



“Chichen Itza.” *Online
Web Fonts.*

Ontology in the Short Stories of Julio Cortázar



Stromslegacy. Black Tribal Axolotl.

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Tribal Rabbit. Tattoo Tribes.

Before I Continue...



1. Have you ever thought about your existence?
2. Have you ever thought about your reality?
3. Do you know what ontology is?

Outline



- I. Significance of the Study
- II. Research Questions
- III. Review of Literature
- IV. Methods of Study
- V. The Life of Cortázar
- VI. The Short Stories
- VII. The Representation of Ontology in Cortázar's Short Stories

Significance of the Study



- Ontology can give us a new understanding of our existence.
- A better understanding of one of the the “Boom” authors of Latin America during the 1950s.

Research Questions



1. How is ontology represented in “Axolotl”, “Letter to a Young Lady in Paris”, and “The Night Face Up” by Julio Cortázar?
2. What is Cortázar’s life situation in París and Argentina when he wrote these short stories in the 50’s?

Review of Literature



Ontology in
Metaphysics

Ontology in
Literature

The purpose
and
objectives of
Cortázar's
stories

Ontology in Metaphysics



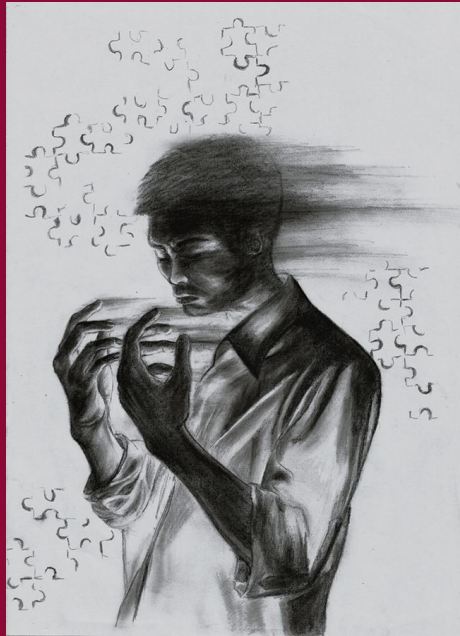
Philosophy



Metaphysics



Ontology



Non-Depressing Existentialism. *Odyssey*.

- To understand the world from a different perspective of the beyond (Bacchini vii)
- An “inventory of the universe” (Varzi 1)
- How people and objects take up space

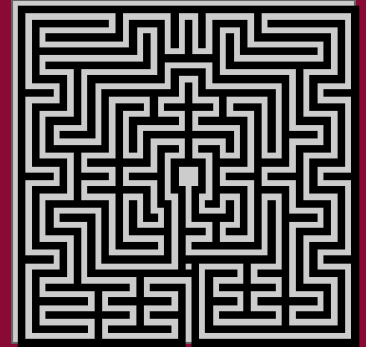
Ontology in Literature

(Merivale and Sweeney)



Characteristics of ontology in literature:

- A detective
- A representation of the world as a labyrinth
- A text or a letter
- Clues or evidence that don't make sense
- A missing person or person with a changed identity
- The failure to turn the page



*Labyrinth of St.
Bertin from St.
Omer, France.*

The Purpose and Objectives of Cortázar's Stories



- Protagonists contemplating their existence (Harris 6)
- Characters living through psychosis (Stavans 13)
- So that the reader can evaluate their own lives and see themselves through his work (“Del cuento breve y sus alrededores” 2)

Method of Study



To complete this study, I analyzed the life of Cortázar, his stories and how they are connected to ontology.

I analyzed the following short stories:

- “Axolotl” (1956)
- “Letter to a Young Lady in Paris” (1951)
- “The Night Face Up” (1956)



Julio Cortázar

- August 6th, 1916 - Brussels Belgium
- Grew up with asthma and stayed home reading Edgar Allan Poe
- Worked as a professor in Buenos Aires in 1932
- Left to París to work for UNESCO as a literary translator
- Traveled to support political movements
- In the 1960's became one of the "Boom" authors
- In 1984, he died from unknown cause, later determined as AIDS

“Axolotl”



This is the story about a man who loves visiting the axolotl to examine their species. He visits every day and contemplates what they are thinking. He sees that they are slow moving creatures and that they aren't fully developed. He would spend hours and days staring at the creatures. At the end of the story, he becomes one himself and is looking at his human self simultaneously. He is the axolotl and the human, and eventually becomes only the salamander with human thoughts.



“Letter to a Young Lady in Paris”



This story is a letter to a woman from a man who reluctantly moves from Buenos Aires to Paris. Immediately after arriving, he throws up a bunny. He hasn't done that in a very long time and starts to become concerned when more and more are coming out of his body. He doesn't know what to do, but he hasn't felt comfortable since the move. He doesn't want to be caught or put in an uncomfortable situation. At the end of the story, the readers realize this is a suicide note. The writer threw the bunnies out the window followed by his own body.



“The Night Face Up”



This story begins with a man riding his motorcycle through the city. He avoids crashing into a woman and ends up in the hospital. Every time he falls asleep, he ends up in another realm where he is being chased by the Aztecs who are hunting him. He keeps switching between the two worlds and can't decipher which is his reality. He always thought the modern world was his reality, but the story ends with him getting captured by the Aztecs.



Ontology in Cortázar's Stories: Analysis



The World
as a
Labyrinth

The Dual
Identity

Body
changes

Mental
changes

Dreams vs.
Reality

The World as a Labyrinth



- A labyrinth is a place of difficult access and transit (Oxford Living Dictionary).

The aquarium in “Axolotl” is a labyrinth because the protagonist keeps returning and never leaves.

In “The Night Face Up” the protagonist can’t seem to stay in one place. He keeps unwillingly moving from one world to the other.

The Dual Identity



- Identity from location
 - Axolotl (Mexican) in Paris
 - Cortázar living in Paris (dual Latin-American identity)
 - A man shifting from one world (the modern world) to the ancient world of the Aztecs
- Developing one's own narrative (Merivale and Sweeney 16)



“The Myth of Dual Identity.” *Grace Junkies*.

Body Changes



“Carta a una señorita en París.” *Deeblog.*

- Body changes make humans acknowledge their existence (Addis 8)
 - “Letter to a Young Lady in Paris”
 - The protagonist vomits 11 bunnies
 - He immediately has nausea upon his arrival to the apartment in Paris
 - “Axolotl”
 - The protagonist observes the salamander so much that at the end he becomes one

Mental Changes



- Immediately after becoming an axolotl, the protagonist realizes that he still has a human mentality.
 - He had more thoughts and human sentiments. He already knew that his mind was at a different level than the axolotl.
- Psychosis is also a mental change that is demonstrated in “Letter to a Young Lady in Paris” when the protagonist moves to Paris, he immediately knows that this was not the right decision. After vomiting 11 bunnies, he becomes neurotic and commits suicide.
- Neurosis makes people reevaluate their existence and their routine (Stavans 38).

Dreams and Realities



- Dreams and reality help us form our perspectives of our lives.
- In “The Night Face Up” the protagonist isn’t sure of what their reality is because they can smell in both worlds. There is nothing specifically that distinguishes one of the worlds from the other.

Conclusión



- Cortázar demonstrates that ontology is present in literature and he connects us with the environment of philosophy in Paris.
- We can conclude that Cortázar's contributions through his literature have given us information about ontology through:
 - The world as a labyrinth
 - The dual identity
 - Body changes
 - Mental changes
 - Dreams vs. reality
- Through his texts, we can create new perspectives about our own identities.

“

*All profound distraction opens
certain doors. You have to allow
yourself to be distracted when
you are unable to concentrate*

-Cortázar

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