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## **Fantastic Literature in Argentina in the 20th Century**

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December 8, 2005

### **Fantastic Literature in Argentina in the 20th Century**

While the two preeminent Argentine writers of the twentieth century, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), were more rivals than friends, the latter may be viewed as Borges' "hijo spiritual," or protégé (Coleman 59), and a comparative analysis of two of their most famous stories-- Borges' "El Sur" ("The South") and Cortázar's "La noche boca arriba" ("The Night Face Up")-- confirms this literary relationship. Borges, a predecessor of the Boom in Latin American literature, and Cortázar, a Boom writer, both proved influential to Luisa Valenzuela (1938- ), a member of the post-Boom, and author of the story "Aquí pasan cosas raras" ("Strange Things Happen Here"). Biographical and professional connections link the three authors as do textual affinities. Cortázar and Valenzuela both take up Borgesian themes: the notion of life as a dream, duality or the Other/Double, the circular nature of history, and the chaos of life. All three stories, Borges' "The South," Cortázar's "The Night Face Up," and Valenzuela's "Strange Things Happen Here," blur the boundaries between dream and reality and call into question human existence.

Born in Buenos Aires in 1899 of mixed British and Argentine ancestry, Borges was always torn between the romanticism of La Pampa and the European charms of Buenos Aires. Borges received much of his formal education in Geneva and was informally groomed by Ultraist writers in Spain. Blinded by a hereditary illness, Borges spent much of his life dictating poems to his mother. His stories and poems are often enigmatic and complex. One prominent Borges' critic puts it this way: "We have not understood a Borges story properly until all the details fit" (Shaw, Companion 100).

While not officially part of a literary movement, Borges is often seen as a precursor to the Boom in Latin American literature. His stories differ greatly from what was being written by his contemporaries. “The literary establishment was still interested in realism of the nineteenth-century variety, while some of the new novelists were trying to apply social realism to the presentation of Latin America’s grim realities... By expressing admiration for popular genres such as the adventure story, the detective novel, and science fiction, Borges offended both groups” (Rodríguez Monegal 354).

Born in Brussels of Argentine parents in 1914, Cortázar lived in Argentina from the time he was four until he was thirty-seven, at which time he moved to Paris, where he spent the rest of his life with his wife Aurora. Borges accepted and printed in the journal Los Anales de Buenos Aires Cortázar’s first major story “House Taken Over” (Stavans 63). “In his early days he was a sort of Borgian aesthete, a qualification to which he is not entirely invulnerable even today. But there was a change in mid-road... Nowadays... he travels along his own circuits” (Harss 208). Or in other words, “if there is one cohesive feature in all of Cortázar’s writing, it is probably the idea of the unrelenting quest for something other and more authentic” (Standish 51). Cortázar died of leukemia and heart disease in Paris in 1984. He left behind “numerous imitators and countless literary followers, including Argentines Luisa Valenzuela and Ana María Shua” (Stavans 62).

Cortázar is regarded as part of the Boom in Latin American literature, the generation of writers who exploded onto the international literary scene in the 1960s and 70s. Several of many characteristics which critic Donald Shaw attributes to Boom writers are the following: 1) the tendency to subvert the concept of chronological, linear time, 2) extensive use of symbolic elements, 3) the tendency to emphasize the ambiguous, irrational and mysterious aspects of

reality, sometimes even using absurdity as a metaphor for human existence, 4) the tendency to abandon realist settings of the traditional novel in favor of imaginary spaces, 5) the tendency to abandon the linear, ordered, logical structure of the traditional novel (which reflects a more or less ordered and understandable world), replacing them with another structure based on the spiritual evolution of the protagonist or with experimental structures that reflect the multiplicity of reality (Shaw, The Post Boom 4). We see all of these elements in Cortazar's "The Night Face Up." Other prominent Boom writers include Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), and Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru).

Born in 1938, Luisa Valenzuela is the daughter of Argentine writer Mercedes Levinson. Throughout Valenzuela's childhood her mother often had interesting guests, including Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Sábato, over for tea. Valenzuela became a journalist at a young age. Like Cortázar, Valenzuela spent many years in France. She still "lectures, travels and writes about reality, life and the need for the oppressed to find their own voices" (Martella 1).

Valenzuela is a prominent member of the post-Boom, successor to the Boom and a contemporary literary movement in Latin American literature. Shaw describes the post-Boom as "a gradual intensification of certain tendencies which were always present in some degree in the Boom... a change of emphasis rather than a new departure" (The Post Boom 6). While the Boom was almost exclusively male, the post-Boom includes a number of women writers. "The Post-Boomers write as if reality could be observed and reported, but with the realization that this is probably a convenient illusion" (Shaw, Companion 177). Other major post-Boom writers include Isabel Allende (Chile), Antonio Skármeta (Chile), Rosario Ferré (Puerto Rico), and Gustavo Sainz (Mexico). While Valenzuela shares a number of characteristics with Boom writers, according to Shaw she is clearly a member of the post-Boom due to her "sporadic

assertion that values survive that are worth struggling for and that contact with some kinds of writing can make us more self-aware" (The Post Boom 118). In particular, she brings awareness to the political oppression under the dictatorship in 1970s Argentina.

While the connection between Borges and Cortázar cannot be denied, there was also a rivalry between them: "One could even claim that Borges was Cortázar's antithesis; the two men exhibited opposing viewpoints on almost everything, were political antagonists, and understood literature very differently indeed" (Stavans 3). Yet overall their complex relationship was "marked by recognition of their individual talent and... by mutual respect" (4).

Some critics refer to Cortázar's work as a continuation, or even a culmination, of techniques that Borges merely attempted. In an article entitled "Borges's Puzzle of Paradoxes," Bruce Lorich argues that "few of the fictions of Borges are authentic fictional wanderings as precise, as well written, as emotionally unbending, and as mentally fulminating as Julio Cortázar's 'Axolotl'" (53). Borges often referred to "The South" as his best story, and even Lorich agrees: "In 'The South' Borges has, more successfully than in any other story, made fiction instead of theory or instructive pattern" (54). Yet he later goes on to say that "Borges is rarely the artist Cortázar is" (58).

Borges' "The South" is the story of Juan Dahlmann's death. The protagonist of the story, Dahlmann, is a librarian in Buenos Aires and a man who "considered himself profoundly Argentine." After an accident and a brief stay in the hospital, Dahlmann takes the train to the south of Argentina to rest at his country house. The train leaves him at a station quite far from the ranch and, while waiting for another form of transportation to arrive, Dahlmann goes into a nearby restaurant. Several gauchos pick a fight with him, and Dahlmann accepts their challenge. He walks outside knowing that this knife fight will probably be the end of him, but it is the death

he would have preferred. While on the one hand, the story seems as if it could be taken at face value, there are clues that not everything is what it seems. For example, the strange cat that appears in the café and the old gaucho that encourages Dahlmann to fight. These clues point to another version of the story: that Dahlmann died on the operating table and dreamed his trip to the south. “The story is... solipsistic and, basically, an Eleatic paradox” and is also “one of the most important man-against-himself conflicts ever written-- that of the identity of a solipsist” (Lorich 60).

Cortázar’s “The Night Face Up” is the story of an anonymous motorcyclist’s death. While driving along the streets of a modern city, which the reader may assume to be Paris, the protagonist, this anonymous motorcyclist, veers off the road to avoid a pedestrian. After the accident, he is rushed to the hospital and undergoes an operation. He then goes back in time to La Guerra Florida (the War of the Blossoms) in the jungles of Mexico, in which the Aztecs are gathering sacrifices. The hunters find him, and he becomes one of the sacrifices. Or conversely, he may have died on the operating table, just as Juan Dahlmann. The interesting twist in Cortázar’s story is that in the end, the motorcyclist realizes that “el sueño maravilloso había sido el otro, absurdo como todos los sueños” [“the marvelous dream had been the other, absurd as all dreams are”] (55; 76), that the jungle in Mexico, which seemed to be the nightmare, is real.

Valenzuela’s “Strange Things Happen Here” is about two thieves, Mario and Pedro, who live in Buenos Aires. They find a briefcase lying on a chair in a restaurant and decide to take it. Next, they find a man’s jacket lying on a car and take it as well. Then they wander the streets of Buenos Aires feeling as if they are being watched and followed by the police. They begin to feel as if they themselves *are* the portfolio and jacket. They also imagine that the briefcase contains a bomb. Near the end of the story, they enter a restaurant and imagine themselves imprisoned by

the chairs which the waiters are stacking on the tables around them. Fear of being caught convinces them to leave the briefcase and jacket, and they are finally able to sleep well, so well that when they awaken they wonder if the explosion they heard in the distance was a dream.

Borges' and Cortázar's stories both include two poles: civilization and barbarism, the present and the past. "The South" presents two settings: contemporary Buenos Aires (circa 1930) and the southern plains of Argentina known as the Pampas. Borges' story "deals with the destiny of a man torn apart by his double allegiance to European culture and life and to native barbarianism" (Rodríguez Monegal 377). "The Night Face Up" occurs on the modern streets of Paris and in the ancient jungles of Mexico, during the War of the Blossoms. The protagonists begin the story in a modern city (Buenos Aires and Paris) and travel back in time to sparsely populated places. They travel to where the gauchos and the Aztecs live, or in other words, to where the savages live.

These two settings in the past, the south of Argentina and the jungles of Mexico, have a few things in common. As in many Borges stories, especially those containing labyrinths and libraries, the setting appears chaotic. Neither the protagonist nor the reader knows where they are exactly. This same confusion is present in the jungle of Cortázar's story. Both protagonist and reader are lost, just as they are lost in life. There is no path to follow, just as the motorcyclist has no path to follow in the jungles of Mexico. Technically, there is no past nor present in these stories, but rather time is subverted (Wright 32). The following description of Cortázar could almost describe all three writers: "An ardent student of Surrealism, Cortázar takes playful liberties with time and space, bringing us a world of terror and anguish just below the world we think we know" (Coleman 60). In other words, he "establishes a bridge and a sense of continuity between past and present" (Stavans 39).

Instead of two distinct settings, Valenzuela's "Strange Things Happen Here" takes place entirely in Buenos Aires but the action is divided between the open spaces of the city streets and the closed interiors of bars. Yet there is still the same sense of confusion about what exactly is happening. While Borges' and Cortázar's stories play with time and space, Valenzuela's story seems to take liberties only with dimensions, or with different versions of reality. There is no time travel in "Strange Things Happen Here;" instead, the strange things happen in the here and now. Instead of transformations of setting, Mario and Pedro themselves transform and see their world transfigured. Yet they also may have dreamed the events of their story.

Borges, Cortázar, and Valenzuela's protagonists possess varying degrees of anonymity. While "The South" has a protagonist with a full name, Juan Dahlmann, the main character in "The Night Face Up" is a nameless everyman. Cortázar's use of the anonymous motorcyclist implies that any person may lose him/herself in a dream and in the past. What the reader does learn about Cortázar's protagonist, s/he learns through his actions. For example, in the beginning of the story the motorcyclist seems to be an easygoing man while riding his motorcycle, yet he also shows genuine concern for other human beings. Immediately after the accident, he inquires about the woman that caused the accident. Valenzuela uses Mario and Pedro, two thieves, as her two protagonists. They are not as complex or as fleshed out as Borges' Juan Dahlmann nor as anonymous as Cortázar's motorcyclist. In using these desperate urban protagonists, Valenzuela highlights the tragedy of poverty in Latin America. According to Donald Shaw, the story is ironic because Valenzuela's "main characters, instead of being right-thinking people with whom we can identify easily, are a couple of penniless young men living on their wits" (The Post-Boom 100).

Aside from the fantastic genre and tone, certain plot events also link these stories. In “The South” and “The Night Face Up” both protagonists undergo accidents and operations, after which they do not wake up in hospitals but in other places and times. The motorcyclist of “The Night Face Up” has an accident in the street. When a woman walks into the crosswalk, the protagonist must veer suddenly so as not to hit her. He is thrown from his bike, and an emergency vehicle soon arrives. In the hospital an infection develops and later a fever. On the other hand, Juan Dahlmann strikes his head on a window while trying to simultaneously read in the dark and walk downstairs. After their respective accidents, both men go to hospitals for indeterminate lengths of time. For Dahlmann “eight days passed, like eight hundred years.” While “Strange Things Happen Here” does not involve accidents, operations, or even hospitals, a similar sense of danger and violence pervades the story. While Borges’s story portrays the Pampas as dangerous and wild in 1939, in Valenzuela’s story Buenos Aires seems to be the more dangerous place in the 1970s. Mario and Pedro wander the streets of Buenos Aires with their stolen goods, presumably imagining themselves as the next *desaparecidos*. If caught with stolen goods, common criminals would not even be missed when they disappeared.

Juan Dahlmann and the motorcyclist both die at the end of the stories. Neither returns to reality. From time to time they are able to perceive hints of reality. They overhear the doctor for a moment or glimpse his scalpel. The motorcyclist realizes that “como sueño era curioso porque estaba lleno de olores” [“it was unusual as a dream because it was full of smells”] (49; 69). The reader may assume that neither returns to his modern city, nor to his libraries and motorcycles. There are two interpretations: 1) that they died in the hospital and dreamed their adventures, or 2) that they truly traveled into the past and died there. In “Strange Things Happen Here” Mario

and Pedro essentially return to where they were at the beginning of the story; that is, they are back to having nothing.

“The Night Face Up” and “Strange Things Happen Here” share the common motif of the fugitive. The motorcyclist in Cortázar’s story is fleeing the Aztec hunters in the jungle, while Mario and Pedro are running from police (who may or may not be pursuing them) on the streets of Buenos Aires. All three characters are propelled by an adrenaline rush.

Each story projects a tone of terror and apprehension. Borges, Cortázar, and Valenzuela deliberately incite a sense of confusion and anxiety in their readers. These stories are full of violence: accidents, operations, knives, fights and danger. The characters are unable to distinguish between empirical reality and illusion, and Borges, Cortázar, and Valenzuela want the reader to experience the same perplexity. They want the reader to feel as lost as their protagonists.

Some readers might confuse these stories with the popular genre known as magical realism. Yet “magical realism is quite different from the fantasies of Borges and Cortázar and should not be confused with them, because of its tendency to see actual reality ‘out there’ as in some sense magical, rather than creating a fantastic reality” (Shaw, Companion 91). Doris Wright, in her article “Fantastic Labyrinths in Fictions by Borges, Cortázar, and Robbe-Grillet,” attributes the similarities between “The South” and “The Night Face Up” to their common roots in “the Fantastic” and the theme of the Labyrinth (29). Valenzuela’s “Strange Things Happen Here” also shares elements of the fantastic, and the streets of Buenos Aires indeed appear labyrinthine. Wright’s article goes on to paraphrase Tzvetan Todorov’s “essential requirements of the Fantastic genre: constant creation of doubt within the mind of the reader about the reality or illusoriness of what is being shown” (29), traits which all three of the stories share.

The stories have various levels. From an autobiographical standpoint, “The South”’s Juan Dahlmann resembles Borges very much. Both are librarians living in Buenos Aires. Both come from military families and therefore feel pressured to be men of action and to die honorable deaths. “Another theme... recurrent in Borges’ fiction is that of the man brought up in the city who has to face a rural destiny” (Rodríguez Monegal 83). Furthermore, Borges once had an accident very similar to the one that Dahlmann has in the story. “Toward the end of 1938, under circumstances he has told in interviews and fictionalized in his story “El Sur”... Borges nearly died of septicemia. This delirious ordeal, which also caused him to fear for his sanity, soon was revealed, however, as an incredible stroke of good fortune” in that it led to Borges’ creation of the fiction (Irby 93). In the story, Dahlmann “subió con apuro las escaleras; algo en la oscuridad le rozó la frente- un murciélago, un pájaro?” [“hurriedly took the stairs. Something in the dimness brushed his forehead- a bat? a bird?”] (525; 174).

On a psychological level, Dahlmann is perhaps in the end the man that Borges wanted to be. In other words, “Dahlmann’s rural adventure becomes in Freudian terms an illusion, a subjective wish-fulfillment of the death he would have preferred” (Bell-Villada 87). “La verdad es que Dahlmann leyó poco” [“The truth is, Dahlmann read very little”], and while reading Arabian Nights on the train, Dahlmann “cerraba el libro y se dejaba simplemente vivir” [“closed his book and allowed himself simply to live”] (527; 176). He picks up the knife and becomes the man of action that everyone wanted him to be. Borges could never put his books down; he never picked up the knife.

Interpreting the story from a patriotic perspective, “The South” is filled with symbols of Argentina. Its very title refers to a province which is typically Argentine, the Pampas. Borges describes the South as “an older and more stable world” (176). This part of the country is full of

cattle, one of the products for which Argentina is famous, and Dahlmann observes bulls from the window of the train. In his story, Borges describes the South as a place where “no turbaban la tierra elemental ni poblaciones ni otros signos humanos. Todo era vasto, pero al mismo tiempo era íntimo y de alguna manera, secreto” [“the elemental earth was not disturbed by settlements or any other signs of humanity. All was vast, but at the same time intimate and somehow secret”] (527; 177). The Pampas are inhabited by gauchos, several of whom even appear in the story, including the man in the restaurant who appears to live “fuera del tiempo, en una eternidad” [“outside time in a sort of eternity”] (528; 178). According to one critic, “bravery is implicit in the very title: the word ‘South’ has overtones of romantic violence in Argentina that are comparable to those of ‘the West’ in the United States” (Bell-Villada 85). Argentine cowboys typically carry knives and Dahlmann dies at the hands of a gaucho during a knife fight. “When Dahlmann is challenged to a knife duel in the pampas, there are some echoes of the day in 1934 when Borges saw a man killed... But it is not the plot (a dream or a nightmare Borges once had that now is Dahlmann’s) but the general atmosphere which is rooted in the 1934 experience” (Rodríguez Monegal 262). The violence and tone of the story also reflect Argentine politics. “During the Peronist years Borges must have felt like Dahlmann and probably dreamed of a similarly savage ending” (Rodríguez Monegal 427).

Cortazar’s anonymous motorcyclist bears at least one similarity to the author: both sustained motorcycle accidents on the streets of Paris. The story is “inspired by a 1952 accident Cortázar suffered while riding a Vespa in France” (Stavans 39). Rather than centering on Argentine nationalism, Cortázar’s story is about Mexico and its indigenous history. Above all, it is about the War of the Blossoms. The motorcyclist ends up the victim of Aztec hunters. He is an involuntary martyr. Instead of confronting his pursuers, like Dahlmann, he makes the

undignified decision to flee. Yet his death is typical of the past into which he has traveled. It is not surprising that Cortázar would eschew an Argentine setting and Argentine motifs, since “like Borges, he has always been something of an expatriate at heart” (Harss 209-10). Yet unlike Borges, Cortázar actually left Argentina.

While Valenzuela has little in common with her protagonists, Mario and Pedro, she does share one important autobiographical and national event with them: the experience of living through the Argentine dictatorship in the 1970s and the attendant feeling of terror and uncertainty of living under political oppression. Mario and Pedro see police everywhere. They even watch as students are dragged out of a café by the police, possibly to join the other *desaparecidos*. One passage expresses the way the Argentine people must have looked back on the time before the dictatorship: “Mario rememora con nostalgia los tiempos (una hora atrás) cuando podían hablarse en voz alta y hasta reír” [“Mario nostalgically remembers the time (an hour ago) when they could talk out loud and even laugh”] (10; 6). Valenzuela aptly conveys the loneliness of living in a militarized state, that is to say, in a place no one can be trusted. Mario, Pedro, and their new unemployed friend go out to eat together and “los tres descubren una idéntica necesidad de poner orden y relatan minusciosamente desde que eran chicos hasta estos días aciagos en que tantas cosas raras están pasando” [“the three of them discover an identical need to relate their life stories in full detail, from the time when they were little to these fateful days when so many strange things were happening”] (15; 11). This passage conveys the need for communication that the people of Argentina must have felt under censorship.

Another key theme in Valenzuela’s work, which is closely linked to that of political oppression, is that of fear. “Strange Things Happen Here,” from Valenzuela’s 1975 collection of the same name, explores the “subtle transition from externalized fear to surreptitious fear”

(Fernando 683). The protagonists of the story are unable to even ask questions: “at times when everything is clear, all sorts of questions can be asked, but in moments like this the mere fact of still being alive condenses everything that is askable and diminishes its value” (9). Valenzuela evokes “a chaotic reality... not to comment on reality as such but to probe the mysterious irrationality of Argentine political life” (Shaw, Companion 190). While Boom writers may have used this type of absurdity as a metaphor for everyday life, Valenzuela, as a post-Boom writer, uses it to portray the strange but real terror of life in 1970s Argentina.

Valenzuela also depicts the extreme frustration of urban poverty. Mario tries to imagine what a nameless unemployed man crying in the streets could have been thinking: “I can’t stand it anymore... If I die right here and now, maybe I can slip through the holes made by my tears in the asphalt and in a thousand years I’ll have turned into oil so that somebody else like me, in the same circumstances...” (9). The story refers to the “blank faces of a weekday,” the “terrible wilderness of workdays,” and the protagonist’s “dream of leaving or of derailing a train or something” to relieve the tension (5, 7, 11).

On an existential level, all three stories deal with the theme of the double/the other. All three stories contain transformations and show two sides to their protagonists. In “The South,” a mild-mannered librarian becomes a hero and a man of action. Juan Dahlmann is a librarian that leads a fairly simple life, yet at the same time he is a hero in a restaurant in the south. “En la discordia de sus dos linajes, Juan Dahlmann (tal vez a impulso de la sangre germánica) eligió el de ese antepasado romántico, o de muerte romántico” [“In the contrary pull from his two lineages, Juan Dahlmann (perhaps impelled by his Germanic blood) chose that of his romantic ancestor, or that of the romantic death”] (525; 174). He refuses to allow the peons to make fun of him. He accepts the knife fight, although he knows it is not going to be fair. He defends what

is right and dies an honorable death. “Si en Dahlmann no había esperanza, tampoco había temor” [“While there was no hope in Dahlmann, there was no fear either”] (529-30; 179).

In “The Night Face Up,” a man, who was once a tough motorcyclist, finds himself running scared through the jungle. The motorcyclist is also a hero, in the sense that he manages to avoid hitting a pedestrian. He literally sacrifices himself to save her. Yet later, when he enters the dream (which in the end, is reality), he ends up a victim of the hunters, an Aztec sacrifice. “The theme of the double, with its infinite variations, is a constant in Cortázar’s work. It can take an oneiric form as in the story ‘La Noche Boca Arriba’ (‘On His Back Under the Night’) where a man in his sleep retreads ancestral paths” (Harss 239).

Likewise, Valenzuela uses the theme of the Other, when her protagonists transform, or at least seem to transform, from people to things while being pursued by the police. “No son ya Pedro y Mario los que caminan, son un saco y un portafolios convertidos en personajes... esos dos elementos tan ajenos a ellos que los poseen a ellos, los envuelven sobre todo ahora” [“It’s no longer Pedro and Mario walking, it’s a jacket and a brief case that have turned into people... these two objects that are alien to them and yet possess them, envelop them”] (7). Valenzuela’s protagonists also show their duality when the two thieves become good samaritans. Mario and Pedro eventually leave the stolen items and befriend an unemployed man. Even the setting in “Strange Things Happen Here” shows a bizarre duality, when the bar seemingly metamorphoses into a jail as the bartender stacks chairs on tables.

Another common thread in the three stories is the repetitiveness of history, or the circular nature of time. As Ilan Stavans puts it in Julio Cortázar: A Study of the Short Fiction, the thesis of “The Night Face Up” is “unquestionably Borgesian: nothing in a person’s life is truly original; every life is an endless chain of repetitions that have populated humankind since the

beginning” (39). Valenzuela’s story starts where it ended; Mario and Pedro still have nothing at the end of the day. “Por fin abren la puerta del departamento sin miedo, y se acuestan sin miedo, sin plata y sin ilusiones” [“Finally they open the door of the apartment without fear, and go to bed without fear, without money, and without illusions”] (16; 12). Compared to Juan Dahlmann and Cortázar’s motorcyclist, who both die in the end, Mario and Pedro are lucky. Mario even hears, or perhaps dreams of, a bang in the middle of the night, which the reader may assume to be the explosion of the brief case which Mario carried around all day.

Closely linked to this theme of the repetitiveness of history is that of destiny.

Valenzuela’s story states that “al fin y al cabo es sólo cuestión de azar” [“when all is said and done it’s only a question of chance”] (8; 4). While Mario and Pedro are waiting for the man sipping his vermouth to leave the restaurant so they can take the brief case, they realize that he may just as easily end up taking it. Yet in Borges’ story, Juan Dahlmann is heading towards his destiny; what happens in the end is what was meant to happen.

Biographical connections as well as textual affinities connect the three Argentine authors Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, and Luisa Valenzuela. Together their work spans the twentieth century and charts the progression of Argentine literature. Borges, a precursor to the Boom in Latin American literature, Cortázar, a member of the Boom, and Valenzuela, a prominent member of the post-boom, have all gained considerable international audiences. Similarities in setting, tone, characters, and themes link the stories “The South” by Borges, “The Night Face Up” by Cortázar, and “Strange Things Happen Here” by Valenzuela. These three stories all show the duality of man, the idea of life as a dream, and the repetitiveness of history. Borges, Cortázar and Valenzuela exemplify the genre of Fantastic literature.

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### Honors Senior Project Approval

Form 3 – Submit with completed thesis. All signatures must be obtained.

Name of candidate: Rebecca Chambers

Department: Foreign Language and Literature

Degree: B.A. - Spanish

Full title of project: Fantastic Literature in Argentina in the  
20th Century

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Approved by:

Shirley S. Mason 12-9-05  
Project Advisor Date

Shirley S. Mason 12-9-05  
Department Chair Date

John S. McRae 12-9-05  
Honors Program Director for Honors Council Date