

# Hopscotch Study Guide

## Hopscotch by Julio Cortázar

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# Plot Summary

Hopscotch is an account of the misadventures of Horacio Oliveira, a discontent Argentinean intellectual in his forties. He wanders 1950s Paris with his mistress La Maga and a band of bohemian cohorts, but a series of missteps and personal tragedies send him packing back to Buenos Aires. There, he encounters still greater tests of his sanity in the company of his childhood friend, Traveler. Hopscotch is a portrait of a creative soul stymied by an inability to act.

The story opens with Horacio searching the bridges of Paris for his mistress La Maga, who has disappeared. Horacio and Maga are members of the Serpent Club, a coterie of artists, writers, musicians, and intellectuals who convene in the evening to drink, listen to music, and engage in dialectical arguments about every facet of art and life.

Horacio lives in a small flat with Maga, but the relationship becomes horribly strained when her child, Rocamadour, comes to live with them. Horacio dissects every part of his life, and after much agonizing, he begins an affair with a wealthy Parisian, Pola, and convinces himself that Maga is sleeping with Ossip Gregorovius, another member of the Club. Eventually, he walks out on Maga, and after a long night walking in the rain - where he sees an elderly writer struck by a car - he returns home to find virtually the entire Club there. Later that night, Rocamadour dies.

Not long after, La Maga disappears. Horacio and his friend Etienne visit the old man Horacio saw struck by a car. He turns out to be Morelli, an iconoclastic writer and literary critic much beloved of the Serpent Club. That night, the Club goes to Morelli's flat to assemble his new work, a novel that can be read in any order. There, a member of the Club, Babs, attacks Horacio for what he did to La Maga. The Club disbands. Horacio retreats to a bridge, where he meets a homeless woman, Emmanuele. They have sex but are interrupted by the police, who arrest both of them.

Horacio returns to Buenos Aires, stopping at La Maga's home of Montevideo on the way. He is met in Argentina by his old friend Manolo Traveler, a worker at a circus who has never left the country. Traveler is married to a former pharmacist, Talita. He begins work as a traveling gabardine salesman, and moves in with an old girlfriend, Gekrepten, in the same hotel as the Travelers. Horacio resolves to spend more time with them, to observe their seemingly happy marriage.

Traveler gets Horacio a job with the circus, and they begin to spend most of their time together. The strong bond between Horacio and Traveler begins to put a strain on the Traveler's marriage, and Talita begins to suspect a romantic tension growing between her and Horacio.

Eventually, the owner of the circus sells it to buy a mental asylum. Traveler, Talita, and Horacio all move to the hospital to begin new jobs. While there, Horacio begins to confuse Talita with La Maga. One night, he sees her playing hopscotch in the courtyard - a game that has come to represent for him his search for an unattainable contentment.



He talks to her for the first time about La Maga, and the pity she shows for him moves him to kiss her. The next morning, Traveler goes to Horacio's room to talk to him. Horacio threatens to kill himself, causing a commotion in the hospital. Traveler talks to Horacio about their relationship and Horacio's mental stability, but in the end, Horacio jumps. He survives, but all three employees are fired.



# **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 73, 1, 2, 116**

## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 73, 1, 2, 116 Summary**

Hopscotch is an account of the misadventures of Horacio Oliveira, a discontent Argentinean intellectual in his forties. He wanders 1950s Paris with his mistress, La Maga, and a band of bohemian cohorts, but a series of missteps and personal tragedies send him packing back to Buenos Aires. There, he encounters still greater tests of his sanity in the company of his childhood friend Traveler. Hopscotch is a portrait of a creative soul stymied by an inability to act.

In Chapter 73, Horacio greets us with a question: how can we be cured of the "colorless fire" that seems to engulf the streets of Paris, stripping it of meaning? He is a writer, concerned that the codified rules governing art and literature have rendered the search for truth impossible. In Chapter 1, Horacio searches the Pont des Arts for his mistress La Maga. He is searching her traditional nighttime haunts. Horacio and La Maga met last winter in this neighborhood, at a store where he was looking at a stuffed monkey. Horacio is an intellectual concerned with order, and La Maga's meandering manner confounds him. Now, she has disappeared, and he is disconsolate.

In Chapter 2, Horacio recalls the joyous early days of his affair with La Maga, the days before her son, Rocamadour, came to live with them. Back then, Rocamadour is staying with an old woman in the country. For Horacio, La Maga is a witness to his search for unity in his life. Rocamadour - and what has happened to him - destroys that quest for Horacio. He laments that he can never finish the novel he longs to write, that being with the La Maga is the closest he'll ever be to transcendence. In Chapter 116, he quotes Morelli, his ideal author, in arguing that a novel should be a surrogate scenario into which the reader can insert himself.

## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 73, 1, 2, 116 Analysis**

Cortazar has structured Hopscotch so that it can be read in two ways. Firstly, one can read Chapters 1-56 straight through and skip the remaining ninety-nine. Otherwise, one can read the entirety of the book in an order that Cortazar provides in a "Table of Instructions." In this order, the "expendable chapters" are interspersed throughout the narrative of the first fifty-six, creating a sort of footnoted version, including commentary by Horacio and his literary idol Morelli, as well as additional scenes alluded to but not witnessed in the first two books. For the sake of thoroughness and coherence, these summaries are placed in the second order that Cortazar recommends.



The first four chapters of *Hopscotch* together provide a sort of prologue by our narrator, Horacio Oliveira. The reader enters the story in medias res - in the middle of the narrative - with Horacio alone and searching for his missing mistress. There are allusions to Maga's child Rocamadour, and to Berthe Trepas, whom he does not meet until he has left Maga. These chapters also serve as an apologia of sorts. Horacio states that "I begin to think that it makes just as much sense to model a doll out of crumbled bread as to write the novel I will never write" (15). He goes on to quote Morelli in a passage that indicates that a truly modern writer must make engaging the reader directly his primary focus. As such, Horacio is indicating that what one is reading will be a sketch of sorts: snapshots seen through his eyes.

It is this mindset that will become the central focus of the novel. Horacio cannot stand disorder, meaninglessness, disconnection. He is forever searching for a unifying logic, dissecting his experiences as they happen, rendering him unable to experience anything. Even the final moment of Chapter 2, as he recalls La Maga's touch and her tongue, he is attempting to reorder these memories into descending importance.



# Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 3, 84, 4, 71, 5, 81, 74

## Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 3, 84, 4, 71, 5, 81, 74 Summary

With Chapter 3, the point of view changes to third person omniscient. Horacio is in bed with La Maga, smoking as she sleeps. He is ruminating on the idea of choice, that every choice to do something contains in it the inverse choice not to do something else. He considers how easily he becomes caught up in these circular dialectical arguments with himself. He has always lived by Socrates dictum that all he knows is that he knows nothing. How, he wonders, can anyone take action if this is true? La Maga wakes, and he tells her what he has been thinking. She retorts that it is he who can never take action. He is forever, she says, observing life as though it were a painting.

In Chapter 84, Horacio pastes some leaves to a lampshade. Separately, Ossip and Etienne — members of the Club — visit him, and only Etienne notices the leaves. Horacio posits that while Etienne did notice the lamp, he did not notice how distracted Horacio was by Pola, who is ill. This points out to him that man only is capable of taking in certain stimuli to the cost of all else. In Chapter 4, Horacio and La Maga sit on a bench as La Maga tells him about Rocamadour for the first time. She came to Paris to experience the world, but Horacio stipulates she could have gone anywhere. After they meet, her friends and his come together to form the Serpent Club. The Club is often infuriated by her ignorance of their topics of conversation. In groups, they frequently mock her, but individually, they want to protect and teach her, though she rarely seems to grasp the lesson. Morelli, in Chapter 71, critiques man's modern yearning for the "millenary kingdom," or a nostalgic, innocent past. He argues that nothing in life can be achieved looking to the past.

In Chapter 5, Horacio and La Maga make love for the first time in a dingy hotel. Over time, La Maga becomes savage during sex, biting Horacio and drawing blood. He, in return, matches her, dominating her in bed. Eventually, Maga develops a fantasy of Horacio killing her in the throes of sex, only to resurrect her as his intellectual equal. Chapter 81 is a quote from Jose Lezama Lima, calling for the development of new artistic forms, followed in Chapter 74 with Morelli's definition of the nonconformist. For Morelli, the nonconformist is the man who denies existing forms, the generally accepted and the traditional. He only concerns himself for with overlooked minutia and grand ideas.





## Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 3, 84, 4, 71, 5, 81, 74 Analysis

These chapters delineate the obstacles facing Horacio and La Maga's relationship both with each other and with the Club. Horacio longs reason his way towards enlightenment; La Maga is an aesthete, living life experientially, like a work of art.

Horacio, in Chapter 3, lays out his central dialectical fixation, that every action taken in life is also the conscious rejection of that action's opposite. In other words, he can't choose to do something without also choosing not to do anything else. His experience with the lampshade illustrates for him and us this point, which he takes one step further, saying that life as a whole, being finite, necessitates the abandoning of certain learning in favor of certain other. The result is that Horacio rarely chooses to do anything in his life. He is always choosing not to, choosing to abandon and retreat from people, places, projects, and ideas. He cites Hamlet and Mahabharata - literary meditations on inaction - but unlike their protagonists, he chooses inaction as a course.

La Maga, conversely, chooses to experience everything. Her world is a phenomenal world, which is to say that it is one to be experienced and reacted to. Her role within the Club becomes ambiguous. As a central figure in its founding, her presence is an inevitability, but she cannot keep up with arguments that take place at the meetings. Moreover, when Horacio or one of the other members tries to explain something to her, she only listens until she hears something - a word or a turn of phrase - that strikes her as profound. La Maga is aware that she is ill-equipped intellectually. As a result, she begins to lionize the stronger members. She longs to be destroyed and reborn as their equal.

Morelli and Lima, speaking abstractly, seem to indicate that the ideal conformist — that person who embraces both the seemingly insignificant and the seemingly insurmountable (the pebble and the star) — ignoring everything in between, is one part Horacio, one part La Maga. They should, ideally, complement each other. Maga should pull Horacio's great inner debates into the real world, and Horacio should help her place her phenomenal wanderings into the context of a philosophical system. In the end however, neither engages the other in a real way. La Maga serves the purpose of observing Horacio, and Horacio cannot be bothered with her "education."



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 93, 68**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 93, 68 Summary**

In Chapter 6, Horacio and La Maga choose a place to meet for a "date." They always keep their meeting plans vague, leaving the option of missing each other. Still, they always run into each other, invariably. In Chapter 7, Horacio sketches La Maga in his mind. He kisses his memory, caresses it. In Chapter 8, he and La Maga go to see the fish for sale at the Quai de la Megisserie. It is a moment of pure happiness between them.

Chapter 93 is told from La Maga's point of view. She is reacting to Horacio's unwillingness to say that he loves her. He wants a love that opens the world to him, that answers the questions he cannot. Maga, feeling shut out by her lover, implores him to stop, forget Morelli's utopia and accept the happiness that she can offer him. In Chapter 68, La Maga and Horacio make love in a passage written in Gliglish, a gibberish language of the couple's devising.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 93, 68 Analysis**

These five chapters comprise the most sentimental of passage of Hopscotch. They contain a metaphor that is central to La Maga and Horatio's relationship. At the Quai de la Megisserie, the couple looks at the fishbowls and Horacio comments that a sad fish alone in a bowl will grow happier if a mirror is places by the bowl.

Both La Maga and Horacio exist in their separate bowls: his of logic, hers of fancy. Still, they make each other happy, as much for the way they reflect each other as for themselves. Ossip will note later that Maga's influence finally forces Horacio out of the library and into the world, and that this change in his worldview is what drives him into Pola's arms. Horacio meanwhile, inspires Maga to undertake hours of intense textual study.

In Chapter 93, from La Maga's view, one sees the friction between them: his distrust of "passions born without some distrustful reason" and her sense of iniquity because of lack of education (425). These issues between them are what ultimately doom their love. Textually, this chapter is compelling because it is in the first person, and the point-of-view is not Horacio's. If the entire book is told as a recollection from his point-of-view as he searches for her, this chapter can be seen as his attempt to stand in her subject position, or as a recollection of something she said to him in the past.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 9, 104, 10, 65, 11, 136, 12, 106, 13, 115**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 9, 104, 10, 65, 11, 136, 12, 106, 13, 115 Summary**

Chapter 9 and the nineteen chapters that follow it take place on an evening that The Serpent Club is meeting at Ronald and Babs' flat to listen to jazz recordings. As Horacio, La Maga, Étienne, and Perico walk in the rain, they argue over the possibility of art and literature to express truth. La Maga does not understand the argument, which aggravates Horacio. They arrive at the flat, where neighbors have already been complaining about the noise. Their friend, Guy Monod enters, who says he is unaffected by losing his mistress. Chapter 104 is a brief meditation on "life" as a metaphor. In Chapter 10, the Club is assembled and beginning to listen to records. Chapter 65 is a Serpent Club dossier for Ossip Gregorovius, detailing at length is different claims regarding his different homelands and mothers.

In Chapter 11, the Club is drunk and drifting, and some have ceased listening to the music. Ossip asks La Maga about Montevideo. He notices Horacio sitting with Babs and wonders if his being left with La Maga was Horacio's plan. Chapter 136 is one of Morelli's favorite quotes, from George Bataille. In Chapter 12, Ossip considers his ever-contentious relationship with Horacio and his desire for Maga. He continues questioning her about her childhood. She tells him about a particular memory of her father asleep, which reduces her to tears. As Ossip comforts her, Horacio watches, resentful of the pity her tears generate from the Club. He and Babs begin to hold each other as she cries at the blues of Bessie Coleman. He wonders whether one day he may be able to escape his proofs and rationales. Chapter 106 is the lyrics of the song the group listens to. In Chapter 13, Babs and Ronald neck as Satchmo plays. Horacio has grown surly and rails against the provincial tastes of his home country. Morelli, in Chapter 115, says he longs to write a piece where the protagonist's name is a blank, and the reader can substitute himself.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 9, 104, 10, 65, 11, 136, 12, 106, 13, 115 Analysis**

These chapters begin the novel's first extended narrative sequence, a night of jazz with the Serpent Club. Read straight through, not incorporating the "expendable chapters," it gives one an impression of the typical Club outing, a freewheeling town-hall where each member debates the others' beliefs surrounding art, philosophy, literature, etc.

This section also introduces the reader to the dynamic among Ossip, Horacio, and La Maga. Ossip is in love with La Maga and the intellectual equal of Horacio. Moreover, he



is more arrogant than Horacio. Horacio is a man concerned with logical justification for his beliefs. Ossip is self-assured that he can stand up to anyone's critique. This passage indicates that Horacio is more than willing to leave Maga with Ossip at these functions, amused at his rival's ridiculous fawning.

The "expendable chapters," as is generally the case in these extended sequences, present quotes, Morelliana, and citations on a theme intended to illuminate the narrative. In this case, the theme is the subjectivity of life experience, beginning with the many definitions of "life" in 104, and continuing with the many biographies of Ossip in Chapter 65 and The Bataille quote in Chapter 136.

Morelli's input is that a work of literature should allow the reader to have a surrogate experience, enter a protagonist's life and learn the lessons of that life without having to actually live it. This idea, in fact, dates back to Aristotle's Poetics, which acknowledges this surrogate experience as the central purpose of tragedy.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 14, 114, 117, 15, 120, 16, 137, 17, 97, 18**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 14, 114, 117, 15, 120, 16, 137, 17, 97, 18 Summary**

In Chapter 14 - still at the jazz listening session at Ronald's flat - Horacio talks to Wong about his studies of Chinese torture. Wong shows Horacio a photo series of a prisoner executed by "death by a thousand cuts." A description of this execution is followed in Chapter 114 with a contemporary news clipping detailing a prisoner's execution by gas chamber, abridged to highlight the similarities between the two. This is followed in Chapter 117, with Clarence Darrow's defense of Leopold and Loeb, decrying capital punishment. In Chapter 15, Horacio is disgusted with himself for ogling the execution photos. He worries that all his education has rendered him a "cretin."

Meanwhile, Ossip continues to press La Maga about Montenegro. She proceeds to tell him a story of herself at nine. Her father caught her playing in the street and took her in to spank her. As he did so, a young man who lives next door watched through a window. That night, the boy snuck in and raped her. La Maga loudly announces the last point to Horacio. Chapter 120 details an anecdote concerning Maga's rapist, Ireneo. He wakes in the night and feeds a grub worm to a group of ants, captivated by the brutality.

In Chapter 16, Horacio and Etienne discuss La Maga's memory as a work of storytelling. Ossip and Maga sit silently as Wong makes coffee. Morelli, in Chapter 137, points out that any conscious attempt by an author to make a statement is marring his own work. In Chapter 17, Ossip tells La Maga that Horacio's problem is his inability to process the world around him. Guy wakes up, having dreamed about his Swiss mistress, and he is depressed. Horacio, meanwhile, absorbs the music, privately marveling at the inclusive revolution that is jazz. Chapter 97 has Morelli, in Ossip's favorite passage, declaring his desire to alienate his reader. In Chapter 18, the night has degenerated into sloppiness, as Horacio agonizes in trying to understand his Parisian lifestyle. His metaphors, references, and emotions get jumbled in his drunken haze. He is alone in the corner, watching La Maga cry.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 14, 114, 117, 15, 120, 16, 137, 17, 97, 18 Analysis**

This second half of the jazz evening at Ronald's flat focuses on humanity's titillating relationship with horror and the intellectual inclination to view potentially moral issues with a dubious impartiality. Wong shows Horacio a horrific photo series involving a Chinese execution technique performed in public for crowds. Horacio is enraptured, much to his own chagrin. He does not want to be impartial in matters of humanitarian



abuse. He considers the Club's policy of scholarly distance in this respect nothing short of prurient voyeurism.

This is punctuated by the interjected selection from Clarence Darrow's famous indictment of capital punishment, but shortly thereafter La Maga tells the room about her rape. Horacio joins Etienne in trivializing it by critiquing her storytelling. This is clearly a tactic to further embarrass Ossip, who pressured Maga into telling the story.

The strange allure surrounding violence is a recurring theme in this section. Chapter 120 is a description of a boy's delight in a living creature's torturous death that leaves a reader feeling dirty. Yet by this point, one has read vivid descriptions of two executions, a rape, and of an animal being eaten alive. When Morelli talks about putting the reader in touch with a personal reaction to a character's experience, one realizes how captivated we were by these passages. We are complicit.

Indeed, we are in precisely the same mindset as Horacio in Chapter 18. Disgusted with ourselves, disoriented, and lost, we sit with him, dispassionately watching the night devolve. Why is he in this room with these people, he asks himself. We are asking it ourselves the same thing, by this point.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 153, 19, 90, 20, 126, 21, 79, 22, 62, 23**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 153, 19, 90, 20, 126, 21, 79, 22, 62, 23 Summary**

Chapter 153 is a short Argentinean anecdote. In Chapter 19, Rocamadour has been moved in with La Maga and Horacio, owing to a fever. Horacio is convinced La Maga is sleeping with Ossip, since he has given her a necklace from "mother." In Chapter 90, Horacio examines his relationship with La Maga. He has been thinking more, lately, turning every aspect in his life into a dialectical quandary. Etienne suggests he help in their efforts for Algerian independence, passing out literature. His unwillingness to take part illustrates his distrust of action in any form. In Chapter 20, Rocamadour is asleep, and Horacio and La Maga discuss whether he will leave her. He promises that he will not leave her as long as Rocamadour is ill, but they both sense that their affair is ending. Horacio admits that once during one of their incomprehensible run-ins in the street, he was on his way to see his other lover, Pola. He leaves for a walk, and Maga tells him not to return. Chapter 126 is a quote from Discourse of the Mandrake in which the speaker laments her loss of innocence.

That same night, in Chapter 21, Horacio sits with Crevel, his friend. He realizes hours after leaving her that he loves - or at least has grown dependent upon - La Maga. Morelli, in Chapter 79, indicates the ideal reader is one who takes on the role of accomplice, experiencing the situation critically. In Chapter 22, Horacio witnesses an old writer struck by a car. Those who know the writer say that he is a solitary man. Horacio reflects that if we were all so solitary, we would lose our ridiculous social conventions and learn to deal with each other as we truly are. Chapter 62 is a plan for a book by Morelli that does away with psychological reasoning for the characters' actions.

Wandering the rainy streets in Chapter 23, Horacio comes upon a recital of three new pieces. Buying a ticket to escape the rain, he watches Berthe Trépat, a dowdy middle-aged music teacher, play three premiere pieces, including one of her own. Following a cloying introduction by her gay friend Valentin, her clunky performance reduces the audience to only Horacio and one other man. Horacio - surprised by the fealty he has for the distraught woman - praises her performance and offers to walk her home. The walk becomes unbearable, as Berthe clings to him and expounds upon her own artistic existence. She curses Valentin for leaving after his introduction and demands that she should receive more recognition as a composer. Horacio attempts to flee, but she will not release her arm as she works herself into a revelry. She insists he come to her home for some wine with Valentin, and he agrees since he needs a place to sleep. When they arrive at her flat, as they pass by the flat, she realizes that Valentin is there already. She flies into a frenzy, convinced that Valentin has brought a man home and



locked her out. Horacio offers to take her to a hotel, and she strikes him. He leaves into the rainy night.

## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 153, 19, 90, 20, 126, 21, 79, 22, 62, 23 Analysis**

Until Chapter 19, Horacio has remained discontent but sedentary. He resents La Maga for her naivete and histrionics, but he does nothing about it. He feels hemmed in by his life in Paris and the Club, but he stays put. He is desperate, but immobile.

Chapter 19 marks the first declaration about the real world that we have heard from Horacio when he accuses La Maga of sleeping with Ossip. In Chapter 90, he reflects on his inability to commit to action, and how this results always in his making friends with his lovers, neither abandoning nor staying with them. In these chapters, Horacio makes a lot of decisions without following through on them. He tells Maga he will not leave her and then does (only to come back at the end of the night). He decides to befriend Berthe Trepot, but doesn't take into account her fragile emotional state. In one night, he abandons two women.

This long rainy night, which is only half over by the time he flees Berthe, is not merely the night he abandons La Maga and their home—it is the night he abandons his great pilgrimage to Europe. If his literal lover is Maga, his intellectual love is Morelli, whom he witnesses being struck by a car. Horacio reflects that solitude must be the only true path to genuine human interaction, since it discourages social niceties. He will put this to the test from now until the end of the book. He is through playing the game of social interaction, of openness to those who care for him. He will be a man apart.

In the ensuing chapters, Horacio will experience a lot of tragedy and need from those around him. Horacio will refuse to allow this to outwardly effect him, and it will deteriorate his relationships and his sanity.





## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 124, 128, 24, 134, 25, 141, 60, 26, 109, 27**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 124, 128, 24, 134, 25, 141, 60, 26, 109, 27 Summary**

In Chapter 124, Horacio tells us that Morelli, disgusted by the contrived and predictable plots of modern novels, writes stories whose characters take no action. Chapter 128 is a French quote from Antonin Artaud. In Chapter 24, Ossip is in La Maga's flat. It is the same night as the previous section, and Rocamadour is getting sicker. Ossip apologizes for drawing the story of Maga's rape from her at Ronald's flat, saying that he has always been something of a voyeur. La Maga is worried about her baby, but she does not want to take him to the hospital. Chapter 134 is an excerpt from an article about the differences between French and English gardens. The writer advises amateur gardeners to plant in the English style, which does not require such rigid geometry.

In Chapter 25, they continue to talk until Rocamadour falls asleep. He makes a reference to Pascal. La Maga asks a question, and Ossip sighs. She feels embarrassed. Chapter 141 concerns the central issue the Club has with Morelli's work, that in his eagerness to reject all existing forms of expression, he offers no alternative. Chapter 60 is Morelli's list of possible acknowledgments for his volumes: a roll of great artists, poets, musicians, actors, and philosophers. Maga is tired in Chapter 26, and Ossip is continuing to talk about how Paris is a metaphor. She tells him she wants to go to sleep but doesn't know when Horacio will back for his things. Ossip begins to talk about the recent changes in Horacio that La Maga has precipitated. Horacio has begun looking for truth in the world rather than in a library, Ossip says, and this is why he left.

In Chapter 109, Morelli states that a writer need only provide individual moments in his protagonist's life, and the reader, then, can be trusted to create the bridges that link them. In Chapter 27 Ossip and La Maga discuss Horacio's other lover, Pola. Pola is dying of breast cancer, and Maga thinks she is herself responsible since she made a voodoo doll of her. Horacio discovered it and crushed it.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 124, 128, 24, 134, 25, 141, 60, 26, 109, 27 Analysis**

These ten chapters cover the same hours as the previous section, this time from La Maga's point of view. She has remained in the flat with the steadily declining Rocamadour, and Ossip has arrived to keep her company.

The dynamic between Ossip and La Maga, first seen at Ronald and Babs' jazz night, comes in to focus in these chapters. Ossip is arrogant and manipulative, but he is also



enamored of Maga. In a group, he will take on any person with whose views he does not agree, but he will not criticize her. The astounding thing is that Maga - never the most observant member of the Club - is acutely aware of how stupid Ossip is around her. As Ossip discusses the changes in Horacio's personality and tactfully apologizes for pressing her about her childhood, Maga is aware of his intentions. As readers, we are led to wonder whether Maga - who clearly has no intention of sleeping with Ossip - has brought him over as revenge on Horacio.

This section is dominated by the presence of a sick child. La Maga is a sympathetic character; yet one is horrified by her terribly neglectful attitude toward Rocamadour. She does not know how to take his temperature, won't go to a hospital, and leaves him unattended for long stretches of time. In Chapter 124, the Club is frustrated immensely by Morelli's static characters, and the same is true of the reader of this section. We have the sense - though we have not been told - that Rocamadour is not going to live, and we sit with Maga and Ossip, discussing Horacio and Ossip's mother, knowing something terrible is coming. In these pages, we become Morelli's accomplice-readers.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 28, 130, 151, 152, 143**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 28, 130, 151, 152, 143 Summary**

In Chapter 28, La Maga puts on a record, but the old man who lives upstairs begins banging on the floor. Worried that he'll wake Rocamadour, she is about to go talk to him. Before she can do so, she hears Horacio upstairs, calming the crazed old man. Horacio then comes into the apartment, where he drinks mate and caña with her and Ossip. The lights are out, and as Horacio crosses the room for a cigarette, he checks Rocamadour. He has died. By now, the old man has begun banging again, and Horacio asks La Maga to deal with it. In her absence, he tells Gregorovius about the Rocamadour. When Maga returns, she is followed by Babs and Ronald. They've just come from Guy's place, where Guy has attempted suicide. They sit down to wait for news from Etienne, who went with Guy to the hospital. As Babs and La Maga make coffee, Horacio quietly tells Ronald about Rocamadour. The child will need his medicine at three, so they silently agree to wait until then for Maga to find out. Etienne returns with news that Guy has thrown up the poison. Horacio tells Etienne about Rocamadour, and Ronald quietly tells Babs. In the meantime, the group discusses the Club's reliance on dialectic thought, which Horacio says is useful in times of relative calm but moot in crisis. At three o'clock, La Maga discovers that her child is dead. She wails and passes out; the old man begins pounding again; Ossip leaves to tell the police. Horacio, thinking it better, departs with him, leaving Babs and Ronald to take care of La Maga.

Chapter 130 is an excerpt from the Observer in London. It warns of recent medical emergencies involving young men with trousers fitted with the new device called the zipper. In Chapter 151, Morelli discusses the similarity between modern biological discoveries and Zen Buddhism. Chapter 152 is a quote from Jean Tardieu. Chapter 143 momentarily shifts the setting to Buenos Aires, where Manolo Traveler, Horacio's friend from childhood, lays in bed with his wife Talita. They are deeply affectionate, but Traveler feels an underlying separation from her. He dreams of a day when they can connect psychically, which he imagines will be a night when they have the same dream.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 28, 130, 151, 152, 143 Analysis**

Chapter 28 has the structure of a thriller in many ways. A man enters a room with a knife and hides in the closet; then a couple enters and goes about the process of preparing dinner. As observers, our attention is not on the dinner but the closet door. Horacio, very early in the chapter, discovers that Rocamadour is dead. He knows Maga will not check the child until it is time for his medicine. Then, the room begins to fill with



people. One by one, Horacio discreetly tells them the news of the child's death. By the time La Maga goes to the bed with the medicine, an entire room is wondering what will happen.

Two other factors improve this dynamic. Firstly, the Club is arriving because Guy Monod may die. Word quickly arrives that he is safe, but by this time everyone knows about Rocamadour. There is no release of tension. Secondly, there is an old man upstairs constantly knocking loudly on his floor. This agitates Maga, the only ignorant party, and threatens to alert her to the fact that her sick child is not waking up.

The assembled thinkers do engage in a brief argument - the most pragmatic of the entire novel - regarding the usefulness of dialectic thought in a crisis. These characters, in the midst of this crisis, have been estranged from their standard situation. They are attempting to maintain a semblance of normalcy even as the clock ticks down to cataclysm. The conversation is a prologue to the moment that will forever shatter the Club's illusion of control.

Chapter 143 introduces us to Traveler and Talita, who will be central characters in the second half of the book. We learn two key facts about their marriage that will be catalysts for much of the later action: they are incredibly affectionate and Traveler feels disconnected from Talita. The inclusion of this chapter may seem incongruous with a Book called "From the Other Side," that takes place entirely in Paris. Later in the novel, Horacio will comment that he can now divide his life into two halves: this side of his affair with La Maga and the other side. The titles of the two central books of Hopscotch refer not to either side of the Atlantic but to the two halves of Horacio's life, before and after this earth-shattering relationship.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 100, 76, 101, 144, 92, 103, 108, 64**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 100, 76, 101, 144, 92, 103, 108, 64 Summary**

In Chapter 100, Horacio calls Etienne in his studio to tell him about a dream he's had. Etienne is annoyed that Horacio has interrupted his painting, but he listens. Horacio dreamed that he was cutting a loaf of bread, and the bread began to scream. Etienne invites him to come to his studio.

Chapter 76 moves back in time to tell of Horacio's affair with Pola, whom he meets at a café. He is captivated by the way her hands open her handbag, and he strikes up a conversation with her. In Chapter 101, Horacio and Pola are in bed together, and she wonders if he makes love with La Maga the same way. In Chapter 144, Horacio performs oral sex on Pola, comparing her smell and taste to Maga, then to every woman. He has to stop himself from analyzing the experience. Chapter 92 details Pola's first tryst with Horacio, in the same hotel room as he took La Maga. He discovers in Pola the same lack of illumination as he feels with La Maga. Their second time together, they go to her flat. He begins to call her Pola Paris. In Chapter 103, Horacio watches Pola sleep. He lays his ear on her stomach and listens, imagining a universe within her.

In Chapter 108, Horacio and La Maga sit on a bench in the Pont des Arts, looking for Emmanuele, a clocharde that Maga likes. She questions Horacio about Pola, whom she knows he has slept with. He won't give her details about their affair. Emmanuele appears and waits for her lover, another clochard. Maga and Horacio speculate about where they go to make love. The clochard appears, very drunk, and dances with Emmanuele. Horacio assures Maga that his being with Pola doesn't effect them. She does not believe him. In Chapter 64, Horacio and Pola meet in the Latin Quarter and watch chalk artists at work. She tells him that everything he touches seems to die or disappear. Later, they are in bed and he kisses her breast. She has an appointment with a doctor, soon.

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 100, 76, 101, 144, 92, 103, 108, 64 Analysis**

Pola is mentioned throughout the first book of *Hopscotch*, but she only appears in the flesh in the "expendable chapters." Horacio's affair with Pola is described in far more vivid detail than La Maga. Ossip tells Maga earlier in the novel that her influence on Horacio drives him to seek enlightenment in the world. So, by extension, Maga's influence on Horacio drives him to Pola.



There is a deep need in the words that Horacio uses to describe Pola, beginning with her hands. He feels, as he watches her in the café, that he needs to have her. This is a far cry from the Horacio that met La Maga in the street, talked to her for hours, and then consulted his fortune teller to confirm her story. Pola is more confident than Maga, and Horacio gets closest to raw, unexamined pleasure in her arms. In the pivotal love scene of Chapter 64 - where Horacio kisses the breast that bears Pola's cancer - he states that "he managed to stop thinking, just for an instant, he managed to kiss without it being anything but his own kiss" (367). Maga believes she brought cancer upon Pola with her voodoo doll. In truth it could just as easily be Horacio's poisoned kiss.

In the end, even in the throes of sex - as in the end of Chapter 92 - Horacio is losing his unfettered joy. He is experiencing the same sense of emptiness he feels with La Maga. Moreover, Maga came first, and they have more invested in each other. This is why it is so much easier for him to leave Pola, even knowing that she is ill.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 155, 123, 145, 122, 112, 154, 85, 150, 95, 146**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 155, 123, 145, 122, 112, 154, 85, 150, 95, 146 Summary**

In Chapter 155, Horacio convinces Etienne to join him in visiting the old writer he saw hit on the street the night of Rocamadour's death. They go to the Necker Hospital and discover that the old man's name is Morelli. Horacio and Etienne sit on a bench to smoke and watch the nurses. Chapter 123 is another dream Horacio has while still living with La Maga. In it, he is in a living room and garden from his childhood and also Maga's room. He and his sister decide which room he should stay in, and they choose the garden. He wakes in bed with Maga, unable to shake the feeling of the dream. In Chapter 145, Morelli quotes Gombrowicz from his absurdist watershed *Ferdydurke*.

Etienne has begun to sketch the nurses in Chapter 122, when Horacio tells him about his dream from Chapter 123. Etienne prods him to consider that the rejection of La Maga's room and the screaming loaf of bread both have to do with guilt involving Rocamadour and Maga. Horacio dismisses the suggestion. Morelli, in Chapter 112, discusses his need to reject literary language and rhetoric. He strives for precise language that dictates clearly an author's intent. In Chapter 154, Etienne and Horacio reach the old man's bed and are shocked to find that it is the Morelli that they idolize. They are starstruck, and he is pleased to have visitors. They all smoke, and Morelli holds court, discussing Ezra Pound, chess, and his own writing. All the while, Morelli is sorting pages in a notebook. Before they leave, he hands them the papers and a key to his flat. Morelli is not sure he will live, and he wants them to assemble his new work, which he says is intended to be read in any order the reader chooses. After they leave Necker Hospital, Horacio gives Etienne the key and tells him to assemble the Club.

Chapter 85 likens life to a story in a newspaper. Chapter 150 is an excerpt from the *Times of London* about a hospitalized dowager. Chapter 95 is a multi-footnoted passage describing Morelli's brief fixation on Zen Buddhism and his translation of its tenets in his novels. To Etienne, in particular, this practice is a bit of literary colonization, with Morelli, an Italian, reaping Eastern philosophy for his Western writing. Chapter 146 is a reader letter to the *Observer* about butterflies.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 155, 123, 145, 122, 112, 154, 85, 150, 95, 146 Analysis**

This section focuses almost exclusively on Morelli, a character that only appears in the "expendable chapters" of Hopscotch. When he is incorporated into the storyline, one sees his influences both as writer and literary critic on the novel and upon Horacio's attitude to the world.

Morelli is an iconoclast in his theories, dedicated to the resurrection of literature through its annihilation. He feels that prose of the Western canon has focused too much on rhetorical brilliance and compelling plots. His lifelong struggle toward pure writing - words that precisely express the intent of the author and passages that require active participation of the reader - has left him a lonely and uncertain man.

Horacio and Etienne visit Morelli without knowing it is he. They have long idolized him, and the Club regularly debates the tenets of his work. When Horacio and Etienne go to the Necker Hospital, however, it is only to check up on the old man Horacio saw struck by a car. Their idol, they find, is an obtuse man, given to idling from one topic to another. The one nugget of sage-like advice he gives is to Horacio, to beware that the search for purity may be an endless search.

The true reward for their visit is the errand that Morelli assigns them. For Horacio and Etienne, the key to his flat is an undeserved treasure. Assemble a novel that chapters can be read in any order is the most transparent bit of self-reference in the novel. It teases the reader with the notion that Morelli could be the author speaking through Horacio.





## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 29, 107, 113, 30, 57, 70, 147, 31, 32, 132, 61, 33, 67, 83, 142, 34**

### **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 29, 107, 113, 30, 57, 70, 147, 31, 32, 132, 61, 33, 67, 83, 142, 34 Summary**

In Chapter 29, Horacio returns to La Maga's flat. It is virtually empty, and Ossip is now living there. La Maga left after Rocamadour's wake - which Horacio did not attend - giving the flat to Ossip. He thinks Maga may have gone back to Montevideo, but it is also conceivable that she's committed suicide. Horacio admits that he knew about Pola's cancer when he left her. In Chapter 107, Morelli imagines the animatronic statue that will be erected for him when he dies. Chapter 113 is a sampling of statements made by club members on the way to Morelli's flat.

In Chapter 30, Ossip tells Horacio about the wake, where Ronald got belligerently drunk. In Chapter 57, Horacio tells him about his dreams and says he is getting mixed up about what is waking and what is a dream. He fears that he's losing his mind. Ossip comments that the state Horacio is in is similar to one mentioned in Zen Buddhism. Chapter 70 is a quote from a sermon by Meister Eckardt. Chapter 147 contains a brief assertion that the Judeo-Christian dialectic curtails human freedom. In Chapter 31, Ossip claims that Horacio is striving to a station of power in the Paris intelligentsia but doing nothing to attain it. Horacio retorts that he is not ambitious; he simply wants to be anonymous in the world, a man apart. This is why he separates himself from life with proofs and dialectics. Ossip, frustrated, leaves to buy a bottle of brandy. Horacio searches the shelves and discovers a letter.

Chapter 32 is that letter. La Maga has written to Rocamadour in the country. She tells him about herself and Horacio, the Club, Paris, and why they cannot always be together. She explains to him what she knows about life, that one cannot separate oneself from the world. In Chapter 132, Horacio recalls a dream where he is banished from the cafés he has frequented in Paris. It feels to him like a casting out from Eden, and it terrifies him. In Chapter 61, Morelli longs to escape his earthly self. In Chapter 33, Horacio, having read La Maga's letter, wonders if Ossip has purposely left him to find it and is eavesdropping. Horacio, since Rocamadour's death, has steadfastly refused to feel guilt or pity for Maga. He picks up the novel in her drawer that was next to the letter. In Chapter 67, Horacio discusses trying to go about his day as normal, only to be caught by a sudden wave of anguish. He wakes up every morning depressed as he remembers what has happened. Horacio goes on, in Chapter 83, to discuss how he cannot reconcile his physical body with the idea of a soul.



Chapter 142 is a listing of statements about La Maga made by Etienne and Ronald. They begin discussing her silliness, whether it was indicative of ignorance. Etienne insists that she understood his painting. They begin to think that Maga was the only member of the Club to achieve some semblance of Morelli's "millenary kingdom," but she felt she needed to justify it through the Club's textual arguments. In the end, neither man has the words to explain her.

Chapter 34 is several pages from La Maga's novel. Interspersed between the lines of the story of a man's move to Madrid, Horacio speaks to the absent La Maga, alternately berating her idiocy for loving him and desperately missing her.

## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 29, 107, 113, 30, 57, 70, 147, 31, 32, 132, 61, 33, 67, 83, 142, 34 Analysis**

If the chapters preceding Rocamadour's death typified the relationship between Ossip and La Maga, this section does the same for Ossip and Horacio. Not surprisingly, the dynamic is vicious. In the climactic Chapter 31, Ossip essentially calls Horacio an over-entitled pseudo-intellectual and a malcontent. Horacio, meanwhile, calls Ossip a lizard. The root of their extended duel is the question on the whole Club's tongue: what does Horacio want that justifies the number of people he has destroyed?

Until this section, Horacio has seemed outright callous regarding La Maga and her tragedy. The combination, here, of the suggestion that she may be dead and her letter to Rocamadour drudges up the despair that our protagonist has been actively trying to contain. Chapter 67 is a stunning admission to Maga and us and a poignant portrait of the depression enveloping Horacio, with which he wakes up, which follows him through his day.

Perhaps the strongest symptom of this incisive guilt is the catalyst for the section of a whole. Why, after all, is Horacio there? The only personal effect he wants is his mate yerba. He is surprised to see Ossip. Moreover, immediately before this he is given the key to Morelli's study — an item of unimaginable value to him — which he immediately passes off to Etienne. He is looking for La Maga, and not finding her will drive him to a despair and misanthropy none of his friends could imagine.



# **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 87, 105, 96, 94, 91, 82, 99, 35, 121, 36**

## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 87, 105, 96, 94, 91, 82, 99, 35, 121, 36 Summary**

Chapter 87 discusses mention of an obscure Duke Ellington number. Morelli continues this theme in Chapter 105, considering phrases and gestures that have fallen out of favor, that live only in fading memory and dreams.

In Chapter 96, the Club talks their way into Morelli's building and - with much difficulty involving the key - enters his flat. It is filled with books and papers. Babs throws out a rotten egg, which enrages Etienne, who thought it a good still life. Ronald calms everyone down with an emotional speech about this momentous night. In Chapter 94, Morelli says that his work is rotting like a piece of meat, breaking down to its simplest form. In Chapter 91, the Club is organizing Morelli's papers when Ossip and Horacio arrive. Etienne starts complaining about the egg again.

In Chapter 82, Morelli doubts that he has nothing to say. As the Club assembles pages in Chapter 99, they begin to argue the meaning of Morelli's battle with language, whether he wants to destroy it or revive it. Horacio welcomes the debate as an escape from his current state of mind. The argument goes on for a while, ending with a rambling defense of Morelli's methods by Horacio. By now, they've run out of liquor, and Etienne makes on final dig at Babs about the egg. Chapter 35 skips forward a few hours as Ronald tries to calm down Babs. The last egg comment sets her off, and in her rage she attacks Horacio over his not coming to the wake. They are broken up, and Horacio begins loudly demanding information about La Maga, whom Babs insists is nursing the dying Pola. Etienne announces that he is leaving the Club, followed by every other member. In Chapter 121, Morelli quotes a Ferlinghetti poem in praise of poetic language.

In Chapter 36, Horacio wanders beneath the Pont des Arts, wondering if he will ever find his "kibbutz." Emmanuèle, the clochard much-beloved of La Maga, wakes up under the bridge the next morning, realizing that her lover Célestin has run off with her sardines and wine. She approaches Horacio and talks to him about the best soup kitchens and smokes with him. He recognizes her and buys some cheap wine nearby and they drink together. Emmanuèle, deciding to take revenge on Célestin, begins to perform oral sex on Horacio, but they are interrupted by the police, who throw them into a patrol wagon. As they drive off, Emmanuèle wails on the floor of the wagon, and Horacio sings, wondering whether he will ever be able to hopscotch to Heaven.



## **Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapters 87, 105, 96, 94, 91, 82, 99, 35, 121, 36 Analysis**

The final meeting of the Serpent Club, despite its auspicious beginning, is doomed from the beginning. No amount of fervent argument or alcohol could contain the elephant in the room. Even if Horacio were absent, it would be impossible. No doubt, Etienne's digs at Babs regarding the spoiled egg are nothing new to the group dynamic, but the fact remains that he is one who left her alone with the La Maga and the dead child.

The Club and Morelli often debate the legitimacy of the pre-Adamite ideal, a utopia that existed before humanity gained knowledge and experience. Now the Club has been cast out of its own Eden, and Babs' assault on Horacio is the final straw, the final acknowledgment that they thinkers cannot think their way past the very real tragedy they have experienced .

Horacio's despairing walk to the Pont des Art contain the most comprehensive examination of hopscotch as a metaphor for his journey. Since the jazz night at Randal and Babs' flat, Horacio has cursed his knowledge and reading as a diminishing of his soul. Now, considering the children that hop to "Heaven" with a stone and chalk, he feel most acutely that he has, in his learning, forfeited his way to paradise - his kibbutz, as he calls it.

In moments of turmoil, Horacio clings to those women in need of someone. He did so with Pola, then Berthe Trepas, and now Emmanuele. Each time, he works the woman into revelry and leaves her hanging. He left Pola in her illness, Berthe stranded in the rain, and Emanuelle in the back of a patrol wagon. Though motivated to do so for reasons entirely separate from Horacio, Emmanuele gave herself to him under the Pont des Arts, and when they are both being hauled to jail, he uses her as a footstool and disappears into his thoughts.



## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 37, 98, 38, 39, 86, 78, 40, 59, 41**

### **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 37, 98, 38, 39, 86, 78, 40, 59, 41 Summary**

With Chapter 37, the setting changes to Buenos Aires. Manolo Traveler works with a circus in Buenos Aires, managing a counting cat. He is married to Talita, a former pharmacist. Traveler has never been out of the country and lobbies his manager, Ferraguto, to send the troupe farther afield. Ferraguto refuses. Talita has the manager's wife, Cuca, over to gossip and lets Traveler sit in the toilet and listen, biting down a handkerchief to stifle his laughter.

In Chapter 98, Horacio considers how La Maga has affected him without knowing it, destroying his faith in his own reason. Maga is a different sort of person from Horacio, he now understands, who does not need to justify her actions. In Chapter 38, Traveler and Talita go to docks to meet Horacio's boat. They go to a waterfront grill, and no matter how many questions Traveler asks about Paris. Horacio refuses to talk about it. Horacio also neglects to mention that before he came to Buenos Aires, he stopped in Montevideo to find La Maga, without success. Instead, in Chapter 39, he listens to Traveler talk about the circus and Argentine politics. Chapter 86 is comprised of two of Morelli's favorite quotes; both declare that man has the capacity to understand all things.

In Chapter 78, Horacio examines the marriage of the Travelers. He is convinced that their seeming intimacy — all intimacy — is no more than a facade. He decides to accept the amorous advances of his former lover Gekrepten in order to move into the same hotel as the Travelers and observe them. He also decides that until he can get work with the circus, he should sell gabardine samples. By Chapter 40, he has settled into the hotel with Gekrepten. He becomes a regular fixture with the Travelers, playing word games with Talita and aggravating his old friend with criticisms of Buenos Aires. Life for him is taking on a frivolous, relaxing air. Chapter 59 is a clipping with a history of the area.

In Chapter 41, Horacio is straightening out crooked nails and whistling for Traveler across the way. The day is painfully hot, and he's trying to convince himself that it's cold. Eventually, Traveler wakes from his nap and the two talk between windows. Horacio asks him for some straight nails and yerba. Traveler brings over the nails but forgets the yerba. Horacio suggests that they run a board between their windows as a bridge. Once back at his room, Traveler and Talita try pushing the board out the window, but it will not reach. Horacio suggests that they both push a board out, weigh them down from inside, and tie them in the middle. Traveler attaches his to a dresser, Horacio to his bed. Talita - despite her protests - is employed climbing out to connect the boards and deliver the yerba. She gets halfway out, and the two men begin bickering about the details of the



plan. Caught between them, she begins to grow faint from heat exhaustion. Traveler gets her a hat, as Gekrepten returns and makes him a café con leche. Horacio no longer needs the yerba mate. Exhausted and frustrated, Talita throws the yerba package into Horacio's room, breaking his window. She's left with the choice of continuing along the bridge to the other room or returning to her husband. She chooses the latter and drops the hat on the way back. Gekrepten goes down to retrieve the hat and is berated by an old neighbor who says that everyone on the street below could see up Talita's robe.

## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 37, 98, 38, 39, 86, 78, 40, 59, 41 Analysis**

The Horacio that arrives to "this side" in Buenos Aires is a different creature than what we have seen until this point. The Horacio of the first book was callous and self-involved, but he was also very much an open book to everyone, much to his detriment. He even reveals the painful truth of his split with Pola to his nemesis, Ossip Gregorovius.

When Horacio arrives home in Chapter 38, he is closed-off, refusing to reveal anything about Paris shy of small-talk to his oldest friend, Manolo Traveler. In Chapter 78, we read a declaration of his intent in entering the lives of the Travelers, one comparable in many ways to Edmond Dantes returning home in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Horacio's experience in Europe has convinced him that intimacy between two people is a quaint myth perpetuated to make solitude more bearable. His intent - beyond merely observing the couple - is to "sow confusion in the ranks" of two people whose relationship he cannot fathom (394). He will even accept the affections of a woman he does not care about - Gekrepten - for the purpose of getting a room next to theirs.

Horacio's great weapon in sowing confusion between Traveler and Talita is his relationship with Traveler. They are very similar in their pursuit of knowledge and errant dispositions, but Horacio has had the experience of traveling abroad, loving and losing. Traveler, meanwhile, his discontent in his stasis, and though he loves his wife, he feels oddly disconnected from her. Talita, meanwhile, is drawn to both of them and intensely wary of Horacio.

This tension reaches a pitch in Chapter 41, when Talita is literally trapped between Horacio and Traveler as she clings to a plank of wood between their rooms. The men argue across her, but she is aware the argument is more about her than about wood, nails, or yerba. When she chooses to return to Traveler rather than go across to Horacio's room, she is making a conscious choice about the situation. This choice will not make the next few weeks any easier for the three of them.



## **Book 2; From This Side: Chapters 148, 42, 75, 43, 125, 44, 102, 45, 80, 46, 47, 110, 48**

### **Book 2; From This Side: Chapters 148, 42, 75, 43, 125, 44, 102, 45, 80, 46, 47, 110, 48 Summary**

Chapter 148 is a quotation featuring Gabio Basso's analysis of the word "person," saying it initially meant mask. In Chapter 42, Traveler gets Horacio a job with the circus. They go out to celebrate at Don Crespo's. In Chapter 75, Horacio looks at his reflection in the mirror and recalls his younger days as a dapper intellectual in Buenos Aires. He laughs and draws over his face in the mirror with toothpaste. In Chapter 43, Talita and Horacio count money for the circus and Talita addresses the strain that his presence is causing her relationship. Traveler cannot sleep, and her presence causes some sort of tension between them. He wonders, if this is so, why Traveler got him a job working together. In Chapter 125, Horacio defends his new viewpoint of himself as a man apart from mankind. In Chapter 44, Traveler is shaving. The manager of the circus is in the process of buying a mental asylum. Talita believes the presence of Horacio in their lives is tearing them apart. He says that the estrangement was always there, and Horacio's arrival is just brought it out in the open.

In Chapter 102, Wong and Ronald look through Morelli's library. They find two books with sections underlined, each dealing with the wonder invested in minuscule things.

In Chapter 45, Traveler cannot sleep. He goes to the window to see if Horacio is awake, but he is not. He returns to bed. Talita is having a nightmare that Traveler is dragging her to a grotesque museum. She wakes and asks Traveler why he got up. Outside, they hear Horacio singing. In Chapter 80, Horacio writes in his journal about a conversation he's had with Traveler regarding dreams hold the same structure as madness, and that madness is just a dream "that takes root." In Chapter 46, the group drinks on night on Don Crespo's patio. Traveler plays guitar. He and Horacio discuss the unsaid about the "triangle" that is developing among them and Talita. Horacio says he'll leave if need be, but Traveler says he won't ask him to.

Chapter 47 is a recording Talita is making on a rented tape recorder. She hopes things with Traveler will be better at the asylum, where she will be managing the pharmacy. She has the feeling that Horacio is planning something awful. He fixes some tea and talks to Gekrepten across the way. They agree to have dinner together. Chapter 110 is a quote from Anais Nin, who describes a dream as a spiraling tower, in which she loses herself. Chapter 48 begins in El Cerro, Uruguay, where Horacio is looking for La Maga. He imagines he sees her in a line one night, but he knows it's not real. He finds himself a spectator in his own life, observing everything while only seeming to participate. He





realizes that Maga has become a fixation for him and that his presence with the Travelers is adversely effecting their marriage.

## **Book 2; From This Side: Chapters 148, 42, 75, 43, 125, 44, 102, 45, 80, 46, 47, 110, 48 Analysis**

This section begins with Horacio getting a job with the circus at which the Travelers work. By now, Talita has grown anxious about the effect Horacio's presence is having on her relationship with Traveler. Traveler cannot sleep. Even the counting cat is not counting as well as once it was. On the other hand, Horacio, to all outward appearances, is being congenial to all three. The reference in Chapter 148 to the face as a mask should indicate that appearances are deceiving.

The inchoate tension in this section draws from the adverse effect this friendship is causing and the unwillingness of any participant to remove him- or herself from it. Indeed, Traveler, for all his anxiety, is the strongest enabler of the bunch, arranging a job for Horacio at the circus through no small effort. He feels the only time that Horacio has no psychic effect on him is when they are together talking. Talita, though she does not want Horacio, is haunted by the thought that he wants her. Still, she will not bring herself to ask Traveler to sever bond with his friend. The most she can do is broach the subject of their marital distance to him in Chapter 44. His response is not exactly comforting, that Horacio is just pointing out a problem that has always existed between them.

Horacio, for his part, is concerned for his own sanity. He is seeing La Maga where she is not, as he did in El Cerro. He has a conversation with Traveler about his dreams and whether a particularly vivid dream is madness. This conversation is very similar to the one he has with Etienne shortly after Rocamadour dies. Clearly he is concerned about the repressed guilt being dredged up by his subconscious. Moreover, Horacio sees what his unstable presence is doing to Talita, and he is beginning to feel guilty.





## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 111, 49, 118, 50, 118, 51, 69, 52, 89, 53, 66, 149, 54**

### **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 111, 49, 118, 50, 118, 51, 69, 52, 89, 53, 66, 149, 54 Summary**

Chapter 111 is a memoir written by a Hungarian woman who, following a failed marriage, becomes a socialite in Paris. After a dark, raucous period, she finds love with the tango musician Carlos Gardel. In Chapter 49, Ferraguto finalizes the deal to sell his circus and take control of the asylum. Traveler and Talita - arguing regularly now - prepare for the change in occupation by reading mental health articles in medical journals. Horacio finds himself listless as the circus prepares to change hands, and spends long stretches with the counting cat. One night, Horacio and the Travelers get word that they are to move to the asylum. Chapter 118 is a quote from Malcolm Lowry.

In Chapter 50, Ferraguto and his wife Cuca are signing papers for the asylum. Traveler, Talita, and Horacio are all there, and a young man named Remorino gives Horacio a tour. Both believe the other man is a madman, though it turns out Remorino is an attendant. The papers are filled out, but the former owner informs Ferraguto that every patient must consent by signature to the change in ownership. Chapter 118 is a clipping from the London Observer about animal cruelty. In Chapter 51, the patients are cycled through to sign. Many negotiate that they will only sign if the "dog" is killed. This "dog" may or may not be Olvera, the hospital's head doctor. Traveler and Horacio walk through the courtyard, where there is a hopscotch court, and Horacio again offers to leave Traveler and his wife. Traveler insists that he only feels free of pressure from Horacio when the two are together. The inmates, by now, have all signed.

Chapter 69 is an obituary written for an ex-army officer who has committed suicide. It is written phonetically. In Chapter 52, the new owners are acclimatizing to life in the hospital. Traveler and Horacio observe the goings-on, and they begin playing poker with the head doctor, Olvera. Chapter 89 is a polemic against the Pope written by an attorney in Santo Domingo. In Chapter 53, the old staff of the hospital is dismissed, and a patient dies. Remorino, Traveler, and Horacio wheel him down to the morgue, where they have a few beers.

In Chapter 66, Morelli tries to sketch out possible endings to his unfinished novel. He writes a statement of defeat over and over on a page. Chapter 149 is a short poem by Octavio Paz. In Chapter 54, Horacio sits at his window, writing to Gekrepten. He has guard duty in an hour. He sees La Maga playing hopscotch in the courtyard, but it turns out to be Talita. She comes up to his floor with lemonade, and they sit together. As they talk, they are interrupted by a patient coming from the basement. They go down to the morgue to make sure everything is in order. While down there, Horacio tells Talita about



La Maga, and he is amazed by how affected he is by her pity for him. Then, he kisses her.

## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 111, 49, 118, 50, 118, 51, 69, 52, 89, 53, 66, 149, 54 Analysis**

Horacio and the Travelers' move to the mental asylum sets the stage for the climax of the novel. Chapter 118, the Observer clipping about the bird placed in the too-small cage is a witty metaphor for the situation in the hospital.

Traveler has convinced Horacio and Talita that the move will be good for everyone's mental health: new challenges, a fresh setting, an exciting and unpredictable atmosphere. Indeed, the first days seems strangely ideal. Talita can read and work in a pharmacy again, and Horacio and Traveler spend much of their time drinking in the morgue and playing cards with the head doctor, Olvera. They even marvel at how sane the patients seem.

The fateful night that sets Horacio's tragic decline begins with his delusion that Talita is La Maga. He sees her playing hopscotch in the asylum courtyard, and it is not until she loses before reaching Heaven that he realizes her real identity. This, of course, is not the first time Horacio has confused a woman with La Maga, but the fact that this woman is Talita complicates things.

Later, Talita and Horacio talk while on guard duty. At one point, she sings a song that La Maga used to sing. He caresses her cheek, and she brushes his hand away. As they head down to the morgue together, Horacio is inclined at last to tell her about his affair in Paris. He tells her, presumably, in a calculated effort to gain sympathy, but he is surprised at how much telling the story - and speaking his fear that Maga is dead - affects him. More surprising, Talita feels pity for him. He wants to feel angry, wants to even lash out at her, but the twin human emotions of regret and gratefulness prompt him to kiss her. He does not do this because she looks like La Maga; rather, he does it because of the long-dormant self-awareness she raises in him.



## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 129, 139, 133, 140, 139, 127, (55), 56, 135, 63, 88, 72, 77, 131, 58 ...**

### **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 129, 139, 133, 140, 139, 127, (55), 56, 135, 63, 88, 72, 77, 131, 58 ...**

#### **Summary**

Chapter 129 takes place during the same hours as Chapter 54. Traveler cannot sleep. He is reading a work by Ceferino Piriz. The author proposes, in the interest of world peace, a Society of Nations. Nations are to be divided into six groups according to their inhabitants' skin-tones. Each group will have its own Chamber in the Society. Chapter 139 is a clipping from a publication about musical anagrams. In Chapter 133, Piriz proposes Society committees for such constituencies as Ranches, Hospitals, Detectives-Errent, and Monks of the Prayer of the Sign of the Cross. Also, each chamber will maintain the animal species of the same color as that chamber's skin. Talita comes back. She tells him about Horacio, how he thinks La Maga is dead, how he thinks she is La Maga, how he kissed her. She feels closer to Traveler now, like she has passed a test.

(Cortazar does not include Chapter 55 in his Table of Instructions. Chapter 55 contains the same narrative as Chapters 129 and 133, omitting the specifics of the Piriz book that Traveler reads)

In Chapter 140, Talita takes over the pharmacy from Cuca at midnight. In this down-time, she reads bit of philosophy, language books, and pseudo-blasphemous articles given her by Traveler. In Chapter 138, Horacio thinks back to Paris, his relationship with La Maga, and how they would sometimes speak of their childhoods with disdain that they did not really have. Chapter 127 details how Cuca - a fierce opponent of Communism and moral laxness — is nightly chased from the pharmacy by Talita's discussions of Morelli and Ceferino Piriz.

In Chapter 56, Horacio is afraid Traveler will attack him. With the help of a patient, he secures some basins, thread, and ball bearings. In his room, he creates a web of thread, attaching the door to objects in his room. He fills the basins with water and lays them on the ground with ball bearings. Then he waits by the open window. While there, he sees Talita playing hopscotch again, and calls her La Maga. She begs him to close the window. Traveler suddenly comes in, knocking down the objects and waking up the whole asylum. He can't get past the web of string to Horacio. Meanwhile, a crowd is gathering in the courtyard, waiting for Horacio to jump. Traveler tells Horacio he is surprised Horacio has not killed himself. He says that Horacio has seemed empty and lost and that he has carried his delusions into Traveler's marriage. Horacio begins



calling Traveler his doppelganger. He says they are the same, except that Traveler does not destroy what he loves. In the end, Traveler storms out, but he and Talita convince everyone to go inside. Horacio watches Traveler comfort Talita and thinks how wonderful he is. Ferraguto and Cuca ask Horacio to come down, but Horacio wonders whether it would be better to jump.

Chapters 135, 63, 88, 72, 77, 131, and 58 are all snapshots from Horacio's point of view after he jumps. They are very short and out of order. They indicate that he is injured badly and is losing sight in one eye. Horacio, Traveler, and Talita are all fired, and Horacio moves back in with Gekrepten. Cortazar's directions indicate that the reader should continue reading between Chapters 131 and 58, in perpetuity.

## **Book 2, From This Side: Chapters 129, 139, 133, 140, 139, 127, (55), 56, 135, 63, 88, 72, 77, 131, 58 ...**

### **Analysis**

This section introduces Ceferino Piriz, a man whose dialectical ambitions far surpass Horacio or Morelli. Enjoyed immensely - if more than a little ironically - by Traveler and Talita, he is an anthropologist of sorts who believes he can arrange humanity into perfect harmony through a vast array of committees. Traveler is consumed with his hyper-detailed world order while in the basement Horacio is kissing his wife. When she returns to the room to tell Traveler what has happened, his reaction is measured and calm. He fears, more than anything, for Horacio's sanity.

For her part, Talita is ashamed of what happened, but she feels that she has passed her test. What began on a plank between Horacio and Traveler's windows ended in the morgue of the asylum. What exists between Horacio and Traveler has always been there; she has resolved what existed between Horacio and her.

If Horacio was surprised by his tender reaction to Talita's pity for him in Chapter 54, he seems enveloped in tenderness in the last moments of Chapter 56, looking at Traveler and Talita, joking with them about the ridiculous Cuca. After all the madness of the morning, he says "the harmony lasted incredibly long, there were no words that could answer the goodness of those two down there" (348). His confrontation with Traveler is not exactly revelatory. Traveler says his piece about his friend's delusions, how they are destroying his sanity and the Travelers' friendship with him, and Horacio largely ignores him. Horacio now realizes that he and Traveler are alike except that Traveler can go on living a life that he cannot entirely explain. Horacio has no great catharsis (in the end, he still calls Talita by La Maga's name), only a complacent sense of well-being.

Reading just the first fifty-six chapters of Hopscotch, the reader is left with Horacio, having just experienced this tender feeling, about to let himself go off the window ledge. The remaining "expendable chapters" drop the reader into the aftermath of the morning's events, with an incapacitated Horacio interacting with various individuals who are attending to him. The moments are disconnected and out of context, and the effect



is much like the effect of all the extra chapters. They give one a sense of Horacio's mindset, forever quoting and referencing sources, most often Morelli. These chapters contain all mentions of Horacio's dreams. He fears his life and dreams are merging together, driving him mad. Now, in the end, one is fully immersed, lost and out of time, rereading the same words, over and over again.



# Characters

## Horacio Oliveira

Horacio is the main character and narrator of the novel, which follows him from Paris to Buenos Aires, where he was born and grew up. When the reader first meets him, he is in his forties and living a bohemian life as a writer in Paris. He is living with his mistress, La Maga, a young woman from Montevideo. They spend their nights with the Serpent Club, a coterie of artists and intellectuals that dedicate themselves to drinks, creating, listening to jazz, and engaging in dialectical arguments.

Horacio is one of the founders of the Club, and he is constantly in competition with the mysterious and arrogant Ossip Gregorovius, who is in love with La Maga. Horacio cares for La Maga, but he grows irate, constantly having to explain abstract ideas and concepts to her. When Maga moves her child, Rocamadour, into their small flat, he begins an affair with a wealthy Parisian woman, Pola. Rocamadour grows ill, and Horacio walks out on them. After a maddening night in the rain, he returns to find Ossip and Maga together. That same night, with most of the Club there, Rocamadour dies. This is the last time that Horacio sees Maga. She disappears, and though Ossip tells him a few cities she mentioned, Horacio is haunted by the possibility that she may have killed herself.

After a brief period of searching, Horacio returns home to Buenos Aires. He takes up residence in the same hotel as his old friend Traveler and his wife Talita. He takes up work as a door-to-door fabrics salesman, but when the weather warms, he joins the circus where his friend works. During this time, a tension develops among the three, as Horacio observes the couple to understand their seeming happiness.

The owner eventually sells the circus to buy a mental hospital, and the Travelers and Horacio move in to work. While there, Horacio begins to think that Talita is La Maga. He kisses her, setting off a confrontation with Traveler that leads to his threatening to jump from his bedroom window. In the end, he acknowledges to Traveler that he will never be content in his life. He jumps, but survives.

Horacio is a man fixated on finding reason behind the chaos of his experiences. He agonizes over every action to the point where he is constantly running from every project and relationship.

## La Maga

La Maga, whose real name is Lucia, is Horacio's Uruguayan mistress in Paris. Having grown up in Montevideo, Maga reveals a few facets of her life before coming to France. At the age of nine, she was raped by a teenage neighbor, and as a young adult she had a child to a man named Carlos Francisco. She brought him with her to Paris and sent him to be raised in the country.



La Maga lives with Horacio in a small flat and has an almost reverent love for the Club. She is not nearly as familiar with the texts, artists, and musicians that the members discuss, and she is generally met with an aggravated sigh when she asks questions.

Rocamadour, her child, develops a fever and is sent to live with her and Horacio. This places an intense strain on their relationship, and she is not prepared to care for a sick child. She doesn't take him to a hospital or monitor his temperature. Eventually, Horacio becomes convinced that she is sleeping with Ossip, another Club member. He leaves her, and she invites Ossip over to help her take care of the child. That night, Rocamadour dies, and Maga is disconsolate. Having lost her child and been abandoned by Horacio, La Maga drops from out of circle after the wake. She gives the flat to Ossip and disappears. Neither the reader nor Horacio know if she leaves Paris or commits suicide.

La Maga is an aesthete disposed to the artist-philosopher lifestyle, but she is not an intellectual. Even the tacit explanations that her cohorts give her tend to go over her head. She lives in a flurry of creative ecstasy but cannot handle the scrutiny the Club. After her disappearance, she becomes something of an icon for Horacio, and his reason for telling the story of this novel.

## Manolo Traveler

Manolo Traveler is Horacio's old friend from Buenos Aires. He is married to Talita, a former pharmacist. His name is a great irritant to him, as he has never been out of Argentina and longs to travel. He is very active in his community, firstly as the owner of the local circus's chief attraction, the counting cat. Additionally, he's a local soccer player, auto driver, political activist, carpenter, and cyclist.

Before Horacio's return, Traveler feels a strange distance from his wife, despite their still tender marriage. They go to meet Horacio's boat when he arrives. Traveler regularly presses his friend to tell him about Paris, but he is always met with banal anecdotes about cafés. Talita regularly raises the issue of Horacio's effect on their marriage to her husband, but he insists on keeping him close, getting him room nearby and a job at the circus. As time goes on, Traveler develops sleeping problems. He begins reading books on psychological disorders with his wife in preparation for their transition to work at the mental hospital. He has accepted that his relationship with Horacio has become a strain on his life because of his intense connection to him and Horacio's attitude toward Talita.

When, at the asylum, Horacio kisses Talita. Traveler is not angry. He goes to Horacio's room - who believes Traveler will attack him - to talk to him. He agrees that they share much of the same personality, but he cannot understand how his friend functions with such despair and such a tenuous grasp on reality. In the end, he leaves frustrated, but clears the crowds watching Horacio on the window ledge. After Horacio jumps, Traveler and Talita are fired by the owner.





## Talita Traveler

Talita is Traveler's wife. She was a pharmacist when they met (Traveler was picking up suppositories). Now she works with him at the circus office and reads encyclopedias, journals, and almanacs.

When the reader first meets Talita, she is in bed with Traveler. They have an affectionate marriage, and as far as Talita is concerned, there is not tension between them. She goes with Traveler to pick up Horacio when he returns to Argentina, and her first impression is that he snubs her. As time goes on, she and Horacio develop a rapport, playing work games with the dictionaries she keeps around the house. After a time, she begins to feel pulled between her husband and his friend, culminating in the hot afternoon when the two build a bridge between their windows and she gets stuck in the middle as they bicker. She believes Horacio wants her.

As they prepare to move to the mental asylum, Talita tells Traveler that she does not think she can stand much more of the tension. Traveler assures her that Horacio is not interested in her, but once they arrive at the hospital it becomes clear to Talita that he is confusing her with La Maga. One night, she and Horacio talk about his fixation on Maga, and her pity towards him moves him to kiss her. She tells Traveler and feels that in some way she has survived something in confronting Horacio.

## Pola

Pola is a wealthy young woman with whom Horacio has an affair in Paris. He sees her one day at a café in Paris and they strike up a conversation. The first time they have sex, he takes her to the same hotel he took La Maga. Both women know about each other, and La Maga makes a voodoo doll of Pola, which Horacio destroys. Pola is frightened by Horacio's cynicism and comments that everything he touches seems to die. On the day she says this, he pointedly kisses her breast. Not long after, she is diagnosed with breast cancer, and Horacio leaves her. Some speculation among the Serpent Club members holds that Maga may be tending to Pola in her dying days.

Pola represents a more confident alternative to Horacio as his relationship with La Maga grows more complicated. The affair, in the end, leaves him dissatisfied.

## Rocamadour

Rocamadour is La Maga's child by an Uruguayan lover. He was born Carlos Francisco, named after the lover. When her father died, however, she renamed him Rocamadour, likely after the French Hillside region which is home to artist communes.

When Talita arrives in Paris, she sends him to live in the country. When he develops a severe fever, however, he is returned to Paris by the old woman who tends him, and La Maga keeps him in a cot in her flat with Horacio. His condition worsens, but Maga does





not take him to a hospital. One night, with most of the Serpent Club in attendance, he dies.

## Morelli

Morelli is a writer who the Serpent Club holds in almost reverential regard. He is distrustful of literature in general and poetic language in particular. He is always reaching towards an extreme where plot is abolished and the reader becomes an equal partner in the story. He has a fixation for quotations.

Horacio, on the night he leaves La Maga, sees Morelli hit by a car without knowing his identity. Days later, Horacio convinces Etienne to join him in visiting the old man. Once they reach the hospital, they discover who it is. Awestruck, they talk with Morelli about his legacy, and the author gives them the key to his flat and some pages. He believes he will die and wants them to compile his new book, whose chapters can be read in any order. At his flat, the members of the Club debate whether Morelli's philosophy does anything other than destroy existing forms.

The character of Morelli only appears in the expendable chapters. In many ways, he functions as a sounding board for Cortazar, allowing him to reference the work itself.

## Ossip Gregorovius

Ossip Gregorovius is a member of the Serpent Club. He is an intellectual living off an allowance and Horacio's rival within the group. His biography is sketchy, mostly owing to his tendency to speak of his nomadic childhood when drunk. His dossier lists a series of different homes and mothers about which he has spoken.

At a Club function, Ossip stays close to La Maga, whom he quietly loves, pressing her to tell her about her childhood. When she reveals the story of her rape, he is chastened and goes silent. Later, he gives one of his mothers' necklace to La Maga, catalyzing Horacio's leaving her. Ossip stays with Maga on the night that her child dies, and when she disappears, she gives him her flat. He speaks with Horacio later, telling him that he never slept with Maga and theorizing as to where she may have fled.

## Etienne

Etienne is a member of the Serpent Club. He is an painter and regularly derides dialectical arguments on the terms that color and image are the only valid conveyers of truth. On the night of Rocamadour's death, he arrives after Babs and Ronald with the news that Guy has vomited up his poison. He goes with Horacio to visit the severely injured Morelli in the hospital. When they receive his key and papers, it is Etienne who gathers the full Club to sort through Morelli's notes. Etienne is the first member to declare he is leaving the Club on that same night.



## Ronald

Ronald is a member of the Serpent Club. He is a musician who shares a flat with Babs, where they have regular jazz listening sessions. He is generally the master of the record player, choosing the records and holding definitive word on the quality of the musician.

He and Babs deliver the news to Horacio, La Maga, and Ossip that Guy Monod has attempted suicide. Later that night, when Rocamadour dies, he and Babs stay with Maga to wait for the police, after everyone else leaves. At the wake, he gets very drunk. When the Club goes to Morelli's apartment to assemble his new novel, Ronald calms Babs down when she attacks Horacio.

## Babs

Babs is a member of the Serpent Club. She is a sculptor and lives with Ronald. Together, they have an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz history. They host listening sessions with the Club in their flat.

One long night at one of these sessions, she cries on Horacio's shoulder. She is also present, in Horacio's flat, the night that Rocamadour dies. She stays with Maga after Ossip and Horacio leave. Babs goes with the group to Morelli's apartment, and there she precipitates the argument that dissolves the Club. She physically attacks him for abandoning La Maga.

## Wong

Wong is a member of the Serpent Club. He is doing research into torture across different cultures. At one of Ronald's jazz listening sessions, he shows Horacio a photo series of a death by a thousand cuts, which captivates him. He is in Morelli's flat on the Club's last meeting.

## Perico Romero

Perico Romero is a member of the Serpent Club. He is a writer and regularly at odds with Etienne regarding the viability of words versus image to examine truth.

## Guy Monod

Guy Monod is a member of the Serpent Club. When the reader first meets him, he is arriving at a jazz listening at Ronald and Babs' flat. His Swedish mistress has just left him, and he feigns nonchalance. That night, however, he passes out and dreams of her. Later, he drinks a tube of gardenal in an apparent suicide attempt. He survives, but this scare is what gathers the Club together in Maga's flat the night Rocamadour dies.



## Berthe Trepap

Berthe Trepap is an aging music teacher and composer. She performs a premier of three new works - one her own - for piano, and Horacio attends on a whim. The entire audience walks out except for him, and in pity, he agrees to walk her home. Berthe is disappointed by the lack of recognition she's received, and she clings to Horacio, trying to relate to him as an artist. He agrees to join her and her gay friend, Valentin, for a drink. They discover that Valentin has locked the door on them, and when Horacio offers to get her a hotel room, she slaps him.

## Emmanuele

Emanuele is a clocharde, or homeless person, living below a bridge in Paris. Horacio and La Maga often see her during their afternoons at the Pont des Arts. Maga befriends her, and discovers that she is in love with a fellow clochard, Celestin. The day after the Club dissolves, Horacio sleeps under the same bridge as Emmanuele. She wakes the next morning to discover that Celstin has left with her sardines and wine. She and Horacio spend the morning together after he buys some wine for them. To get back at Celestin, Emmanuele has sex with Horacio under the bridge, but they are arrested by police before finishing.

## Gekrepten

Gekrepten is an old girlfriend of Horacio's from Buenos Aires. When he and La Maga play a game of trying to remember minute details on insignificant memories, he can barely remember her face.

Gekrepten waits for Horacio while he is in Europe, and she is the first of his friend's to discover that he is returning, hearing so through an Argentinean travel bureau. When he arrives, she offers herself to him, and they move in together at a hotel. Gekrepten is a dim woman, entirely uninterested in the literary arguments of her lover, who rarely expresses desire to spend time with her. Horacio abruptly leaves her to move into the mental hospital, but after his suicide attempt, she attends to him.

## Ferraguto

Ferraguto is the owner of the circus where the Travelers work in Buenos Aires. Traveler regularly presses him to book shows out of the country, but Ferraguto insists there is not enough money. When Horacio returns to Argentina - and with some petitioning by Traveler - Ferraguto agrees to take him on as an employee. Not long after, he sells the circus to buy a mental hospital, and when he takes over he is forced into the arduous task of getting every patient's signature of consent for the change in ownership. After Horacio's suicide attempt, Ferraguto fires him and the Travelers.



# Objects/Places

## Pont des Arts

The Pont des Arts is a pedestrian bridge that crosses the Seine, Paris's central river. It is located near the Louvre. The bridge is a regular haunt for Horacio and La Maga.

## The Serpent Club

The Serpent Club is a small coterie of artists and intellectuals in Paris, created when La Maga and Horacio began to introduce their friends to each other. The group meets in the evenings to drink, listen to jazz, and engage in extended arguments on all topics of art and philosophy.

## Morelliana

Morelliana is a the word created by the Serpent Club to delineate the theories and aesthetic behind the work of Morelli, the iconoclastic writer.

## Dialectics

A dialectic as an argument between two different viewpoints with intention of the persuasion. Perhaps the most famous dialectic is the Socratic, in which one side of an argument picks apart inconsistencies in the opposing view. The Middle Ages was dominated by the Judeo-Christian dialectic, codified in the works of Thomas Aquinas. The most influential modern dialectic is likely the Hegelian dialectic, in which one proposition gives rise to its opposite, leading in turn to a synthesis of the two into a third proposition.

## Hopscotch

Hopscotch, the children's game, is played on a chalk playing space with a pebble kicked between squares. In its original European form, the player begins on Earth and finishes in Heaven.

## Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism is a strand of Buddhism that favors enlightenment through meditation rather than textual study. It invoke the stripping away of the conscious self and an equilibrium between opposing forces.



## The Millenary Kingdom

The Millenary Kingdom — a phrase parsed from Morelli — is the pre-Adamite state towards which people strive. Placed in different contexts, it could be nirvana, the rapture, or self-actualization. Within the Club, it has ambiguous connotations: they believe most people in the world delude themselves into thinking they can return to it, but they feel their arguments and study may hold the key to unlocking it.

## The Mondrian Painting

Piet Mondrian's work — to which Horacio is often compared and to whom he likens himself — is marked by sharp geometric shapes, often squares and rectangles. They are generally separated by perfectly measured negative space or solid gridded lines. His work is a self-contained study of form and color.

## The Counting Cat

The Counting Cat is the circus act that Manolo and Talita Traveler manage in Buenos Aires. It is a cat that solves mathematical equations for crowds.

## Mate

Mate is a hot drink made with yerba leaves and served in a hollowed gourd. One drinks it through a bomba, a sort of straw. Mate provides energy comparable to a cup of coffee.

## Cana

Cana is a brand of rum distilled in Nicaragua.

## Gauloise

Gauloises are short cigarettes sold in France.

## Death by a Thousand Cuts

Death by a Thousand Cuts is a form of execution common used the early twentieth century in Asia, intended for public display. The condemned was affixed to a stake, and small parts of his body are sliced off until, after a prolonged period of agony, he bleeds to death.



## Gliglish

Gliglish is to gibberish language that La Maga and Horacio create.

## The Works of Ceferino Piriz

Ceferino Piriz is a fictional essayist who has devised a new world order headed by a Society of Nations, which he believes will bring about world peace. The Society is built around the idea of dividing the nations of the world into coalitions of like skin colors. The painfully detailed plan for the Society involves a committee for every facet of the world.

# Social Sensitivity

The 1950s served to introduce Cortazar to the reading public principally as a writer of stories characterized by frequent and unexpected encounters with the fantastic. In the 1960s, although he continued to write short stories, he suddenly turned to the novel as the genre most suitable for his expression. As Cortazar's vision of reality deepened, he required a form that offered more room for philosophical, social, and personal digression.

The transition from short story to novel is basically a broadening of the author's artistic vision to include humankind's philosophical questioning of his own destiny.

As the reader commences his journey into Cortazar's novelistic world, s/he is at once struck by the richness of the author's vast knowledge of literature, anthropology, philosophy, art, religion, music, and history. Accompanying this encyclopedic vision is his creative manner of constantly looking at life from different levels and perspectives.

The ever changing focus of a reality that is fraught with challenging allusions and hidden meanings leaves the reader at times with the notion that he has been looking at the world through the transforming lens of a kaleidoscope.

Although the reality presented in Cortazar's novels may seem kaleidoscopic, it is in fact the medium through which he searches out the spiritual center of existence where transitory occurrences cease and an absolute harmony and peace is experienced.

Cortazar has said on several occasions that to write a novel is to create, with his readers' help, a mandala in which he may search out his personal path to absolute freedom. The primary focus of *Hopscotch*, therefore, is metaphysical and not social. Considered the first great Spanish American novel by the *London Times Literary Supplement* and winner of a National Book Award in the United States, much of its continuing intrigue revolves around its unique structure, which demands much, but rewards and challenges those who persevere in the game. In the introductory "Table of Instructions" the reader is told that this book is really many books, but above all, two. The first book is made up of chapters one through fifty-six. It comprises approximately two-thirds of the novel.

Although there is a logical presentation of events, the structure in which these events take place is split into two sections. "From the Other Side" recounts Horacio Oliveira's experiences in Paris, while "From This Side" records events that occur upon his return to Buenos Aires. Taken together, the two sides mirror both the inner and outer schizophrenic reality of the protagonists.

Beginning with chapter fifty-seven there is a third section called "From Diverse Sides; Expendable Chapters."



This section consists of unconnected episodes that at times seemingly have little to do with what took place in the first two sections, but occasionally add details that enhance and clarify previous events. As the subtitle playfully suggests, this third section may be ignored by the reader. The second book to which Cortazar refers consists of a random sequence of chapters chosen by Cortazar that destroy any semblance of coherent narrative. After enduring this "second" book the reader is then free to read, or perhaps it would be more precise to say, to play hopscotch in as many different sequences as he may wish. Hopscotch's revolutionary structure (simultaneously one, two, and an almost infinite number of novels) reflects the book's ultimate reason for having been written. It is the story of man's metaphysical search for integrity and Cortazar's linguistic quest for a newer and more authentic form in which to express this search.





## Techniques

Cortazar's fundamental mistrust of language expresses itself in various forms: in the spontaneous creation of melodramatic dialogues, in the humorous seesaw questions between La Maga and Horacio, and in the recital of nonsense poems. In an effort to surpass traditional linguistic expression, Oliveira and La Maga create their own subjective language called gliglico.

Moreover, there is a continual playing with words throughout Hopscotch. For example, Cortazar arbitrarily adds "h" to the beginning of certain words.

Since, in Spanish, "h" has no phonetic value the random placing of "h" before words may be considered added ornamentation to what is already mere decorative print for Cortazar.

In contrast to his lack of faith in language, Cortazar looks upon silence as a direct and efficacious way of communicating reality's ultimate truth. In chapter sixty-six, he speaks of a written page that consists of one sentence repeated over and over again. Towards the bottom of the page one word is missing. In the empty silence created by the absence of this word would lie the opening that leads to enlightenment.



# Themes

## Life is a Series of Snapshots

Morelli states that a novel should be a series of snapshots without a clear sense of continuity. This leaves the reader open to take an active role in assigning meaning to the disconnected events. In *Hopscotch*, the reader is given a series of experiences: a night listening to jazz, Horacio in bed with Pola, Traveler and Horacio building a bridge between their windows. One is invited to make decisions regarding the importance of these events.

Horacio, meanwhile, is constantly asking the same questions as the reader throughout. Why is he here at this time in this place? What is his purpose in La Maga's life? What is her purpose to him? More than anything, his central question: "What is there to do? With that question I'll never sleep. Oblomov, cosa facciamo? The great voices of History stir us to action ... Happy are those who choose, those who accept being chosen, the handsome heroes, the handsome saints, the perfect escapists." (19)

Maga's response to this conceit is that Horacio is an observer of life, not a participant. Ossiop says that Horacio's problem is that he is overwhelmed by the world. Horacio is reaching toward an extreme, a moment of clarity that unifies his experiences. He needs a unifying principle to guide his actions. This singular fixation drives him first from La Maga - her child, Rocamadour, is one too many complications for him - and later his life in France.

In Buenos Aires, Horacio forgoes all semblance of action and spends his time observing the Travelers in an attempt to understand human intimacy. This project nearly destroys their marriage and drives him to the brink of suicide. Again, his desire to understand life rather than living it not only costs him dearly, but also those close to him.

Cortazar states, through his writer Morelli, that one is intended to read this as accomplices, surrogates on Horacio's journey. On the one hand, one can view this as a modern tragedy, a man's quest to assign meaning to a life that has none. On the other hand, Horacio seems a divine fool on the order of Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot*, forever static, while the other shoe never drops. Either way, the lesson to be learned is that life is a series of moments, and no text can definitely make them one.

## Innocence and Experience

Through out the novel, Horacio, Morelli, and the Serpent Club as a whole make many references to the "pre-Adamite," "Edenic," and the "millenary kingdom." Horacio fixates throughout on the game of *Hopscotch*, a childhood ritual where, with chalk and a pebble, a person can skip from Earth to Heaven.



Morelli warns of the dangers inherent in mankind's need for an Arcadia. For him, such backward yearning is antithetical to forward progress of humankind. The Club members have placed their faith in books and theory, all except for La Maga. Horacio is likened to a Mondrian painting, all form and self-contained reason. La Maga, meanwhile is a Klee, free form and playful. She infuriates Horacio with her questions, but once they are parted, he realizes that what draws him to her is her playfulness. She represents for him the childhood understanding of Heaven that he jettisoned when he began his studies. It is telling that both times Horacio calls Talita by La Maga's name, she is standing in a hopscotch square.

For Horacio, the desire for knowledge and the need to apply textual reason to his day-to-day existence has destroyed the innocence of his younger hopscotch days. He laments at the end of Book 1 that, "childhood is over all of a sudden and you're into novels, into the anguish of the senseless divine trajectory, into the speculation about another Heaven that you have to learn to reach too. And since you have come out of childhood ... you forget that in order to get to Heaven you have to have a pebble and a toe." (p.214)

Once out of the Garden, one cannot return, and Horacio finds himself on his window edge in Chapter 56, looking down at Heaven on the Hopscotch court on the yard, wanting to come home.

## Literature as a Surrogate Experience

Hopscotch begins in the first person, from the point of view of Horacio. Throughout the fifty-six main chapters, the reader moves back and forth from a third-person perspective and Horacio's point of view; however, taken together, the main narrative feels like Horacio's story.

When the ninety-nine "expendable chapters" are added in the order that Cortazar recommends, one sees added dimensions: new points of view, leaps in time and flashbacks, diversions into separate story lines, and quotes and literary criticism from Morelli that serve as a commentary for the main story. The narrative is broken apart and interrupted with interjections that provide additional information, narrative notes on form and theme, and the occasional wild non sequitur.

Taken as a whole, the full 155 chapters of Hopscotch become not only the story of Horacio Oliveira, but also a comment upon itself as a work of art. Hopscotch is equal parts found-object sculpture, jazz improvisation, and literary critique. It is classic Aristotelian tragedy: a story of a man who strives for order only to arrive at madness. It is simultaneously a Brechtian exercise on itself: one is alienated from the narrative by being asked by Morelli throughout the story to place ourselves in the subject position of the protagonist and make judgments about his actions (or lack thereof),

The reader's understanding of Horacio's thought process is as intimate and muddled as Horacio. In Chapter 18, a drunken Horacio tries to piece together why he is in Ronald



and Babs' flat listening to jazz. He has spent all night dissecting the goings-on of the rest of the Serpent Club, and now he is lost and inebriated. As he works through his thoughts, his references get mixed up, he interrupts himself with snatches poetry and quotations, and he loses his thread more than a couple of times. The result is a rambling three page monologue.

Hopscotch, taken as a whole, serves the double-edged purpose of placing the reader squarely in the consciousness of a deeply confused individual and forcing one to question one's own role as a reader.

## Significant Topics

Hopscotch is a novel with an appreciable and central theme: Horacio Oliveira's quest to experience a wholeness founded on truth. His goal is to touch truth directly without the aid of intellectual concepts or philosophical language. Hopscotch is a child's activity in which the player attempts to reach the final goal (heaven) by successfully kicking an object from one square to the next. Cortazar transforms this simple children's game into a literary one.

The point of Cortazar's game is that no amount of intellectual theorizing will ever lead to true peace. One must act.

The first part (From the Other Side) describes the bohemian life of Horacio Oliveira, an Argentinean intellectual living in Paris. From its opening sentence where he asks himself if he would ever find La Maga (an Uruguayan woman living in Paris with her baby, Rocamadour), Hopscotch focuses on the theme of searching. At the core of Oliveira's quest is the desire to arrive at a totally "other" mode of existence, that unreachable state that is variously referred to throughout the novel as the kibbutz of desire, utopia, heaven, omphalos, Nirvana, Satori, and Ygdrassil.

Oliveira is representative of Western man in that he continually analyzes and ponders the significance of his every thought and act. While in Paris he associates himself with a bohemian group of friends who call themselves the Serpent Club. They spend the majority of their time either discussing the finer points of literature, philosophy, and art or listening to jazz.

Among the club's more interesting members are a Russian intellectual, Ossip Gregorovius; two Frenchmen, Etienne and Guy; a Spaniard, Perico; an American couple, Babs and Ronald; and a Chinese named Wong.

Feeling himself somehow incomplete, Oliveira is attracted to a young Uruguayan woman named La Maga.

Whereas he is the epitome of the anguished intellectual, she is a free spirit whose spontaneous and intuitive nature he longs to acquire. Of the many events described in Oliveira's Parisian experience, three are of particular significance in understanding his confused efforts to free himself from his egocentric obsession to comprehend the



ultimate meaning of existence: his unemotional response to Rocamadour's death; his compassionate involvement with the pathetic Berthe Trepas; and his drunken encounter with La clocharde (a much abused and time-worn prostitute). This last episode results in his deportation from France.

In the novel's second part (From This Side) Oliveira's spiritual odyssey continues. On returning home to his native Buenos Aires, he is greeted by three friends: Gekrepten, his loyal but unexcitingly bourgeois lover; Traveler, a life-long friend; and Traveler's wife, Talita. Each of these three characters has a European counterpart. Together with their other half they share a doppelganger relationship that manifests a fundamental lack of unity within each character as seen from the eyes of Oliveira.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel opens in the first person. The narrator is Horacio Oliveira, and large sections of the novel are long soliloquies from his point of view. As a narrator, his point of view is subjective, at best. When intoxicated - as he often is - his descriptions become garbled and easily diverted into diatribes. When sober, his accounts are heavily influenced by emotion and neurosis, given to long explanations, rationalizations, and polemics. Near the end of the novel, Horacio has entered a delusional state and sees visions of La Maga.

Much of the time, however, the point of view changes to an omniscient third person, though the impression given from the work as a whole is that these passages are anecdotes presented by Oliveira. When the third person narrator examines the thoughts of a given character, it is generally the thoughts of Horacio himself.

Two notable exceptions are Chapter 35, which appears to be from the point of view of Ronald comforting Babs after the last meeting of the Serpent Club, and Chapter 93, told from La Maga's point of view. Also, many of the "expendable chapters" consist of quotations, news clippings, and Morelliana — pages of criticism from the writer Morelli.

Taken together, though, *Hopscotch* can be read as a novel in the first person, told by Horacio as a free-form novel that he is in the process of composing and appending simultaneously.

## Setting

The novel takes place in the 1950s. Book 1 takes place mainly in Paris, Book 2 primarily in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In Book One, the book begins on the bridge of the Pont des Arts, where Horacio is searching for La Maga. Beyond that, most of the action takes place in the various flats of members of the Serpent Club. Ronald and Babs host a long night of jazz in their flat. Horacio and La Maga have a small flat, where the Club gathers on the night that Rocamadour dies. Morelli's cluttered apartment is the site of the final meeting of the Club.

In Book Two, Horacio's activity in Buenos Aires takes place in four major locations. He shares a hotel room with Gekrepten, located directly across the street from the Travelers' room, and several flights up. This location becomes important on the day that Horacio and Traveler decide to build a bridge between the two windows. Nights are often spent at Don Crespo's patio, a favorite haunt in the neighborhood. Outside of that, action takes place in the circus where the Travelers and Horacio work initially, or the



Mental Asylum, where they later work. This hospital is a large building with several floors, a central courtyard, and a service elevator that leads down to the morgue.

## Language and Meaning

Hopscotch is a stream-of-conscious work with all the attending stylistic choices: long complex sentences, digressions, frequent references, shifts in language, abrupt changes in form. These create the impression that one is not necessarily reading a series of events but rather the narrator's processing of it.

The sentence structure throughout the book is incredibly complex, with some sentences - such as Horacio's rumination on the glories of jazz - lasting for several pages with many clauses and digressions. Horacio is a multilingual individual and he regularly shift between English, French, Spanish, and Latin. He and La Maga have their own language, Gliglish, which he occasionally lapses into. Chapter 68 is written in Gliglish, and Chapter 69 is written in a sort of phonetic English: "Abila Sanhes waz a man wurthi of atenshun" (374). More over, the writing reflects compulsive ticks the protagonist has. For example, he tends to add a wh- to words he's fixated, such as "whastute" or "Whecumenical."

Perhaps most pervasive throughout the novel is the use of references - literary, philosophical, artistic - to figures both real and invented. Horacio constantly derides his accursed learning, but everything he sees, does, or thinks is analogous to someone else: Klee, Wittgenstein, Artaud, Satchmo, Morelli. Many of the "expendable chapters" in the last third of the novel are quotations, snatches of poetry and song, or analyses of Morelli's works. Morelli himself is fond of extensive quoting. The effect is of a world seen through the eyes of an over-educated, neurotic man.

## Structure

The novel consists of 155 chapters in three books: On the Other Side, On This Side, On Diverse Sides. The first two books contain a single narrative with a straightforward chronology. The third, On Diverse Sides, serves as a sort of appendix to the first two, with "expendable chapters" that include commentary by Horacio and his literary idol Morelli, as well as additional scenes alluded to but not witnessed in the first two books. Cortazar has structured Hopscotch so that it can be read in two ways.

Instead of a Table of Contents, Cortazar provides a Table of Instructions, advising one can read Chapters 1-56 straight through and skip the remaining 98. Otherwise, one can read the entirety of the book in an order that Cortazar provides, with expendable chapters interspersed throughout the narrative of the first fifty-six. One chapter, 55, is omitted in this reading, replaced by several expendable chapters that tell a longer version of that episode. This shuffled order ends with a rotation between the last two chapters, reread over and over again. Taken together, the 155 chapters for Cortazar's novel take on the quality of a mixed-media art piece or an improvised jazz session.

For the sake of thoroughness and coherence, this guide analyzes the book in the shuffled order suggested by the author.





## Quotes

"... childhood is over all of a sudden and you're into novels, into the anguish of the senseless divine trajectory, into the speculation about another Heaven that you have to learn to reach too. And since you have come out of childhood ... you forget that in order to get to Heaven you have to have a pebble and a toe."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 36, p. 214

"I believe in the principle that thought must precede action, silly"

"You believe in the principle," said La Maga. "How complicated. You're like a witness. You're the one who goes to a museum and looks at the paintings. I mean the paintings are there and you're in the museum too, near and far away at the same time. I'm a painting. Rocamadour is a painting. Etienne is a painting, this room is a painting. you think you're in this room, but you're not. You're looking at the room, you're not in the room."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 3, p. 20

"How we all hate each other, without being aware that endearment is the current form of hatred, and how the reason behind pure hatred is this excentration, the unbridgeable space between you and me, between this and that."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 78, p. 394

"All the time I've known you, all you've done is search, but one gets the feeling that what you're looking for is right in your pocket ... And in the meantime, you mess up the lives of any number of people."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 31, p. 180

"There are metaphysical rivers, [La Maga] swims in them like that swallow swimming in the air, spinning madly around the belfry, letting herself drop so that she can rise up all the better with the swoop. I describe and define and desire those rivers, but she swims in them."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 21, p. 96

"Gregorovius sighed. They all used to sigh when she asked a question Horacio and especially Etienne, because Etienne not only used to sigh but would sniff, snort, and call her stupid. "It's so purple to be ignorant," La Maga thought, hurt."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 25, p. 131

"La Maga would cease being a lost object and become the image of a possible reunion — no longer with her but on this side of her or on the other side of her; by her, but not her."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 48, p. 292

"As soon as a thing begins to function well, you feel trapped. But all of us are a little like that, a band of what we call failures because we don't have professions, degrees, and



all that. That's why we're in Paris, man."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 28, p. 165

"Understand that dialectics can only set our closet in order in moments of calm."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 28, p. 163

"Everything falls apart when you take hold of it, even if you just look at it," Pola said.

"You're like some terrible acid, I'm afraid of you."

... Oliveira thought, leaning over to kiss her on the breast, exactly where she had just pointed a hesitant finger.

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 64, pp. 366-367

"Next to Talita, wrapping up her face and head with his lips and fingers, Traveler could feel the impassable barrier, the dizzy distance that not even love could leap."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 143, p.540

"He hated the name Traveler because he had never been outside Argentina ... and the fact that he was a sort of agent and jack-of-all-trades for a circus called Les Estrellas gave him no hope whatever of traveling around the world Barnum-style."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 37, p. 219

"I'd give them anything for them to stop arguing," Talita thought. "No matter what they talk about, it's always about me in the end."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 41, p. 248

"All of us, Talita, you, and I, we form a triangle that is exceedingly trismegistic. I'll tell you again: just give me a signal and I'll break it off."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 46, p. 281

"I am I, I am he, [Talita] had said it without thinking ... I am I, I am he, and he wasn't Manu, he was Horacio, the inhabitant, the treacherous attacker, the shadow within the shadow of his room at night, the glow of his cigarette slowly sketching out the shapes of his insomnia."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 47, p. 285

"[Talita] had never seen [Horacio] smile like that, faintheartedly and at the same time with his whole face open and frontward, without the usual irony ... going up to her in the act of accepting that thing impossible to name that was making him smile. And his kiss was not for her either, it wasn't happening there grotesquely next to the freezer full of corpses."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 54, p. 321

"Do you think I'm not surprised that you haven't committed suicide? You're the real Doppelganger, because you're like something disembodied, you're a will in the form of a weather vane, up there. I want this, I want that, I want north and south and everything at the same time, I want La Maga, I want Talita, and then the gentleman visits the morgue and plants a kiss on his best friend's wife. Everything because realities and memories



are mixed up in him."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 56, p. 340

"I know she's Talita, but a while ago she was La Maga. She's two people, just like us."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 56, p. 346

"I begin to think that it makes just as much sense to model a doll out of crumbled bread as to write the novel I will never write."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 2, p. 15

"I can make a dialectical operation even out of soup," Oliveira thought.

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 90, p. 419

"La Maga will never know how her finger pointed towards the thin line that shatters the mirror, up to what point certain silences, certain absurd attentions, a certain scurrying of a dazzled centipede were the password for the firm establishment of my being in myself."

Book 2, From This Side: Chapter 98, p. 439

"Morelli was working up an episode in which he would leave the names of his characters blank, so that in each case the supposed abstraction would have to be resolved in a hypothetical attribution."

Book 1. From the Other Side: Chapter 115, p. 478

"In one way or another everyone is looking for it, everyone wants to open the door that leads out to the playground. And not just Eden ... the retirement from kicks in the ass."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 71, p. 377

"The attitude of my nonconformist is translated into his refusal of everything that smells like an accepted idea, tradition, a gregarious structure based on fear and falsely reciprocal advantages."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 74, p.387

"My prose is rotting syntactically and is heading — with so much work — towards simplicity."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 94, p. 429

"This instant between one and another instant in those lives which were so vague and so little characterized would have to be presumed or invented by the reader ..."

Book 1, From the Other Side: Chapter 109, pp. 469-469

"Who cares," Morelli said. "You can read my book way you want to. Liber Fulguralis, mantic pages, and that's how it goes. The most I do is set it up the way I would like to reread it."

Book 1, From the Other Side. Chapter 155, p. 556



## Topics for Discussion

Cortazar divides his story into two books: "From the Other Side" and "From This Side." In Book 2, Horacio comments that his life can now be cleanly divided into his time on this side of La Maga and his time on the other side of La Maga. Why is Horacio's relationship with Maga so transformative to him? How is he changed?

Ossip and La Maga describe Horacio as inhuman. Throughout the novel, he is an observer, one who cannot act, prone to moments of circular reasoning that frustrate him immensely. Discuss what Horacio's objective is that draws him to be so antisocial. What does he want? Does his goal justify the pain he causes others?

Compare and contrast Traveler and Horacio. Do they want the same thing out of life? Are their doubts about their lives similar? Is Traveler's lack of world experience a strength or a weakness?

Hopscotch is sometimes described as a hypertext novel, one in which the chapters can be read in any order. Why do you think the author has offered two different orders with certain chapters listed as "expendable?" Does your understanding of the narrative events change when you read all of the chapters as opposed to just the first fifty-six?

Ossip has to press La Maga to get her to talk about her childhood in Montevideo. She claims that her past has no connection with who she is now. To what extent are Horacio, La Maga, and Traveler trying to erase their pasts?

Discuss the role of beauty in literature. Morelli suggests that poetic language and rhetoric has no place in modern literature. Do you think that such language serves the deceptive purpose that Morelli suggests?

Discuss the relationship between Talita and Horacio. Many times, Talita states that she doesn't want Horacio, but she fears the tension between them. Why does Horacio kiss her? Does he think she is La Maga at that moment? Is he merely grateful to her? After his observation of her and Traveler, does he want their love?

After the disappearance of La Maga, Horacio works very hard to repress his feelings of regret and guilt. This leads to nightmares, sleeplessness, anguish throughout his day, and eventually visions. Are there ever moments when this repressing emotions of despair is necessary and worthwhile?

Discuss the novel's connection between dream and madness. Is there a connection between Rocamadour's death and the vivid dreams that haunt Horacio during the day? Is madness the inability to differentiate between dreams and waking?



## Literary Precedents

Cortazar has been influenced by many philosophical, scientific, literary, and artistic theories: Bergson's "elan vital" and Sartre's Existentialism; Planck's quantum theory and Einstein's theory of relativity; Surrealism, the Theater of the Absurd, Neo-realism, Vanguardism, Cubism, Futurism, and Pop Art, make up the creative milieu out of which he creates his own deeply personal world view. Hopscotch, in many instances, borrows directly from his knowledge of Zen Buddhism. At times, Cortazar resembles a literary Roshi (Zen Master) whose goal goes beyond novelistic creation. Cortazar has said that to write is to create his mandala from which he hopes to achieve enlightenment. He also hopes to challenge his readers to struggle for enlightenment. By searching through the "many books" that make up Hopscotch, Cortazar hopes his readers might encounter their spiritual center.

One of the many possible books in Hopscotch appears in seminal form in chapter sixty-two. Here the diffuse plans for a book that was to be written by the deceased writer Morelli are described. It was Morelli's desire to write a novel in which Aristotelian causality would be nonexistent. In its place the reader would encounter yet another wholly new perspective of reality. The novel alluded to in chapter 62 of Hopscotch emerges fully developed in 1968 as Cortazar's 62: A Model Kit.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994