

## The Mutating City: Buenos Aires and the Avant-garde, Borges, Xul Solar, and Marechal

JASON WILSON  
*University College London*

*This paper explores the 'urban experience' in the Buenos Aires of the 1920s and 1930s, the avant-garde city, through the comparison between Paris and Buenos Aires and myths of modernity (surrealism, T. S. Eliot and Joyce). A framework of a mutating city, oscillating between an infernal and a heavenly city, between city anguish and the city as a refuge in the mind, is established through three avant-garde reactions. The first is 'Borges's city of street freedoms' and deals with how the infernal city takes hold of his mind. The second is Xul Solar's 'metaphysical city' as escapist from the cruel market place of actual Buenos Aires, and the third is Leopoldo Marechal's tale of two cities in his novel *Adán Buenosayres*, 1948, where Marechal recreates the avant-garde city of Borges and Xul Solar at the Norah Lange 'salon', but flimsily disguised. *Adán's* descent into 'Cacodelphia' with Xul Solar, who also designed this hell, and it turns out to be in fact the actual, infernal city of 1920s Buenos Aires. This third section also attempts to recuperate a novel sidelined by the boom writers and promoters.*

The rapid growth of Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century, from colonial backwater to Latin America's grandest city, can be told in statistics. Of the 56 million people who emigrated from Europe to the New World in the nineteenth century, some six and a half million ended up in Argentina, which in 1914 had a higher proportion of foreigners to natives than did the USA. Some four-fifths of the population were foreign-born. Between 1914 and 1970 Buenos Aires expanded from 2,035,031 to 8,352,900, and the city still contains a higher percentage of the total national population than any other Latin American metropolis (Wilson 1999a). Immigration has created a genuinely international city. Christopher Isherwood noted this cosmopolitanism: 'Buenos Aires must be the most truly international city in the world' (1949: 168).

A city is always more than one observer can assimilate, so to capture the subjective experience of the city, I aim to explore three attempts to create a city of the mind where the city is internalized as subjectivity itself, directly experienced by all city-dwellers, or citizens. First, how a city imagines itself through comparisons

Address correspondence to Jason Wilson, Department of Spanish and Latin-American Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK.

'Buenos Aires was then, as always, the most beautiful, sophisticated, and civilized city in Latin America' (1988: 13).

If there is some essence that survives demolition and change in this Paris/Buenos Aires twinning, then it lies in the mind and not in the city. The reality of a city as experienced by individuals and incorporated into subjectivities is more complex. Cities mutate fast, and especially so in Buenos Aires where there is little respect for the past. The colonial city has melted back into the mud that the adobe bricks were badly made of, the nineteenth-century city has toppled to cheap, anonymous high-rise blocks, and now skyscrapers give it a New Yorkish aura. Ezequiel Martínez Estrada noted how Buenos Aires advance by erasing its past (1942: 61). Recently, Alvaro Abós called this 'la religión de la piqueta' (2000: 8). The city changes so fast that individuals cannot keep up with its unpredictable metamorphoses. Nostalgia is the obvious recourse against this disorientation. The speed of change, the lack of town planning and keeping to the law has led to feverish sensations of city 'flux'.

Jorge Luis Borges focused on this constant change: 'La imagen que tenemos de la ciudad siempre es algo anacrónica. El café ha degenerado en bar; el zaguán que nos dejaba entrever los patios y la parra es ahora un borroso corredor con un ascensor al fondo' (1974a: 1029). This urban experience of loss, at variance with the predictable changes of the natural cycles, leads to Charles Baudelaire, one of the earliest poets to explore city alienation, who lamented in his poem 'Le cygne' that 'Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville/Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel' (1941: 95). Louis Aragon's *Le paysan de Paris* (1926), preserved his favourite Parisian space — the glass-covered arcades — from the 'pichoche', but only in his prose.

I move now to avant-garde versions of Buenos Aires in the early works of Jorge Luis Borges, the paintings of Xul Solar, and Leopoldo Marechal's long-in-gestation, experimental novel *Adán Buenosayres* (1948). These three creative friends shared the task of trying to renovate art and match it with their views of the social, political and cultural changes that were happening in the city in the 1920s and 1930s. Two general comments stand out. First, these three react against the official, commercial and tourist Buenos Aires. Second, they come to terms with the undercity, the factories, brothels, slums, sewers and city alienation, with that inevitable yearning for some transcendental refuge-city.

There are parallels in the way that the surrealists inhabited their Paris at around the same period. André Breton's 1928 account of his affair with Nadja is grounded in his strolling an erotic Paris streetscape haunted by Nadja and the *merveilleux*, found in the chance encounters in the streets. Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* is even more grounded in place, the Passage de l'Opéra. It also explores the 'merveilleux quotidien', the 'insolite', aesthetic criteria at the heart of the avant-garde (1961: 14). Aragon sought to diagnose a modern mythology based on street happenings, on ephemerality, the *frisson* of danger, and erotic mystery. His text mocks the conventional city guidebooks as he lists the bars, baths, brothels, shops and denizens of this disappearing passage. He calls this a geography of pleasure, a new *patrie* that corresponds to his own freedom outside the law (1961: 63). These glass-covered passages are where he locates Paris: 'Terrains vagues intellectuels où l'individu

1998: 53) — at odds with the later library-bound Borges, in the spirit of a true Baudelairian *flâneur*. Luisa Valenzuela evoked walks he took with her mother to the Constitución station bridges: 'Importaba el caminar, y hablar, y husmear atmósferas de esta ciudad que le gustaba explorar como quien se interna en terreno desconocido' (1999: 61). Silvina Ocampo recalled a similar kind of gnosis into surprising urban ugliness, strolling 'por uno de los lugares más sucios y lóbregos de Buenos Aires: el puente Alsina. Caminábamos por las calles llenas de barro y piedras' (2002: 14). They often took writer friends from Europe, even Argentines; they would pass stray cows, and Borges would point to the bridge over the stinking Riachuelo (Ocampo 2002: 14).

The first poem of Borges's first book is inevitably titled 'Las calles', and the first line links the outer street with the inner body: 'Las calles de Buenos Aires/ya son mi entraña' (1974a: 17). These streets are defined against the bustle of the commercial and cosmopolitan centre of the city: 'No las ávidas calles, incómodas de turba y de ajeteo'. He turned his back on Calle Florida, which Martínez Estrada used to evoke a group of Europeanizing writer friends who would meet and gossip in this glamorous street (1942: 212–16). In a discarded foreword to his first collection, Borges made his plan plain: 'De propósito pues, he rechazado los vehementes reclamos de quienes en Buenos Aires no advierten sino lo extranjero: la vocinglera energía de algunas calles centrales y la universal chusma dolorosa que hay en los puertos' (1997: 162). The centre and the port are dismissed in favour of the suburbs where the countryside still permeated the city. Walking the streets then led Borges to a 'recuperada heredad', suggesting salvation through street-pilgrimage, an expectant roaming. Years later he confessed that in his dreams abroad he always remained in his patch of Buenos Aires, a city that both created Borges and reflected his true, anonymous self, freed from European echoes.

Borges avoided another Buenos Aires: the port city of immigrants and sailors, of brothels and hovels, the packed *conventillos* that anticipated the *villas miserias*. For Borges and Martínez Estrada the dockside area of Italian immigrants called La Boca, was 'otro país' (Martínez Estrada 1968: 57). Equally absent in Borges's Buenos Aires was Calle, then Avenida Corrientes, a teeming populist zone invented by Colombians and Peruvians, according to an out-of-touch Borges, 'en Buenos Aires nadie piensa en calle Corrientes' (Zito 1998: 44). Yet an essayist like Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, in 1931, located the city's heart at the junction of Corrientes and Esmeralda — 'el polo magnético de la sexualidad porteña' (1991: 34). Leopoldo Marechal wrote a history of the Calle Corrientes in 1937 as the key street to understanding the city. It was here that the tango was born and flourished. Borges was disgusted by this brothel dance, and refused to site his inner city there.

He faced up to this infernal Buenos Aires in a poem of 1929, which was to be a farewell to poetry for Borges, and a farewell to the street Rambler. The poem is titled 'Paseo de Julio', a street in the Bajo which for all *porteños* of his time was synonymous with sex (so much so that it was renamed Avenida Leandro Alem). The poem refers accurately to the 'alta recova' where prostitution is hidden by the music emanating from the dives. Of this foul street, Borges exclaimed, 'Nunca te sentí patria'. A series of terms convey his disgust: the Paseo as 'pesadilla', 'fealdad', 'perdición', 'caos', 'infierno', 'codicia', with its 'fauna de monstruos', its 'noche

sanctuary. In a poem from *Elogio de la sombra* Borges evokes his private city, with a list of places and faces, to end with the city slipping out of his grasp: 'Buenos Aires es la otra calle, la que no pisé nunca [...] es mi enemigo' (1974a: 1010).

Borges's early street wanderings — his early, liberating phase of 'aventurero' (1993: 25) — led him to create an unrecorded city, a colonial backwater, a non-immigrant city, close to the provinces and what Martínez Estrada saw as the real but hidden city where Buenos Aires could be 'cualquier pueblo olvidado de La Rioja' (1942: 193). That is, a blank city without past or history or myths. The streets for Borges promised something he refused to define, a free-floating but empty state, suggesting erotic possibilities, friendship, salvation, even danger but ignoring sex, crowds, commerce, immigrants, and later, Peronism. Borges closed his 1952 piece 'La muralla y los libros' with a famous definition of the aesthetic experience as an experience that emerges from certain places, faces or from music, 'esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce' (1974a: 635), which evokes exactly what did not happen to him during his street wanderings.

In a later prologue to his first prose work, an eccentric biography of the suburban poet Evaristo Carriego, Borges opposed his safe childhood garden and his father's miraculous library in Palermo to the outside world of hoodlums, knives, guitars, duels and brothels imagined through Carriego's verse (1974a: 101). What he learnt from this minor, populist poet Carriego could define what he sought in his street ramblings: 'que el universo (que se da entero en cada instante, en cualquier lugar [...]) también estaba ahí, en el mero presente, en Palermo en 1904' (1974a: 158). Borges can shrink Buenos Aires back into his perception of it, whether in a library, or in the *barrio* of Palermo. The centre is where he happens to be. But in the end, Borges allied himself with another writer from his class, Manuel Mújica Láinez, who was equally 'paseadero' (1974a: 10), but whose strolls reunited him with his Patrician past. Mújica Láinez rubbed shoulders with historical ghosts related to his family; he was a 'viejo porteño, porteño de siglos' (1974a: 21–26) for whom in 1977 the city was its smart zones around the Plaza San Martín, as it was for the more conservative 'Borges' from the 1930s on.

#### *Xul Solar (b. 1887, d. 1963) and his Metaphysical City*

Beatriz Sarlo opened her study of modernity in the periphery in the Buenos Aires of the 1920s and 1930s by describing Xul Solar's paintings as a 'rompecabezas' of Buenos Aires. Obsessive semiotics echoes the clash of tongues in the immigrant city streets, speaking *cocoliche*, close to Xul Solar's invented languages called *pan-criollo* and *panlengua* (1988: 15). But Xul Solar's art expresses more than a Babelic city. Like his friend and admirer Jorge Luis Borges, Xul Solar returned home to Buenos Aires after twelve years in Europe. He arrived in the thriving, commercial city with well-thought out reactions to the European avant-garde, allied himself with the avant-garde *Martín Fierro* group, and published in their magazine. The Exhibition with his friends Emilio Pettoruti and Norah Borges in 1926 defined the avant-garde in Buenos Aires. Some constants emerge from Xul Solar's astonishing art: first, how he avoids mimetic realism or representation. He is an anti-realist painter. Like Paul Klee, Xul Solar mainly used watercolours to create his alternative, inner

inner, and what is real. He reversed the usual twentieth-century typologies rooted in matter. Xul Solar's autodidacticism is very *porteño*, shared by Roberto Arlt's astrologer, with an unpredictable slant on life from such jumbled readings.

In a catalogue to Xul Solar's 1949 exhibition, Borges conveyed his admiration: 'Xul Solar es uno de los acontecimientos más singulares de nuestra época [...] Sus pinturas son documentos del mundo ultraterreno, del mundo metafísico en que los dioses toman las formas de la imaginación que los sueña', and refers to Xul's happy colours, his angels, his passionate architectures, and how he has superseded realism by reinventing 'la mística pintura de los que no ven con los ojos físicos', like Blake ('nuestro Blake', said Borges), the yogis and the bards (*Prólogo*). Borges, younger by eleven years, called Xul Solar a mystic, the most impressive of the three geniuses he had met — the other two were Macedonio Fernández and Rafael Cansinos Assens (Verdugo). Borges dedicated his book of essays *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, to Xul Solar, who illustrated it with five 'viñetas' that were excised from the posthumous edition. Xul Solar and Borges stopped seeing each other in 1949, perhaps due to political discrepancies.

Two examples of Xul Solar's work suffice to illustrate my point. Buenos Aires metamorphoses into his watercolour *Ciudad Lagui*, 1939, a strange, futuristic city by water with ladders reaching to the sun, and pilgrims gripping walking sticks and sacks on their backs striding away. Here the skyscrapers that were growing in Buenos Aires like the Kavanagh on Plaza San Martín, built in 1936 and thirty floors high, have become the new temples, a symbolic reaching up to heaven, with the mystical ladders outside the buildings, leading into the sun of illumination (Wilson 1999b: 102). An even more visionary city is his 1933 water-colour *Paisaje celestial* with its houses as spiritual metaphors of after-life, ladders, transparent people, transformations, strange simian faces: an open-ended symbolism that defies explanation, though echoing St John's New Jerusalem, a perfect cube, with doors (Raine 1999: 37). Xul Solar argued for 'imprevisibles perspectivas', and a holy city, 'una villa flotante', emerging from heaven (Gradowczyk 1990: 166). Mario Gradowczyk, invoking Calvino, sees this work as an initiatory exercise that wakes in the viewer sudden, unexpected desires to reach higher states of consciousness (150). Xul Solar is not out to simply please the eye, with his version of that 'retinal art' so mocked by Marcel Duchamp, but probes the more real inner self, beyond the material and sexual world, in a new, ascetic city with soul.

*Leopoldo Marechal (b. 1900, d. 1970), and a Tale of Two Cities*

Marechal began writing *Adán Buenosayres* in 1929 or 1930 in Paris, exploring his subjective city Buenos Aires after participating in the 1920s avant-garde around the magazine *Martín Fierro* (1924–27) with his friends Borges, Xul Solar, Oliveira Girondo, Norah Lange, and others. All of them were equally involved in exploring the city *barrios* (Andrés 1968: 21). From abroad, Marechal told Andrés, he had decided to define his city: 'fui al estudio y experiencia de Buenos Aires' (1948: 13). Then in the wake of inter-locking crises — the death of his first wife and daughter, a religious conversion, militant Peronism — Marechal finally completed his massive, 'unreadable' novel in 1948. He confided to Andrés that it was a gigantic autobiography linked to Buenos Aires (1948: 14), whose centre were the streets

1970. The reception of Marechal's novel has yet to be studied, but the first crucial step was Julio Cortázar's generous review in 1948 (1994: 167–76), followed by reviews by respected critics like Noé Jitrik in 1955 and Adolfo Prieto in 1959. In an interview, the Mexican critic Emmanuel Carballo reminded Marechal of Anderson Imbert's 1954 dismissal of the novel as a 'bodrio', with unjustified obscenities, copied from Joyce (Carballo 1967: viii). Emir Rodríguez Monegal, promoter of the Latin American fiction boom of the 1960s, excluded Marechal as a 'resentido', a loaded local term that is virtually a euphemism for 'Peronist/social upstart', and most agreed (Andrés 1968: 89).

The novel's dedication 'A mis camaradas "martinferristas", vivos y muertos, cada uno de los cuales bien pudo ser un héroe de esta limpia y entusiasmada historia' (1948: 7) harks back from 1948 to the avant-garde days of the 1920s and his bohemian companions. However, it was removed by Marechal from the second edition in disgust at his treatment by these old avant-garde buddies. But, as an unfolding of this dedication to his comrades, *Adán Buenosayres* can be read as a *roman à clef* with Borges, Xul Solar, Jacobo Fijman, Scalabrini Ortiz, Norah Lange, Victoria Ocampo and others as its identifiable protagonists, around the autobiographical Adam/Marechal. Featuring amusing debates, witty dialogues and arguments, in a slangy, mock-epic style, Marechal has recorded a vivid account of avant-garde 1920s café and street life in Buenos Aires.

Take Borges. In the novel he is called Pereda, and is referred to as 'fortachón y bamboleante como un jabalí ciego' (Marechal 1948: 7 & 163) and 'cegatón y bochinchero' (1948: 131), but he is mocked as an absurdly folkloric defender of *criollo* values, as indeed Borges was in the 1920s, to his own shame, forbidding the republication of his writing of that time. This Borges/Pereda studied Greek at Oxford, literature at the Sorbonne, and philosophy in Zurich, but returns home to 'meterse hasta la verija en un criollismo de fonógrafo' (1948: 133). In the seventh and last book of the novel, a descent into a hell invented by the astrologer Schultze (Xul Solar) called Cacodelphia, and modelled on Dante's *Commedia*, with Xul Solar as the guiding Virgil to Adam, we come across Borges again in the hell of the 'falso parnaso'. He is accused of pretending to be a thug walking round the *barrios* muttering badly learnt tango songs (1948: 576), caught up in his 'fervores misticosuburbanos' and creating fake mythologies, imbuing local thugs with vague metaphysical impulses. Adam tries to defend Borges's vindication of 'lo criollo', is thanked by Borges and promised a gin 'en el almacén rosado de la esquina' (1948: 577). 'Fervor' and 'almacén rosado' are obvious allusions to Borges. Borges is also one of the avant-garde gang in the first five books of Marechal's novel. He takes part in the lively literary arguments in the Amundsen house, and journeys into the night in the outskirts of Saavedra in the collective 'happening'. He is presented in a Villa Crespo bar as 'criollósofo y gramático' (1948: 251). In this novel, Marechal gently teases Borges. However, in the final section of the descent into Cacodelphia, Adam and Schultze listen to the story of a human turned into an insect who has literally become a book worm, devouring books in a tiny room in a library guarded by an impassive, inhuman and blind librarian, a Borges in a hellish *biblioteca de Babel*, in a scene that underlines the utter pointlessness of book-reading. By 1967, Marechal blamed his ostracism during Peronism and then

The fourth member of the avant-garde gang in the novel is even less thinly disguised. He is the astrologer Schultze, evoking Xul Solar, born Schulz Solari. Xul Solar was fascinated by astrology and Tarot cards, and painted horoscopes of Victoria Ocampo and Miguel Angel Asturias. He is also the creator of the hell of Cacodelphia where he and Adam re-see all their friends and enemies from Villa Crespo. The final book, a critique of the Buenos Aires of the 1930s, the *década infame*, is designed as a descent into a helix with nine levels, as if reader and characters inhabit one of Xul Solar's own paintings. In the first five books of the novel, Xul Solar, 'iniciado en misterios orientales' (Marechal 1948: 205), is obsessed with smell and defecation. He introduces a subtopic — coprophilia and an *ars cacandi* — that outraged early critics. As the avant-garde gang stumble through the dark in Saavedra, the margin where the countryside meets the city, they come across a putrefying horse: 'el hedor era ya insoportable, y todos contenían sus respiraciones, menos el astrólogo que aspiraba con delicia el aire emponzoñado, sosteniendo ascéticamente que aquel aroma era un tónico formidable para el alma'. This image of Xul Solar using smell to explore his mind is corroborated by Carlos Mastronardi who recalled Xul Solar smelling rubbish in the Abasto market in the 1920s (1967: 206). In the novel, Xul Solar then inspects the 'montón de bosta final que yacía bajo la cola del bruto' and philosophically linked this *ars cacandi* with death (Marechal 1948: 171). Further on in the night, the gang meets a giant glyptodont and chats about Argentine geology (and mocks the famous Argentine scientist Florentino Ameghino, whose bookshop was called the 'Glyptodón' (Babini 1986: 153–58)). As the beast leaves, it drops three great spheres of fossil dung (180), subsequently kept in the La Plata Science museum as meteorites. They then meet up with Xul Solar's own invention, the neo-criollo (a gentle version of Frankenstein's monster), who simply lets out a 'pedo luminoso' as it tries to talk (Marechal 1948: 192). Such hilarious scenes plainly convey the novel's tone.

The ascetic Xul Solar is the most idiosyncratic of all the gang, quite outside polite society, and far from the bourgeois *porteño* dreams of making it. At the Lange *tertulia*, he shocks his listeners by going too far. He begins to describe his invented neo-criollo's penis when he is warned: 'Una palabra más, y lo echo de la tertulia' (Marechal 1948: 116). He epitomizes experimentalism: 'usted anda innovándolo todo' (1948: 116). Adam gives the following silhouette of this quirky extremist, once an anarchist, as tall, skinny, with a high forehead and silver hair; a severe face looking like a plant bulb, with eyes that lit up as if throwing a handful of ash on to you. He seemed ageless, both young and old, so people thought he embodied 'la simple y llana inmortalidad del cangrejo' (1948: 407). He could sing all night in low dives and yet was extremely ascetic. Some saw him as having attained an 'iniciación védica', while others accused him of a 'macaneo filosófico', but in essence he was a joker (1948: 408). Xul Solar is the hero of the novel, one of the few avant-gardists not to betray his beliefs. Years later Marechal paid posthumous homage to his 'grandeza' (1995: 186). In the novel, Adam encapsulated Xul Solar's creativity (his hellish Cacodelphic labyrinth) as 'caprichoso y rebelde a toda simetría' (1948: 464).

Finally, the eponymous Adam. In reading this novel through its dedication to the 'martinfierristas' in Buenos Aires, Adam is obviously Marechal himself, and

today beyond the *década infame*). Both Borges and Marechal were *yrigoyenistas* (Salas 1994: 119 & 145–49). This dual perspective of inner and outer counterpointing and debate, both critique and self-critique, corresponds to Marechal's dual vision of Buenos Aires, though we mostly see the infernal version.

Book one opens with a description of Buenos Aires as seen by a 'leal porteño' as a busy port, fed by a stream, the Riachuelo, along whose banks lie the slaughterhouses and freezing plants that ensure a 'hecatombe a la voracidad del mundo' (1948: 11): a vast killing-fields to satisfy the world's greed. The music of this city is that of cash registers, with busy bankers and engineers. This opening paragraph closes: 'Buenos Aires en marcha reía: Industria y Comercio la llevaban de la mano' (1948: 12). Modern Buenos Aires is already hell for Adam, who calls himself a 'desertor de la ciudad violenta' (1948: 13), an artist. Adam retreats into the working-class and immigrant *barrio* of Villa Crespo. The movement in the novel is away from the commercial centre into the margins at Saavedra, away from Europeanizing modernity into the clash between modernity and rural traditions that the Argentine avant-garde was fighting in the Lange tertulias. The whole novel is an anatomy of a soulless city, with no place for art.

From the artist Adam and his friends' view-point, Buenos Aires is a reality 'sin vuelo' (1948: 15); uninspiring because conceived as having one value, where citizens only understand 'el sentido literal de las cosas' (1948: 16), and fight to make money, surrendering to 'la tentación de la fortuna material, en el ansia de poseer objetos inútiles' (1948: 22). Adam and his friend Samuel baptize the city a 'gallina' scratching away day and night 'sin acordarse de la triste Psiquis, sin levantar los ojos al cielo' (1948: 43). Buenos Aires is without spirit, art, myths or roots, 'sin arraigo en nada' (144). It is a city destroying itself, a 'perra que se consume a sus cachorros para crecer' (1948: 47) in its constant, mindless activity. There is no inner city (1948: 49), no refuge, nothing uplifting or fresh (1948: 323). If the inner and outer merge, then this infernal Buenos Aires is located in every subjectivity as 'la batalla de los ángeles y los demonios que se disputan en el alma de los porteños' (1948: 169). The more the city advances and modernizes, the more the spirit regresses, argued Tesler/Fijman the self-taught philosopher, who 'pisses' on this city from his ascetic poverty.

Two simultaneous cities: one is the actual Buenos Aires, a vast 'factoría' (1948: 144); the other is invisible, beyond the senses. The novel is a quest for the latter in the former. This dual city corresponds to dual human nature, a war between the body and soul, between the senses and spirit, for the city, like Adam himself, is an 'enigmática bestia razonante' in continual self-quarrel, asking who am I (1948: 28). Book four ends with Adam speculating about his utopian Buenos Aires called Philadelphia, where brotherly love reigns, where peace and harmony and home become real; there will be no loud radios, no stealing of milk bottles, and even bus drivers will be polite. Above all, there will be no bankers, no cattle-slaughterers and no prostitutes (1948: 315–16).

Prostitution brings us back to the literal city, and Borges's retreat into the library, away from the brothels and the commerce of sex, and back also to Xul Solar's leap into ascetic metaphysical images. Marechal's avant-gardists are all ascetics who seek love, brotherhood, a place for the spirit and the arts in the violent capitalistic



levels of hell. The first level is the 'suburbio de los irresponsables' made up of the majority of Buenos Aires's citizens, who openly defecate and sing songs based on newspaper headlines.

The end of this hellish but actual city is the ninth circle where Adam and Xul face the 'gran Hoya', a great hole in the ground with a gelatinous monster that Xul calls the 'Paleogogo', a kind of 'molusco gigante' (1948: 644). You sense that they're looking down a huge toilet, into a sewer, and see the evil origins of life. Xul then asks Adam what he thinks of this invention and Adam, ever the poet, strings together a list of witty similes, ending, and this is the novel's last line, 'solemne como pedo de inglés' (1948: 644).

Cacodelphia is a literary conceit devised by an avant-gardist modelled on the painter Xul Solar's utopian architectures, but who was only a 'literato al fin' (1948: 205), imagining his inner and outer city. Marechal placed art below religious understanding in his Platonic scale. Adam dies to his old avant-garde self by turning to the kitschy 'Cristo de la mano rota' in Villa Crespo, often passed on his street wanderings. The church the Christ statue belongs to is the San Bernardo; its clock-face shines in the night like a cyclop's eye, like a cat's eye. Adam's *via ascetica* is traditionally Christian. Behind the exaggerations and literary experiments, Marechal accepts a suffering and an impoverishment symbolized in a broken cement statue of a Christ from a poor quarter. However, Marechal does not invoke a traditional Catholic repentance. In fact, he later joined the Evangelical church in 1960. Throughout the novel there are suggestions about an experiential understanding beyond words and art, alluded to as 'terror divino' (1948: 333). During the 'noche absurda' (1948: 247) in the wastes of Saavedra, the friends alluded to in the novel's dedication find themselves in a sacred place (1948: 167), and receive visions and understanding about their Argentine identity as they humorously interact with gauchos, Indians, *payadores* and thugs under the spell of this 'pavor sagrado' (1948: 161). This term is close to Rudolf Otto's description of the holy as *mysterium tremendum*, a terrifying sensation of sacred power (Eliade 1965: 13-14). Marechal hinted to Andrés that Buenos Aires was a transcendental city: 'nos rodean y manejan fuerzas misteriosas' (1948: 64).

Marechal's ignored but outsize novel is a long epitaph for a generation of freedom-seekers, street wanderers and ascetic artists whose world collapsed in 1930, each one of these avant-gardists associating that date with personal crisis. The novel *Adán Buenosayres*, in its 'desmesura' (Cortázar's term), gathers them together and mocks them all in a hellish city of word that means nothing, a *pedo*, when compared to what really counts. In this surprising novel, Buenos Aires, renamed Cacodelphia, no longer mutates.

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*Este artículo explora la 'experiencia urbana' en la Buenos Aires de los años 1920 y 1930, la ciudad vanguardista, a través de la comparación entre París y Buenos Aires y mitos de modernidad (el surrealismo, T. S. Eliot y Joyce). Se arma un esquema de una ciudad mutante, oscilando entre una ciudad infernal y una ciudad paradisíaca, entre la ciudad como angustia y la ciudad como refugio. Después, se estudian tres versiones de esta ciudad subjetiva. La primera es la de Borges y su libertad callejera, y cómo la ciudad infernal lo invade. La segunda es la de Xul Solar, la ciudad metafísica como un escapismo del mercado actual y cruel de Buenos Aires, y la tercera es la de Leopoldo Marechal, y sus dos ciudades en la novela Adán Buenosayres, 1948, donde Marechal recrea la ciudad vanguardista de Borges y Xul Solar en la casa de Norah Lange, pero levemente disfrazados en la ficción. La novela termina con el descenso de Adán en 'Cacodelfia' con Xul Solar como guía y diseñador de este infierno, pero resulta ser la ciudad infernal de Buenos Aires misma. Esta tercera sección también recupera una novela olvidada por los promotores del 'boom' literario.*

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