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Misreading the River:
Heraclitean Hope in Postmodern Texts

Nancy Lee Roane
Comparative Literature Honors Thesis
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Notes on the translations:

For *Rayuela*, I used Gregory Rabassa's famous translation to the English, only changing words here and there in order to bring out my more philosophical reading of the original text. I have supplied his page numbers after each quote, barring the few times that I directly translated from Cortázar's original text. For Heraclitus, I mostly worked with Charles Kahn's translations to the English, but also heavily read T.M. Robinson's translations and studied many of the fragments in Ancient Greek as well. All of the fragments are listed in the Appendix, with the ones that I also analyzed in Ancient Greek noted there. For *Fin de Partie*, I translated all of the quotes myself.

Misreading the River:

Heraclitean Hope in Postmodern texts

The ideal, or the dream, is to arrive at a language that heals as much as it separates.¹

- Hélène Cixous

In its bold, simple establishment of a hopeful project for what language can do, this quote sets the theoretical stage on which my project unfolds. Positioned in post-structural discourses, this quote by Hélène Cixous comprehends language as divisive and not corresponding to the world. She considers the possibility of achieving a language that restores just as much as it already decays, but the hope put forth is notably not to achieve a language that sews the world together as metaphysics purports to do. The fissures are an integral part of language itself that cannot be superseded.

In postmodern inquiries, often the first shots fired in response to modernism are related to this starting place that Cixous is working off of: decentering knowledge, destabilizing language. What to do and where to go from this destabilization is much more varied, and often critics of postmodernism claim that the instability falls into relativism, apathy, or chaos. For this reason I am drawn to Cixous' proposal of a wish. It suggests a direction to go in, even if the "final point" of that direction is only a dream, only something to be going towards but not something we can ever fully arrive at.

Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* is positioned with many of the same stakes – language is slippery, recursive, and problematic. The place of the novel itself is dramatized as a site of deconstruction, with the traditional organization becoming highly complicated, out-of-order, and non-authoritative. *Rayuela* does not stop there, but further stages modes of post-

structural inquiry through its vigorous use of hypertextuality and intertextuality, its unclear narrative structure that eschews spatio-temporal contiguity or readily-accessible conclusions, and its playful use of language that sometimes even sees the creation of made-up tongues. With all of this spinning, where can one grab a hold? *Rayuela* doesn't readily give the reader a hand, but instead asks the reader to hold onto itself, drastically shifting the "center" from the novel or the author to the unlikely reader. This *lector cómplice* [complicit reader], as Cortázar calls them, is invited to play, commit transgressions, and invent alongside the author, but even further, they are asked to closely read, to tease out inconsistencies, to make mountains out of mole hills.

In the spirit of close reading, I took special note of the role Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus plays in *Rayuela*. It was as if I were primed to spot the strange way he seemed to crop up: upon reading *Rayuela*, I had just spent a year in Buenos Aires (the setting for half of the novel) learning Ancient Greek and studying philosophy. The way that protagonist Horacio Oliveira talks about Heraclitus in a couple of chapters immediately struck me as off. I shouldn't have been too surprised: what remains of Heraclitus are only fragments, and the fragment for which Heraclitus is perhaps the most "remembered" is actually a bit of a misquote that has become an authorless axiom in Western culture: No man steps in the same river twice, they say. Even Pocahontas sings a version of this quote in the Disney film. This misquote is not the only instance of questionable interpretation of Heraclitus: from Aristotle interpreting him as "[deriving] the entire physical world from fire" to Plato directly contrasting him with philosopher Parmenides and making him the philosopher of "flux," Heraclitus and his disjointed, obscure fragments may be some of the most misunderstood of Western philosophy (Kahn, 4). In step with these instances, Cortázar's protagonist, Horacio Oliveira, commits his own

misreading of Heraclitus, inaccurately interpreting his doctrine and using it to justify going from bad to worse in his treatment towards himself and towards others.

Considering that *Rayuela* presents itself as reader-centric, and Heraclitus is already famous for being misread, this instance of misreading begs a deeper analysis. Studying this misreading brought forth for me other parts of the novel that seemed to be echoing Heraclitean sentiments, but almost always with a flaw, a failing. For this reason I took note of the *río metafísico* [metaphysical river] and its implications for Horacio and his troubled relationship with la Maga. Horacio's *río* is not quite like Heraclitus', and this difference points to larger theoretical tensions inherent in both. Deconstructing this misreading of Heraclitus can help us better understand the philosophical oscillation that Horacio finds himself in that often supplies his justification for his own abusive and neglectful behavior. Whereas Horacio detains himself in inaction or negligence because he cannot resolve with some culminating answer the theoretical paradoxes he sees in the world, Heraclitus embraces fluctuating identities, sustained paradoxes and conflicts in concepts and beyond, putting forth a much more productive project.

These misreadings also expound upon the stakes that Cixous lays out in this quote: can we arrive at a language that begins to restore what it has broken down? Considering this question politically, can we reconstruct with the very same language that fosters systems of marginalization and oppression that we are caught in? How to build with that which is broken? The stakes established in this Cixous quote make it timely for my project of reading the misreading of Heraclitus in *Rayuela*. This Cixous quote also stands in as a sort of icon for my project because it is an instance of intertextuality itself. I first came across it in Carole Maso's *AVA*, a post-structural stream-of-consciousness text that, like *Rayuela*, weaves in quotes and allusions from many other sources. The setting is that of the mind of Ava Klein

on her last day on Earth. Many voices, memories, and languages drift in and out of her consciousness before her thoughts ultimately cease altogether. Cixous' voice is not the only one that comes through strongly in *AVA*, but other figures like Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett take the stage as well, becoming characters in their own right within the text. Just as *Rayuela* plays with questions of what (deconstructed) language can do, *AVA* seeks to represent in prose the stream of consciousness of a dying woman as she floats in and out of all the memories and snatches of language that came into and affected her life.

Fin de Partie is just one of many Samuel Beckett plays that would offer a reason why Beckett figures in *AVA* as a character breaking out from the boundaries and “learning to fly” (Maso, 16). *Fin de Partie*, written originally in the French during the period that Beckett abandoned English as the appropriate channel for his creative pursuits, figures in to the “Theater of the Absurd” movement of the 1950s, consisting of only one long, unbroken, repetitive act. Like *AVA*, *Fin de Partie* also stages the post-structural problematic, but in a way that plays with scarcity as opposed to overabundance in order to show the destabilizing of language as arbiter of Truth. When comparing *Fin de Partie* to *AVA*, the similarities of the theoretical questions posed become even more interesting when one considers the stark contrasts between how the works stage them. Where the multiplicity of voices and vocabularies is the base of celebration in *AVA*, the impoverished language and dead end of possibilities paints a hopeless scene in *Fin de Partie*.

Their central death themes can be beneficially compared with the ending of *Rayuela* when Horacio “jumps” from his window. Death is a helpful theme through which to think the post-structural problematic of how to move forward. While Cixous draws it as a hope or dream, a sentiment echoed in all of *AVA*, *Fin de Partie* draws it as a steady decay with no hope for regrowth. The post-structural position is one that marks a point of no return –

after deconstructing language as a referent to the world and an arbiter of Truth and Justice, the prior consideration of language has died, and what comes after is quite uncertain. It could be the dividing line that ushers us into a new, better paradise, into nothingness, or into something different altogether.

All three of these post-structural texts respond in some way to this dividing line, reacting to a situation where truth is no longer affirmable, language is slippery and contingent, and epistemology is teetering. Where *Fin de Partie* and *Rayuela* feature characters that react by giving up on trying, the central character in *AVA* takes the patchworked events from her life and arrives at a more multi-layered, decentered site of meaning. But other characters in *Fin de Partie* still engage, just as Horacio in *Rayuela* oscillates between dismissing everything as useless and entertaining productive possibilities for his deconstructive inquiries.

Considering how these works interact with death, it is notable that Jacques Derrida refers to choosing between “pure unity” or “pure multiplicity” as “a synonym for death” (Derrida, 13). I take from this quote that the stagnation (death) comes not from either unity or multiplicity as concepts per se, but from taking either/or, and further, from considering them to be *pure*, as in, without overlap. This lack of overlap considers concepts positioned in opposition dualities to be fixed, stable, and Platonic. Pure “unity” or “multiplicity” suggests the full embodiment of an idea such that identity reaches its culmination by being fully *one thing* that is affirmed by the fact that it is utterly not its opposition.

Such dualities cause Horacio from *Rayuela* to halt in inaction or mistreat people, for he cannot seem to reconcile the problem of finding meaning in anything if there is no metaphysically-confirmed meaning to be had. Horacio sees paradoxes such as questioning language *from within* language to be aporetic. For this reason, Horacio’s misreadings of

Heraclitus can indicate a larger theoretical trap he falls into that has to do with the way he reacts to paradoxes. Where Horacio presents language as *either* being able to harbor truth *or* as scattering into multiplicities and idiosyncrasies, Heraclitus would reject even presenting the problem in this way. Heraclitus holds that what we consider paradoxes are only *apparently* such, for what is unresolvable or unknowable at one level will get worked out (or not even be a problem) at the next level, usually indicated to be the level of the Greek Gods or of the overarching structure of the Real. These *apparent paradoxes*, as I am going to call them, do not pose actual problems for multiple reasons: the harmony inherent in conflict, the overarching structure of the Real, and the fluidity of identity name a few.

Heraclitus' *apparent paradoxes* work as such by both maintaining *and* destabilizing the concept of dichotomous schemas through a move where he shows such dualities to be *leaky*. By *leaky dualities* I refer to concepts in opposition that do not remain stable in the enacting of their identity, but instead flow into one another, become one another. Heraclitus uses the "stability" of such dichotomous concepts like "life" and "death" or "warmth" and "coldness" in order to show their unstable nature: the play of being fixed and in opposition is what allows their fluidity and mobility to become salient. Such a definition must be constructed before it can be deconstructed; "warmth" must be not-cold in order to make sense of what it means for it to be in the process of becoming-cold. Heraclitus does not *choose* either stability or instability, but instead plays with them both, engaging multiple levels at once. I feel justified in coming up with my own terms to talk about Heraclitus in this way because in reading him alongside post-structural texts, there is a need to talk about him in new ways. His fragments begin to interact with similar lines of inquiries, but indeed escape them just as quickly, for where post-structuralist works like *Rayuela* are not based in a metaphysics, Heraclitus' system is thoroughly metaphysical.

I find this tension to be ripe grounds for study, because I think metaphysically-supported doctrines like that of Heraclitus *can* communicate and work with deconstructive projects, for the base and the *telos* (end goal) being in opposition does not necessarily pose a problem. Deconstructive projects are not about *discovering* but instead *disentangling*, which implies that there is no *telos* that is intrinsic to deconstruction. The lack of a *telos* puts post-structural projects in a productive position to interact with all kinds of thought systems and works of art, for nothing is off limits to its line of inquiry; the agenda does not limit but instead begs for *more* inquiry into texts. As Derrida brings forth, “Deconstruction is not a method or some tool...Deconstruction is something...which happens inside” (9).

Deconstructive projects, while seeming to negate the possibility of any meaning, are actually more affirmative, not looking to tear down in order to supply a site in which to writhe around in the rubble, but instead to pick apart seemingly airtight systems. In picking them apart, one can see the cracks and can use them to make space for the other, to think both within and past the systems that bind us, and to arrive at a language that both rips apart and sews together.

I find it to be a problem when giving up on a Truth or logos-centric world ends in frozen, ethically-empty, or ironic relativism or apathy. This move happens clearly in *Rayuela* and in *Fin de Partie*, but can certainly be seen in many other postmodern and post-structural projects or in the ways people misunderstand them. We need not throw the baby out with the bathwater, and the ability to closely read, deconstruct, find the holes, and put a text in conversation with its own terms, supplies us with a myriad of directions to think in and actions to take. While deconstruction may suggest the “death” of an old metaphysical Order or hope for a referential language, I do not take it as a definitive death, but one that supplies many possibilities for rebirth.

For this reason, I find the Heraclitean *telos* of arriving at comprehending the Real to be in step with Cixous' dream. The Heraclitean fragments supply ways in which someone can work towards comprehending the Real, even if it is nearly impossible. In a similar move, Cixous wants to arrive at a language that heals as much as it harms, that is both fractured and fused, even if this is only an "ideal." Neither sentiment concludes if these *teloi* are possible to achieve, for the point is not in the end but instead in never ceasing to move, to get somewhere.

While I will be using *Rayuela* and *Fin de Partie* in their original languages, Spanish and French respectively, I will only be using a select number of Heraclitean fragments in the original Ancient Greek for a question of time and an attempt to keep the scope of my project feasible with regards to my limited study of Greek. For this reason, I have carefully selected the fragments that I believe to be the most important to analyze syntactically in Greek and I will discuss these linguistic details when they add to the interpretation. You will find all of the fragments I use in their order of appearance in the Appendix with the Ancient Greek included when I analyzed the fragment in Greek.

While I have studied both T.M. Robinson and Charles Kahn's famous translations of the fragments, I have chosen to work principally with Kahn's translation because I find it to be more poetic, looking to make Heraclitus' voice as a writer come forth just as much as his thought. I do not wish to separate form from content, and therefore seek in this project to closely read both. I am reading Heraclitus as both a poet and a philosopher, putting him into conversation with theories and texts far after his death, for my project is not one allied to the history of philosophy, but instead to how thought can be constantly reborn in new contexts or when read against different texts. Further, I feel even more justified in taking Heraclitus in this way because no one can speak authoritatively about his thought system as a whole – all

we have are disjointed, out of order, second hand copies of fragments lost years and years ago. For this reason, even interacting with Heraclitus at all flirts with the same theoretical questions that post-structuralists dedicate themselves to. It only seems fair to put them into active conversation with each other.

The first three chapters are focused specifically on Heraclitus and *Rayuela*, working to explore and disentangle Horacio's misreadings and what this implies for his overall theoretical project. Chapter 1 elaborates on how Heraclitus' writings on good searching and comprehending the Real can be connected to Cortázar's *lector cómplice*. I explore the felt tension between Heraclitus' system that holds that there is an overarching Answer to discover and the dislocation of the possibility of metaphysical answers in *Rayuela*. This tension plays out in Horacio when, while either stuck in inaction or acting badly, he theoretically justifies his apathy or abuse by *apparent paradoxes*. Many of Heraclitus' fragments play with *apparent paradoxes*, turning them on their head by the use of *leaky dualities*. Chapter 2 elaborates upon the place of fire and water in Heraclitus' fragments, specifically focusing on the river fragment, and how it lines up (and more so does not) with the *río metafísico* in *Rayuela*. Building off of the theoretical distinctions made in chapter 2, chapter 3 explores what can go wrong when deconstructive impulses are couched in metaphysically-based thought. Where Heraclitus calls for understanding dualities as *leaky*, Horacio reorients his baseless, deconstructed worldview in re-concretized, ultimately harmful dualities that are *airtight* as opposed to *leaky*. In an almost inverse move, Heraclitus' starting point of a unified Logos moves into more post-structural-type realms as he recognizes subjectivity, fluid identities, and constant flux.

In the final chapter I bring in *AVA* and *Fin de Partie* in order to look more broadly at the post-structural inquiries at stake. Their post-structural tilt and focus on death add

meaningfully to the conversation, and their own special intertextuality make them good test cases to round out the *Rayuela*/Heraclitus comparison. *AVA* lays out so clearly the theoretical stakes of a post-structural project, just as *Fin de Partie* stages them, taking them to an extreme where word and world are so fundamentally interrupted and the possibility of meaning is so impoverished that the prospect of still “trying” amongst all of the rubble is a Herculean effort. Heraclitus’ fragments on death are integral parts of understanding his system, and their ambiguity and fluidity speak volumes to this question of death as an ending or as a marker for a new beginning.

Two types of responses to this “what next?” question are staged in *Fin de Partie*, one falling into an Horacio-like apathy, while the other connects more closely to the very end of *Rayuela* that sees a possible death and a theoretical “softening,” if you will, of our protagonist. *AVA* deals with death in this way, staging marvelously the post-structural problematic and capturing a death that is both deeply multiplicitous and thoroughly singular. These death themes can again be related back to Heraclitus and his writings on death, which supply for us a very integral part of his thought system as I use it in my project. For Heraclitus, death is a part of the cycle of life, meaning that it is both terminal and eternal simultaneously, and further, it is the *unknowable* part of this cycle that is globally knowable. This nuance is a great takeaway that can meaningfully add to the post-structural line of inquiry, for it imagines an overall unity that is comprised of unknowable multiplicities. Such a set up would seem to be a paradox, but within Heraclitus’ system of thought, the essence of identity is fluid such that *apparent paradoxes* do not pose a problem.

In this sense, Heraclitus’ system is not interested in tying up all loose ends, but instead in recognizing patterns, cycles, and layers of perspective and relativity. This nuance becomes especially useful to us in closely reading *Rayuela* which features a main character

that is constantly teetering the border between arriving at what I am calling *leaky dualities* and getting lost and stuck in *apparent paradoxes*. Harking back to the Cixous quote, he is hopping between a language that heals and one that separates, only towards the end of the book opening himself up to a language that does both.

Chapter 1: Being a good searcher

XXXVI It is wise, listening not to me but to the report, to agree that all things are one.

The focal point of Heraclitus' philosophy as indicated from his fragments is also perhaps one of the most difficult to understand: his concept of a cohesive structure of the Real that holds within it the unity of opposites. All things align themselves with this Logos, which can be understood to refer to discourse and language itself, the structure of the Real, and "the universal principle in accordance with which all things come to pass" (Kahn, 22). When I say that it is difficult to understand, I mean it on two different levels: 1. For the contemporary reader, given the ambiguity of Heraclitus' body of work and the seemingly, and sometimes directly, contradictory ideas he holds (which we will address a little later) and 2. For *his* contemporary reader, in the sense that Heraclitus himself states in his fragments that very few people can comprehend the Real, the unity, but instead get lost in the multiplicity, living as if they were asleep.²

X Nature loves to hide.

Heraclitus' fragment on nature helps to clarify a bit why humans fail to comprehend this Logos: nature doesn't readily reveal itself, in fact, the nature of nature is to cloak itself. φύσις [nature] refers to both the entire group of natural, physical things, as well as the "nature" of something, as in, its generally-occurring behavior or origin. And so, we can reasonably derive that the "nature" of things, meaning their original (as in, from origin) sense is hidden, and also that Nature, as in all physical, natural things, tends to hide. The verb κρύπτεσθαι [hide for oneself, be hidden] is in the middle/passive voice, indicating either

that nature likes to hide because of its own vested interest (middle voice), or that it likes to be hidden by something (passive voice). Due to a lack of context in the fragment or in a greater work, we can reasonably take the middle voice value, meaning that nature loves to hide for itself. This is important, for it suggests that the truth inherently obscures itself, that the nature, if you will, of truth is not for it to be laid bare. This allowance suggests that the appearance put forth is not faithful to the thing itself, challenging the general conception of nature as the most “raw,” the most “accessible,” not marred by interference of any kind. In light of the texts in this study that stage post-structural inquiries, this fragment speaks to the shift away from literary realism (that seeks to represent psychologically realistic characters and true-to-life accurate prose) and romanticism that Morelli, the resident philosopher of *Rayuela*, constantly speaks out against. Nature, according to Heraclitus, and as can be seen not only in *Rayuela* but also in *Fin de Partie* and *AVA*, is not so easy to discover. It is inherently elusive.

III Although the account is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession.

IV Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions.

As if nature’s cloak were not enough to make comprehending the Real difficult, Heraclitus also holds that humans are not very disposed to recognizing Logos, tending to think that what they think (their own Logos, one can extrapolate) is private, and their opinions about what they experience are more correct than what they *actually* experience. And given that nature either puts forth a sense that is not real (for the real sense is hidden), or puts forth nothing at all, the people who do not comprehend, who are sleeping, project

something onto nature. And so, getting at the real sense is quite difficult, for it must be properly detected *and* parsed out from all of the multiple opinions.

We can take from these fragments that there is a fundamental, two-sided disconnect that separates humans from Logos, even though everything happens in accordance with Logos. The fact that the disconnect is coming both from nature *and* from humans seems important to me, especially in consideration of the profound schism that texts staging post-structural lines of inquiry find themselves facing. If the disconnect is on two sides, one of which is nature itself, then the process for comprehending the real becomes much more complex, and not necessarily only related to a failure on the human's part. This nuance complicates the accessibility of truth, for a truth that loves to keep itself away from the masses does not exactly match up with a truth considered to unite them. But, Heraclitus holds, a good handle on your senses can lead the way.

XVII Not knowing how to listen, neither can they speak.

XVI Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language.

Heraclitus does not consider speaking, meaning speaking Logos (as opposed to useless babble), to be possible if the speaker does not first know how to properly listen. But, properly listening requires a profound understanding of the language (not being a “barbarian” or someone without the right language), not just the physical capacity to hear. In this sense Heraclitus calls forth a multi-pronged approach to comprehending the Real: it requires both the good use of one's senses and good thinking that can analyze what came in clear through the senses. One without the other, the project fails. From this we can reasonably take that Heraclitus is not suggesting that knowledge can come from pure theory

or study alone, but also needs everyday experience, and taking notice of “the stuff right in front of you.”

Just as Heraclitus describes to us the type of searcher needed in order to successfully find, *Rayuela* too presents to us a model for how we can read, and, depending on what we choose, what could be discovered. The beginning of the novel starts even before the first page, with a *tablero de dirección* [directory table] that explains to us that there are principally two novels within the work, and a reader can choose which they would prefer to read. The first novel is to be read “en la forma corriente,”³ [in a normal fashion] (7,1) instructing the reader to begin at chapter one and follow along chronologically until chapter 56, at which point the reader can finish the book without worry about what comes after. The second novel, however, begins at chapter 73 and follows a highly scattered order that has the reader reading “all” of the 155 chapters, including the *capítulos prescindibles* [expendable chapters] that are completely left out of the first reading. And so, even before a reader begins, he must choose *how* to read.

The difference between the two readers, as well as their purpose, is further revealed through Morelli-centric *capítulos prescindibles* that preach the type of project that *Rayuela* itself attempts. He explains how these types of novels differ from romantic or classic novels, which try to be understood through their author and characters, or through the message they provide, respectively. Instead, he calls for making the reader “un cómplice, un camarada de camino [an accomplice of the reader, a traveling companion]” (517, 397). This *lector cómplice* both co-participates and co-suffers with the author, discovering what the author discovers in the “same way” s/he does, failing to find certain mysteries that can never be worked out perfectly. The novels that incite a *lector cómplice* eschew an “orden cerrado [closed order]”

(515, 396), allowing the reader to go adventuring, maybe even participating in the very destiny of the characters they read (612).

The *lector cómplice*, by agreeing to follow along on the much more complicated path that Cortázar scatters forth, is *accompanying* the author in his revolutionary project, dirtying his hands alongside the author, and making the experience of reading something decidedly more active. By signing on to the project, the *lector cómplice* recognizes both the intentional energy needed to move away from the traditional novel towards a more complicated one and agrees that this different kind of reading experience *requires* a search. The search then comes forth on many levels: the end of each chapter sends you to another one that you must flip through the book to find, the timeline of events is muddled and confused, and the connections are not clear between the *capítulos prescindibles* and the chapters that tell more or less the “main narrative” (chapters 1 through 56).

Of course, there is a bit of a trick. (But what would one expect? Can you ever trust a criminal, even if you are his accomplice?) What the role as *lector cómplice* suggests is that accompanying Cortázar will unlock secrets that the “lector-hembra” [female reader] (515, 396) does not get.⁴ The more complex route suggests that the *capítulos prescindibles* will explain some of the loose threads that always stubbornly stick around even after attempts to “explain” a narrative have been made. But, the *capítulos prescindibles* no more clear up the loose threads than create new ones, and the *lector cómplice* no more “solves” the book than begins to recognize both the book’s and their very own blind spots.

Like the first Heraclitean fragment, that holds that humans fail to comprehend “both before hearing it and once they have heard” (Heraclitus, Kahn, 29) the process is not one-sided; if nature chooses to unveil itself, we will not instantly see. Alternatively, if we use our senses well, we still may not even be able to comprehend, even if we hear the answer

whispered right into our ears. The work of the *lector cómplice* is just as much about digging up the unclear patches in the text as it is about looking inward and dealing with one's own murky thinking – it is a two-sided process, just as Heraclitus puts forth. While *Rayuela* is a highly complicated, often unreadable hypertext that challenges meaning and language to such an extent that it may lead to utter chaos, Cortázar's *lector cómplice* is the shovel that can dig itself out, that can come away with realizations that may have been unexpected, but are just as useful. Another *Morelliana* describes a narrative of this variety as “Una narrativa que no sea pretexto para la transmisión de un ‘mensaje’ (no hay mensaje, hay mensajeros y eso es el mensaje...) [A narrative that will not be a pretext for the transmission of a ‘message’ (there is no message, only messengers, and that is the message...)]” (516, 397). Thus, there is a felt shift away from approaching a text as a treasure trove that will *reveal itself* and its secrets to the reader toward the experience of the *lector* as the enactor in the exchange.

Chapter 66 succinctly demonstrates the work of a *lector cómplice*. The chapter begins describing a page that contains only one sentence, repeated over and over, without punctuation or margins: “En el fondo sabía que no se puede ir más allá porque no lo hay [“Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn't any]” (485, 370). The wall of words, the chapter goes on to explain, represents the very sense of the sentence, illustrating a barrier that one cannot go past. Like the door in Jacques Derrida's criticism of Franz Kafka's story “Before the Law,” it serves as an example of “referentiality which does not make reference” (Derrida, 213). In the essay “Before the Law” (the same name as the story), Derrida purports that the contract made between authority and those who obey it holds that law remain sacred, something to stand *before* but not to *enter*, because in reality there is no non-historical, pure essence of law there, but only the boundary that protects its claim. This wall of words, too, would suggest something similar. There is no way to go

deeper, because of the wall, but further, there is no *reason* to go deeper, for there is nothing there. But, the chapter notes, an “ojo sensible [sensitive eye]” will detect the “lo [any]” that is missing in one small spot on the page, and see “el hueco entre los ladrillos, la luz que pasa [the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through]” (485, 370).

Indeed, the job of a *lector cómplice* is also the job of a good command of one’s senses, as the “sensitive eye” (as in sensing) suggests, and as Heraclitus also notes concisely. Only with close attention paid can the *huecos* be teased out and examined in order to find both moments in the text where it does something in spite of itself and moments when the reader would otherwise have taken as much for granted. The point of this chapter is to suggest that every text has holes in it, in the sense that there are so many layers of meaning that an exhaustive, comprehensive reading would not be possible. But instead of being a problem, the parts where the text doesn’t quite perfectly come together provide important moments, for with each gap, light passes through. Light both draws attention to the cracks, but also itself represents knowledge (like the Enlightenment, or, in Spanish, *la Iluminación*) or a new perspective, as the phrase “shed light on” would suggest. And so, because light both facilitates discovery and represents discovery itself, perhaps the gap that doesn’t totally close can be *itself* the thing to learn from.

Like in “Before The Law,” this chapter makes it clear that there is no sacred meaning past the boundary, but instead that the boundary itself gives the sense of meaning, for it prohibits access and protects “something.” We can take Derrida’s understanding of the law as informative for the understanding of Logos in *Rayuela*: “...one cannot reach the law, and in order to have a *rapport* of respect with it, *one must not* have a *rapport* with the law...” (Derrida, 204). The wall of words in Chapter 66 stage the process of meaning being grounded thanks to its inaccessibility, its separation, and its sacredness. But the nothingness

behind the wall is challenged, for because of a missing word, light passes through, suggesting a crack in the system, a problem unraveling. If light passes through, is there absolutely nothing, then, past the wall?

The question becomes even more complicated by the fact that we are denied access to this wall of words: the chapter only describes its construction, the same sentence repeated over and over, but does not enact it. We are told of the light that passes through, but we ourselves do not receive the first sense of it, the experience of a page filled from top to bottom with the same sentence over and over. We are several times removed from whatever is or is not past this wall of text, just as we are from the truth of nature in Heraclitus. Neither can completely hide from a good searcher, though. Like Heraclitus' good searcher, the *lector cómplice* can be understood as a positive sort of task where the reader *can* discover and uncover if they go about it the right way. But, the fact that the second reading does not result in an "orden cerrado [closed order]" of the book itself suggests that what the *lector cómplice* can discover are the cracks in the wall, not the answer to some mystery beyond, at "the heart" of the text. Literature is a ball of loose threads with no center.

CXVIII The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.

LXXIX The name of bow is life; its work is death.

Even as Heraclitus holds that Logos is the expression of the Real, this perfection does not play out in every utterance or referent. Instead, Heraclitus puts forth a more nuanced view of language, recognizing that it both does and does not communicate. As we see in the fragment about Zeus, the wise is singular and divine, but the naming of him (the words it is spoken by) is a bit more complicated. Where there appears to be a contradiction

(both unwilling and willing at the same time) there is more so a complexity: τὸ σοφὸν [the wise one] is μούνον [alone, solo] and ἓν [one] but does not necessarily match one referent. The wise one – we can take to be the source of knowledge, the center of Heraclitus’ system – both rejects and accepts the name of Zeus, the king of the Greek Gods. Because οὐκ ἐθέλει [unwilling] is listed before ἐθέλει [willing], we can understand that the referent fails before it succeeds.

Kahn suggests that the confusing contradiction of being both unwilling and willing at the same time not only questions the traditional idea of the one supreme god Zeus, but also “springs rather from a grave sense of risk in communication, a risk amounting almost to a certainty that he will be misunderstood” (270). For this reason, Kahn continues, Heraclitus must resort to “enigma, image, paradox, and even contradiction” (270) in order to rustle the audience awake and cause them to consider the intricacies of the wise one alone and the unified structure of the world that we cannot quite fully grasp with our word “Zeus.” The word does not quite match the world – something is missing, or slightly displaced. It communicates as it also mutes.

The fragment about the bow also hits upon the slipperiness of language, playfully noting that in Greek the word βίος [bow] is strikingly close to the word βίος [life] even as its purpose is to kill.⁵ In this fragment Heraclitus sets up an *apparent paradox*, wherein which the contradictory elements of βίος [life] and θάνατος [death] are used to draw attention to a contradiction between ὄνομα [name] and ἔργον [work]. Because of δὲ [but] in the second half of the fragment, Heraclitus is suggesting that the second clause poses a problem in relation to the first, indicating that the purpose of the fragment is indeed to draw out a tension. Because life and death are an “agreed upon” contradiction, Heraclitus can bring forth a possible dissonance between the name (the word) which indicates identity through

Logos, and the work (the action), which could be considered the *enactor* of identity. Because the name (indicating life) doesn't match up conceptually with the purpose (causing death), then the accurateness of the name (the representation of the bow) is put into question.

But here there is a turn, because the paradox that is created in order to throw doubt into the ability of the name to reflect identity is only so *in appearance*. With a "sensitive eye," the *apparent paradox* that Heraclitus has set up very quickly undoes itself. Whereas rhetorical devices use words in such a way to suggest an underlying "truth" that can be unraveled by language, the device at play in this fragment does just the opposite, undermining itself just as soon as it establishes itself. Only with a brief consideration of what the fragment is at first trying to argue does the unraveling begin: while the work of a bow may be indicated by this fragment to be to kill, it's work is *also* to preserve life, whether it be in a self-defense sense or in a hunting sense, where the killing of an animal directly results in the nourishment of the killer. So in this sense, there is no *actual* paradox presented in the fragment, but only a superficial one that artificially siphons off what the work of a bow is. Following this line of reading, then, the *apparent paradox* shows us how problems or contradictions can be placed in language, but at the moment to test them out, they are not actual problems.

But taking this *apparent paradox* further, why would there even *be* a problem of the name of the bow and the work of the bow being at odds? The fragment's purpose seems to be to bring forth this tension, even if the rhetorical grounds on which it stands are very faulty. What seems to be at stake here is the identity or essence of the bow: is it in the name, the Logos? Or in how the bow acts? And is it a problem if there is a discrepancy between the two? Heraclitus is clearly playing with the issue of where the bow's identity lies, but only *apparently*, only with a Heraclitean turn that seems to be grounded in strong dualities that actually turn out to be *slippery*. Like the Zeus fragment, where the name for Zeus both does

and does not work (not willing and willing to be called by this name), the name βίος [life] both does and does not work, for as we teased out, the work of a bow can also be understood as preserving life. The more common reading of the fragment that does not focus so much on the *apparent paradox* can take Heraclitus to be suggesting that life and death are both concurrent in different aspects of the identity of the bow, therefore suggesting that they are not like magnets that cannot touch, but instead that their separating boundaries are a bit leakier, less strong. In this reading, the name and the work being at odds is not a problem at all because life and death can concur, which is not usually permitted in opposites. Thus, the duality of life and death is maintained, but made to be *leaky* as opposed to *airtight*.

With either reading, the problem put forth is an *apparent* one, and the takeaway is one that softens hard boundaries and questions the role of paradoxes that are caused by apparent dualities. By setting up an *apparent paradox*, Heraclitus here is exploring a main theme in his fragments, which I will call a *leaky duality*.⁶ In Heraclitus' *leaky duality*, a strong-seeming duality (like life or death) is brought forth, but then the border that connects the two is weakened, made more permeable, as if to be leaking. As we will see in more detail in chapter 2, Heraclitus sews the two apparently distant poles up, suggesting that dualities are not static, but instead are always going towards and away from each other, becoming each other. This is not to say he would suggest that the dualities *are* each other, this is important: Heraclitus does not break them down, but instead zooms out a layer to show that they are cooperative in a harmonious system that is perpetuated by the balance that dualities provide in their state of constant flux. Therefore, the very way to *think* dualities is explored in Heraclitus' fragments, bringing forth a more fluid, less dichotomous model.

The interesting turn is that this model does not seek to break the dualities down, but instead to consider them in a different way, one that creates fewer paradoxes and does not

beg forced value judgments. The question for Heraclitus isn't *which one*, because he does not in fact see these dualities as being at odds. This subtlety of Heraclitus' thought will carry us through this project, and is a main reason that I find Heraclitus thought to be useful and profitable to read alongside such a post-structural project as *Rayuela* even as the "end goals" of *Rayuela* and Heraclitus are very different. Whereas in Heraclitus, a good searcher *will* have some overarching Real structure to discover, the *lector cómplice* in *Rayuela* will more so arrive at the discovery that there is no objective key to discover. In *Rayuela*, what is "discoverable" is instead many complicated layers of blind spots and assumptions that come from the reader, the author, the work itself, and finally, the language.

That said, does Heraclitus' project really have *anything* to do with the project set forth in *Rayuela*? And if one supports itself in metaphysics where the other does not, is there any meaningful link between the two? The fact alone that Horacio misreads Heraclitus is interesting, but what makes it so productive for study is the fact that Horacio's misreadings are often couched in misunderstandings of post-structural types of inquiry and how they interact with metaphysical projects of uncovering the Real. Where Heraclitus' project starts from a metaphysical place, but can be closely read to move into less centered, more fluid lines of thought, Horacio begins with a mistrust of language and societal organizations, only to fluctuate between needing definitive answers to his grand questions or chalking everything up as totally meaningless. Putting Heraclitus and Horacio into conversation teases out the ways that weakening the concept of Truth can be misunderstood to the point of detriment, or alternatively, can dialogue with a fairly metaphysical system of thought. Sometimes huge mistakes can prove useful, for they show us what to do better next time.

Chapter 2: Of fire and water

Los dos fuegos

XXXVII The ordering, the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures going out.

Both Heraclitus and Horacio employ fire and water metaphors in order to express integral aspects of their world views. But where Heraclitus' fire encompasses both revival and doom, for the fire sometimes ignites while at other times goes out, Horacio's fire only comprehends the doom aspect. Where Heraclitus' river suggests constant flux and an overall comprehension, Horacio's *río metafísico* symbolizes drowning in the multiple tides that can never really be understood. Tracing both of their fire and water metaphors brings forth some of the fundamental differences with how Heraclitus and Horacio react to that which cannot be known. It is notable that where Heraclitus' project is ultimately metaphysical, positioning itself via Logos, it is Horacio that justifies his apathy and moral bankruptcy by metaphysically-based affirmations of the importance of fixed, knowable meaning. Through Horacio's fire and water metaphors, we can trace how his theoretical vocabularies and reasonings inform his day-to-day actions. He figures that if there is no possible, centered meaning to apprehend, then there must be no meaning at all.

“Sí, pero quién nos curará del fuego sordo [Yes, but who will cure us of the deaf fire]” (500, 383) hauntingly opens chapter 73, the first of the *lector cómplice* order of *Rayuela*. The central image of the “fuego sordo [deaf fire]” and the inescapable, inevitable situation of burning up by the very fire that we invented serves as the first metaphor for Horacio's theoretical positioning at the onset and throughout most of the novel. This fire, indicated to be invisible and undetectable, could represent a postmodern predicament wherein which

historicity and contingency keep us grounded in our current context, even as this current context is itself ungrounded, not based in any sure Truth or metaphysics. Horacio marks this fire as allied to “el tiempo y el recuerdo [time and memory]” which, like “sustancias pegajosas [sticky substances]” keep us stuck in “este lado [this side]” (500, 383). It is important to note that not only does this fire seem to work like glue that keeps us fixed in our place and time, but also that the fire is destroying us, burning us up, even as we accept it “con la obediencia de la sangre en su circuito ciego [obedient as our blood in its blind circuit]” (500, 383). Just as blood circulates without awareness of the greater body it is in, a body that will one day die, Horacio sees this predicament to be inevitable, incurable.

The paradox becomes clear when Horacio indicates that we are doomed because the only possible *truth* we can find are through inventions, indicated in the text as *turas* because of the suffix of the majority of the inventions: *escritura*, *literatura*, *pintura*, etc. Horacio broadens the definition to things that do not include artistic creation (or the suffix) like “los valores [values]” “la sociedad [society]” and “el amor [love]” (501, 384). He contrasts the *turas* with “la Gran Costumbre [Great Habit]” (501, 384) reassuring that one can elect a *tura* as opposed to handing oneself over to custom. From this distinction we can take that the *turas* are invented or constructed and are able to be chosen, while habit must be more involuntary. This distinction remains murky and provisional because the difference between “habit” and *turas* like “society” almost seems to just be a question of nomenclature. But the distinction does seem to hone in on what one can change or choose, and it could be argued that one’s society or one’s love can be chosen where a habit or custom are not.

But this ability to be *chosen* is itself also a trap. Horacio states, “El solo hecho de interrogarse sobre la posible elección vicia y enturbia lo elegible [The very fact that one asks one’s self about the possible choice vitiates and muddies up what can be chosen]” (501, 383).

Tying reasoning to literature and ultimately to untrustworthy words, Horacio posits that choice is wrapped in words “como la servilleta el pan [the way a napkin does a loaf of bread]” (502, 385). The central image of the “fuego sordo [deaf fire]” is also a *tura*, which suggests that the only truth one could possibly get to is one that is invented and will ultimately destroy them. Therefore, Horacio views his current situation to be one that is doomed, for there is no metaphysical grounding, but the Truth grounding that we create for ourselves is also our downfall.

Where Horacio’s *fuego* works as a metaphor to indicate a paradox where what saves us also destroys us, Heraclitus’ fire is a metaphor for the cyclical, continual cosmos (world order) that undergoes phases of destruction and reconstruction that he refers to in multiple fragments. These phases of destruction and reconstruction, represented as fire that is ignited sometimes and snuffed out in other times, are comprehended in the constant flux that the cosmos always engages in. It is a stability that comes from a constant instability that both comprises an ending and that ending’s renewal. This cosmos, which is symbolized as everliving, eternal fire, is indicated as not being made by either man or by a god. Instead, it is the same for everything, and always was, is, and will be everlasting fire.

The emphasis on the cosmos being *not made* suggests the negation of a fixed origin where the cycle first started, where the fire was first ignited to then be extinguished and in turn reignited. This nuance becomes highly important when read against the metaphysical aspects of Heraclitus’ fragments that hold that Logos comprehends the Real and everything is one thing, denoting pure unity. Heraclitus’ system may indicate overall knowability and harmony, but does not grant a definitive origin or genesis, instead focusing on the cycle itself and its constancy. This fire, the cosmos, exists as time exists: as past, present, and future, and just as time flees a starting point because a “beginning” of time would negate its own

identifying feature of always having “been” and is “ongoing” in an uninterrupted flow, the cosmos, too, flees its own origin. We can support an interpretation of this cosmos being similar to time by the use of the word μέτρα [measures], which denote time periods or other amounts measured out numerically. These measures are “kindled” sometimes and “snuffed out” others, bringing forth the cyclical nature of this everliving fire.

These intricacies reveal parts of Heraclitean thought that run contrary to that of Horacio. Where Horacio’s fire resembles only destruction that was caused by its own creation, Heraclitus’ fire is ongoing because of its constant play between death and life. The *process* of the fire, ultimately of the cosmos, is the most central theme to Heraclitus. He is not so concerned with a metaphysical grounding, a central starting point, but instead negates it in an antithetical turn wherein which the system holds within it opposing forces, like ignition and elimination, essentially granting its own undoing that will then grant its recreation. For Horacio, truth can only come through a process of choice, a move that deadens the power of a “truth.” The concept of truth does not work by whim or circumstance, holding that it is such *no matter what*, that is to say, obligatory. Given this, the grounding we choose to create is corrupted anyway, the fact of us choosing it renders it just as weak as the words with which we describe it. Thus, where Horacio is hung up on a problem of where and how to ground truth, Heraclitus turns towards the “later” steps – what actually happens in the process, how the everlasting cosmos keeps itself regulated. This fundamental difference of how Horacio and Heraclitus interact with questions of truth and knowability can be seen even more vividly in the differences between Heraclitus’ and Horacio’s *ríos*.

...

Los dos ríos

L As they step into the same rivers, others and still other waters flow upon them.

The first appearance of the *río metafísico* [metaphysical river] in *Rayuela* is only an instance of wordplay, a snarky remark from La Maga thrown in the face of Horacio during a couple's skirmish. La Maga insinuates that Horacio's detachment from the real world and his anxiety over his own private theoretical world will cause his undoing. She tells him she has always felt sorry for him, that she sees him being in danger. He quips back, "Mis peligros son sólo metafísicos...Creeme, a mí no me van a sacar del agua con ganchos, ["The only dangers for me are metaphysical...They're not going to haul me out of the water with grappling hooks, believe me]" (127, 89). Horacio is clearly upset that La Maga would suggest that she is superior to him and takes the opportunity to indicate yet again that he is more cultured and philosophical. Whereas she has considered throwing herself into a river, Horacio considers himself on a higher level than her, with higher "dangers" and more intellectual problems. La Maga retorts, "¿Por qué decís: peligros metafísicos? También hay ríos metafísicos, Horacio. Vos te vas a tirar a uno de esos ríos [Why did you say metaphysical dangers? There are also metaphysical rivers, Horacio. You're going to throw yourself into one of those rivers]" (127, 89). La Maga's comment lodges itself into Horacio's brain, quickly gaining legs and becoming an important part of Horacio's reconsideration of how he goes about things.

Whereas the *río metafísico* at first glance seems to be a passing comment, its importance as a working metaphor for Horacio's interactions with the world comes forth precisely *because* Horacio grabs a hold of the comment, takes ownership of it, and crystalizes it as a concept that works as a sort of shorthand for his predicament. Therefore, the *río metafísico* becomes a useful term that encompasses the frozen, failed position that leads to doom, first expressed in the fire metaphor in chapter 73.

Heraclitus' river comes from one of his most famous fragments that is often edited down and quoted as "No man steps in the same river twice." This fragment serves as a

cornerstone of Heraclitus' constant flux theory. The standout point is the idea of constant change within a "fixed" entity, and the multiplicities that are held within a unified thing. Symbolically reading this fragment, the river that Heraclitus alludes to refers to the unified structure of the real, the "one thing" that holds the "all." Thus, the multiplicities are the waters that are flowing, and no matter how many different waters there may be, they are all conceived within the overarching river. In this sense, the constant change within the unity does not put the unity in danger of scattering into multiplicities, but instead the multiplicity and the flux are the properties that define the unity itself. A river runs, receiving waters from many different streams, just as the overarching unity, the Logos, contains within it many different, multiple intricacies.

Upon a closer reading, a nuance comes forth that suggests a fundamental difference between the way that Heraclitus and Horacio interact with multiplicity. The repetition of ἕτερον [others] emphasizes the multiple waters flowing within one unified river, verbally creating *multiple* multiplicities, for there are not just only *other* waters, but others and others still. The many waters cannot just be encompassed by one instance of ἕτερον [others] but instead are separated into multiple instances, suggesting a lack of unity amongst the multiple waters flowing. Further, the repetition lends a sense of urgency, much like a fast-flowing river, where the multiplicities encased within the river are coming and coming successively, without pause. Because of the sense of urgency and separation, we can take that even though all of these multiplicities are encased within the *same* river, they are not all connected or, for that matter, able to be captured. This fragment suggests a certain loss – the multiple *others* keep coming and coming, covering each other up, complicating the possibility of comprehension, adding layers. But even these uncapturable multiplicities remain comprehensible within the context of the greater, unified, homogenous river. The

importance lies in conceiving this unity and understanding that within it are encased so many multiplicities that it would be impossible to know each different current. Again, we see how Heraclitus' project does not concern itself with what is lost, but instead with understanding the cyclical, constant process of loss and gain.

Horacio's project, on the other hand, often concerns itself *only* with what intricacies may be lost, concluding that because of the bits of water that drip away, fleeing capture, the whole river becomes meaningless. We can see this framework working in the instances when the *río metafísico* first appears in Horacio's argument with La Maga, and later as the term rolls around in his head as he begins to reconsider how he interacts with the world. Horacio is searching for a philosophical answer and doesn't see much purpose in involving himself in anything outside of this self-centered realm. He even draws a theoretical dichotomy between action and inaction in order to justify his apathy, reasoning that social action is inherently "buying in" or being fake. Interestingly enough, Horacio signals that he is not against actions per se, like loving your neighbor, for example, but instead in the personal conduct tied to it, which is often in service of getting rid of a bad conscious or looking good for your friends. For this reason, he declares that sin by omission is better than sin by action. He figures that social action is usually tied to something exterior and for this reason, is committing a self-denial or betrayal.

But even in his apathy, Horacio is incredibly anxious, precisely because he is not quite finding the philosophical answers he is looking for. "Un análisis de la inquietud, en la medida de lo posible, aludía siempre a una descolocación, a una excentración con respecto a una especie de orden que Oliveira era incapaz de precisar [An analysis of this unrest, as far as is possible, would always allude to a dislocation, to an excentration in regard to a kind of order that Oliveira was incapable of defining]" (545, 419). We can better understand what

this “order” is via a quote that comes just a bit before: “Tenía la ventaja nada despreciable de que sus peores defectos tendían a servirle en eso que no era un camino sino la búsqueda de un alto previo a todo camino [it was no mean advantage for him that his worst defects tended to be useful in that matter which was not a path but rather the search for the superior one prior to every path]” (544, 418). This “superior one prior to every path” is pointing towards an answer or a method that is metaphysical, a priori, and all-encompassing. He is concerned with “una verdadera respuesta a las grandes preguntas [a true response to the grand questions]” (417, translation mine). This “order” is prioritized by Horacio, and he spatially places it as so, remarking that the betrayal is “la renuncia al centro, la instalación a la periferia [a denial of the center, one’s installation on the periphery]” (544, 418).

Not only does Horacio point to inaction as the “máxima libertad [maximum liberty]” that leaves a void which can be filled by “un contenido libremente escogido por una conciencia o un instinto más abiertos [a content freely chosen by conscience or by an instinct that is more open]” (543, 417) but he also refers to action – or being an actor – as renouncing the audience. Because Horacio suggests that we are spectators, this would mean that action means betraying what we are, for we are *watching* the play, not *acting* in it. Instead, Horacio is suggesting that we are the spectators, or, at the very least, *he* is a spectator in the front row. Considering this idea of being a spectator helps to clarify Horacio’s search for this “center” or “order” that is only muddled by social action. He seems to be placing humans in a position of little agency, where our role is not to make changes, but instead to understand or observe. What is not clear, however, is if that is the position he sees us in forevermore, or if it is currently our position because we have not yet perceived the “first sense” of things. Horacio continues with this theatrical metaphor, stating that he is like a blindfolded spectator that only sometimes catches the “second sense” of a word or some music, and this

fills him with anxiety because it signals that there is present a first sense. “En esos momentos se sabía más próximo al centro...era una proximidad inútil [In moments like that he knew he was closer to the center...but his was a useless nearness]” (545, 419).

Indeed, while Horacio considers himself as only perceiving a “second sense,” and wants greatly to get to the meat of things, he also is a bit despairing, already sure that this approach is, itself, impossible because of the recursivity of his attempts given that putting any inquiry into words already makes it questionable. This impasse that Horacio hits upon quickly transfers to matters outside of language, and catapults Horacio to a point of identifying attempts in the real world (like going to hang protest posters with his friends, for example) as useless. Horacio constantly vacillates between looking for this “center” and declaring the search itself totally useless because it so quickly falls in on itself.

Horacio is a bit aware that he is somewhat doomed, trapped in his own paradox, and the fact that La Maga so aptly identifies it clearly strikes a chord with him. This perhaps too can help us understand why the *río metafísico* so quickly becomes a loaded Concept that Horacio uses. Just as soon as Horacio attaches himself to the concept of the *río metafísico*, he is, interestingly enough, incited to change himself a bit and connect more with the world and his peers. The chapter opens with Horacio worrying about his way of confronting the world. He feels isolated from the other men in the café that are able to talk about current events, art, and popular theory and recognizes that he even has no clue what the young people of Argentina, his home country, talk about. This inner monologue occurs as a dialogue with René Crevel, a French surrealist writer that died years before in 1935. It is clear that Horacio is deeply self conscious and beginning to question what it means that he separates himself so fundamentally from his peers and from “the stuff on the ground.” He “says” to Crevel, “Es triste llegar a un momento de la vida en que es más fácil abrir un libro a la página 96 y

dialogar con su autor...mientras en las mesas de al lado se habla de Argelia [It's sad to reach the point in life where it's easier to open a book to page 96 and converse with the author...while at the tables around people are talking about Algeria]" (131, 92). In this chapter he resolves that he needs to change and "reinstalarse en el presente [reinstall himself in the present]" (131). Nevertheless, Horacio expresses that his chances to change are limited: he sees himself as trapped in his own theoretical dilemma, searching for something that perhaps is not even there.

This push towards involvement becomes very clear when Horacio witnesses a car accident of an old man in chapter 22 and then starts to consider his self-exclusion from others and his loneliness. By chapter 23 he has ducked into a concert that goes from bad to worse, but feels like supporting the musician, Berthe Trepas, and perhaps going to visit that random old man he saw in the accident: "Tantos ríos metafísicos y de golpe se sorprendía con ganas de ir al hospital a visitar al viejo, o aplaudiendo a esa loca encorsetada [So many metaphysical rivers and suddenly he wants to go visit the old man in the hospital, or he is surprised to find himself applauding this madwoman in a corset]" (151, 170). He tries to reach out to the artist, offering compliments (even though he found the whole thing to be truly awful) and finds himself comforting her as she sobs. But, Horacio tries to fight against his *ríos metafísicos*, to stay involved and be less selfish: Horacio "luchaba en vano para evadir las sensaciones personales, para refugiarse en algún río metafísico, naturalmente [fought in vain to get away from personal feelings, to take refuge in some metaphysical river, naturally]" (155, 110). Now, not only does the concept of the *río metafísico* serve to define Horacio's viewpoints, but also now works as a catalyst that he uses to try to get himself to engage a bit more, to prove that he isn't as self-centered as La Maga had suggested.

He gets a bit bamboozled into walking Berthe Trepap home, and worries a bit about if one of his friends saw him. But, even in his attempts to be selfless, Horacio tends towards an apathy. He thinks, “como si después de los ríos metafísicos mezclados con algodones sucios el futuro tuviese alguna importancia [as if after the metaphysical rivers mixed with dirty pieces of cotton the future might have some importance]” (162, 115). The “dirty pieces of cotton” strike up an image of something once clean and white that is now stained, once pure but now with unmistakable spots. The *ríos metafísicos* clearly have not lessened in importance for Horacio, only now they are mixed up with his murky attempts at piety, ultimately, still, pointing towards a meaningless future.

The night with Berthe Trepap ends badly, with her accusing him of trying to sleep with her and then slapping him in the face. Horacio walks home in the rain, finally letting himself cry. His final thoughts of the chapter in free indirect speech point back to Horacio’s anxiety, with him picking apart the scene “hasta que no quedara más que lo de siempre, un agujero donde soplaban el tiempo, un continuo impreciso sin bordes definidos ‘No hagamos literatura’, pensó [until the same old thing was left there, a hole where time was blowing, an imprecise continuum that had no set bounds. ‘Let’s not get literary,’ he thought]” (173, 124). He interrupts himself and decides that he doesn’t want to involve pesky, unreliable words (literature) in his reasoning of what happened. Before stopping himself, the “hole” and the “imprecise continuum” once again suggest an ultimate meaninglessness where even *engaging* in identifying them as such is meaningless because it is just language. This is precisely the impasse that Horacio arrives at, even when he tries to escape it.

The concept of the *río metafísico* both affirms him and incites him to change: he feels poorly and wants to connect more with the world, become more involved and less self-centered, and yet he takes some sort of strange delight in the fact that he can hide himself in

these *ríos*. The *ríos metafísicos*, to Horacio, show that there is ultimately no point to any of it because the search is itself flawed and doomed, gaining even just barely the “second sense” of things. But, in light of Heraclitus, even the idea of a “metaphysical river” is a misreading: Heraclitus’ river both captures the constant flux (an idea Horacio signs onto), but also the inability to capture all of the multiplicities that are contained within the river. Horacio wants a complete, comprehensive answer, he wants a “center,” and given that he cannot catch the trickles of water that slip between his fingers, he declares the water itself as meaningless.

Chapter 3: Crimes against meaning

XLIX: “Cold warms up, warm cools off, moist parches, dry dampens.”

XCIX: The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle.

Horacio has a theoretical dilemma: he both longs for a “center” and has already given up on the possibility of finding or expressing one in language. The problem comes when this perceived paradox remains not just an abstract, theoretical conflict about the limitations of language, but plays out in his day-to-day life, acting as justification for his poor treatment of his loved ones. This chapter is dedicated to what is at stake in Horacio’s theoretical understandings and justifications for his own life, exploring how his framework of *airtight* (as opposed to *leaky*) dualities works as a way for him to ground definitions even as he dismisses them as not working.

Heraclitean *leaky dualities* offer us a different way to consider paradox or contradiction, for they destabilize the idea of a fixed identity and also what it means to be in opposition. Whereas logical contradiction understands some A and some NotA to be utterly opposed to each other in every way, thus dichotomous and on two fixed points at either end of a spectrum, Heraclitus signals dualities as being *leaky* in the sense that they are always in a process of becoming each other. The fragment about coldness and warmth highlights this movement through its use of antithesis in the original Greek. The phrase is grammatically balanced (subject, verb), such that the switch of the terms symbolizes their movement towards each other, reversing roles. In the first section of the fragment (as in the second section), the noun of the first clause, ψυχρὰ [cold] becomes its verbal form in the second half just as the verb of the first half θερμαίνεται [become warm] becomes its substantive form.

They not only fill each other's roles, but switch places in a balanced way that the symmetrical grammar of the fragment mirrors. As the ideas oppose each other, the ordering of the phrase remains balanced and constant, alluding to the cyclical nature of these *leaky dualities*.

The oppositional definition of the two points of the duality is only fixed in the sense that “cold” and “warmth” can be *stated*, but in actuality, they are always *moving*, tending towards each other such that the exact opposite serves more as an “endpoint.” But this endpoint is itself not definitive, as we can see in the circle fragment – it constitutes another point in the flux, just as the beginning does as well. An origin or a *telos* is not realized in the cycle.

CXXIV Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.

LXXXII One must realize that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained?) in accordance with conflict.

LXXXIII War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free.

These fragments see the marriage of Heraclitus' *leaky dualities* and his central idea of “unity in plurality” with the help of his concept of conflict. In the “Graspings” fragment, Heraclitus first presents several dualities simply side by side, without a verb, to highlight their relationship as opposites. ὅλα [whole] and οὐχ ὅλα [not whole], for example, are both simply in the nominative, standing freely as concepts without any indication of action. Heraclitus shows that just by putting concepts like συνᾶδον [consonant] and διᾶδον [dissonant] next to each other, there is a tension. The reason for grouping these dualities together only becomes clear at the end of the fragment with the introduction of ἐκ [from] which indicates a directionality. He writes that ἐν [one thing] comes from πάντων [all

things] *just as* all things come from one. Just as the “coldness” fragment can be read to reveal that Heraclitus’ *leaky dualities* generate each other, this fragment suggests the same thing, going as far as to say that multiplicity generates singularity and vice versa.

The fragment on war suggests that conflict motivates this flux. It is the tension itself that holds the balance in place. But as the second fragment reveals, war is not impartial: some people become kings while others are made to be slaves, not because of some intrinsic quality, but because of historical circumstance that in the day-to-day is imbalanced, but zoomed out to the macro, balances itself out. It is important to bring up again here that Heraclitus’ constant flow, his river (which we saw in Chapter 2) is not flowing off into oblivion, but instead is encapsulated, is understood within the unified whole. Because of this, we cannot understand Heraclitus’ softening of identity and his doctrine of constant change to be pointing towards a randomness or a moral void, but instead is understood within a greater, organized context that is held in place by the movement of opposites and by the push of conflict. This subtlety is important when read against what happens with the use of dualities by Horacio in *Rayuela*. Horacio works to dismantle structural, hierarchical understandings of the world, but uses dualities that instead of being *leaky*, that is to say, flexible, fluid, and mixing with each other, are *airtight*, or rigid.

A big problem with Horacio’s *airtight dualities* is that they, unlike those of Heraclitus, are often hierarchized, falling right back into highly structured, “logical” schema that clamp down on identity and then derive fixed Truths. Thus, through the eyes of the Heraclitean project, Horacio misreads and misuses dualities, unwittingly re-cementing the possibilities of meaning in the process. Even as Horacio gets trapped in the hierarchies of his *airtight dualities*, his more post-structural side recognizes the contingency of these categories. But in the process of deconstructing and dismantling structures of meaning, Horacio turns to

apathy. This setup supports itself in the idea that with the promise of “meaning” comes the promise of value: if something is without fixed meaning, it is in danger of becoming *meaningless*, which is another way of saying that it is insignificant, without value. If words do not correspond with the world, there lacks a correspondence with Truth that then throws morality into question. Where Heraclitus would complicate what it means to be Right or Wrong, softening the duality, Horacio decides that the best way to act is to just *not act at all*, because putting forth anything means dealing with its contingency.

CIII The way up and down is one and the same.

LXX The sea is the purest and foulest water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly.

LXVIII For god all things are fair and good and just, but men have taken some things as unjust, others as just.

As we can see plainly in the “up and down” fragment, Heraclitus signals that value judgments come down to perspective. For Heraclitus, the displacement of “fixed meaning” connects with the concept that “right” and “wrong” are not outside of or a priori to humans, but instead operate according to perspective and power. The two fragments above exemplify this well: the first, about seawater, doing so perhaps more playfully, while the second fragment drives home the point that there is no intrinsic “good or bad” value to anything as it is conceived in Logos. For the Gods, all things are valuable because they make up important parts of the overall whole, even as some things may be harmful and others helpful to humans. Heraclitus suggests a grand leveling: just as the seawater kills humans, it is essential for fish; humans are not necessarily privileged. Seawater is not overall “bad” because it is “bad for humans.” Horacio recognizes his state of contingency and the lack of a

metaphysical answer, but falls into value judgments wherein which a state of flux points to a void of meaning. For him, it is either impossible or not worth it to reinscribe meaning “outside-of-the-box.”

LXI Dogs bark at those they do not recognize

XXIX It belongs to all men to know themselves and to think well.

CXV The mysteries current among men initiate them into impiety.

Horacio’s utter inaction is often indirectly violent by way of negligence, but sometimes he becomes suddenly reactionary, often becoming more actively harmful towards himself and others. Heraclitus addresses how humans react in the face of not knowing Logos, suggesting that they begin to behave badly. In the “dog” fragment, the verb γινώσκωσι [to recognize] is the same as in the fragment about men knowing themselves, suggesting not only a connection to self-knowledge and knowledge of others, but also to *properly* recognizing and thinking clearly. Heraclitus focuses on a personal (inward) search as an important key to comprehending the totality. We can take from these two fragments that Heraclitus is suggesting that the common response to the failure to comprehend is violence.

Men who still “fail to comprehend” Logos also do not use their senses well to understand themselves. Impiety is framed as a misjudgment, as a lack of knowledge, for it is attached to “mysteries” and strangers. Just as a dog barks at something he does not know, men act badly in the face of not knowing. With this in mind, we can come to frame Horacio’s bad behavior in relation to his state of not knowing. While Horacio holds that “inaction” is the best response to the relativity of what any action could mean, he fails to see that his lack of action is, too, an action by way of negation. His negation often translates into

violence towards women and others with less power than him, and when he *does* act, it tends to be compulsive and palpably violent. In the face of not knowing, Horacio commits crimes against meaning, forging (or negating) meaning by reinscribing it in hierarchical and oppressive structures.

First offense: Violent (In)action

As we began to see in chapter 2, Horacio approaches his relationship with La Maga as if they were dichotomous, utterly opposite from each other. La Maga is disorganized while Horacio represents order, she is all emotion as he occupies a rational space, she is the body, he is the mind. This difference becomes fetishized such that Horacio uses La Maga as a sort of vacation from his world, like when he is deliberately disorganized, or leaves things up to “chance” and plans to wander around until he randomly runs into La Maga. He also refers to La Maga as his “testigo [witness]” (30, 14) and sees her as the way he will be able to discover sides of the world otherwise closed to him.

Chapter 5 serves as a disturbing example of when Horacio uses La Maga for his own mental predicaments, entering into her space – the space “without logic,” the “physical” space – in order to challenge Logos and escape from language that he feels always contaminates the possibility for any experience to be real or true. The chapter features a confusing, distorted sex scene between Horacio and La Maga that evokes sexualized violence and sexism. The scene ends with visions of Horacio killing her, signaling that as she hangs there, drool spilling out her mouth, he would then begin to recognize her, make her true, and bring her to his side, as if she is only valid when totally dominated by him. The episode begins with La Maga biting into Horacio’s shoulder until she draws blood and there is “un confuso pacto sin palabras. Oliveira sintió como si la Maga esperara de él la muerte, algo en

ella que no era su yo despierto [a confused and wordless pact. Oliveira felt that La Maga wanted death from him, something in her which was not awakened self]” (48, 28). As told by the quote, this pact they enter into is not given in language, but instead operates outside of language in a hyper-violent, physical space. Whereas Horacio’s awake side comes forth in sex, this inner desire that Horacio claims La Maga has is not her “yo despierto,” suggesting that Horacio is “more awake/aware” than La Maga, and maintains control because of it. When Horacio has La Maga drink his semen, it is described as running through her mouth like a “desafío al Logos [challenge to the Logos] (48, 29), also, notably enough, evoking the image of a running river.

For Horacio, it seems the violence of Logos could only be countered with a corresponding violent physical act. The sexual acts are described as an “operación de conocimiento que sólo el hombre puede dar a la mujer [ultimate work of knowledge which only a man can give to a woman]” (48, 29) indicating that Horacio considers not only these actions to be a challenge to Logos, but also to be inscribed in traditional, sexist gender roles where the man exerting sexual violence on the woman “teaches” her something. We can frame him penetrating her as if she were an adolescent boy and using her like “la más triste puta [the most abject whore]” (48, 29) in the context wherein which Horacio is older, wiser, and above her. Therefore, just as Horacio thinks he is breaking with some structure by “challenging Logos,” he is actually using the support systems of other sexist structures to do it. He exerts power mentally, emotionally, and physically, for those hierarchies are not the ones he is questioning.

In this scene, he further reaffirms the duality drawn between him and La Maga. He is described as a “matador místico para quien matar es devolver el toro al mar y el mar al cielo [mythical matador for whom killing is returning the bull to the sea and the sea to the

heavens] (48, 28). Because this sexual encounter is framed as a challenge to Logos, as a pact without words, it makes sense that Horacio's role is "mystic" and acts to return things pertaining to the "world" (as opposed to language or to Logos) to their origin. Thus, the bull is returned to the sea, an image that makes one think of a reversal birth, of the man returning to the womb of his mother, and the feminine sea (which could be the womb) returns to the eternal Father, to heaven. Only without language does this "return" seem possible, because language is unwieldy, contaminated by history. Language, and Logos, are not the world. For Horacio, they seem to undermine it.

Horacio's mistreatment of La Maga also comes forth in his treatment of her baby, Rocamadour. When he first got together with La Maga, the child did not figure into the picture because he was kept in a nursery in the countryside. When Rocamadour falls ill, La Maga and Horacio bring him back to Paris and La Maga begins to care for him. Horacio is very negative about the baby, saying things like "el chico no entraba en mis cálculos [I didn't plan on the kid being here]" (117, translation mine) and suggesting that the baby's presence has changed La Maga for the worse and has caused her to ignore him. When they fight in chapter 20 (when La Maga first mentions the *río metafísico*), Horacio states that he won't abandon la Maga, not because he cares about either her or the baby, but because it would look bad to other people.

Horacio is unwilling to do anything to help with the sick child, and this unwillingness heightens to negligence and cruelty in chapter 28 when he returns from walking Berthe Trepat home. The baby's health has been steadily going from bad to worse, a fact that Horacio has not allowed La Maga to ignore, often mentioning that he thinks the baby would do better to be sent away. Sometime while La Maga is chatting with their friend Gregorovius (also an admirer of La Maga's, a fact that makes Horacio very jealous), Rocamadour passes

away. Horacio arrives at the apartment, angry to see Gregorovius there alone with La Maga, and quickly realizes that the baby has died. La Maga has not gone over to his crib in awhile and does not yet realize her baby is dead. Instead of telling her immediately or calling an ambulance, Horacio falls into his usual apathy and justifies it with his action/inaction dichotomy. He considers seeking help and panicking about the dead child to be “conforming” to what society would expect of him: “Calzar en el guante, hacer lo que debe hacerse en esos casos. Ah, no, basta. ¿Para qué encender la luz y gritar si sé que no sirve de nada? [Put the glove on, do what must be done in cases like this. Oh no, that’s enough. Why turn on the light and shout if it won’t do any good?]” (203, 147). He compares taking action in this moment to being just like his failed attempt to connect with the world by helping Berthe Trepap. He quietly informs Gregorovius, and soon all of the other members of the Club except La Maga, but holds that they shouldn’t make a big scene of it.

Instead, Horacio proceeds to have yet another highly philosophical discussion with the other members of the Club. When one member, Ron, argues that even if they all have different perspectives, there is only one reality, it is clear that Horacio takes this as a stab at the way he is handling the death of Rocamadour. In a move that seems to take its cue from post-structural types of arguments about there being no Absolute, metaphysically-confirmed reality, Horacio attempts to negate his wrongdoing by throwing morality into pure relativism: “¿Cómo actuar sin una actitud central previa, una especie de aquiescencia a lo que creemos bueno y verdadero? Tus nociones sobre la verdad y la bondad son puramente históricas, se fundan en una ética heredada. [How can one act unless there is a previous central attitude, a sort of acceptance of what we call the good and the true? Your notions about truth and goodness are purely historical, based on an ethic you inherited]” (229, 166). Amongst all of the theoretical discussions, the plight of La Maga is forgotten and no one bothers to tell her

that Rocamadour has died. When she goes over to give him his medicine, she discovers him dead in his crib. She shrieks and doubles over and the members of the Club scramble to wrap up the body and call the police. Horacio disappears, neglects to come to the baby's wake, and begins a multi-day bender of drinking.

While usually the *lector cómplice* order of the book has a few *capítulos prescindibles* [expendable chapters] come between the “main narrative” chapters, this section of the book features the longest pause from the “main narrative” of the entire book, giving us 22 “expendable chapters” before returning us to the chapter following Rocamadour's death. This move not only suggests a deliberate moment of silence or break after such an intense episode, but also echoes Horacio's dislodgment from the events of his life, what Ron would refer to as “reality.” Horacio uses this forced separation from the people and things around him as a sort of “free pass” from not having to be responsible for his actions (or inactions). This “free pass” comes from a move that both argues that the reality in which we operate is not held together by some essential contact with the Real, but at the same time, couches itself in the concept that past that, or in another spot, there is an *actual* essence that is not reflected here. Chapter 152, the third of this “pause,” particularly reflects this concept. The chapter is a fragment by French artist and writer Jean Tardieu. He notes that the house he is in looks exactly like his, as the hours and minutes that pass are also copies of those that pass in his life. “¡Pero no se vaya a pretender que soy yo! ¡Vamos! Todo es falso aquí [But no one must think that it is I! After all! Everything is false here]” (712, 551) he says, similar to Horacio's claims that everything in front of his face is just *appearance*, but is blocking the *real*.

During this *entr'acte*, Horacio decides to go visit the old man that he had seen get hit by a car, and it turns out this old man is actually Morelli, the philosopher that he and the members of his Club have been obsessing about. En route, he tells Etienne, who is

accompanying him, that he has realized that La Maga had a personal life, even if it took him until now to realize it. “En cambio yo estoy vacío [On the other hand I’m empty]” (728, 563) he states, again returning to this idea that *this* Horacio is not the actual one, but a shell, a representation that is not placed in anything real. Even while conversing with Morelli, Horacio’s intellectual hero, they struggle to find an authentic way to communicate that is not marred by language: “Se trataba de encontrar un lenguaje que no fuera literario [it had to do with finding a language that wasn’t literary]” (716, 554). Morelli gives Horacio the key to his library, but Horacio is conflicted: how to deal with this happy moment amongst all of the bad things he has just done? He acknowledges his “ausencia culpable [guilty absence]” (720, 557) even if he still will not admit it to anyone else. When Horacio tries to find La Maga again, she is nowhere to be found. She abandons her apartment to Gregorovius and leaves no trace as to where she has gone. It is clear that Horacio feels guilty about what he has done, for he tries to extract from Gregorovius details about the wake and La Maga. He gets in yet another philosophical argument, similar to the one from the scene when Rocamadour dies. When Gregorovius accuses him of rejecting everything and disengaging from the world, Horacio retorts, “No renuncio a nada, simplemente hago todo lo que puedo para que las cosas me renuncien a mí [I’m not renouncing anything, I simply do what I can so that things renounce me]” and a little later, “*Nous ne sommes pas au monde [We are not in the world]*” (249, 181)

Facing the lack of any a priori metaphysical Truth or moral code, Horacio arrives at an apathy and moral relativism that he uses to effectively renounce others and the consequences of his own actions. Where Heraclitus’ fragments would be in conversation with historical contingency as affecting concepts of truth, for he recognizes the role perspective and power play as a part of the constant flux, Horacio separates historical

context from questions about action or inaction, as if they are more pure, a priori: "...le parecía tramposo y fácil mezclar problemas históricos como el ser argentino...con problemas como el de la acción o la renuncia [it seemed slippery and facile to mix up historical problemas, such as one's being Argentinian...with problems like the ones those that deal with action or withdrawal]" (34, 17-8). Where he can take "history" as contingent, if language and morality are to be so, then they must be meaningless. Differing perspectives make Horacio feel that there is just no perspective at all.

Even though Horacio recognizes that not fighting for social justice makes him feel bad, "Hacía bien en negarse al fácil estupefaciente de la acción colectiva [He was right in rejecting the simple stupefaction of collective action]" (542, translation mine). He sees signing on to a movement as a "salida del yo [turn away from the I]" (543, translation mine) and feels like he is betraying himself when he does "actividades de carácter social [activities of a social nature]" (543, 418). We can see this abstract concept in action when he sees rejecting the "usual procedures" (such as helping La Maga with the death) as him doing something valuable by choosing to *not* do anything. He disengages as his own version of a revolt, but does not realize that his inaction is, too, an action, and often one that harms more than anything. But because he finds it absurd that we live our lives without questioning why we do what we do, he then sees himself justified in his dismissal of doing these things.

VII He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored.

This divergence from Heraclitean flux culminates in chapter 36 when Horacio uses Heraclitus supposed⁷ cause of death as inspiration for hitting rock bottom in Paris. Horacio, now totally isolated from his friends in the Club and unable to find La Maga, continues to

get drunker and drunker, ending his several day bender in a park in Paris. He interacts with a homeless woman, Emmanuèle, that he had seen before with La Maga, buying wine for her and eventually engaging in a sexual act with her that then leads to their arrest. He compares Heraclitus' death to his current situation: "En la mierda hasta el cogote, Heráclito el Oscuro, exactamente igual que ellos pero sin el vino [In shit up to his neck, Heraclitus the Obscure, just like the two of them except without wine]" and remembers that "Heráclito había dicho que si no se esperaba jamás se encontraría lo inesperado [Heraclitus had said that if one did not expect he would never find the unexpected]" (285, 210). We see Horacio moving very explicitly from a "passive" to an "active" role in this chapter, purposefully entering the unhygienic, less privileged space of the homeless people in the park in order to make a point: "...se repetía fríamente que no era mejor que [Emmanuèle] y que en el peor de los casos siempre podría curarse como Heráclito [repeating coldly that he was no better than she was and that if worst came to worst he could always cure himself like Heraclitus]" (287, 212).

Heraclitus' fragment makes it clear that understanding Logos will not come from passive participation, but requires being susceptible and ready to discover the Real by good use of one's senses (as we saw in chapter 1). Horacio absorbs the point about actively expecting the unexpected, but he takes this concept out of context and reasons that the only way to reach his happy place, his place full of hope, would be to go from bad to worse, "tirarse al suelo como Emmanuèle y desde ahí empezar a mirar desde la montaña de bosta, mirar el mundo a través del ojo del culo [Throw yourself on the floor like Emmanuèle and from there begin to look out from the mountain of manure, look at the world through the eye of your asshole]" (292, 215). He buys bottles of wine with Emmanuèle and notes with disgust her stench and her excessive saliva as she drinks straight from the bottle and hands it

over to Horacio. He finds it funny that she unzips his pants and performs oral sex on him, imagining her for a second as Pola, his mistress (288).

Horacio signs on to an *airtight duality* between “up” and “down” where they are not only in opposition, but also beg a choice that is based in a value judgment, ironically deciding that like Heraclitus, he will choose to drive himself “down” as opposed to in the direction of heaven. But as we saw earlier in Heraclitus’ specific “up and down” fragment, this concept of directionality depends entirely on *perspective* and does not reflect any fixed definition about what is good or bad. Again, Horacio misses the mark, this time compulsively putting himself in unsafe and unpleasant situations, effectively using Emmanuèle, a homeless woman in a subordinated position, for his own personal “journey.”

Second offense: doubling

The long pause between chapters 28 and 29 (*22 capítulos prescindibles*) marks not only the beginning of Horacio’s “descent,” but also marks the beginning of La Maga’s absence in the text. Not knowing where La Maga went or what happened to her drives Horacio crazy, even causing him, on his return trip to Buenos Aires, to stop off at Uruguay and look around for her fruitlessly. While Pola, Horacio’s not-so-secret mistress, figures in to the story before in only oblique references and allusions, the story of Horacio’s relationship with her becomes one of the central foci of this *entr’acte*. One reason for this seems to be because just when La Maga exits the narrative and leaves a gap, Pola is ushered in to fill it. This shift is also felt in the way the relationship unravels: we come to see that while he was with La Maga, he used Pola as a sort of “double” of La Maga in order to “understand” and contextualize her. After leaving Paris, he continues to double La Maga, this time using his

best friend Traveler's wife, Talita, as a sort of sounding board in order to deal with his feelings that he is otherwise unable to face.

Through duplication, Horacio is able to avoid representation via referents placed in language, similarly to how two opposing points of a duality define each other instead of having a concept stand alone with its own explanations and definitions. Given that the double helps to define the "original," but at the same time the "original" defines its double, neither identity seems able to be tied down or limited by a definition. They multiply to infinity, an attribute that makes representation via duplication seem more open and ample than a simulcra or a definition placed within language. Instead of a glass mirror, then, Horacio's doubling works as if Pola and Talita were "live-action mirrors" of La Maga, both helping him to represent La Maga "outside of language," and also letting him "rest easy" knowing that none of them are purely representative.

First, with Pola, the "live-action mirror" works to both duplicate and flip the image in the process. He sees Pola and La Maga as exact opposites of each other, much like the dualities he loves to play in. Pola is organized and cultured, with postcards of contemporary artists and intellectual books filling her room. Even La Maga notices the differences between her and Pola: "[Horacio] se cansa de mí porque no sé pensar...Me imagino que Pola piensa todo el tiempo [Horacio was getting tired of me because I don't know how to think...I have a feeling that Pola thinks all the time]" (188, 136). The nicknames that Horacio gives them, too, signal the difference: "La Maga" suggests she is mystical and magic while Pola París (and its variations) tie Pola with the cultured, educated, and sophisticated city. Pola París is the inverse of La Maga.

Pola serves as a new experience for Horacio as his relationship with La Maga becomes unbearable. Horacio notes the routine of la Maga: "Querer a la Maga había sido

como un rito del que ya no se espera la iluminación; palabras y actos se habían sucedido con una inventiva monotonía [Loving La Maga had been a sort of rite from which one no longer expected illumination; words and acts had succeeded one another with an inventive monotony]” (549, 422). But instead of changing up the routine, he switches La Maga out for Pola: he takes her to the same hotels that he takes La Maga to, and acts the same with her in bed as he did with La Maga. But when he has to get used to the new, different curves of Pola’s body, the shoulder that falls in a slightly difference place than that of La Maga, it gives him pleasure: “...un diferente oleaje lo arrancaba a los automatismos...parecía denunciar oscuramente su soledad enredada de simulacros [a different set of waves shook him in his reflexes...seemed to denounce in a vague way his solitude enmeshed in phantoms]” (550, 423). Treating Pola exactly like La Maga was like a big experiment, and its inevitable failure comforts Horacio, makes him feel that both of the relationships are more authentic. By viewing the very undoing of his own doubling, Horacio gets the best of both worlds: he is able to define them against each other and confirm that they are individuals and not just copies, simulcra.

By making Pola La Maga’s double, Horacio feels more emotionally connected to both, as if they act as mutual buffers. With Pola, Horacio manages to get a little out of his own head: “Consiguió dejar de pensar, consiguió por apenas un instante besarla sin ser más que su propio beso [He managed to stop thinking, for just an instant he managed to kiss her without its being anything but his own kiss]” (482, 367). In chapter 108, when Horacio is with La Maga watching the enamored clocharde Emmanuèle (chronologically before the unfortunate episode of chapter 36), Pola’s presence is strongly felt and seems to be a catalyst that gets Horacio to admit his love for La Maga, a confession that does not come easily to him. La Maga asks about Pola but he doesn’t want to reveal anything. They fight briefly and

even Pola is injected into the prose of the narrator, showing that she occupies a notable space in their conversation: “Se miraron. Pola [They looked at each other. Pola]” They continue to fight about Pola until Horacio admits: “Sabés, es tan difícil decirte: te quiero [You know, it’s so difficult to tell you: I love you]” (608, translation mine).

La Maga accuses him of giving her a carbon copy, which greatly insults Horacio, yet again indicating Horacio’s heavy dislike of the concept of copies, even as he deals in them. He reasons with her that talking about Pola wouldn’t work because it would be converting her into words. For Horacio, “bad” representation (meaning, representation that seems to not come from some duplicating form) changes the subject, transforms it into words, making it unreliable. Doubling La Maga with Pola makes Horacio feel more comfortable with sharing his emotions by “putting them into words” and admitting aloud that he loves her.

It seems that once La Maga is really gone from his life, Horacio shifts from needing a double that works as a counterpoint to needing a double that can represent La Maga as closely as possible. He finds this double in Traveler’s wife, Talita: the first thing he notices when he gets to Buenos Aires is how she looks just like La Maga, even though we are never given a physical description of either woman (304). During the first weeks in Buenos Aires, he proceeds to treat Talita very weirdly, frequently acting as if she were not even there or vaguely flirting with her, suggesting that there is something between them. Talita and Traveler seem to be having marital problems that emerged right when Horacio arrived, with Horacio being some type of messenger for a storm that would have come anyway, according to Traveler. But Talita notices that Traveler and Horacio have a strange relationship, and points out that Horacio often gets in the way of her marriage, acting as if Traveler were an extension of him. This suspicion is not unfounded, for Horacio also doubles Traveler,

constantly referring to him as his doppelgänger. Just as he uses Pola to better understand La Maga, it seems that Horacio and Traveler define themselves against each other as opposed to being defined as individuals.

This tension comes to a head when they are all working in the insane asylum together. He thinks he spots La Maga from his window, hopping on the hopscotch board in the patio, which brings him a certain peace, making him feel that everything has returned to order. When he realizes that it is Talita, he is quite taken aback, and the moment of confusion seems enough to convince him to tell her a bit about La Maga. But, it is notable that not even the snatches of dialogue are themselves represented in the prose, a wink from Cortázar, perhaps. But, we know that he tells Talita because she responds, “De manera que me parezco a esa otra mujer [So I look like that other woman]” (421, 317) and later, “La Maga era solamente un nombre, y ahora ya tiene cara [La Maga was only a name, and now she finally has a face]” (422, translation mine).

Soon after they descend to the morgue, a basement filled with eight large refrigerators, Horacio reflects briefly upon the conversation that has just occurred. He thinks telling Talita all about La Maga and other details of his life as if she were La Maga (even as he knew she wasn't) was a kind of giving up, a leaving behind of himself in order to reconcile with others: “...Eso era como un fin, la apelación a la piedad ajena, el reingreso a la familia humana [it was all like a culmination, the appeal to a foreign piety, the re-entry into the human family]” (425, 319) thinks Horacio. Talita (as fake Maga) was a false representation, a false sign, and his recounting of La Maga is then false as well. With the connection came a disconnection, and this concept unsettles Horacio deeply. Returning to “the human family” means leaving behind himself; reconciliation is, at some level, forfeiting.

What comes next is a total shift: Horacio ceases to see Talita as Talita, but *really* sees her as La Maga. He begins to speak to Talita in French, referring to the time La Maga told him that she felt sorry for him. He kisses Talita, “Y tampoco su beso era para ella...Se estaban como alcanzando desde otra parte, con otra parte de sí mismos [his kiss was not for her either...It was as if they were coming together from somewhere else, with some other part of themselves]” (427, 321). Instead of facing that La Maga is *actually* gone, he transforms Talita into La Maga, making her present again in order to say goodbye, reconcile with what has happened, and admit again that he loves her. He says to “La Maga,” “Andá a saber si nos sos vos la que esta noche me esupe tanta lástima...si en el fondo no hay que llorar de amor hasta llenar cuatro o cinco palanganas. [Who can tell if you’re the one who spit so much pity out at me tonight...if after all the only thing left is to cry over love until you fill four or five buckets]” (426, 321). He sees Talita as actually La Maga because he is hung up on the idea of representation and authentication. Only when Talita *becomes* La Maga can his reconciliation be authentic; it is a necessity for him to be able to come to some reckoning. Horacio’s rejection of Logos and representation becomes yet again misguided, hitting rock bottom delusion.

But, while this scene is particularly tragic, showing Horacio kissing his best friend’s wife in the morgue of the insane asylum where they work, convinced that he is kissing the lover he both dropped and lost in Paris, it also presents us with a shift for Horacio away from his *airtight dualities* and towards something more fluid. From Talita’s point of view we learn that the face he puts on, all open and without his usual irony, seems to be “aceptando alguna cosa que debía llegarle desde el centro de la vida [accepting something that must have come to him from the center of life]” (426, 321). The appearance of a “center” here is not insignificant in regards to Horacio’s book-long search for some center in life, and is re-

echoed at the end of the paragraph when the point of view shifts to Horacio and he regards this moment as them having arrived at “la última castilla, el centro de la mandala [the final square, the center of the mandala]” (427, 321).

This space that Talita and Horacio enter is noted as “something else,” where someone could “...estar de gris y ser de rosa, donde se podía haber muerto ahogada en un río...y asomar en una noche de Buenos Aires [be dressed in gray and be dressed in pink, where one could have died of drowning in a river...and appear in a Buenos Aires night]” (427, 321). The verb change from “estar” to “ser” is noteworthy, and denotes a gradation of being that allows multiple ontological forms at once, such that a person could be dressed in two different outfits at the same time. Further, given that the patients at the asylum are made to dress in pink, the color shift suggests a place where two opposites – sanity and insanity – can coexist in the same person. The idea is then extended to life and death, wherein a person (La Maga, we can extrapolate) could have drowned in the river and could show up in Buenos Aires to play hopscotch. This space softens the dichotomies that Horacio deals in, making them more akin to Heraclitus’ *leaky dualities*, for it allows a space where all the alternatives coexist and blur together, where there is perhaps a meeting place.

Even though Horacio seems to come into contact with some “center” that is more fluid and peaceful in this shared moment when Talita becomes La Maga, his delusion does not stop there, but brings him to a place of frantic paranoia. Wracked with guilt about kissing his best friend’s wife, Horacio becomes utterly convinced that Traveler wants to kill him and sets up an elaborate defense system in his room made of strings hung like spider webs and buckets of water scattered about the floor. For Horacio, Traveler *really* becomes his doppelgänger, coming to represent Horacio’s death. Horacio has reasoned that “le iba a doler siempre no poder hacerse ni siquiera una noción de esa unidad que otras veces llamaba

centro [it was always going to pain Oliveira that he could not even get a notion of that unity that other times he called center]” (439, 331). But even in giving up on his “center,” he organizes his understanding of his relationship in *airtight dualities*, signaling Traveler as “en armonía con el territorio [in harmony with the territory]” and Horacio as “yendo y viniendo [coming and going]” (457, 345) from Traveler’s territory to his side of “maldita imaginación [cursed imagination],” a place that does not conform with the “cinco mil años de territorio falso y precario [five thousand years of false and precarious territory]” (460, 347).

But in other ways, the *airtight dualities* do begin to break down. For example, when he thinks of his “battle” with Traveler in terms of wakefulness versus sleep, he then thinks, “Pero decir: la vigilia contra el sueño era ya reingresar en la dialéctica [but to say *waking against sleep* was already a return into dialectics]” (439, 332). But while this breakdown signals a peaceful, sobering effect for Horacio, it also brings him anxiety, for it means giving up on some unity he wants to achieve. Here, Heraclitus’ unified river that contains others and still other waters that flow comes forth in Horacio’s movement towards more *leaky dualities*:

“Ni siquiera le hacía falta fumar, por unos minutos había hecho la paz consigo mismo y eso equivalía a abolir el territorio, a vencer sin batalla y a querer dormirse por fin en el despertar, en ese filo donde la vigilia y el sueño mezclaban las primeras aguas y descubrían que no había aguas diferentes; pero eso era malo, naturalmente... [He didn’t even feel the need to smoke, for a few minutes he had made peace with himself and that was the equivalent of abolishing the territory, of conquering without a battle and of wanting to fall asleep finally in the moment of wakening, on that line where wakefulness and sleep first mixed their waters and discovered that there was no such thing as different waters; but that was bad, naturally...]” (446, 336).

We see in this extended quote that Horacio feeling at peace with himself also signals breaking down his relation to Traveler (the man of the “territory”) as his double, his *doppelgänger*. Treating himself as an individual brings him peace, and moves him toward seeing the “unity” in the opposition of wakefulness and sleeping. Just as Heraclitus links the “same rivers” with the “others and still other waters” that flow within them, Horacio reasons that these mixed waters are not different (separate) but instead are comprehended in the overall unity. But he immediately draws back, reasoning that this allowance is bad.

When Traveler comes to his room, they argue back and forth about who is whose *doppelgänger*, about if Horacio is really crazy. Horacio keeps referring to Talita as La Maga, to which Traveler worriedly asks Horacio if he actually understands that La Maga is not there. “Yo sé que es Talita [I know she’s Talita]” Horacio states, “pero hace un rato era la Maga. Es las dos, como nosotros [but awhile ago she was La Maga. She’s two people, just like us]” (458, 346). Traveler calls him crazy but Horacio holds that “Todo se llama de alguna manera [Everything is called something]” and that Traveler adores “las explicaciones como todo hijo de los cinco mil años [explanations just like all the other sons of the five thousand years]” (458, 346).

At a certain point, Horacio tells Traveler to leave him and go down to the patio where Talita, their bosses at the asylum, and other doctors are calling up to Horacio to ask him to stop this insanity. They are all worried that Horacio has gone insane and will jump from his opened window. Horacio says, “La única diferencia real entre vos y yo en este momento es que yo estoy solo. Por eso lo mejor es que bajes a reunirte con los tuyos [The only real difference between you and me at this moment is that I’m alone. That’s why the best thing is for you to go downstairs and rejoin your people]” (455, 343). Horacio is terrified of being alone. As we’ve seen from Horacio’s deep-seated issues with representation

and definition, he can't seem to come to terms with things standing on their own: they need a double, an opposition, something to throw the definition over to another side, something to avoid limitation. Without Traveler, Horacio cannot define himself other than by things he lacks, like action. Towards the end of their argument, Traveler accedes and calls down to the bosses to tell them to leave Horacio alone, that he is not crazy. Traveler's blessing makes Horacio feel that Traveler "era realmente su hermano [really was his brother]" (459, 346) which we can take to mean that he has given up Traveler as being his double, at least a bit, entering into another type of relation with him.

From his window, talking with Traveler and Talita, he reasons that "algún encuentro había, aunque no pudiera durar más que ese instante terriblemente dulce [there was some meeting after all, even though it could only last just for that terribly sweet instant]" (462, 349). It seems that this moment of harmony only came when he finally let Traveler be his own person, defined by Traveler alone, indicating a rupture with duplication. At the end of the chapter, Horacio suggests that the best response to this *encuentro* would be to throw himself from the window, which is reminiscent of what La Maga warned him that he would do. He feels that there had been a wonderful moment of harmony that words could not describe. While this sounds like it could be a cliché, for Horacio it is significant. Words betray, words cannot touch this center that he has found.

Once again, we can see Horacio's search for purity peeking its head through in his belief that the best response to this *encuentro* is an act of self-inflected violence. As we saw early in this chapter, violence is a break with logos, is an escape. Horacio realizes that to a certain extent, he had to "accept" or "give in" in order to reach his reconciliation, his center. And while there was a brief *encuentro*, a meaningful communication, in which he felt truly in touch with the world because Traveler and Talita had both come to understand him, it could

only last for a second, and could only logically be followed by an act of violence before Logos, the word, and all the structures surrounding it ruin it.

The suggestion of throwing himself onto the patio where the hopscotch board is drawn has its own significance as well. Hopscotch is a game that is both ordered and disordered: numerical but also requires that one hop around. The Hopscotch board, in a sense, represents the conundrum that Horacio faces when he wishes for purity. Horacio recognizes that to a certain extent, he too must play the game and participate in Logos. Even as he wishes and tries to separate himself out, he must be a part of humanity. This allowance, in his mind, is tainted (just as words are), and therefore is inauthentic. For this reason, he must break with it. The thing is: he is playing even when he thinks he isn't, for returning to violence is still playing back into the structures he wants to eschew. Horacio thinks it best to throw himself into a *río metafísico*, because by doing so, he is breaking with the common practices that he sees his peers absurdly taking part in. But he is misguided; little does he know that he is actually playing right back into that which he is trying to escape. Hopping to another square on the hopscotch board.

Chapter 4: What comes after death

XCII Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others' death, dead in the others' life.

LXXXIX Death is all things we see awake; all we see asleep is sleep.

LXXXIV What awaits men at death they do not expect or even imagine.

The relationship between life and death is a focal point of Heraclitus' theory of constant flux. This central *leaky duality* not only embodies the general movement of restoration/destruction inherent in the flux (as in the everliving fire fragment), but also zeros in on what can be gained in viewing life and death not mutually exclusive. Heraclitus links death to "not knowing" and offers profound insight on the connection and difference between "my own death" and "the deaths of others." For this reason, Heraclitus' fragments on death particularly speak to not only *Rayuela* but also to other postmodern texts such as *Fin de Partie* and *AVA* that all address the question of destabilized Truth and all end their stories in death.

The "immortals" fragment works to connect death to not-death, suggesting a *leaky duality* by using the basis of opposition to work at shortening the distance between the two opposites, just as the "graspings" fragment we saw in chapter 3. While the first half of the fragment throws into question what it means to die and not-die, positing that mortals are immortal and vice versa, the second half of the fragment dives into why that may be. Both halves of the fragment feature a perfect chiasmus wherein which the structures are inverted. But the second half of the fragment is far more complicated than the first, for the repetition of ἑκείνων [others] does not lend itself to an easy, direct reading. Because who exactly the "others" are is not made clear, we can draw from the first part of the fragment to place them. First, the participle ζῶντες [those living] operates as a noun that takes the direct

object θάνατον [death], indicating that they (we can assume, the mortal immortals) are living the other's (the immortal mortals) deaths. Then, the participle τεθνεώτες [dead], while intransitive, awkwardly and forcefully takes the object of τὸν βίον [life], stating that they (the immortal mortals, if we are following this line) are dying the lives of others (those living the deaths, the mortal immortals). It is unclear if this second instance of ἐκείνων [other] is referring back to the one before, or indicating a reciprocity wherein which the immortal mortals are dying the lives of the mortal immortals. As we can see, the fragment is quite hard to even wrap one's head around for all of the heavy repetition and points of opposition. Further, it begs the question, how could someone live the death of another's life if this someone is already dead in the life of that other?

We can take this riddle-like circle that Heraclitus spins not as an expression of an unsolvable problem or paradox, but instead as a turn that expresses the cyclicity of life and death. For this reason immortals are mortal and vice versa: we experience other's deaths such that they are "immortal" just as others experience our deaths, indicating our mortality. This fragment enters into play with the difference between "my death" and "another's death," interacting with the seemingly paradoxical way in which we live other's deaths just as others will live ours. Immortals are mortal because their stories die with us; mortals are immortal because their lives can forever be retold. Living other's deaths suggests experiencing an absence that we cannot experience firsthand; the only death that could be experienced, it seems, is one while living.

This idea sheds light on the "Death is all things we see awake" fragment: death permeates all of life around us, for in the Heraclitean system, death is an integral part of the cycle of restoration and destruction. Whereas the dreams we see while sleeping pertain to the imagination, Heraclitus locates death in the realm of the "real," of the stuff we can properly

see with good use of the senses, as we saw in chapter 1. But Heraclitus indicates in the third fragment I listed that men do not know what will happen when they die. It is an issue of removal: experiencing another's death is profoundly unlike that of experiencing your own.

For this reason, the relationship between "my death, unknowable to me" and the *leaky duality* wherein which life generates death and vice versa becomes very important at the moment of considering what Heraclitus' system can not only say to me personally, but what it can say to a post-structural project generally. While Heraclitus' system is one which is *knowable*, albeit with a lot of work, the way that Heraclitus considers death suggests to us that the overall, knowable Logos is comprised of some parts that are thoroughly unknowable. While we can see other things dying, we cannot know our dead selves. But even as we know others' deaths, what is it that we know? The essence of death renders it strange in the cycle: it is more like a patterned gap, it can only be known secondhand or by removal. It is a loss of experience that ushers in a gain.

Further, if death is unknowable, and *leaks* into life and vice versa, then parts of life must, too, be unknowable. This means that neither destruction nor renewal is fully disclosed, but instead that the fact of their movement and their fluidity is what Heraclitus suggests we can come to know. We can also take from this that even the duality of knowing and not-knowing is *leaky*, and for that reason it is not useful to think in terms of enlightenment, wherein which a light turns *on* and then full knowledge floods in where the darkness once was. Not only does understanding the overall structure not correspond with capturing all of the minutia, but also it does not guarantee complete knowledge of everything within it. As we saw that the multiple waters of the river are slipping away, are fundamentally uncapturable as new and ever new waters flow over them, splashing them into oblivion, the

overall river that holds all of these multiplicities is available to be understood. The river holds its own mystery; the knowable is made up of, in part, that which cannot be known.

This non-dual status of *knowing* and *not-knowing* is lost on characters like Horacio, who keep the dichotomy steadfast such that any inkling of *not-knowing* completely negates *knowing*. Indeed, the way death as a theme touches upon an absence that is present (like the gaps in the overall structure, or experiencing the deaths of others) and the fact of unknowability make it a useful metaphor with which to characterize post-structural projects. Post-structural inquiry, in its pursuit to weaken the idea of a Truth and to explore the disconnections and multiplications within language, harbors a sense of something “coming to an end.” What comes next is unknown: post-structural inquiries often find themselves right on the border of that which they are questioning, using vocabularies and understandings from the very structures they are working to unpack.

Because any question about language happens *also in language*, and any question about Truth plays with the argument being either “true” or “false” in its aim to convince, post-structural inquiry stands on the margins of the kingdom, pushed right to the limit, but does not itself quite leave that limit. It implies existing right on the border between being an outsider that can see the “holes” in the protecting wall and still belonging to this kingdom, for it helped formed you. What may be past this border is like death: it suggests a turn away from what came before, a leaving behind, a full leap into what comes next once we see our current reality as inconclusive. Past the moat, is there nothing? Or so many other kingdoms that one could get lost in the multiplicities, or even worse, get caught in another metaphysical vocabulary? What to do with this plurality, this ungraspability?

Fin de Partie and *AVA* are both post-structural texts that interact actively with these questions, specifically centering their narratives around the theme of death. In *Fin de Partie*,

everything is in decay, losing meaning and purpose, where in *AVA* the attempt to display all of the overflowing memories suggests that the meaning of a single life is impossible to express. The death themes are not the only similarities we find between how post-structural inquiries play out across *Fin de Partie* and *AVA*. Both use repetition to explore and play with the confines of language when tasked with representing the world. While both texts eschew traditional, easy-to-follow narrative structures and beg a sort of *lector cómplice*, their use of repetition is actually quite different, as are the size of their worlds: *AVA* stretches across multiple regions and languages, seeking to represent in a single day of Ava's consciousness her entire 39 years of life, not to mention her intellectual and artistic influences which are quoted wildly; the world of *Fin de Partie* is very small, only stretching as far as the boundaries of the house the main characters live in and what limited world can be seen from the window. The world is in decline, things are going extinct and disappearing and spring will never return.

Even among so many divergences, the way these texts use repetition both adds to and echoes the ways in which they interact with their death themes and the question of "what next?" Where the repetition in *AVA* complicates matters by multiplication, it does so by division in *Fin de Partie*. Through multiplication of possible meaning, the death at the end of *AVA* does not feel like a conclusive ending that halts meaning, but instead all of the utterances feel as if they echo, repeating to infinity, just as the last two chapters of *Rayuela* recur. Repetition in *Fin de Partie* hammers home a sense of reduction and impoverishment such that when Clov, the slave to Hamm, decides to strike out on his own to see if anyone is still out there in the abyss, the difficulty and intensity of his decision is palpable. In *AVA*, repetition acts as glue that brings all these fractured pieces together, not in a move to

attempt a connected, comprehensive story, but one that is interconnected even if messily, overflowing with meaning.

The conversations of *Fin de Partie*, for example, are so circular and repetitive that it gives the sense that the words available to speak are diminishing just as most objects that come up in the play are said to no longer exist almost as soon as they are mentioned. “Va me chercher deux roues de bicyclette [Go get me two bicycle wheels]” Hamm asks, to which Clov responds, “Il n’y a plus de roues de bicyclette [There aren’t any more bicycle wheels]” (22) or soon after, when Nagg asks for his gruel, to which Clov responds, “Il n’y a plus de bouillie [There isn’t any more gruel]” (23). The repetition of “Il n’y a plus de *quelque chose* [There is no more of *something*]” begins to create a depressing expectation that whatever is mentioned will not still exist, casting doubt on the ability of the words to either communicate something useful or guarantee the existence of their referent. With each new negation, each word, one by one, is divorced from its referent, chipping away at the sense that words still reliably work to accurately describe the world that they are in. The arbitrariness of words builds steam with each declaration of extinction, as does the arbitrariness of the “items” that are extinct: why do bicycles no longer exist, but lamps do? Why is there no more gruel, but there are still biscuits?

This repetition also makes interactions feel disingenuous, lacking emotion. For example, several times Hamm says to Clov, “J’ai dit pardon [I said sorry]” to which Clov always responds, “Je t’entends [I hear you]” (21). Hamm’s apologies are not taken as genuine, but instead as just something to hear, something to respond to. Their conversations feel like automatic responses, robotic mechanisms, that almost “act out” what an actual conversation would be, or should be. This sense of form without content, function without meaning, comes forth again in Hamm’s response to Clov’s question “A quoi est-ce que je

sers ? [What purpose do I serve?]" Hamm replies, "A me donner la réplique [To give me a reply]" (79-80).

Even the fact of repetition is repeated, folding back onto itself, forming its own sort of doubling or mirror effect, supplying us with playful meta-commentary of the text. The repetition of repetition comes in the form of mentioning constantly *l'habitude* [habit], which at its core refers to rituals or routines that are repeated day after day. For example, when Hamm asks Clov what the temperature is outside, Clov responds, "Le même que d'habitude [the same as always]" (43) and Clov indicates that the time of day is "zero", "La même que d'habitude [the same as always]" (18). Upon Hamm asking Clov if he is very white, Clov responds, "Pas plus que d'habitude [Not more than usual]" (86). After arguing back and forth about whether it is daytime outside or whether it is nighttime, Clov, seeming to be tired of the discussion, asks, "Pourquoi cette comédie, tous les jours ? [Why this comedy, day after day?]" to which Hamm responds, "La routine. On ne sait jamais. [Routine. One never knows]" (49). The repetition of sentiments such as these is itself a part of this routine.

The repetition of items or of conversations effectively nullifies the significance of *action* (because each thing *plays out* the same way) or the significance of *content* (because no matter the thing, it is treated the same way). It creates a dullness, a banality. But the repetition of repetition folds back onto itself, drawing attention to the fact of repetition. The repetition of certain responses or things creates an expectation, suggesting that they happen because they are part of the everyday, *l'habitude*. Thus, the "reason," the explanation of *why* certain things are repeated is because of a force of habit, or to put it another way, they are repeated because they are always repeated. In repeating repetition itself, there is no explanation to fall back on: the explanation itself (*l'habitude*) loses traction, becomes slippery, and begins to feel arbitrary, casting a feeling of meaninglessness over the totality of the daily

lives of these characters. Why do they do what they do, every single day? “Routine. One never knows,” Hamm replies not only to Clov, but to the situation as a whole, it seems. In this way, *Fin de Partie* not only chips away at the usefulness of language, but also highlights the questionable force of habit.

Fin de Partie, like both *Rayuela* and *AVA*, divorces world from word and throws into question intrinsic truth or purpose embedded in things like tradition or habit. But, in the wake of questioning the schism between world and word, the main character Hamm in *Fin de Partie* falls into a similar trap that Horacio in *Rayuela* falls into, mistaking the dislodgment of fixed meaning as a manifesto of meaninglessness. The only option for considering flux appears to be chalking up everything as insignificant, taking meaning to be only possible when fixed, static. And this nothingness translates into apathy, which then becomes extreme mistreatment by Hamm towards the others that live in the house.

Because Hamm is at the center of the power (even literally: Hamm loses it when he doesn't think Clov has put him perfectly in the center of the room), he acts inconsiderately and in an abusive manner towards the other characters. Hamm does not see a point in trying to continue, and for this reason connection with others becomes unimportant. Thus, his relationships do not tend towards communication but instead towards manipulation. And so, just like Horacio, he situates himself as the central, powerful, paternal male that can choose who he feels the need to listen to, whose life is still worthwhile. Hamm does not seem to care about the failing health of the other characters, but instead treats their conditions as hurdles to get over in order to complete other functions of their relationships. For example, when Hamm asks Clov how his legs are functioning and Clov responds, “Mal [poorly]” Hamm reasons, “Mais tu peux bouger...Alors bouge ! [But you can move...so move!]” (21). Because Hamm cannot see, Clov is required describe in detail certain things to

him, like the weather outside, or the color of his stuffed *petit chien*. Hamm is seldom interested in actually listening to any of the other characters, commenting when one of them begins a story “Mais de quoi peuvent-ils parler encore? [But what can they still talk about?]” (38). But, at the moment when he wishes to tell his own story, he bribes the other characters to listen to him, even promising his father Nagg a treat if he will listen.

Hamm verbally and physically abuses Clov, like when he tells him he will only feed him just enough so that he won't die. At another point in the play he tells Clov to throw Hamm's parents, Nell and Nagg, into the sea. Hamm's attitude towards the other characters and towards “survival” in general seems to come very strongly from a sense of “why bother?” because the decay is so inevitable. This can be seen particularly in his preference for mercy killing when there appears a flea. When Clov discovers a flea, the cries of horror are not because it will cause them discomfort or to itch, but because “l'humanité pourrait se reconstituer! [humanity could reconstitute itself!]” (50). Hamm implores Clov to kill it, to which Clov responds by promptly going to find the insecticide. Both characters are on the same page: considering that the world is in decline, permitting any creature to regenerate humanity would be woefully wrong.

Repetition gains meaning in *AVA* by playing with context and content as the repetitions stack up, both building on and undoing all of the various contexts that situate and affect what is being repeated. By doing this, a lot of weight – almost like an electric charge – is placed upon the phrases that are repeated, both gaining meaning through their attachment to all of the prior and proceeding utterances while they also break away from these contexts, coming to stand on their own. A notable instance – that carries through the text all the way to the very last utterance – appears first when Maria Regina, a woman who Ava describes as “the beautiful woman,” misuses the word “ravishing.” The word echoes

through the text, becoming somewhat of an emblem of strong, feminine desire, a main theme of *AVA* that plays out both in the fragments and also in the snippets of critical and literary theory that form a large part of the text. It is important that the word is first a “mistake” that then transforms (through repetition and recontextualization) into an empowering tool. Given that “ravishing” is linked etymologically with words for rape and seizure⁸, this movement serves as an example of how *AVA* takes up its *own* project that it establishes through its interaction with Hélène Cixous: “to arrive at a language that heals as much as it separates” (Maso, 163).

As Maria Regina tends to the spaghetti she is making, she declares, “I’m ravishing...I mean – what is the word – famished, starving, ravenous...” (80). Ava agrees with her immediately – that she is ravishing – but for some reason cannot bring herself to say it aloud. Instead, she blushes, she hesitates. It is pertinent that even though Maria herself had “misused” the word, Ava takes it at face value – that is to say, takes it seriously – and is palpably bothered by her own shying away from the word and the weight it holds. Maria Regina laughs at her mistake, but Ava thinks: “You are ravishing./Blushing, staring down at my Anonioni shoes” (80). Then, Ava questions herself, asking why it is that she hesitated, and about a page later the question crops up again: “Why did I hesitate?” (81). Her inquisitive retrospection seems to suggest that in looking back, Ava considers her hesitation as an error, as an omission. She wishes that she had told Maria Regina what she really felt. Thus, a word first spoken as a mistake becomes an overarching theme of the book, with the word “ravishing” (especially in the instance of “you are ravishing”) appearing over and over in the text, adding weight to the word and linking it back constantly to that very first scene where Ava felt attracted to her friend that she describes as a “beautiful and hungry woman” (80).

When the word “ravishing” appears in the text, it is often linked theoretically with French philosopher Hélène Cixous and her concept of *l’écriture féminine*, which not only brings to the fore women’s voices that have not been heard because of patriarchal society, but also “tolerates the movements of the other” and “frees, liberates language, word usage” (Conley 137-8).⁹ *AVA* heavily quotes Cixous, linking main character Ava with Cixous’ liberating, feminist ideas. This particularly comes forth with the connection to “ravishing,” a repurposed word that gains steam throughout the book: “Almost everything is yet to be written by women about their infinite and complex sexuality, their eroticism./Ravishing, enchanting...” (216). And later, Ava thinks, “The ultimate trust – to let go in the dark./Ravishing, feminine night” (228).

“You are ravishing” as a statement becomes separated from the scene itself with Maria Regina, now carrying its own sense of gravity. Indeed, it wasn’t even “supposed” to appear in that scene, for Maria Regina really meant to say ravenous, but misspoke when speaking a second language. In another scene, Ava is with an unnamed woman in a moment she describes as “a moment of perfect grace” (110). The scene explores Ava’s desire, heavily suggesting that she is sexually attracted to this woman. After Ava offers her lavender, the woman crushes it and brings her fingers up to Ava to smell. The woman “Tilts her head back. Laughs.” The scene is heavily charged with suggestive language, and closes with “You are ravishing” (110). Later, the thoughts “Who is this girl who is so curious? So in love with everything?” (212) pass through Ava’s consciousness. This girl put forth – it is unclear if it is Ava or another – is hungry for knowledge and passionate. These questions link to the next line, “Let’s stay in the garden then...with the cats and the last – you are ravishing” (212), suggesting that the (perhaps orgasmic) interruption of “you are ravishing” is connected to a playful, perhaps sensual scene of strong femininity and sexual exploration. What was once a

hesitation on Ava's part to express admiration or attraction to a woman is now becoming a strong, charged statement that continues to carry through the text. The repetition of "ravishing" refers directly to Ava's relationship with women, which, despite her multiple male lovers and husbands, holds its own as a strong theme of the book.

Given that Ava is dying of a rare blood disease, and the book follows her thoughts from her hospital bed on her last day on earth, we can take the final sentence of the book – "You are ravishing" – to be her final thought before death. In allowing the sentence to take on all the weight of its prior versions, we can take this to mean that her very last thought was that which she could not first say. When "ravishing" is read as an indication of both female desire, potency, and writing, her last thought is a moment of power and triumph, before all thoughts themselves stop. This instance supplies us with an interesting possibility for what to do with a language we see as impure, as steeped in history and contingency. Where "ravishing" could have collapsed beneath all of the weight, it takes all of the potential and pushes forward. *AVA* plays with the word's ties to history and its own contextual past in Ava's life, while also opening a space for a new usage that doesn't negate the old nor does it allow the old to limit it.

The other lines that come right before the ending of *AVA* all tie back in with charged repetition: they are almost all lines that have been gaining steam throughout the book, and now end on a celebratory note that suggests, perhaps, a new beginning. Let us take a look at the final page of *AVA* (265):

Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973), a major influence on such writers as Günter Grass, Christa Wolf, Max Frisch and Peter Handke. Born in Klagenfurt, Austria. Died in Rome, Italy, from injuries sustained in a fire.

The girl draws an A. She spells her name:

AVA

Today is of course a holiday –

Snow falls like music.

How we celebrated.

One feels the need in the end for hundreds of daughters –

We used to take the rabbit path up and over the hill and we were there.

Come quickly –

You can't believe,

A throbbing. A certain pulsing.

You are ravishing.

Not only “ravishing,” but all of these lines link back to utterances repeated throughout the book. It is revealed over the course of the work that Ava was on her way to Germany to study Ingeborg Bachmann when she found out about her rare blood disease. For this reason, Ingeborg Bachmann is just one example of the many things Ava realizes she will never get to do. Further, Ava often thinks of other female writers that she has studied and loved, a sentiment that links Bachmann up with others such as “Nathalie Saurraute. Monique Wittig. Hélène Cixous” (144). These female writers allude to the potential for female power in writing and in affirmations of sexuality that will, as Cixous says and Ava echoes, “[constitute] a potential disturbance to the masculine order” (Maso, 178). This also connects back to all of Ava’s strong female relationships she’s had throughout her life, like the one we saw with Maria Regina. She writes: “Older women, holding my hand, leading the way...” and then lists their names (Maria Regina included). Just after, she says, “I was coming to meet them. In need of consolation. In need/ Ingeborg Bachmann. My next project” (133).

Thus, in her final thoughts, she writes a sort of eulogy for Ingeborg Bachmann that forms a part of her own eulogy, indicating not only that she is “finishing” the project which

in life she will not be able to, but also that these female writers (and other women) make up a deeply important part of her life. This importance also comes forth in the line about wanting “hundreds of daughters.” With her second husband, Anatole, Ava miscarried a child, a fact that reflects itself in her desire for many children. Notably, she wants daughters, not sons, which we can connect to her appreciation of all of the women in her life. She writes, “When perhaps all along what I have really wanted most is the friendship, the love of women./ You are ravishing” (75). These thoughts do not contrast with her three marriages and countless affairs with men that happen throughout her life, but they do mark a strong longing for female companionship that comes forth as the most important, as we see in the final “ravishing” line of the text.

The connection between femininity and writing is one of the strongest in the book, and a big reveal is that the “young girl [who] learns how to hold a pencil” (9) and painstakingly practices her letters is indeed Ava, spelling out “A V A.” We do not know for the entire book until the final page that we are witnessing the first scene where little Ava puts herself into words and writes her name. Writing, linked to feminine potential, is also linked to freedom in general: A tiny hand draws letter A./ You spread your wings and try to fly” (163). Ava refers to the child learning a “hovering and beautiful alphabet” (217) which later comes forth in connection to the idea of one realizing themselves in a language just to confront the possibility that this language is fractured, unable to communicate. What, then, happens to an identity that is placed in language, the text begs us to ask. She writes (229):

Hovering and beautiful alphabet –
As we struggle to make meaning,
Where maybe there is none.

But a bit later, Ava links up this “hovering” alphabet to Cixous’ wish, writing, “To create a language that heals as much as it separates./ – as we form our first words after making love” (258). *AVA* plays with the possibility of meaninglessness, but never tumbles into it, for as slippery as language is, there are too many connections and possibilities for them to be discarded as impertinent. Just as she remembers her first moment of writing her own name, she meaningfully connects this “hovering and beautiful alphabet” to both disconnecting *and* connecting. The “first words” after making love suggest this as well, both expressing a moment without language, a moment of physical connection, and the return of language to the scene, effectively reintroducing the fracture, but also linking it to the instance of love. A fractured language does not imply one that does not connect.

These female relationships can also be connected to the line “Come quickly” and the one about the “rabbit path.” While the final instances of “Come quickly” imply impending disaster, like the penultimate one that states, “Come quickly, Ava./ Blood transfusion.” (264), most instances before are connected to Ava’s mother. “Come quickly, my mother says, there are finches at the feeder,” (5) repeats throughout the text. Ava’s relationship with her parents is actually one of the most noticeable instances of silence in the entire book. She seldom mentions them, only saying things like her mother “seemed like a shadow” (222) and that her parents didn’t cry when they heard about her disease, even as they cry at everyday things like “a simple game of Hide and Seek” (53). The reason for this could be related to the “rabbit path” and a character that could be Ava’s sister, named Sophie. From several fragments, we can just barely piece together that Sophie died in a tragic accident. Her story is another felt absence in the book.

The only other mentions of her parents come in connection with music, which is another one of the most important themes in the book and which can be seen reflected in

the ending line, “Snow falls like music.” She writes, “My parents singing the world into existence for themselves./Prolonging the world with song” (76). They are not the only ones: Ava writes that “Music was everything” (74) and “Music moves in me” (20). She even jokes that if music “changed the composition of [her] blood,” (20) she still considers herself lucky that music moves within her. Throughout the book she jokes about an erotic song cycle she once wrote, stating and re-stating the titles to reflect different moments in her life, like “*Duet for the End of the World*” (244) or “*In the Joie de Vivre Room,*” (259) which alludes to where she conceived her child.

The book is split into three sections: Morning, Afternoon, and Night. The end of the Morning chapter states, “And we listen to the music that is silence” (123). This idea becomes an important one, and links meaningfully to Heraclitus’ death that is a present absence. Silent music is a contradiction in terms that suggests how even the absence of sound, which can be certainly heard, is its own form of music, of expression. Just as death in Heraclitus acts as an integral gap, Ava writes, “Learn to love the questions themselves./The spaces between words. Between thoughts. The interval” (171). The spaces in *AVA* are plentiful: each line is separated by a line of blank space, and usually the lines preceding and following are non-sequiturs. The thoughts jump around, between speakers, time periods, languages. Ava signals through these gaps that the points of breakage, the fracturing, are themselves a part of the totality of her life. Just as the “ojo sensible [sensitive eye]” can point out the hole in the wall and learn from it, Ava takes the cracks as indispensable.

Where Horacio or Hamm would reorient these cracks structurally or take them as evidence of destruction, Ava plays with them, engages with them. Even as she solemnly wonders why her life must end so soon, she remembers the times she celebrated, as she notes in the ending line, “Today is of course a holiday –”. Earlier in the text, she refers to

Mardi Gras as a “farewell to the flesh” and a “good-bye to the body” (67) and constantly remembers her celebratory moments. They speak greatly to her impending death: “We are racing toward death, Francisco. We knew it even then./How we celebrated each holiday, each saint’s day. With verve” (84). The entirety of *AVA* remains on the border between boundless celebration and deep sadness. They do not cancel each other out, but instead exist in tandem as the book closes; both form such important parts of her life.

Just before Ava’s final words, the physical reality of death makes its way into the language of the text through the words, “A throbbing. A certain pulsing.” But this turn inwards, to the reality of “her death” that marks the shutting down of her body, is met with an apostrophe in “You are ravishing.” This turning outward at the end recalls Heraclitus’ fragment about our living others’ deaths just as they live ours. What Ava couldn’t say before she can now say, just as the participation of others (a you) suggests that her death will not result in her obsolescence. Ava’s outward turn can also be read as referring to the cyclicity of life, like Heraclitus’ concept of death that generates life and so on. The momentum of all of the repeated utterances does not halt at “You are ravishing,” but continues to echo. *AVA* feels as if it could go on to infinity.

The ending of *Fin de Partie* also features a turn outward that indicates new life within the process of death. When Clov looks out the window and sees a boy on the horizon, he wishes to go out and see if the boy is living. Hamm, as per usual, replies that there is no point: “S’il existe il viendra ici ou il mourra là. Es s’il n’existe pas ce n’est pas la peine [If he exists he will come here or he will die there]” (105). Once again, Hamm expresses apathy in the face of possible action because he sees ultimate decay as inevitable. He doesn’t care about knowing whether or not the boy is living, because that knowledge doesn’t matter anymore. It is unclear whether or not Clov wants to kill the boy, given that he proclaims the

boy “Un procréatur en puissance [a potential procreator]” (105) and earlier in the play he extinguishes the flea at the threat of it procreating. But even with this confusion, it is clear that the boy on the horizon pushes him to leave – which he has not yet been able to do – because the knowledge of him is worth pursuing. Where the entire play has been a large rumination on *l’habitude* and the inevitability of decay, this new boy is an unknown possibility, a suggestion of other life.

When Clov says that he is leaving, Hamm asks Clov for some words that he can recite to himself. But according to Clov, there is nothing more to say. Even in such a tension-filled moment, Clov chants a silly poem about being bored. The possibility of an emotional moment falls flat, again suggesting that a connection between he and Hamm is something that can never really be achieved. But, just as Hamm insults Clov’s poem, Clov launches into a final monologue that gives us the deepest glance as of yet into Clov’s emotions. He recounts that he was told that love and friendship were something simple and easy, even as he used to tell himself that he must suffer more than that in order to be free. It seems that Clov is caught in a similar logic as Hamm where things must always get worse. He refers to “l’amour [love]” and “l’amitié [friendship]” as “Cet ordre! [That order!]” (108) which can be connected to earlier in the play when he says that he loves order because it is silent and still, suggesting that it will not rapidly disappear like everything else around him does.

Whereas before he thought himself to be “trop vieux, et trop loin, pour pouvoir former de nouvelles habitudes [too old, and too far away to be able to form new habits]” (108), this final monologue marks him changing, even though change has already been set up as impossible/inaccessible because of entrenched *habitude* in *Fin de Partie*. Now, Clov is experiencing an opening, a possibility of actually leaving. Because he doesn’t understand this

sudden change, he asks the words that still remain – “sommeil, réveil, soir, matin [sleep, waking, night, morning]” (109) – but they no longer have anything to say to him. Not even these words that recall cycles and *habitude* can provide any explanation for him. Finishing his monologue, Clov describes himself leaving and seeing the charred Earth beneath him. He knows that the Earth itself has been extinguished, even though he never saw it illuminated. This quote is very telling, because it illustrates well Clov’s positioning in this post-structural scape. Clov has only lived a life in full-on decay; not when the world still corresponded to word or when things seemed meaningful.

Because of this, a move towards change and recovery of something meaningful would be monumentally difficult for Clov. No wonder he could never leave his house – he never grew up in a world where there *were* things to discover. This love of *l’ordre*, this “stuckness” also seemed to keep Clov in the house: not only is his relationship with Hamm an abusive one that keeps him trapped there, but also Clov himself states that he cannot leave. Only now, in this final goodbye monologue after seeing the boy on the horizon, does Clov seem to change, to move towards the possibility of there still being something significant out there. Hamm’s *airtight duality* of decay and growth holds steadily during the final part of the play as he throws away most of his remaining precious items (like his stuffed dog) and is left alone with Nell (who has died) and Nagg (who no longer responds to him). Clov turns outward, existing in a space where there is both decay and regrowth – even as everything declines towards death the boy on the horizon could signal new life; Clov can leave the tomb-like home where he was cooped up his whole life and go after this hope.

Conclusion: What We Do Not Know

CII For souls it is death to become water; for water it is death to become earth.
From earth water arises, out of water soul.

Neither death nor resurrection is final, but instead they participate in a constant cycle where one causes the other. Soul dies to become water, water dies to become soul; earth dies to become water, and so on. It is notable that water mediates both of these ever-flowing life-death cycles, just like Heraclitus' river and the *leaky dualities* I have brought forth. Given that the Heraclitean death signals a state of not-knowing, this fragment suggests that even what we *do* know ushers in what we *don't*. There is no light switch that goes on to never go off again. A Heraclitean arrival would not signal some conclusion made up of pure, complete knowledge, but instead an understanding of a state of constant movement and change.

Horacio in chapter 36 (when he has an encounter with the clocharde Emmanuèle) thinks he can cure himself of all of his guilt and wrongdoing by going from bad to worse, as Heraclitus supposedly did. Not only is the concept of the hierarchized "up" and "down" a problem with an eye to Heraclitus' philosophy, but so is the concept of *arriving*, which would imply a culmination, a conclusion. One of Horacio's biggest problems is that he is only focused on the *death descent* and on getting somewhere, even as he doesn't really know where that "somewhere" is. He lashes out violently in the face of *not knowing*; he wishes for a metaphysical answer for his deconstructive projects and language games. But as the "souls" fragment would suggest to us, just as life and death are not in opposition, nor are they hierarchized. Just is the case with knowing or not-knowing, for out of not-knowing do we come to a state of knowing that then ushers in not-knowing again. Where there is relativism and nihilism in Horacio, there is flux and perspective in Heraclitus. There is a call to

consider “my death” in the context of the “deaths of others” as well as in the overarching cycle of life and death, even as one recognizes they cannot really know their own death.

Fin de Partie and *AVA* both play with what it means to know and what it means to die. Clov turns outward, just as Ava does, attempting to live a life that is permeated with death in a language that both heals and separates. The end of *Rayuela*, too, plays with a non-dual death: Horacio maybe jumps from the window, but what exactly happens is never laid out. The remaining chapters give us snatches of conversations that could be from the events following Horacio’s jump – his getting fired, his recovery, his plans with Traveler to become a monk – but they are not linear nor are they very clear, with some featuring lines that are semi-repeated in others.

The end of the book signals an infinite recursion because the end of chapter 131 sends you to chapter 58 which then sends you back to 131 and so on. If you continue following the indication at the end of each chapter to go to the proceeding chapter, you will be either trapped in a constant back-and-forth from which there is no escape, or alternatively, set free from a fixed, definitive final chapter. Where the *lector cómplice* spent all of 700+ pages faithfully following the order put forth by Cortázar, they can only actually finish the book if they choose to break with the hyper-organized, hopscotch-esque order of chapters. Not even a break with the traditional, chronological novel signals a break from structure – it is notable that this must happen outside of the novel itself, in the chosen silence, in finishing that which is not an ending. At any moment one could pick up the book again and still not finish it.

...

In both Heraclitus and *Rayuela*, what is ultimately at stake is what it means to not know. As we saw in Chapter 1, both projects place importance on the *search*, whether it be by

good use of the senses or by acting as a complicit, active reader that is willing to follow the more difficult and less traditional order of chapters, participating in their own alienation. But neither *Rayuela* nor Heraclitus seem to sign on to a final answer. As Derrida suggests that “pure multiplicity” or “pure unity” is a “synonym for death,” we can take this metaphor to indicate that any final, definitive answer marks a sort of death. It halts the search.

Chapter 2 expounded upon the theoretical makeup of both Horacio and Heraclitus, showing how their fire and water metaphors work to characterize our frustrating, seemingly paradoxical situations of relying on a language that, in order to work, be stable even if that stability is forever elusive. What to do with a tool we know to not totally work? Where it seems that Heraclitus hinges upon the concept that although we may not know Logos, we can indeed *arrive* at a state of knowing, both chapter 2 and 3 reveal how there is no *airtight duality* of ignorance and comprehension to depend upon. In other words, we don't completely know either what we know or what we don't know. Horacio's gravest errors in judgment are couched in a belief that organizing his understanding by dichotomies and then placing a truth and moral value on them is the appropriate answer to the “problem” of multiplicity. He justifies treating everyone around him as chess pieces in his own little game by his mistaken understanding of how to ground himself in the quicksand that is Logos.

Horacio's bad behavior shows us how misunderstanding the slipperiness of language at the theoretical level can lead to apathy and relativism in everyday life. As much as Horacio tries to separate himself out from the world, apathy and relativism never happen in a void. In the attempts to shirk the underlying structures, apathetic and relativist responses unwittingly play into them, for structured power affects *who* can be apathetic or relative, and *how*. Horacio in his relationship with women and Hamm with his servant Clov fail to see that chalking up things as meaningless does not somehow make the playing field equal.

What is at stake in *not knowing* has much to do with what is at stake in death, for both mark a vulnerability, a disconnect, and possibly a void. Reading how all of these texts interact with ignorance and death show us how a non-dualistic, *leakier* approach can result in a more productive perspective. *AVA* and *Fin de Partie* play with the linkages between death and destabilized meaning, putting forth examples where Clov and Ava live in a way that interacts with death. Ava and Clov's turn outward highlights a way to put "our own death" in conversation with the "deaths of others," to both know and not know at the same time. Horacio, too, turns outward when he recognizes Traveler and Talita as separate from him but still acknowledges that there had been a harmonious meeting between them. The ending of *Rayuela* offers a constructed situation wherein which the reader is incited to finish an inconclusive work. All of these examples of *leaky dualities* echo again in Hélène Cixous' wish. We can understand it more broadly as finding a balance where opposites can co-exist, for language communicates as it also mutes; we are mortal in some ways, immortal in others.

APPENDIX:

The fragments appear as per order of appearance in my thesis. I have included the Ancient Greek for those that I also analyzed in that language.

Chapter 1:

XXXVI It is wise, listening not to me but to the report, to agree that all things are one.

I Although this account holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account, men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. But other men are oblivious of what they do awake, just as they are forgetful of what they do asleep. (Only listed here)

X Nature loves to hide.
φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

III Although the account is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession.

IV Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions.

XVII Not knowing how to listen, neither can they speak.

XVI Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language.

CXVIII The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.
ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μόνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα

LXXIX The name of bow is life; its work is death.
τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος

Chapter 2:

XXXVII The ordering, the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures going out.

κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰεὶζῶον, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα

L As they step into the same rivers, others and still other waters flow upon them.
ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ

Chapter 3:

XLIX: “Cold warms up, warm cools off, moist parches, dry dampens.”

τὰ ψυχρὰ θέρεται, θερμὸν ψύχεται, ὑγρὸν ἀυαίνεται, καρφαλέον νοτίζεται

XCIX: The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle.

CXXIV Grasplings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.

συλλάψεις· ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντα

LXXXII One must realize that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained?) in accordance with conflict.

LXXXIII War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free.

LXX The sea is the purest and foulest water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly.

LXVIII [[For god all things are fair and good and just, but men have taken some things as unjust, others as just.]]

CIII The way up and down is one and the same.

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή

LXI Dogs bark at those they do not recognize.

κύνες γὰρ καταβαύζουσιν ὧν ἂν μὴ γινώσκωσι

XXIX It belongs to all men to know themselves and to think well.

ἄνθρωποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοὺς καὶ σωφρονεῖν

CXV The mysteries current among men initiate them into impiety

VII He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored.

Chapter 4:

XCII Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others' death, dead in the others' life.

ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι, ζῶντες τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον, τὸν δὲ ἐκείνων βίον τεθνεώτες

LXXXIX Death is all things we see awake; all we see asleep is sleep.

LXXXIV What awaits men at death they do not expect or even imagine.

CII For souls it is death to become water; for water it is death to become earth; from earth water arises, out of water soul.

ψυχήσιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή

Endnotes:

¹ This quote by French philosopher Hélène Cixous comes from an exchange with Verena Conley in 1982 and can be found in her book *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* on page 146. Conley herself translated it from the French.

² Heraclitus often uses “sleep” as a metaphor for not comprehending Logos. Given that we understand the unified structure by good use of ears and eyes, sleep signals a turning away from the world, a shutting off of the senses.

³ Notably, *corriente* [current or flowing] evokes a river.

⁴ The use of *Lector-hembra* [female reader] to describe general readers who would not have patience for a complicated book but would instead give up because it is too hard for them serves as one particularly blatant example of sexism in *Rayuela*.

⁵ This word play would have been even more salient in Heraclitus’ time, for written Greek did not yet have accents. Therefore, we can guess that the words would have *sounded* differently, but were written the same way.

⁶ I have chosen the term *leaky duality* to recall Heraclitus’ river fragment, one of the most important for his thought, to recall the fluid nature of his doctrine of constant flux, and also to specifically reference Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the *ligne de fuite* [line of flight]. Deleuze defines the line of flight as a process of “life-experimentation” (47) that involves deterritorializing oneself from their usual surroundings and ways of being in order to plunge into a process of *becoming*. The line of flight is very much about fluctuation, constant movement, and an active flee from tradition or categories that bind. With an eye to breaking down binaries and calling for constant movement instead of fixed definitions, I saw much of Deleuze in my readings of Heraclitus. The word “fuite” in French means flight, escape, or a leak. While it is clear that the best translation to English is “flight,” the fluid side comes forth in Deleuze’s original word. Because Heraclitus’ dualities “leak” into one another, complicating stable identity, I chose the word *leaky* to not only give the image of water that escapes even when it is not supposed to, but also to riff off of Deleuze’s thought. It proved indispensable when putting Heraclitus into conversation with post-structuralism.

⁷ *Testimonia* from Diogenes Laertius, an Ancient Greek philosophy biographer, indicates that Heraclitus was diagnosed with dropsy, and in the attempt to cure it, submerged himself in cow dung and passed away shortly thereafter (Robinson, 166). Charles Kahn refers to this account as showing “a malicious pleasure in mocking a figure whom the Stoics venerated” (1) and does not consider Heraclitus’ death as pertinent to the rest of his philosophy. There is no direct historical evidence that Heraclitus died in this manner, and even if he did, the way that Horacio interprets it and turns it into a sort of Heraclitean doctrine clearly reveals a grave misunderstanding on Horacio’s part.

⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary online (www.oed.com) notes that the archaic usage of “ravishing” is “The action of taking or carrying away a person by force; plundering; violation, rape.”

⁹ These quotes by Hélène Cixous come from the same conversation with Verena Conley as the opening quote.

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