



LEOPOLDO MARECHAL

ADAM BUENOSAYRES

a novel

*Translated and edited by* NORMAN CHEADLE



# Adam Buenosayres

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A novel by  
Leopoldo Marechal

Translated by  
NORMAN CHEADLE  
with the help of Sheila Ethier

Introduction and notes by Norman Cheadle

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## CONTEXTS: NATION, HEMISPHERE, WORLD

“The publication of this book is an extraordinary event in Argentine literature.” So wrote Julio Cortázar in his 1949 review of *Adán Buenosayres* (20)<sup>2</sup> shortly after the novel was published in 1948. The young Cortázar struggled somewhat to conceptualize just why the novel was so extraordinary, but there can be little doubt that this literary event had an influence on Cortázar’s brilliant *Rayuela* (1963) [Hopsotch] whose unusual structure and celebration of language surely owe something to Marechal’s *Adán*. Later, other novelists of the 1960s Boom generation – Ernesto Sábato, Carlos Fuentes, José Lezama Lima, Augusto Roa Bastos – echoed Cortázar’s appreciation; and after them, major post-Boom writers such as Ricardo Piglia and Fernando del Paso. Speaking as an Argentine, Piglia named Roberto Arlt, Jorge Luis Borges, and Leopoldo Marechal as his precursors, the writers who forged the direction of twentieth-century Argentine literature (“Ficción y política” 102). Del Paso, Mexican author of *Noticias del Imperio* (1986) [News from the Empire] – a sweeping *tour de force* that marries a “Joycean” narrative with the historical novel – does not hesitate to qualify his “*Buenosayres* querido” [“beloved *Buenosayres*”] as “one of the greatest Spanish American novels” of the twentieth century (16). Today, one can say not only that the arrival of *Adán Buenosayres* was a signal event for both Argentine literature and Latin American narrative fiction but also, if we are to credit Franco Moretti, that Marechal’s novel is a significant feature in the topography of world literature.

Paradoxically, however, as del Paso observes in the same breath, *Adán Buenosayres* is one of Spanish America’s least read novels. Even so vastly well-read an intellectual as Carlos Fuentes learned of *Adán*’s existence only in the 1960s, after fellow Mexican writer Elena Garro thought she detected its influence on Fuentes’s first novel, *La región más transparente* (1958) [Where the Air is Clear]. The astonished Fuentes went to great lengths to track down a second-hand copy of *Adán Buenosayres*; thoroughly impressed by it, he then likened it to Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), and John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), as well as to his own work (Carballo 561–2). The anecdote is significant for more than one reason. First, how was it possible that Fuentes, who actually lived for a time in Buenos Aires, had never heard of Marechal’s novel? Second, without any need to speak of influence, it became clear to Fuentes’s contemporaries that *Adán Buenosayres* was in tune with the new direction of the Spanish American novel of his generation. Third, *Adán* is a Joycean novel of the metropolis that Fuentes places in an international rather than a national, regional or hemispheric context.

In the twenty-first century, literary theory and practice both confirm this third point. In Volume 1 of his monumental work *The Novel*, Franco Moretti includes a reading of *Adán Buenosayres* under the rubric “The New Metropolis” – a series of short interpretations of major novels that is critically framed by Philip Fisher’s “Torn Space: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (in Moretti 665–83). There, Ernesto Franco’s personal essay on *Adán Buenosayres* holds a place between other readerly takes on novels of the city, set respectively in Shanghai and Lagos.<sup>3</sup> Just as those two novels give narrative form to the “torn space” of twentieth-century Asian and African metropolises, Leopoldo Marechal’s *Adán* grapples with the turbulent space of a great Latin American port city. Buenos Aires, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was deluged by torrential flows of foreign capital (most



British) and immigration (especially from Italy, Galicia in northern Spain, and Eastern Europe, but also from Syria and Lebanon). By the 1920s “Buenos Aires in motion was laughing; Industry and Commerce were leading her by the hand,” warbles the narrator of *Adán*, cheekily parodying the boosterism of newsreels, propaganda organ of capitalism. Adam Buenosayres enters the street of his city – “a river of multiplicity” – and finds “peoples from all over the world [who] mixed languages in a barbarous dissonance, fought with gestures and fists, and set up beneath the sun the elemental stage of their tragedies and farces, turning all into sound, nostalgias, joys, loves and hates.”

Founded in 1580, Buenos Aires was laid out on a grid pattern, like many Spanish-colonial towns. For the first two centuries of its existence it was a quiet backwater, but by the end of the eighteenth century it had come into its own and in 1810 was the first Spanish American city to break definitively with Spain. In the 1880s it began to grow rapidly. By 1910, when it celebrated the centenary of Argentine independence, it was riding the crest of rapid urban growth and economic development powered by foreign capital investment, foreign immigrant labour, and internal migration. It was then that modern downtown Buenos Aires – its spacious parks, broad avenues, elegant cafés and *confiterías*, and Parisian-style architecture – took its definitive shape.<sup>4</sup> With its newly constructed Obelisk replica arising from the midst of the world’s widest thoroughfare (Avenida 9 de Julio), as well as the tree-lined Avenida de Mayo modelled on the Champs Élysées, it was a city that fancied itself the “Paris of the Pampas.”<sup>5</sup> Bounded by the broad estuary of the Río de la Plata on its northeast flank, it was rapidly expanding south and west over the pampa. Villa Crespo, relatively centrally located, had been a typical *barrio* (municipal district) among the forty-eight comprising the city. As we see in the novel, in the 1920s Villa Crespo was home to many immigrant communities. The First World War had temporarily interrupted the flow, but immigrants poured in throughout the twenties; between 1920 and 1930, the city’s population grew from 1,700,000 to 2,153,200 (Walter 83). In politics, the new Argentines found representation in the Radical Party, and their massive collective presence was expressed and reflected in new modes of cultural production – in amusement parks and major entertainment centres such as Luna Park (depicted more than once in Cacodelphia), as well as in popular theatre, cinema, and literature.

Immigrants arrived not only from abroad, however. If the inner-city *barrio* of Villa Crespo is the stage of cacophonous cosmopolitan encounter, the city’s suburban edge – the badlands of Saavedra – is where urban modernity and rural *criollo* tradition collide. It is where the hinterland’s displaced descendants, internal immigrants uprooted by the industrialization of agriculture and ranching, claw their way to the edges of metropolis in a new subculture of the *arrabal*. “I like the landscape in Saavedra, the broken terrain where the city comes to an end,” says Adam’s friend, the philosopher Samuel Tesler. Indeed, Adam and his avant-garde comrades are irresistibly attracted to that “frontier zone where burlesque and wilderness meet in an agonistic embrace, like two giants locked in single combat.” Zone of knife fights and tango, brutality and forlorn sentimentality, the suburban frontier traces an advancing line of creative violence, the very knife edge of modern actuality; and it is there that most of the novel’s mock adventures take place, including the long final descent into the avant-garde inferno designed by the astrologer Schultz.

In Moretti’s selective encyclopaedia of the novel, then, Marechal’s *Adán Buenosayres* finds itself well positioned under the Joycean aegis of metropolitan “torn space”; not surprisingly, several critics have looked at the theme of the city and urban space in *Adán* (Ambrose, Limami, Wilson, Berg).<sup>6</sup> But in light of the troubled history of the reception of *Adán* – a point to which we will return – a more general observation must be made. “Countless are the novels of the world,” notes Moretti apologetically (ix); and yet this particular novel cannot be left out of the account. Decades after Carlos Fuentes’s prescient observation, Moretti’s method of “distant reading” on a planetary scale finds *Adán*

to be a significant fixture of world literature when viewed with the objectivity of the long view. The theoretical point is corroborated in practice by literary experience. In Santiago Gamboa's novel *Síndrome de Ulises* (2005) [The Ulysses Syndrome], the Colombian protagonist-narrator meets at the Sorbonne a Moroccan-born student happily obsessed with *Adán Buenosayres*: Salim, a devout Muslim, is writing a doctoral thesis based on Marechal's novel and its representation of the individual vis-à-vis the city (Gamboa 24).<sup>7</sup> Remarkably, a novel written by an Argentine Catholic nationalist about 1920 Buenos Aires speaks to Salim across barriers not only temporal and geographical but also religious and ideological. Like the wily Ulysses, a great piece of literature can overcome tremendous obstacles and travel to the most unlikely places. And for Gamboa's (autobiographical) narrator, who until the moment of recognition – through the eyes of a non-Westerner – had seen *Adán Buenosayres* as a book "condemned to live within its [national] borders" (32), there dawns a new geo-cultural consciousness.

## THE JOYCE CONNECTION AND CULTURE WARS

At the heart of this novel is the story of Adam Buenosayres's unrequited love for a young woman called Solveig, whom the hapless poet reimagines as his latter-day Beatrice. This interior drama is boisterously paved over by a festive narrative about seven mock-heroes whose madcap antics, farcical adventures, and wild conversations about everything in heaven and on earth give the novel its living flesh. All seven evoke avant-garde writers and artists of 1920s Buenos Aires, a "golden age" of Argentine literature. Some are composite figures, while others are caricatures of clearly recognizable individuals: notably, Luis Pereda (Jorge Luis Borges), the astrologer Schultz (artist and polymath Xosha Solar), the philosopher Samuel Tesler (poet Jacobo Fijman), and the pipsqueak Bernini (writer Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz), as well as the protagonist Adam, a quasi-autobiographical version of Marechal himself. Thus the novel is on the external level a *roman à clef*<sup>8</sup> – with the curious anomaly of the character portrayed as Adam's beloved, Solveig Amundsen. Since her family is clearly a novelist's version of the real-life Lange family, it has been speculated that behind the fictive Solveig stands the writer Norah Lange, dubbed at one time the "Muse of *Martín Fierro*" (the literary review to which we will return presently). Strikingly, however, the meek, passive, voiceless girl who is Solveig does not even vaguely resemble Lange – a creative, highly articulate, and outgoing intellectual. Solveig stands as a virtually empty figure, functioning as the Beloved whom the poet Adam Buenosayres idealizes and recreates in the mystico-courtly manner of the Petrarchan poets. When she accepts the suit of Lucio Negri, Adam's rival for her affections, Solveig becomes a sort of antagonist to Adam, an obstacle whose stubbornly concrete existence he must overcome as a writer, especially since Negri epitomizes the bourgeois *doxa* against which Adam rebels. Thus, caution must be exercised when interpreting *Adán* as a *roman à clef*. On the other hand, it can be read as a *Künstlerroman* whose most obvious model is Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, though these two subgenres can hardly account for the novel in its totality.

Another clear source of inspiration is Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which traces Leopold Bloom's itinerary through Dublin for a single day (16 June 1904).<sup>9</sup> Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres* takes place over three days, April 28–30, in an unspecified year in the 1920s. The novel opens at 10 a.m. on Thursday the twenty-eighth, as Adam wakes up. On Saturday the thirtieth at midnight, he and Schultz begin their descent into the infernal city of Cacodelphia. Meanwhile, we follow Adam and his friends around Buenos Aires; their adventures are recounted in Books One to Five by a Protean third-person narrator who, as in the case of *Ulysses*, assumes different voices in different contexts. These five "books" could stand alone as a traditionally structured novel. Books Six and Seven, on the other hand, are presented in the "Indispensable Prologue" by the quasi-fictive narrator as "found manuscripts" (a

old Cervantine trick). Both these texts are narrated in the first person by Adam himself, and both talk as literary models texts by Dante Alighieri. Book Six, “The Blue-Bound Notebook,” is Adam’s spiritual autobiography, an earnest account of his love and its transformation along the lines of Dante’s love for Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*. It is in Adam’s Notebook, far more than in the clownish misogyny of Samuel Tesler or Franky Amundsen, that the entire rhetoric predicated on gender divisions becomes interesting; a close study of Adam’s Neo-Platonist text from a gender studies perspective would surely produce worthwhile results. Finally, Book Seven – at once social satire and great meta-literary romp – recounts the journey to Cacodelphia, jocosely parodying Dante’s *Inferno*.

Borges complained that Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with its “arduous symmetries and labyrinths,” was “indecipherably chaotic” (“Fragmento sobre Joyce” 61). By contrast, the structure of *Adán* in *Buenosayres* is quite orderly. Notwithstanding the young Cortázar’s astonishment at the novel’s apparent “incoherence,”<sup>10</sup> the plot unfolds in a clear and simple temporal line: from Thursday morning to Friday night (Books One to Five), then Saturday night (Book Seven), and thence to the sunny, springtime morning when Adam’s funeral is quite literally celebrated, in a rite of distinctly paschal overtones, in the novel’s “Indispensable Prologue.” This temporal sequence echoes the narrative paradigm of the Passion of Christ as ritually codified in the Christian liturgical calendar from Holy Thursday through the Crucifixion to the subsequent Resurrection.

The novelist does, however, impose a couple of structural displacements on this linear paradigm. First of all, the ending (Adam’s funeral) is announced at the textual beginning. Second, there is a hiatus of six months between the descent into hell on a Saturday night in April and Adam’s funeral on a Sunday-like morning in October – spring, the paschal season, comes in October in Argentina. Third, Adam’s notebook, his spiritual autobiography, wedged between Books Five and Seven, textually prior to the linear plot but in a sense contains the rest of the novel. Depending on one’s perspective, “The Blue-Bound Notebook” is either a poetic diversion from the novel or both its centre and circumference.<sup>11</sup> There is no narrative “chaos” here: the displacements are easily recognizable, and the reader has no need to resort to a complex scholarly roadmap of the kind Stuart Gilbert drew up for Joyce’s *Ulysses*. If one wishes to speak of “incoherence,” it will have to be on the level of interpretation: what do these clearly marked *cleavages* mean? Does Adam end up stranded at the bottom of hell, as the novel’s last page seems to suggest?<sup>12</sup> Or does he spiritually climb out of the hole and achieve some sort of “resurrection”? But then, why has he died? Marechal’s narrator provocatively addresses his narratee as *lector agreste* “rustic reader,” clearly putting readers on notice: it will be up to the them to negotiate the novel’s narrative gaps, come to terms by their own lights with its built-in aporias. As in a Borges story, a structure of crystalline clarity is deliberately absent: readers are led to make their own intellectual or imaginative leaps.

Much has been made of *Adán*’s debt to Joyce, often by Marechal’s irate detractors. He read *Portrait* very attentively, as evidenced in his personal copy of Alonso Dámaso’s 1926 Spanish translation; later, when in Paris in 1929–30, he read Valery Larbaud’s French translation of *Ulysses* hot off the press and forthwith began work on the *chef d’oeuvre* that took eighteen years to come to fruition. According to the author, after writing the first few chapters in Paris in 1930, he dropped it for a long while before taking it up again in 1945, perhaps not uncoincidentally the year that Argentine José Salas Subirat’s first-ever Spanish-language translation of *Ulysses* was published in Buenos Aires. However, according to his lifelong friend, the poet Francisco Luis Bernárdez (glimpses of whom can be seen in Franky Amundsen in *Adán*), Marechal was already planning the novel in his imagination as early as 1926 (Bernárdez 2). This claim cannot be concretely documented, but it is plausible. The echoes of Joycean material in *Adán* derive largely from *Portrait*, plus the “Telemachus” section that opens *Ulysses* and focuses on Stephen Dedalus; in terms of content, Marechal’s interest was drawn



the narrative of the Stephen cycle, not to the adventures of Leopold Bloom. This is not, however, to deny Marechal's evident uptake of Ulyssean narrative technique.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, *Adán Buenosayres* is the first Joycean novel to be written in Spanish-language literature. When in the 1960s Cortázar's *Hopscotch* was being hailed as the "Spanish American *Ulysses*," it was José Lezama Lima – author of *Paradiso* (1966), another major novel deemed Ulyssean – who opportunely reminded his interlocutor that the clearest antecedent of *Rayuela* was Marechal's *Adán*, never mind Joyce (Simo 57).<sup>14</sup> The Joycean lineage that earned accolades for Cortázar brought mostly scorn upon Marechal, at least when *Adán Buenosayres* first came out in 1948. In a review that Piglia later termed an "infamous screed" (xvii), Eduardo González Lanuza described it as a pietistic imitation of *Ulysses* but "abundantly spattered with manure";<sup>15</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Enrique Anderson-Imbert, two major critics who would subsequently exert great influence in the North American academy, followed suit (Lafforgue xiii). The violence and incoherence of their *ad hominem* attacks are clear signs that something more than differences in sensibility and literary taste was at stake here.<sup>16</sup>

The troubled history of *Adán Buenosayres*'s reception is a direct consequence of what might be called the mid-twentieth-century Argentine culture wars or, following historian Loris Zanatta, the "ideological civil war" cleaving Argentina during the thirties and forties (13). To some degree, this civil war is a reprise or recrudescence of political-ideological divisions dating back to Argentina's birth as a nation in the nineteenth century, which was followed by a long civil war between *federalistas* and *unitarios* – between traditional, Catholic, Hispanophile Federalists, on one side, and liberal, anti-clerical, Europhile Unitarians, on the other. The latter eventually won out, and a modern liberal constitution was put in place in 1853. Culturally, modern nineteenth-century Argentina looked to France, England, and the United States; economically, it was friendly to the influx of British capital while the immigration from impoverished Catholic countries, Italy and Spain, was uneasily tolerated by the liberal-patrician elite. After a triumphal celebration of the nation's centenary in 1910, however, the liberal model began to show cracks and, with the 1929 economic crash, Argentina lurched into crisis. By the mid-thirties, after brewing since at least the early twenties, Catholic nationalism was becoming a powerful cultural and, eventually, political force. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and the Second World War three years later, further polarized the nation's writers and intellectuals. By the time Church-supported Juan Domingo Perón became president of the nation in 1946, the divorce was absolute. As a Catholic nationalist and a Peronist functionary, Leopoldo Marechal, along with a few other writers, was at loggerheads with the now-alienated liberal literary establishment, whose leading light was Jorge Luis Borges. Hunkered down, as it were, in the fortress of SADE (*Sociedad Argentina de Escritores*; Argentine Society of Writers), the liberals, guerrilla-style, maintained a coded war of words against what they hyperbolically called the "Nazi-Fascist-Peronist dictatorship." In return, Borges was unceremoniously removed in 1946 from his position at the Miguel Cané municipal library and named Inspector of Markets.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, according to one cultural historian, Marechal had become enemy number one of SADE (Fiorucci 184n). Into this poisoned context was born the novel *Adán Buenosayres*.

### MARTINFIERRISMO AND CRIOLLISMO

In the glory years of the literary review *Martín Fierro* (1924–27), Marechal and Borges had been friends who wrote admiring reviews of each other's books of poetry. Politically, too, they saw eye to eye; in the run-up to the 1928 presidential elections, they struck the Intellectuals' Committee for the Re-election of Hipólito Yrigoyen, with Borges as president and Marechal as vice-president (Abel 135–6). In her historical novel *Las libres del sur* (2004) [*Free Women in the South*], María Rosa Lo

– better known as a judicious literary and cultural critic – portrays the two young writers as friends who shared adventures. By the end of the decade, however, a rift was already perceptible. Marechal, Bernárdez, and Borges planned to revive the *martinfierrista* spirit in a new review titled *Libra*, but for reasons that remain murky Borges did not participate (Corral 26). In spite of the involvement of the prestigious Mexican, Alfonso Reyes, then resident in Buenos Aires, the review managed only a single issue, in 1929. The party was over. A military coup inaugurated the “Infamous Decade” of 1930s Argentina. Marechal and Bernárdez underwent personal crises – the spiritual crisis mentioned in the “Indispensable Prologue” of *Adán* – and joined the *Cursos de Cultura Católica*, an institute founded in 1922 that served as the stronghold of Catholic nationalism. The in-your-face vanguard journals of the twenties gave way to the more serene literary review *Sur* (founded in 1931) attempting to stay “above the fray,” *Sur* managed to provide a pluralistic venue for intellectuals from the Americas and Europe before finally succumbing toward the end of the decade and taking sides in the national ideological divorce (King 75). Victoria Ocampo, writer and wealthy patroness of the magazine, is caricatured quite unkindly in *Cacodelphia*, whereas ten years earlier, in 1938, Marechal had contributed to *Sur* a respectful article on “Victoria Ocampo and Feminine Literature.” The insult to Ocampo – in a passage surely written after 1945 – seems like a parting shot at his erstwhile colleagues at *Sur*, a grenade lobbed from Marechal’s side of the barbed-wire fence.

However, the period evoked in the broad canvas of the novel is generally not the nasty thirties and forties, but rather the culturally effervescent twenties. Buenos Aires was directly plugged into the international network of the artistic and literary avant-garde. Just back from Europe in 1921, Borges and a few others, including Norah Lange, “published” the first issue of the review *Prisma* as a series of posters tacked to trees and pasted to walls throughout the city. This playful and provocative gesture set the tone for the decade to come. The short-lived *Prisma* was succeeded by *Proa*, in which Borges precociously wrote a review of Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1924. Patronized by wealthy Argentine author Ricardo Güiraldes, a friend of Joyce’s translator and promoter Valery Larbaud, *Proa* gained international prestige and notoriety. Though the young avant-gardists rhetorically challenged the previous generation of writers, such as Manuel Gálvez, Ricardo Rojas, and Leopoldo Lugones, they adopted as their presiding genius the elderly Macedonio Fernández, an eccentric philosopher and exquisite humourist. *Proa* endured for two short spurts (1922–23 and 1924–26). Meanwhile, *Martín Fierro* (1924–27) came into being. The finest flower of the contemporary avant-garde, it was the review that gave a generation its name – the *martinfierristas*. Their manifesto (attributed to Oliver Girondo) began like this:

Faced with the hippopotamic impermeability of the “honourable public”;

Faced with the funereal solemnity of the historian and the professor, which mummifies everything it touches; [. . .]

Faced with the ridiculous necessity to ground our intellectual nationalism, swollen with false values that deflate like piggy-banks at the first poke;  
[. . .]

*Martín Fierro* feels it essential to define itself and call upon all those capable of perceiving that we are in the presence of a NEW sensibility and a NEW understanding, which, when we find ourselves, reveals unsuspected vistas and new means and forms of expression;  
[. . .]

*Martín Fierro* knows that “all is new under the sun” if looked at with up-to-date eyes and expressed with a contemporary accent. (*Revista Martín Fierro*, XVI; my translation)

The basics of *martinfierrista* ideology and rhetoric can be gleaned from this brief excerpt: the cult of the new and of youth (common to the international avant-garde of the period), a taste for provocative hyperbole, an aggressive attitude that doesn't take itself in complete earnest, but also a sort of soft cultural nationalism that deserves some commentary. The review is named after a nationally iconic literary figure. José Hernández's *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) [Martín Fierro the Gaucho] and *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879) [The Return of Martín Fierro] comprise a two-part poem recounting the tragedy of the gaucho, cowboy of the pampas, whose way of life was being eroded by modernization. In *El payador* (1916) [The Gaucho Minstrel], Leopoldo Lugones consecrated Hernández's work as the Argentine national epic and the gaucho as a symbol of Argentine national identity. But Lugones's ideological manoeuvre is complicated, if not outright contradictory: for in the same breath he celebrates both the gaucho's contribution to Argentine identity and the historical disappearance of this ethnic type tainted by "inferior indigenous blood" (83). Though racially mixed, the gauchos always self-identified culturally as *cristianos* and *criollos* rather than *indios*. The archetypal literary gaucho, Santos Vega, had long been a paradigm of telluric nobility. (To this day, the phrase *hacerle a alguien una gauchada* in rural Argentina means "to do someone a right fine favour," as a real gaucho would do.) Martín Fierro becomes a new archetype: the noble gaucho with attitude.

When the manifesto of *Martín Fierro* impugns the "false values" of "our intellectual nationalism," what is intended? Is the text alluding to Lugones's seeming mystification? In what looks less like a serious *prise de position* than a provocative jab at Lugones, with whom he also polemicized on aesthetic issues, Marechal demanded that we "forget about the gaucho" (*Martín Fierro* 34, 5 October 1926). Or does the manifesto impugn the tendency of the academic elite to imitate European models too closely? Is it perhaps simply an anarchic rejection of empty rhetoric? "Tradition, Progress, Humanity, Family, Honour are now nonsense," writes *martinfierrista* Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz toward the end of the decade in a famous essay titled *El hombre que está solo y espera* (101) [The Man Who Alone and Waits/Hopes]. Or does the manifesto express an inchoate nationalism that deplors economic colonization by British capital with the acquiescence of the Argentine landed oligarchy? All these elements – and more – jostled and clashed among the contestatory *martinfierristas*, who lacked any coherent ideological program as a group and argued with each other as much as they rebelled against their seniors. In Book Two, chapter 2 of *Adán*, the mock heroes get into a tempestuous argument about Argentine national identity – upon what values it should be grounded – in an episode that will repay the reader's close attention.

In that same violent discussion, the problem of *criollismo* gets an airing. With the phrase *criollismo urbano de vanguardia*, Beatriz Sarlo aptly synthesizes the motley ideological-aesthetic program of *martinfierrismo* (105). Nothing is surprising about the conjunction of the terms "urban" and "vanguard"; rather, it is *criollismo* that distinguishes the Buenos Aires avant-garde from its international context. *Criollo* was in colonial times the term for those of Spanish blood born on American soil, but came to mean simply "native to the Americas." (The English and French cognates – Creole and *créole* – tend to be associated with the Afro-Caribbean.) In Argentina the term gradually acquired a more specific identitary thrust, somewhat comparable to the *Québécois de souche* of French-speaking Canada; the *criollos* were old-stock Spanish American Argentines, as opposed to *indios* on the one hand or immigrants on the other. But this ethnic distinction was destabilized by the massive influx of immigrants, both internal and foreign, into late-nineteenth-century Buenos Aires. The cultural movement of *criollismo* contained elements of class struggle as well. According to Adolfo Prieto, *criollismo* became a discursive site where competing social groups attempted to defer or establish their legitimacy. For the ruling Argentine elite – and their ideological representatives such



as Lugones – the appropriation of rural, gaucho discourse was a way of keeping at bay the unnerving presence of the poor lower-class immigrants thronging to the capital and spilling outward from there. For rural Argentines displaced from country to city, it was an expression of nostalgia and a alternative to rebellion against the impositions and demands of modern (sub)urban life. And for foreign immigrants, adopting *criollista* cultural expression was a sort of fast track to cultural citizenship in the new country (Prieto, *El discurso criollista* 18–19). In *Adán Buenosayres*, for example, we meet Tissone, a son of Italian immigrants, who, although he has never set foot outside the city of Buenos Aires, handily makes his living doing a schtick as a *payador* or gaucho minstrel.

An urban *criollista* avant-garde, then, is a strange hybrid. In Europe, the avant-garde that looks to the technological city of the future normally turns its back on local autochthonous tradition. Not so the *martinfierristas*, even though their attitude toward an increasingly artificial and mediatized *criollismo* was ambiguous and conflicted. Marechal stages this conflict at the wake of Juan Robles, mud-stomper and “good old boy,” in [Book Three, chapter 2](#), an episode that particularly delighted Cortázar (22b). As Prieto puts it, Marechal’s send-up of popular suburban *criollismo* brilliantly brings a long-lived cultural movement to a close (*El discurso criollista* 22). But parody always enacts a sort of homage as well, and the colourful gallery of cultural types and stereotypes populating this and many other episodes of *Adán Buenosayres* add up to a celebration of Argentine popular culture and its expressive forms. Why else would the epigraph to the novel’s first chapter be constituted of verses from sentimental tango?

#### GENEALOGIES (RELIGIOUS, IDEOLOGICAL, LITERARY)

The young writer Cortázar was both disconcerted and excited by what he enigmatically called the *diversa desmesura* of Marechal’s novel (original Spanish version 23), its hypertrophic excess on various levels – perhaps its monstrous hybridity – which *rationaly* he perceived as an inadequate matching of structural form to content but which *intuitively* the writer in him grasped as this novel’s aesthetic achievement, its “energetic push toward what is truly ours [in Argentine literature]” (24). As Ángel Rama put it, in *Adán* the forms of high culture meet those of popular culture in a parodic oscillation, with the net effect that the former are destabilized along with their philosophic underpinnings (216–17). By “high culture” one must understand the allusions not only to classic Greece and Rome, but also to the Bible – Northrop Frye’s “great code” – and to Catholic theology. Marechal himself insists that the “keys” to his novel are to be found in two parallel lines of thought stretching from Aristotle to Saint Thomas and from Plato to Augustine (Andrés 32); he interprets *Adán Buenosayres* as a Christian allegory, the soul’s odyssey through the world and its eventual homecoming in God (Marechal, “Las claves”). A Catholic-theological reading of the novel is certainly possible – Navascués’s narratological study and the introduction to Barcia’s scholarly edition are fine examples – but much of the novel’s material seems to overflow this ideological framework, to the point of rudely shaking or even damaging the frame itself. Argentine critic Horacio González once mused about the novel’s “comical,” “ironic,” or even “broken” Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Even if one enlarges the Christian-epic reading to an ecumenical “metaphysical” interpretation, as Graciela Coulson does in order to account for the many allusions to non-Christian traditions, the essential problem only gets displaced, not resolved. Suffice it to say here that different readers, according to their cultural formation, will have different takes on *Adán Buenosayres*. As with all great works of literature, it is a novel that no single critical reading can exhaust.

Adam Buenosayres and his close friend and confidant, Samuel Tesler, are both “traditionalists” who move in a discursive world informed by such radical traditionalist authors as René Guénon

whose voluminous output includes the apocalyptic *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps* (1945) and who attempts to conflate the metaphysical systems of the world's great religions in a single block that stands superior to the error of modern thought. The two "metaphysicals,"<sup>20</sup> Adam and Samuel, make common cause against the positivist scientism of Lucio Negri. (The third "metaphysical" is the astrologer Schultz, who like Xul Solar could be described with the paradoxical term "avant-garde traditionalist.") And yet, Adam will eventually rebuke Samuel for his Jewishness, invoking the hoary myths invented by medieval anti-Semitism. As in most traditional Catholic societies, a degree of anti-Semitism – a frightening term for us since the Second World War – was still quite normal in 1920s Argentine society. The Jews (mostly from Russia and Eastern Europe) along with the Italians, Galician Spanish, "Turks" (refugees of varying ethnicity from the crumbling Ottoman Empire), and so on, were cast as stereotypes in the popular imaginary; Marechal's novel humorously sets those popular stereotypes on display. The Jews, the odd anti-Semitic incidents notwithstanding, were in the mind of the Catholic *criollo* majority just one distinct minority among others. Nevertheless, the rise of Argentine Catholic nationalism, under the influence of a new outbreak of a very old virus emanating from Europe, was accompanied in some circles by a more virulent expression of anti-Semitism. Although the centuries-old prejudice was deeply racialized, the most thoughtful Catholic-nationalist intellectuals attempted to confine it to a religious question: the Jewish failure to recognize Christ was a theological error from which they needed to be disabused. Manuel Gálvez, for example, professed his love for the Jews. This love, which he considered to behoove any good Catholic, did not, however, prevent his endorsing negative Jewish stereotypes (Schwartz 131–2). Gálvez – as well as Adam Buenosayres and perhaps even Marechal himself<sup>21</sup> – could well be cited as examples of what Máximo José Kahn in 1948 called "philo-Semitic anti-Jewishness," referring to those who are philo-Semitic "by civilization" and anti-Jewish "by instinct" (Kahn 48).<sup>22</sup> And yet, parsing this paradox further in his incisive but (deliberately?) enigmatic article, he opines that atheism is worse than philo-Semitic anti-Jewishness (57), even if the unbeliever seems to be on your side. Here he seems to refer to those liberals who waved the banner of *anti*-anti-Semitism as part of the anti-Peronist campaign, their negative philo-Semitism militantly expressing, within the perfectly polarized ideological field of the time, their hatred of Peronism and its supporters, which initially included the Catholic church.<sup>23</sup> Adam and Samuel have their differences, but they are united against modern non-religious scientism. Both men locate themselves squarely in what Israeli historian Ze'ev Sternhell has called the tradition of the "anti-Enlightenment," the many-faceted revolt against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment that constitutes a second, parallel modernity (8).

Reading the frank anti-Semitism on display in a few passages of *Adán Buenosayres* is a complicated business, not only because of the paradox of anti-Jewish philo-Semitism but also because of the novel's polyphony. The shifting and parodic narrative voice makes it hazardous to ascertain precisely the pragmatic ethos of any given passage. What *is* certain, however, is that Adam Buenosayres dies and Samuel Tesler lives on to play a part in Marechal's third novel, *Megafón, o la guerra* (1970), the only one of his fictional characters to do so.<sup>24</sup>

From a strictly stylistic perspective, one finds another index of *diversa desmesura* in the juxtaposition of the earnest, spiritualist, neo-Dantian prose of Adam Buenosayres's "Blue-Bourbon Notebook" with the novel's Rabelaisian *tremendismo*, to use Marechal's own term for his conscious emulation of Maître François. The humorous contrast of high and low, the spiritual and the coprological, stems as well from Miguel de Cervantes's legacy, worth recalling here for the benefit of English-speaking readers.<sup>25</sup> Besides the Cervantine device of the "found manuscript" mentioned above, Marechal, as Cervantes does in *Don Quixote*, interpolates into the text lengthy stories that serve as functional instances of *mise-en-abyme*; the stories told in Cacodelphia by The Man with

Intellectual Eyes and by Don Ecuménico are salient examples. Another meta-literary technique bequeathed by Cervantes is to provide commentary, either directly or by allusion or by parody, on diverse texts of various genres, literary and otherwise. The Argentine component of *Adán's* meta-literary discourse is what particularly struck Piglia: “A novelist constructs his own genealogy and narrates it; literary tradition is a family saga. In *Adán*, origins, relationships, endogamic succession are all fictionalized. Marechal treats the struggle among various Argentine poetics with the ironic tone of a (Homeric) *payada* [literary duel in the gauchesque tradition]” (xvi).

In the notes accompanying this edition of the novel, the reader will find explicated many – not likely all! – such allusions to Argentine literature. For example, José Mármol’s foundational novel *Amalia* (1851) – a Manichean melodrama pitting noble *unitarios* against the evil *federales* of the Rosas regime – is prominently referenced at the outset of *Adán Buenosayres*. Equally significant, perhaps, is that another foundational text of Argentine literature – Esteban Echeverría’s short story “El matadero” (circa 1939) [The Slaughterhouse] – is seemingly effaced from Marechal’s literary genealogy. Echeverría memorably made the slaughterhouse a symbol of the bestial ferocity of the Rosas regime and its supporters (the Church and the lower classes). But Marechal, on the first page of [Book One](#), evokes the slaughterhouse merely as a feature of the urban landscape and a symptom of “the world’s voracity.” If his image of the slaughterhouse carries any political valence at all, it refers not to the context of Argentine national politics, but rather to the geo-economic/political order: *chilled beef* – the term appears in English more than once in *Adán* – was being shipped from the refrigerator of the slaughterhouse in Buenos Aires to “voracious” Europe.

### ADÁN BUENOSAYRES AND THE VISUAL ARTS

When he speaks of the fictionalization of competing poetics in *Adán*, Piglia is likely referring to the fantastical adventures of [Book Three \(chapter 1\)](#), when a succession of national-literary characters and sociocultural stereotypes visit the seven drunken adventurers and provoke heated discussion among them. These episodes, and other flights of fancy in the novel – the street brawl as a Battle of Armageddon ([Book One, chapter 2](#)), Adam’s imaginary rampage as a mad giant in the streets of Vilma Crespo ([Book Two, chapter 2](#)), and any number of scenes from Cacodelphia – could also be considered from the aesthetic perspective of the visual arts and their impact on Marechal’s novelistics. Marechal was always interested in the plastic arts, and it is no accident that the astrologer Schultz – based on polymath and avant-garde painter Xul Solar – is so important a character in the novel, both as Adam’s guide and mentor, and as the architect of Cacodelphia. Xul’s biographer, Álvaro Abós, does not hesitate to resort to Marechal’s novel to round out his account of the unclassifiable painter; just as Adam constantly converses with Schultz, avers Abós, so Marechal’s novel is an extended dialogue with Xul Solar (*Xul* 183). More interesting still than the two characters’ conversations about aesthetics is the performative dialogue between novelist and visual artist. Xul Solar’s *sui generis* watercolours have impressed Beatriz Sarlo for certain qualities that can likewise be discerned in Marechal’s novelistics. Sarlo speaks of the “semiotic obsessiveness” in Xul’s art, as well as the deliberate absence of perspective that recalls both primitive painting and cartoon strips ( *Una modernidad periférica* 14). Sign and image commingle, and the distinction between graphic and iconic representation is blurred and at times completely effaced, as in Xul’s *Grafía* (1935) [Graphemes] or *Prigrafía* (1938) [Prigraphemes?].<sup>26</sup> The perspectival flatness of Xul’s paintings gives them the appearance of creative texts rather than mimetic representations. Caricatural forms, products of a deliberate abstraction, collide in a two-dimensional space and easily recombine in outlandish hybrids such as *Mestizos de avión y gente* (1936) [Hybrids of Airplanes and Persons]. In Marechal/Schultz’s Cacodelphia, we find



similar hybrids: *homokites* or kite-men, *homoglobes* or balloon-men, *homoplumes* or human feather bomb-men, and tabloid-men who, crushed by rotary presses, turn into newspapers and then back into humans. In the tabloid-men, body becomes text becomes body.

The art of caricature, in both Xul and Marechal, is an aesthetic choice that offers the immense plasticity and freedom enjoyed by cartoon strips and film animation. Perhaps not uncoincidentally Buenos Aires in the 1910s and '20s was home to the great animationist Quirino Cristiani (1896–1984) who made the world's first feature-length animated film, *El apóstol* (1917) [The Apostle], an amusing spoof of President Hipólito Yrigoyen. His *Peludópolis* (1931) was another premiere – the first “talky” in animated film. Its symbolic character Juan Pueblo [John of the People] may be the source of Marechal's Juan Demos, a similarly symbolic figure who, seated on a pedestal inside the Cacodelphian parliament, offers pithy comments on the parliamentarians' deliberations. Between those two landmark films, Cristiani prolifically created animated films for popular consumption (Bendazzi 49–52). Marechal's novel, it would seem, not only enters into dialogue with the high avant-garde art of a Xul Solar, but also exploits the aesthetic possibilities, along with those of tango and popular theatre, of the popular visual arts.

The picture theory explicit and implicit in *Adán Buenosayres*, grounded in Dante and Thomas Aquinas and yet keenly cognizant of the new visual media emerging in his time – in particular cartoons and animated film – has yet to be comprehensively addressed in Marechalian criticism. For our present purposes, we need only observe that, if Xul Solar is the semiotically obsessed creator of pictures, Adam Buenosayres presents the converse case: the image-obsessed wordsmith whose obsession causes him guilt. Just as Dante's image theory, as Hans Belting has put it, got “entangled in an unresolvable conflict” with the theological doctrine of the soul (*An Anthropology of Images* 133) so the piously logocentric Adam stumbles over contradictions in the aesthetic theory he expounds at *Ciro Rossini's* restaurant ([Book Four, chapter 1](#)). Whereas the astrologer Schultz and his real-life model Xul Solar are fearless (or quite mad) in their semiotic-imagistic experimentation, Adam has profound doubts about the ontological status of the image and its verbal analogue, the poetic image. Though Adam's theological language may strike late-modern readers as anachronistic, his angst over the nature of images, and their power, makes him our contemporary. We still await the picture theory of the calibre of a W.J.T. Mitchell or a Hans Belting, who will translate Marechal's theological metaphors into a twenty-first-century theoretical discourse.

It is again no accident that filmmakers such as Fernando “Pino” Solanas and Eliseo Subiela are inspired by Marechal's novel(s).<sup>27</sup> The greatest cineaste to champion *Adán Buenosayres* has been the venerable Manuel Antín, whose project to take the novel to the big screen was repeatedly frustrated by Argentina's turbulent history (Sández 36, 100). Spurred on by his friend Julio Cortázar (some of whose texts he filmed), Antín with the help of Juan Carlos Gené wrote a screenplay, which as recently as 2009 he still possessed.<sup>28</sup> And yet, one cannot help wondering how Antín could have realized so quixotic a project as filming the *diversa desmesura* of *Adán Buenosayres* in the medium of live-action film. The medium of film animation could provide one solution to the technical difficulties involved. Twenty-first-century advances in computer animation offer another solution – the sort of film language developed, for example, by Esteban Sapir in *La antena* (2007) [The Aerial]. Steeped in the avant-garde film tradition of both Europe and Argentina, Sapir's crossing of grapheme, word, and image, as well as his morphology of human-machine hybrids, seems a direct homage to Xul Solar and Marechal's Schultz. The continuously falling snow-like substance in *La antena* – is it finely shredded paper? semiotic dust? – recalls the rain of grimy newsprint in the first circle of Schultz's Cacodelphia and Sapir's *hombres-globo* (human balloons) are surely the formal descendants of the *homoglobes* designed by Schultz/Marechal or Xul Solar's human airplanes. Perhaps Antín's dream of filming *Adán*

## THIS ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

This translation of *Adán Buenosayres* is based on the fourteenth (and final) edition of the original publisher, Editorial Sudamericana, and Pedro Luis Barcia's annotated edition (Clásicos Castalia, 1994). Although I have consulted other editions, the minor textual variations (mostly orthographic) are too slight to be of significance for the English-language translator. Patrice Toulat's French translation (Grasset/UNESCO, 1995) has been amply consulted as well, especially by Sheila Ethier, who read the first draft of my English translation against Toulat's version and gave valuable feedback. Nicola Jacchia's 2010 Italian translation arrived too late to provide a substantive point of comparison, but I have been grateful for our stimulating and helpful e-mail exchanges about translation problems.<sup>29</sup>

In principle, this translation adheres as closely as possible to the elusive ideal of textual fidelity. Recourse to annotation allows for the possibility of rendering the novel's rich colloquiality more directly. Though often rendered in approximate equivalents toward the beginning of the translated novel, many of the original *lunfardo* or Argentine-slang terms, are progressively incorporated in the translated text, with explanations provided in the notes and the glossary; the intent is that readers should gain more direct access to the palpable flavour of a unique urban culture, which in turn facilitates a more precise reading of it. It is worth noting that two of the many dictionaries I consulted – the Academia Argentina de Letras edition of the *Diccionario del habla de los argentinos* and Job Gobello's *Nuevo diccionario lunfardo* – both frequently cite Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres* to illustrate particular Argentine usages; this is yet another indication of the novel's cultural importance.

The long sentences and elaborate language of Marechal's neo-Baroque prose present a problem for English syntax. I have broken up run-on sentences when doing so seemed to profit readability, but never at the expense of any layer or nuance of meaning. Marechal's prose is often self-parodic: he piles up clause after clause in pretentiously elaborate constructions with comic intent, the opulence of the expressive means humorously contrasting with the relative banality of the content. In such cases I have adjusted the syntax as little as possible, in order to conserve the humour. In cases where language is ludically celebrated in nonsense prose or utterly gratuitous puns, I have at times needed to sacrifice textual fidelity; such instances are signalled in endnotes.

Further, in order to retain as much original flavour as possible, I have, with two exceptions, not translated the characters' names. The first is the most vexatious; the eponymous "Adán Buenosayres" – in Spanish a euphonious six-syllable verse of poetry – has been rendered as "Adam Buenosayres." Unfortunately, the substitution disrupts the rhythm of the name/title, and the music of this love *verso llano* suffers. However, the name *Adán* is not readily recognizable to most anglophones, and would not therefore convey all the biblical and symbolic freight we hear in "Adam." Poetry has thus had to take second place to meaning. The other exception is the name of the astrologer Schultze, changed from Marechal's "Schultze," the latter being a far less common form of the German surname. But the real-life model for the astrologer is the self-named Xul Solar, a moniker that condenses his birth name "Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari." It seems likely that Marechal preferred "Schultze" because the German "Schulz," lacking the final voiced "e", is virtually unpronounceable within the phonological system of Spanish. In English, by contrast, it is more natural to say Schulz and to spell it with a "t" (as Marechal has done).

Much lyric material is quoted in the novel, including verses from tangos, folk songs, children's poetry, doggerel, and Marechal's own poetry. So as not to disrupt the flow, I have placed m

translations of this material in the main text and the original versions in the endnotes. Readers of *Ulysses* will notice that I use the same protocols for dialogue as Joyce does; that is, a dash to mark the point where a given character's speech begins. This partially replicates the Spanish punctuation observed in Marechal's text (in Spanish, a second dash normally marks the point where the speech ends). In fact, as Lafforgue notes, Marechal in his manuscript notebooks often neglected to add the closing dash ("Estudio filológico preliminar" xxiii–xxiv), perhaps unconsciously under the influence of his reading of *Ulysses*. On the other hand, as Barcia observes (103), Marechal never used the Joycean stream-of-consciousness technique. Indeed, he seems to hesitate when punctuating complex narratorial layering; in [Book Two, chapter 1](#), for example, he vacillates between the dash and quotation marks when handling Adam's interior monologues, sometimes presenting them as soliloquies (see Lafforgue and Colla's critical edition). Nevertheless, once in print, the punctuation remains quite stable in all succeeding editions. In this translation, with the exception noted above, I reproduce Marechal's punctuation of dialogue and interior monologue.

Marechal often cites classical phrases in Latin. Unless the phrase is very short and its meaning obvious, I usually provide translations in the notes. When we read, for example, that Adam says something to himself *ad intra*, it is obvious that he is speaking inwardly. Adam's penchant for using Latin phrases, an anti-modernist gesture, is as odd in Spanish as it is in English. The narrator uses phrases from both classical and medieval Church Latin, often with cheeky jocularity.

The annotation, intended for both scholars and non-specialist anglophone readers, owes much to Pedro Luis Barcia's 1994 edition, as well as to the recent critical edition of Javier de Navascués, who was kind enough to exchange manuscript notes with me. References to Barcia's notes are indicated by page number (e.g., Barcia 100n); likewise to Navascués's critical edition (e.g., Navascués, *AB* 227n). Textual material quoted in the notes, if the original is in Spanish prose, is rendered in my English translation, unless otherwise indicated. All errors and omissions, of course, are entirely my responsibility.





Leopoldo Marechal in 1929. (Courtesy of María de los Ángeles Marechal)





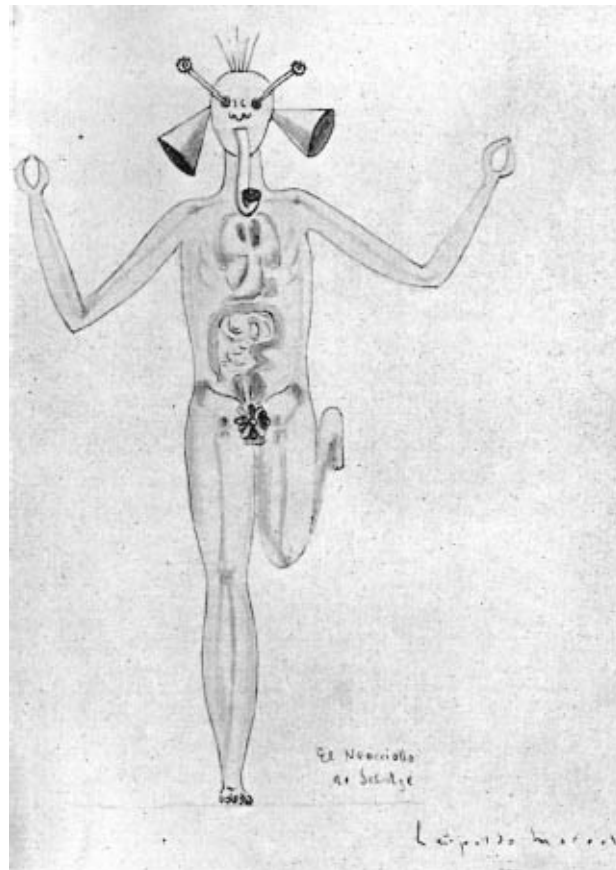
Sketch of Marechal by Aquiles Badi (Paris, 1930). (Courtesy of María de los Ángeles Marechal)



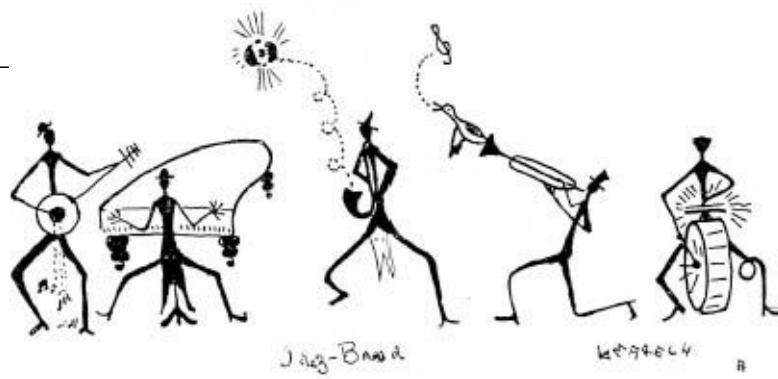
Argentine artists of the “Grupo de París” around Aristide Maillol’s *Monument à Cézanne* in the Jardin des Tuileries, Paris, 1930. Standing, left to right: Juan del Prete, Alberto Morera, Horacio Butler, Raquel Forner, Leopoldo Marechal. Sitting, left to right: Maurice Mazo, Alfredo Bigatti, Athanase Apartis. (Courtesy of the Fundación Forner-Bigatti)



Artists of the “Grupo de París” in Sanary-sur-Mer on the French Riviera, 1930. Left to right: Alberto Morera, Alfredo Bigatti, Aquilino Badi, Leopoldo Marechal, Raquel Forner, Horacio Butler. (Courtesy of the Fundación Forner-Bigatti through the Centro Virtual de Arte Argentino)



Marechal's working sketch of Schultz's “Neociollo,” the astrologer's visionary model of Argentina's future inhabitants. (Courtesy of María de los Ángeles Marechal)



LEOPOLDO MARECHAL: Jazz-Band.

Sketch by Marechal for the magazine *Valoraciones* (August 1926). His poem “Jazz Band” appeared in *Martín Fierro* 27–28 (10 March 1926). (Courtesy of María de los Ángeles Marechal)



Leopoldo Marechal, Susana Rinaldi (tango singer and actress), and composer Astor Piazzolla. Photo first published in the magazine *Extra* in 1968. (Courtesy of photographer Gianni Mesticelli)

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