



Final Exam

Julio Cortazar, Alfred MacAdam, Julio Cortázar

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Long undiscovered, Final Exam, Julio Cortzar's first novel (published 1986 in Spanish) is a major work by this important Argentinian author, now available in English translation for the first time. In its characters, themes, and preoccupations it prefigures Cortzar's later fictions, including Blow-Up and his masterpiece Hopscotch. Written in 1950 (just before the fall of Pern's government), Final Exam is Cortzar's allegorical, bitter, and melancholy farewell to an Argentina from which he was about to be permanently self-exiled. (Cortzar moved to Paris the following year.) The setting of Final Exam is a surreal Buenos Aires, dark and eerie, where a strange fog has enveloped the city to everyone's bewilderment. Juan and Clara, two students at a college called "The House" (the Great Books are read aloud there by so-called Readers), meet up with their friends Andrs and Stella, as well as a journalist friend they call "the chronicler." Juan and Clara are getting ready to take their final exam, but instead of preparing, they wander the city with their friends, encounter strange happenings in the square, attend concerts, and discuss their lives in cafs.

Final Exam is a fascinating literary experiment: with stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques, radical typographical innovations, and also shifts in rhythm and direction of its characters' thoughts and speech.

Darkly funny -- and riddled with unresolved ambiguities -- Final Exam is translated ably here by Alfred MacAdam. It is one of Cortzar's best works--long overdue in English.

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