my emphasis])[27]

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[26] See *Rayuela*, ed. Andrés Amorós (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 540. The metaphor of the door which Man must somewhow open or 'desfondar' (the same verb is used) if he is to gain access to the 'reino milenario' runs throughout the chapter (Ch.71) in which this passage features.

[27] Jimson is quoting here from the final chorus of the 'Song of Liberty' that closes Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), to which he makes frequent reference. This provocatively heterodox work, opposing traditional dualism and the hierarchical and divisive moral order to which it gives rise, is predicated on the

Again, the theological language is given a worldly, indeed explicitly sexual gloss. Even more striking is the following extract:

> The angels must always be surprised when some man dives head-first into dirt, and then just by a twist of his imagination comes out again as clean as a comet with two wings better than the biggest in all heaven. (705)

Once more, the implication is that only fleshly, mortal beings who, in Johnny's terms, can 'eyacular' and 'mear', fully embracing the material world in which they find themselves, are capable of achieving anything than might be deemed angelic, since angels themselves, as a consequence of their perfection, are constitutionally immune to change, progress or any kind of inspiration. Paradoxically, the mere possibility of divine transcendence robs Man of a goal or, as Johnny puts it, 'No tiene ningún mérito pasar al otro lado porque [Dios] te abra la puerta'.[28]

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notion that 'Without contraries is no progression' and, spurning 'pale religious lechery', proposes (the words are those of the Devil) that 'Man has no body distinct from his soul' and that 'Energy is the only life and is from the body'. Blake's work, which revels in sensualist exuberance, is in large part a critique of Swedenborg's purely heavenly, disembodied view of angels, whom Blake depicts as bloodless, vain, insufferably pedantic and logical beings – except one, 'who is now become a devil' and is the poet's 'particular friend'. It is also in this text that Blake refers to the '*doors* of perception' which, if cleansed (via an 'improvement of sensual enjoyment'), might allow man to perceive 'the infinite'. See *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Hong Kong: Longman, 1971), 101-24 (105-6, 114, 124 [my italics]). Cortázar indicated in a letter to Eduardo Jonquières dated November 16, 1953 (*Cartas* I, 473) that he was considering using one of the 'Proverbs of Hell' from Blake's work ('Eternity is in love with the productions of time') as an epigraph to his poem 'Los Dióscuros', which itself celebrates impassioned mortality over drear eternity. Again, in all of the above the aesthetic path from Blake to Cary to Cortázar to Johnny seems clear.

[28] There is also a markedly Nietzschean undertow to all of this, as there is to much of 'El perseguidor'. The following passage from the close of *Ecce Homo* immediately comes to mind: 'The concept "God" is invented as the antithetical concept to life […] The concept "the Beyond", "real world" invented so as to deprive of value the *only* life that exists – so as to leave over no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality! The concept "soul", "spirit", finally even "immortal soul", invented so as to despise the body, so as to make it sick.' See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1991), 103. Djelal Kadir alludes to the similar passage from the story in his 'A Mythical Reenactment: Cortázar's *El perseguidor*' (*Latin American Literary Review* 2 [1973], 63-73), which draws loosely on elements from *The Birth of Tragedy* relating to the Apollo-Dionysus opposition, but does not link it with Nietzsche.

Critics and Biographers

Thus far I have dealt with what might broadly be considered thematic parallels between the two works, but they also share a key organizational principle, one which suggests perhaps more than any other common feature that *The Horse's Mouth* was a primary source of inspiration for Cortázar. Both Jimson and Carter loathe art critics (whom the former disparagingly dubs 'crickets'), and indulge in devastating harangues against what they see as the excessively slick, trite and preening critical establishment.[29] That correlation alone is worthy of note, but even more arresting is one particular way in which the two authors go about discrediting a certain sort of academic criticism. 'El perseguidor' is, of course, narrated by Bruno, Johnny's often glib and self-regarding biographer. Cortázar had never attempted anything quite like this before, and whilst the aesthetic rationale for having Bruno narrate (i.e. Johnny's supposedly salutary lack of a certain sort of anaesthetizing critical intelligence) is clear enough, commentators have shown little interest in how Cortázar came up with the idea of building his story around the biographer-artist relationship, assuming that, as he himself indicated in several interviews, 'El perseguidor' is a calculatedly anti-intellectual response to Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), which employs precisely the same basic narrative premise – that of a staid, unimaginative biographer writing a life of a 'demonic' artist.[30] Yet there may be more to the matter than this. In the second of the letters to Eduardo Jonquières in which he mentions *The Horse's Mouth* (February 23, 1955), Cortázar describes the novel as 'una supuesta autobiografía de un pintor que admira a Blake'

[29] See for example *The Horse's Mouth*, 536-39, 621, 737, and 'El perseguidor', 190-201.

[30] See especially the interview with Picon Garfield, where he says, 'Cuando me plantée *El perseguidor* e imaginaba el personaje central, tendía tendencia a caer en aquello que decíamos de Thomas Mann en *La montaña mágica* o en *Doktor Faustus*: crear personajes superintelectuales que especulaban muy inteligentemente sobre ciertos problemas metafísicos. Entonces decidí, por el contrario, construir un personaje asimilable al hombre de la calle, un hombre medio, pero que tuviera esa sed de absoluto' (106). The closest precedent to Bruno in Cortázar's work is perhaps the stolidly rational lawyer Dr. Hardoy, who narrates 'Las puertas del cielo' from his first collection, *Bestiario* (1951).

(*Cartas* I, 489). In fact, the work is highly problematical in this respect, since although in Ch.13 Jimson announces that he is 'dictating this memoir to my honorary secretary' (549), much of the text plainly could not have been dictated. Besides, Jimson's death at the close renders any first-person retrospective of his life impossible. Curiously, even this logical discrepancy is partially mirrored in 'El perseguidor', which repeatedly draws attention to itself as a written account (see, for example, 65ff, where Bruno is scribbling notes during the interval at one of Johnny's concerts; 176-77, where Bruno tells us that he is writing in a café; 192 and 194, where he refers to the words which he is supposedly in the process of setting down), but swathes of which could hardly be penned reconstructions of Bruno's various encounters with Johnny, and whose successive sections are narrated in a variety of tenses which are not always obviously sequential.[31] Indeed, the mere existence of the text *qua* text is, in a sense, questionable, since the reader is bound to ask himself whether Bruno would have possessed sufficient insight and capacity for self-criticism to produce and then apparently make public a document which so roundly condemns both him and the specious biography of which he nevertheless remains so proud, a few fleeting reservations notwithstanding. Various explanations, none of them wholly satisfactory, suggest themselves. For example, late in the story Bruno reveals (but to whom?) that he is committing certain thoughts to paper 'en privado' (192), which seems to imply that what we are reading is a private, introspective document (akin to a series of diary entries compiled over many months) which Bruno understandably never intended to see the light of day.[32] Yet

[31] Cortázar indicated that this latter technique was deliberate, an attempt to give the story a jazz-like, musical structure (*La fascinación de las palabras*, 95), though such a schema might strike the reader as lying beyond the prosaic Bruno's imaginative reach, and in any case does not resolve the diegetic incongruities alluded to above. Doris Sommer grapples tortuously and often confusedly with one of the latter (Cortázar's insistent use of the present perfect) in her 'Grammar Trouble: Cortázar's Critique of Competence' (*Diacritics*, 25:1 [1995], 21-45), though she never addresses some of the deeper logical problems which this creates, or questions the nature and status of the text itself. Nor does she entertain the less baroque possibility that Cortázar was attempting to mimic French grammar, though, as he confessed in a letter to Eduardo Jonquières dated February 11, 1956, Aurora had upbraided him for this very proclivity in the stories of *Las armas secretas* (*Cartas* II, 82).

[32] This is the technique employed by Henry James in stories such as 'The Figure in the Carpet' and especially 'The Death of the Lion', both of which involve unscrupulous critics who harry creative writers—to death in the

much of the text, not least the final, triumphalist and hence most damning section, is clearly directed squarely at the very external readership from whose scrutiny it ought most zealously to be kept, at least if he wishes to continue making money from his book.[33] But this issue, crucial though it is to the aesthetic integrity of the story, lies beyond the remit of the current study. Returning to the purely biographical dimension of Cary's novel, much more significant than Jimson's claim to be narrating his own life story is the fact that in Ch.18, during one of his stretches in prison, he receives a letter, which he initially assumes to be a 'bad joke', from an impoverished and more than faintly ridiculous young scholar called Alabaster (whose very name suggests a stony unresponsiveness), who is proposing to write 'a biographical and critical study of [Jimson's] whole artistic development' (*The Horse's Mouth*, 596). He grudgingly accepts, primarily because he thinks that the publicity might help rescue him from his current predicament. However, he quickly comes to see Alabster as 'one of the up and at'em boys, looking for a stepping stone to higher things' (617), and refers to him ever more disparagingly as a 'biografter', 'my biograbber' and finally 'my biogrubber' (618, 621, 748), mocking him at every turn. He predicts from the outset that any fame that might accrue to him on the back of the biography will likely be a source of woe and will

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latter case—but in which the author scrupulously avoids the sort of narrative discrepancies which compromise 'El perseguidor'. Cortázar was surely familiar with these tales, since he refers to James in the epigraph of 'Los pasos en las huellas', a story in which a manipulative biographer very publicly recants his best-selling but distorted life of a formerly undistinguished poet.

[33] The other obvious if, in terms of the internal consistency of the work, still inadequate answer is that Cortázar is, in the form of the story itself, providing a literary corrective to Bruno's excessively sanitized biographical account, including all the ugly detail about Johnny that the latter strategically omits. This is strongly hinted at in the text when Delaunay and Hodeir advise Bruno against revising the book because, he senses, 'los dos temían *un contagio literario*' which would mean that 'yo acabara tiñendo la obra con matices que poco o nada tenían que ver con la música de Johnny, *al menos según la entendíamos todos nosotros*' ('El perseguidor', 202 [my emphasis]). This is precisely what Cortázar is doing over Bruno's shoulder, so to speak, but, by having him divulge what he has supposedly decided to exclude, it entails a flagrant and implausible manipulation of his character. Fiddian does not cite this particular example, but he is right to identify this authorial tactic as a persistent aesthetic flaw which 'prevents [Cortázar] from making any significant concession to the requirements of realistic character portrayal, particularly in the second half of the story where it appears that [he] has deliberately rigged the proceeding against [Bruno]' ('Religious Symbolism and the Ideological Critique', 161). This is surely a major shortcoming in a work supposedly intended to remedy the artificiality of the earlier stories in which, according to Cortázar himself, the characters were little more than 'marionetas al servicio de una acción fantástica', by introducing a greater psychological realism (*La fascinación de las palabras*, 66). Bruno remains very much an authorial stooge.

interfere disastrously with his painting, the only real beneficiary being Alabaster himself (615). Nevertheless, the latter doggedly trails Jimson, fastidiously noting down everything he says, though taking care to edit out anything that might offend his prospective readership (657, 748), and an editor's footnote in Ch.41 tells us that his biography, *The Life and Works of Gulley Jimson*, was indeed published 'with a scholarly introduction' in 1940, 'soon after Jimson's lamented death' (744). The stepping stone turns out to be a gravestone, and, to add insult to injury, Alabster reportedly argues in that introduction that if Jimson is to find a 'permanent niche in the history of art' it will be as a consequence not of his later, experimental works, but rather of those 'in his earlier manner', such as 'Lady in her Bath' (744) – a painting which the artist himself had dismissed as the most contemptibly 'slick' thing that he had produced (669). The parallels with 'El perseguidor' are obvious. In one of the story's most memorable passages (190-201), Johnny excoriates Bruno's clever but clichéd and ultimately vacuous biography, but his death months later means that the latter can add a hastily penned 'nota necrológica' and a 'fotografía del entierro donde se veía a muchos jazzmen famosos' (a suitably nauseating addendum) (205) to a second, now pleasingly 'complete' edition which is likely to be an international bestseller (Bruno concedes that 'Quizá no esté bien que yo diga esto' and then fatally attempts to excuse himself by adding, 'Pero como es natural, me sitúo en un plano meramente estético' [205]), to the untrammelled joy of Bruno's wife.[34] His decision not to re-write the biography in the wake of his final confrontation with Johnny is, he tells us, a consequence of his desire not to 'crearse

[34] Critics have said little about the presence or function of this character in the story, or about Cortázar's decision to include her at all. In many respects she is both an accoutrement to and a token of Bruno's prototypically bourgeois life, who throws into relief both his values (which are ultimately venal and self-serving) and his hypocrisy (he takes a dim view of many of Johnny's excesses, especially his multiple infidelities, but is himself an adulterer). There may be a distant echo here of Zeitblom, Mann's narrator in *Doctor Faustus*, who is tranquilly married (and refers repeatedly to this) but lets slip that he has indulged sexually in his youth, but a more immediate and likely source is Feather's obituary, in which the latter recalls the happy times he and 'ma femme' spent with Parker and his first wife, Doris, after the latter's discharge from the Camarillo psychiatric institute in 1947 ('Charlie Parker tel que je l'ai connu', 8). There is something irretrievably smug about the inclusion of this gratuitous detail, and it may well have inspired Cortázar to provide Bruno with a particular sort of wife and refer to her in a similar way.

complicaciones con un público que quiere mucho jazz pero nada de análisis musicales o psicológicos, nada que no sea la satisfacción momentánea y bien recortada […] y después basta, nada de razones profundas' (203). In other words, he will give an undemanding public precisely what it wants, however inaccurate. There may even be a number of more or less direct re-workings of material from the novel. For example, early in the narrative (before he has met Alabaster, in fact), Jimson muses that it is a 'dangerous thing to tell people about yourself. They try to put you in their box. Keep you for the drawing-room cabinet' (535), an assertion in which we might hear a pre-echo of Johnny's damning rebuke to Bruno that in presenting his own, neatly packaged version of him to the public, 'De lo que has olvidado es de mí' ('El perseguidor', 196). Even more noteworthy are the two protagonists' withering references to their respective biographers' sedulous note-taking. In their final meeting, Jimson remarks of Alabaster:

> The professor had withdrawn a little and *was making a note of my conversation*. What an art biogrubber loves is a subject that talks. Because then he can fill up the gaps between the reproductions and dates; and sell the thing as a Work at a guinea, instead of a catalogue at sixpence. And if the filling is polite conversation, which is rude nonsense, so much the better, as readers will feel that it's given them their money's worth, and they won't have to bother with the reproductions. (*The Horse's Mouth*, 748 [my emphasis])

This dim view of the 'art-loving' public and its preferences is not dissimilar to Bruno's, although the latter, his eye firmly on the cash register, is untroubled by it. In their respective encounter, meanwhile, Johnny sneers, 'El compañero Bruno *anota en su libreta todo lo que uno le dice*, menos las cosas más importantes' ('El perseguidor', 198 [my emphasis]). Both

the context and the phrasing are analogous, yet even if we are not persuaded by these specific correspondences, there is surely sufficient overlap here for us to accept the larger claim that Cortázar elected to incorporate a self-serving biographer into his story at least partly under Cary's sway.

Two Final Links

Before concluding, I shall examine two more isolated correspondences between the works, though neither is merely contingent. In his climactic stand-off with Bruno, Johnny suddenly pauses to stroke a 'gato blanco' (196), subsequently lamenting 'Estoy tan solo como ese gato, y mucho más solo porque lo sé y él no' (197). In fact, this incident has been carefully foreshadowed in the text, since when the two first meet in the narrative Bruno likens Johnny's 'atención distraida' to that of 'un gato que mira fijo pero que se ve que está por completo en otra cosa; que es otra cosa' (142), and later, when he visits Johnny in hospital, the latter scorns the notions which, as a consequence of having devoured 'un montón de libros', self-assured 'sabios' have forged about the imagined difficulty of his art, insisting rather that 'Mirar, por ejemplo, o comprender un perro o un gato. Esas son las dificultades, las grandes dificultades' (174). The cat is an embodiment of pure, unreflective animal instinct as opposed to calculating reason (Johnny's outburst is initially directed at the doctors and psychiatrists who had tried to 'cure' him during a previous stay in hospital, standard-bearers all of what he contemptuously refers to as 'la ciencia americana' [173]) and to time-bound consciousness more generally, which is something (in many respects *the* thing) that torments Johnny throughout the story since it isolates, distances, and conceptualizes, converting the measureless ecstasy of improvised performance into the regular ticking of the metronome and Bruno's stilted script. Now, towards the close of *The Horse's Mouth*, Jimson

also comes across a white cat on his way into a pub and picks it up because 'I wanted some kindness' (*The Horse's Mouth*, 751). He returns to it obsessively throughout the chapter, admiring both its spontaneous gracefulness and its utter indifference to him. At first it reminds him of Blake's elemental tiger, and he mentally recites the opening line of the poem (751). Shortly afterwards he remarks, 'It looked at me for thirty seconds or half an hour. I looked at the cat and the cat looked through me. I wasn't even in the way' (756) and then, a page later, muses:

> And I looked down at her, deaf, castrated cat. What did she care? *She never knew what she was missing*. The only individual cat in the world. Universal cat. (758 [my emphasis]).

Jimson's fascination with the animal prefigures Johnny's in every respect, from its apparent freedom from the shackles of time to its blissful lack of awareness both of itself and the world it unknowingly inhabits.[35] Both the strikingly similar expressions 'yo lo sé y él no' and 'She never knew what she was missing', as well as the fact that Cortázar decided to make his cat a white one when he need never have mentioned its colour, strongly suggest that the

[35] The cat's enviable incapacity to distinguish between half a minute and half an hour is reminiscent of the episode in the Paris metro in which Johnny claims to have been day-dreaming for at least a quarter of an hour in what were actually fewer than two minutes of clock time, and concludes that 'Si yo pudiera solamente vivir como en esos momentos, o como cuando estoy tocando y también el tiempo cambia … Entonces un hombre, no solo tú sino ésa [Dedée] y todos los muchachos podrían vivir cientos de años' ('El perseguidor', 153-54). Jimson's reference to the simultaneously 'individual' and 'universal' cat appears to have been derived from the famous passage in Schopenhauer often cited by Borges: 'I know quite well that anyone would regard me as mad if I seriously assured him that the cat, playing just now in the yard, is still the same one that did the same jumps and tricks three hundred years ago; but I also know that it is much more absurd to believe that the cat of today is through and through and fundamentally an entirely different one from the cat of three hundred years ago […] This rests on the fact that in this animal the eternity of its idea (the Species) is distinctly marked in the finiteness of the individual.' See Artur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (New York: Dover, 1966), II, 482. For Schopenhauer, the animal's lack of (self-)knowledge effectively elides the division between individual and species and frees it from the *principio individuationis* which makes human beings painfully aware of their confinement within time and space and instils in them a 'terrifying certainty of death' by which the animal is unencumbered (II, 463).

episode is a covert writerly homage to Cary, though this is no mere caprice, since the model and its implications suit his own metaphysical purposes perfectly.

I remarked above that both Jimson and Carter fill their respective texts with laughter, and in the end both literally die laughing. We know that the real-life Charlie Parker died after a fit of laughter while watching the Dorsey brothers' television show, and at least one account of Johnny's demise indicates that he met his end 'contento y sin saberlo' (finally matching the cat), 'a mitad de un programa de televisión que le hacía mucha gracia' ('El perseguidor', 203).[36] Jimson, after suffering a stroke, is taken away in a police ambulance, accompanied, ironically enough, by a nun, who tells him not to talk as he is seriously ill. Never short of an acid rejoinder, even at death's door, he replies:

> Not as seriously as you are well. How you don't enjoy life, mother. I should laugh all round my neck at this minute if my shirt were not a bit on the tight side. (*The Horse's Mouth*, 768)

'It would be better for you to pray', she answers, and with his final, laconic riposte the novel ends: 'Same thing, mother' (768). This shared laughter is no mere character trait, a 'sense of humour', but rather an expression of a fundamental existential attitude, a joyfully senseless, Dionysian antidote to the po-faced intellectual posturing and critical cant which so often surround them and, by extension, to the entire rational, reasonable but, in their eyes, stultifying and death-dealing order of things against which they have pitted their lives and their art, and a more authentic alternative to which they have relentlessly pursued.[37]

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[36] For a somewhat overblown account of Parker's final hours, see Russell, *Bird Lives!*, 355ff.

[37] Again, this omnipresent laughter has a characteristically Nietzschean ring to it. Consider, for example, 'An Attempt at Self-Criticism', the 'Foreword' added to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), which ends with an injunction to 'laughingly send all petty metaphysical consolation to the Devil' and a long quotation

Conclusion

The aim of the preceding observations is not to argue that 'El perseguidor' is a slavish imitation of *The Horse's Mouth*, with a jazz musician standing in for a painter, or that Cary's novel is Cortázar's only literary source, which is plainly not the case. Indeed, there are at least as many differences between the texts, both thematic, formal and expressive, as there are similarities, only the most conspicuous being that Jimson, as droll, erudite and eloquent as Carter is faltering, unschooled and inarticulate, gets to narrate his own story, whilst everything we learn about Johnny comes to us via Bruno. Nor has it been my intention to provide a new, replacement narrative to explain how Cortázar came to write his pivotal story. Rather, and more modestly, I have sought to nuance and thereby enrich the account summarized in the 'Introduction' by suggesting that certain concrete stimuli, in this case a now obscure novel, may have played a part, and perhaps a substantial part, in what turned out to be sea-change in Cortázar's whole existential outlook, the first literary fruits of which were the character of Johnny Carter. Which leads to a final thought. Any number of theories have been formulated to explain how Cortázar came up with the name of his protagonist, and what the extra-textual models for his character (other, of course, than Charlie Parker) might be.[38] Julio Cortázar and Jesus Christ are the principal candidates, and Jean Cocteau is another possibility, given the impact that the latter's *Opium* had on the young Cortázar.[39] A case can be made for any or all of them, but it is also tempting to think that, whether or not he intended

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from 'that Dionysian monster, Zarathustra' celebrating such laughter. See *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12-13. Again, Kadir makes no mention of this vital component of the text.

[38] Jakfalvi, for example, suggests that the name Johnny Carter is an amalgam of Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges, both of whom were also alto saxophonists ('El perseguidor', 158 [note]). The same applies to other invented characters. Art Boucaya, for example, seems to combine the names of alto and bartione saxophonist William Boucaya and drummer Art Blakey, who often played with Parker.

[39] See for example Harss, 'La cachetada metafísica', 244, and especially Prego, 'La fascinación de las palabras', 44-5.

it, Cortázar would not have minded the fact that his character also shares his iconic initials with Joyce Cary.