

MORE VOLUBLE
DISCUSSION: LEWIS
CARROLL'S
"JABBERWOCKY" AND
JULIO CORTÁZAR'S
GLÍGLICO IN *RAYUELA*

ORIO MASSEGÚ

University of Birmingham

But I want to know one thing. Does each symbol always have the *same* meaning? A cipher is no good, unless it can be read by whoever has got the *key* to it. But, if you make a symbol sometimes mean 'A' and sometimes 'B', and sometimes 'C', why, then *nobody* can read it, even with key: for how are they to know *which* meaning to use?

Lewis Carroll, "Letter to Enid Stevens"

En lugar de Wong había una sonrisa de gato de Cheshire y una especie de reverencia entre el humo.

Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*

1. Plenty of room at Carroll's literary tea-party

Seldom has any author confined within the realms of so-called children's literature been able to offer as many rich aspects for literary criticism as Lewis Carroll. Perhaps the Oxford clergyman's appeal lies in the eternal human enjoyment in listening to a fictional narrative full of imagination, an attraction which haunts us for the rest of our life. But surprisingly, despite the volume of critical reviews published so far, the truth of Carroll's success is formidably difficult to fix. It might be explained by the subversive content of his books, the linguistic mechanisms and literary nonsense displayed, the psychological and anthropological interpretations of his symbols, and possibly, the ludic and logical situations presented in his two unforgettable masterpieces *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872). Although Carroll's famous stories were both published in the Victorian Age, it has been in the twentieth century –with its Freudian exegesis, creative vanguards and controversial artefacts– that they have fulfilled their potential. Writers like James Joyce, Raymond Queneau, T. S. Eliot, Italo Calvino and George Perec are all said to have tumbled down the rabbit-hole in search of an interesting literary framework for their fictional works. The list of Alice's famous disciples seems endless. The purpose of this article is to determine whether a new guest, the Argentine author Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), should also be invited to such a literary tea party. With this intention, we will focus, amongst other aspects, on the most striking resemblance between Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* and Julio Cortázar's brilliant work *Rayuela* (1963): a tremendous fascination with words and metalinguistic issues. Although linguistic concern is latent throughout most of the chapters in *Through the Looking-Glass* and Cortázar's masterpiece, we will concentrate on one of the most powerful examples of Carroll's interest in language: the celebrated poem "Jabberwocky", which we believe is the inspiration for Julio Cortázar's linguistic experiment, *gliglico*, developed in his famous novel. Manuel Durán (1972) mentions Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" as a valid predecessor of Cortázar's *gliglico* in *Rayuela* and some passages in *Historias de cronopios y famas* (1962). Other possible ancestors to be considered are Quevedo's sonnet *Sulquivagante, pretemor de Estolo* and the French *lettrisme* after the Second World War. However, while Durán's article analyses Cortázar's work *Historias de cronopios y famas*, it fails to take the connections between Carroll's poem and *Rayuela*'s linguistic experimental language any further.

2. "Beware the Jabberwock, my son!"

The first appearance of the initial stanza of "Jabberwocky" was in the family magazine *Mischmasch* under a different title, "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry", in 1855. The famous quatrain was followed by a gloss of the supposedly Anglo-Saxon terms provided by the author. Francis Huxley

mentions Salvatore Rosa's painting of the *Temptation of St. Anthony* as the original of the Jabberwock. Carroll might have been so interested in Rosa's illustration that his original intention was to have the monster as the frontispiece of *Through the Looking-Glass* (Huxley, 1976: 65 and 68).

The spelling and characters used for this initial version were archaic enough to preserve the intentions of the original title (Taylor, 1952: 21). The rest of the poem was written in the light of the disruptive effect of the first four lines during a family gathering with his cousins at Whitby, near Sunderland. It was originally Carroll's parody of his cousin Menella Smedley's poem called "The Shepherd of the Giant Mountains". This fact should not surprise Carroll's readers: the English writer is known to be very fond of producing parodies of other texts. When collecting material for the second part of his Alice saga, he decided to include the poem in the fantastic adventures of *Through the Looking-Glass*, published fifteen years after the first appearance of "Jabberwocky". Carroll's original intention was to publish the whole poem in two pages of reverse writing and he asked his publisher, MacMillan, to do so. Carroll eventually changed his mind, deciding to spare his readers the predictable difficulties with the mirror-effect of the initial verses and also to include an appropriate illustration on the poem's content. These are Carroll's words to his editor, in a letter dated 31 January 1869:

I have pretty nearly settled in my own mind that it will be too troublesome for the reader to have 2 pages of 'reverse' type to make out, and that we had better limit it to one or 2 stanzas (with perhaps a picture over them to fill the page) and print the rest of the ballad in the usual way. (Cohen & Gandolfo, 1987: 77)

The result of the discussion between Carroll and MacMillan is to be found in the course of Alice's curious adventures in *Through the Looking-Glass*: the young girl meets the White King in the first chapter, happens to read an obscure passage from a book and she thinks that "it's all in some language I don't know" (1994: 28). Alice is shocked about it but concludes that, being now in a Looking-Glass world, the text might demand a different readers' strategy: "if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again" (1994: 28).

Lewis Carroll, obsessed with inversion even in mathematics, was fascinated with the idea of mirror-reversal. He is known to have written some letters back to front. So, the puzzled reader either needed a mirror to decipher them or else he needed to start from the last word and proceed accordingly (see Fisher, 1975). By performing this "ritual", the seven-stanza text of the so-called "Jabberwocky" *apparently* ceases to be so unintelligible to Alice. Here is the first quatrain of what the puzzled protagonist reads:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves
And the mome raths outgrabe. (1994: 28)

Alice made use of a mirror to be able to read the poem. And yet, it cannot be understood in the conventional sense. It only fills her head with ideas which she is unable to describe in detail. “It seems very pretty”, Alice maintains, “but it’s *rather* hard to understand!” (1994: 30). In a completely understandable reaction, she is not prepared to admit the extent of her reading incompetence. Unfortunately, she was trained for a type of reading which “Jabberwocky” does not permit. However, Alice claims to have reached some degree of understanding when she utters that “*somebody* killed *something*: that’s clear, at any rate” (1994: 30).

The first stanza of “Jabberwocky” seems to supply a sort of setting for the action of the poem. But the verbal texture of the poem leaves the information far from explicit. The second stanza starts with the warning to a young protagonist –“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!”– and we learn about some strange creatures called the Jabberwock, the Jujub bird and the Bandersnatch. In the next stanza we find the *somebody* –according to Alice’s terms– killing the *something* with his “vorbal blade” and returning somewhere with the monster’s head as a trophy. The courageous doer of the heroic action is joyfully received in the arms of somebody, probably a paternal figure, who welcomes the protagonist with the terms “my beamish boy”. Finally, the first stanza is repeated, a structure which traditionally suggests a cyclical process and some degree of completeness or closure. In a letter to Mrs. Chataway asking permission to dedicate a new book to her daughter Gertrude, Lewis Carroll provides some information on the island where the Jabberwock is slain. We learn that this island is also to be the setting for *The Hunting of the Snark*. Unfortunately, although it confirms the final extermination of the hideous monster and announces the appearance of the Jujub and the Bandersnatch in Carroll’s new book, this revelation does little to solve the confusing poem in *Through the Looking-Glass*: “It is called ‘The Hunting of the Snark’, and the scene is laid in an island frequented by the Jujub and Bandersnatch –no doubt the very island in which the Jabberwock was Slain” (Hatch, 1933: 109).

At any rate, Carroll is obviously playing games with conventional ballad clichés in “Jabberwocky”. We instantly recognise the structure as a traditional narrative with young heroes and dragons eventually killed. However, Alice’s endless successive adventures do not allow her to read the poem so carefully. After admitting her difficulty in understanding the text, she suddenly jumps up and runs hastily towards the garden. When Alice comes across the live flowers later, she admits she has got *only* some ideas in her head about the previous poem. In fact, no successful reading of the “Jabberwocky” has taken place yet in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

It is only later in the book, when Alice meets Humpty Dumpty, an enormous egg-creature, that she is given a possible interpretation of the text. Humpty Dumpty’s exegesis is based on his mastery of words but, unfortunately, it only accounts for the first stanza of the poem and does not completely illuminate all the unfamiliar words to Alice. His approach states

the power of language itself: linguistic categories may have human qualities –“They have temper, some of them– particularly verbs, they’re the proudest –adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs– however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them!” (1994: 101). The large egg-creature believes that words must have a definite meaning: he laughs at Alice’s name for not meaning anything. And he prides himself on having everything under control:

“When *I* use a word” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean –neither more or less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master –that’s all.” (1994: 101)

From his point of view, meaning is both necessary and arbitrary. Therefore, he is determined to find some in “Jabberwocky”. Humpty Dumpty seems to be an expert on semantics and etymology as he explains some archaic and dialectal words in the poem and, particularly, introduces the original concept of *portmanteau* words, namely a neologism containing the meaning of the words which have been merged. For example, he says that *brillig* means “four o’clock in the afternoon –the time when you begin *broiling* things for dinner” and that *slithy* means “lithe and slimy” (1994: 102). In his preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*, published in 1876, Lewis Carroll refers to Humpty Dumpty’s concept as “two meanings packed in one word like a portmanteau” (Carroll, 1982: 731). The author also takes the opportunity to explain how certain words in the poem should be pronounced. But probably the most interesting part in the preface is the illustration of how to track the origin of a portmanteau word in “Jabberwocky”: “frumious”, a neologism formed by fuming and furious. According to Lewis Carroll, the process undergone, the result of a “perfectly balanced mind”, is as follows:

For instance, take the words “fuming” and “furious”. Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards “fuming”, you will say “fuming-furious”; if they turn, by even a hair’s breadth, towards “furious”, you will say “furious-fuming”; but if you have the rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say “frumious” (1982: 731)

Regardless of what we think of Humpty Dumpty’s doubtful interpretation, it is evident that the poem has got a clear syntactic and rhythmic structure which provides an architecture for the content and makes it perfectly credible. In this respect, Henry Holiday wrote the following comment on the apparent nonsense of “Jabberwocky” in 1898. He seems to imply that, thanks to an underlying order in this obscure poem, we may be compelled to look for some meaning beyond the defiant words. The explosive discourse is thus regarded as a creative text:

When the nonsense seems most exuberant, we find an underlying order, a method in the madness... Take the “Jabberwocky” for instance... The page looks, when we open it, like the wanderings of one insane: but as we read we

find we have a work of a creative genius... Whether the humour consists chiefly in the conscious defiance of logic by a logical mind, or in the half-conscious control of its lovely and grotesque fancies, in either case the charm arises from the author's well ordered mind. (Lennon, 1947: 237)

It is true that, despite the grotesque language found in her first reading, the multiple sounds suggest vague associations which fill Alice's head. But the words in the first stanza are meaningless to her. What renders the poem familiar to an English speaker like Alice is the syntactical structure: it follows conventional word order, it has got some function words (pronouns, connectors, English verbs and auxiliaries) and inflectional markers. This grammatical anatomy enables Alice to guess the function of certain obscure words: we can tell by the little girl's questions that she is able to recognise plural nouns (hence the question "what are 'toves'?"") and infinitives ("what's to 'gyre' and to 'gimble'?", 1994: 102). She feels the text *must* mean something and asks for help from the enormous egg-creature, because, as Alice has concluded from previous examples, he seems to be "very clever at explaining words" (1994: 101). Humpty Dumpty kindly proceeds with his etymological demonstration only after he has proudly reminded the young girl that he "can explain all the poems that ever were invented –and a good many that haven't been invented just yet" (1994: 101-102). Because of his arrogant attitude, Alice thinks that Humpty Dumpty is one of the most unfriendly characters she has met during her game-of-chess adventure in *Through the Looking-Glass*:

"Of all the unsatisfactory—" (she repeated this aloud, as it was a great comfort to have such a long word to say) "of all the unsatisfactory people I *ever* met —" She never finished the sentence for at this moment a heavy crash shook the forest from end to end. (1994: 108-109)

We should note how self-conscious of her language Alice is when uttering the final statement of the chapter. This metalinguistic awareness is also noticeable in the main character of Cortázar's *Rayuela*. Amongst other interpretations, Humpty Dumpty has been seen as a satirical figure representing the impenetrability and presumptuousness of literary critics (Sutherland, 1970: 94). In fact, this creature prides himself on being a lord of language. And yet, he fails to realise that his condition of existence is a linguistic structure itself: a nursery rhyme known to any Victorian reader. Alice repeats to herself the children's song at the onset of her conversation with Humpty Dumpty:

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall:
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty in his place again." (1994: 94)

Humpty Dumpty's existence is determined by the previous quatrain. The rhyme says he exists to the extent to which he sits on a wall and eventually falls. And so he does and so it will occur. Words are not passive in *Through the Looking-Glass*. They affect actions in such a fatalistic manner that

they might become eternally fixed. “Tweedledum and Tweedledee fight over their rattle not because they want to –quite the contrary– but because, in effect, the rhyme says they do, therefore they must” (Spacks, 1972: 272). In Humpty Dumpty’s case, a linguistic framework places the egg-creature on the wall and the reader is certain that he will soon have a great fall. Humpty Dumpty can only count on the king’s horses rescuing him after the inevitable accident but, at the same time, he knows they will not be able to assemble his body pieces together again. His interpretation of “Jabberwocky” is a linguistic *tour de force*. But his arrogant security is bound to have a boomerang-effect on him. The reason for that is that Humpty Dumpty’s interpretation of “Jabberwocky” is also conditioned by the nursery rhyme. He is an individual who tries to master words, fatally unaware of the fact that words have already conditioned all his actions and later literary exegesis. He puts forward an intentional interpretation of a text that he himself is constructing. His strategy cannot be regarded as innocent. He is confronting the Jabberwock’s monstrous form with his own biased reading, which additionally implies assigning a meaning to unknown words for Alice, the puzzled reader. He is limiting the significance of the poem in order to suit his philosophy: a model of arbitrarily semantical determination. Humpty Dumpty seeks to control the text and yet, his artificial interpretation can only make him fall down from the exegetical throne. The absurd arbitrariness of his *impenetrable* discourse on etymology leads him to face a semantical disaster. Only the king’s men may take care of him after all. Words will prevail and so will the initial nursery rhyme which gave Humpty Dumpty his existence in the first place.

However, the egg-creature is not the only individual who makes the effort to master the impenetrability of “Jabberwocky”. Lewis Carroll himself provided an adapted version of the “Stanza of Anglo-Saxon poetry”, namely the first quatrain of “Jabberwocky”, in 1855. After the supposedly technical glossary of the Anglo-Saxon terms found in the text, the English author added a sort of literal translation of the passage:

It was evening, and the smooth active badgers were scratching and boring holes in the hill-side; all unhappy were the parrots; and the grave turtles squeaked out.

There were probably sundials on the top of the hill, and the ‘borogoves’ were afraid that their nests would be undermined. The hill was probably full of the nests of ‘raths’, which ran out, squeaking with fear, on hearing the ‘toves’ scratching outside.

This is an obscure but deeply affecting relic of ancient poetry (Gardner, 1960: 191-192)

On one hand, we should note the enormous job done by Carroll in translating the poem. The modern version has uncovered nearly all the original occult meanings and expanded the mysterious setting for the future Jabberwock. On the other hand, we should also mention the striking differences between Carroll’s interpretation of the stanza and the original illustration produced by John Tenniel, included in Alice’s encounter with Humpty Dumpty. Both

Carroll's literary version and Tenniel's picture seem to be attempts to impose a transparent and realist discourse onto "Jabberwocky". And their efforts to fix the meaning like a mighty source of truth are not so different from Humpty Dumpty's intervention. They all seek to limit the openness and semantical magnitude of "Jabberwocky" through various mechanisms. Can they ever succeed? Except for the young protagonist of Carroll's poem, the monster seems to elude any final capture.

In February 1888, Lewis Carroll wrote the following letter to the editors of *Jabberwock* magazine. He was begged to give them permission to use the name of the famous creature as the title of the publication and also clarify the meaning of the fictional monster:

Mr. Lewis Carroll has much pleasure in giving to the editresses of the proposed magazine permission to use the title they wish for. He finds that the Anglo-Saxon word 'wocer' or 'wocor' signifies 'offspring' or 'fruit'. Taking 'jabber' in its ordinary acceptation of 'excited and voluble discussion', this would give the meaning of 'the result of much excited discussion'. (Cohen, 1979: 695)

Is Lewis Carroll alerting literary critics to predictable future dissertations on the subject of "Jabberwocky"? He seems to imply that the famous poem is to be the object of endless analysis, "much excited discussion". We wonder if Carroll could foresee the real controversy that his monster would produce for literary criticism. However voluble our interpretation of "Jabberwocky" might be, it should certainly avoid restricting any plurality of meanings in the text. In fact, Carroll could have rephrased the warning in the second stanza in the following terms: beware the Jabberwock, my reader. We might have been more prepared.

3. Julio Cortázar and the vorpal blade

We should now consider the extent to which Lewis Carroll is present in Cortázar's masterpiece, *Rayuela*, by analysing the question of language and the possible resonances of "Jabberwocky" in the novel. The Argentinian author is truly aware of the linguistic complexity of Lewis Carroll's literary works and, in this regard, he has declared that translating Alice's "suave insolencia" is a challenging job for any translator (Cortázar, vol. 3, 1994: 292). As for the controversial exegesis of Carroll's "Jabberwocky", in his review of Leopoldo Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres*, Cortázar compares the characters' theory of no-foolish remarks to the discussion between Humpty Dumpty and Alice: "la teoría del no-disparate, que me parece digna de aquella que, en torno a *Jabberwocky*, pronunciara el grave Humpty Dumpty para ilustración de la pequeña Alicia" (Cortázar, vol. 2, 1994: 174). In a letter to his friend Mercedes Arias, Cortázar provides an account of some books read in 1941. At the end of the list, he includes an extensive reference to Lewis Carroll and particularly to the issue of language in the his works. Interestingly, "Jabberwocky" is mentioned:

Ahora, please don't get excited, las obras de Lewis Carroll que encontré en un precioso Giant de la Modern Library. Sobre esto último le diré que desde hace mucho tiempo ansiaba conocer en su original *Alice in Wonderland*. No sólo no fue una decepción, sino un encantador y *profundo* pasaje a la tierra de las hadas. El lenguaje, los juegos de palabras, las incidencias, todo es de una finura y una gracia que recompensan mi lectura con harta abundancia. [...] ¿Le gusta a usted 'Jabberwocky', conoce *Through the Looking-glass*? (Domínguez, 1992: 83)

But preoccupation with language is very explicit in Cortázar's *Rayuela* when we look into the underlying search of the main character. The dissatisfied Horacio Oliveira, an Argentinian intellectual on a spiritual quest in Paris and Buenos Aires, is concerned with human means of expression: he believes that transforming one's language should precede any attempt to explore one's existence. All reality is multiple and constantly changing and Horacio finds it difficult to grasp:

la vida de los otros, tal como nos llega en la llamada realidad, no es cine sino fotografía, es decir que no podemos aprehender la acción sino tan sólo sus fragmentos eleáticamente recortados. (*Rayuela*, 646)

the life of others, such as it comes to us in so-called reality, is not a movie but still photography, that is to say, that we cannot grasp the action, only a few of its eleatically recorded fragments. (*Hopscotch*, 458)

Therefore, human language cannot rely on the dualistic linguistic tools of the past because they embody the weight of tradition and its static philosophical categories, such as time and space. Cortázar's vitalist point of view is opposed to a cerebrally dominated world. To transform human beings we need to change their mechanisms of knowledge in the first place. Horacio suggests a revolutionary attack on words, which he describes as "las perras palabras, las proxenetas relucientes" (*Rayuela*, 269) ["those bitchy words, those made-up pimps", (*Hopscotch*, 121)]. On the question of the search for a new language for literary expression, see Eduardo de Faria Coutinho (1980).

Horacio fights against the limitations of language. From his perspective, words –"las perras negras"– are a horrific restraint of secular connotations and escaping from them is certainly harmful:

Pero estoy solo en mi pieza, caigo en artilugios de escriba, las perras negras se vengán como pueden, me mordisquean desde abajo de la mesa. ¿Se dice abajo o debajo? Lo mismo te muerden. ¿Por qué, por qué, pourquoi, why, warum, perchè este horror a las perras negras? (*Rayuela*, 593-594)

But I'm alone in my room, I'm falling into tricks of writing, the black bitches get their vengeance any way they can, they're biting me from underneath the table. Do you say underneath or under? They bite you just the same. Why, why, *pourquoi*, *por qué*, *warum*, *perché*, this horror of black bitches? (*Hopscotch*, 416)

Oliveira's impression is that human beings need to revitalise language. For example, Horacio Oliveira's guidance also mentions brushing up one's words before using them:

Hace rato que no me acuesto con las palabras. Las sigo usando, como vos y como todos, pero las cepillo muchísimo antes de ponérmelas” (*Rayuela*, 233)

It’s been a long time since I went to bed with words on. I still wear them, like you or anybody else, but I give them a good brushing before I put them on (*Hopscotch*, 93)

And this could be done by abolishing traditional dichotomies, merging different language registers to describe reality and returning to the primitive meaning of words:

si seguimos utilizando el lenguaje en su clave corriente, con sus finalidades corrientes, nos moriremos sin haber sabido el verdadero nombre del día (*Rayuela*, 614)

we still use the language in its current key, with its current finalities, we shall die before ever knowing the real name of the day” (*Hopscotch*, 432).

The latter is illustrated in the following passage which hints at a plan to recover the true significance of the verb *to descend*. The impoverished word should undergo a process of punishment, renovation and recovery of its deserved semantic potential:

Lo que Morelli quiere es devolver al lenguaje sus derechos. Habla de expurgarlo, castigarlo, cambiar “descender” por “bajar” como medida higiénica; pero lo que él busca en el fondo es devolverle al verbo “descender” todo su brillo, para que pueda ser usado como yo uso los fósforos y no como un fragmento decorativo, un pedazo de lugar común (*Rayuela*, 611)

what Morelli is trying to do is give language back its rights. He talks about expurgating it, punishing it, changing ‘descend’ into ‘go down’ as an hygienic measure; but what he’s really looking for is to give back all its glow to the verb ‘descend’, so that it can be used the way I use matches and not like a decorative fragment, a piece of commonplace” (*Hopscotch*, 429)

Horacio enjoys playing with words. He has the habit of adding unnecessary *h* at the beginning of words when he is meditating or mocking his own discourse, for example:

Me apasiona el hoy pero siempre desde el ayer (¿me hapasiona, dije?)” (*Rayuela*, 231)

Today fascinates me, but always from the point of view of yesterday (did I say phascinate?)” (*Hopscotch*, 91)

The narrator’s explanation for this behaviour is that the character makes use of “las haches como penicilina” (*Rayuela*, 581) [“He used this *wh* the way other people used penicillin”, (*Hopscotch*, 407)].

This particular estrangement of language, also present in surrealists like Jacques Vaché, seems to echo the episode with the Lion and the Unicorn in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Suddenly Alice also starts playing with the letter *h*: “I love my love with an H (...) because he is Happy. I hate him with an H, because he is Hideous. I fed him with –with– with Ham-sandwiches and Hay. His name is Haigha and he lives–” (1994: 112).

Looking back to Cortázar's novel, linguistic games are constant throughout the text. On one occasion the protagonist comes across a document with a list of the members of a certain Committee from Burma. Reading the unfamiliar names, Horacio cannot help but write what he calls a "jitanjáfora", that is, a literary game which uses the phonetic and suggestive elements of language (*Rayuela*, 395, *Hopscotch*, 234). The concept of "jitanjáfora" was coined by Alfonso Reyes in 1929 and it certainly resembles the effect of Cortázar's *gliglico* and Carroll's experiment in "Jabberwocky". (Compare this with Nicholas Round's translation of "Jabberwocky", *La Jipijaraguera*). Other linguistic games in *Rayuela* include: *ispamerikano*, a language which is a funny transcription of Spanish as it is pronounced with an huge alteration of traditional orthography (see chapter 69), "los juegos en el cementerio" –opening the dictionary, the so-called cemetery with obvious critical connotations, and playing with the words as they are listed in the book–, and "las preguntas-balanza" between Horacio and his friends (see particularly chapter 41).

Because of his ambition to transcend language within a literary product, Cortázar's attitude, expressed in the novel through the sketches and notes of the mysterious Morelli, implies an interesting metafictional approach to instruments of communication and literary works produced with them. *Rayuela* is thus an application and theorisation of the validity of literary mechanisms, which become simultaneously related to the search for the meaning of human existence. The author himself has declared that:

Toda *Rayuela* fue hecha a través del lenguaje. Es decir, hay un ataque directo al lenguaje en la medida en que, como se dice explícitamente en muchas partes del libro, nos engaña prácticamente a cada palabra que decimos. (Harss & Dohmann, 1966: 285)

Procedures associated with Cortázar's admitted conflict with language are a clear divorce from traditional syntax, use of arbitrary punctuation and a mixed linguistic register containing foreign phrases, dialectal and educated expressions. Other mechanisms are the use of cliché, an overused trivial expression, but with all the words together or separated by hyphens (see Langowski, 1982: 49-152). The mechanism of the surrealist analogical prose, practised by Cortázar in novels like *Los premios* (1960), has also been mentioned as a way of going beyond the dual structures of reality (Garfield, 1975: 216-223). But probably the most relevant attempt is the creation *gliglico*, the language which is based on similar principles to the experiment displayed in "Jabberwocky". As a matter of fact, Carroll's poem is quoted by the male protagonist of *Rayuela* in one of his endless meditations: indeed, the first line of the second stanza of "Jabberwocky" appears during Horacio Oliveira's speculation on a possible way to achieve his metaphysical quest despite the barrier of language. Like Carroll's characters, he is extremely self-conscious about all his linguistic operations, constantly reflecting on the language he is using, playing with images and adding literary quotes and proverbial sayings to his stream of consciousness:

Seamos serios, Horacio, antes de enderezarnos muy de a poco y apuntar hacia la calle, preguntémonos con el alma en la punta de la mano (¿la punta de la mano?). En la palma de la lengua, che, o algo así. [...] preguntémonos si la empresa hay que acometerla desde arriba o desde abajo (pero qué bien, estoy pensando clarito, el vodka las clava como mariposas en el cartón, A es A, a rose is a rose is a rose, April is the cruelest month, cada cosa en su lugar y un lugar para cada rosa es una rosa es una rosa...). Uf. Beware of the Jabberwocky my son. (*Rayuela*, 209)

Let's get serious, Horacio, before we struggle up in a while and head for the street, let's ask ourselves a question while we have our soul in the palm of our hand (the palm of the hand? In the palm of our tongue, or something like that [...] let's ask whether we should attack from above or from below (but, hey now, I'm making sense, the vodka has pinned them like butterflies onto a tray, A is A, a rose is a rose is a rose, April is the cruelest month, everything in its place and a place for every rose is a rose is a rose...) Huf. Beware the Jabberwocky my son (*Hopscotch*, 72)

Horacio quotes first the poetical maxim of Gertrude Stein and then the first line of T. S. Eliot's "The Burial of the Dead", *The Waste Land*. For an interesting comparison between Lewis Carroll and Eliot, see Elisabeth Sewell (1972: 119-126). As for the reference to "Jabberwocky" in *Rayuela* we should note that Cortázar has included the preposition "of" which is not found in Carroll's original text.

We have already seen how the first stanza in "Jabberwocky" was partially illuminated by the excellent explanations of Humpty Dumpty. Now we should see how Cortázar makes use of Carroll's idea to create a similar language: the so-called *gliglico*. *Glíglico* is used exclusively between Horacio and his female partner Maga. It is their private means of communication. No other character in the novel utters any sentence in this language. Let us see a brief extract from a dialogue in which Oliveira asks Maga to tell him about her sexual relationship with another man, Gregorovich. Both characters include certain phrases in *glíglico* to refer to body reactions during sexual intercourse:

–¿Pero te *retila* la murta? No me vayas a mentir. ¿Te la *retila* de veras?
 –Muchísimo. Por todas partes, a veces demasiado. Es una sensación maravillosa.
 –¿Y te hace poner *los plíneos* entre *las argustas*?
 –Sí, y después *nos entretornamos los porcios* hasta que él dice basta basta, y yo tampoco puedo más y hay que apurarse, comprendés (*Rayuela*, 221) (Our italics for the *glíglico* words)

“– But does he retilate your murt? Don't lie to me. Does he really retilate it? / – A lot. Everywhere, sometimes too much. It's a wonderful feeling. / – And does he make you put your plinnies in between his argusts? / – Yes, and then we trewst our porcies until he says he's had enough, and I can't take it any more either, and we have to hurry up, you understand”, (*Hopscotch*, p. 83)

Gerald J. Langowski points out that “La palabra *murta* existe en español, y su connotación aquí es comprensible. Pero las palabras *plíneos*, *argustas* y *porcios* son invenciones de Cortázar, expresiones sugestivas, desprovistas de sentido” (1982: 150).

Immediately after this exchange of views, Horacio is very annoyed to hear about Maga's affair. He says that he finds *gliglico* too boring and criticises her for always repeating the same phrases. Maga feels irritated, responds that "El gliglico lo inventé yo" and that Oliveira's phrases are seldom truly *gliglico*. (*Rayuela*, 221) ["I invented Gliglish", (*Hopscotch*, 83)]. Later on in the book, Horacio leaves Maga, goes back to Buenos Aires and gives up thinking in the language they had shared: "la dulce lengua que tanto te gustaba chamuyar hace unos meses" (*Rayuela*, 557) ["the soft language that you liked to babble in so much a few months ago" (*Hopscotch*, 386)].

But probably the best known example of *gligligo* in Cortázar's *Rayuela* is chapter 68. It comes after several discussions amongst the characters about the role of language in our perception of the world and the dramatic influence it can have. One of the characters, Etienne, seems to be advocating a world free from the necessity to name things, namely a world in which showing, through alternative pictorial techniques, is more important than explaining: "Ustedes si no nombran las cosas ni siquiera las ven. Y esto se llama perro y esto se llama casa, como decía el de Duino. [...] hay que mostrar, no explicar. Pinto ergo soy" (*Rayuela*, 164) ["If you people can't name something you're incapable of seeing it. And this is called a dog and that's a house, as the guy from Duino used to say. You've got to show, [...] not explain. I paint, therefore I am", (*Hopscotch*, 35)]. It also follows Horacio's critical remarks on words, "las perras negras". Let us read the last part of chapter 68, when the physical contact between Maga and Horacio reaches its climax and the discourse is also disrupted accordingly:

Apenas se entreplumaban, algo como un ulucordio los encrestoriaba, los extrayuxtaba y paramovía, de pronto era clínón, la esterfurosa convulcante de las mátricas, la jadehollante embocaplúvia del orgumio, los esproemios del merpasmo en una sobrehumítica agopausa. ¡Evohé! ¡Evohé! Volposados en la cresta del murelio, se sentían balparamar, perlinos y márulos. Temblaba el troc, se vencían las marioplumas, y todo se resolviraba en un profundo pínice, en niolamas de argutendidas gasas, en carinias casi crueles que los ordopenaban hasta el límite de las gunfias (*Rayuela*, 533)

No sooner had they cofeathered than something like a ulucord encrestored them, extrajuxted them, and paramoved them, suddenly it was the clinon, the sterfurous convulcant of matericks, the slobberdigging rainmouth of the orgumion, the sproemes of the merpasm in one superhumitic agopause. Evohé! Evohé! Volposited on the crest of a murelium, they felt themselves being balparammed, perline and marulous. The trock was trembling, the mariplumes were overcome, and everything became resolvirated into a profound pinex, into niolames of argutentic gauzes, into almost cruel cariniers which ordopained them to the limit of their gumphies" (*Hopscotch*, 365)

After getting to the last sentence of the passage, the reader is likely to need a Humpty Dumpty expert on semantics in order to clarify the meaning of Cortázar's text. Unfortunately, no such character exists in *Rayuela*. There is no attempt made by any of the characters in the novel to give us an indication of the meaning of *gliglico*. And yet, with *gliglico* we get the same feeling as Alice after reading "Jabberwocky": our head is full of ideas.

We might even claim that chapter 68 lies in an erotic experience between two people. This suspicion arises from three aspects, which we believe are also present in “Jabberwocky”: the text’s musicality, the reader’s role of accomplice and the grammatical structure of the discourse.

First of all, the power of the spoken word. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the first time Alice finds “Jabberwocky” she just reads the poem in silence. Later on in the book she meets the arrogant Humpty Dumpty and his answer to Alice’s request to illuminate the meaning of the poem is the following: “Let’s hear it!” (1994: 101). Therefore, the little girl says it aloud. A similar effect occurs with *gliglico*. It is worth noticing that Cortázar’s text undergoes a transformation if read aloud by the reader. Thus, the obscure language acquires possible significance thanks to the powerful musicality of the passage. The following extract from Morelli’s notes seems to allude to the same effect: it insists on the convulsive and ludic structure of language, similar to jazz, when Morelli’s writing originates from blurred ideas if any. He seems to be referring to a sort of expressive discourse which is close to *gliglico*. Language itself, its rhythm and musical pattern unfolds in the text with no restriction from the writer’s hand:

¿Por qué escribo esto? No tengo ideas claras, ni siquiera tengo ideas. Hay jirones, impulsos, bloques, y todo busca una forma, entonces entra en juego el ritmo y yo escribo dentro de ese ritmo, escribo por él, movido por él y no por eso que llaman el pensamiento y que hace la prosa, literaria u otra (*Rayuela*, 564).

Why am I writing this? I have no clear ideas, I do not even have ideas. There are tugs, impulses, blocks, and everything is looking for a form, then rhythm comes into play and I write within that rhythm, I write by it, moved by it and not by that thing they call thought and which turns out prose, literature, or what have you (*Hopscotch*, 392).

Is Cortázar advocating a more authentic discourse through the power of sounds or is he just attacking rational language, the recipient of secular tradition? Perhaps both. What is certainly clear is the author’s use of *portmanteau* words, polysemic verbal phrases and other original neologisms. In chapter 68 we can also detect another important aspect in Cortázar’s creative work: the role of the reader. The open-endedness of the text demands our complete participation. Cortázar’s spokesman in *Rayuela* expresses this with the following words: “el verdadero y único personaje que me interesa es el lector, en la medida en que algo de lo que escribo debería contribuir a mutarlo, a desplazarlo, a extrañarlo, a enajenarlo” (*Rayuela*, 608) [“the true character and the only one that interests me is the reader, to the degree in which something of what I write ought to contribute to his mutation, displacement, alienation, transportation” (*Hopscotch*, 427)].

Like Lewis Carroll’s Alice, we might not be certain about the exact meaning of the *gliglico* phrases, and yet, the communicative dialogue between the reader and the text seems to be working to a sufficient extent. Not only do the sounds evoke some meaning to the Spanish-speaker, the *gliglico*

discourse also shows a familiar grammatical structure that can easily be perceived. Thanks to the syntactic skeleton, we somehow understand the content of the text as Alice did when confronted by “Jabberwocky”. She claimed that *somebody* had killed *something*. In *Rayuela* we might similarly claim that somebody reached an erotic climax with somebody else. Let us see how the structure of the passage would appear if we suppressed all the *gliglico* words and kept only the basic grammatical pattern:

Apenas se — algo como un — los — de pronto era el — se sentían —
temblaba el — se vencían las — y todo se — en un profundo — que los —
hasta el límite de las —.

However unintelligible the text might seem, we do find a logical progression which supports our perception of an act of sexual intercourse between two people. The participation of the reader is extremely important. The reader’s imagination should be the effective tool to reach some sort of comprehension of the *gliglico* text. Musicality, the syntactic structure and co-operation from the reader should coincide happily in chapter 68. And we believe that these elements are already suggested by Carroll’s “Jabberwocky”. Because, despite Humpty Dumpty’s explanations, Alice is also left on her own in order to make out the meaning of the poem. She has to play along as an active reader. And she can only fall back on her imagination, aided by the semantics lecture of the enormous authoritarian egg-creature, and on her competence of English syntax and inflectional elements. The suggestive morphological and phonetic content of “Jabberwocky” should do the rest.

Due to its rich form and content, Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* has been the victim of various appropriations. Alice’s focus on language has been especially influential in contemporary literature. The author’s original suggestion of *portmanteau* words and neologisms, as exemplified in “Jabberwocky”, has encouraged poetical and experimental works throughout our century. And the powerful surrealist trend has not been an exception. The openness and dialogic structure of the modern novel has certainly found inspiration in Carroll’s ludism and literary mechanisms. We wondered at the beginning of this article whether Julio Cortázar would merit an invitation to a fictional literary tea party alongside, say, such disciples of Carroll as James Joyce. Cortázar’s interest in language, illustrated by the experiment with *gliglico*, should suggest enough evidence to confirm his participation in such a hypothetical gathering. And, as we all know, Alice’s famous admirers are countless. The rabbit-hole is still dangerously inviting.

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