

Going Under: The Metro and the Search for Oneself in Julio Cortázar's "The Pursuer"

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Julio Cortázar's "The Pursuer" ("El perseguidor") is recognized as an early contribution to the Boom in Latin America.¹ As a result, the narrative is well investigated in areas such as jazz or music in general, character development, adherence to traditional qualities of short stories, autobiographical possibilities, reality and time.² Yet, some elements of "The Pursuer" remain unexplored. In particular, critics have mentioned the metro only as a means for understanding the plot or other thematic considerations of Johnny's character. An extensive discussion of the metro is lacking; this study demonstrates comprehensively the various roles of the metro which lead to Johnny's metacognition and prompt the reader to begin or continue his or her own search for self. The darkness of the underground journey proves to be symbolic of Johnny's and the reader's passage to self perception.

Leslie Schumer, in *The Elements of Transport*, concludes that "the function of transport is to move people and goods from place to place, and it is implied that the people and goods should be discharged at the end of each journey in the same order and condition as at the commencement" (11). This is certainly not the end result of Johnny's metro trip, as subsequent realizations alter his life and the message of "The Pursuer." Thus, we shall discuss the metro in regard to Johnny's concept of time perception, to the differences between Johnny's and Bruno's characters, to character development, and to the projection of Cortázar's personal beliefs. The metro is also used to provide the reader with alternative means of percep-

tion, as a physical place for various actions to occur, as a comparison point for music, as a means for Johnny's physical distancing from both the reader and Bruno, and as an invitation to seek the meta-physical with Johnny.

First, let us consider the historical purpose of travel in the works by Cortázar. Martha Paley de Francescato postulates that Cortázar reveals his interest in travel by using travel in difficult situations: "Todo es difícil: el viaje, la percepción de lo que ocurre, y los motivos que causan los acontecimientos" 'everything is difficult: the trip, the perception of what occurs, and the motives which cause the events' (130). Furthermore, travel in a Cortázar narrative thrusts a character more deeply into a situation, negating a means of escape and thereby resulting in a difficult ending. Cortázar, in his interview with Ernesto González Bermejo, personally recounts both his fascination with any kind of passage as well as a personal experience with the metro showing his interest in time perception (46). Specifically, the metro in "The Pursuer" develops his idea of fractured time: "usted entra en el vehículo que se mueve, que lo desplaza . . . y usted queda sometido a una especie de pasividad total mientras lo llevan a un destino determinado" 'you enter a vehicle that moves, that displaces . . . and you are subjected to a kind of total passivity while you are taken to a determined destination' (González Bermejo 55).

Time itself has been an integral part of contemporary literature, especially as it relates to the relationship between "tiempo subjetivo (interior al hombre) y el objetivo (exterior o de la naturaleza)" 'subjective time (internal to man) and objective time (external or of nature)' as Joan Hartman concludes (341). Johnny's perception of time applies to Gloria Bautista Gutiérrez's definition of "magical time" in which "la visión de la realidad hace que el tiempo, enfren-tado con lo imaginario, se diluya y no fluya lineal ni cronológico sino según el sentir y actuar de los protagonistas. . . ." 'the vision of reality makes time that is confronted by the imaginary diluted, and it flows neither linearly nor chronologically but according to the feelings and actions of the protagonists. . . .' (36). Johnny's internal perception conflicts with the external reality resulting in the sus-pension of chronological time and the implementation of "magical time." Johnny enters the supernatural in his perception and adheres

to a non-conventional and “magical” pattern of time. Through his explanation of what occurred to him as a passenger of the metro this change is revealed. He experiences a wide array of thoughts, 15 minutes of thoughts measured by conventional time in the short space of a minute and a half while he was a passenger of the metro.

Time perception is fundamental to “The Pursuer” and the most significant function of the metro is to handle its treatment. Cortáez conveys his theory of time perception by comparing the relationship between Johnny and Bruno, which is of central significance in the story. However, it is not simply their external relationship, but their individual internal perception reflected in their interaction with one another, which gives depth to their interaction and develops both their characters and their individual perspectives. Johnny is impressed by the metro not only because he becomes “simultaneously conscious of objective and subjective time” (189-190) as Gordana Yovanovich notes, but also because the metro represents imposed time, or Bruno’s perception of time. Johnny struggles to explain his thoughts, memories and feelings that transcend time. The metro experience facilitates this explanation and hence, is transformed into the principal means of establishing conflict between characters and implicitly to differentiate their perceptions.

Carmen de Mora Valcárcel differentiates Bruno’s and Johnny’s characters. Unlike Bruno, who is willing to accept reality (including time) as it is, she reveals that Johnny is searching for a deeper metaphysical answer: “La actitud de Johnny se fundamenta en una búsqueda del tiempo, el auténtico valor de las cosas y de su relación con el mundo exterior. . . .” ‘Johnny’s attitude is founded upon a search for time, the true value of things and his relationship with the external world. . . .’ (192). Malva Filer concludes that while Johnny’s search is metaphysical, he is completely devoid of “recursos intelectuales para analizarlo” ‘intellectual resources to analyze it’ (109). Lacking the skills to verbalize his metaphysical questions Johnny can only answer them through playing jazz music (109). Lois Parkinson Zamora refers to this state as the “apocalypticist’s search for the medium to express his vision” (97). Music is his basic mode of communication; in contrast, the metro most directly reveals his inability to use language for meaningful communication.

The discussion of Johnny’s experiences on the subway makes

clear to the reader that Johnny is self-aware. First, he is aware that he does not possess the ability to explain the impossible: “la verdadera explicación sencillamente no se puede explicar” (108) ‘the right answer simply can’t be explained’ (192-193). Johnny also recognizes that he is unique in his perception but does not have the means to analyze how or why he is different. He knows only that he stands alone with his exceptional ideas, “me parece que eso solamente me ocurre a mí” (108) ‘it seems to me that that would only happen to me’ (193). Osvaldo López Chuhurra affirms Johnny’s awareness which accentuates his inability to verbalize this phenomenon: “Johnny tiene conciencia—está seguro—que existen dos tiempos” ‘Johnny is aware—he is sure—that two times exist’ (223).

Johnny’s knowledge of his problem with marijuana is also exposed in the conversation with Bruno about the metro: “Te juro que en ese día no había fumado ni un pedacito, ni una hojita” (110) ‘That day I swear I hadn’t smoked even a roach, not a crumb’ (195). Johnny excuses his behavior, to which Bruno is eager to draw attention. In spite of Johnny’s awareness, he is ignorant of his search. Cortázar asserts that Johnny has a type of “inocencia” ‘innocence’ or “esa especie de *naïvete* que se produce en el aduanero Rousseau cuando pinta obras maestras sin tener la menor idea de lo que está haciendo” ‘that breed of naiveté that occurs in ‘Le Dounier’ Rousseau, when he paints masterpieces without having the slightest idea of what he is doing’ (González Bermejo 62).³

Leonard Jackson studies Sigmund Freud’s hypothesis of “primary process thinking” which is defined as “thinking in images and elementary narratives rather than in words and arguments” (5) which demonstrates this naivety and classifies the difference between Johnny and Bruno. Johnny thinks, but cannot express his thoughts, while Bruno relies on arguments and external logic. Bruno and Johnny are also differentiated according to Carl Jung’s concept of archetypes including the *ego*, *shadow*, *persona* and *self*. The *self* is who one really is, the *ego* is self-representation, the *shadow* is self imposed repression of certain aspects and most importantly for purposes of this study, *persona*, that “part of the personality which acts as mediator or mask; it is developed specifically for playing parts—roles—in the outer world” (Jackson 111).

Thus, Bruno relies heavily on *persona*; he wears a mask (“O
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make me a mask –Dylan Thomas,” (100) appears as an epigram to the story); and he denies the truth proposed by Johnny, the dominion of *shadow*. Johnny, on the other hand, is dominated by ego, and his self-representation corresponds to reality. He proposes, without pretensions, to be only himself. Johnny’s last words before dying are, “oh, hazme una máscara” (151) ‘o, make me a mask’ (247), an indication that he is aware that he is different and wishes that he too could play the role of another, escaping reality and hiding behind a guise. This mask would: “allow him to transcend his limited point of view, extend his consciousness into space, and surrender himself to vatic tendency” (Parkinson Zamora 96). His *persona* is underdeveloped much as his perception is childlike and innocent.

Johnny’s character is significant to Cortázar in that they both undergo a character transformation resulting from physical progression from one place to another: Johnny via the metro and Cortázar via his move to Paris, immediately preceding the writing of “The Pursuer”. Johnny is also the vehicle that transports the change of Cortázar’s personal beliefs, which is most recognizable in “The Pursuer” according to Peter Standish (181). Johnny’s life in an equivalent way is changed after his metro ride. He admits: “después me ha vuelto a suceder, ahora me empieza a suceder en todas partes” (110) ‘then it happened to me again, now it’s beginning to happen to me everywhere’ (195). Johnny encounters the other realm for the first time without music during his metro trip. In the same way, Cortázar undergoes his own metamorphosis, through a trip, thus reaching another level in his writing.

The transformed Cortázar demonstrates a desire to work in the existential realm (Filer 109), which brings about his transformation from an aesthetic to a humanistic writer, and changes his focus with regard to character development. Just as Johnny uses the metro to describe and project his own internal change to Bruno, Cortázar uses Johnny to describe and project his internal change to the reader. His ability to masterfully develop character, especially starting with “The Pursuer,” is one of the elements that differentiates Cortázar’s style from other writers. Cortázar’s stories “have no setting other than the minds and hearts of the narrators and characters” (Gordana Yovanovich 177). Again, the metro functions as an external place to understand the characters and demonstrate

their differences. Cortázar achieves success by revealing his characters and never outwardly describing them. Subtly but convincingly, we discover most of the fundamental components of the story while Johnny discusses his experiences on the metro with other characters.

Johnny's experiences convey Cortázar's personal and individual values, although Johnny's character is based on the jazz musician, Charlie Parker. Johnny communicates Cortázar's personal beliefs about the "concept of time, the feeling that the metro is an environment that invites different modes of perception, and the belief that music may allow one to express what language will not" (Standish 28). As László Scholz concludes, the metro subsequently plays a role in propelling the author's personal agenda through a character with whom Cortázar sympathizes because of their shared non-traditional, reality-questioning beliefs: "Lo que se propone es destruir el tiempo, tal y como lo entiende el *homo sapiens*, e instalar en su lugar su siempre-ahora" "That which is proposed is to destroy time, just as it is understood by *homo sapiens*, and replace it with his always-now" (Scholz 45).

Cortázar himself explains his intent with the metro scene in "The Pursuer" during an interview with Ilan Stavans:

I have no reason to obscure the authenticity of my personal experience and to create of it an ingenious superstructure of fiction. In my story what happens is exactly the same as what had happened to me various times in analogous circumstances. During a subway ride [Johnny] enters into that state which we call distraction and into which the fantastic tends to slide very easily. (Stavans 92)

Cortázar summarizes what happens to Johnny on the metro and concludes with: "the subway has served as an exterior clock to show him that during those two minutes he was given fifteen minutes to think" (Stavans 92).

Public transportation, for Cortázar, as discussed by Leu Kipnis, is a place "donde se encuentran imbricados, varios temas característicos de este autor, a saber: el doble, la búsqueda, la soledad del individuo en un tumulto, el viaje. . . ." "where various themes characteristic of this author are found to be involved, namely, the double, the search, the solitude of the individual in tumult, the trip. . ." (76).

Johnny precisely fits this profile. Various aspects of Johnny can be seen; his conflict, his search, his solitude, and the fact that his external physical trip represents a more internal trip. The reader, who also embarks on this journey relates to these struggles and the extra-sensory perception that sometimes is revealed even in the midst of a dark passage.

Bruno recognizes that his challenge as the narrator of Johnny's story is to retain a bond of sympathy with the reader who may experience difficulty in accessing Johnny's real character, much as he does. Bruno cannot relate because he has not seen the same light of perception in the darkness of the metro or in life. Bruno's problem is that he "has to ask the logical question because of the world he lives in, like the reader's world is based on logic" (Yovanovich 183). María Lima notes: "es precisamente cuando Bruno divulga la distancia existente entre Johnny y 'nosotros' que el lector siente que es más fácil identificarse con Bruno" 'it is precisely when Bruno divulges the distance existing between Johnny and 'us' that the reader feels that it is easier to identify himself with Bruno (26). This metaphysical difference is expressed externally in the physical distance and by moving away from the reader as Johnny embarks on the metro. Bruno, in contrast, remains behind with the reader, as a sympathetic character with whom the average reader can relate.

Moreover, Bruno's lack of progress explains his inability to reach the "yonder" as Néstor Tirri concludes (160). The metro demonstrates just how incompatible Bruno and Johnny are metaphysically. While, the metro is an agent of change for Johnny, Bruno who is given precisely the same opportunity to perceive life and time in the same way does not change. Conversely, as Bruno gets closer to a realization he laughs it away and rejects it: "sonríó lo mejor que pude, comprendiendo vagamente que tiene razón" (111) 'I smile the best I can, understanding fuzzily that he's right' (195). He is unable to accept Johnny's beliefs. In fact, he is unwilling to do so:

He entrado en un café para beber un coñac y lavarme la boca, quizá también la memoria que insiste e insiste en las palabras de Johnny, sus cuentos, su manera de ver lo que yo no veo y en el fondo no quiero ver. (113)

I went into a café for a shot of cognac and to wash my mouth out,

maybe also the memory that insisted and insisted in Johnny's words, his stories, his way of seeing what I didn't see and, at bottom didn't want to see. (199)

Bruno's reasoning and rejection of Johnny is facilitated and justified by their opposing perceptions identified in their discussion of the metro trip. Bruno, therefore, represents the reader who knowingly rejects this illumination.

Furthermore, Saul Sosnowski emphasises Johnny's naiveté: "que por ser un hombre instintivo se reduce a intuiciones, a sentimientos ocultos e irreducibles a formulaciones lógicas" "that by being an instinctive man, he is reduced to intuitions, to hidden feelings, and irreducible logical formulations" (Saúl Sosnowski 433). Bruno is a conformist of accepted truths and pre-established order (Sosnowski 433), while Johnny's maintains the time perception of a child. William Friedman's *The Developmental Psychology of Time* considers judgment and subjective perceptions that clarify Bruno and Johnny's relationship. For example, "many judgments about duration are made in situations in which measurement or other logical solutions are precluded" (3). Friedman also explains that a child must pass through many stages of development in order to achieve mastery of time. This is precisely the level of immature thinking of Johnny, who is unable to rationalize, as an adult, the concept of time.

Friedrich Wilkening's analysis of time, distance and velocity interrelation, included in Friedman's book, clarifies that relationships among these three factors, when combined, can change perception. The rapid velocity of the metro and the large amount of distance covered affects Johnny's time perception. Wilkening claims that time information is stored in and retrieved from memory. So, when Johnny tries to perceive how long the metro trip lasted he remembers all the things that went through his mind and most appropriately thinks that fifteen minutes, instead of one minute and a half, have transpired. He asks himself: "¿cómo se puede pensar un cuarto de hora en un minuto y medio?" (110) 'how can one think a quarter of an hour in a minute and a half?' (195)

Friedman's text also contains a description of adaptation by Paul Fraisse who states: "the central question at issue in the developmental psychology of time is the development of mankind's adaptation to time. The most advanced form of this adaptation is the

capacity to think about time . . .” (113). However, Johnny’s incapacity to adapt to time does not negate his ability to think about it. In fact Bruno, who is the well-adapted character chooses not to think about time and merely accepts it on the basis of societal imposition. Johnny, however, with the mentality of a child is unaffected by psychological norms.

Dédée, Johnny’s lover, is the other character developed during the discourse of the metro. The few things that she says and the manner in which she behaves reveal her personality. Primarily, she is the responsible mate, Johnny’s caretaker and his external consciousness—since his internal consciousness is non-functional. For example, when Johnny comes home from the metro and announces the loss of yet another saxophone, it is she who talks to the metro workers and the police. He is dependent on Dédée—although he doesn’t outwardly admit it—he depends on her to know his schedule and plans. Cortázar also reveals her doting and nagging personality. For example she says to him: “te va a subir la fiebre” (104) ‘You’re going to get your fever up’ (188). The metro, as well as the time Johnny spends recounting his experience of what happened on the metro, helps the reader understand Dédée and her relationship with him.

The loss of the saxophone on the metro also reveals Dédée’s desire to get out of financial trouble. She talks of the month-long contract Johnny would have if he could get another saxophone. She dreams, “podríamos arreglarnos tan bien” (108) ‘we could clean up’ (192); she is hoping to find a way out of poverty. Moreover, her character is willing to accept money from Bruno to replace the saxophone. Bruno is compassionate towards Johnny and Dédée and gives them the money that they need. Finally, the loss of the saxophone demonstrates Johnny’s complacency: “el músico no siente preocupación alguna por el contrato sino el hecho de no poder tocar, no poder acariciar ese objeto que tanto necesita y tanto ama” ‘the musician doesn’t worry about the contract but rather about not being able to play, to be unable to caress that object he needs and loves so much’ as Manuel Cifo González concludes (416). The metro, then, is a strategic location for the author; it results in the loss of the saxophone which allows Cortázar the opportunity to create viable characters with few words.

Finally, the loss of the saxophone itself, on the metro, is mean-

ingful. Johnny puts the saxophone under his seat, feeling secure with it there. But, when he leaves the saxophone under the seat, the musician loses his ability to play music (by not having the instrument). At this moment he gains consciousness of his perception of time. Sosnowski claims, “toda intuición del tiempo causa el abandono de los compromisos artísticos de Johnny” ‘all intuition of time causes the abandonment of Johnny’s artistic commitment’ (434). Again, that is to say that with the gain of one mode of perception the musician loses the ability to experience the other mode. Johnny says, “la música ayuda, sabes. No a entender, porque en realidad no entiendo nada” (104) ‘I think the music helps, you know. Not to understand, because the truth is I don’t understand anything’ (187). The metro and music for Johnny are both elements which achieve the same understanding that something must be lost for perception to be gained. This loss is often material or it is the loss of the sustained belief that reality can be understood.

The strange events on the metro happen unconsciously to Johnny. Through the metro, he gains, “la vivencia de poder liberarse del tiempo cronológico, objetivo, se inicia en el metro y sólo allí sigue siendo verdadera; por otra parte, ese salir del tiempo elástico no depende de su voluntad, es algo que le ocurre, le sucede” ‘the ability to free himself of chronological time, objectively, it begins in the metro, and only there does it continue to be true; on the other hand, his removal from time isn’t dependent on his will, it is something that occurs to him, that happens to him’ (Scholz 80). Scholz demonstrates that the metro frees Johnny from imposed time, however he fails to mention that music achieves a similar result. In fact, music, as the precursor to the metro, gives Johnny the ability to understand what he experiences while on the metro. He understands not only that he really cannot comprehend the parallel situation but also that he cannot even describe whether the metro and music take him further away or put him more deeply into the concept of time perception—just as is the case with music. The reader’s illumination is quite the same, after reading the narrative. We recognize our perception has changed yet cannot differentiate whether we are nearer to or further from understanding.

Furthermore, in spite of the fact that both music and the metro achieve the same results, they cannot occur simultaneously. Music

delivers Johnny to the *yonder*, “cuando Johnny toca su música se introduce en un mundo distinto en el que se rompen esas dimensiones de espacio y tiempo” ‘when Johnny plays his music he establishes himself in a distinct world in which those dimensions of time and space are broken’ (Cifo González 418). Johnny arrives at the place he only experiences with music: “El metro hace algo que Johnny reconoce no poder hacer por sí solo: recordar; mejor aún que los recuerdos pasen por su frente a la velocidad del metro” ‘The metro does something that Johnny recognizes that he can’t do for himself alone: to remember; better yet that the memories pass in front of him at the velocity of the metro’ (Cifo González 418). On the metro, in contrast, Johnny is consciously reminded of his ability to reach the “yonder” (Tirri 160), something he forgets when he is playing music.

Johnny hopes to achieve the yonder in order to enhance his life:

Entonces un hombre, no solamente yo sino ésa y tú y todos los muchachos podrían vivir cientos de años, si encontráramos la manera podríamos vivir mil veces más de lo que estamos viviendo por culpa de los relojes, de esa manía de minutos y de pasado mañana. . . . (111)

Then a man, not just me but her and you and all the boys, they could live hundreds of years, if we could find the way we could live a thousand times faster than we’re living because of the damned clocks, that mania for minutes and for the day after tomorrow. . . . (195)

Johnny hopes to achieve a longer and more fulfilling life in a place that is free of societal restrictions and time impediments.

However, Johnny’s metro ride does not permit him to forget the other less pleasant things in life, such as “la hipoteca o la religión” (106) ‘the mortgage or religion’ (190). The difference is that it changes his view of them. These elements become like “el traje que uno no tiene puesto” (106) ‘a suit I’m not wearing at the moment’ (190). Later, when Johnny continues to describe what he feels on the metro he says, “Estoy como parado en una esquina viendo pasar lo que pienso, pero no pienso lo que veo” (109) ‘I’m like standing on a corner watching what I think go by, but I’m not thinking what I see’ (193). He sees both what is in his mind and his memories as

if they were really occurring simultaneously. Reality, the mortgage, religion, or the metro passengers do not cease to exist, but Johnny's perception of them becomes secondary and his memory, the past, is juxtaposed with the present. Johnny's heightened state of consciousness while on the metro facilitates his triumph over the constrictions of imposed time.

Kipnis has argued that public transportation expresses fear in three specific Cortázar stories, namely, "Después del almuerzo" ("After Lunch") "Ómnibus" ("Omnibus") and "Manuscrito hallado en un bolsillo." ("Manuscript Found in a Pocket"). While transportation in "The Pursuer" does not serve the same function as transportation in these stories, some of Kipnis' general ideas relate to this study while others simply contradict what "The Pursuer" achieves. He states:

Un medio de transporte no sólo limita sino forma parte del espacio normativo, emocional-psicológico que contiene. El transporte público es un ámbito configurado, con frecuencia, negativamente—lo que se relaciona perfectamente con su índole de espacio cerrado. . . .

A mode of transport not only limits but also forms a part of the emotional-psychological normative space that it contains. Public transportation is a sphere, frequently configured negatively—which perfectly relates with the nature of closed space. . . . (76)

For Johnny the metro does not limit or enclose him, but instead is in fact the very thing that enables his freedom of thought and open mind.

Subterranean space in literature has a history of delving into dark regions: "se relaciona tradicionalmente con la parte oscura de la vida, con el miedo y con la muerte, lo que confirman abundantes ejemplos clásicos, entre ellos la mitología griega y *Les Misérables* de Victor Hugo" 'it is traditionally related with the dark side of life, with fear and death, that which abundant classical examples confirm, among them Greek mythology and *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo' (Kipnis 77). Johnny reaches that "dark side" through his mind, analyzes his own perception and becomes self-aware. He manages this darkness without fear. Contrarily, Bruno, overcome with fear projects his negative feelings onto Johnny and criticizes his

thought patterns.

The enclosed space of the metro joined with the open mind of Johnny is repulsive to Bruno. Bruno fears losing control and while he is compelled to identify himself with the metro-experience as described by Johnny, he experiences the fear that Kipnis refers to in reference to the metro. Johnny, the actual passenger of the metro, does not suffer these fears. Johnny in his childlike wonder is unaffected by the fear of losing control, a problem that plagues adults. "Los temores, relacionados con el problema de control . . . indican la escasez de la libertad espacial de los protagonistas y por lo tanto, representan la amenaza inmediata para el individuo" 'The fears, related to the problem of control . . . indicate the scarcity of spatial freedom of the protagonists and therefore represent an immediate threat to the individual' (Kipnis 84). Bruno is compelled to run away from the metro and from Johnny, in rejection of what they both represent because he cannot understand Johnny's perception while riding the metro or implicitly, living life.

Some parallels also exist that relate Charlie Parker, the real musician, to Johnny whose character is loosely based on the musician. For example, Charlie Parker lost touch with reality and was taken care of by the sculptress Julie MacDonald as Rodolfo Borello demonstrates (581). Readers and Bruno may both agree that Johnny, too, has lost touch with reality based on his ranting about the metro and he most certainly is cared for by Dédée as is obvious in the loss of his saxophone. Perhaps, more accurately, Johnny has not lost touch with reality but has achieved another perspective, one that is treated with incredulity by those who are unable to reach that higher level of thought. Another comparison between the two jazz musicians is their propensity for repetition. Parker repeated complete segments of music while Johnny reiterates important facts. For example, "el metro es un gran invento, Bruno" (107) 'the metro is a great invention, Bruno' (191), which Johnny repeats exactly a few paragraphs later (pages 108 and 192 respectively).

Beyond the autobiographical elements and parallels to Charlie Parker, most critics situate this work and Cortázar in general as a fantastic or neofantastic writer.⁴ Cortázar's own definition of fantasy is:

Algo muy simple que puede suceder en plena realidad cotidiana, en

este mediodía del sol, ahora entre usted y yo, o en el Metro, mientras usted venía a este *rendez vous* . . . Simplemente para mí lo fantástico es la indicación súbita de que, al margen de las leyes aristotélicas y de nuestra mente razonante, existen mecanismos perfectamente válidos, vigentes, que nuestro cerebro lógico no capta pero que en algunos momentos irrumpen y se hacen sentir.

Something very simple that can occur in the middle of everyday reality, in this midday sun, now between you and me, or on the metro, while you were coming to this *rendez vous* . . . For me the fantastic is simply, the sudden indication that, at the margin of Aristotelian laws and our reasoning mind, perfectly valid and acceptable mechanisms exist, enforced, that our logical brain does not capture but that in certain moments do interrupt and make themselves felt. (González Bermejo 42)

This interruption of logic is exactly what the reader of “The Pursuer” feels. The most fantastic element of “The Pursuer” is time, which for Cortázar becomes the central focus in many of his stories (López Chuhurra 218).

C. Leonard Jackson, who integrates literature and psychology, says of literature, “Cognitive science cannot explain why any organism would want to spend hours entertaining false cognitions about the world” (4). He proceeds to classify humans as “fantasists” (4). According to his definition, normal consciousness comes from the external world and not internally. Being able to retreat into internal consciousness is not only necessary for human beings but also meaningful and desirable. The success of “The Pursuer” can be attributed to this very element. Not only does Cortázar give us a fantasy in which to retreat but also develops a character who becomes metacognitive of this same relationship to reality. The narrative exceeds the imposed boundaries of literary form by creating a sense of awareness in Johnny. The reader who feels what both Cortázar and Johnny feel while riding on the metro may long for more analysis. This can be found in Cortázar’s masterpiece, Rayuela. Cortázar says, “«El perseguidor» es una suerte de preludio de Rayuela . . . esa ansiedad, la angustia de la búsqueda metafísica; quieren hacer saltar las puertas para ir más allá” “The Pursuer” is a sort of prelude to Hopscotch . . . this anxiousness, the anguish of the metaphysical search; these want to break down the doors to reach the beyond”

(González Bermejo 106). The metro demonstrates these elements in "The Pursuer" by establishing a fantastic atmosphere in which the reader is dually enveloped—first the reader finds himself in the story and secondly he is drawn into Johnny's subconsciousness. Not everyone is able to meet Johnny's challenge; he reveals this by what he says about his lost saxophone: "algún pobre infeliz estará tratando de sacarle algún sonido" (101) 'some poor devil's probably trying to get some sound out of it' (184). Not everyone who plays the saxophone will achieve what Johnny can, just as not every passenger of the metro feels the same effect that the musician does, and not every reader will catch a glimpse of Johnny's *más allá*.

In conclusion, the metro serves many functions in "The Pursuer." The reader has a clearer understanding both of the opposing characters of Johnny and Bruno, including their differing psychology and perception, of Dédé's character, and of Cortázar's personal outlook. The role of music in Johnny's life is revealed and the reader is confronted with the same choice offered to Bruno. We can accept the challenge to search for the metaphysical or we can reject it. Cortázar himself says, "viajar es inventar el futuro espacial" 'to travel is to invent a spacial future' (Kipnis 76). In this creation, the reader is invited to join Johnny and Cortázar in their common quest for the *yonder*, which is symbolized by the underground journey through the dark tunnels traveled by the metro. The road to be traveled as proposed by Cortázar is not an easy one, and has no clear destination, but taking the metro with Johnny makes the reader more aware of Cortázar's postulate that art can open the doors of perception.

Notes

1 All translations are mine with the exception of those from "The Pursuer," which are translations from Paul Blackburn in Cortázar's *Blow-Up and Other Stories*.

2 Many of the most significant essays are found in my bibliography. Other important articles include Blas Matamoro's, "El músico, ese perseguidor" in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 625-626 (2002): 129-38; Eduardo Soren Triff's article, "Improvisación musical y discurso literario en Julio Cortá-

zar" in *Revista Iberoamericana*, 57:155-156 (1991): 657-63; Robin William Fiddian's "Religious Symbolism and the Ideological Critique in 'El perseguidor' by Julio Cortázar" in *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 9:2 (1985): 149-63; and Graciela P. García's "Time, Language, Desire: Julio Cortázar's 'The Pursuer'" in *Pacific Coast Philology*, 38 (2003): 33-39.

3. Henri Rousseau, a self-taught French painter served first in the army, then as a customs official collecting tolls. Hence his French nickname, "Le Douanier" or in Spanish, "Aduanero."

4. See for example, Julia G. Cruz, *Lo neofantástico en Julio Cortázar*. Madrid: Pliegos, 1998.

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