



MAD LOT

JESSA CRISPIN

The promiscuously well-read Bookslut editor picks and discusses one personal favorite, *The Diary of Andres Fava* by Julio Cortázar

By Kate Rockwood

Jessa Crispin started Bookslut.com with two goals in mind: she wanted to score free books from publishers, and she wanted a new way, besides Minesweeper, to kill time at her day job. Now the monthly Web literary magazine has become her day job, read by an ever-growing fan base of booklovers eager to read reviews, columns, author interviews, plus a daily blog where Crispin dishes out her acerbic opinions about the woeful state of publishing.

But don't think Crispin's busy schedule or sexy accolades — she was once

named one of *Wired* magazine's 10 Sexiest Geeks — has made her any less of a bookworm. She reads more in a month than most readers get through all year, a voracious habit she's honed since her upbringing in Kansas, when her father would read *Dune* and the short stories of Mark Twain to her at bedtime.

Now a Chicago resident, Crispin has a personal library in her apartment that most would consider a fire hazard. From that dense impressive collection, she cherry-picks one standout title, Julio Cortázar's *The Diary of Andres Fava*.

1. In one sentence, *The Diary of Andres Fava* is: the diary of a fictional stand-in for Julio Cortázar, including his musings on the death of a friend, his travels, and day-to-day business.

2. I chose this book because: whenever I read Julio Cortázar, I have the feeling that he's writing specifically for me. It's an arrogant feeling, but he speaks directly to the core of my being. No interpretation necessary. I think most readers have one writer whose brain works on the same wavelength as their own, and for me it has been Cortázar ever since I picked up *The Winners* seven years ago.

3. The first time I read it: I had just left a long-term relationship and was living on my own for the first time in four years. I was still feeling disoriented and wobbly and was relying heavily on writers like Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, Alasdair Gray, and Cortázar

to straighten me out and keep me company.

4. I've read it: many times. It's not a linear book, so I just dip in and out of it as necessary.

5. One free-associative personal memory I have of this book is: It was the first thing that came into my head when I was deciding where to go next. I just knew I had to see Buenos Aires. Cortázar had a complicated relationship with Buenos Aires, one that showed up and played out in many of his books.

6. My favorite line is: "To travel is to invent a spatial future. Instead, if I stay, I destroy even the temporal future to replace it with a matchbox future, a future of weekends, new detective stories, Thursdays with Olga and Sundays at the cinema. I know how many shirts I have in the closet. The wall of my office is a vertebra. Soup, then soup. Then this blue armchair." Because it voices my need to travel perfectly.

something I've never been able to explain.

7. If I ever met the author, I would: probably freak out, since he's dead and all.

8. After reading it, this book caused me to: immediately e-mail the translator. It was nice to talk to someone who felt as passionately about Cortázar's literature as I do.

9. Music to listen to when reading this: Cortázar was very into music, and it showed in his writing style, especially jazz from the '50s and '60s.

10. You should read it when: I'm not really into prescribing literature for self-help purposes, but I know that I pick up Cortázar when I'm getting itchy feet and need to perform a life upheaval of some sort. He never had all of the answers, but that's why I find him comforting. I need him when I need to be reminded that the chaos is just as worthwhile as the balance.