

BOOKS

RAYUELA, by Julio Cortázar. Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1963. 634 p.

An exasperated denunciation of sham-in life and literature, Cortázar's latest book breaks with traditional systematic construction to provide a double framework through which his characters move in a dramatic incongruity that counterpoints appearance and meaning, old and new, the surface and the profound. His statement on the design of life is a game of hopscotch (*rayuela*). The reader can reach the final block by going through chapters one through fifty-six consecutively, or by jumping through the 155 chapters in an irregular sequence set forth on the first page.

IT WAS TIME for someone to write *Rayuela*.

It was certainly no easy task, perhaps not even a pleasant one, but it had to be done. This book had been caught in our throats for years, an enormous undigested duck invulnerable to all seltzers whose feathers blocked our lungs and whose beak, stuck in our craws, talked on and on, forcing us into the role of involuntary ventriloquists.

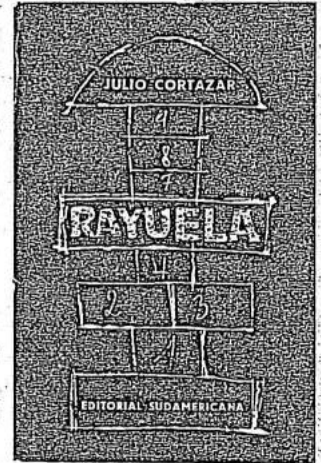
Woe unto those communities whose necessary books have not been written! This book is made of the stuff of Paris and the Seine, of Carlos Gardel and Borges, of Ricardo Arlt who gets mentioned and of *Adán Buenosayres* which does not. It had to be written or our heads would have burst, and in any event our livers were already ailing. Catharsis is certainly not the legacy of Greek tragedy but of all tragedy, and *Rayuela* is perhaps the first Argentine tragedy of the New Conscience. Like all first things, it has identifiable antecedents and consequents, concomitants and even adiposities. Its Queen Dulcinea (*Su Majestad Dulcinea*), its Don Segundo Sombra, its Seven Madmen (*Siete Locos*), its Macedonio Fernández, its Clerk Pedreiras (*Oficinista Pedreiras*). It is not easy to digest the creole duck, blue as Picasso's blue period. It has many souls, many paths, many traditions, many reincarnations—Italy, Spain, the Seine, jazz, Martín Fierro, the tango, Hamlet, paperback editions of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, translations of Heraclitus, the *Bhagavad Gita*, De la Pua's poems in *La Crencha Engrasada* (Greasy Hair), the *Verde* and the *Rosa* (our *Racing Form* and *Green Sheet*). Creole duck is a highly seasoned dish and it needs a great quantity of gastric juices to digest this pill that will eventually find its way



Julio Cortázar

into the River Plate to enrich some island in the Delta. That famous alluvium. *Vide* real property law.

I know how difficult it is to find roots in the asphalt of Buenos Aires. How hard it is to discover the ancient Querendi, stout Pedro de Mendoza, our city's founder Juan de Garay, our city hall that has kept its tower intact with such difficulty, and how does one offer a Río Negro apple without a Río Negro? It is not easy to happen upon colonial poets like a Ruiz Díaz de Guzmán, a Luis de Tejada, or a Labardén, and thank God that old José Hernández found the formula of the carob tree and that the admirers of *Martin Fierro* with Leopoldo Lugones among them rescued the gaucho, although he was mis-



sing a boot and his baggy trousers were torn to shreds. Consciousness without memory is less than full consciousness. The corner café is all too often a space station suspended in the void. Perhaps for this reason we Argentines have something to say today because the world is being uprooted, which is a way of saying that we must accept new roots fashioned from dim memory and affixed to the present like a leech. A present inapprehensible without anguish, but apprehensible in the sorrow that is man's lot. And it is this final ability that rescues our digestion and gives us back our duck turned island, fruit, and mountain range. I am grateful to Cortázar for having allowed *Rayuela* to put himself into words. His novel, to give it a label, will cork more than one nunciatory bottle, keep it afloat. In Paris or wherever he may be, Argentine Cortázar will be living testimony for the Pampa's desolate cemeteries with their scattering of crosses, a few ghosts, and endless sky.

—Rafael Squirru

Director, PAU Department of Cultural Affairs

DOINGS AND UNDOINGS: The Fifties and After in American Writing, by Norman Podhoretz. New York, Farrar, Straus and Co., 1964. 371 p. \$4.95.

THIS COLLECTION of literary, political, and sociological essays by the editor of the important Jewish periodical *Commentary* shapes up into one of the best available accounts of the position of the "intellectual" in the United States at present. Podhoretz himself is abundantly en-