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Dante and Argentine Identity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

by

Heather Renee Sottong

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dante and Argentine Identity

by

Heather Renee Sottong
Doctor of Philosophy in Italian
University of California, Los Angeles, 2016
Professor Massimo Ciavolella, Chair

This dissertation examines Dante’s afterlife in Argentina in selected works by Bartolomé Mitre, Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, and Leopoldo Marechal. My analysis is informed by the theories of Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Nicolas Shumway, who coined the concepts of “invented traditions,” “imagined communities,” and “guiding fictions” respectively. I have applied these notions to the case of Argentina, which after the War of Independence from Spain (1810-1818) had to develop its own national cultural identity. In Chapter 1, “Bartolomé Mitre and the Building of a Nation,” I examine Mitre’s 1897 translation of the Divine Comedy, his friendship with Giuseppe Garibaldi, and his role as President of Argentina from 1862-1868. I have found Mitre’s reading of Dante to have important resonances with the readings of Risorgimento Italians such as Giuseppe Mazzini who associated Dante with political unity, morality, and high culture. I argue that Mitre’s translation is a counter-operation to the linguistic and aesthetic tendencies and socio-political message of José Hernández’s El Gaucho Martín Fierro (1872).
Chapter 2 is dedicated to Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Lugones’ short story “Francesca” (1909) is a creative re-invention of the Vth Canto of *Inferno*. Borges, who was well aware of this story and its lack of correspondence to the literary nationalism Lugones advocated in *El payador*, set out to write a Francesca of the pampas. His short story “The Intruder” simultaneously subverts Dante’s Vth Canto and Lugones’s adaptation. I also examine Borges’ famous story “The Aleph,” which, I argue, is not only a parody of the *Divine Comedy*, but also a subtle critique of Lugones in the figure of Carlos Daneri. In the third and final chapter I discuss how in *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) Leopoldo Marechal employs Dante to parody the viewpoints of many of Argentina’s intellectual elite (including Borges) on the topic of Argentine literature and identity. I conclude that the *Divine Comedy*, a work widely acknowledged to have played a key role in the emergence of Italian national conscious, was an important font of inspiration for a several major Argentine authors concerned with developing Argentine national literature.
The dissertation of Heather Renee Sottong is approved.

Luigi Ballerini

Efraín Kristal

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2016
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Introduction

Dante’s presence in the Río de la Plata region dates back to the early 1800s and continues to the present. My dissertation inquires into the cultural and historical reasons why some Argentine intellectuals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries called upon Dante as a means to found, develop, and expand their literary tradition. Giving pride of place to the key issues of national unification and the establishment of national identity, my study of Dante’s afterlife and reception in Argentina examines his presence in the works of four Argentine authors: Bartolomé Mitre, Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, and Leopoldo Marechal.

I have been researching this topic since 2011 when I co-organized along with Prof. Massimo Ciavolella, Prof. Efraín Kristal, and the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, the symposium “Dante in the Americas.” The aim of the conference was to bring together international scholars to discuss the textual characteristics of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* that make it an ideal vehicle for literary appropriation, as well as the historical and cultural factors which account for Dante’s enduring popularity in North and especially South America. While Dante’s presence in the U.S. has received a great deal of critical attention ever since Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s seminal translation of the *Divine Comedy* in 1867, the important role he played in Hispanic American literature is something of a new frontier in Dante scholarship.

As was evident from the conference, Dante’s literary presence is pervasive throughout Central and South America: in Mexico (in the poetry of Octavio Paz and the novels of Juan Rulfo and Ignacio Padilla); in Brazil (in the novels of Machado de Assis); in Peru (in the poetry of Jorge Wiesse and the novels of Mario Vargas Llosa); in Argentina in the works of Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, Leopoldo Marechal, and many more. The more I researched, the more I understood that focusing on Argentina for my dissertation was inevitable. The presence of Dante
in Argentine literature begins with the Generation of 1837, a group of writers aimed at overthrowing the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. In the 1890s the *Divine Comedy* was translated into Spanish by none other than Bartolomé Mitre, President of Argentina from 1862-1868. Subsequently, Dante was appropriated by the most prominent authors of the Argentine literary canon. Although there are a number of articles and a few books on the influence of Dante on Borges, there exists no comprehensive study of the impact of Dante’s work in Argentine letters. The goal of my dissertation is to make a case to remedy this situation, and in doing so to fill a gap in scholarship. The main question I seek to answer is: in what ways did Argentines call upon Dante in their endeavors to create a uniquely Argentine literature?

To complete this project, I travelled three times to Argentina for periods of two months each, first in 2013, and again in 2015 and 2016. During my stays I met with other Dante and Mitre scholars at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and conducted archival research at the *Museo Mitre* which houses Mitre’s personal library, including all his epistolary correspondence, his copy of the *Divine Comedy* used for translation, and all notes related to the process of translation. I also visited the personal library of Leopoldo Marechal at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario which houses Marechal’s copy of the *Divine Comedy* and *Vita Nuova* and five texts of Dante criticism by Luigi Valli.

This study was written with two readerships in mind: Italianists who may know little of Argentine history and literature, and Argentines who may have little familiarity with Dante. Writing for both audiences has been challenging to say the least. For the benefit of the Italianists I have provided basic historical contextualization as a necessary framework for each chapter. I have also translated the Spanish quotes into English. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. As regards Argentine readers, as a foreigner I can hardly hope to teach them about their own
national history. Instead, my goal was to enrich their reading of Argentine classics through newfound knowledge of Dante, and to enable a better understanding of the role of literature in the formation of a sense of Argentine national identity.

My analysis of the texts under consideration is informed by the theories of Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Nicolas Shumway, who coined the concepts of “invented traditions,” “imagined communities,” and “guiding fictions” respectively. The “invention of tradition” is a notion developed by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, who explore the creation of new traditions which appear or claim to be old in origin. Although every epoch, they explain, most likely gave rise to invented tradition, it occurs more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys previous social patterns. This phenomenon is especially apparent in the development of nationalism, and often involves the dismantling and restructuring of images of the past. It is not to be confused with genuine traditions: “Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented.”¹ Hobsbawn identifies late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Europe as a place and time in which invented traditions flourished. Benedict Anderson goes a step further, identifying nations in general as social constructs, existing only in the minds of those in the community and constructed by the political and cultural elites. In his book, *Immagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rather than focus on nineteenth-century Europe, he traces the emergence of community in South America.²

The concepts of “imagined traditions” and “imagined communities” can be applied to the case of Argentina, which after the War of Independence from Spain (1810-1818) had to develop

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its own national cultural identity. At the end of the colonial period Argentina was a largely un-
populated land, with an estimated population of around 500,000. Unlike Mexico and Peru with
highly developed Indian civilization, Argentina had mostly nomadic tribes which were annihilated
over time and excluded from the construction of a national identity undertaken by Argentina’s
forefathers. Nicolas Shumway explains that during the last half of the 1700s Argentina was “a land
of isolated settlements, autonomist townsman, nomad gauchos, relatively docile employees of
estancieros, unconquered Indians, minimal economic and political development—and no sense of
national destiny.” European immigration was encouraged and supported to populate the expanses
and modernize the economy. The great European immigration wave to Argentina took place in the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and resulted in a heterogeneous population of
predominantly Spanish and Italian origin. Symbolical or ideological identification among the
population had to be established and “argentinidad” invented.

According to Nicolas Shumway, the attempt of Argentina’s forefathers to invent a
collective identity was a failure. He argues that the nineteenth-century intellectuals who first
framed the idea of Argentina were unsuccessful in creating an ideological framework for union. Rather than creating a mythology of inclusion, nineteenth-century Argentina gave rise to opposing
“guiding fictions” which resulted in a mythology of exclusion. Shumway employs the term
“guiding fictions” to refer to the notions that give individuals a sense of nation, peoplehood,
collective identity, and national purpose. He argues that from independence onward, two
divergent streams of thought dominated the country’s guiding fictions: one elitist, liberal, pro-

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4 Ibid., 12.
5 Ibid., x.
6 Ibid., xi.
European and porteña, and the other populist, nationalist, nativist, and federalist. Developed in the nineteenth century during the period of national consolidation, these guiding fictions, according to Shumway, continue to exert their influence on Argentina’s present. Each one of the authors in the present study comes down on a different side of this ideological divide. In each chapter I focus on one author and explore how Dante factors in relation to their articulation of Argentine national identity.

In Chapter 1, “Bartolomé Mitre and the Building of a Nation,” I examine Mitre’s motives for dedicating a decade of his life to the translation of the Divine Comedy, the definitive version of which was published in 1897. It remained the only Argentine translation of the work until Angel Battistessa’s 1972 edition. Mitre’s reading of the Divine Comedy has important resonances with that of Risorgimento Italians such as Mazzini, who figured Dante as a harbinger of Italian unity. Heavily influenced by the ideas of Young Italy, Mitre associated Dante with political unity, morality, and high culture. In this chapter, I explain his views on the state of Argentine literature at the time, and argue that his translation of the Divine Comedy is in many ways a counter-operation to the linguistic and aesthetic tendencies of José Hernández’s El Gaucho Martín Fierro (1872). Most importantly, Mitre’s translation was a means to promote an opposing social message: political progress and unity. The translation coincides with a larger project to create a national mythology and national heroes via his Historia de Belgrano (1858–59) and Historia de San Martín (1887–88). Chapter 1 culminates with an exploration of the commonalities between Giuseppe Garibaldi’s role in Italian unification and Mitre’s political role as president of Argentina, examined

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7 Pertaining to the port city of Buenos Aires.

8 Ibid., xii.
through the lens of their epistolary correspondence (the two leaders were good friends after having fought together during the Siege of Montevideo).

My discussion of Mitre’s motives for translating the Comedy is framed within the context of Argentine debates on immigration. Mitre welcomed Italian immigration in particular, and his translation of the Divine Comedy appropriates the Italian classic for incoming and extant Argentine citizens. Liberal leaders such as Mitre construed immigration as a means to bring people from supposedly more “civilized” countries into a sparsely populated land, in hopes of creating a modern society with a dynamic economy. From 1882-1886 (the years of his presidency) of the 289,409 recent immigrants, 205,442 were from Italy (that is approximately 70%).

By the turn of the century, the immigration promoted by Mitre had become a reality. Despite the ever-changing demographics and political situation, the popularity of Dante and the Argentine preoccupation with questions of identity remained a constant. In response to the volatile demographic flux of the first decades of the 1900s in Buenos Aires, intellectuals felt it a pragmatic necessity to define what exactly it meant to be “Argentine.” The following two chapters explore divergent responses to this question, all of which incorporate Dante.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Although studies have been done on Dante in the works of Leopoldo Lugones and in Borges individually, scholars have failed to address the relationship between Borges’s adaptations of the Comedy and those of his distinguished antecedent and rival of sorts. In this chapter I evidence how Borges’s rewritings of Dante are in direct dialogue with those of Lugones. Borges uses Dante to parody Lugones’s pedantism and also his nativist nationalistic views expressed in El payador.

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Lugones was heavily influenced by the *Divine Comedy*. In the first poem of his collection *Lunario sentimental* (1909) he claims to have learned his verse from Dante, “Abuelo arduo y conciso. / Por cuyo Paraíso/ Jamás pasó un pedante” [Arduous and concise ancestor/ Through whose Paradise/ No pedant ever passed].

The primary cultural proponent of Modernism in Argentina, Lugones originally turned to Dante because he was a pillar of Western culture upon which Modernism is based. His short story “Francesca” (1909) is a creative re-invention of the Vth Canto of *Inferno*. Subsequently, however, he abandoned his Eurocentric style of writing in order to embrace gaucho literature, and in particular the epic poem *Martín Fierro*, as the literature which best expresses “the heroic life of our race.”

Borges, who was well aware of Lugones’s story “Francesca” and its lack of correspondence to the literary nationalism he advocated in *El payador*, set out to write a Francesca of the pampas. His short story “The Intruder” simultaneously subverts Dante’s Vth Canto and Lugones’s adaptation. I also examine Borges’s famous story “The Aleph,” which, I argue, is not only a parody of the *Divine Comedy*, but also a subtle critique of Lugones in the figure of Carlos Daneri, a pedant whose poetics the character Borges despises.

My third and final chapter looks at the use of Dante in Leopoldo Marechal’s *Adán Buenosayres* (1948). In this novel of epic proportion, Marechal, a pro-Perón Catholic nationalist, uses Dante to parody the snobism and lack of consensus among the intellectual elite, the primary producers of culture. Through the voice of the main character, Adán, he articulates the need for a return to tradition and a spiritually-directed literature. As the title suggests, Adán Buenosayres is the first man (Adam), as well as the primary representative of Buenos Aires. Just as the protagonist

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12 Borges selected this story to be included in the collection *La estatua de sal* (published posthumously), for which he wrote a preface.
of the *Divine Comedy* is also its author, so too Adán is the literary incarnation of Marechal. In Book VII, Adán, guided by the astrologer Schultze (Virgil), descends through limbo (“un arrabal” [slum]) and then through nine circles of hell which are divided into “barrios” [neighborhoods]. Not only does the book closely follow Dante’s *Inferno* in structure, but just like the *Comedy*, it is the story of a penitential journey that ends in spiritual realization. The second most important motif of the novel is also Dantean in nature: the *Mujer Celeste* or *Madonna Intelligenza*. Book VI, “El Cuaderno de Tapas Azules” is a philosophical reflection that closely parallels Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and is heavily influenced by the doctrine of the *Fedeli d’Amore*.

While the focus of my analysis is Adán’s infernal journey, I also closely examine the conversations on national identity which take place between Adán and the members of his social circle in Books I-V. The novel is set in the 1920s, and the protagonists correspond to important members of Argentina’s literary elite: Borges (Luis Pereda), Xul Solar (the astrologer Schultze), Francisco Luis Bernardez (Franky Amundsen) and Jacobo Fijmann (Samuel Tesler). Each character represents one of the contradicting trends of the Argentine avant-garde.

These four explorations of Dante in Argentine letters testify to the resonance of the *Divine Comedy* in Argentina in the nineteenth and twentieth century. I conclude that the *Divine Comedy*, a work widely acknowledged to have played a key role in the emergence of Italian national conscious, was an important font of inspiration for a several major Argentine authors concerned with developing Argentine national literature.
Chapter 1

Bartolomé Mitre and the Building of a Nation

Bartolomé Mitre, President of Argentina from 1862-1868, was also the first Argentine translator of Dante. His Spanish translation of the *Divine Comedy* published in the 1890s remained the only Argentine translation until Ángel J. Battistessa’s 1972 edition. Although ultimately not as influential as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s English translation (1867), it nevertheless played an important role in the diffusion of Dante in the Río de la Plata. This chapter examines his motives for the translation, and his mission to bring European high culture to his fledgling country. I will frame my discussion in terms of the contemporary debates on immigration in Argentina, as Italian immigration significantly shaped the makeup of the country, and issues of immigration are at the heart of Mitre’s intentions. I will also explore the similarities between Garibaldi’s role in Italian unification and Mitre’s political role as president of Argentina. While Garibaldi, “father of Italy” was Mitre’s military hero, Dante, “father of the Italian language,” was his literary role model. Mitre, who believed that creating a linguistic model as Dante had done was a fundamental part of the construction of a national identity, wanted to portray himself as the father of Argentina.

Bartolomé Mitre was born in Buenos Aires in 1821. His father, Ambrosio, was both a man of letters and a military officer in the independence movement. Because of their opposition to the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas, Mitre’s family left Buenos Aires for Montevideo when he was just a boy, although he would return sporadically until 1838. At the age of sixteen, he entered the Montevideo military academy, and would soon thereafter be defending the city from Rosas’ troops during the Great Siege of Montevideo (1843-1852). Following Rosas’ defeat in 1852, Mitre returned to Buenos Aires (at this time an independent province) where he played an active role in politics, serving in the parliament and founding the newspaper *Los Debates*. In 1859 he was elected
governor of Buenos Aires and in 1862, following a military triumph, president of Argentina. As president he oversaw the location of Buenos Aires as capital of the confederation and consolidated the process of national unification. Once his term concluded in 1868 (he was to be succeeded by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento), he founded the newspaper La Nación and continued to exert political influence as a statesman. He also orchestrated two unsuccessful military uprisings to regain power, first in 1874, hoping to prevent Avellaneda’s inaugural, and later in 1890 along with Leandro Alem. In addition to being an influential military leader, diplomat, legislator, and journalist, he was also an important South-American historian, authoring both Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina (1857) and Historia de San Martín y de la emancipación sudamericana (1869).

Among Mitre’s many accomplishments was his translation of the Divine Comedy. His translations of cantos I, III, V, XXXII and XXXIII of Inferno first appeared in 1889 in a limited edition of 100 copies dedicated to the Academy of Arcadia in Rome. This was followed by the publication of La Divina Comedia. Juicios críticos sobre la traducción del Dante por Bartolomé Mitre in 1891, a compilation of corrections and criticisms on his translation. Shortly thereafter in the same year the French publisher Félix Lajouane printed a luxury edition of Inferno that was the first to include Mitre’s theory of translation, “Teoría del traductor.” But his work on the translation was far from finished. He would continue to meticulously amend errors, publishing the texts Fe crítica de erratas y de correcciones dantescas, Correcciones a la traducción del Infierno de Dante. Con notas complementarias, and Segundo apéndice. Correcciones a la traducción del Dante in the same year. In 1893 a new edition of Infierno with over 1400 corrections was published in

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13 Mitre’s victory in the 1861 Battle of Pavón led to the dissolution of the national government and the reincorporation of Buenos Aires Province into the Argentine Republic. Following the battle Mitre served as interim President, appointed by the National Congress. Subsequently in 1862 he was officially elected as the first President of a unified Argentine Republic.
Buenos Aires, and in 1894, *La Divina Comedia* in its entirety was published by Peuser. Finally, in 1897 a definitive edition updated with corrections was made available, and it is on this edition that this study is based.

As is readily apparent from the sheer number of editions with their copious corrections, the translation of the *Divine Comedy* was not something that Mitre took lightly, having dedicated a decade of his life to this gargantuan task. Legend has it that during the war of Paraguay, he spent all his downtime translating. One day when combat was halted, an official entered his tent to find him immersed in his work, surrounded by dictionaries and scattered sheets of paper. Curious, he inquired:

- Qué anda haciendo, mi general?
- Aquí me ve, traduciendo al Dante.
- Hace bien, a esos gringos hay que darles con todo.\(^{15}\)

\[ - What are you doing, General?  
- Just as you see me, translating Dante.  
- You have to go hard on those gringos, General. \]

The term “gringos” was used at the time to refer to all foreigners. The official’s comment suggests that Mitre’s translation was butchering the original text so badly as to be an insult to the gringos, i.e. the Italians in this case. Although probably made up in subsequent years, the anecdote circulated widely. While the location of the exchange (either in a tent near the battlefield or Mitre’s office) and the identity of the interlocutor varies, the ending is always the same and demonstrates the confusion surrounding Mitre’s literary labor.\(^{16}\) In some versions the interlocutor is told to wait

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\(^{14}\) Cfr. Longhi de Brancaglia, 1936.


\(^{16}\) In some versions Mitre’s interlocutor is Lucio V. Mansilla, a fellow diplomat and statesman. Versions of this anecdote can be found in Sergio Waisman, “Foundationa Ch  

Endpoints of Translation,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe (Israel)* 21, no. 01 (2010): 60.; Giuseppe Bellini, “Dante nella versione di Mitre,” in *Del
outside for some time, thereby placing the importance of the translation above and beyond that of his visitor. According to Ángel Battistessa, who followed in Mitre’s footsteps as a translator of Dante, Mitre considered the translation of the *Comedy* more an act of government than a literary endeavor. But why did Mitre see translating Dante as important as his military exploits and the affairs of the state? And what could the translation of an Italian epic poem have to do with Argentine politics? As we shall see in this chapter, translating Dante was part of Mitre’s project to fill what he perceived as a “cultural void” with classics from Old World Europe, to create a linguistic model to serve as a foundation for a nascent cultural identity, and to adopt a literary work which was ideal for creating cultural cohesion among the existing population and incoming Italian immigrants.

Mitre’s notions regarding the function of epic poetry within society are typical of the Romantic period. Romantic nationalism presupposes that the state derives its political legitimacy as a consequence of the unity of the people it governs. This unity was believed to be dependent upon factors such as race, customs, and religion. These factors combined constituted the cultural patrimony of a nation. One such factor which was believed by Romantic thinkers to be of particular importance for the identity of a people was language. The German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) reflected upon the unity of language and nation in his thirteenth address “To the German Nation” in 1806:

> The first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and have the power of continuing to make

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themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.\textsuperscript{18}

The linguistic processes of romantic nationalism required linguistic models. In Italy, for example, Risorgimento thinkers based themselves on the linguistic model codified by Dante in the \textit{Divine Comedy}. The concept of a “national epic” was also a key notion of Romantic nationalism, as a legendary work of poetry was thought to reflect the spirit of a nation. In this regards too, the \textit{Divine Comedy} proved fundamental in the eyes of Risorgimento Italians.

In the current era of globalization, we tend to think of ‘national literatures’ as a “well-founded fiction,” to use a term of Bourdieu.\textsuperscript{19} For Mitre’s generation (apart from forward thinkers such as Goethe, a harbinger of \textit{Weltliterature}), literature was very much associated with the particularity of nations and considered a key factor in the construction of national identities. In newly-established nations, translation contributes greatly to the building of national literatures by establishing a corpus of literary texts and models around which a unique national literature could develop.\textsuperscript{20}

A strong Romantic nationalist element is present in the rhetoric of Mitre. His Romantic views on language and literature can be seen in his 1887 letter to Señor don Miguel M. Ruíz regarding the possibility of creating a course on South American literature, which as of yet did not exist as a subject taught at universities. Ruíz had written to Mitre requesting his opinion and advice on the matter, having heard from Prof. Alió at the colegio del Uruguay that Mitre believed such an endeavor to be impossible. Alió had seconded Mitre’s opinion, informing Ruíz: “no hay material


\textsuperscript{20} Even-Zohar, \textit{Polysystem Studies}. 
para formar un texto, que sirva para dictar un curso de literatura argentina y americana” [there isn’t material to form a text with which to teach a course on Argentine and American literature].

Mitre’s response to the proposal, which he refers to “un asunto en el cual no deseaba tomar participación directa ni indirecta” [a matter in which I didn’t want any part, neither direct nor indirect], is less than enthusiastic. Not only, he claims, is there no extant didactic material for such a course, but none could be created even if they wanted to: “la obra no es solo difícil, sino materialmente imposible.” Why impossible? In Mitre’s eyes, what could be labeled under the umbrella “South American Literature” was yet to be written:

Para dictar un curso de literatura, lo primero que se necesita es una literatura, y en el caso que nos ocupa, no sólo faltan los materiales completos para dictarlos, sino que falta la materia misma que constituye la substancia del asunto.

[In order to teach a literature course, the first thing one needs is literature. In our case we are lacking not only the complete materials to teach such a course, but also the very material that constitutes the subject itself.]

Although he has already spelled out his opinion in black and white, Mitre then makes recourse to a character from folklore to drive home what he considers an obvious truth.

Hay una receta de cocina muy conocida, que pertenece al número de las verdades de Pero Grullo, y es que para hacer un guiso de gallina, lo primero que se necesita es una gallina.

[There is a well-known cooking recipe among the many truths of Pero Grullo: in order to make a chicken stew, the first thing one needs is a chicken.]

Pero Grullo is a folkloric character known for his manner of stating truisms with authority, thereby creating a comical effect. Believed to have been a real person who lived from 1213-1227 in

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22 Ibid., 170.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.
Palencia, he entered into the popular imagination in anecdotes and eventually became a figure of literature. Francisco de Quevedo included him in his 1622 book *Los sueños*, wherein Pero Grullo gives ten prophesies which Quevedo terms “perogrulladas.” Mitre’s mention of Pero Grullo in this context is particularly significant because it draws attention to the distinction Mitre makes between folklore and literature. As the essay progresses, Mitre’s preference for high literature and the classics becomes apparent. At the same time, he makes it clear that elements of popular culture can indeed develop into material for high culture over time.

In Mitre’s opinion, in the case of South America, although some literary materials existed, they were fragmentary, and could not be studied as a fully formed “literature.”

Si por literatura se entiende simplemente cierta cantidad de libros escritos por naturales de una región sobre alguna de las materias que forman el tesoro del arte ó del pensamiento humano, la América meridional puede decir que tiene una literatura suya, pero fragmentaria incompleta, en germén puede decirse, pero que hasta el presente ha dado más materiales á la bibliografía que al caudal de las ideas ó á la crítica. Si por literatura se ha de entender lo que ella significa, es decir, un conjunto de obras que abrace el vasto campo del pensamiento humano, que comprenda además de todos los géneros que ella comparta, creaciones originales que señalen un progreso en las letras ó escritores que sin haber alcanzado reputación universal basten para alimentar por sí solos con su medula el genio de una nación, no: la América meridional no tiene literatura, y la que tiene no constituye ni las simples muestras de sus múltiples formas ó géneros.

[If by the word literature one understands quite simply a certain number of books written by the natives of a specific region about a few of the subjects that make up the treasure of art or human thought, South America could be said to have its own literature; a literature which is fragmentary, just budding one could say, and which up till now has contributed more material to the bibliography than to the wealth of ideas or criticism. If, however, by literature one understands what the word actually means, that is, a collection of works which embrace the vast field of human thought, which includes, in addition to all extant genres, original creations that mark progress in literature or writers who, without having

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27 Ibid., 173. My emphasis.
gained universal renown, nourish with its essence the genius of a nation, then no: South America does not have a literature. And that which it has does not even include simple examples of the diverse forms or genres.]

His criteria for literature is that a) it encompass the vastness of human thought, b) it include works of all genres, c) it include original creations which demonstrate progress, or d) writers who alone are able to nourish the genius of a nation.

The idea that literature must “alimentar con su medula el genio de una nación” [nourish with its essence the genius of a nation] is particularly Romantic, as is Mitre’s idea of the history of literature, which he defines as “un documento que copia las costumbres que la circundan y el signo de un estado de los espíritus, es decir, el modo cómo los hombres piensan y sienten en un momento dado, reflejando la colectividad” [a document which records customs and the spirit of a people, the way men think and feel at a given time, reflecting collectivity].

A history of literature is something he perceives as related to national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, rather than geographical:

No por esto se le ha ocurrido á nadie hacer por simple razón geográfica una historia de literatura europea, aun cuando abunden y sobren los materiales para formarla, por cuanto esto importaría hacer artificialmente sin orden lógico y bajo un punto de vista muy restringido, la historia de la humanidad entera con la confusión de la torre de Babel.

[For this reason, no one has ever thought to write a history of European literature simply for geographical reasons, even though the materials to do so are abundant and superfluous, for doing so would entail writing artificially without logical order and under a very limited point of view, the history of humanity with all the confusion of the Tower of Babel.]

A third criteria for any history of literature is that it have a guiding thread: “Los cursos de literatura deben tener por unidad, ó bien la lengua ó bien el género, ó bien los enlaces filosóficos”

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28 Ibid., 170-171.

29 Ibid., 171.
[Literature courses must have a unifying criteria, whether it be linguistic, genre-related, or philosophical].\(^{30}\) He mentions by means of example Schlegel’s course on dramatic literature, “en que al través del tiempo se estudia la formación de una lengua y el genio de una nación, ó bien el desarrollo de una forma del arte en sus múltiples y análogas manifestaciones” [which examines over the course of time the formation of a language and the genius of a nation, or the development of an art form in its multiple and analogous manifestations].\(^{31}\)

The only unifying thread that could be said to exist among works written by South America authors, in Mitre’s opinion, is language:

El único vínculo que podría atar la historia de la literatura Americana, sería, aparte del geográfico que no responde á un plan nacional, el de la lengua, que es un vehículo, su carne, á la vez que su vestidura.\(^{32}\)

[The only nexus that could tie together a history of American literature would be, apart from geography which does not correspond to a national plan, the nexus of language, which is a vehicle, as well as the essence and ornament of literature.]

In summary, according to Mitre, the language and genius of a nation, reflected in its literature, develops gradually over time, and the study of this development is the history of literature. The literature of South America and Argentina Mitre believed to be in an embryonic state, necessitating an incubational period of centuries for great genius to develop. Not only does he apply this reasoning to literature, but also to other art forms such as painting, sculpture, and music. Interestingly, he sees the duration of this artistic incubational period as something which can be calculated by modern science.

La ciencia moderna ha podido determinar aritméticamente cuántos millones de hombres y cuántos siglos se necesitan para producir un gran músico, un gran escultor y un gran pintor. Es una elaboración del tiempo, una combinación de

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 172.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
afinidades electivas, una evolución que se opera gradualmente y que reconoce por factor principal las facultades hereditarias y la **acumulación intelectual**, que como el capital es producto del trabajo reproductivo. ¿Acaso porque la América ha producido unos cuantos músicos, --uno solo de los cuales ha producido una ópera, --¿o cuenta con una docena de buenos pintores y algunos regulares escultores, puede pretender tener un arte musical, pictórico ó estatuario?\(^{33}\)

[Modern science has mathematically determined how many millions of men and how many centuries are necessary to produce a great musician, a great sculptor, and a great painter. It is a question of time, a combination of elective affinities, an evolution that occurs gradually and which has as its principal factor hereditary ability and **intellectual accumulation**, which like capital is accumulated over time. Can South America claim for itself a musical, pictorial, or sculptural art when it has only produced a few musicians (only one of which created an opera), or a dozen painters and a few sculptors?]

Mitre believed such developments to be impossible in a country such as Argentina which was scarcely populated and which existed until only a relatively short time before as a colony of Spain. In all of South America, he points out, there are significant voids to be filled: “hay muchos vacíos que llenar en su territorio como en su cabeza. La mayor parte del terreno no sólo no está cultivado, pero ni siquiera ocupado, y las colonias literarias carecen hasta de representantes y personificaciones en su suelo profundo pero erial” [there are many voids to be filled, both territorial and intellectual. The vast majority of the land is uncultivated, and even unoccupied, and the literary colonies lack representatives and personifications to populate her terrain which is profound but yet untilled.]\(^{34}\)

The main question Mitre asks is “¿Cómo se llenarían los grandes **vacíos** que resultan?” [How to fill the great voids?] The desert must be populated, and the cultural voids filled, while at the same time breaking away from the cultural influence of Spain. Mitre’s plan was to fill the void

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
with non-Spanish European high culture, in particular that of Italy, which, as he would express fifteen years later, he considered the cradle of civilization:

La Italia ha sido la madre fecunda de la civilización moderna. Ella ha dado al lenguaje humano su nota más armónica; a la literatura el más original de los poetas del Renacimiento; a la ciencia el revelador de las leyes del Universo; a la Geografía, el descubridor del Nuevo Mundo; a las Bellas Artes, las creaciones que han dado forma, color y cuerpo al ideal; a la música, las inspiraciones melódicas que hacen estremecer las almas; al derecho humano la abolición de la pena de muerte y al mundo político la Italia Libera e Unita…!\(^{35}\)

[Italy is the fertile mother of modern civilization. She gave to human language the most harmonious of her notes; to literature the most original of the Renaissance poets; to science the revealer of the laws of the Universe; to Geography the discoverer of the New World; to the visual arts the works that gave form, color, and body to the ideal; to music the melodious inspirations that stir souls; to human rights the abolition of the death penalty and to the political world a Free and United Italy…!]

In contrast to the uncultivated Argentina, stands Italy, the “fertile mother of modern civilization.” Until homegrown seeds of genius could develop and intellectual capital accumulate, it was necessary to adopt foreign texts. Of Italian authors, Dante was an obvious choice. Dante was the “father of the Italian language,” known for having provided the moral and ethical sustenance to fuel the genius of his nation. The Risorgimento thinkers considered him the harbinger of Italian unity, and he was very popular among poets of the Romantic period, as were the other authors translated by Mitre, such as Byron, Hugo, and Horace.

Mitre’s choice to translate foreign texts is part of what would become a strong literary tradition of translation in Argentina. As Sergio Waisman in his article “Foundational Scenes of Translation” demonstrates, translation played an important role in the formation of the Argentine nation from its very inception, when it was first used by the criollos who sought to break away

\(^{35}\) Mitre, 1902; Cf. *Italia en el sentir y pensar de Mitre*, 5.
from the Spanish empire and forge a new literary language.\textsuperscript{36} More generally speaking, translation is often key to the development of national identity in peripheral traditions:

The nation, intimately related to but ultimately different from the State, is a cultural and linguistic concept. The nation is formed, and at times dismantled then reformed, in and through culture and language. Translation in peripheral traditions participates actively in the complex processes of the formation of nations and their subjectivities…the act of translation reveals nodes of potential that bring to the forefront issues of identity and representation.\textsuperscript{37}

According to Itamar Even-Zohar, three main conditions that create a situation in which translation is likely to play a major role within a literary polysystem:

(a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, i.e. when the literature is young and in the process of being established

(b) when a literature is ‘peripheral’ or ‘weak’ or both

(c) when there are turning points, crises, or a literary vacuum in a literature.\textsuperscript{38}

All three of these conditions apply to Argentina at the time of Mitre’s translation. Having only just started the independence movement in 1810, Argentine literature was yet in its infancy. Not only was their literary canon a mere shadow of that of other European countries, but they continually saw themselves on the periphery of Western Civilization. In fact, a key characteristic of the Argentine literature that would follow is its lasting preoccupation with defining its place among other Western traditions. Finally, Argentina was at a major turning point in her history. The territory had been united, the caudillos largely suppressed, and the modernization of the economy was under way, also largely thanks to Mitre’s presidency. Mitre continually sought to usher in

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Waisman, “Foundational Scenes of Translation,” 55.

progress and to “civilize” and populate what was just a short time before a largely uninhabited pampa. Not only was Mitre’s translation a means to bring high culture to the country, it would also help to enrich Argentinean Spanish, broadening its expressive possibilities. Mitre saw translation as a necessary part of the complex process of nation building. He chose the Divine Comedy to serve as a foundational text for the citizens of the progressive nation. It embodied the ideas and values that Mitre wished to propagate for a united and progressive post-Independence Argentina, an Argentina that embraced Italian immigration. Before further discussing why Mitre turned to Dante, we must briefly investigate his penchant for Italian culture, and why he saw Italian immigrants in particular as key to the country’s development.

**Populating the Desert: Italian Immigration in Argentina**

Following independence, the governing elites sought to populate and modernize the vast expanses. The population of the entire Argentine territory at the time of independence from Spain is estimated to have been a mere 400,000.\(^{39}\) Intellectuals such as Juan Bautista Alberdi, the major political thinker behind Argentina’s 1853 constitution, emphasized the importance of increasing the nearly non-existent population. Like Mitre, Alberdi was a member of the “Generation of ’37” literary group and an opponent of the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. Following the battle of Caseros in 1852 when Rosas was defeated, Alberdi wrote his book *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (“Bases and Starting Points for the Political Organization of the Argentine Republic”), in which he seeks to outline a simple and rational bases for organizing the nascent country.\(^{40}\) He points out that the foremost enemy of pure unity in the

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\(^{40}\) “Bases y puntos de partida para lo organización política de la República Argentina,” in *Obras completas de Juan Bautista Alberdi*, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: La Tribuna nacional, 1886-1887). All Alberdi quotes here cited in English were translated by Ian Barnett in *Liberal Thought in Argentina 1837-1940*, ed. Natalio R. Botana and Ezequiel Gallo (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2013).
Argentine Republic is not Don Juan Manuel Rosas, but “the space of 200,000 square leagues in which the handful of our scare population of one million is diluted, like a drop of red paint in the Paraná River.” 41 Ten chapters of *Bases* are devoted to describing the problem of deficient population and to proposing possible solutions.

Alberdi’s primary solution is to populate the desert. He coined the phrase “gobernar es poblar” [to govern is to populate] and argued that the only civilization on Argentine soil was European: “We do not have a single important city that was not founded by Europeans…Even now, after independence, indigenous people are neither important nor numerous in our political civil society.” 42 Alberdi argues that Europe had brought the notion of order, the knowledge of liberty, the art of wealth, and the principles of Christian civilization. 43 In fact, everything that Argentina has, he claims, she owes to Europeans: “If it had not been for Europe, America today would be worshiping the sun, the trees, the beasts, burning men in sacrifice, and would not know marriage.” 44 He felt that the native population was incapable of self-rule and that without a rebirth of culture the country was doomed to stagnation and barbarism. He encourages Argentines to recognize their need for progress and “call again for help from Europe for our incomplete culture.” 45 The only way to fill the void and bring civilization to the otherwise “empty and gloomy territory” was by encouraging mass immigration from Europe. 46 The ideas articulated by Alberdi

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41 Ibid., 169.
42 Ibid., 132.
43 Ibid., 136.
44 Ibid., 132.
46 Ibid., 124.
heavily influenced the Argentine constitution of 1853, the preamble of which invites all good-willed citizens of the world to immigrate to Argentina.

Although the preamble says very openly “all good-willed citizens,” article 25 specifies that the Federal government will encourage “European immigration” (Article 25).\textsuperscript{47} Clearly they very much needed to populate the country, but were certain immigrants preferred over others? Julia Albarracin demonstrates in her dissertation “Selecting Immigration in Modern Argentina” that notions of ethnic and/or cultural eligibility of certain immigrant groups for membership in the “imagined community” have influenced Argentine immigration policy. She argues that although economic factors are important in explaining how many immigrants a country is willing to accept, identity politics tend to dictate who is admitted.\textsuperscript{48} As she shows throughout her study, the conceptions of the ideal citizen were redefined over time; however, Argentine immigration policies show a recurrent preference for European immigration.\textsuperscript{49}

While the Founding Fathers of Argentina were all in favor of immigration, they had slightly different ideas regarding what constituted the “ideal” immigrant. Let us compare Alberdi, the so-called “Father of the Constitution,” Mitre (President from 1862-1868), and Sarmiento, Mitre’s successor and author of one of the cornerstones of Argentine literature, Facundo (1845).

As we have seen, in Alberdi’s view, immigration was the only means “for this American desert to swiftly become a world of opulence.”\textsuperscript{50} For Alberdi ideal immigrants were European

\textsuperscript{47} Article 25 of the Constitution states that “The Federal Government shall encourage European immigration; and it shall not restrict, limit or impose taxation of any kind upon the entry into Argentine territory of aliens coming to it for the purposes of tilling the soil, improving industries, or introducing and teaching sciences and arts.


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{50} Alberdi, Bases, 138.
(preferably Anglo-Saxon), and they would civilize the extant population by serving as a model with their modern work and consumption habits. In Chapter XV of *Bases* he writes:

¿Cómo, en qué forma vendrá en lo futuro el espíritu vivificante de la civilización europea a nuestro suelo? Como vino en todas épocas: Europa nos traerá su espíritu nuevo, sus hábitos de industria, sus prácticas de civilización, en las inmigraciones que nos envíe.\textsuperscript{51}

[How and in what form will the life-giving spirit of European civilization come to our soil in the future? As it has come in every epoch: Europe will bring her new spirit, her habits of industry, her practices of civilization in the immigration she sends to us.\textsuperscript{52}]

Alberdi felt that the best way to impart the desired European “civilization” was vis-à-vis the example set by Europeans themselves rather than through the educational system. He continues, “Every European who comes to our shores brings us more civilization in his habits, which he then passes on to our inhabitants, than in so many philosophy books…A hardworking man is the most effective catechism.”\textsuperscript{53} Because education was insufficient, the gauchos and the indigenous population were to acquire culture through first hand contact. He argues that even if the *roto*, the gaucho, and the *cholo* were to have the best education system, “in one hundred years you will not make him an English laborer who works, consumes, lives decently and comfortably.”\textsuperscript{54} Although all of the articles of Alberdi’s constitutional project advocate immigration from Europe in general, the fact that he here specifies “English” rather than “European” indicates that the English are indeed the ideal.\textsuperscript{55} Throughout his *Bases*, he mentions the English as an economic example or in

\textsuperscript{51} Alberdi, *Bases*, XV.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 137.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 138.

\textsuperscript{55} In Article 21, he declares that “No foreigner is more privileged than another.” In Article 33, “Immigration cannot be restrained, nor can it be limited in any way, under any circumstance, or under any pretext.”
association with “liberty,” the French as the epitome of culture, and the United States, particularly California, as an ideal constitutional model. The Italians go unmentioned.

Sarmiento’s writings also reveal a similar bias. In his search for models for Argentine institutional development, he explored the systems in place in Northern European countries. He also wrote extensively about the United States, having travelled there to analyze political and educational institutions. In his primary literary work, *Facundo*, he contrasts the lovely and orderly houses of the German and Scottish settlements south of Buenos Aires with the “barbarous aspect” of the housing in the city center. Like Alberdi, he believed immigration from “civilized” nations to be the cure for Argentina’s “barbaric” state, which was largely the cause of the gauchos and, even worse, the caudillos, such as Juan Manuel de Rosas. At the end of the book Sarmiento contrasts France and Argentina, representing civilization and barbarism respectively. Sarmiento projected that a transformation from barbarous society to civil society could be achieved through education, foreign capital investment, and immigration.

Although Alberdi and Sarmiento’s envisioned transformation from a predominantly Indian-Mestizo population to one of primarily white European immigrants did occur over the next half of a century, the majority of these immigrants came not from Anglo-Saxon nations, nor from France. Between 1857 and 1900, 2,000,000 European immigrants were admitted, 1,116,000 of

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57 “Da compasión y vergüenza en la República Argentina comparar la colonia alemana o escocesa del Sur de Buenos Aires, y la villa que se forma en el interior; en la primera las casitas son pintadas, el frente de la casa siempre aseado, adornado de flores y arbustillos graciosos…La villa nacional es el reverso indigno de esta medalla: niños suyos y cubiertos de harapos viven con una jauría de perros; hombres tendidos por el suelo en la más completa inacción, el desaseo y la pobreza por todas partes; una mesita y petacas por todo amueblado, ranchos miserables por habitación y un aspecto general de barbarie y de incuria los hacen notables.” Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (Madrid: Editorial-América, 1922), 28-29.
whom remained in the country. Among those who remained 660,392 were Italian, 250,135 Spanish, 106,334 French, 18,240 Austro-Hungarian, 18,095 British, 15,521 Swiss, 14,862 Russian Jews, 14,737 Belgian, and 17,989 German.\(^{58}\) In other words, approximately 60% of all European immigrants who arrived during this period were Italian. In the following section I intend to show that not only did Mitre recognize Italian immigration as Argentina’s reality, but he also saw it as her future.\(^{59}\)

**Mitre on Immigration**

Throughout his political career, Mitre advocated Italian immigration. He saw Italians as ideal immigrants for a variety of economic, social, and cultural reasons. For Mitre, Italians were 1) responsible in large part for the country’s economic prosperity and 2) the bringers of moral progress. Furthermore, he strongly advocated what he termed “spontaneous,” as opposed to encouraged immigration. Politicians at the time were divided as to whether the government should have a “laissez faire” immigration policy or if official arrangements should be made with other nations and subsidies offered. In 1870 (two years after the end of his presidential term) Mitre defended the spontaneous immigration policies he had advocated during his presidency in four discourses, given on September 23 and 24. The discourses were first published as installments in 1870 and are included in their entirety in the second volume of the definitive edition of *Arengas* published by the Biblioteca de la Nación.\(^{60}\) Having studied immigration antecedents in the United States and Australia, and because of his experience as leader of the nation, he was strongly opposed

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\(^{59}\) Ironically, while both Alberdi and Sarmiento had travelled to Italy, Mitre had not.

to what he called “artificial immigration.” Not only was it costly for the nation, he argued, but it also ran the risk of creating a country full of unintegrated minority groups who did not adapt to the host country.

He begins his speech by stating that he will defend the system of spontaneous immigration that has been in operation throughout his presidency, which began with 6,000 immigrants and ended with 30,000. The existing system of immigration, he explains, was not born of chance; rather, it was the logical consequence of a clearly conceived idea and a dedication to its development during the course of his administration. And said idea did not cost the country anything more than “sesenta centesimos por cabeza” [sixty cents a head]. “Ante este resultado no hay nada más elocuente que decir!” [In the face of such a result, nothing more eloquent need be said!], he declares matter-of-factly. Furthermore, the “energetic” man who comes of his own free will and with his own capital is more likely to have success upon arrival:

El hombre enérgico que emigra por su libre espontánea voluntad, que elige su nueva patria por un acto deliberado, que viene con sus brazos libres, con su capital propio, puede ejercitar su libertad de acción en campo más vasto, con más medios y mejor resultado que el que obedeciendo á impulsión extraña, viene atado á un contrato, sin contar más recursos que los que la munificencia del gobierno le otorga, ó el interés de la especulación le anticipa.

[The energetic man who immigrates of his own free will, who deliberately chooses his new patria, who comes with open arms and his own capital, can exercise his liberty of action more vastly and with better means and results than he who obeys a foreign impulse, who is tied to a contract, with no more resources than those which the government generously grants him or loans him.]

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61 Bartolomé Mitre, Arengas de Bartolomé Mitre, 108.
62 Ibid., 107.
63 Ibid., 108.
64 Arengas, 95. [My translation]
Who then does Mitre see as this “energetic man” who will bring progress to Argentina? The immigrants in question are the Italians, whose presence in Argentina bolsters Mitre’s defense of spontaneous immigration. Italians, the best on land and at sea, have modernized a formerly backwards Argentina. First he praises them as cultivators of the land:

¿Quiénes son los que han fecundado las diez leguas de terrenos cultivadas que ciñen a Buenos Aires? ¿A quiénes debemos estas verdes cinturas que rodean todas nuestras ciudades a lo largo del litoral, y aún esos mismos oasis de trigo, de maíz, de papas y arbolados que rompen la monotonía de la pampa inculta? A los cultivadores italianos de la Lombardía y del Piamonte, y aún de Nápoles, que son los más hábiles y laboriosos agricultores de Europa. Sin ellos no tendríamos legumbres, no conoceríamos siquiera cebollas como el campesino de Virgilio, porque estaríamos respecto de horticultura en las condiciones de los pueblos más atrasados de la tierra.”

According to Mitre, the Italians are the most able and hard-working farmers in Europe. They are responsible for making fertile what was entirely barren. The fact that Mitre mentions the “uncultivated monotony” of the pampas speaks to what Sarmiento writes at the beginning of *Facundo*. The book begins with a lengthy geographical description of Argentina and an explanation of how the bleak and featureless geography of the pampas was a major barrier to civilization. Mitre’s solution to the problem of the underpopulated pampas is the Italian. If it

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weren’t the descendants of the ancient Ligurians, the fellow countrymen of the discoverer of the new world, Argentina would still be in the Dark Age as regards agriculture.

Secondly Mitre notes the benefit their presence has brought to the shipping industry.

¿A quién se debe el fomento de nuestra marina de cabotaje y la facilidad y baratura de los transportes fluviales? ¿Cuáles son los marineros que tripulan los mil buques que enarbolan en sus mástiles la bandera argentina, y hasta los tripulantes de nuestros buques de guerra? Son los italianos descendientes de los antiguos ligurios, los compatriotas del descubridor del nuevo mundo, excluídos expresamente por este proyecto del beneficio con que se quiere brindar á otras razas, que cualesquiera que sean sus cualidades, no por eso han concurrido á nuestra labor como lo han hecho y lo hacen los genoveses.67

[To whom do we owe the development of our coastal shipping fleet, and the ease and cheapness of river transport? Who are the sailors that man the thousand ships flying the Argentine flag on their masts, or even the crews of our warships? They are the Italian descendants of the ancient Ligurians, the fellow countrymen of the discoverer of the New World, expressly excluded by this scheme from the benefit offered to other races, who, whatever their qualities, have not necessarily contributed to our workforce the way the Genoese have done and still do.]

The Italians, descendants of Christopher Columbus, are the real bringers of progress, the true laborers responsible for improvements in the shipping industry, the loyal Argentines flying the flag and manning the warships. Evidently frustrated by the tendency of his fellow politicians to associate progress with immigrants from Northern Europe, Mitre speaks out to earn the Italians their due recognition.

He then counters the opinion that the Italian immigrants have settled and brought benefit only to urban areas. Of the 80,000 Italians in Argentina, only half of these are in Buenos Aires. The rest, he remarks, are well-dispersed in various coastal cities and the countryside, where they are well-integrated with the existing population on account of the similarities in religion, language, and climate.68 Gualeguaychú, Uruguay, Corrientes, and Paraná all own their development to the

67 Arengas, 112.
68 Ibid.
spontaneous immigration of the Italians. Half the population of Rosario and Santa Fe is comprised of successful boatmen who have built entire neighborhoods along the rivers that are now filled with their commercial boats.

Finally, Mitre argues, Italians are good for the banking industry. Twenty percent of the money deposited in the Bank of Buenos Aires belongs to Italian immigrants, “que nos dan este ejemplo del capital acumulado por la economía” [who set the example of capital accumulated through savings]. Here the Italians are setting a good example for their local population by means of their good habits, the very means by which Alberdi insisted the barbarism of Argentina must be purged.

Mitre devotes much more of his discourse to lauding the Italians than any other migrant group. Of the nationalities mentioned, only the Irish and the Italians receive over a page of commentary. To the next largest population group after the Italians, the Spanish, he dedicates only two sentences. To the French, a brief paragraph. Although the envisioned ideal of Alberdi and Sarmiento was the English and the French, the reality was the Italian. Not only were Italian immigrants the major migrant group during Mitre’s presidency (1862-1868) and at the time of his four discourses supporting spontaneous immigration (1870), but they would continue to be the dominant migrant group in the following decades. From 1882-1886, of the 289,409 recent immigrants, 205,442 were from Italy. By the time Mitre published the first installments of

69 Ibid., 112-113.
70 Ibid., 113.
various cantos of *Inferno* in 1889. Italians had long been a permanent part of the fabric of Argentina.

**Why the Divine Comedy?**

Having filled the territorial void with Italians, he intended to fill the cultural void with Italian literature. As we have seen in his letter to Miguel M. Ruíz, Mitre believed literature to be something which could “alimentar con su medula el genio de una nación” [nourish with its essence the genius of a nation]. Since he did not believe this sort of literature to exist in Argentina, or for that matter even in all of South America, his intention was to import via translation the work best known for having provided the moral and ethical sustenance to fuel the genius of nations. Let us return briefly to Mitre’s letter on South American literature to get a better understanding of his classical preferences, and his insistence that a work of literature be a transcendental, guiding text of international influence.

**Mitre’s Aesthetic Preferences**

Mitre’s letter to Señor don Miguel M. Ruíz also provides us with valuable information regarding his aesthetic preferences. Which Spanish-American poets and authors deserve his mention? According to Mitre, South America can only claim great lyric poets. He names specifically by means of example Heredia (Cuban) and Olmedo (born in Guayaquil). Olmedo’s poems are refined, grandiloquent, and neo-classical. Mitre praises him as the “feliz importador del lirismo de los clásicos antiguos” [proud importer of the classical lyricism of the ancients]. The dramatic poets mentioned by Mitre are Alarcón (Mexican), known for comedy of manners and

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72 Cantos I, III, V, XXXII, and XXXIII were the first to be published.
characters in the style of Terence; Goristiza (Mexican); and Ventura de la Vega, born in Argentina and considered the precursor of “high comedy.”

As regards prose authors, “estos se reducen á algunos historiadores, de los cuales no hay dos que puedan llamarse clásicos” [they are limited to a few historians, not even two of whom could call themselves classical]. Even more significant, South America “No tiene literatura épica ni dramática ni filosófica ni imaginativa siquiera, fuera de los arranques espontáneos de su poesía lírica.” [South America does not have epic literature, nor dramatic literature, nor even philosophical or imaginative writings, apart from its spontaneous bursts of lyric poetry]. The only two American epic poets mentioned by Mitre are Pedro de Oña and Ruíz de León. Pedro de Oña is best known for his verse epic poem Primera parte de Arauco domado (1596), written in rhymed couplets and modeled after Virgil’s Aeneid, as well as on Ercilla. De Oña also wrote a sacred epic, the Ignacio de Cantabira (1639). Ruíz de León (Mexican) is the author of the epic poem Hernandía (1775). As is quickly apparent from Mitre’s list of poets, he privileges authors who base themselves heavily on classical sources and who are known for their high style. He accords epic poetry a privileged rank over lyric poetry.

Secondly, the only authors who deserve mention are those who have acquired renown abroad. He declares that South America can claim no novelists of any import, and certainly not any significant philosophers.

No hablemos de filósofos ni de grandes pensadores en el dominio de las ideas transcedentales, que en sus páginas reflejen en formas literarias, ya que no originales, siquiera como Emerson, los amplios vuelos del pensamiento humano,

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74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.
con alas bastante poderosas para volar, ya que no al futuro, al menos más allá de las fronteras nacionales. Ni aun dentro de estas fronteras han podido caminar.

[Let’s not even talk about philosophers, nor of great thinkers in the domain of transcendental ideas, who in their pages reflect in literary forms the ample flights of human thought. It doesn’t even have to be as original as Emerson. We do not have any work of literature with wings sufficiently powerful to fly over national borders, and certainly not into the future. Their work couldn’t even walk within these borders.]

For Mitre, a true work of literature (whether poetry or prose) must be a guiding text which transcends borders. The authors he mentions in his letter are those whose names had achieved a certain degree of influence in European literary circles. In his opinion one could hardly expect many original works which provide moral and spiritual guidance from a nascent literature that had only recently emerged from chaos:

La genesis de la literatura americana ha salido del caos: ha definido sus formas y va asumiendo rasgos originales, pero todavía no han aparecido en su firmamento los astros que deben iluminar sus horizontes. En tales condiciones pretender dictar un curso de literatura americana, y argentina por añadidura, prescindiendo de orígenes, enlaces y géneros fundamentales, es pretender alumbrar al mundo en pleno día con un candil, y este mismo con cuatro de sus mechas apagadas.

[The genesis of American literature has emerged from chaos: it has defined its forms and is in the process of acquiring original characteristics; but the stars that will illuminate its horizons have not yet appeared in its firmament. Given such conditions, to aspire to teach a course of American literature, and in addition Argentine literature, without fundamental causes, connections, and genres, is like wanting to illuminate the world in the middle of the day with a candelabra with four of its candles extinguished.]

Although it is evident that what Mitre says of South American literature is by inclusion true of Argentina, he reinforces this point for clarity’s sake:

Y lo que digo de lo que se llama literatura sudamericana, --que no tiene un drama, un poema, una novela, ni un tratado de filosofía de cuenta, --lo digo de lo que se llama literatura argentina que recién se va formando, pero que todavía no forma un

76 Ibid., 176.
77 Ibid., 178.
conjunto que merezca este nombre, ni aun para los simples afectos de la clasificación de los géneros.  

[And what I say in regards to what is called South American literature, --which has no drama, poem, novel, nor philosophical treatise of any import, --pertains as well to that which we call Argentine literature, which has only recently begun to take shape and which still does not consist of a collection of works which merits such a name, and cannot even be classified according to genres.]

Argentina, however, was not without important and original works of literature. Significantly, he makes no mention of what would become in the twentieth century and beyond, Argentina’s most prized literary classic, *Martín Fierro* (first published in 1872). Many Argentine intellectuals, most notably Lugones, would later uphold the work to be the greatest reflection of Argentine national identity. In his 1913 lectures, Lugones declared the work to be the epic of Argentina, comparable to Italy’s *Divine Comedy* or Spain’s *Don Quixote*. In what follows, I will evidence why Mitre, who acknowledged the nation’s need of an epic, chose not to embrace *Martín Fierro*; rather, as a counter operation to the work, he translated the *Divine Comedy*.

**The Divine Comedy as the anti-Martín Fierro**

Si Italia tiene su *Divina Comedia*, España su Quijote, Alemania su Fausto, la República Argentina tiene su Martín Fierro.

[Just as Italy has its *Divine Comedy*, Spain its *Don Quixote*, and Germany its *Faust*, Argentina has its *Martín Fierro*.]

Pablo Subieta, 1881

Considered by many as Argentina’s greatest literary masterpiece, *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (Part I) (1872) is the story of an impoverished gaucho of the Argentine pampas who sings of his

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78 Ibid., 177.

79 Although Lugones insists that *Martín Fierro* is an epic, the works genre is debatable. Borges described the work as more of a “verse novel” than an “epic”.

many misfortunes, most of which are directly related to his persecution by Argentine institutions such as the military and government. Drafted into the army, Fierro leaves his family, only to be exploited and mistreated by the military men who were misusing the conscripts as a free labor force. After realizing the futility of remaining on the front, he deserts and returns home, only to find his house destroyed and his family gone. In a country that offers him no alternative, he is forced to live as an outlaw. By the end of the book, Fierro and his friend Cruz have withdrawn from civilization.

The book’s author, José Hernández (1834-1886), was raised on his father’s ranch near Buenos Aires where he became deeply familiar with the rural life of the gauchos, as well as their speech, mannerisms, and rugged lifestyle. He was not a gaucho himself, but rather a member of the ruling elite. He was economically liberal, but, unlike Mitre, felt that the economy should be based on cattle rather than on agriculture and industrialization which was more labor-intensive and required immigration. Gauchos, rather than immigrants, were a key component of a cattle-ranching economy. Hernández was a federalist, and his life and works were dedicated to safe-guarding the interests of the land-owning population of the provinces. He shared with other rural land-owners the growing sentiment that the rampant “progress,” excessive immigration, and arbitrary power of the city of Buenos Aires over the provinces could lead to a loss of tradition and values.

Hernández made his voice heard as both a journalist, politician, and author of fiction. In 1851 he got a job as the Paraná-Entre Ríos correspondent to La Reforma Pacífica. From 1852 to 1872 he defended the provinces against what he considered was the excessive centralization of the government in Buenos Aires. He also took part in the gaucho uprising led by López Jordán, which ended in 1871 with the defeat of the gauchos and his exile in Montevideo. He was overtly against
the extreme liberalism of Mitre, and his military contradictions during the War of Paraguay.\(^{81}\) He also spoke out against Sarmiento, who was elected president in 1868. From 1869-1870 he was the editor of the newspaper *El Río de la Plata*, which published articles against the persecution and exploitation of the gauchos, among other political issues. The goals of the newspaper were published in the first issue:

Situado en una línea de ideas independientes tanto de Sarmiento y Mitre, como de Urquiza, el diario sostendrá algunas postulaciones esenciales: defensa de los hombres de la campaña, oposición total y sistemática a la guerra del Paraguay y ataque a los intereses brasileros, postulación incansable del régimen municipal y el juicio por jurados, concordia y unión nacional, libertad bien entendida para todos, igualdad ante la ley, federalismo político y económico, proteccionismo industrial y nacionalismo económico.\(^{82}\)

[Situated in a line of thinking independent from Sarmiento and Mitre, as well as from Urquiza, the newspaper will support a few essential tenets: defense of the men of the countryside, total and systematic opposition of the War of Paraguay and the attack of Brasilian interests, infatigable postulation of the municipal regimen and the judgement of the jury, concord and national unity, liberty for all, equality in front of the law, political and economic federalism, industrial protectionism, and economic nationalism.]

One of controversial topics opposed by Hernandez was the military draft of the gauchos, whom he believed were needed in the countryside to raise the cattle which he saw as the economic future of the country. He felt they were needed on the ranches and not on the front fighting Indians or other American countries, as in the Paraguayan War. In his opinion, universal conscription was bound to end in disaster.

No es necesario poseer los secretos del porvenir para predecir lo que sucederá; basta conocer la campaña, la índole de nuestros gauchos, sus costumbres y el terror pánico que les inspira todo lo que es servicio militar.\(^{83}\)


[It’s not necessary to possess the secrets of the future in order to predict what will happen. It’s enough to know the countryside, the nature of our gauchos, their customs, and the terror and panic that military service provokes in them.]

These socio-political arguments are at the heart of *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (Part I). Hernández began writing the poem following the suppression of his newspaper when he was in exile. In 1872, he received amnesty and was able to return to Buenos Aires, where he would publish it. This part, written by a bitter and recently politically-bruised Hernández, is extremely critical of the central government and ends with no hope of integration of the rebel gaucho into society. The second part of the work, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879), on the other hand, is much more conciliatory. This is no doubt because it was written when Hernandez’s political situation was far more favorable on account of the presidency of Nicolás Avellaneda (1874-1880).

Hernández held a number of different political positions, including official in the accountant’s office of the confederation, secretary of General Pedernera during his vice-presidency, and minister to Evaristo Lopez. In 1880 he was elected as a representative in the Buenos Aires legislature, during which time he continued to defend the interests of the inhabitants of the countryside. In 1881 he wrote *Instrucción del estanciero* and was elected provincial Senator, a position for which he was re-elected in 1885.

In *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (Part I) Hernández depicts the gaucho as a pawn of the Central government soon after the fall of Rosas. The book is an idealization of the life-style of this plainsman prior to the so-called “Politics of Progress,” which brought about his demise. Hernández was convinced that the national essence of Argentina was to be found in local rural traditions rather than European ancestry. The work enjoyed immediate success and was embraced by the rural
population. Within two years of publication (1872), it had been printed nine times.\(^\text{84}\) Seven years later in 1879, Hernández published a sequel to the work entitled *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro*.

In March of 1879 Hernández himself sent Mitre, his long-time political adversary, a copy in which he inscribed the following words:

Hace 25 años que formo en las filas de sus adversarios políticos – pocos argentinos pueden decir lo mismo; pero pocos también, se atreverían como yo a saltar por sobre ese recuerdo, para pedirle al ilustrado Escritor, que conceda un pequeño espacio en su Biblioteca a este modesto libro. Le pido que lo acepte como un testimonio de respeto de su compatriota.\(^\text{85}\)

[For 25 years I have been among the ranks of your political adversaries—few argentines can say the same; but just as few have dared as I have to rise above this distinction, to ask the illustrious Author that he concede a small space in his Library for this modest book. I ask you to please accept it as a gesture of respect from your fellow countryman.]

Although Mitre did not yet own a copy, he was most certainly aware of the book’s popularity, which he acknowledges at the beginning of his response letter: “*Martín Fierro* es una obra y un tipo que ha conquistado un título de ciudadanía en la literatura y en la sociabilidad argentina” [*Martín Fierro* is a work and a figure who has earned citizenship in Argentine literature and society].\(^\text{86}\) Mitre accepted Hernández’s literary offering, responding:

Agradezco las palabras benévolas de que viene acompañado [el libro], prescindiendo de otras que no tienen certificado en la república platónica de las letras.\(^\text{87}\)

[I appreciate the benevolent words that accompany your book, and your omission of others that do not have a place in the platonic republic of letters.]

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\(^{84}\) Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature, 418.

\(^{85}\) Letter from José Hernández to Bartolomé Mitre, written on the flyleaf of Mitre’s personal copy of *Martín Fierro*. Museo Mitre.

\(^{86}\) Letter from Bartolomé Mitre to José Hernández. April 14, 1879. Museo Mitre.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
Mitre ostensibly puts politics aside and responds as a man of letters, but his criticisms, as we shall see, include his disapproval of the work’s socio-political message.

Mitre initially describes the book as “un verdadero poema espontáneo, cortado en la masa de la vida real” [a truly spontaneous poem, a slice of real life]. Although this may seem to be a flattering remark, coming from Mitre it is most likely a slight, an insinuation that the poem was written with little heed to formal perfection. His disdain for Hernández’s verse and word choice will be addressed shortly.

He goes on, however, to praise the work which seems to meet the criteria for a national literature as laid out in the aforementioned letter to Miguel M. Ruíz, wherein Mitre insisted that a nation’s literature possess “creaciones originales que señalen un progreso en las letras” [original creations that mark literary progress.] He says of Martín Fierro:

Hay en él, intención, filosofía, vuelos poéticos y bellezas descriptivas, que señalan la tercera ó cuarta forma que este género de literatura ha revestido entre nosotros. Hidalgo será siempre su Homero porque fue el primero, y como Vd. se inspiró en su poética que ha condensado Ud. en estos dos versos:

Porque yo canto opinando
Que es mi modo de cantar
Ascasubi marchando tras sus huellas, poniendo al guacho en presencia de la civilización, exaltando su amor patrio; y Estanislao del Campo haciéndolo juzgar las obras del arte y la sociedad con su criterio propio, marcan las formas intermediarias.88

[It has intention, philosophy, poetic flights, and beautiful descriptions which signify the third or fourth form that this genre of literature has taken on among us. Hidalgo will always be its Homer because he was the first, and like you he was inspired by a poetics that you have summed up in the following verses:

Because I sing my opinion
Which is my way of singing
Ascasubi, who followed in Hidalgo’s footsteps, putting the gaucho in the presence of civilization and exalting his patriotism; and Estanislao del Campo, who made the gaucho judge works of art and the society according to his own criteria, mark the intermediary forms of the genre.]

88 Letter to José Hernández, April 14, 1879. Museo Mitre.
We can see that Mitre recognizes the gauchesque as a literary genre unique to Argentina that has developed over time, culminating in *Martín Fierro*. His perception of the development of a whole genre is probably his greatest achievement as a literary critic. But despite his identification of *Martín Fierro* as the apex of this original literary genre, he is very critical of its lexicon, style, and content:

> creo que Vd. ha abusado un poco del naturalismo, y que ha exagerado el colorido local, en los versos sin medida de que ha sembrado intencionalmente sus páginas, así como con ciertos barbarismos que no eran indispensables para poner el libro al alcance de todo el mundo…

[I find that you have been overly realistic, and have exaggerated the local color in verses without meter which you intentionally sowed into your pages, as well as certain barbarisms which were not necessary to make your book accessible to the world…]

Mitre’s first critique regards the work’s so-called abuse of “naturalismo.” This is most likely not a reference to the literary tendency naturalism, but rather his euphemistic way of expressing that *Martín Fierro* was overly realistic and not refined or poetic enough for his tastes. Mitre does not seem to appreciate the extent to which *Martín Fierro* is formally sophisticated, nor his mythologization of the gaucho. He most likely could not get past the work’s subject matter in order to recognize its literary potential. Furthermore, it is possible that he feared that the negative portrayal of the situation in Argentina was bad publicity for the new nation and critical of both his and Sarmiento’s presidencies. In what follows, I will explain how Mitre’s translation of the *Divine Comedy* can be considered an anti-*Martín Fierro* of sorts, a way to mitigate the linguistic and aesthetic tendencies of the work, and most importantly, to promote the opposite social message: political progress and unity.

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89 Ibid.
First, let us examine the contrast between *Martín Fierro* and Mitre’s translation of the *Divine Comedy* on an aesthetic and thematic level. In *Martín Fierro* Hernández incorporates expressions characteristic of the popular Argentine Spanish of the pampas (considered unworthy of high literature) much like the Italian vernacular was at the time of Dante. When he lived among the gauchos, Hernández absorbed their way of speech and employed its expressive power for the story-telling “duels” of his poets of the Pampa. Dialect pronunciations are frequently imitated via orthographic changes. For example, Hernández replaces “f”s with “j”s (“juerte” for “fuerte” and “juera” for “fuera”); “b”s with “g” (gueno for Bueno); and “v”s with “gs” (guelta for vuelta). Similarly, the “d” is more often than not omitted from the suffix “-ado” which is written as it was pronounced by rural Argentines as “-ao”. The simple change of leaving off the final “d” of the suffix “-dad”, thereby lengthening the “a”, gives his gaucho poetry a unique phonetic quality:

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que nunca peleo ni mato
sino por necesidá
y que a tanta alversidá
sólo me arrojó el mal trato.
(vv. 105-108)\(^90\)
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In addition to the omission of the final “d”’s, the first “d” in “adversidad” is changed to an “l”. While such pronunciations were typical of the gauchos, they were not the norm among the urban intellectuals such as Mitre. Hernández’s goal was to be a poet for the rural population, and therefore he has his protagonist proclaim at the onset, “yo no soy cantar letrao” (v. 49), to convey a sense of humility, although in reality such verses could only be written by a man of letters.\(^91\)

To make the work relatable to the rural population, he specifically mentions traditional Argentine dishes such as *carbonada*, a stew made with beef, corn, pumpkin, potatoes, sweet

\(^{90}\) *Martín Fierro*, 70.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 68.
potatoes, rice and peach; and *mazamorra*, a dish made with corn that is sweetened and boiled in milk. Naturally, there are many mentions of *mate*, the traditional drink of Argentina consisting of leaves of *yerba mate* steeped in hot water. Several episodes feature the use of *bolas*, a weapon used by gauchos consisting of three hard balls attached to the end of three ropes tied together which could be thrown through the air at enemies. Animals of the pampas mentioned include the *vizcacha*, a rodent of the chinchilla family; *teros* a bird that makes its nest in holes and hollows in the ground; and the *Ñandú*, an ostrich. There are four different types of uniquely Argentine dances mentioned throughout the text: the *milonga* (predecessor of the tango), as well as the *pericón, gato,* and *fandanguillo*.

Perhaps even more interesting are the humorous plays on words that combine both the pronunciation and imagery of the pampas. For example, when the drunk Martín Fierro insults a woman he fancies when out dancing:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Al ver llegar la morena} & \quad \text{Upon seeing the brunette enter} \\
\text{que no hacía caso de naides} & \quad \text{who paid attention to no one,} \\
\text{le dije con la mamúa:} & \quad \text{I said to her drunkenly:} \\
\text{“Va…ca…yendo gente al baile”}. & \quad \text{“Va…ca…yendo gente al baile.”}\quad \text{\textsuperscript{92}} \\
& \quad \text{(vv. 1151-1154)}
\end{align*}
\]

Fierro, slurring on account of “la mamúa” (Argentine slang indicating a state of drunkenness), wishes to point out that people are starting to show up to dance (“va cayendo”). However, because his speech is slurred and drawn out, “va…ca…” is interpreted by the woman as an insult, “vaca” meaning “cow.” The woman retaliates, “más *vaca* será su madre” (Your mother is more of a cow.)

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{93} All English translations of *Martín Fierro* are by Emily Stewart from the bilingual edition (Buenos Aires: Ediciones LEA S.A., 2009), 67.
This only escalates the animalesque vulgarity of Fierro’s advances, as he continues to offend her in the low language of the rural dance halls:

| “Negra linda”…dije yo, “me gusta…pa la carona”; y me puse a talairar esta coplita fregona: | “Beautiful negress”…I said to her “Me gusta…pa la carona,” and I started to sing this Little verse: |
| “A los blancos hizo Dios, a los mulatos San Pedro, a los negros hizo el diablo para tizón del infierno.” | White men were made by God, mulatos by San Pedro and blacks were made by the devil to stain the fires of hell.” |

(vv. 1163-1170)

Here Fierro tells her he would like to mount her, since “carona” could be understood as “saddle,” thereby likening her to a horse. Shortly thereafter he gets into a brawl and ends up killing a black man. He says to him at the beginning of the fight: “Por…rudo…que un hombre sea/ nunca se enoja por esto” (Por …rudo…as a man may be/ he should never get mad over this.” Similar to the tenzone of Dante’s time, Hernández packs as many insults into one line as possible, Porrudo meaning hairy in addition to rude (rudo).

The text even pokes fun at the way of speech of the Italian immigrants, who were not as refined as the country’s forefathers had imagined. For example, when Martín Fierro meets an Italian:

| Era un gringo tan bozal que nada se le entendía. ¡Quién sabe de ande sería! Tal vez no juera cristiano, pues lo único que decía es que era pa-po-litano. | He was a gringo with such a strange way of speaking that no one understood him. Who knows where he was from! He may not have been Christian but the only thing he said was that he was Neapolitan. |
| (vv. 847-853) | |

94 Ibid., 100.

95 Ibid., 91.
The style, of course, is low, comic, and characterized by rural colloquialisms which were undesirable in Mitre’s eyes. He calls them “barbarisms,” a technical term in philology meaning a word or expression which is badly formed according to traditional philological rules, e.g. a word formed from elements of different languages. But more importantly, “barbarism” means an absence of culture and civilization; it was a politically charged word ever since Sarmiento’s *Facundo* depicted the opposition between “civilización” and “barbarie” as the central conflict in Argentine culture. For the urban intellectual elite, the gauchos and the caudillos represented the barbarism believed to derive from the nature of the Argentine countryside. Their way of life stood in opposition to the civilization that was to be cultivated via modernization and the importation of European cultural ideals. The adherents of such a philosophy, such as Sarmiento and Mitre, must have perceived the speech patterns of the pampas as a degradation of language.

In Mitre’s opinion, rather than include low language in a work of literature in order make it accessible, high language should be employed to elevate the “inteligencia vulgar al nivel del lenguaje en que se expresan las ideas y los sentimientos comunes al hombre” [vulgar intelligence to the level of language used to express ideas and feelings common among men]. This is a particularly interesting point with regards his translation of Dante, which eliminates much of the low language so characteristic of the text. Linguistically, his translation of the *Divine Comedy* is a counter-operation to that performed by Hernández. Mitre seeks to reverse the tendency to bring creole colloquialisms into language, employing instead an antiquated Spanish enriched by Italianisms and Latinisms.

In his prologue to the translation entitled “Teoría del Traductor,” Mitre declares that the best and most analogous translation of the *Divine Comedy* in Spanish would be one in the style of the Castilian poets of the fifteenth century, such as Juan de Mena, Manrique, or the Marquis of
Santillana. It was at this time, he says, that Spanish, as a romance language, free of its initial ties to Latin, came into its own right, a time which marked the transition between the anti-classical and classical period of Spanish literature. According to Mitre, a translation in this style would be most capable of mirroring Dante’s text as regards structure and idiomatic physiognomy. In the style of the Castilian of the poets of the fifteenth century, he claims, it would be possible to reproduce many of the sounds and metrical combinations of syllables, similar to Latin from which both languages are derived.

Nevertheless, Mitre declares that he will not be the one to attempt such a translation; rather his version will seek to conserve the natural and spontaneous quality of the original. He explains that he will introduce antiquated terms and idioms when they happen to “harmonize” with the tone of the original composition, but not when including the classicism would “disfigure” the poem. In this way he hopes to give the translation “un ligero tinte arcaico, sin retrotraer su lenguaje a los tiempos ante-clásicos del castellano, lo que resultaría una afectación pedantesca y bastardar” [a light archaic touch, without taking its language back to anti-classical Spanish, which would result in a pedantic and spurious affectation]. His goal is to provide a “faithful,” “rational,” mathematical,” and at the same time “poetic” translation, and to “vestirla con un ropaje análogo, si no identico” [dress it with analogous, if not identical clothing], which in his view meant returning to more antiquated words.

Of other extant Spanish translations of the Comedy, Mitre declares that none “reflect even minimally the inspirations of the great poet.” Although he claims that he wasn’t aware of Juan

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96 “cuidando de conserver al estilo dantesco su espontánea sencillez, a la par de su nota tónica y su carácter propio,” XI-XII.

97 Ibid., XII.

98 Ibid., XIII.
de Pezuela’s 1868 translation when he started, he says that when he eventually acquired a copy, it slowed him down, as he felt all the more obliged to produce a translation unlike preexisting ones. He criticizes Pezuela’s translation harshly: “Sin ser absolutamente infiel, es una versión contrahecha, cuando no remendona, cuya lectura es ingrata, y ofende con frecuencia el buen gusto y el buen sentido.” [Without being completely unfaithful, it is a deforming version, when not mending the original. It is a version that is unpleasant to read and which frequently offends good taste and good sense.]99 The only modern Spanish poet whom Mitre deems capable of translating the Divine Comedy is Núñez de Arce, who in 1879 published the short poem La selva oscura, inspired by Dante. But since none of the extant Spanish translations of the text are acceptable according to his criteria, his own endeavor is justified.

Mitre deems translations of the Comedy into foreign languages other than Spanish to be equally inadequate. He mentions only one extant translation as even having come close to the original—that of Emilie Littré, a French lexicographer best known for his Dictionnaire de la langue française. Mitre praises Littré’s medieval French version:

El sabio Littré […] se propuso traducir la Divina Comedia en el lenguaje contemporáneo del Dante, tal como si un poeta de la lengua del oil, hermana de la lengua del oc, la hubiese concebido en ella o traducido en su tiempo con modismos análogos. Esta es la única traducción del Dante que se acerque al original, por cuanto el idioma en que está hecha, lo mismo que el dialecto florentino, aun no emancipado del todo del latín ni muy divergentes entre sí, se asemejaban más el uno al otro, y dentro de sus elementos constitutivos podían y pueden amalgamarse mejor.100

[The wise Littré […] set out to translate the Divine Comedy in language contemporary to the time of Dante, just as a poet of the language of oil, sister to the language of oc, would have conceived of it and translated it in his time with analogous idioms. This is the only translation of Dante that comes close to the original, as the language in which it is written, just as the Florentine dialect, was not yet entirely emancipated from Latin nor very divergent from the Italian; they

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99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., X-XI.
resembled each other more, and in their constitutive elements they could and can amalgamate better.]

His goal then is to introduce archaisms with the objective of giving the text “cierto aspecto nativo, producir al menos la ilusión en perspectiva, como en un retrato se busca la semejanza en las líneas generatrices acentuadas por sus accidentes.” [a certain native aspect, to produce at least the illusion in perspective, just as in a portrait resemblance is sought in principle lines and accentuating details.]

Any attempt to modernize the Comedy would be like defacing a masterpiece of art:

Las lenguas hermanas de la lengua de Dante, muy semejantes en su fuente originaria, se han modificado y pulido de tal manera, que traducir hoy a ellas la Divina Comedia, es lo mismo que vestir un bronce antiguo con ropaje moderno; es como borrar de un cuadro de Rembrandt, los toques fuertes que contrastan las luces y las sombras, o en una estatua de Miguel Ángel limar los golpes enérgicos del cincel que la acentúan…Si el lenguaje de la Divina Comedia ha envejecido, ha sido regenerándose, pues su letra y su espíritu se han rejuvenecido por la rica savia de su poesía y de su filosofía.

[The sister languages of the language of Dante, very similar to their original source, have been modified and refined in such a way, that to translate the Divine Comedy today into these languages is the same as dressing an antique bronze in modern clothing. It would be like removing from a Rembrandt the strong brush strokes that create the contrast of light and shadow, or removing from a statue of Michelangelo the energetic strokes of the chisel that give it depth…If the language of the Divine Comedy has aged, it did so regenerating itself, for its word and spirit have become younger on account of the rich vitality of its poetry and philosophy.]

He says that the Divine Comedy was written “en un dialecto Tosco, que brotaba como un manantial turbio del raudal cristalino del latín” [in a Tuscan dialect that sprang like a murky spring from the crystalline torrent of Latin.]

This is very interesting because calling the vernacular “murky” and Latin “crystalline” indicates a negative evaluation of the developing vernacular, and a linguistic purism in favor of Latin. As we shall see, Mitre’s version retains Latinisms and many Italianisms.

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101 Ibid., XII.
102 Ibid., X.
103 Ibid., IX.
For example, in *Purgatorio* XI lines 103-105 Mitre replaces the colloquial language employed by Dante with a more formal register:

> “Che voce avrai tu più, se vecchia scindi,
da te la carne, che se fossi morto
anzi che tu lasciassi il ‘pappo’ e ‘l ‘dindi,’”

*Purg.* XI, 103-105

*Pappo* and *dindi* are baby talk words for bread (*pappo* = *pane*) and money (*dindi* = *denaro*). Mitre translates the lines as “¿Qué más fama tendrás desde el momento/ que te separes de tu carne vieja,/ o papa digas con *pueril acento.*” Mitre’s line, far from colloquialisms, includes a Latinism. Whereas José Hernández’s *Martín Fierro* (1872/1879) incorporated colloquialisms into a new poetics, Mitre, it seems, was out to reverse the trend. Rather than replacing Dante’s many colloquialisms with Argentine equivalents, he frequently leaves the terms in Italian, or replaces them with Latinisms or archaisms.

As Claudia Fernández Speier has argued, Mitre’s many archaisms, Italianisms, and neologisms may have impeded comprehension for many nineteenth-century readers. To determine the degree of difficulty his translation would have presented to readers at the time, Speier consulted the 1869 to 1884 *Diccionario de la lengua Castellana por la Academia Española.* She argues that Mitre’s frequent selection of antiquated terms and Italianisms made the text fairly inaccessible to readers not versed in Golden Age Spanish poetry as well as in Italian. Speier concludes that if a Dantean term existed in the “italianized Spanish” of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, then Mitre retained it.104 Perhaps realizing the difficulty some of these terms may have presented to

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readers, Mitre accompanies many of the archaisms by a brief note explaining that the term is antiquated and providing the modern equivalent. 105

Mitre’s intent in including these terms seemed to be to preserve a refined poetic diction and to differentiate Argentine literary Spanish from the standards established by the Real Academia Española. On the first occurrence of an antiquated term (canto I), he provides a lengthy explanation that reinforces the use of archaisms explained in the “Teoría del Traductor”:

*Infierno I (75) – Poichè il superbo Ilion fu combusto*
Al exponer nuestra teoría como traductor, digamos, que al introducir algunos modismos y términos anticuados, no era nuestro objeto retrotraer el lenguaje de la versión castellana á la época contemporánea del Dante, sino darle un ligero tinte arcáico, de manera de armonizarla más con el original empleando no sólo palabras equivalentes, sino también las mismas del original, algunas de las cuales están fuera del uso corriente, pero que en la época del Dante eran comunes a los dos idiomas, y se conservan en ambos con la misma acepción. Tal sucede con la palabra *combusto*, y como es la primera vez que aparece un arcaísmo en esta traducción, lo acompañaremos de un breve comentario.

Como lo observa Littré: “el arcaísmo es una necesidad de todas las lenguas, y bien empleado, una garantía y una sanción, y por no haberse tomado en cuenta, se han condenado con poco juicio, formas y palabras que eran necesarias.” La palabra *combusto*, anticuada, es una de ellas, que tiene el mismo valor en español

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Speier notes the following examples:

*Amparanza* for “amparo” (Par XXXI),
*Esparramar* for “desparramar” (Inf XIV)
*Cambiante* for “variación” (Inf XX),
*Demudar* for “variar”, “mudar” (Inf XX)
*Conjurar* for “jurar siniestramente” (Inf XXXII)
*Enguirlandar* for “enguirnalder” (Pg XIII)
*Licencia* for “claridad” o “esplendor” (Pg XIII)
*Leticias* for “felicidades” (Pg XXIX)
*Humildosamente* for “humildemente” (Pg XXIX)
*Allegar* for “unir” or “juntar” (Par II)
*Conforto* for “confortacion” (Par XI)
*Vosco* for “vos” (Pg XVI, Par XXII)
*Enarcar* for “arquear” (Par XXIII)
*Delectar* for “deleitar” (Par XXIII)
*Comenzamento* for “comienzo” (Par XXII)
*Dolorio* for “dolor” (Par XXVII)
*Arredonar* for “redondear” (Par XXVIII)
*Perdonanzas* for “perdones” (Par XXIX)
*Celar* for “encubrir”, “ocultar” (Par XXIX)
*Nodriz* for “nodriza or “madre” (Par XXX).
y en italiano, y que se conserva en ambos con la misma acepción. Los italianos la han declarado arcáica porque han abandonado el uso del verbo _combustere_ a que corresponde. Los españoles la han declarado anticuada, eliminándola de un grupo de palabras en que hace falta (_combustión_, _combustible_, _combustibilidad_, _comburene_, _combusto_) y la reemplazan con la palabra _abrasado_, que no es lo mismo ni tiene el mismo valor científico…

[In explanation of our theory of translation, our objective in including certain idioms and antiquated terms was not to take the language of the Spanish version back to the epoch of Dante, but to give it a light archaic touch, in order to harmonize it with the original, employing not only equivalent words, but also words that are the same as in the original. Some of these are out of current use, but in the epoch of Dante they were common to both languages and are maintained in both with the same meaning. Such is the case with the word _combusto_, and because it is the first time that an archaism appears in this translation, we have accompanied it with a brief commentary.

As Littré observed: “the archaism is a necessity in every language, and properly used, a guarantee and a sanction. And for not taking this into account, necessary forms and words have been condemned with little judgement.” The word _combusto_, antiquated, is one of these words that has the same meaning in Spanish as in Italian, and which is maintained in both with the same usage. The Italians have declared the word archaic because they have abandoned the use of the verb _combustere_ to which it corresponds. The Spanish too have declared the word to be antiquated, eliminating it from a group of words where it is now lacking, and replacing it with the word _abrasado_, which is not equivalent and does not have the same scientific value…]

Similar, although less lengthy notes are to be found throughout all three canticoes, and especially in _Paradiso_, where antiquated terms appear more frequently. Below I have included a few such examples of particular interest in which he openly expresses his displeasure at the decisions of the Academia Española.

1. _Inf XVIII (4)_

_Malignoso_. Esta palabra arcaica de buena ley no se encuentra en ningún diccionario español, ni aun como arcaísmo. Los puristas españoles, en su prurito de eliminar vocabolos, que amortizan como anticuados, sin reemplazarlos por otros equivalentes ó mejores, y excluir los neologismos necesarios, tienden no solo á empobrecer el idioma, sino también á inmovilizarlo como una lengua muerta, y esta misma, mutilada.

_[Malignoso_. This archaic and valid word is not to be found in any dictionary of the Spanish language, not even as an archaism. The Spanish purists, in their desire to eliminate vocabulary which they deem antiquated, without, however, replacing
them with other words which are equivalent or better, and to exclude necessary neologisms, tend to not only impoverish the language, but also to immobilize it like a dead language, and one that is mutilated.]

2. *Infierno XXXII* (54) —-Perché cotanto in noi ti specchi?
Del verbo anticuado *espejar*, (*specchiare*) que los italianos han conservado racionalmente y que los españoles han declarado sin razón en desuso, reemplazándolo por el circunloquio complicado y menos expresivo de *mirarse al espejo*…

*[Espeja, from the antiquated verb *espejar*, (*specchiare*), which the Italians have sensibly maintained, and which the Spanish have, without reason, declared obsolete, replacing it with the complicated and less expressive circumlocution, *mirarse al espejo*…]*

3. *Paradiso* VIII (138)
*Enmante*, del verbo *enmantar*, en su acepción de poner manto, que la Academia Española ha declarado arcaico, reemplazándolo por una perífrasis, como en el caso de *espejar*, *enmitrar*, etc.

*[Enmante from the verb *enmantar*; meaning to put on a cloak. The Academia Española declared this word to be archaic, replacing it with a periphrasis, as is the case with “espejar,” “enmitrar,” etc.]*

4. *Paradiso* XIV (13), *Ditegli se la luce, one s’infiora
Se *enflora*, lo mismo que en el original, del verbo *enflorecer*, declarado anticuado por la Academia Española, sin reemplazarlo por ningún equivalente, teniendo así que acudir para expresar la idea, á la complicada perífrasis de “engalanar con flores.”

*[Se *enflora*, the same as in the original, from the verb *enflorecer*. The Academia Española declared this word to be antiquated without replacing it with an equivalent, making it necessary to turn to the complicated periphrasis “engalanar con flores” to express the idea.]*

5. *Paradiso* XXIV (56)
*Expandiese*, del verbo *expandre*, vocablo declarado anticuado por la Academia, no obstante conservar los sustantivados y adjetivados que con él se relacionan, como son: expansión, expansible, expansivo, expancimiento, expansiblemente y expansibilidad. No habría que observar á esto, si al desterrar la palabra fundamental, madre del grupo de palabras á que ha dado origen, se la reemplazase siquiera por una madrastra; pero ni eso. Así, al definir la palabra expansión, se vé obligada á reconocer á la madre que reniega, diciendo: “Expansión: Física: acción y efecto de extenderse ó dilatarse.” (Definición incorrecta, como varias otras de la Academia, por lo que respecta á la acción y al efecto, pues expansión es la acción,
y expansimiento el efecto, como en rendición y rendimiento). Moral: carácter expansivo, amistad expansiva....

[Expandiese, from the verb expander, a word declared antiquated by the Academy, despite its having maintained the nouns and adjectives related to it, such as: expansión, expansible, expansivo, expansamiento, expansiblemente and expansibilidad. It wouldn’t be necessary to note this if in banishing the fundamental word, mother of a group of words which are derived from it, they had replaced it with a substitute; but no. As such, in order to define the word expansión, they are obliged to recognize the mother that they have disowned, saying: “Expansión: Física: acción y efecto de extenderse ó dilatarse.” (An incorrect definition, like many other definitions of the Academy, as far as action and effect are concerned, for expansión is the action, and expansimiento the effect, as with rendición y rendimiento). Moral: carácter expansivo, amistad expansiva....

In these notes Mitre’s main purpose seems to be to highlight where he is at odds with the Academia Española, an approach which is typical of the anti-academicism of Argentine Romantic writers. His inclusion of these words along with the note seems to be an attempt to reincorporate them into the language, thereby enriching it while differentiating it from continental Spanish.

Regardless of his goal, the result of his word choice is at times a loss of colloquiality and a change in tone. The first instance of this nature occurs in the first canto when Dante meets Virgil, his beloved author and soon-to-be infernal guide.

| “Or se’ tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte che spandi di parlar si largo fiume?” | Tú eres Virgilio, la perenne fuente que expande el gran raudal de su oratoria! |
| “O de li altri poeti onore e lume, vagliami ’l lungo studio e ’l grande amore che m’ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume. | le interrumpí con ruberosa frente, |
| Tu se’ lo mio maestro e ’l mio autore, tu se’ solo colui da cu’io tolsi lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore. | ¡Oh! de poetas, luminar y gloria, |
|  (Inf. I, 79-87) | ¡válgame el largo estudio y grande afecto que consagré a tu libro, y tu memoria! |
|  | ¡Oh mi autor y maestro predilecto! de ti aprendí tan sólo el bello estilo, que tanto honor ha dado a mi intelecto. |
In the original, Dante the pilgrim seems humble and his meeting with Virgil has the intimate feel of a young pupil encountering his greatest idol. In Mitre’s version Dante the pilgrim comes across as pedantic on account of grandiloquent phrasing. In his translation of the line, “Or se’ tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte,” Mitre eliminates the more colloquial “quel” (ese) and replaces the demonstrative adjective “quella” with the descriptive adjective, “perenne,” (perennial) from Latin *perennis*. The result, “Tú eres Virgilio, la perenne fuente” is less colloquial than if he had translated it in a more analogous fashion as: “Tú eres ese Virgilio, y aquella fuente.” The next line, “el gran raudal de su oratoria!”, is magniloquent in comparison to the original, as is the adjective “ruberosa,” from Latin *rubor, -ōris*, which could have been translated with the more common and also more analogous “vergonzosa.” In the original, the image of Dante seeking out Virgil’s book is tender (“che m’ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume”), while Mitre’s (“que consagré a tu libro, y tu memoria!”) is more austere and abstract, with the verb “consagrar” (instead of “buscar”) and the noun “memoria” (memory), which is not in the original.

The incongruously lofty register of certain parts of the first canto led me to wonder how Mitre had handled cantos XVIII-XXIII, which exemplify Dante’s plurilinguism. Most notably in canto XVIII, we can find low, comic language and explicit sexual language mixed in with high language. As Zygmunt G. Barański has explained, Canto XVIII of *Inferno* features “un vocabolario spinto ai limiti del linguisticamente accettabile. In tal modo, Dante mette a nudo l’avvilente realtà, celata solitamente dalle “parole ornate” (v. 91) dei peccatori, di colpe dalla forte carica sessuale.”

che là si graffia con l’unghie merdose,  
e o r s’accoscia e ora è in piedi stante.  
Taïde è, la putana che rispuose  
al drudo suo quando disse “Ho io grazie  
grandi apo te?”: “Anzi maravigliose!”  
E quinci sian le nostre viste sazie.”

(Inf. XVIII, 127-136)

As Baranski explains, Dante’s language is phonetically “aspro” (Inf. XXXII, 1), and features, on one hand, low words such as “sozza e scapigliata fante” (v. 130), “graffia” (v. 131), “merdose” (v. 131), “puttana” (v. 133) e la rima in –inghe (vv. 127 and 129), and, at the same time, words such as “drudo” (v. 134) which are clearly courtly, with feudal-cavallaresque connotations. Even the exchange between Thais and her love is “high” style and includes a blatant Latinism: “apo” (v. 135), from apud. The canto is indicative of Dante’s plurilinguism, i.e. the heterogeneity of language and style. Let us take a look at how Mitre handles the canto, and if his translation manages to conserve the roughness of the original.

In the first malebolge of the eigth circle where panderers and seducers are punished, Dante recognizes a familiar face, Venedico Caccianemico. Dante asks him what he is punished for, and Venedico explains that he pandered his sister Ghisolabella into doing sexual favors for a Marquis.

| Mensa il andava, li occhi miei in uno  
| Per ch’io a figurarlo i piedi affissi;  
| E quel frustato celar si credette  
| se le fazion che porti non son false,  
| Ma che ti mena a si pungenti salse?”  

| Fijé la vista en uno que allí estaba,  
| Como de mi maestro estaba junto,  
| Creyó esquivar el rostro el flagelado,  
| si acaso no me engañan tus facciones,  
| ¿Qué te trajo tan duras puniciones?”  

107 Ibid., 84-85.
Ed elli a me: “Mal volontier lo dico; ma sforzami la tua chiara favella, che mi fa sovvenir del mondo antico.

I’ fui colui che la Ghisolabella condussi a far la voglia del marchese, come che suoni la sconcia novella.

E non pur io qui piango bolognese; anzi n’è questo loco tanto pieno, che tante lingue non son ora apprese a dicer ‘sipa’ tra Sàvena e Reno; e se di ciò vuoi fede o testimonio, rècati a mente il nostro avaro seno.”

Così parlando il percosse un demonio de la sua scurïada, e disse: “Via, ruffian! qui non son femmine da conio.”

I’ mi raggiunsi con la scorta mia; poscia con pochi passi divenimmo là ’v’ uno scoglio de la ripa uscia.

(Inf. XVIII, 40-69)

Y él respondió: “A mi pesar lo digo, pero me obliga tu habla, porque en ella percibo el eco de otro mundo amigo.

Yo soy aquél, que cándida doncella entregué del Marqués al apetito, como se cuenta de Ghisola bella.

No soy el solo boloñes contrito que llora aquí, pues el lugar tan lleno está de lenguas más que en el distrito do dicen sips entre Savena y Reno; pues has de recordar, como se cuenta, que de avaricia, saco fue su seno.”

Demonio armado de una verga cruenta, lo azota y grita: “¡Anda, rufian maldito! mujeres no hay aquí de compra-venta.”

A mi guía volvímé en el conflicto, y a poco andar un puente allí encontramos, de roca, cual los que antes he descrito.

The differences between Dante and Mitre’s versions are most notable in the dialogue. In Dante’s text the pilgrim exclaims, “Gìa di veder costui no son digiuno,” a very dantean phrase which employs the adjective “digiuno” (without food/fasting) to mean never having experienced.\(^{108}\) Mitre does not seek to recreate the peculiar colloquial phrasing, translating the lines simply without dialogue as “no era primera vez que le miraba.” Mitre then translates the pilgrim’s words to Venedico Caccianemico as “¿Qué te trajo tan duras puniciones?” which does not conserve the rough vigor of “Ma che ti mena a si pungenti salse.” While Dante’s text acknowledges the

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\(^{108}\) *digiuno* used in this sense also occurs in *Par. XVI*, 135, “Se di nuovi vicin fosser digiuni” (If they had not had experience of new neighbors” and in *Par. II*, 75, “fora di sua materia si digiuno” where it means “lacking.”
distinctiveness of Bolognese speech (“E non pur io qui piango bolognese”), Mitre’s text indicates simply that the speaker is from Bologna, but not that his speech itself is different (“No soy el solo boloñes contrite”).

In the devil’s speech in the original, Dante includes a colloquial expression which is slang for female genitalia: “Via, ruffian! qui non son femmine da conio.” Mitre does not employ the Spanish equivalent “coño” which is very close in nature, but rather euphemizes the line: “¡Anda, rufián maldito!, mujeres no hay aquí de compra-venta.”¹⁰⁹ “Compra-venta” is a term used to refer to commerce in general and is not specifically related to prostitution. Whereas in Dante’s version the pilgrim refers to Virgil as “la scorta mia,” continuing the allusions to prostitution, Mitre writes simply “a mi guía.” But while Mitre euphemizes the derogatory term for female genitalia, as well as the references to prostitution, he adds a vulgar pun relating to male genitalia which is not in the original: “Demonio armado de una verga cruenta.” Dante’s demon is armed with a “scuriada” which means simply “whip,” and which could have been translated with “vara,” “fusta,” or “látigo,” all of which have no sexual connotation. Mitre, however, has the devil carry a “verga,” meaning both “stick” and “penis.”

Later in the canto, Dante and Virgil come to the second malebolge where sinners are writhing in sewage and excrement. Here they encounter Alessio Interminelli da Lucca and Thaïs the whore, both punished for false flattery. It is in this very graphic part of the canto that Dante’s langauge is particularly crude and comic. The description of the bolgia contains graphic visual and olfactory terms, as well as vulgar terms such as sterco, privadi, merda, unghie merdose.

¹⁰⁹ Mitre includes a long note to this line, explaining, “por vía de curiosidad,” various interpretations of the line over the centuries, followed by his own interpretation which demonstrates his understanding of the reference to prostitution: “El verso 66 dice claramente lo que dice, y si la palabra da conio pudiese dar lugar á dudas en cuanto á su diversa acepción en el trascuso del tiempo, las palabras femmine y ruffian manifestan, que se trata de mujeres que se compran ó se venden por dinero, interviniendo en ello los rufianes. La palabra compra-venta comprende con precisión todos los sentidos que el concepto dantesco pueda envolver.”
Phonetically speaking this part of the canto is very “aspro,” with harsh-sounding words such as s’incrocicchia, nicchia, scuffa, grommate, appasta, and stucca.

Già eravam là ’ve lo stretto calle con l’argine secondo s’incrocicchia, e fa di quello ad un altro’ arco spalle.

Quindi sentimmo gente che si nicchia ne l’altra bolgia e che col muso scuffà, e s’è medesma con le palme picchia.

Le ripe eran grommate d’una muffa, per l’alito di giù che vi s’appasta, che con li occhi e col naso facea zuffa.

Lo fondo è cupo sì, che non ci basta loco a veder sanza montare al dosso de l’arco, ove lo scoglio piu sovrasta.

Quivi venimmo; e quindi giù nel fosso vidi gente attuffata in uno sterco che da li uman privadi parea mosso.

E mentre ch’io là giù con l’occhio cerco, vidi un col capo si di merda lordo, che non parëa s’era laico o cherco.

Quei mi sgridò: “Perché se’ tu si gordo di riguardar piu me che li altri brutti?” E io a lui: “Perché, se ben ricordo, già t’ho veduto coi capelli a sciutti, e se’ Alessio Interminei da Lucca: però t’adocchio piu che li altri tutti.”

Ed elli allor, battendosi la zucca: “Qua giù m’hanno sommerso le lusinghe ond’io non ebbi mai la lingua stucca.”

Appresso ciò lo duca “Fa che pinghe,” mi disse, “il viso un poco più avante, si che la faccia ben con l’occhio attinghe di quella sozza e scapigliata fante

Llegamos a un extremo, donde alcanza el arco con sus bordes a juntarse, y es pilar de otro puente que se avanza; siento de allí una grita levantarse, con bufidos de gente condenada, y unos a otros coléricos golpearse.

La pendiente está toda embadurnada de sucio órin, que la nariz ofende, y que náuseas provoca a la mirada.

En vano el ojo penetrar pretende, aquella hondura, sólo percibida de la alta roca a cuyo pie desciende.

Vimos allí una turba zabullida, que chapoteaba en una cloaca inmunda, a estecolar humano parecida; y en medio a la asquerosa baraunda, uno de ellos, que clérigo barrunto, con excremento su cabeza inunda.

¿Por qué miras” preguntó el del unto, “y no a esos brutos?” Con el ojo fijo, le respondí: “Porque eres un trasunto, de uno limpio de pelo, y bien colijo, eres Alessio Interminei, de Luca: por eso en verte aquí me regocijo.”

Y él, entonces, golpeándose la nuca, dijo: “Aquí purgo la lisonja aviesa, que con la lengua al prójimo embauca.”

Ahora, adelanta un tanto la cabeza,” dijo mi guía “y mira hacia adelante, para que tu ojo clave con fijeza esa descabellada lujuriante,
che là si graffia con l’unghie merdose, e or s’accoscia e ora è in piedi stante.

Taïde è, la puttana che rispuose al drudo suo quando disse “Ho io grazie grandi apo te?”: “Anzi maraviglione!” E quinci sian le nostre viste sazie.”

The above lines of Mitre’s do not conserve the rough alliteration, such as in the line “con le palme picchia.” Mitre inserts the word “coléricos” which was not in the original and which is a more formal register. He preserves the animalesque nature of the sinners somewhat with “bufidos,” but this is not as graphic as “col muso scuffia.” Furthermore, the lines “La pendiente esta toda embadurnanda/ de sucio orín que la nariz ofende,/ y que náuseas provoca a la mirada” is a much more formal register and conveys nothing of the colloquial or phonetically “aspro” quality of the original. Wherever possible, he chooses to incorporate words of Latin origin: “pendiente” (instead of “inclinado”) from lat. pendens, -entis; “orín”, from lat. vulg. aurīgo, -ĭnis; “offender” from lat. offendēre; “náuseas” from lat. nauseāre; “provocar” (instead of “producir” or “causar”) from lat. provocāre.

The same can be said of the lines:

Lo fondo è cupo sì, che non ci basta loco a veder sanza montare al dosso de l’arco, ove lo scoglio più sovrasta.

En vano el ojo penetrar pretende, aquella hondura, sólo percibida de la alta roca a cuyo pie descieende.

Mitre’s choice of vocabulary, “en vano,” “penetrar,” “hondura,” “percibir” and the use of the pronoun “cuyo” give his version a loftier feel. When it comes to references to excrement, instead of using the common term “mierda,” Mitre opts for “estercolar” from Latin, stercorare, “cloaca” also from the Latin, or he adopts an Italianism, writing “uñas de merdosa” for Dante’s “l’unghie merdose.”
What is also interesting is that while Mitre’s version down-plays the vulgar aspect of the canto, it places more emphasis on the moral signification. This can be seen in his treatment of Dante’s Thais. As Baranski has pointed out, Thais speaks to her lover in a courtly style, not to be confused with the low language found elsewhere in the canto. This language Mitre maintains with the analogous phrases “Estoy en gracia?” and “¡Y muy maravillosa!” But he adds the adjective “licenciosa” (licentious) to describe her, where there is no such qualifying term in the original. Furthermore, Dante’s “viste sazie” is a metaphor related to food, and therefore comic. Mitre’s translation adds the word “podredumbre” (moral corruption) which is not in the original.

In summary, Mitre employs an antiquated Spanish which works well for some of the loftier sections of the poem, but which fails to convey the “aspro” quality of the comic sections of the original. It is ironic that Mitre would use Dante as a means to counteract the literary tendencies exemplified by works such as Hernández’s Martín Fierro because it implies a misunderstanding of Dante’s plurilingualism, his ability to write in a style that is at times rough and vulgar; at times gentle and soft; and at times lofty and refined. It seems that Mitre associated The Divine Comedy strictly with high, as opposed to popular, culture.

Hernández, on the other hand, incorporates low language into a sophisticated poetics. Like Dante (who chose to write in the vernacular rather than the literary Latin to reach a wider audience), Hernández envisioned his work being read in all corners of the countryside, and not just in the circles of the educated. Indeed, Martín Fierro was even sold the pulperías, rural country stores, where it was frequently read aloud for the illiterate. In the prologue to the 1879 publication he calls the work:

un libro destinado a despertar la inteligencia y el amor a la lectura en una población casi primitiva, a servir de provechoso recreo, después de las fatigosas tareas, a millares de personas que jamás han leído, debe ajustarse estrictamente a los usos y

110 Baranski, 83-86.
costumbres de esos mismos lectores, rendir sus ideas e interpretar sus sentimientos en su mismo lenguaje, en sus frases más usuales, en su forma más general, aunque sea incorrecta;[111]

[a book destined to awaken the intelligence and the love of reading in an almost primitive population, and which will serve as a beneficial recreation after tiring labor for thousands of people who have never read. As such it must be adapted to the uses and customs of these same readers; it must render their ideas and interpret their feelings in the same language, and in their most common phrasing, even if this be incorrect.]

His notion too, of a work of literature is Romantic, i.e. that it should reflect the social customs of a population. The difference between Hernández and Mitre is that Hernández writes for both a popular readership and men of letters, while Mitre’s work is intended for the intellectual urban elite, or the ideal future citizen who has been “elevated” via education. His translation of the Divine Comedy was marketed to the most “civilized” of readerships. The publication announcement of September 1890 declares that “for the first time” an Argentine work will have the honor of being a luxury commodity.[112] More than once the advertisement emphasizes that this is no ordinary edition, but a distinguished publication to be appreciated by the erudite: “Acabamos de poner en prensa, en uno de los mas importantes establecimientos parisienses, el Infierno del Dante, cuya edicion destinamos exclusivamente á los hombres de letras y bibliófilos argentinos” [The Inferno of Dante, which is destined exclusively for men of letters and Argentine bibliophiles, just went to press in one of the most important Parisian publishing houses.][113] The book is referred to it as “un lujo refinado,” and as such, the number of copies must be limited to make it an exclusive possession: “Siendo exclusivamente una edición de lujo, nos hemos limitado a un número

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[113] Ibid., 84.
reducido de ejemplares, fijando el tiraje en 600, que irán todos numerados á la prensa” [Because it is an exclusive, luxury edition, we limited ourselves to only 600 copies which are all individually numbered by the publisher.]114

The edition included original illustrations by artists in imitation of the “obras mas elegantes” published by Parisian editors. Six illustrations by the painter Cornillier, winner of the Prix de Rome, grace its pages. The pictures were reproduced in water color by señor Abot, known for his popular illustrations of fashionable books printed in Paris. The book also featured a portrait of both Dante and his translator.115 Even the paper was a luxury, having been ordered expressly for this edition, every page with a water mark. The printing was entrusted to none other than the presses of Chamerot, the preferred printer of the Parisian editors. Mitre himself went to Paris to personally discuss his corrections with the editor. The result was advertised as “digna de quedar como un precioso recuerdo para los que admiran la laboriosidad y erudición del historiador de San Martin y de Belgrano” [a worthy edition which will be of interest to those who admire the laboriousness and erudition of the historiographer of San Martin and Belgrano.]116

While Hernández sought to cultivate his image as a spokesman for the humble rural population, Mitre as translator of the Divine Comedy sought to cultivate his image as a man of

114 The 600 editions were subdivided according to the quality of paper and the art. My emphasis.
No 1-15: Printed on imperial paper of Japan with two series of engravings and water color illustrations. “Encuadernacion de lujo de Marroquin del Levante.” These few editions were priced at 20 $ ORO and must be reserved in advance.
No 26-35: Printed on paper from China with water color illustrations. 20 $ ORO
No. 36-100 Printed on imperial paper of Japan with one series of illustrations and “Encuadernacion de amateur” 15 $ ORO
And No. 101-600 printed on the paper made especially for this edition. 8-10 $ ORO depending on binding.
It is interesting to compare the price of these editions with the price of Martín Fierro when it was first published. Martín Fierro was 0.40 $ ORO and La Vuelta 0.80 $ ORO. The average monthly wage of a rural worker was 12 $ ORO, making a copy of Martín Fierro accessible, but an edition of the Divine Comedy not.

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
letters and of Argentines as literati. He sent out copies of the work to libraries, foreign ministers, and even the Arcadia Romana, which had honored Longfellow for his translation just decades before. The enthusiastic response from those who received the work was overwhelming, and the great majority of the letters that flooded in praise Mitre’s erudition and emphasize the honor his translation brought to the “patria.” The third Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Uladislao Castellano, profusely thanks Mitre, “eminente publicista y literato” [eminent publicist and man of letter] for laboring actively, “aun en la edad que parece reclamar mayor descanso,” [even at an age that requires more repose] in order to produce a translation “de que se enorgullece nuestra patria” [of which our fatherland can be proud.] Osvaldo Magnasco thanks him for the copy and writes “mis felicitaciones por el honor que tan notable monumento refleja sobre su nombre de Ud. y de las letras nacionales” [congratulations for the honor that this noble monument reflects on your name and on our national literature.] The Academia Nacional de Ciencias de la Republica Argentina praise Mitre for bringing “honor a la Patria y lustre a las letras” [honor to the Patria and prestige to literature.] Francisco Netri, an Italian, thanked him for spreading knowledge of the “gran poeta de mi tierra” [great poet of my country.] M. Peña writes that the translation “representa un honor y gloria para las letras Argentinas y le corona à Usted. una vez más, un frente de laureles” [represents an honor and glory for Argentine letters and crowns you yet again with laurels.] Luis D. Destefani, profesor of history at the university of Montevideo wrote: “Con júbilo inmenso veo que consagra usted su honorable vejez á hacer á la América del Sud el regalo que á la Norte hizo Longfellow: una traducción de Dante. ¡Ojalá sea usted igualmente afortunado que el gran vate y


dé feliz cumplimiento á la ya empezada tarea!” [With immense joy a see you dedicate your honorable old age to giving the gift to South America that Longfellow gave to North America: a translation of Dante. I hope that you will be equally as fortunate, and I wish you a successful termination of what you have begun.]120 B.C. Lacerda of the Legação do Brazil na República Argentina (Legation of Brazil in Argentina) also emphasizes the glory brought to Argentina. He says that the translation, “ademas de su merito literario, tiene el de llevar el nombre del ilustre Argentino, honra y gloria de su Patria y de America” [in addition to its literary merit, it has the honor of porting the name of the illustrious Argentine, bringing honor and glory to the Patria and America.]121 The Academy of Arcadia congratulates him and writes that the translation proves that “el culto del más grande de los poetas cristianos existe más allá del Atlántico, en una tierra hospitalaria para los italianos que buscan un asilo lejos de la madre patria” [the cult of the greatest Christian poet exists on the other side of the Atlantic, in a land hospitable to Italians who seek refuge far from the motherland.]122 As is clear from such responses, the prestigious translation added to the symbolic capital of Argentine letters, while sending a message of welcome to prospective Italian immigrants.

**Divergent Social Message**

Apart from conveying glory and honor on himself and his patria, Mitre intended to promote vis-à-vis the *Comedy* a social message very different from that found in *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (Part I). José Hernández had given voice to the oppressed figure of the gaucho and the rural

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120 Letter from Prof. Luis Desteffani, Montevideo May 3, 1889. In *Corres. Lit. III.*

121 Letter from B.C. Lacerda of the Legação do Brazil na República Argentina to Mitre. August 4, 1897. Museo Mitre #12784.

community in protest against the Argentine political establishment which he considered the cause of the gaucho’s demise:

“porque el guacho en esta tierra
Sólo sirve pa votar”
(vv. 1371-1372).\textsuperscript{123}

The government is depicted as responsible for the exploitation of the gaucho:

Lo miran al pobregauchocomo carne de cogote:
lo tartan al estricote,
y sí aní las cosas andan
porque quieren los que mandan
aguantemos los azotes.
(vv. 2095-2100)

Todo se güelven proyectos
de colonias y carriles
y tirar la plata a miles
en los gringos enganchaos,
mientras al pobre soldao
la pelan la chaucha ¡ah viles!
(vv. 2113-2118)\textsuperscript{124}

The work strongly emphasizes the contrast between the rural, illiterate inhabitants of the pampas and the urban intellectuals who control their fate: “El campo es del inorante/ el pueblo del hombre estruido.”\textsuperscript{125} His aim was to “oír a nuestros paisoanos más incultos” [listen to the most uncultivated of our countrymen], in hopes that they no longer be excluded from the political decisions of the elite.\textsuperscript{126} Mitre, of course, disapproved of the social philosophy of Hernández’s protagonist who rebels against and withdraws from the “civilized” society. He admits as much to Hernández himself in the aforementioned letter:

\textsuperscript{123} Martín Fierro, 105.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{125} La vuelta de Martín Fierro, vv. 55-56, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{126} Prologue to La vuelta de Martín Fierro, 138.
No estoy del todo conforme con su filosofía social, que deja en el fondo del alma una precipitada amargura sin el correctivo de la solidaridad social. Mejor es reconciliar los antagonismos por el amor y por la necesidad de vivir juntos y unidos, que hacer fermentar los odios, que tienen su causa, más que en las intenciones de los hombres, en las imperfecciones de nuestro modo de ser social y político. Sin embargo, tal como es, creo “que no se ha de llover el rancho” en que su libro se lea. 127

[I am not completely in agreement with your social philosophy, which leaves in the depths of the soul a bitterness without the correction of social solidarity. It is better to reconcile antagonisms with love and the necessity to live together and united, than to ferment hatred which has as its cause, more than the nature of man, the imperfections of our social and political state. Nevertheless, as it is, I believe “it won’t “rain on the ranch” where people read your book.]

For Mitre, Martín Fierro was a work which would foster discord, unrest, and rebellion among the rural population. Although the second part does allow for the possibility of social integration, it still reflects negatively on the centralized government. Furthermore, picturing the past life of the gaucho prior to the country’s modernization as a “golden days” was counter to the progressive Argentina that Mitre was working to establish. In what follows, I will discuss why the Divine Comedy was an anti-Martín Fierro not only on account of its divergent aesthetics, but also because it represented for Mitre a different socio-political ideology. Mitre, like the thinkers of Risorgimento Italy, associated Dante with national unity, justice, and high culture. Mitre associated Martín Fierro, on the other hand, with political dissent, injustice, and rural Argentina. 128

What did Dante mean for Mitre?

In order to understand what Dante represented for Mitre, we must return to his youth, long before his presidency, the influx of Italian immigration, and the publication of the translation. According to Mitre himself in the “Teoría del Traductor,” the Divine Comedy had been his “libro de cabecera” for more than forty years, and although he long since believed himself to be

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127 Letter to José Hernández, April 14, 1879. Museo Mitre.

128 Martín Fierro withdraws from society because he perceives justice in such a society as impossible.
“impregnado de su espíritu,” it wasn’t until the 1880s that he had the courage to translate it. In the following section, I will discuss just what Mitre considered the “spirit” of the Divine Comedy to be.

Mitre’s fascination with Dante dates back to his days in Montevideo, when Argentina was divided by constant internal struggles between the Unitarios and the Federales. While the Unitarios (Unitarians) advocated a Unitary state (centralized government) with Buenos Aires as the capital, the Federales (Federalists) supported a federation of independent provinces. The provincial caudillo leaders constantly vied with one another for power, creating an unstable political situation which Mitre interpreted as a recipe for continuous internal strife.

For most of Mitre’s adolescence (he was born in 1821) and young adulthood, the caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas held control of the Argentine provinces as governor of Buenos Aires Province from 1829-32 and again from 1835-52. Rosas was born of a wealthy family of landowners and grew up in the countryside where he learned the ways of the gauchos. His knowledge of rural Argentina would later make him adept at governing its otherwise unruly population. In the areas he controlled, his rule was absolute, and his opponents considered him a tyrant. Not only did he restrict the press, but he also resorted to brutal tactics via spies and the mazorca to dissuade those who opposed his rule from revolting. His supporters, for example Hernández, considered him a leader who would safe-guard the interests of the land-owners, the gauchos, and the rural population.

129 “El Dante ha sido, por más de cuarenta años, uno de mis libros de cabecera, con la idea desde muy temprano de traducirlo; pero sin poner mano a la obra, por considerarlo intraductible en toda su intención, bien que creyese haberme impregnado de su espíritu.” Teoría del Traductor.

130 Mazorca means “ear of corn” in Spanish and an ear of corn was their symbol and stood for their unity. Opponents to the group, however, said that the name should be spelled más horca or “more hangings,” on account of their brutal tactics.
For Mitre and the other *unitarios*, Rosas way of governing was backwards and despotic. He sought to maintain his influence with an iron fist and resisted pressure to create a national constitution, insisting that Argentina was not ready for such an organization. Mitre’s main mission during his earlier career was to oust Rosas to pave the way for progress, modernization, and his own political career. Mitre spent his youth in Buenos Aires when Rosas was in power and began living in exile in Montevideo in 1837. Mitre’s family was not alone. Many other exiled intellectuals lived in Montevideo which was a hub of anti-Rosas activity. Newspapers, literature, and political commentaries became a means for them to stir up anti-Rosas sentiments both at home and abroad, in hopes that this would eventually lead to armed uprisings, foreign support, and his downfall.

The vision that the young Argentine exiles at the time had of Rosas is best summed up by Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), in which he contrasts the barbarism of the caudillo dictatorship with the progress and civilization of enlightened Europe. For Sarmiento, Mitre, and other exiled intellectuals, Rosas represented a providential mindset and stagnant world order reinforced by tyrannical rule. It wasn’t until the Battle of Caseros in 1852 that Rosas was finally defeated when Justo José de Urquiza led an army of 24,000 soldiers (mostly from Argentina, but also from Brazil and Uruguay) into the provinces of Santa Fe and Buenos Aires. A thirty-year-old Mitre commanded a division during this battle which put an end to Rosas twenty-year rule over Argentina.

Now that we have briefly examined the battle against *caudillismo* in Argentina, we can begin to understand why the ideology of the poets and thinkers of “Young Italy” and Risorgimento Italy appealed to the romantic generation of exiled Argentines. While Argentina had been dominated by *caudillismo*, Italy had been dominated by foreign powers. The revolutionary ideas of Young Italy served as a blueprint for Young Argentina and inspired a similar program of
liberation. As we shall see later, Mitre shared not only their political vision, but also their patriotic reading of Dante an emblem of national unity.

**Young Italy, Young Argentina**

As an Argentine of the romantic period engaged in overthrowing “tyranny” and building up a newly-established democracy, it is not surprising that Mitre looked to Italy for inspiration. He identified with the Italian struggle for independence and saw Giuseppe Mazzini, the founder of “La Giovine Italia” as an inspirational leader with a similar political ideology. Politically speaking, Argentine intellectuals saw themselves in similar circumstances as the revolutionaries of the Risorgimento in Italy. First, let us consider the similarities between the circumstances in Argentina and those on the Italian peninsula during their respective revolutionary phases.

**Young Italy**

Young Italy was a political movement founded in 1831 by Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini’s goal was to create a popular uprising against the Austrian Empire in order to create a unified Italy, which did not become the Kingdom of Italy until 1861. Since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, there was an absence of central political structures on the Italian peninsula. The area’s history was one of warring city-states which were often internally unstable due to violent disagreements between parties.

In addition to internal conflict there was also the problem of foreign domination. The rich Italian territory was an attractive (and relatively easily won) prize for foreign conquerors. This key feature of Italian history is reflected in the literary works of Italy’s major authors, including Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Machiavelli, who all spoke out against foreign domination in one form or another. Petrarch, for example, in his canzone “Italia Mia,” laments the terrible presence of mercenaries in his homeland. He bemoans the “trivial reasons” for which “swords of strangers”
paint the verdant plain red with “barbaric blood.”"\textsuperscript{131} His powerful canzone is a desperate cry for Italian solidarity against the northern “barbarians.”

This idea of the northern “barbarians” resurfaces in Machiavelli, who in Chapter XXVI of \textit{The Prince} urges Lorenzo de’ Medici to “liberate Italy from the barbarians.”\textsuperscript{132} In contrast to the previous books which are very matter-of-fact in tone, the final book of Machiavelli’s political treatise is passionate and patriotic. He exhorts Lorenzo de’ Medici to raise local armies so that he can be “defended against foreigners by Italian valour.” No Italian, Machiavelli claims, would refuse his support, given that “to all of us this barbarous dominion stinks.”\textsuperscript{133} He ends the book by quoting Petrarch’s \textit{Italia Mia}.

From the time of Petrarch, to Machiavelli, to Mazzini, little had changed on the Italian peninsula as regards fragmentation and foreign domination from the north. Spain, France, and Austria all took turns having the upper hand. In the nineteenth century, after the fall of Napoleon, and immediately preceding the Risorgimento, it was largely the Austrian Empire that dominated. Giuseppe Mazzini was extremely instrumental in provoking the popular uprising against the Austrians that would eventually lead to Italian unification. In 1831 he founded the revolutionary association Giovine Italia. Having witnessed the failed revolts attempted by the Carbonari (\textit{Charcoal Burners}), members of a secret society, his intention was to attract Italians to his cause of independence through a widespread moral and spiritual revival. Education and insurrection were the means by which his patriotic movement sought to liberate Italy.


\textsuperscript{132} See chapter XXVI of \textit{The Prince}, “An Exhortation to Liberate Italy from the Barbarians.”

Mazzini’s ideas quickly spread beyond the Italian peninsula, resulting in the formation of Young Germany, Young Switzerland, Young Poland, and in 1834, Young Europe. But his influence was not to be confined to one continent. The model established by Giovine Italia inspired the Romantic River Plate intellectuals to organize themselves politically into the “Asociación de la Joven Argentina” (or Young Argentina). On the night of June 23, 1837, a group of approximately 35 young men united to organize this new association. Esteban Echeverría, the group’s leader, read a credo he had written entitled “Palabras simbólicas,” which received an enthusiastic response. On the 8th of June the group united once again to give their oath, which was, according to Echeverría, based on that of “Giovine Italia.”

1. Juran concurrir con su inteligencia, sus bienes y sus brazos a la realización de los principios formulados en las palabras simbólicas que forman las bases del pacto de la alianza; 2. Juran no desistir de la empresa, sea cuales fueren los peligros que amaguen a cada uno de los miembros sociales; 3. Juran sostenerlos a todo trance y usar de todos los medios que tengan en sus manos para difundirlos y propagarlos; y 4. Juran fraternidad recíproca, unión estrecha y perpetuo silencio sobre lo que pueda comprometer la existencia de la Asociación.

[1. They swear to combine their intelligence, property, and manual labor in service of the realization of the principles formulated in the symbolic words that form the basis of the pact of alliance; 2. They swear to not give up in the endeavor, no matter what the dangers that may threaten each of the social members; 3. They swear to sustain these principles in every difficult situation and to use all the means at their disposal to defend and disseminate them; and 4. They swear reciprocal fraternity, close union, and perpetual silence regarding anything that could compromise the existence of the Association.]

The group was the Argentine version of a secret society, defining notions of liberty and patriotism and opposing the perceived tyranny of Rosas. They produced a great deal of anti-Rosas propaganda.

134 In 1846 they changed their name to Asociación de Mayo, after the May Revolution that began Argentina’s independence movement.


136 Ibid., 19
to gain support from fellow Argentines and Europeans alike. Their dogma, articulated by Echeverría, was first published as “Declaraciones de principios que constituyen la creencia social de la República Argentina” in 1838 and re-published in 1846 as _El dogma socialista_. This idealistic and extremely patriotic document shows similarities with the 1832 “Istruzioni Generali per gli affratellati della Giovine Italia” and Young Europe’s _Pact of Fraternity_, signed in Berne, Switzerland in 1834. In it the members of the association declare themselves to be “builders of the sacred mission of defining their nations”:

La asociación de la Joven Generación Argentina, representa en su organización provisoria el porvenir de la nación Argentina: --su misión es esencialmente orgánica. Ella procurará derramar su espíritu y su doctrina; --extender el círculo de sus tendencias progresivas;--atraer los ánimos a la grande asociación nacional unificando las opiniones, y concentrándolas en la patria y en los principios de la igualdad, de la libertad y de la fraternidad de todos los hombres.

[The Association of Young Argentina represents in its provisional organization the future of the Argentine nation: --its mission is essentially organic. It will try to spread its spirit and doctrine; --extend the circle of its progressive tendencies; --encourage interest in the great national association, unifying opinions and concentrating focus in the patria and in the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity for all men.]

Mazzinian ideas were further diffused among exiled Argentines in Uruguay via the journal “El Iniciador,” founded on the 1st of January 1839 by Andrés Lamas and Miguel Cané. The Italian journalist, Gian Batista Cúneo, who was instrumental in spreading the ideas of Mazzini in South America, collaborated with the editors. The Mazzianian slogan "Bisogna riporsi in via” was printed on the front of every edition in Italian along with the Spanish translation “Es necesario

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137 First published in Montevideo in 1846. There is some discrepancy regarding the exact date of foundation of the Asociación de Mayo. Most sources list 1847 as the date, but others a year later in mid-1848.

138 Esteban Echeverría, _El Dogma Socialista a la juventud argentina_ (1837), (Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 2003), 6.
ponernos en camino.” Mitre, who contributed to the journal’s pages along with other Argentine intellectuals exiled from the regime of Rosas, was steeped in the ideology of Young Italy.\textsuperscript{139}

A testament of Mitre’s enthusiasm for the Young Italy movement is a poem published in an edition of “El Nacional” from the 30\textsuperscript{th} of November, 1838. Although published anonymously, Mitre signed his name “B. Mitre” underneath the poem in his personal copy of the issue kept in his library (see Figures 1-2):

\begin{verbatim}
¡Italia! ¡Italia! De mil héroes patria,
Alza tu frente entre la nada hundida,
Un siglo de existencia carcomida
Se borra con un día de igualdad.
¡Juventud Italiana! La esperanza
No reneguíes en vuestr os corazones,
Hermanos son los santos pabellones
Que llaman a la Gloria y Libertad.
¡Joven Italia! El mundo te saluda
Y te saluda el pueblo Américano.
¡Desterrados! os damos nuestra mano….
Ahora los himnos de la unión, cantad.
¡Joven Italia! El estandarte santo,
Alze a tu vez la juventud potente,
Caiga el tirano, el trono y esplendente
Se sublime la Santa Libertad.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{verbatim}

[Italy, Italy, land of a thousand heroes,
Raise from the ruins your downcast head,
A century of existence in decay
Is erased in one day of equality.
Young Italy! Do not reject
The hope in your hearts,
Brothers are the sacred peoples
Who strive for Glory and Liberty.
Young Italy! The world salutes you
And the American people salute you.
Exiled, we give you our hand…
Now sing the hymns of union!
Young Italy! May the holy banner

\textsuperscript{139} Other contributors include Juan Bautista Alberdi, Juan María Gutiérrez, Florencio Varela, Esteban Echeverría, Juan Cruz Varela.

\textsuperscript{140} Bartolomé Mitre. El Nacional, Montevideo: Novembre 30, de 1838. Museo Mitre.
Elevate the powerful youth,
Let the tyrant fall, the throne, and resplendent,
Be transformed into Holy Freedom…]

Proclaiming all Americans, and all the world, to be the friends and brothers of the Italians, he calls for solidarity and liberation achieved through battle. While the poem ostensibly supports the Risorgimento, it is also implicitly opposes the hegemony of Rosas, who was perceived as a tyrant preventing the unity and progress of Argentina. In their fight for Rosas’ downfall, the members of Young Argentina looked to Young Italy as a political model for liberation.\textsuperscript{141} The ideas of Mazzini were well known to the young Mitre, as were his views on the power of poetry to inspire patriotism and action.

**Mazzini’s Reading of Dante**

During the Risorgimento, Dante was embraced by intellectuals involved with the political emancipation of Italy. Giuseppe Mazzini appreciated Dante for his ethical example and contributed to his revival during the Romantic period. In the following section, I will examine Mazzini’s depiction of Dante as the ideal patriot and his ultimate use of him to promote Risorgimental ideals.

First of all, it must be remembered that Dante had, for the most part, fallen out of fashion from the fifteenth to the late eighteenth century, when Petrarch’s poetry was the predominant literary model.\textsuperscript{142} But towards the end of the eighteenth century, Dante steadily increased in popularity. There are a variety of reasons why Dante appealed to the Romantic Zeitgeist. For example, the Romantics valued what was imaginative, emotional, visionary, and transcendental, the *Divine Comedy* being all of these things. Furthermore, during the Romantic Age the Middle Ages were in vogue as far as epochs are concerned, whereas during the Renaissance and

\textsuperscript{141} See Jorge Myers, “Giuseppe Mazzini and the Emergence of Liberal Nationalism in the River Plate and Latin America,” in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism 1805-2005*.

immediately after, the medieval period was largely envisioned as a dark age. The *Divine Comedy* was either seen to embody the Middle Ages, or, for some, to have marked the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. As C.P. Brand points out, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), the Italian political philosopher, locates Dante at the end of a period of barbarism and sees him as herald of a new age.¹⁴³ For Vico, Dante, whom he calls “il toscano Omero” meant the end of “la ritornata barbarie d’Italia.”¹⁴⁴ Mitre, as we shall see later, hoped that Dante could mean the same for Argentina.

What comes to the forefront most frequently when Romantics sing the praises of Dante are the following aspects: his moral unrighteousness, his defiance of political injustice, and his defense of political unity. Andrea Ciccarelli argues in his article “Dante and Italian Culture from the Risorgimento to World War I,” that the recovery of Dante by nineteenth-century Italian culture was based “mostly on political and ethical reasons, and that these patriotic reasons converted Dante into an emblem of national unity.”¹⁴⁵

Mazzini was influential in inspiring many patriotic readings of Dante, eventually converting him into a national icon. His first essay, *Dell’amor patrio di Dante* (1826-27), concerns Dante’s love for Florence. In *Sopra alcune tendenze della letteratura italiana del XIX secolo* (1829) he links Dante’s moral righteousness with contemporary Italian writers. In *Ai poeti del secolo XIX* (1832), he promotes the use of poetry as the voice of the people. As Andrea Ciccarelli explains, these essays helped establish a parallel based on ethical convictions between Dante and late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers:


Mazzini sees Dante as an example, actually, *the* example of Italian integrity for his refusal of moral compromises with the political power of his times, and he draws an analogy with the writings of some late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers, especially with those of Vittorio Alfieri and Ugo Foscolo.\(^{146}\)

Mazzini started the long-term trend of establishing analogies between Dante and the historical protagonists of the Risorgimento.

Mazzini, who read Dante primarily in a political vein, was very adept at using his name as a rallying point. His essay “Dante” written for Operai Italiani in London in the *Apostolato Popolare* the 15\(^{th}\) of September, 1844 is essentially a call to action. Mazzini begins by asking the question, “who was the man whose name belongs to the Italian people?”\(^{147}\) First he establishes that Dante’s aims of unity were the same as those of present day. Secondly he thanks Dante for the formation of a common language “che rappresenterà un giorno fra tutti noi l’Unità Nazionale.”\(^{148}\) Not only was Dante a great poet and great thinker, but he was also a great politician, who “intendendo meglio d’ogni altro la missione dell’uomo italiano, riuni teorica e pratica, Potenza e virtù,-- Pensiero ed Azione.”\(^{149}\) The notion of thought followed by action was at the center of Mazzini’s political creed.

Mazzini also helped promote the idea of Dante as *pater patria*. “Patria,” was, according to Mazzini, the dominant thought of Dante’s life, and the dream for which he suffered and sacrificed. In his brief biographical sketch, he emphasizes the elements of Dante’s life story that make him an ideal patriot. For example, he emphasizes that Dante was involved in the civil affairs of his city,

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 126.

\(^{147}\) Reprinted as a preface to the 1914 edition of the *Comedy*. Giuseppe Mazzini, "Dante" in *La Commedia* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1914), 11-12.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{149}\) Ibid.
and that he fought valorously at the battle of Campaldino. Since his aim is to depict Dante as a moral hero and ideal patriot, he devotes a significant section of this short essay to explaining that Dante was neither Guelph nor Ghibelline, but rather, as he says in his own poem, “s’era fatto parte per sè stesso.” In other words, his ideas were above the petty party rivalries because it was the idea of future nationhood that predominated in his soul.

Furthermore, Mazzini provides examples of Dante’s moral righteousness and his refusal to compromise himself. He describes Dante, the errant exile, who in 1316 was invited to return to Florence only if he paid fees and declared himself forgiven, and thus guilty. Mazzini, outraged that Dante be asked to pay his oppressors, includes the letter of the offended Dante, refusing the offer. The episode is meant to be indicative of Dante’s dignity and his sound ethics.

Although Dante was unable to return to his beloved Florence, Mazzini claims that he died comforted, knowing that Italy would one day become “Nazione e direttrice una terza volta dell’incivilimento Europeo.” Although the times were not mature for Nationhood, Mazzini claims that Dante never once relinquished his belief in Italian unification. Patria, for Dante was a religion, and he believed his land to be “destinata da Dio alla grande missione di dare unità morale all’Europa e per mezzo d’Europa all’Umanità.”

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150 Ibid., 13.
151 See Paradiso, XVII, 67-69, Cacciaguida’s prophetic speech to Dante: “Di sua bestialitate il suo processo/ farà la prova; si ch’a te fia bello/ averti fatta parte per te stesso.”
152 Mazzini, 15.
153 Mazzini refers to a Latin letter in which Dante honorably declines to return to Florence following the deal offered him in 1315, the terms of which would have required him to pay fees. See Epist. XII, 5-8.
154 Ibid., 11.
155 Ibid., 15.
At the end of his laudatory essay Mazzini asks how Italians can honor this great man who gave them their language and foundational book? His answer is a call to unity in the name of Dante:

Volete voi, Italiani, onorare davvero la memoria dei vostri Grandi e dar pace all’anima di Dante Allighieri? Verificate il concetto che lo affaticò nella sua vita terrestre. Fate UNA e potente e libera la vostra contrada. Spegnete fra voi tutte quelle meschinissime divisioni contro le quali Dante predicò tanto, che condannarono lui l’uomo che più di tutti sentiva ed amava il vostro avvenire, alla sventura e all’esilio, e voi a una impotenza di secoli che ancor dura. Liberate le sepolture dei vostri Grandi, degli uomini che hanno messo una corona di gloria sulla vostra Patria, dall’onta d’essere calpeste dal piede d’un soldato straniero. E quando sarete fatti digni di Dante nell’amore e nell’odio—quando l’anima di Dante potrà guardare in voi senza dolore e lieta di tutto il suo orgoglio Italiano—noi innalzeremo la statua del Poeta sulla maggiore alteza di Roma, e scriveremo sulla base: AL PROFETA DELLA NAZIONE ITALIANA GLI ITALIANI DEGNI DI LUI”¹⁵⁶

His essay is essentially a plea to “do it for Dante.” Mazzini makes Dante a national idol, a point of convergence for all Italians.

**Mitre’s Risorgimento Reading of Dante**

Influenced by the thinking of the Italian exiles they encountered in Montevideo, Mitre and his fellow Argentine exiles associated Dante with liberty and political union. Mitre clarifies this association of Dante with his days in Montevideo in a letter to Miguel Cané (the younger), written in justification of his translation. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Mitre sent out copies of the *Comedy* to friends, men of letters, and institutions, and received many letters in return thanking him for the glory he brought to the *patria*. But not everyone’s response was so enthusiastic. Miguel Cané (the younger) was skeptical regarding the benefits that Mitre’s translation could have for the country. He seems dumbfounded that “a man so involved in modern life” had the “colossal

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.
strength” to translate a work of Dante. And for what? He doubts the relative importance of the translation, given that in his opinion most of Argentina’s citizens will not actually read the work:

¿Cuántos hombres calcula usted que en tierra argentina han leído íntegra y reposadamente la Divina Comedia? No hablo de los italianos, bien entendido, que habitan nuestro suelo. Para ellos, leer el Dante, es cuestión de obligación, cuando aprenden á leer, algo como el sello final á la carta de ciudadanía.

[How many men in Argentina do you figure have read the Divine Comedy unhurriedly and in its entirety? I’m not talking about the Italians, of course, who live in our land. For them reading Dante is an obligation from the time they learn to read, something like the final stamp on a document of citizenship.]

His concern, in fact, is that the Divine Comedy is a work which is only accessible to men of letters, and not of much import to the greater population.

Los argentinos, pues, y los pueblos de habla española en general, habían resuelto suprimir al Dante como pan espiritual; mucho respeto, un tinte ligero del conjunto, conocimiento exacto (para las gentes de pluma) de los puntos brillantes, consagrados, conocidos. Pero nada más. Y no les falta razón, general. El Dante es obscuro, es difícil.

[Argentines and Spanish-speaking peoples have decided to do away with Dante as their spiritual bread; they respect it; they have a superficial knowledge of the whole, and in the case of men of letters, a perfect understanding of the brilliant, established, and well-known points. And that’s it. And they aren’t wrong, general. Dante is obscure, difficult.]

And as we have seen, due to the myriad archaisms, Latinisms, and Italianisms, Mitre’s translation would have been even more challenging for Argentine readers of the nineteenth century than Dante’s already difficult poetry was for contemporary Italian readers. Miguel Cané immediately understands the degree of inaccessibility for the general population. Nevertheless, as a fellow man of letters, he does not disagree with Mitre’s decision to include so many archaisms. Rather, he

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158 Ibid. 318-319.
seems to understand it as an effort to safeguard against the barbarisms of the pampas, and suggests a return to the linguistic models of the sixteenth and seventeenth century:

Pienso que la única salvación que hay para nuestra lengua, amenazada por la anarquía americana y el estrecho despotismo académico, está en volver á sus fuentes, en remontarnos á sus buenos tiempos y leer mucho los buenos modelos de los siglos XVI y XVII.159

[I believe that the only salvation for our language, threatened by American anarchy and strict academic despotism, lies in a return to its sources, in a return to the good times and reading the good models of the XVI and XVII centuries.]

Cané feared the degradation of the language both because of American barbarisms and strict Spanish academicism. He shared Mitre’s idea to return to previous models. He did not, however, share Mitre’s unbridled optimism with regards to the modernization of the country. While Mitre equated modernization with progress (economic and cultural), Cané feared that the rapid economic transformation of Argentina was leading to a loss of tradition and a degradation of moral values. In a letter to his daughter, he expressed his unease regarding a progress he perceived as directionless:

“¡A prisa, a prisa! La vida se acorta, el mundo se estrecha y en el orden moral los vagos e indefinidos horizontes del pasado desaparecen; agitémonos en este movimiento febril, para tener, por lo menos, la ilusión de marchar hacia un objetivo!”160

[Hurry, hurry! Life is getting shorter, the world is getting narrower, and in the moral sphere the vague and indefinite horizons of the past are disappearing. We toss about in this hectic movement to obtain at least the illusion that we are marching towards an objective!]

159 Ibid., 321. The emphasis is mine.

In *Ensayos*, which is a compilation of notes written between 1872 and 1876, one can perceive his apathy towards modern life. He complains of “un mundo obscuro, materialista, descreído, sin fe, sin grandes pasiones” [an obscure, materialistic, godless, faithless, and passionless world], and this in turn was the reason that poets are “sombrios como las tumbas y tristes como la noche” [gloomy as graves and sad as the night].\(^{161}\) His bleak outlook on modern society as faithless can also be sensed in his letter to Mitre where he comments on the use of archaisms in the various cantos.

En el Infierno y de acuerdo con su teoría, había arriesgado uno que otro arcaísmo, desenterrado alguna voz anticuada, pero con timidez, con cierta cortedad, hasta apoyándose en Littré…En el Purgatorio es usted también parsimonioso en materia de arcaísmos…Pero ya lo he dicho; es en el Paraíso donde el lector se mueve en pleno arcaísmo, como si esa región de ultratumba fuera la que más se ha anticuado en la fe de los hombres.\(^ {162}\)

[In the Inferno and in accordance with your theory of translation, you risked many archaisms, exhuming a few antiquated words, but with reserve, with a certain shyness, even relying on Littré…In Purgatory you are also careful in your use of archaisms…But as I have already said, it is in Paradise that the reader moves fully through archaisms, as if this region of the afterlife had become the most antiquated in the faith of man.]

In his view, *Paradiso*, where archaisms are most prevalent, is where Mitre really comes into his own as a translator. There are so many archaisms, however, that the text often becomes inaccessible even to Cané himself, a fellow man of letters. He admits that many of the words are “tan desconocidos que, por mi parte, tenía constantemente un dedo en el texto y otro en las notas. Verdad es que así hay que leer el texto mismo” [so unfamiliar that, personally, I had to constantly keep one finger on the text and the other on the notes. The truth is that like this you have to read the text itself].\(^ {163}\)

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\(^{161}\) M. Cané, *Ensayos*, (Buenos Aires: La Cultura Argentina, 1912), 166 and 168.

\(^{162}\) Ibid. 321-322.

\(^{163}\) Ibid. 322.
Furthermore, Cané goes on to question how well Mitre really understood Dante:

Y á este propósito, general, ¿cómo ha podido usted hacer de una edición de la *Divina Comedia*, sin notas ni comentarios, un libro de cabecera? ¿Se contentaba sólo con la música?¹⁶⁴

[On that note, general, how were you able to make a guiding model out of an edition of the *Divine Comedy* without notes and commentaries? Did you content yourself simply with its music?]

Miguel Cané’s letter points to a viable problem with Mitre’s translation: it’s inaccessibility. Although Mitre’s intentions may have been to enrich the language and provide Argentina with a guiding epic, what he had actually achieved in Cané’s opinion, was an obscure book of little import. In his opinion, Mitre’s time would have been better spent writing another history.

Para concluir, general, no quiero ocultarle un rumor que anda, anda, callandito pero á prisa; es el sentimiento general de que toda esa labor enorme, no la haya empleado usted en darnos un nuevo libro fundamental de historia.¹⁶⁵

[To conclude, general, I do not want to hide from you a rumor that is spreading quietly but quickly; it is the general sentiment that with all of this enormous labor, you might have given us a new fundamental book of history.]

Cané then calls the translation a “capricho de titan” [titanic caprice] and jokingly warns Mitre against deciding next to learn Sanskrit and translate the *Ramayana*.¹⁶⁶

For Miguel Cané, just one generation younger than Mitre, the decision to translate the *Comedy* was almost incomprehensible. Perhaps in the liberal (un-romantic) view of Cané, the consolidated state of 1894 did not need an epic to galvanize the nation. He recognizes, however, that the importance of Dante for Mitre has everything to do with the influence of the Italian exiles

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¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 322.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 323.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
(such as Cuneo) during Mitre’s days in Montevideo. At the time, Argentine and Italian exiles alike read Dante and dreamed of unity for their sister countries.

Esa sensación del italiano, que despertaron en usted, allá en su juventud, los proscriptos italianos en Montevideo, la he tenido también por tradición de hogar. Cuneo, poco años antes de su muerte, me habla de usted y de mi padre, de todo el grupo argentino que hacía brillar á Montevideo en la noche de Plata. Cuneo quería hacerme decir de memoria cantos del Dante y sonetos de Petrarca, como los decía mi padre, en el culto de aquella Italia que ustedes veían entonces triste y encadenada como la propia patria, y que hoy vemos, con secreto dolor, en triples alianzas que repugnan á su índole, á su historia y á su destino.167

[The sensation of Italian that the exiles awoke in you, back in your youth, I have also maintained as a household tradition. Cuneo, just before his death, spoke to me about you and my father, about the whole group of Argentines that made Montevideo shine in the night of Silver. Cuneo wanted me to recite cantos of Dante and sonnets of Petrarch from memory, like my father did, back in the cult of that Italy that you all saw at the time as sad and enchained like our own country, and that today we see, with a secret suffering, in triple alliances that prove sickening for her sort, her history, and her destiny.]

Mitre writes back to confirm that therein lies the significance of Dante for his generation. He tells Miguel Cané (the younger) of the strong friendship he formed with his father (Miguel Cané the elder)168 when the two were united in the fight against Rosas. He thanks him for reminding him of “la época lejana en que lo [la Divina Commedia] deletreaba […] aleccionado por los proscritos italianos que soñaban con la Italia Unida presentida por el Poeta, a la vez que los emigrados argentinos esperaban la libertad de su patria” [the distant epoch in which the Divine Comedy was observed in great detail […], chosen by the exiles who dreamed of the united Italy presented by the Poet, at the same time as the Argentine immigrants hoped for the liberty of their country.]169

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167 Ibid. 320.

168 One of the founders of the journal “El Iniciador”

169 Letter from Mitre to Miguel Cané (the younger). Museo Mitre.
For Mitre, just as for Mazzini, Dante had prefigured Italian unity and was a poet associated primarily with “patria,” “liberty,” and “justice.”

In the lines that follow, he recalls nostalgically when Florencio Varela and Miguel’s father used to teach him Dante’s verses, and how strongly this made him feel “love for beauty and the cult of Justice.” Dante’s world was one of Justice, where each man is properly retributed for his actions. Reading the Divine Comedy no doubt gave the exiles in Montevideo hope that their enemy, Rosas (perceived as an evil tyrant), would soon meet his downfall. They also identified with Dante because he, like themselves, suffered political exile.

**Exiles with a Patriotic Mission**

Dante wrote the Comedy, the Convivio, De vulgari eloquentia, and Monarchia all while in exile.\(^{170}\) We have to wonder if these works would even exist if he had not been banished from the political life of his beloved Florence. It would seem, in the words of Giuseppe Mazzotta, that “exile turned out to be for Dante a blessing in disguise, nothing less than the central, decisive experience of his life.”\(^{171}\) Although in the Convivio he bitterly laments the injustice of his banishment,\(^{172}\) his canzone “Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute” seems to indicate that he eventually came to see his exile as honorable. Dante imagines that three women personifying Divine Justice, Human Justice, and Law have been exiled from the earth. These honorable ladies come to visit Dante in exile and lament their situation. Their discourse causes Dante to re-evaluate his own situation.

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E io, che ascolto nel parlar divino
consolarsi e dolersi
cosi alti dispersi,
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\(^{170}\) Dante lived in exile from 1301 to his death in 1321.


l’essilio che m’è dato, onor mi tegno:\(^{173}\)

(Rime CIII, 73-76)

Identifying with Dante, intellectuals of the Risorgimento found honor and inspiration in exile. Take for example Vittorio Alfieri, a self-imposed exile who wrote powerfully in defiance of tyranny in his *Della tirannide* (1777) and *Del principe e delle lettere* (1786). Ugo Foscolo too was a poet in exile who appreciated Dante for his activism and ethical conviction. In *Parallelolo fra Dante e Petrarca* (1821) he depicts Dante as a poet of action in contrast to Petrarch, a poet of contemplation.\(^{174}\) Exile was also a defining experience for Mazzini, who, from 1831 onward, spent most of life in exile, first in France, then Switzerland, then England.\(^{175}\) It was in exile that he founded Giovine Italia and wrote the majority of his work. He must have seen himself as a modern day Dante, an exile with a prophetic mission to save humanity. Mazzini was particularly adept at capitalizing on Dante’s optimism, his belief in a political utopia, and his boldness in condemning contemporary leaders whom he deemed corrupt. He turned Dante into a symbol of his aims, and eventually the buzz word “Dante” became synonymous with “patria,” “liberty,” “action,” and “unity.”

The exiles in Montevideo, including Mitre, were carrying out Mazzini’s mission on the South American continent. As Miguel Cané (the elder) wrote in an article dedicated to Mazzini:

Hoy se anuncia desde lejos una nueva época y a nosotros, escoltas avanzados de la humanidad, nos toca guiar a la muchedumbre incierta mientras dure el dolor de la inmensa noche que nos cubre. Seremos mártires de la regeneración americana. ¡Gloria mil veces a los sacerdotes de la llama divina en que se inflama el corazón del siglo XIX…! ¡Gloria mil veces a los que han unido en pacto fraternal


Today we announce from afar a new epoch, and as the elevated guardians of humanity, we are entrusted with guiding the uncertain multitude for as long as the pain of this immense night that envelops us continues. We will be martyrs of the American regeneration. Eternal glory to the priests of the divine calling which inflames the hearts of the XIX century...! Eternal glory to those who united in a fraternal pact Young Buenos Aires and Young Italy, Young Europe, and Young Humanity...!]

The exiles in Montevideo envisioned themselves as the guides of humanity, as part of a divine mission to bring democracy to America. It was to be a regeneration/rebirth from a period of darkness. Mitre, who actively participated in their endeavor, both on a military and literary front, shared Mazzini’s ideology and his reading of Dante as a moral hero and Pater patriae.

Reading the Divine Comedy in the Argentine Political Context

Returning to the translation, if we look at Canto X of Infierno which deals with the theme of exile, we can see that Mitre’s version highlights this topic even more than the original. In canto X Dante encounters Farinata degli Uberti, a Ghibelline from a noble family. Although the Ghibellines twice defeated the Guelphs (in 1248 and 1260), the Guelphs both times were able to return to power, while the Ghibellines after their defeat in 1266, did not. Farinata was excommunicated. During his brief discussion with Dante in the circle of the heretics, he prophesies Dante’s own exile. The episode highlights the division that occurred among Florentines on account of partisan politics. Mitre underscores this aspect of the canto which would have resonated with readers of his generation, particularly those exiled in Montevideo. Let us compare Mitre’s version with the original. The following to pertains to Farinata’s speech regarding the exile of the Ghibellines.

| poi disse: “Fieramente furo avversi a me e a miei primi e a mia parte,” | Luego me dijo: “Cuando yo bregaba, fueron tus padres fieros adversarios:” |

176 Quoted in Italia en el sentir y pensar de Mitre, 10.
Mitre could have translated the Italian “dispersi” with equivalent Spanish adjectives such as “disgregada,” “separada,” or “desparramada,” or “echada.” Instead he opts for the more politically charged “desterrada,” which underscores the painful loss of the homeland itself. Secondly, he translates the Italian “S’ei fur cacciati” with “Si fueron exilados” instead of “Si fueron expulsados.” Finally, to further drive home the painful idea of exile, he translates the more general “tornar d’ogne parte” (to return from every place) with “volvieron del destierro” (to return from exile).

Despite Mitre’s frequent use of antiquated terms, his translation has at times a very Romantic feel. For example, during Odysseus’ speech, which is very classical in nature, Mitre’s translation diverges substantially from the original. In the following lines, Odysseus explains to Dante why he did not immediately return to Ithaca.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quando mi diparti’ da Circe, che sotrasse me più d’un anno là presso a Gaeta, prima che sì Enea la nomasse, né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta del vecchio padre, né ’l debito amore lo qual dovea Penelópe far lieta, vincer potero dentro a me l’ardore ch’i’ ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto, e de li vizi umani e del valore;</td>
<td>“Cuando libre de Circe la inhumana, que más de un año en Gaeta me retuvo, do antes de Eneas era soberana, ni el cariño por mi hijo me contuvo, ni de mi viejo padre la ternura, ni el amor de Penélope me abstuvo, de correr por doquier a la ventura, por conocer el mundo como experto, y al hombre con sus vicios y cultura.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Dante’s version, the focus is on the neglect of Odysseus’ ethical obligation to his son, father,
and wife, which contrasts him with Virgil’s hero, Aeneas. In Mitre’s version, the emphasis on ethics is softened, while feelings stand in the forefront. Instead of translating “pieta” with its Spanish equivalent, “piedad,” Mitre replaces it with “ternura.” The idea of moral obligation stressed by “debito” and “dovea” in the original is absent in his version, which says simply “amor.” What is more interesting, is that he translates “valore” with “cultura” instead of “valores.” This gives the impression that he is equating culture with moral values. The first line of the last stanza above, “de correr por doquier a la ventura,” is not in the original. One can hypothesize that he invented this line for the purpose of rhyming with “cultura,” a word of import in his translational choice. This in turn is likely the cause for “ternura,” also not in the original.

Maintaining more equivalent word choice would not have presented great difficulties in Spanish. For example, the passage might be translated as follows (my translation):

\[
\begin{array}{|l|l|}
\hline
\text{né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta del vecchio padre, né } & \text{ni la dulzura del hijo, ni la piedad del viejo padre, ni el debido amor que debía a Penélope llevar felicidad,} \\
\text{lo qual dovea Penelopé far lieta,} & \text{vencer pudieron dentro de mí los ardores que tuve de hacerme del mundo experto y de los vicios humanos y de sus valores.} \\
\text{vincer potero dentro a me l’ardore} & \text{vincer pudieron dentro de mí los ardores} \\
\text{ch’i’ ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,} & \text{que tuve de hacerme del mundo esperto} \\
\text{e de li vizi umani e del valore;} & \text{y de los vicios humanos y de sus valores.} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

\textit{(Inf. XXVI, 94-99)}

With more analogous word choice, it is possible to conserve the sense of ethical duty present in the original. The rhyming pair “ardores”/ “valores,” (ardours/ values) could also be translated as “ardor”/ “valor,” which would however change the meaning to “bravery.” In any case, Mitre’s choice of “culture” in place of the Italian “valore” stands out. It seems to play into the dichotomy culture and civilization vs. barbarism, where European immigration and the importation of European culture was envisioned as the means to civilize and bring moral values to the Argentine desert.
One particularly interesting translational choice that adapts the *Divine Comedy* to the nineteenth-century Argentine political context occurs in *Purgatorio* VI. *Purgatorio* VI shares a certain parallelism with the sixth cantos of the *Inferno* and *Paradise*, which also address political themes. *Inferno* VI focuses on the corruption of Florence, *Purgatorio* VI ends with a vehement apostrophe to Italy, and *Paradiso* VI contains the history of the Empire.

In *Purg* VI Dante and Virgil encounter Sordello, from Mantua. Virgil and Sordello embrace upon the realization they are from the same land. This incites an emotional response and violent invective from Dante who laments the division of Italian citizens, calling his native country a ship without a helmsman and a whore. He laments that the citizens are constantly divided in war, that they did not follow the laws of Justinian, that the Church impeded Caesar from governing as he should, and that Albert I of Austria ignored Italy during his reign and failed to quell its internal strife. This passage would have likely appealed to nineteenth-century Argentine readers, for its extended metaphor comparing Italy to an untamed horse. Following this metaphor, Mitre makes a deliberate translational choice which strengthens the potential for association of the passage with the Argentine context.

| Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello, nave sanza nocchiere in gran tempesta, non donna di province, ma bordello! | ¡Oh, Italia esclava, habitación del duelo; nave en gran tempestad, sin su piloto; señora de un burdel, no de tu suelo! |
| Quell’anima gentil fu così presta, sol per lo dolce suon de la sua terra, di fare al cittadin suo quivi festa; | Para el alma gentil, bastó el remoto dulce recuerdo de nativa tierra, para brindar al compatriota el voto, |
| e ora in te non stanno sanza guerra li vivi tuoi, e l’un l’altro si rode di quei ch’un muro e una fossa serra. | mientras tú vives en perpetua guerra, y con tus mismas manos te destrozas, aun entre muros que igual foso cierra. |
| Cerca, misera, intorno de le prode le tue marine, e poi ti guarda in seno, s’alcuna parte in te di pace gode. | Mira, ¡infeliz! Las playas espaciosas de tu marina, y busca si en tu seno en parte alguna con la paz te gozas. |
| Che val perché ti racconciasse il freno  
| Justiniano, se la sella è vota?  
| Sanz’esso fora la vergogna meno.  
| ¡De qué sirvió que te ajustase el freno  
| Justiniano, si está la silla rota?  
| Sin él, tu oprobio fuera menos pleno.  
| Ahí gente che dovresti esser devota,  
| E lasciar seder Cesare in la sella,  
| se bene intendi ciò che Dio ti nota,  
| ¡Ay! gente, que debieras ser devota  
| al César en su trono bien sentado,  
| ¡Entiende bien lo que tu Dios te nota!  
| guarda como esta fiera è fatta fella  
| per non esser corretta da li sproni,  
| poi che ponesti mano a la predella.  
| ¡Ve la fiera que brava se ha tornado  
| porque sólo la brida manejaste  
| sin haberla de espuelas adiestrado!  
| O Alberto tedesco ch’abbandoni  
| costei ch’è fatta indomita e selvaggia,  
| e dovresti inforcar li suoi arcioni,  
| ¡Oh, tú, tudesco Alberto, que dejaste  
| que ella se hiciera indómita y salvaje  
| porque en sus hombros nunca cabalgaste!  
| Giusto giudicio da le stelle caggia  
| sovra ’l tuo sangue, e sia novo e aperto,  
| tal che ’l tuo successor temenza n’aggia!  
| ¡Justa sentencia desde el cielo baje  
| sobre tu sangre; y sea tan de cierto  
| que a tu heredero el miedo le trabaje;  
| Ch’avete tu e ’l tuo padre sofferto,  
| per cupidigia di costà distretti,  
| che ’l giardin de lo ’mperio sia diserto.  
| pues por ti, con tu padre de concerto,  
| por codicia de tierras apartadas,  
| el jardín del imperio fué un desierto!  
| Vieni a veder Montecchi e Cappelletti,  
| Monaldi e Filippeschi, uom sanza cura:  
| color già tristi, e questi con sospetti!  
| (Purg. VI, 76-108)  
| ¡Ven, y verás facciones desalmadas;  
| Montescos, Filipescos, Capuletos  
| y Monaldos, y gentes contristadas!  

In this extended metaphor, Dante compares an unruly horse to the ungovernable population of Italy, in need of a strong rider (leader) capable of taming her. Her saddle is broken, making it futile for Justinian to “racconciasse il freno.” The horse does not allow Caesar to remain in the saddle. In the third tercet above, Dante describes the horse as a “fiera” (a beast) which has grown wilder because managed only by the reigns and not by the spurs. In other words, partial attempts at governing that are not sufficient in force will only result in rebellion from an uncivilized, or beastly population. Finally, he criticizes Albert I for having left the population untamed and savage because he was not astride her saddle-bow. On the whole, the passage is a justification of the
necessity of strong government. Force (signified by the reigns and spurs) must be used, if necessary, to dominate a population which remains unruly if untamed.

Immediately following this extended metaphor that would have readers thinking in an Argentine context on account of the equestrian vocabulary, Mitre makes a translational choice that connects the message of lines to the population of the Argentine desert. In Dante’s version, “che ’l giardin de lo ’mperio sia diserto,” “diserto” is an adjective, meaning “abandoned” or “deserted” [that the garden of the empire was deserted]. In Mitre’s version, the word is a noun, meaning desert “el jardín del imperio fué un desierto!” [the garden of the empire was a desert]. This was a deliberate choice, as he could have translated the line “que el jardín del imperio esté desierto!” The word “desierto” would have had particular resonances in the Argentine context, given that it was a common term used to refer to the pampas. At the time it was used in the slogan “conquista del desierto,” the governments military campaign against the Indians, which immediately preceded the publication of the translation (1878-1885). The passage can be read as a justification of the government’s use of force to dominate a population seen as “indómita” and “salvaje,” words often used to describe the native Americans. The word choice of “compatriota” for “cittadin” also strengthens the connection to the fatherland, as it shares the same root as “patria,” which derives from Latin patrius, originally pater. This too is a deliberate choice, as he could have translated the word with “ciudadano” as he did in Inf. VI, line 52.177

The passage presents an opportunity for readers to reflect on nineteenth-century Argentine history through the lens of Dante’s Italy, as well as the Italy of the Risorgimento. To further understand the connection between nineteenth-century Argentina and Risorgimento Italy, we must examine Mitre’s friendship with Giuseppe Garibaldi, whom he viewed as a military role model.

177 Inf. VI, 52: “Voi, cittadini, mi chiamaste Ciacco;”; “Los ciudadanos me llamaban Ciaco;”
Giuseppe Garibaldi, “The Hero of Two Worlds”

Jamás se viera una lealtad mayor
Que la del León Italiano
Al amigo de América que amó en fraterno amor.
De Garibaldi y Mitre las dos diestras hermanas
Sembraron la simiente de encinas italianas
Y argentinas que hoy llenan la tierra de rumor!
Y en el Dante se amaron. En el vasto crisol
Se encontraron un día dos almas de diamante
Hechas de libertad y nutridas de sol.\textsuperscript{178}

-Rubén Darío (1906)

Rubén Darío’s 1906 “Oda a Mitre” was inspired by the friendship between Mitre and Garibaldi, lovers of Dante and founding fathers of their respective countries. They were not only friends, but self-proclaimed “brothers of the humanitarian path,” united on the battlefield during the Seige of Montevideo, and subsequently in spirit on a moral mission to guide humanity towards its destiny of civilization and progress.

Garibaldi, of course, was heavily influenced by the ideas of Mazzini. He first joined the Young Italy movement in 1833 and dedicated himself fully to the struggle to liberate and unify Italy. In fact, it was his involvement in a Mazzinian plot to overthrow the Piedmontese government which ultimately landed him in South America, where he was to meet Mitre. When the plot failed, Garibaldi was sentenced to death and fled first to Marseille and then to South America, where he spent 12 years (from November 1835 to January 1848) before returning to Italy. When Garibaldi travelled to Rio in late 1835, he brought with him the General Directions of Young Europe and the sixth issue of Giovine Italia.\textsuperscript{179} A Jan 27\textsuperscript{th} 1836 letter to Mazzini reveals his intentions of setting

\textsuperscript{178} Rubén Darío, “Oda a Mitre” (1906), in El Canto Errante (Madrid: M. Perez Villaviciencio, 1907). Darío also wrote an article on Garibaldi entitled “El hombre de la camisa roja.”

up branches of Young Italy in Buenos Aires and Montevideo for the purpose of recruiting volunteers to return to Italy when the revolution came.\textsuperscript{180}

While in South America Garibaldi took up the cause of the rebels fighting for their independence. In Rio he joined the Republic of Rio Grande do Sul in its attempt to separate from Brazil. He commanded a ship named \textit{Mazzini} and carried out missions “for the ideal of freedom and independence.”\textsuperscript{181} He also assisted in circulating the ideas of Young Italy.\textsuperscript{182} Cuneo was also in Rio at the time, and he worked on a newspaper entitled \textit{La Giovine Italia}, like the magazine published by Mazzini in Marseille. Its manifesto proclaimed that “the era in which Italy shall rise up with terrifying threats against its tyrants” was near. The aim of the periodical was:

\begin{quote}
to spread our principles and to bring us Italians in America together, particularly those who reside in Brazil and the provinces of La Plata, so that Italy can receive as much assistance as possible from these countries, when it comes to the insurrection.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

Cuneo later went to Montevideo to establish an association there to foster Mazzini’s ideals, and Garibaldi was to follow in 1841. In Montevideo he raised an “Italian Legion” to fight in the Uruguayan Civil War. During the Great Siege of Montevideo he fought alongside the Colorados and the Argentine Unitarios (including Mitre) against the former Uruguayan president Manuel Oribe’s Blancos and Juan Manuel de Rosas’ Federales. He became famous for his raids which lessoned the effects of the blockades during the most difficult years of the siege.\textsuperscript{184} It was also in Uruguay that he and his troops came to wear their signature red shirts, which were originally

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 34-35.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 123.
intended for slaughterhouse workers in Buenos Aires. Stuck in a warehouse in Montevideo on account of the blockade, they were sold cheap to the government and transformed into military uniforms.

Garibaldi was quite famous by the time he decided to return to Italy in 1848. He would look back with nostalgia on his Montevidean adventures in an 1860 letter to Joaquín Suárez, president of Uruguay from 1842 to 1852. He recalls “the resolution of patriots determined to defend the liberty and independence of my second motherland, whatever the cost” and identifies the experience as formative:

I learned from your brave fellow citizens how to fight the enemy, how to endure suffering, and above all how to resist steadfastly in the defense of the sacred rights of peoples against the liberticidal arrogance of despot.

Garibaldi’s influence would not soon be forgotten by those involved in the fight against tyranny, and certainly not by Mitre, who considered him a true hero. In his article “Un episodio Troyano” Mitre paints a mythical portrait of Garibaldi based on his recollections of their first encounters. When he first caught a glimpse of the then thirty-six-year-old hero, Garibaldi was making a toast with various Italian exiles. As they sung the Hymn of Young Italy, Garibaldi chimed in “con voz dulce y vibrante, mientras comía con un pedazo de pan una salsa de ajos preparada á la genovesa, bebiendo un vaso de agua pura” [with a sweet and vibrant voice, while he ate with a piece of bread a garlic sauce prepared genovese style, drinking a glass of water]. On a

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185 Ibid., 124.
186 Ibid.
187 According to Adolfo Mitre, Garibaldi lived not far from Mitre’s residence in Puerta del Mercado during his time in Montevideo.
188 Mitre “Un episodio Troyano,” 184.
subsequent occasion, Mitre had a chance to speak with “that living enigma,” and recorded his impressions in his military diary, which was the basis for “Un episodio Troyano”:

Me penetré de que era un republicano apasionado, por convicción y temperamento. Bajo un exterior modesto y apacible, ocultaba un genio activo y una cabeza poblada de grandiosas sueños. Su sueño por entonces era desembarcar en las costas de la Calabria con su legión de voluntarios dando la señal de la resurrección italiana, y morir en la demanda si no alcanzaba á clavar la bandera de la redención en el Capitolio de Roma.189

[I realized that he was a passionate republican, both by conviction and temperament. Underneath a modest and gentle exterior, he hid an active character and a head filled with grandiose dreams. His dream at the time was to disembark on the coast of Calabria with his legion of volunteers, giving the signal for an Italian insurrection. He was determined to fasten the flag of redemption on the Capitol of Rome, or die trying.]

From that day forth, Mitre was convinced that Garibaldi would realize his dream of becoming the liberator of Italy. His “imperative” and “dogmatic” speech gave Mitre the impression “of a head and heart in disequilibrium, of a soul animated by a sacred fire with an inclination to greatness and sacrifice.”190 After listening to him expound passionately on his political theories, Mitre was thoroughly convinced that he was speaking with “a true hero in flesh and bone, a hero with sublime ideals.”191 Their conversation was interrupted by sudden shooting. As the drums beat and the cornets sounded the call to arms all along the lines, Garibaldi mounted a red horse with Brazilian trappings and galloped off in the fashion of a true hero, ordering his men to follow. He led troops into battle “con aquel irresistible magnetismo que tenía en sí y que era mayor en los momentos desesperados…” [with that irresistible magnetism that he had and that was strongest in the most

189 Ibid., 185-186.
190 Ibid., 186.
191 “La impresión que me dejó fue la de una cabeza y un corazón en desequilibrio, al alma animada al fuego sagrado con tendencia á la grandeza y al sacrificio, y la persuasión de que era un verdadero héroe en carne y hueso con un ideal sublime, con teorías de libertad exageradas y mal dirigidas y que tenía en sí mismo los elementos para ejecutar grandes cosas.” Mitre, “Un episodio Troyano,” 186.
desperate of moments].

Although at the time he had not yet adopted his trademark red shirt with which he would make “una aparición fantástica” [a fantastic apparition] at the Siege of Rome, his presence on the battlefield was nonetheless worthy of awe.

Mitre portrays Garibaldi as a larger-than-life leader, possessed of “embriaguez sagrada” [sacred intoxication]. On one occasion he witnessed him defy by the “tyrant Rosas” (who was blocking the port of Montevideo) by boat, and “both vessels and men seemed to obey his every will.”

Even in those early days in Montevideo, Garibaldi had already acquired “una fama novelesca.” But Mitre specifies that Garibaldi’s fame is not just on account of his courage, but because of his “elevación moral” [moral nobility]. Remembering the 17th of November 1843, he writes:

[I came across Colonel Garibaldi leaning with both arms on the parapet and with his gaze lost in the distance. He was contemplating the landscape or meditating, perhaps looking into the inner depths of his soul. I was only twenty-two at the time, and the personality of Garibaldi had a powerful effect on my imagination. I was mesmerized by the tales of his feats and by a sort of moral mystery that surrounded him.]

Even in the detailed physical description he paints of Garibaldi, Mitre cannot help but mention his moral beauty:

De tez blanca y color encendido por la sangre generosa, tenía en sí los elementos de la belleza y de la fuerza física, pero su belleza era más bien moral, como lo era

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192 Ibid., 185.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid., 184.
su poder de atracción respecto á las masas y el ascendiente de su valor firme y sereno en medio de los grandes peligros.\textsuperscript{195}

[Of a white complexion flushed with blood, he was both beautiful and physically strong. But his beauty was on account of his morality, as was the power he held over the masses and the influence of his firm and serene bravery in the middle of danger.]

Mitre attributes Garibaldi’s well-known capacity to command crowds, his bravery, and even his ability to stay calm to his strong moral character. Around the same time, a young Mitre (twenty-one years old) wrote in his “Diario de sus lecturas” that the ultimate goal of humanity is spiritual and moral perfection:

La perfección espiritual y moral es la aspiración más noble de corazón humano. Yo, que me debo a mí mismo todo, todo cuanto sé, creo sentirme con las fuerzas suficientes para emprender mi educación a los veintiún años de mi edad. El hombre que “quiere” ha hecho ya la mitad del camino con esto solo…\textsuperscript{196}

[Moral and spiritual perfection is the most noble aspiration of the human heart. I, who owe to myself all that I know, believe myself to be strong enough to start my education at this age of twenty-one. The man who “desires” has already traversed “la mitad del camino” with this alone…]

Is it merely a coincidence that he mentions spiritual and moral perfection and “la mitad del camino”?\textsuperscript{197} Especially given the fact that it was precisely around that time (the 1840s) that Mitre first read the \textit{Comedy} while in Montevideo?\textsuperscript{198} The young Mitre had two role models, both father figures who set a moral example. Garibaldi was Mitre’s military hero, who would go on to become, just as Mitre predicted, “el héroe de la Italia Libre” [the hero of Free Italy].\textsuperscript{199} Dante was his moral

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 187.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Mitre “Diario de sus lecturas”; Quoted in “Italia en el sentir y pensar de Mitre,” p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Mitre translates the first line of the \textit{Comedy} as “En medio del camino de la vida”, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{198} In “Teoría del Traductor,” the preface to his translation of the \textit{Divine Comedy}, Mitre explains his long-term fascination with the book.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Remembering one of their first encounters, Mitre writes: “Desde aquel día non dudé que Garibaldi sería con el tiempo el héroe de la Italia libre, y en la correspondencia que hemos mantenido en estos últimos tiempos, he tenido
\end{itemize}
literary hero, father of the Italian language and culture. Just as Garibaldi was the “Hero of Two Worlds,” Mitre envisioned Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as the epic of two worlds.

**Providential Role**

Following the defeat of Rosas in 1852 and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, Mitre and Garibaldi remained friends. Their epistolary correspondence is testimony to their mutual mission to bring unity, liberty, and democracy to the Old World and the New. On March 6, 1864, a then 57-year-old Garibaldi, writing from Caprera, affectionately calls Mitre his “hermano en la senda humanitaria” and asks him to join in the quest for terrestrial redemption. He implores Mitre’s allegiance, at least in spirit, in the struggle against Napoleon and despotism.

Hoy más que nunca es necesario entenderse; hoy que la clava del despotismo pesa también sobre ese nuevo hemisferio, hasta ahora asilo incontaminado de la libertad del mundo. Hace quince años que Napoleón entró en Roma y ya son frías las cenizas de aquella república. Dos años que puso su sacrílego pie sobre el suelo de la república mexicana y ya no saldrá sino pisoteando los últimos escombros. La república de San Salvador fue invadida por Carreras de Guatemala con el apoyo de Buonaparte, y no dudo, que entre sus planes liberticidas se halle la destrucción del sistema republicano aquí como allá…

[Now more than ever it is necessary to understand one another; today the cudgel of despotism is also aimed at the new hemisphere, which up till now has remained an uncontaminated sanctuary of world liberty. It’s been fifteen years since Napoleon entered Rome and already the ashes of that Republic are cold. Two years since his sacrilegious foot stepped over the border of the Mexican Republic, and he won’t settle till he’s trampled on its ruins. The Republic of San Salvador was invaded by Carreras of Guatemala, with the backing of Bonaparte, and I have no doubt that his plans to kill liberty include the destruction of the republican system, here just as there…]

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Napoleon is depicted by Garibaldi as a tyrant, whose “cudgel of despotism” must be combatted in the name of liberty. His reign, and particularly his presence in Rome, is downright sacrilegious. This sacrilegious rule is then contrasted with that of Garibaldi and Mitre, dual providential saviors of the old world and the new. It is not merely a battle for political supremacy, but a battle between good and evil on a universal scale: “usted capitanea el gobierno que puede ponerse al frente del principio del maléfico, que domina casi universalmente” [you are the head of a government that can oppose the principle of evil which dominates almost universally].

In the final lines of the letter he continues to speak of the necessary “fraternity” in the battle against tyranny and despotism. He lavishes praise on Mitre on account of his morality and encourages his engagement by emphasizing that it is his ethical duty to defend democracy:

SEA USTED EL ADALID DE LA CAUSA JUSTA, DE LA CAUSA DE DERECHO, DE LA CAUSA EN FIN DE LA DEMOCRACIA DEL MUNDO. Diga usted, en nombre de los generosos pueblos del Plata, que Buenos Aires es el centro de las aspiraciones del hombre que sufre sin distinción de casta y de color, y que de esas hermosas orillas resuene el grito de la fraternidad de las naciones, y la reprobación de los tiranos; y que no sólo el despotismo tiene un gobierno jefe, más que también lo tienen los hombres libres; entonces todos seremos soldados de este gobierno iniciador, y la democracia así organizada, y con su jefe reconocido puede ponerse en estado de guiar la humanidad á su destino de civilización y de progreso, de donde la desviaron los opresores de las naciones.

[BE THE CHAMPION OF THE JUST CAUSE, THE CAUSE OF RIGHT, OF THE CAUSE OF DEFENDING WORLD DEMOCRACY. Proclaim, in the name of the noble people of the Plata, that Buenos Aires is the center of the aspirations of men who suffer no discrimination, be it of class or color. Proclaim that throughout these lovely shores the cry of fraternity between nations and the defeat of tyrants resound. And that not only despotism has gained another governor in chief, but that free men have as well. Thus we will all be soldiers of this initiating government, and with democracy organized in this fashion, and its leader recognized, it may put itself in a position to guide humanity to its destiny of civilization and progress, where oppressors of nations shall be thrust aside.]

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201 Ibid.

202 Ibid., 319.
As we can see from his letter, Garibaldi views Buenos Aires a place where justice reigns supreme, a political utopia populated by noble citizens who enjoy equality. The leader of such a utopia (in this case Mitre, president at the time) will “guide humanity towards its destiny of civilization and progress.”

Mitre’s response is decisively less optimistic as regards the situation in Buenos Aires. Faced with the reality of governing, Mitre, it seems, had developed a more pragmatic vision of Argentina as a sparsely populated nation whose history amounted to a mere fifty years of discord. In his response to Garibaldi, he differentiates between underdeveloped Argentina and the great European powers such as England, France, and Italy:

Si la providencia me hubiera colocado al frente de un pueblo que dispusiera de los poderosos elementos de la Inglaterra ó de la Francia, ó de Italia después que usted la ha elevado al rango de las potencias de primer orden, habría sido para mí la mayor gloria haber podido ofrecer á usted todos los elementos para realizar sus grandes ideas, pero al frente de una república joven que apenas cuenta millón y medio de habitantes, que recién sale del caos, y en que luchando con dificultades internas y externas, vamos consiguiendo á fuerza de grandes trabajos consolidar su unión nacional y radicar en ella la verdadera democracia y la verdadera libertad, ¿qué puedo ofrecer á usted para sus grandes planes sino la admiración y la simpatía que le tributan todos los pueblos y todos los hombres libres de la tierra?203

[If providence had placed me at the head of a people who had at their disposal the powerful resources of England, France, or Italy (after you raised it to the ranks of a leading power), it would have been for me the greatest honor to offer you all the support necessary for you to achieve your great ideas. However, leading a young republic of a mere million and a half inhabitants, who have only recently emerged from chaos, and who, battling with internal and external difficulties, continue by means of great efforts to consolidate our national union and to establish true democracy and true liberty, what can I offer to you for your great plans, except the admiration and sympathy given you by all peoples and all free men of the world?]

Mitre would later use the same language to talk about the state of South American literature:

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La génesis de la literatura americana ha salido del caos: ha definido sus formas y va asumiendo rasgos originales, pero todavía no han aparecido en su firmamento los astros que deben iluminar sus horizontes.204

[The genesis of American literature has emerged from chaos: it has defined its forms and is in the process of acquiring original characteristics; but the stars that will illuminate its horizons have not yet appeared in its firmament.]

In Mitre’s opinion, both the nation and its literature were in its infancy. He saw his country as being in need of a cultural history to promote unity, stability, and morality. What Mitre sought was a foundational text that would foster unity and guide the spirit. The Divine Comedy, in my opinion, was an obvious choice for many reasons. Firstly, Italy (the country Mitre recognized as the cradle of civilization and after which he modeled his nation-building politics) upheld the Divine Comedy as a national Bible of sorts. The text could easily be adopted as part of the cultural heritage of Argentina, given that such a large percentage of the population was of Italian origin. Furthermore, the Divine Comedy is a fundamentally ethical and spiritual text, meant to serve as a moral compass for readers as they journey towards God. It is the quintessence of poetry as Mitre defines it:

La poesía es el puente misterioso que une al hombre físico con el hombre moral y que pone en contacto todas sus facultades.205

[Poetry is a mysterious bridge that unites physical man with moral man, and which puts him in contact with all his faculties.]

This quote is from the lengthy preface to his Rimas, written in 1854, wherein Mitre defends the practical and moral value of poetry. Poetry is the “divine art” that “puts man in relation with God and establishes between heaven and earth the golden chain that, according to the ancients, linked all creatures with their creator.”206 In his discussion of the moral function of poetry, Mitre

204 Letter to don Miguel M. Ruíz, March 26, 1887, Corres. Lit. III, 178.

205 Rimas, Preface, XVII.

206 Rimas, Preface, XVII-XVIII.
specifically mentions the example set by Dante, Homer, Horace, Schiller, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Lamartine, whose important works of poetry shape the conscience of a better world.

Mitre too had tried his hand at the noble vocation of poet. The few poems that he wrote in his twenties were mainly anti-Rosas propaganda geared towards renewing the spirit of nationalism. Filled with rhetorical flourishes, his poems tend to focus on freedom from oppression. Myra Cadwalder Hole, in her book entitled *Bartolomé Mitre: A Poet in Action*, depicts Mitre as “an evangelist of patriotism” who used his verse to drive the political movements of the time. One need look no further than the titles (“Hymn to the Martyrs of Liberty,” “The Veteran,” “The Defeat at Quebracho,” “A Call to Arms,”) to get an idea of their patriotic content. Among his many odes to Argentine war heroes who struggled for national development is “Hymn to the Martyrs of Liberty,” written in 1839 when he was merely eighteen. The poem ends with the exclamatory verses “La aurora de Dios brilla!/ Tiranos, de rodilla! Naciones, levantad.” In the same year (1839), in the pages of his military diary, Mitre wrote the poem “José Campon,” which begins by naming Argentina’s tyrant directly:

Cuando las huestes de Rosas
Pisaron de Oriente al suelo
Al toque de la corneta
Seis mil bravos acudieron:
A su cabeza se vió
Al héroe antiguo de Haedo,
Acaudillando los bravos
Que de la patria en el seno

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208 1838 Hymn to the Martyrs of Liberty; 1838 The Veteran; 1839 José Campón; 1839 The Bell; 1840 The Defeat at Quebracho; 1840 The Death of Zacarias Alvarez; 1840 The Cosair; 1841 Satire to Sandoval; 1841 A Call to Arms; 1844 To the Sun of the 25th of May, 1844; 1848 Invocation; 1849 The September Prayer; 1849 To America; 1849 To the Martyrs of Independence; 1850 To the Condor of Chile; 1852 Hymn to the 25th of May.


210 Later published in *Rimas*. 

101
Heróicos se levantaron
En sostén de sus derechos.\footnote{Ibid., 51.}

In these and other verses, the key words are “derechos,” “patriotismo,” “pabellones,” “libertad,” “gloria,” “guerreros,” “espada,” and “patria.” Certainly not innovative from a stylistic or thematic point of view, these poems reiterate the political credo of the 1837 Generation. For example, his 1840 poem “El Corsario,” which was published in a Unitarian newspaper in Montevideo:

\begin{quote}
Mi divisa es:--“Valor é Independencia.”
Mi ley:--“Aborrecer al opresor.”
Mi religión:--“La libertad del mundo.”
Mi patria:--“El continente de Colon.”\footnote{Ibid., 39.}
\end{quote}

Perhaps his most important poem from this point of view is “Al Sol del 25 de Mayo de 1844,” which celebrates the anniversary of Argentine Independence on May 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1844.\footnote{Compare to Echeverría’s 1841 poem, “El 25 de Mayo,” in Poesías varias, Obras completas III pp. 365-391.} Mitre describes how the flame of revolution was divinely kindled and subsequently formulated into words by the burning lips of Mariano Moreno. What began as an idea was quickly converted to action:

\begin{quote}
Esta palabra el entusiasmo inflama,
Prende en los corazones noble llama,
Que como chispa eléctrica cundió:
Y cual hiere entre escolllos la marea,
Hirvió entre las cabezas una idea
Que dio vida á la gran revolución.\footnote{Ibid., 23.}
\end{quote}

Although here Mitre refers to the May Revolution that lead to Argentine Independence from Spain, the main focus of the poem is the lamentable and barbaric state of affairs brought about by Rosas’ tyranny: “Los principios de Mayo conculdados,/ Los derechos del hombre...”\footnote{Ibid., 23.}
pisoteados.” The current state of Argentina is described as “anarchy” and as an “inferno” due to the lack of unity.\textsuperscript{215} Barbarism reigns as the \textit{mazorca}\textsuperscript{216} terrorize the countryside: “La mesnada de torpes asesinos/ Que deshonran el nombre de Argentinos.” But despite the bitter lament of the “bárbaras cadenas” imposed by Rosas, the poem remains idealistic. Argentines can count on imminent liberation because God is on the side of the revolutionaries whose movement is “founded in justice.”\textsuperscript{217} Mitre even likens the Argentines to “the chosen people of Jehovah” and uses the adjective “sacred” to describe the flag. The young men who will lose their blood in combat against tyranny are said to be “martyrs of a universal cause.”\textsuperscript{218} Four of his stanzas begin with a benediction of war heroes (\textit{Benditos seais…}), the third of which prophesies their eventual triumph over Rosas:

\begin{quote}
   Benditos seais, para rasgar el pecho  
   Del torpe Rosas, con robusta mano,  
   Y dar al pueblo en que nació Belgrano  
   De libertad y gloria la señal.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

Their victory will benefit not only Argentina, but all of humanity. The realization of the “golden utopias” of the poet and the “ideal del genio pensador” is “universal justice.”\textsuperscript{220}

Following the section in \textit{Rimas} on patriotic poems is a section entitled, “Armonías de la Pampa.” In poems such as “Á un ombú in medio de la pampa,” “Á Santos Vega payador Argentino,” and “El caballo del gaucho,” Mitre waxes poetic on regional features of Argentina.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[215] Ibid., 27.
\item[216] Supporters of Rosas.
\item[217] Ibid.
\item[218] Ibid., 30.
\item[219] Ibid., 33.
\item[220] Ibid., 35.
\end{footnotes}
Unlike Hernández, however, he refrains from colloquialisms. What is interesting is the presence of the ombú tree in the poetry of both men as a symbolic marker of the frontier between civilization and barbarism. The ombú, a massive evergreen, is the only representative of tree-vegetation native to the pampa. It tends to grow in the humid pampa, as opposed to the dry and less-inhabitable pampa where the harshness of the climate makes life more challenging. In Echeverría’s *La cautiva*, the tree marks the space between civilization and barbarism. It provides shelter, and at the end of the poem shades the grave of Maria which is marked by a solitary cross. Echeverría thus combines the symbol of the pampas with that of Christianity.

Luis L. Dominguez, a friend of Mitre’s and fellow politician, wrote a poem about the ombú in 1837 for which he won a literary contest in 1843. After the battle of Pavón, he became Mitre’s secretary, and would later be appointed finance minister by Sarmiento. Dominguez’s poem is a clear attempt to secure the ombú’s status as an Argentine national symbol:

\[
\text{Cada comarca en la Tierra}
\text{tiene un rasgo prominente}
\text{el Brasil, su sol ardiente;}
\text{minas de plata, el Perú;}
\text{Montevideo, su cerro;}
\text{Buenos Aires –patria hermosa–,}
\text{tiene su pampa grandiosa;}
\text{la pampa tiene el ombú.}
\]

At the beginning of the poem, Dominguez focuses on the flora and fauna on the pampas, and emphasizes the ombú’s mysterious origin:

\[
\text{¡El ombú! Ninguno sabe}
\text{en qué tiempo ni qué mano}
\text{en el centro de aquel llano}
\text{su semilla derramó.}
\]

---

The primary characteristic of the ombú is its resilience, and so too the resilience of all the inhabitants of the pampas.

Mas su tronco tan ñudoso,
su corteza tan roída
bien indican que su vida
cien inviernos resistió.

...esa pampa, misteriosa
todavía para el hombre,
que a una raza da su nombre
que nadie pudo domar.

As in Echeverría, the ombú grows on the edge of civilization and barbarism.

Desde esa turba salvaje
que en las llanuras se oculta
hasta la porción más culta
de la humana sociedad,
como un linde está la pampa
sus dominios dividiendo
que va el bárbaro cediendo
palmo a palmo la ciudad.

Dominguez personifies the tree, portraying it as the silent and loyal guardian of Argentina’s history.

¡Cuánta escena vio en silencio!
¡Cuántas voces ha escuchado
que en sus hojas ha guardado
con eterna lealtad!

He describes how the tree has witnessed the independence of the nation and caudillos battling Indians. It has provided shade to gauchos, payadors, landowners, and is the burial site of many Argentines who lost their lives on the pampas. Perhaps the strongest image in the poem is the closing stanza which describes the gaucho returning to the pampa after an absence.

Y si en pos de amarga ausencia
vuelve el gaucho a su partido,
echa penas al olvido
cuando alcanza a divisar
el ombú, solemne, aislado,
de gallarda, hermosa planta,
que a las nubes se levanta
como faro de aquel mar.

Mitre too would take up the topic of the ombú in 1843. His poem retains the association already established by Echeverría and Dominguez of the ombú as signifier of the edge of civilization.

Aquí estás, ombú gigante
A la orilla del camino,
Indicando al peregrino
No siga más adelante
En la llanura sin fin.
Tú señalas las barreras
Que dividen el desierto,
y oyes el vago concierto
Que alzan las auras ligeras
De la pampa en el confín.

Also as in Dominguez, the ombú is the grave messenger of the history of the pampas. He emphasizes the ombú’s eternal nature, as symbol of past, present, and future of the nation:

Con el pasado a tu espalda
Y a tu frente el porvenir.
…
Estás contando al viajero
Memorias de hoy y de ayer.
…
Lo que es y lo que será.

What is different in Mitre’s poem, is that he emphasizes the progress of the nation that the ombú witnesses. The first sign of the civilization of the area is the development of the houses.

Miras la pobre cabaña,
Que en palacio se transforma,
Y que al tomar nueva forma,
Con nuevas luces se baña
Su contorno natural.
Secondly the ombú witness as the Indians are exterminated (teatro de exterminio), and the Christians settle the pampa and transform the landscape. In the future, the ombú, “today king of the prairie,” will die and become discolored and be replaced by trees associated with civilization.

Y en su lugar la corona
Verás alzarse del pino,
Que unido al hierro y al lino
Sirve al hombre en toda zona
Para dar al mundo ley.

This process is civilization: “para dar al mundo ley.” Unlike the other trees planted by the settlers, the ombú has no practical purpose other than to serve as a messenger of life:

Ese destino te espera,
Árbol, cuya vista asombra,
Sin dar al rancho madera,
Ni al fuego una astilla dar;
Recorrerás el desierto
Cual mensajero de vida,
Y, tu misión concluída,
Caerás cual cadáver yerto
Bajo el pino secular.

The final message then of the poem is that the pine, symbol of civilization, will triumph in the end over the ombú, symbol of the edge of civilization. While Domínguez’s poem is a celebration of the life and death on the pampa that takes place beneath the ombú’s shade, Mitre’s poem is a moment of reverence for the death of a tree, associated with Argentina’s uncivilized past, which will soon be replaced by progress and modernization.

The ombú also figures in *Martín Fierro*. When Fierro kills an Indian in order to save a captive woman, he must flee with her through the desert which is risky both because of the hard conditions and the fact that it offers no place to hide from pursuers.

642
Es un peligro muy serio
cruzar juyendo el desierto:
muchísimos de hambre han muerto,
After a perilous and miserable journey, Fierro spots an ombú which marks the end of the uninhabitable desert.

650
Después de mucho sufrir
tan peligrosa inquietú,
alcanzamos con salú
a divisar una sierra,
y al fin pisamos la tierra
en donde crece el ombú.

Upon seeing the ombú he remembers his deceased friend Cruz and is overcome by emotion. He kisses the ground, thankful for his salvation. The ombú, then, is associated with memory and refuge. After his return to civilization, Fierro discovers that the government is no longer in pursuit of him. At the end of the poem, there seems to be some hope of Fierro’s integration into society.

Although the poetics and political vision of Mitre and Hernández were in opposition, both men had chosen the ombú as a symbol of the central conflict of Argentine literature and history: civilization vs. barbarism. While in Mitre civilization and progress are undoubtedly positive and necessary, in Hernández it comes with a price.

But apart from his prolific twenties, Mitre did not write much poetry. As he explains in the preface to Rimas, he quickly gave up on his dreams of laurels:

Hubo un tiempo en que fuí poeta por vocación, como Vd. [Sarmiento] me ha llamado en sus Viajes, y cuando me acuerdo de esto, me digo á mí mismo, penetrado de una profunda melancolía: Y yo también viví en Arcadia! Las poesías que va á leer, fueron escritas casi todas ellas á la edad de veinte años. Entonces soñaba con la inmortalidad, y los laureles de Homero me quitaban el sueño. Pronto comprendí que ni podía aspirar á vivir en la memoria de mas de una generación como poeta, ni nuestra sociedad estaba bastante madura para producir un poeta laureado.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{222}Preface to Rimas, LIV-LV.
[There was a time that I was a poet by vocation, like you [Sarmiento] called me in your *Voyages*. When I think back on this, I say to myself, overcome with a profound melancholy: *And I too lived in Arcadia!* The poems you are going to read were nearly all written when I was twenty years old. At the time I dreamed of immortality, and the laurels of Homer cost me sleep. Soon I understood that I could not aspire to live in the memory of more than one generation as a poet, and that our society was not mature enough to produce a laureled poet.]

His use of the phrase *Y yo también vivi en Arcadia!,* from Latin *Et in Arcadia ego,* is noteworthy, as it was the beginning of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* [Italian Journey] (1816-17): “Auch ich in Arkadien.” For Goethe, Italy was the cradle of civilization and classical culture, and Rome “the First City of the World.” The grand tour to Italy was a tradition among upper-class European men of his time who desired to come in contact with the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. In Goethe’s case, the trip had a significant impact on his aesthetic and philosophical development. The Latin phrase is usually imagined as being spoken by Death, which suggests that every paradise is afflicted by mortality, and Mitre uses the phrase to refer to the fleeting duration of his dreams of poetic glory. Realizing that he could not live in the memory of more than one generation as a poet, and that Argentine society was not mature enough to produce a poet of any import, he turned to translation, and specifically the translation of classics. In addition to Dante, he translated poems by Hugo, Byron, and Schiller. The desire to link Argentina to an illustrious European civilization was also clearly what eventually led him to Dante. As Giuseppe Bellini points out, one of Mitre’s primary goals in translating the *Comedy* was to fill a void of centuries in Argentine intellectual history.

Se l’esistenza letteraria dell’Argentina iniziava, in sostanza, con l’Indipendenza, mancavano *radici e fondamento nel passato,* come invece potevano vantare il Messico e il Perù, centri di grande civiltà precolombiana e poi coloniale. La *Divina Commedia* finiva per costituire, quindi, non solo un aggancio concreto alla civiltà europea illustra, legame sempre ostinatamente perseguito in seguito dall’intellectualità argentina, ma un fondamento solido di civiltà, a partire dal quale, *superando coscientemente un vuoto di secoli,* poteva legittimamente proiettarsi

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nel mondo la nascente cultura del grande paese, in cerca di identità e di affermazione. Dante, quindi, con il suo poema, veniva legittimato da Mitre, attraverso la sua traduzione, introdotto a pieno titolo nella storia culturale del paese.

[If Argentine literature began essentially with the Independence, it lacked roots and foundation in the past, such as enjoyed by Mexico and Peru, great centers of pre-Colombian and then colonial civilization. The *Divine Comedy* was to constitute, therefore, not only a concrete link to illustrious European civilization (a link thereafter always obstinately pursued by the Argentine intellectual elite), but also a solid foundation of civilization/culture. From this foundation, overcoming consciously a void of centuries, the nascent culture of the country in search of identity and affirmation could legitimately launch itself in the world. Dante, then, was legitimized by Mitre, vis-à-vis his translation, and fully inserted into the cultural history of the country.]

In Bellini’s opinion, Dante is something of a launching pad for Argentine cultural identity.

In addition to linking Argentina with an illustrious European civilization, Mitre set out to write the history of Argentina. His *Historia de Belgrano* (1858–59) and the *Historia de San Martín* (1887–88) are the fruit of his endeavor to canonize two national heroes, and the writing of these important works coincides with his translation of the *Divine Comedy*. Mitre began his work as a historiographer as early as 1857 when he was invited to contribute a life of Manuel Belgrano to a collection of lives of famous Argentines. His biography soon grew lengthy (the longest in the collection), and he was forced to shorten up the end of Belgrano’s life to avoid further exceeding the allotted page number. Subsequently, he was able to expand and develop his research to write his book, *Historia de Belgrano y de la Independencia Argentina* (*History of Belgrano and of the Independence of Argentina*). As the title indicates, the work is just as much a history of the Argentine Independence as it is the story of Manuel Belgrano, one of the first leaders in the Argentine revolt against the Spanish Viceroy. A national hero, he was also one of the members of the first governing council formed after Independence and the creator of the Argentine flag.

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Because Belgrano was born in Buenos Aires, Mitre’s linking the success in the War of Independence to his figure was also a way of glorifying his own province.

Mitre describes Belgrano as a modest hero, “who does not dazzle like a meteor, but who shines like a peaceful star on the horizon of the fatherland.”\textsuperscript{225} His aim in writing this important book about Argentine history was to counter the factionalism rampant at the time by awakening “the feeling of Argentine nationality, then dampened by the division of the peoples.”\textsuperscript{226} He also hoped it would help Argentina’s newer citizens, the immigrants, assimilate into the culture by inspiring a sense of pride in the national history.\textsuperscript{227}

Belgrano was, like Garibaldi, a hero and role model for Mitre. One of the aspects for which Mitre admired Belgrano was his understanding of the importance of cultivating a common ideology based on moral values to create unity. In the \textit{Historia de San Martín} he relates that Belgrano taught a “great truth” to San Martín:

\begin{quote}
La guerra no sólo ha de hacerse con las armas, sino con la opinión, apoyada en las virtudes morales.\textsuperscript{228}
\end{quote}

[War is not to be fought with weapons alone, but also with opinion supported by moral virtues.]

These are the words of Belgrano, quoted from a letter to San Martín in which he criticizes his disciplinary system and offers his friend what Mitre calls “patrióticos consejos dignos de consignarse en las páginas de la historia” [patriotic advice worthy of being recorded in the pages

\textsuperscript{225} \textit{Historia de Belgrano y de la Independencia Argentina}. Cuarta y definitiva edición, P. Mouillot, Paris, 1887, vol 3, 584; Cf. Hole, 126).


\textsuperscript{227} “Speech to the Argentine Senate, September 23 and 24, 1870,” \textit{Arengas parlamentarias}, pp. 211-23.

\textsuperscript{228} Letter from Belgrano to San Martín (M.S. Pap. de San Martín), quoted by Mitre in \textit{San Martín}, Vol. 1, 258.
of history]. Mitre reinforces the importance of the idea in the following pages, calling Belgrano “un patriota y un político que perseguía un propósito, al poner en juego los resortes morales que mueven al hombre al sacrificio.” Belgrano, he underscores was the inventor of the Argentine flag as a symbol of independence, and the man who taught San Martín “que la guerra no sólo había de hacerse con las armas, sino también con las fuerzas morales” [that war must be fought not only with weapons but also with moral force]. To further drive home this idea, Mitre once again quotes this line of Belgrano as the opening of the next section (IV):

La guerra no sólo ha de hacerse con las armas, sino también con la opinión,” decía Belgrano á San Martín, en momentos en que esta gran verdad se comprobaba por hechos memorables, que eran la consecuencia de la fiel observancia de esa máxima.”230

[War is not to be fought only with weapons, but also with opinion,” said Belgrano to San Martín in moments when this great truth was verified by memorable events that were the consequence of the faithful observance of his maxim.]

Mitre had clearly taken the maxim to heart. It may even be in imitation of Belgrano that he decided to dedicate himself to the arduous task of translation in addition to all his military and political duties. Belgrano, Mitre notes, was busy translating George Washington’s Farewell Address on the eve of the battle of Salta:

Belgrano aprovechaba los momentos de descanso para cultivar su inteligencia, y fortalecer su conciencia por la meditación de los escritos de los grandes hombres con que se honra la humanidad. Entre éstos, era Jorge Washington el objetivo de su particular admiración: así es que, en los pocos días que permaneció el ejército patriota detenido en la margen izquierda del Pasaje, acabó de perfeccionar una traducción de la Despedida que aquel inmortal republicano había dirigido al pueblo de los Estados Unidos al tiempo de separarse de los negocios públicos.231

229 San Martín, Vol. 1, 258.


231 Bartolomé Mitre, Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina, Vol. 2. (Buenos Aires: Felix Lajouane, 1887), 152.
Belgrano took advantage of moments of leisure to cultivate his intelligence and strengthen his conscious for meditating on the writings of the great men who have honored humanity. Among these, it was George Washington who most attracted his admiration: for this reason, in the few days that the army was detained to the left of the Passage, he finished perfecting a translation of the Farewell Address which that immortal republican addressed to the people of the United States and the time he separated himself from public business.]

This book, which accompanied him on all his campaigns, was Belgrano’s “libro de cabecera” [guiding book]. Belgrano greatly admired Washington whom he calls “an example of moderation and true patriotism.” Like Mitre, alleged to have translated during down time on his military campaigns, Belgrano considered the translation of utmost importance for diffusing the ideas related to patriotism and progress. In the introduction to the Farewell address he explains his motives from taking time away from his other important occupations to dedicate to the translation:

El ardiente deseo que tengo de que mis conciudadanos se apoderen de las verdaderas ideas que deben abrigar si aman la patria y si desean su prosperidad bajo bases sólidas y permanentes me ha empeñado a emprender esta traducción en medio de mis graves ocupaciones.”

[The burning desire that I have for my fellow citizens to uphold the true ideas that they must protect if they love the patria and desire its prosperity under solid and permanent foundations led me to undertake this translation in the midst of my grave occupations.]

In addition to Washington’s Farewell address, he also translated two books from French on economic topics: Máximas generales del gobierno de un reyno agricultor by François Quesnay (1794), and Principios de la Ciencia Económico-Política (1796), by various authors. At the Museo

232 Ibid.

233 Antonio Zinny, Bibliografía Historica de las provincias unidas del Rio de la Plata desde el año 1780 hasta el de 1821. (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Americana, 1875), 88.

234 Ibid.
Mitre there is also a manuscript of his last translation from 1814 which was never published: *Bosquejo de Constitución* (1814) by Benjamin Constant.

Mitre’s second history is the biography of another one of his personal heroes, José de San Martín. In *San Martin and the South American Emancipation*, rather than focus on Argentina alone, Mitre examines the South American Emancipation as a whole led by the Argentine example.

In the first pages, he defines the work as follows:

> Es en el orden nacional y de un punto de vista restringido, el desarrollo militar y político de la revolución argentina que toma la ofensiva y la exterioriza, propagando su acción y sus principios; y en el orden internacional es la gestación de nuevas naciones independientes y soberanas que nacen bajo esos auspicios con formas y tendencias democráticas á imagen y semejanza suya.235

>[It is on a national level and from a limited point of view, the military and political development of the Argentine revolution which took the offensive and showed the way, spreading its action and principles. On an international level, it is the gestation of new independent and sovereign nations born under the auspices of democratic forms and tendencies in its image and likeness.]

San Martín is an Argentine hero on an international level, who completes the “trilogy of great republican liberators of the New World,” along with Washington and Bolívar.236 Mitre highlights his role in momentarily uniting the revolutionary armies of South America (which led to the eventual victory), and describes their coming together as “having the precision of a mechanical solution, and the ideal unity of a poem.”237 He glorifies the revolution, but only in as much as it was a necessary process for the current stage of development. In the intro to the work, he explains that revolutions are a necessary disintegration and reassembling of the elements that permit a period of growth and nation building.

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In addition to heroicizing San Martín, whom he portrays as a patriarch figure, there are a number of episodes in *San Martin and the South American Emancipation* which are indicative of Mitre’s intent to inspire unity and patriotism in the whole population, and to incorporate all ethnicities into the fabric of Argentine identity. I would like to briefly discuss two such episodes, the first of which is the story of a brave negro soldier, Falucho, who lost his life on account of his unyielding patriotism during the Peruvian War of Independence. In 1824 in the Peruvian port of Callao, Peruvian patriots, as well as Argentines and Chileans, were fighting against royalist regiments for independence. An uprising occurred amongst the patriot soldiers who had not been paid for their service. According to Mitre, Falucho was the sentinel on duty in the Real Felipe tower during the uprising. Mitre describes him as a brave solider, well known for his patriotic zeal and his enthusiasm for Buenos Aires. During the night the rebel soldiers raised the Spanish flag over the tower that Falucho watched over. When the sun rose, Falucho refused to honor the flag against which he had always fought. His patriotism cost him his life:

Un negro, soldado del regimiento Río de la Plata, nacido en Buenos Aires, llamado Antonio Ruiz (por sobrenombre Falucho), que se resistió á hacerle los honores, fué fusilado al pie de la bandera española. Murió gritando: ¡Viva Buenos Aires!  

The story of Falucho was first published on the 14th of May, 1857 in the newspaper *Los Debates* as an "homage to the modest and courageous heroes who were obscure collaborators in the independence movement." It was republished in *La Nación* on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th of April, 1857.

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238 *Historia de San Martín*, 70.

1875. In time, the episode attracted a number of critics and dissenters who questioned the existence of a man named Falucho in this regiment. As a result, when Mitre included the episode in the Historia de San Martín published in 1887, he added a long footnote detailing his supposed sources. He counters those who claim that a man named Falucho wasn’t in this regiment by suggesting that this nickname was used to refer to “los héroes desconocidos de esta valiente raza, que formó el núcleo de la infantería en las guerras de la independencia” [the unknown heroes of this valient race who formed the nucleus of the infantry in the wars of independence]. He also omitted some of the more opinionated patriotic details which appeared in the first versions, such as the sentence “¡Feliz el pueblo que tales sentimientos puede inspirar al corazón de un soldado tosco y oscuro!” [Happy the nation that can inspire such sentiments in the heart of a crude and dark soldier].

Although Mitre claims that all the details and words of his story are “rigurosamente históricos,” historians have continued to call into doubt this statement. A polemic regarding the existence of Falucho began in the 1920s. Mitre had long since been “the” authority in Argentine history: he set the basic plot, and other historians would amplify his research, following his lead. But in the 1920s, and even more so in the 1930s, nationalist historians (known as revisionistas)

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240 When Mitre included the episode in the Historia de San Martín published in 1887, he added a long footnote detailing his supposed sources: “Algunos han puesto en duda la muerte de Falucho en esta ocasión, y otros han llegado hasta negar su existencia, aunque no públicamente, por no tener pruebas en qué apoyarse. La existencia y la muerte del negro Falucho, está comprobada: 1. Por el testimonio verbal del general E. Martínez, que mandaba la división de los Andes, quien nos lo dio en Montevideo en 1839, juntamente con una copia manuscrita de su “Exposición”, cit. 2. Por el testimonio escrito de los coroneles Pedro José Díaz (á cuyo cuerpo pertenecía Falucho) y Pedro Luna, en Buenos Aires en 1856, ambos oficiales de la división de los Andes al tiempo de la sublevación del Callao. 3. Por el testimonio escrito del coronel Juan Espinosa (natural de la Rep. Del Uruguay), que pertenecía á la división de los Andes, y tomó además informes directos del coronel Casariego, que se hallaba en Lima, cuando aquel publicó su libro titulado “La herencia española”, en que se registra un episodio histórico sobre la sublevación… Historia de San Martín, 70.

241 Ibid., 70-71.

242 Falucho y el sorteo de Matucana. Episodios de la Revolución, 31.
started to challenge his version of history, criticizing his decisions as a politician. Revisionist historians saw Mitre as oligarchic and anti-popular and felt that history needed to be reevaluated. His account of Falucho was one of the elements in his history under fire. In 1925 an article in the journal *El Hogar* entitled “El negro Falucho no existió jamás” was published. In another article of the same vein entitled “El invento de Mitre,” the journalist Pedro Olgo Ochoa writes:

Falucho en realidad, nunca existió. Lo más probable es que Mitre, liberando su vena romántica, haya querido plasmar en un solo Falucho, al heroísmo de esa valiente raza.  

[In reality, Falucho never existed. Most probably Mitre, giving his romantic vein free reign, desired to capture in the figure of Falucho the heroism of his valient race.]

The degree to which Mitre’s Falucho account is historically accurate remains debatable. What can be said, is that Mitre included the story in order to represent emergent nationalism in Argentina, and to create patriotism among a population comprised of many different minorities. The story had a lasting effect. Rafael Obligado wrote a poem in honor of the hero in 1882, and on the 17th of May 1897, a bronze statue was erected in Falucho’s honor in Plaza San Martín, later to be moved to the small plaza named for the hero in the neighborhood of Palermo.

Another story in the *Historia de San Martín* that serves a similar purpose is that of Sergeant Cabral. Juan Bautista Cabral was an Argentine solider who died as a consequence of aiding San Martín when his horse fell, trapping him underneath, during the Battle of San Lorenzo. As the royalists approached, Cabral dismounted to help San Martín. The extent of Cabral’s intervention is not known, but he lost his life saving San Martín. In Mitre’s version he frees San Martín from under his horse with herculean effort and in the process receives two fatal bayonet wounds. What is interesting about Mitre’s version of the story is that in addition to making him a national hero,

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he specifies that Cabral was a “héroe de última fila.” This is contrary to what Pastor Obligado reports in *Tradiciones*: that Cabral was promoted to corporal in 1812 and sergeant in 1813. It is possible that Mitre manipulated this detail of the story to make an ordinary soldier into a hero. He relates that the patriotic Cabral cried out as he receives his fatal wounds, “¡Muero contento! ¡Hemos batido al enemigo!” [I die content! We defeated the enemy!].

He also says that following his death, when a sergeant said his name aloud, the other soldiers responded, “¡Murió por la Patria!” [He died for the Patria!], and that a portrait of Cabral depicting him in the act of saving San Martín was for a time conserved in el Regimiento, but was then lost during the uprising of Callao, and that a bronze statue of the hero by the sculptor Romairone was erected in 1882 and was cast in the Parque de Artillería de Buenos Aires.

Both characters appear in *San Martín y la historia de la emancipación americana*, which stresses Argentine unity and epic values such as honor, bravery, and sacrifice. Both Falucho (a porteño blackman) and Cabral (mestizo or zambo from Corrientes) represent the participation of the common folk in what Mitre conceived as the epic of the Argentine people. In the case of Falucho, since the black population strongly identified with Rosas federalist government, the inclusion of a negro hero was a way of communicating that people of this race were also an integral part of “the new Argentina.” In Mitre’s version, Falucho was a faithful supporter not only of Argentina, but in particular of Buenos Aires. Cabral and “granadero Baigorria” (the other soldier that helped San Martín when his horse fell), on the other hand, represent their respective provinces (Cabral from Corrientes and Baigorria from San Luis), creating a general feeling of Independence as a united national effort.

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244 *San Martín*, Vol. I, 179.

245 Ibid., 180.
Both episodes contrast with Hernández’s *Martín Fierro*, where both Fierro (a gaucho) and the black man whom he murders feel like mistreated misfits in Argentine society. During the famous *payada* between Fierro and el Moreno, el Moreno laments the inequality in the application of the law, which is made for all but only applies to the poor: “La ley se hace para todos, mas sólo al pobre le rige” (4333–4). He compares it to a spider’s web that only catches tiny animals, to a knife that doesn’t offend the one who handles it, and finally to a sword which cuts whoever is underneath:

Le suelen llamar espada.
Y el nombre le viene bien:
Los que la gobiernan ven
A dónde han de dar el tajo:
Le caí al que se halla abajo
Y corta sin ver a quién.

Although both the gauchos and the negroes had played a major role in the country’s independence from Spain, and had fought in the civil wars in Argentina, Hernández shows that they were in turn exploited and denied a proper place in society, which ultimately lead them to a loss of identity and lack of patriotism. As Picardia explains in *La vuelta*, there is no cause for patriotism among them.

“la Provincia es una madre/ que no cuida a sus hijos”
“que no tiene patriotismo/ quien no cuida al compatriota”
“el gaucho no es argentino/ sino pa hacerlo matar”

Here we can see for Picardia, government which is something which should be on a provincial rather than on a national level, and he insists that the gaucho is not “argentino.” It is the province and not the nation that is responsible for “taking care of its sons.” While Hernández’s *Martín Fierro* suggests lack of patriotism among minority groups who experience a rampant injustice, Mitre’s histories present minority groups (Falucho) and soliders from the provinces (Cabral and Baigorria) as having a strong sense of belonging to the Patria.
San Martin and the South American Emancipation was published in 1887, the same year that his fourth and definitive edition of the History of Belgrano was published. Simultaneously, he was translating the Comedy, the first installments of which, he published in 1889. Today in Argentina Mitre is remembered much more as a historian than he is as a poet or translator. Although Mitre’s translation of the Divine Comedy did not win a place in the hearts of everyday Argentines as did Martín Fierro, its relevance was certainly felt among the elite. As Alejandro Patat explains:

la Comedia de Dante quedó ligada en la Argentina a la ideología cultural de la élite. Por ello no sorprende que la manipulación de la Comedia haya tenido en Ocampo y en Borges una continuidad mayúscula. Y tampoco debe sorprender que ese mismo texto haya servido de base para la sátira desacralizadora de esa misma élite por parte de Marechal. La posición de los intelectuales argentinos frente a Dante puede estudiarse como una clave de su modo de insertarse en la historia literaria (o más bien cultural) de la Nación.246

[Dante’s Comedy in Argentina remained bound to the cultural ideology of the elite. For this reason the continuity of the manipulations of the Comedy by Ocampo and Borges is not surprising. Furthermore, it is not surprising that this same text served as the basis for Marechal’s desacralizing satire of this very elite. The position of Argentine intellectuals in regards to Dante can be studied as a key to their way of inserting themselves into the literary history (or more precisely the cultural history) of the Nation.]

A consequence of Mitre’s translation was that Argentine intellectuals considered Dante and important literary reference. His presence is pervasive in the pages of Argentina’s most prized authors. The following chapter will examine some literary appropriations of Dante by two of Argentina’s intellectual powerhouses: Leopoldo Lugones and Jorge Luis Borges.

Figure 1

Mitre’s signature (B. Mitre) underneath the poem “A la Joven Italia,” published in El Nacional the 30th of November, 1838.
Figure 2

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Chapter 2

Rewriting Francesca: Leopoldo Lugones and Jorge Luis Borges

This chapter examines rewritings of the story of Francesca by Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). I will begin by explaining how great influxes of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in a rapidly-changing demographic that made defining what it meant to be Argentine all the more imperative for Argentine authors. I will then examine growing sentiments of xenophobia and nostalgia for the past among the creole population. Leopoldo Lugones was one such nativist who advanced nationalistic arguments in a series of lectures later published as *El payador* (1916), arguments which contributed to the mythologization of the gaucho and the idea that *Martín Fierro* was the epic of the Argentine people. Although in *El payador* Lugones advocates for local themes, his short story “Francesca,” written previously and published in 1909, is highly Euro-centric. I argue that Borges, realizing this contradiction and at odds with Lugones’s thesis in *El payador*, set out to write a nativist version of the story that takes place on the pampas. His short story “The Intruder” simultaneously subverts Dante’s Vth Canto and Lugones’s adaptation. In the latter half of this chapter I also discuss how his short story “The Aleph” parodies what he perceived as pedantism in the poetry of Lugones. On two separate occasions then, Borges uses Dante to parody his influential antecedent.

First, in order to understand Lugones’s xenophobia and nativist position with regards to Argentine literature, let us discuss how immigration had changed the face of Argentine society. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Mitre’s generation saw immigration as an essential component of national development, along with building railways, improving the shipping industry, and developing Argentina’s economy. In order for Argentina to become a major exporter
of grains, meat, and wool, the country needed large numbers of laborers. In addition to powering Argentina’s growing economy, immigrants were intended to import the values necessary for cultural transformation. According to Alberdi, Mitre, and Sarmiento, they would set a positive example for the existing population by means of their industriousness and high ethical standards. In 1845 Sarmiento had written in *Facundo* that “the principal ingredient towards order and moralization in the Argentine Republic is immigration from Europe.”

He depicts the European immigrants as upright individuals, living in clean, orderly, and picturesque houses, while the lazy native inhabitants of Buenos Aires wallow in filth and poverty. European immigration was largely envisioned as the cure for Argentina’s state of “barbarism.”

Secondly, during the nineteenth century immigration was seen as a way for the country to break away from the cultural influence of Spain. In 1818 Bernadino Rivadavia had proclaimed, that immigration “was the most efficient means...of destroying the degrading Spanish habits and of creating a homogeneous, industrious and moral population, the only solid base for Equality, Liberty, and consequently, the Prosperity of the nation.”

Apparent in Rividavia’s proclamation is the Hispanophobia of the nineteenth century, as well as the belief that the immigrant was to be the agent of a cultural transformation that would bring about economic, political, and moral “progress.”

The dreams of the nineteenth-century liberals to “populate the desert” with European immigrants became a reality towards the turn of the century. The actual immigrants who came, however, did not correspond to the idealized version of the future immigrant envisioned by

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Argentina’s forefathers. First of all, fleeing the desperate poverty of their home country, they came with a few tattered belongings rather than a great deal of capital. They were from southern, rather than northern Europe, where wages tended to be higher than those offered in Argentina. They were often poor and illiterate, and therefore hardly the importers of high “culture.” Their presence certainly did not generate a homogenous population of new Argentines, but rather a racially mixed population of foreigners, most of whom did not acquire citizenship. Furthermore, they arrived at rates that proved alarming to the existing population, in particular the land-owning elite. Between the second national census of 1895 and the third of 1914, the population rose from 3.9 million to 7.8 million. The population of Buenos Aires alone increased sharply from 660,000 to more than 1.5 million.

Although mass immigration was already underway during Mitre’s presidency, it increased sharply during the presidency of Nicolás Avellaneda. Unlike Mitre who advocated spontaneous immigration, Avellaneda, Sarmiento’s successor, was a firm believer in artificial immigration. In 1876 Congress passed the Avellaneda Law which set up immigration offices in Europe to offer European farmers and workers subsidized passages, temporary lodging, and free transportation inland upon arrival. This law nearly doubled the amount of immigrants willing to make the journey to Argentina. Between 1870 and 1914, 5.9 million immigrants came to Argentina, and approximately half of them were from Italy. The historian José Luis Romero described immigration in turn-of-the-century Argentina as nothing short of “aluvional.”


251 Ibid., 141.

The flood of recent immigrants meant major changes for the rapidly-developing country. As regards economic growth, their presence proved positive. Agricultural production increased and Argentina became the third world exporter of grain. She was also a major exporter of wool and beef to industrializing economies in Europe, and an importer of manufactured goods. Economic booms took place from 1884-1889 and 1905-1912.\(^{253}\) Economically speaking then, it could be said that the influx of immigrants did indeed bring about the desired “progress.” But such large-scale immigration was not without problematic consequences.

One major consequence of the massive immigration was an accelerated urbanization. Although the Immigration and Settlement Act of 1876 sought to promote colonization of the interior, many of the immigrants had difficulty acquiring land and chose instead to settle on the coast and in the cities, namely in Buenos Aires.\(^{254}\) This led to rapid urbanization and the exponential growth of an urban middle class. Jean Delaney in her article “Making Sense of Modernity: Changing Attitudes toward the Immigrant and the Gaucho in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina” explains how the Argentine intellectuals at the time tended to blame the social consequences of rapid modernization on the immigrant population alone. She identifies this tendency to make the immigrants into scapegoats as a distinct feature of Argentine antimodernism: “most striking about the Argentine case was the widespread tendency to blame the European immigrant for many of the problems associated with modernity.”\(^{255}\) The creole inhabitants of Buenos Aires, especially the elite, felt threatened not only because of the sheer

\(^{253}\) For Argentina’s economic growth during the early twentieth century see the chapter “Four Seasons of Democracy, 1890-1930” in David Rock’s *Argentina 1516-1982*, 162-213.

\(^{254}\) In 1895 only 8% of the immigrant population were landowners. Rock, 140.

\(^{255}\) Delaney, 435.
number of immigrants pouring into the country, but also because these immigrants occupied an “intermediary” social standing:

In contrast to the other nations formed by immigration such as the United States, where most nineteenth- and twentieth century immigrants occupied the stratum below the native white working class, most immigrants to Argentina occupied an intermediary place in Argentine society, above the traditional popular classes but below the native elite and professional groups.256

Indeed, in Argentina where previously a clear social hierarchy existed, the social status of inhabitants became increasingly blurred. Although it was difficult for most immigrants to acquire land, which was a huge economic asset for agricultural production, there was a substantial amount of social mobility.257 The small elite, which constituted about 5% of the population in comparison with the working classes, became increasingly hostile towards the newcomers, whom they perceived as encroaching on their hegemony.

Not only did they blame them for social problems in rapidly growing cities, they also were concerned about their lack of social integration and naturalization. The population was extremely racially-mixed and culturally segregated. In addition to the Spanish and Italians who made up the great majority, there were Slavs, French, Germans, Russian, and Irish, and other ethnicities. But very few of these many immigrants acquired citizenship. Between 1850 and 1930 fewer than 5% of immigrants took Argentine citizenship.258 Argentina was populated, but it remained “un país sin ciudadanos” as says the title of a book published by Lucio Mansilla in Paris in 1907 by Garnier.259

256 Delaney, 440.
257 In 1895 only 8% of the immigrant population owned land. Rock, 140.
258 Rock, 143.
Although without citizenship they could not vote, the mass of immigrant workers was not entirely politically powerless. They brought with them political movements from their European countries of origin, such as labor unionism, anarchism and socialism. There were an increased number of worker strikes and anarchist and socialist activism as workers tried to improve their economic condition. The anarchists, who controlled much of Buenos Aires’ unskilled laboring class, quickly became the most powerful element in the Argentine labor movement.260 Osvaldo Bayer shows how Italian immigration played a direct role in the anarchist movement in Argentina, specifically emphasizing the roles of Errico Malatesta and Pietro Gori, two figures of Italian anarchism who had a definitive influence in the formation and consolidation of organized Argentine anarchism.261

Also disconcerting to the creole population was the fact that the racially-mixed immigrant population was not, as Rvidavia had imagined, becoming “homogenous.” The immigrant workers did not share a common past, nor a common language. In Buenos Aires, many of them lived in *conventillos*, urban collective housing known for being over-crowded and unsanitary, where several different languages were spoken at any given time. The great majority of them were men, who came on their own before sending for their families. Amongst the foreign-born population of Buenos Aires, there were three times as many men as women.262 The densely-populated immigrant

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261 Errico Malatesta (in Argentina from 1885-1889) drew up the charter for the baker’s union, which established the norm for other similar activist working class organizations. Pietro Gori (in Argentina from 1898-1902) was fundamental in the founding of the Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA), the first national labor union. Of the 47 delegates present at the inaugural congress in 1901, 26 of them had Italian last names. See Osvaldo Bayer’s article “The influence of Italian immigration on the Argentine anarchist movement.” https://libcom.org/library/influence-italian-immigration-argentine-anarchist-movement-osvaldo-bayer. Accessed Dec 6, 2014.

areas of Buenos Aires were associated with squalor, brothels, and crime. The polyphonic, predominantly-masculine, and racially-mixed masses appeared, in the eyes of the native population, to produce a degradation of language, morals, and tradition.

The negative stereotyping of the immigrant by the intellectual elite can be seen in works of literature from the time period. Luis Pascarella’s 1917 novel, *El Conventillo* (The Tenement), for example, depicts the Italian immigrant as a man who has forgotten his history who is only concerned with material gain:

(The immigrant’s) mind, free of memories of the past, is filled now with only one phrase: earn, earn money. This and no other was the chatter [retintín] which circulated from morning to night around the patio [of the conventillo]. When someone was mentioned…or when two people met, the first thing they would ask was how much he earned, how much he had saved, how much he had, how much had been sent back to Italy.263

In addition to being associated with materialism, immigrants were frequently depicted as shrewd and lacking in ethical standards. Delaney explains that the common image of the immigrant that appeared repeatedly in both fiction and journalistic writings of the period was that of a “grasping, greedy individual whose sole purpose in coming to Argentina was to enrich himself.”264 This is a far cry from the moral and hardworking individual that Mitre’s generation had envisioned.

What was the proposed solution by Argentine intellectuals to the unintegrated masses? They desired to “argentinize” the racially-mixed and ever-growing immigrant population that did not share a common past. The lack of cultural cohesion generated a frenzy of discourses regarding national identity in which important writers sought first to delineate what was uniquely “argentine”

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264 Delaney, 447.
and secondly how to impart these qualities and traditions to the immigrant masses. In other words, they sought to foster a sense of nationalism. As Carlo Solberg demonstrates in his book *Immigration and Nationalism. Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914*, the uneasiness regarding the immigrant population ultimately lead many intellectuals to question the liberal cosmopolitanism of the previous generation:

> After 1905 influential writers in both republics [Argentina y Chile] were rejecting the positivist and Cosmopolitan-oriented ideologies invoked by the elites since the 1850’s to justify liberal immigration policies. In place of cosmopolitanism, these intellectuals began to formulate nationalistic ideologies [...]”

Although Solberg’s book looks specifically at Argentina and Chile, nationalism was a phenomenon of all of Latin America. But in Argentina the topic of national identity was particularly pressing, given that for forty years the number of persons born abroad was greater than those born in the territory. During the first decades of the twentieth century, there was an acute urgency to delineate a national identity. The quest for national identity dominated literature. If I may take the liberty of using a term from personal psychology to refer collectively to the nation, Argentina underwent an identity crisis of sorts.

> But can a “national identity” even be spoken of? Is there something unique and unalterable in the collective conscious of a nation? Does a common past produce a cohesion among its citizens and cause them to develop certain characteristics? For my purposes, we will be looking at national identity as something which is constructed, selected, and codified by writers, those involved in

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267 Critics who have written on the question for national identity include Beatriz Sarlo, Ivonne Bordeloi, Alejandro Catruzza, Silvia Saytta, Rafael Olea Franco, and Juan José Sebrelli.
creating a cultural history of a country. In a similar vein, the “invention of tradition” is a concept developed by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, who explore the creation of new traditions which appear or claim to be old in origin.\(^{268}\) This phenomenon often involves the dismantling and restructuring of images of the past, and is not to be confused with the “strength and adaptability of genuine traditions”: “Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented.”\(^ {269}\) Invented traditions are:

responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the “invention of tradition” so interesting for historians of the past two centuries.\(^ {270}\)

Although every epoch, they explain, most likely gave rise to invented tradition, it occurs more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys previous social patterns.\(^ {271}\) The phenomenon is particularly evident in the development of nationalism: invented traditions are “highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the ‘nation,’ with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest.”\(^ {272}\) The two phenomena, nationalism and invented tradition, are intertwined and should be in conjunction with one another:

\(^ {268}\) Eric Hobsbawn defines “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1). The particularity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity is largely factitious. Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds. The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

\(^ {269}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^ {270}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^ {271}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^ {272}\) Ibid., 13.
And just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern ‘nation’ consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as ‘national history’) the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the ‘invention of tradition.’”

In the final essay of the book, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” Hobsbawn identifies the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a period which saw invented traditions “spring up with particular assiduity.” This was also the case in Argentina, which, as I have outlined, had recently undergone rapid social transformation and which faced the political problem of assimilating the heterogeneous masses. Symbolical or ideological identification had to be established and “argentinidad” invented.

In what follows, I will examine the response of Leopoldo Lugones and Jorge Luis Borges to the problem of national identity. Both authors dedicated much of their writing to inventing a literary tradition for their country. In particular, I will examine how Dante factors into their endeavors to articulate a uniquely argentine type of literature. While Mitre believed the Divine Comedy to be the ideal epic for his new nation (given that in his eyes she was too young to produce her own), Lugones argued that no epic of another culture and time could possibly substitute for a new nation. He sought to establish an existing Argentine work as the national epic, a work which was written at precisely the same time that Mitre began translating the Comedy: José Hernández’s Martín Fierro (1872, 1879).

As aforementioned, Mitre did not even mention this work in his writings on the history of Argentine literature, as it represented for him the rural barbarism he was trying to eradicate. The book enjoyed immediate popular success, although it was not until Lugones gave a series of

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273 Ibid., 14.

274 The poem was originally published in Two parts, El Gaucho Martín Fierro (1872) and La vuelta de Martín Fierro (1879).
lectures on the work in 1913 that it was raised to the status of a classic. In what follows I will examine his reasons for choosing this work as the reflection of national essence, as well as his own rendition of an episode of the Divine Comedy.

Leopoldo Lugones, belonging to the generation following Mitre’s, was born on June 13th, 1874. At that time, the then 53-year-old Mitre was leading an armed rebellion contesting the election of Nicolás Avellaneda. Having only been awarded three provinces, Mitre claimed electoral fraud. His insurrection was eventually stifled by Julio Roca, allowing for Avellaneda’s October 12 inauguration. Avellaneda, unlike Mitre who supported spontaneous immigration, was an advocate of artificial immigration, and the legislation passed during his presidency meant a sharp rise in what was already a massive influx of immigration.

Leopoldo Lugones, born to Santiago M. Lugones and Custodia Argüello, grew up during the so-called “wave” of immigration that brought about an ever-changing demographic. The Lugoneses perceived themselves as a family of ancient lineage, with creole ancestry dating back to sixteenth-century Perú. His grandparents belonged to the first generation of Argentines after the independence, and therefore his family considered themselves among the original citizens of the nation, as opposed to the sons of recent immigrants.275

Leopoldo was schooled in the conservative and Catholic city of Córdoba before moving to the more cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires in 1896. It was there that the young Lugones met Rubén Darío, whose book Azul (1888) gave rise to what would later be known as modernismo, the artistic movement of which Lugones was the primary Argentine exponent.276 His first major


276 Modernismo, a Spanish language literary movement influenced by French Symbolists and Parnassians, is characterized by the use of extravagant imagery and innovative meters.
publication, *Montañas de oro* (1897), is written in this aesthetic, as is his most significant work of poetry *Lunario sentimental* (1909). It is at the end of this collection of poetry that we find Lugones’s creative reinvention of the story of Dante’s Francesca of Rimini, to which I will return later on in the chapter.

Although Lugones considered himself first and foremost a poet, he was also a journalist, orator, polemicist, and minister of Public Education. Politically he was a socialist in his early years, a traditionalist later on, and finally a supporter of Fascism. He supported the 1930 coup d'état of General José Félix Uriburu against Hipólito Yrigoyen. The coup marked the start of what would later be referred to as the “Infamous Decade.” During these dark years when Argentina was hit hard by the global Great Depression, Lugones himself fell into a depression from which he never recovered. In 1938 he committed suicide by ingesting a mixture of whisky and cyanide at the resort town of El Tigre just outside Buenos Aires.

**Lugones on Immigration and Nationalism**

¡Feliz quien como yo ha bebido patria,/ En la miel de su selva y de su roca!*

Lugones, like many creole intellectuals, worried about the future of Argentina in view of the massive changes brought on by the influx of immigration. In 1930 he articulated his anxieties regarding immigration in *The Great Argentina*. His xenophobic views reflect the fears of much of the creole population at the time, including racial prejudices, fear of colonization, and fear of growing labor movements. At the onset of his discourse, Lugones seeks to make clear that he is not opposed to immigration in general. He declares it to be a function of internal markets, and outlines its many benefits, including increases in labor, production, and consumption. More

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277 Lugones, who had joined the fascist cause in 1924 by giving a famous speech entitled “The Hour of the Sword,” was appointed as the writer of the fascist government’s first proclamation.

services offered means lower prices, therefore “a growing density of the population makes it easier to ensure that everyone has a comfortable and inexpensive life.” He acknowledges Argentina’s need to attract immigrants to further her economic progress.

He does not, however, see unbridled immigration as beneficial to the nation. His first concern is that society may become overburdened by a rapid influx of immigrants, and he insists that measures should be taken to “prevent a rushed and crowded congestion.” Secondly, he sees all instances of massive immigration as colonization attempts by the countries of origin:

Given the formation of the European mind and consciousness, which is simply the natural consequence of such events, every mass immigration is a movement of colonization. This is proven by the spiritual state revealed in Rome by the Conference on Emigration, and by the law of double citizenship in force in Germany and incorporated into the current project of the Spanish constitution.

Here Lugones refers to the international conference on emigration and immigration which was held in Rome in 1924. Several countries at the time, in response to increased international migration, were adjusting citizenship requirements in order to allow emigrants to maintain their original citizenship when they acquired citizenship in their new country. Lugones sees dual citizenship as inherently problematic, as it permits the country of origin to maintain their ties with the recently emigrated, thereby hindering their full integration in the new society and potentially presenting a conflict of interests.

Unlike Mitre, who advocated spontaneous immigration, Lugones promoted artificial immigration and felt that the exact conditions of the plan of immigration should be well-publicized

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280 Ibid.

281 Ibid., 86-87.

282 For example German laws of 1914 and the Spanish Constitution of 1931 allowed for dual citizenship.
in the countries of origin and that economic and political agreements should be established with the appropriate governments.\textsuperscript{283} Such agreements, in addition to Argentina’s vigilance, he claims, should help prevent the “transplantation of people predestined to misery from unemployment or incompetence.” It is also in Argentina’s common interest to prevent the entrance of delinquents, agitators, Marxists, and anarchist communists. Likewise, Lugones does not support a proletarian immigration which he claims would overburden the urban population and artificially increase “the sectarian elements and the domestic services—the servile condition being itself parasitic and depressing.”\textsuperscript{284}

In addition to productivity, political beliefs, and profession, race is another essential criteria by which to evaluate potential immigrants. What should be sought after in his view is “an organic unity” rather than a racial heterogeneity, for “there is no greater destructive anarchy than the millenary conflict of the races.”\textsuperscript{285} The preventative solution is to “adopt preferences, not only concerning the economic capacity and the health and civic state of the immigrant, but also with regard to his ethnic character.”\textsuperscript{286} Although Lugones does not here specify which ethnicities should be avoided, it can be inferred that he is referring to the so-called “new immigrants” from the poorer nations of Southern and Eastern Europe, who, fleeing poverty in their own lands, constituted the bulk of immigration to Argentina in the early decades of the twentieth century, and who were perceived as culturally and ethnically diverse from the Northern European immigrants desired by Argentina’s forefathers. He may also be referring to the many Jews who came from Eastern Europe (mainly Russia and Poland) fleeing Tsarist persecution. In any case, he underscores the fact that

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 88.
Argentina is by no means obliged to open its doors to those fleeing harsh conditions or religious persecution: “Our country is not a refuge or a shelter, but an association of people living in agreement. No one has a right to turn our homeland into a source of charity.”

To explain what he feels might be misconstrued as an inhumane stance, he makes a distinction between homeland and humanity. The homeland, unlike humanity, is a political entity, which does not have obligations to human beings. To pretend, he says, that “the homeland be host to all of humanity is a paradox that inverts to the point of the absurd the relationship between continent and content.” For her overall benefit and survival, he argues, the homeland is obligated to restrict residence and citizenship, which are native privileges or ones bestowed uniquely to those deserving residing in the homeland. Argentina must not be concerned with performing charity but with safeguarding her interests: “The morality of the homeland demands that she not harm anyone but it does not force her to do good to anyone who is not her son.” Lugones’s rhetoric is obviously problematic. In the same moment that he makes a distinction between humanity and homeland, he conflates the two by personifying the homeland and employing the terms “morality” and “son.” Could not the same argument be made in the case of humanity? Could it not be said of man that he must act in his own interest if performing charity means risking his survival?

A further problematic aspect of Lugones’s argument is the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes an Argentine, or rather a “non-immigrant.” He says of the Argentines,

We belong to the Latin race, and it is to our benefit that we do. Naturally because we are. But also because in this manner we belong to the most noble of civilizations. When Sarmiento pronounced that profound sentence declaring that “we form an integral part of the Roman Empire,” he formulated our true destiny with brilliant precision.

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287 Ibid.

288 Ibid.

289 Ibid., 89.
Placed at the end of a discourse arguing against what he considers the overzealous admission of immigrants from southern Europe, this comment is decidedly ironic. The majority of newly immigrated, as it were, came from Italy, but yet according to his logic their admission must be restricted in order to ensure Argentina’s brilliant destiny to form a part of the Roman Empire. In mentioning the noble past of the Roman Empire, he indulges in a fiction regarding Argentina’s heroic past and heroic destiny, but yet he warns, “We must form a homeland with those people who are a benefit to us, not with those whom we many like for some sentimental or ideological satisfaction.” The Argentines are descendants of the Italian people, but the Italians are not Argentines.

Further stressing his fear of colonization, Lugones insists that the “Argentines,” as opposed to the “foreigners,” must be in control of the nation’s affairs: “The Republic of Argentina is not a condominium or an experimental colony of more or less prestigious ideologies. It belongs to Argentines, and only Argentines can administer her toward her stated goal.” In other words, the current hegemony of the oligarchy must be maintained, and foreigners distinguished from the true sons of the nation. While the first native generation he claims belongs to Argentina “heart and soul,” this does not guarantee that the newly immigrated will in one generation’s time become fully-integrated Argentines, for the nation’s “digestive capacity” has its limits. His solution to what he clearly views as a foreign invasion is to make the immigration process far more selective, citing the Johnson-Reed Act in the U.S. (1924) as a “valuable example.” This legislation, responding to fears concerning the massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe (especially of Jews) and from Asia, established a quota system in the United States which limited the number of

290 Ibid.

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immigrants from certain regions. Lugones strongly advocates a more selective immigration policy for Argentina, one which regulates “the selection of the elements that we are to incorporate, with attention paid to their productive efficacy and fecundity, and the correlative determination of its race.”

As becomes apparent from Lugones’s non-fictional writing on immigration, he viewed national identity as something that existed previously but which was threatened by the ever-increasing racial and cultural heterogeneity of the population. Like many other creole writers at the time, he viewed modern society as decadent and sought to distinguish the “creoles” from the “gringos.” From Mitre’s generation to Lugones’s, the word “criollo,” a theoretically neutral term referring to a native of a locality, had acquired entirely new connotations. As James R. Scobie demonstrates, in Argentina’s early years, the word was practically pejorative: “Durante el siglo XIX en los textos tanto de viajeros extranjeros como de ensayistas argentinos, la palabra criollo se convirtió en sinónimo de incapacidad y haraganería.” [During the nineteenth century in the texts of foreign travelers as well as argentine essayists, the word criollo became a synonym for incompetence and idleness.] As time went on, however, it came to be used both as a noun and as an adjective with increasingly positive connotations. By the time of Lugones, who proudly considered himself a “viejo criollo,” the word was frequently used in association with certain values and virtues, in opposition to the term “gringo,” associated with certain vices such as greed.

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291 This system was in effect until 1965.

292 Ibid., 86.


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and materialism. As Beatriz Sarlo and Carlos Altamirano explain, commenting on the history of the two words “criollo” and “gringo”:

En el espacio de significación que circunscribían estas palabras, generosidad, desinterés e, incluso, cierta disposición para la vida heroica, se contraponían a la imagen de una laboriosidad sin elevación de miras, afán de lucro y mezquindad. La literatura y el teatro dramatizaron esta oposición semántica e ideológica. 294

[While the word “criollo” was identified with positive attributes such as generosity, impartiality, and even a certain disposition for heroic life, “gringo” came to signify industriousness with no higher aim than personal profit. Literature and theatre dramatize this semantical and ideological opposition.]

In literature, the operation of denigrating the qualities of the “gringos” while exalting the virtues of the “criollos” is known as criollismo, a nationalistic preoccupation with native scenes and types. The term was employed as early as 1902 by Ernesto Quesada in the essay El criollismo en la literatura argentina, and subsequently was used to refer to literature that represented the national culture, as opposed to that of the immigrant masses. 295 Just two years before in 1900 Quesada had deplored the corrupting influences of Italian immigration on the Spanish language in El problema del idioma nacional. He was one of many turn-of-the-century Argentines who lamented the linguistic and cultural changes brought about by massive immigration.

Although criollismo refers to regionalist tendencies which occurred in all of Spanish America in the first decades of the twentieth century, I will be limiting my discussion to criollismo in Argentina, which specifically took on the form of gauchesque literature, wherein the figure of the gaucho, previously despised by Mitre’s generation as an impediment to civilization, is represented as the embodiment of Argentine virtues. This shocking transformation of the formerly

294 Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, Ensayos argentinos: De Sarmiento a la vanguardia (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1983), 95.

“barbaric” plainsman into the heroic “civilizer” of the pampas was able to take place because the gauchos at the time had all but disappeared from the Argentine planes and were no longer a threat to the modernization advocated by the liberal intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Because the gaucho was an obvious “non-immigrant,” and because he was associated with the land and the past, he was converted into a mythological national symbol around which the creole elite could converge.

As aforementioned, I consider national identity as something which is constructed by the intellectuals who concern themselves with writing “guiding fictions” or “inventing traditions” to foster nationalism. I can think of no better example of a clearly invented tradition than gauchesque literature, which does not describe the real conditions of the historical gaucho, nor reflect the poetry of the payadors. Rather it presents an idealized, romanticized version of the guacho, while eruditely poeticizing an imagined golden era of Argentine history, pre-massive immigration. The gauchesque was, for many authors, the preferred means to locate the essence of the “native” population in the creole past.

Three major Argentine thinkers whose nationalistic responses contributed to elevating the status of the Argentine gaucho are Ricardo Rojas, Manuel Gálvez, and Leopoldo Lugones. All three claimed gauchesque literature to be the literature which best represented the historical essence of Argentina. Ricardo Rojas, author of the eight-volume *Historia de la Literatura Argentina*, begins his work with a chapter on *Los gauchescos*. Manuel Gálvez saw the native creole as the preserver of the spiritual and moral values essential for the nation. He argued that these

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296 Borges makes this argument in “La poesía gauchesca,” in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), 179-197.

297 An important study on the myth of the gaucho and immigration is Gladys Onega, *La inmigración en la literatura argentina (1880-1910)* (Rosario: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Cuadernos del Instituto de Letras, 1965).
values, embodied in the figure of the gaucho, must be safeguarded against the corruptive influence of the immigrant. In 1913 he wrote of *Martín Fierro*: “Sintetiza el espíritu de la raza americana, en lo que este tiene de hondo y permanente” [It synthesizes the profound and permanent aspects of the spirit of the American race].

But perhaps the intellectual most responsible for the gaucho’s conversion into a national emblem was Leopoldo Lugones, a prominent public figure and author at the time. In what follows, I will examine his rational for designating a gauchesque work of literature, *Martín Fierro* as the national epic. Unlike Mitre who was pro-European as regards cultural production, he sought a noble past for Argentina within Argentina’s recent history, rather than outside of it. Secondly, I will examine Lugones’s rewriting of an episode of the *Divine Comedy*, Canto V, which does not fall in line with his later *criollista* prescriptions of 1916. Finally, at the end of this chapter, I will turn to Borges’s rendition of the same Dantean episode in “The Intruder,” which satirizes many of Lugones’s arguments regarding Argentine literature and creates a wildly original Francesca of the pampas.

Although Lugones’s re-writing of Dante is anything but gauchesque, his first book, *La Guerra Gaucha* (1905), does in fact belong to his genre. It is a book of poems about the gaucho guerrilla war commanded by Martín Miguel de Güemes against the Spanish royalists during the Argentine War of Independence. In preparation for this patriotic book, Lugones travelled to Salta Province to visit the battlefields and to record the oral traditions of the locals. Filled with lengthy poetic descriptions of the Argentine pampas, the work is clearly an endeavor to create a glorified portrait of the land and its “heroes” responsible for her liberation. Most episodes center around the valor of the gaucho characters. “Carga,” for example, describes a gaucho raid of the Spanish camp,

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298 Manuel Galvez, “¿Cuál es el valor del *Martín Fierro*,” in *Nosotros*, N. 50, June 1913; quoted in Altamirano and Sarlo, 98.
while in “Al rastro” one gaucho single-handedly fights a royalist battalion, and in doing so loses his life. The work, an obvious idealization, is far from a realistic representation of gaucho life. It is filled with the fictional gaucho slang of the time, which renders the work somewhat cryptic and artificial for those not versed in this style of writing. Nevertheless, it was a successful book during its day, and years later (1942) was made into a movie of the same title, directed by Lucas Demare, which is considered to be a classic of Argentine cinematography.²⁹⁹

More important for the re-evaluation of the gaucho than Lugones’s own gaucho poetry, is the book *El payador*. Published in 1916, the book is a modified version of a series of lectures given at the Odeón theater in Buenos Aires in 1913. It consists of ten total sections, including a discussion of the function of epic poetry, a heroic portrait of the gaucho and his habitat, an examination of gaucho poetry, an argument that *Martín Fierro* is an epic poem, and a detailed study of *Martín Fierro*.³⁰⁰ Thus, like Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, it is a heterogeneous, non-fiction work offering a particular interpretation of Argentine landscape, people, and history. Like *Facundo*, it is now considered a foundational text of Argentine literature. Both works engage in describing the Argentine national character and in explaining the effects of Argentina’s geographical conditions on her subjects. Both authors were profoundly concerned with national identity. Already in 1883 Sarmiento had proclaimed: “¿Somos nación? ¿Nación sin amalgama de materiales acumulados, sin ajuste ni cimiento? ¿Argentinos? Hasta dónde y desde cuándo, bueno es darse cuenta de


But Lugones’s generation felt more acutely the need to define “argentinidad,” particularly around the time of the centenary of Argentine Independence. It was a time when nationalistic sentiments ran high, and there were a number of rituals, festivities, exhibitions, and monuments commemorating the occasion. It was also, as the historian Luis Romero has pointed out, a moment of cultural reevaluation, national affirmation, and the generation of new cultural myths. The publication of *El payador* (1916) coincided with the centenary of the Argentine declaration of Independence (July 9, 1816).

As regards the vision of the gaucho, *Facundo* and *El payador* are antithetical. While Sarmiento paints a negative portrait of the gaucho Juan Facundo Quiroga in order to show the contrast between the “barbaric” nature of nineteenth-century Argentina if left uncivilized by European cultural ideals, Lugones paints a glorified picture of the gaucho, emblem of a former civilization threatened by immigration. The striking reversal of the civilization/barbarism dichotomy has been noted by a number of scholars, including Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, who in their seminal essay “La Argentina del Centenario” write:

> El gaucho simbólico, el desierto, la carreta ya no son los representantes de una realidad “bárbara” que hay que dejar atrás en la marcha hacia la “civilización,” sino los símbolos con los que se trama una tradición nacional que el ‘progreso’ amenaza disolver.  

> [The symbolic gaucho, the desert, the wagon are no longer the representatives of a “barbarous” reality that must be left behind in the march towards “civilization”; rather, they are the symbols used to construct a national tradition that “progress” threatened to dissolve.]

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301 Quoted in Altamirano and Sarlo, 73.

Immigration, formerly associated with progress, had come to be seen as the new form of barbarism. Although it may seem surprising that the gaucho (a troublesome figure in the eyes of the founding fathers of the nation) could be chosen by many twentieth-century intellectuals as the symbol of Argentine national essence and gaucho poetry the expression of her people, we must remember that writers at the time sought a regional literary genre unique to Argentina alone. As Ángel Rama points out, gaucho poetry developed without a European model. Instead it pretends to mimic Argentine rural orality and describe a gaucho-way-of-life which came to be seen as “traditional.”

For Lugones, the gaucho is not only a heroic figure, but also the “proto-type of present-day Argentines,” and the payador, who poeticizes gaucho life, the most significant agent in the formation of the Argentine race:

Titulo este libro con el nombre de los antiguos cantores errantes que recorrían nuestras campañas trovando romances y endechas, porque fueron ellos los personajes más significativos en la formación de nuestra raza. Tal cual ha pasado en todas las otras del tronco greco-latino, aquel fenómeno inicióse también aquí con una obra de belleza. [The title I have chosen for this book is the name of the old errant singers who roamed our countryside looking for romances and laments, because they were the most significant figures in the formation of our race. Just as happened in Greek and Latin cultures, this phenomenon began with a work of beauty.]

In the first chapter, Lugones explains that a race is defined by its epic poetry: “la poesía épica es la expresión de la vida heroica de una raza: de esa raza y no de otra alguna” [epic poetry is the expression of the heroic life of a race: of this race and of no other.] Hence, no epic poem from another culture can represent a new race. In following with Lugones’s definition of the

303 Ángel Rama, Los gauchopolíticos rioplatenses (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982), 236.
305 Ibid., 21.
306 Ibid., 29.
function of epic poetry, the *Divine Comedy* could only serve as the epic of the Italian people. For Lugones, an epic poem does not just sing for justice and liberty in a general sense, but shows how a particular people fought for these ideals. Having established his definition of epic, he states that his primary objective is to prove that *Martín Fierro* is the Argentine national epic.

His selection of *Martín Fierro* as Argentina’s national epic accomplishes several important objectives. First of all, it is an attempt to immediately assuage the widespread anxiety regarding national identity, or rather the perceived lack thereof. One need look no further than its covers for the “secret to her [Argentina’s] destiny.” As he clearly explains in the 1916 prologue:

> El objeto de este libro es, pues, definir bajo el mencionado aspecto la poesía épica, demostrar que nuestro *Martín Fierro* pertenece a ella, estudiarlo como tal, determinar simultáneamente, por la naturaleza de sus elementos, la formación de la raza, y con ello formular, por último, el secreto de su destino.\(^{307}\)

> [The aim of this book is to define from this angle epic poetry, to demonstrate that our *Martín Fierro* belongs to this genre, to study it as such, and to determine, simultaneously, on account of its natural characteristics, the formation of our race and its destiny.]

In other words, all the answers to the questions which plagued the intellectuals of the turn of the century were to be found just within its pages.

Secondly, *El payador* is an assertion that Argentina is already a civilization on par with ancient Greece, whose epics he refers to as a model in his discourse on the function of epic poetry. Argentina, no less than ancient Greece, has a unique artistic expression of her land, race, and language. Finally, because gaucho poetry has no European model, and because *Martín Fierro* was written in 1872, pre-influx of immigration, his definition of Argentine identity is a rejection of the

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\(^{307}\) Ibid., 22.
culture of the immigrant population. While offering a point of convergence for the criollo citizens, it excludes the immigrant masses.

Scholars such as Carlos Altamirano, Beatriz Sarlo, Richard W. Slatta, and Raphael Olea have emphasized the exclusionary nature of Lugones’s intentions, not only as regards race, but also in respect to social standing. The 1913 lectures were attended by prominent members of the oligarchy, including the president of the Republic, Roque Saénza Peña and his cabinet. In his remarks to the audience, Lugones insists upon the cultural hegemony of the upper class:

> Felicítome por haber sido el agente de una íntima comunicación nacional entre la poesía del pueblo y la mente culta de la clase superior; que así es como se forma el espíritu de la patria...Mi palabra no fue sino la abeja cosechera que llevó el mensaje de la flor silvestre a la noble rosa del jardín.  

[I am happy to have been the agent of an intimate national communication between the poetry of the pueblo and the cultivated minds of the upper class; the spirit of the patria is formed in this way...My words are only the pollinating bee that transmits the message from the wild flower to the noble rose of the garden.]

Although gaucho poetry pertains to “el pueblo” the “espíritu de la patria” can only be cultivated by the elite.

As Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo have argued, his advocacy of Martín Fierro affirms, “a través del mito del origen, el derecho tutelar de la elite de los “criollos viejos” sobre el país. Derecho que los recién llegados aparecían impugnando” [through the myth of origin, the guiding right of the elite “criollos viejos” over the country. A right that the recently immigrated

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308 As Rafeal Olea argues, “Al ubicar la esencia de la “argentinidad” en un pasado preinmigratorio, al no sumar ninguna de las características de los inmigrantes al acervo del ser nacional, Lugones expresaba en verdad un fuerte rechazo a las masas.” Olea, 324.

309 Cronica de La Nación, which includes the closing remarks of his lectures, later included in El payador, 361; quoted by Altamirano and Sarlo, 101.
seemed to challenge.]³¹⁰ Similarly, Rafeal Olea has argued that Lugones wanted to create a myth which would legitimize the power of the creole elite.

Lo que en realidad sucede es que el gaucho, ineficaz para los fines capitalistas de la oligarquía en el siglo XIX, es usado a principios del XX como instrumento de oposición a la naciente fuerza de la masa inmigratoria.³¹¹

[What actually happened was that the gaucho, ineffectual for the capitalist aims of the oligarchy of the 19th century, was used at the beginning of the 20th as an instrument of opposition towards the growing power of the immigrant masses.]

In conclusion, both Mitre’s translation of the Divine Comedy and Lugones’s reevaluation of Martín Fierro are attempts to fortify a sense of national identity via epic poetry. Mitre’s choice of translating the Divine Comedy was a means to embrace incoming immigrants, especially Italians, and promote national cultural cohesion for present and future generations, including the recently immigrated. Although Martín Fierro was written before he published his translation, he did not consider it a representative epic. Nor did he believe that Argentine society at the time was mature enough to produce one. Furthermore, what he sought was a cosmopolitan, Old World epic that would have a “civilizing” effect on the undeveloped rural population.

Lugones, on the other hand, argues that no epic from another culture can substitute for another nation. The possession of an epic poem indicates the existence of a national identity. Not only did he see Argentina as developed enough to produce her own epic, if anything, he saw her as a civilization on the decline. In his view nationality must be preserved in the face of foreign invasion. The goal for both Mitre and Lugones is “civilization,” but while Mitre saw civilization as something brought about via immigration, Lugones sees a uniquely Argentine epic, which was written before Mitre’s translation, as proof of her already extant culture. Mitre’s endeavor was

³¹⁰ Altamirano and Sarlo, 100.

³¹¹ Olea, 323.
cultural cohesion for the recently migrated. Lugones offered a point of conversion specifically for the creole elite.

**Lunario sentimental and Francesca**

Although Lugones’s advocacy of *Martín Fierro* as national epic is in a sense an operation which runs counter to Mitre’s promotion of the *Divine Comedy*, that is not to say that Lugones did not admire Dante or draw inspiration from him. Dante’s influence on Lugones did not go unnoticed by Borges, who in the prologue to a collection of Lugones’s short stories writes: “Lugones had four cardinal poets. In 1897, judging from *Las montañas del oro*, these poets were Homer, Dante, Hugo and Walt Whitman.” His second book of poetry, *Lunario sentimental* (1909) would be influenced by the same authors, “with the exception of Whitman, because he foregoes the rhyme that Lugones deems essential to modern verse.” Lugones himself acknowledges Dante’s influence in the opening poem of *Lunario*, wherein he claims to have learned his verse, “limpia y pura” from the great Italian master:

> Yo lo aprendí en el Dante,  
> Abuelo arduo y conciso,  
> Por cuyo Paraíso  
> Jamás pasó un pedante.  

[I learned it from Dante  
Arduous and concise ancestor  
Through whose Paradise  
No pedant ever passed.]

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The poem begins with an epigraph from *Purgatorio* VIII: *Che cotesta cortese opinïone/ Ti sia chiavata in mezzo de la testa.*\(^{314}\) The lines correspond to Currado’s response to Dante the pilgrim who has just lavished praise on his family, the Malaspinas. Currado hushes Dante and prophesies that before seven years time he will have much stronger personal motives for singing their praises.\(^{315}\) The lines seem to be confidently addressed to the reader, who perhaps after finishing the volume will have an even more “courteous opinion” of its author “nailed within the brain.” This innovative ode to the moon proposes a change from the “hipermetría precedente,”\(^{316}\) and Lugones playfully assures us that “Mi poético exceso,/ Naturalmente es queso/ Para vuestro buen gusto.” [My poetic excess/ Naturally is cheese/ For your good taste.]\(^{317}\) His surprising, often irreverent, vibrant, and experimental language would prove influential to poets all over the Spanish-speaking world. Gwen Kirkpatrick, commenting on the groundbreaking nature of *Lunario* writes:

> With *Lunario* Lugones was the first in Spanish to experiment with free verse, although he retained rhyme in all his poetry; the *Lunario’s* satiric, often shocking metaphors, directed at Western love’s most revered symbols, unhinged the framework of lyricism in Spanish.\(^{318}\)

Indeed, Lugones radically reworks some of the oldest poetic tropes and western love stories, including Dante’s Francesca of Rimini.

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\(^{314}\) The lines are Currado’s response to Dante the pilgrim who has just lavished praise on his family. In other words, his says that Dante will have personal reason to praise the Malaspina family.

\(^{315}\) Currado predicts that Dante will have more cause to praise his family more before the sun returns to the constellation Aries seven years from now (1306). This is Dante the poets way of thanking Franceschino Malaspina, who offered him hospitality in Lunigiana in 1306. See Boccaccio’s *Vita di Dante*.


\(^{317}\) Ibid., 18.

Before looking at the story itself, and its curious positioning at the end of this book of poems, we must take a look at the polemical prologue to Lunario, in which Lugones announces the unconventional nature of what follows. He starts off by proclaiming, “Fortunately, the time of having to apologize to practical people for writing verse is coming to an end.”\footnote{Leopoldo Lugones, Prologue to the First Edition of Lunario Sentimental, in Selected Writings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 69.} Although it was commonplace in prologues for the poet to spend a few paragraphs justifying the purpose of his endeavor, I cannot help but wonder if Lugones had in mind Mitre’s foreword to Rimas, one of the most conspicuous of such prologues in the history of Argentine literature. Mitre’s 50+ page justification of the importance of poetry is addressed to Sarmiento, the far more “practical” of the two friends, who had lamented the hours and energy wasted on poetry (“un monólogo sublime á veces, estéril siempre”), hours which could have been directed at what he deems more practical accomplishments.\footnote{Several times in his prologue, Mitre quotes Sarmiento’s words that poetry is a “monólogo sublime á veces, estéril siempre.” Here p. xviii of Rimas. The passage he is referring to can be found in Sarmiento, Viajes por Europa, Africa y America 1845-1848 (Barcelona: Red Ediciones, 2012), 62. “El español inhábil para el comercio que explotan a sus ojos naves, hombres y caudales de otras naciones, negado para la industria, la maquinaria, las artes, destituido de luces para hacer andar las ciencias o mantenerlas siquiera, rechazado por la vida moderna para la que no está preparado, el español se encierra en sí mismo y hace versos; monólogo sublime a veces, estéril siempre, que le hace sentirse ser inteligente y capaz si pudiera, de acción y de vida, por las transformaciones que hace experimental a la naturaleza que engalana en su gabinete, como lo haría el norteamericano con el hacha en los campos, aquel poeta práctico que hace una pastoral de un desierto inculto, e inventa pueblos y maravillas de la civilización, cuando del seno del bosque asoma su cabeza a la margen de un río aún no ocupado (...) Qué de riquezas de inteligencia y cuánta fecundidad de imaginación perdidas! Cuántos progresos para la industria! Y qué saltos daría la ciencia si esta fuerza de voluntad, si aquel trabajo de horas de contracción intensa en que el espíritu del poeta está exaltado hasta hacerle chispear los ojos, clavado en un asiento, encendido su cerebro y agonizando todas sus fibras, se emplease en encontrar una aplicación de las fuerzas físicas a producir un resultado útil!”} Mitre, shocked and offended that Sarmiento could “speak with such disrespect” of this beloved profession, responds with the lengthy and passionate letter which would later serve as his prologue to Rimas.\footnote{Bartolomé Mitre, Rimas de Bartolomé Mitre con un prefacio del autor (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Librerías de Mayo, 1876), xxxiii.}
Although Lugones claims that the need for such extensive justification is coming to a close, he nevertheless desires to demonstrate the utility of verse for the cultivation of language. No one, he says, can fail to recognize the advantage one has when one is able to speak clearly and with brevity. It is the labor of the poets to cultivate a country’s linguistic patrimony:

Language is a set of images, consisting, if one looks at it properly, of one metaphor per word; therefore, finding new, beautiful images, and expressing them with clarity and concision, is a way of simultaneously enriching and renovating the language. Those in charge of this labor—which is at least as honorable as that of refining livestock or administering the public debt, given that it serves a social function—are the poets. **Language is a public good; even more, it is a nation’s most solid element.**

His assertion that language is a nation’s most solid element is particularly striking in a passage on the necessity of creative flux in poetry. It is, in my opinion, an assertion that the cultural identity of a country rests in the hands of the poets, who must create worthy and original foundational texts.

It is noteworthy that he specifically emphasizes clarity and concision, poetic virtues for which Dante is well-known (“abuelo arduo y conciso”). But to persist in copying Dante after centuries would mean linguistic stagnation, for to continue imitating the classics, he explains, can lead to the triumph of the commonplace, or rather, to the degradation of language. The cure for this degeneration is innovation.

Like Mitre, Lugones sees poetry as necessary for civilization: “Verse is one of the fine arts, and it is well known that cultivation of the fine arts civilizes the people.” Likewise, disdaining verse is a sign of barbarism:

When a person who considers himself to be cultured says that he does not perceive the charm of verse, he is revealing a relative un-refinement, which does no harm to verse, of course. Homer, Dante, Hugo will always be greater than that person,

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323 Ibid.
simply because they composed verse...Disdaining verse is like not appreciating painting or music. It is a phenomenon characteristic of lack of culture.\textsuperscript{324}

Lugones wants to make clear in the prologue that his departure from classical poetry is by no means because he disdains it. On the contrary, because he has proven himself capable of properly handling classical verses, he asserts the right to affect innovations upon them. He confidently defends his use of free verse, and declares rhyme to be an essential element of modern verse. He closes the prologue with a reflection of a “personal nature”:

Three years ago, when I announced that I was working on this book, I said, “...An entire book dedicated to the moon. A sort of vengeance of which I have dreamt almost since childhood, every time I find myself overcome by life.”...Is there a purer and more arduous enterprise in the world than that of singing to the moon to avenge life?\textsuperscript{325}

Given that he has just professed the need for innovation in poetry, it may seem paradoxical that he has chosen to write odes to the moon, an age-old tradition of western poetry. But Lugones along with other modernists at the time saw Western models as a point of departure upon which to affect innovations. The goal was to borrow exotic elements from other cultures and to rework archetypal patterns in unorthodox ways to produce a poetry unique to Latin America, ideally a poetry which would rival the classics of Old World Europe. His particular strategy in \textit{Lunario} is to employ shocking metaphors, unexpected imagery, and pointed irony to playfully call into question traditional views of poetic beauty. He liberates verse from classical norms in a way that anticipates the avant-garde. In short, his strategy during this phase which I will refer to as modernismo, for lack of a better word, was to develop uniquely Argentine poetry vis-a-vis verbal play with foreign models. Just seven years later, in 1916, he would completely reverse tactics, embracing the realism

\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid., 74-75.
commonly rejected by modernist poets and by turning to rural rather than cosmopolitan elements, poetized with a patriotic rather than ironic tone. Borges, in acknowledgement of the various ideological phases of Lugones’s lifetime, wrote of the “diversas sinceridades de un hombre a quien le interesa un mismo problema y que da, a lo largo del tiempo, con soluciones contradictorias.” [diverse sincerities of a man interested in the same problem, who gives, over time, contradictory solutions]. Although Borges was referring to his political fickleness (from anarchist, to socialist, to fascist), drastic changes in strategy can also be perceived in his literary productions. Modernismo and criollismo, although contradictory tendencies, were at different times seen by Lugones as the ideal means for arriving at a uniquely Argentine literature.

Now that we understand Lugones’s technique of creatively re-working western models, we may turn to his short story inspired by the Vth Canto of Inferno. “Francesca” occupies an important position in Lunario as the final piece of the volume. It takes place in Italy and opens with the narrator’s visit to the famous municipal salon decorated by Raphael in Forli. He happens to ask a passer-by, an Italian student, about the train schedule to Rimini so that he can go visit the hometown of Francesca. Upon hearing this, the un-named student, with a commendable frankness, declares himself to be poor and offers to sell him a document: a parchment from the thirteenth century which he claims contains the true story of Francesca. Never, states the narrator, would he have purchased the codex out of pity or generosity, but his fervor for the ancient heroine combined with the spirit of fraternity that this student inspires in him lead him to undertake the transaction. Rather than travel to Rimini, he remains seven days in Forli engrossed in decoding its mysteries.

Lugones dedicates a great portion of his tale to convincing the reader of the authenticity of the manuscript, his quest for verisimilitude mirroring Dante’s efforts to convince the reader that
his voyage into the afterlife actually took place. The deteriorated document is written in Latin, in the beautiful gothic calligraphy characteristic of the thirteenth century. It is graced by an intricate nine-sided signum tabellionis of the notary Balzarino de Cervis, dating June 12th, 1292. Deciphering the text proves to be burdensome, with its innumerable abbreviations and symbols making the collaboration of a paleographer indispensable. But these same symbols that are so arduously decoded are yet another proof of the authenticity incessantly insisted upon by our narrator. He goes so far as to enumerate the many aspects of the document that make it datable to the supposed lifetime of Francesca.

Following these philological considerations, the narrator explains that providing the reader with a transcription of the document could only result in disinterest, so rough is the Latin and so curial the rhetoric. Thus, he will offer us a translation “tan libre come me plazca”327 [as free as I please], leaving the original at the disposal of the meticulous to be examined in the National Library. Here, the reader who has been bombarded with indications of the historical veracity of the document is suddenly playfully reminded that what he is reading is subject to the whims of our story-teller’s imagination.

By now, the reader of Lunario is very much in tune with Lugones’s playful spirit, and is less likely to be surprised by his daring modifications of the classics. Unlike many of the other pieces in Lunario which feature an unexpected twist revealed only at the end, in “Francesca” Lugones lays bare his innovative intentions early on—to prove Dante, Boccaccio, and the “falso Boccaccio” to be wrong--Francesca is not guilty of adultery:

Jamás hubo otra relación que una exaltada amistad entre Paolo y Francesca. Aun sus manos estuvieron exentas de culpa; y sus labios no tuvieron otra que la de estremecerse y palidecer en la dulce angustia de la pasión inconfesa.328  

328 Ibid.
[Paolo and Francesca never had any relationship beyond *exalted friendship*. Even their hands were free of guilt; and their lips did nothing more than tremble and become pale in the sweet anguish of un-confessed passion.]

This is the fundamental claim of the text which, we are told, was written by an unnamed friend of Francesca’s husband. According to his version of the story, Francesca was sixteen when she was betrothed to Giovanni Malatesta, a marriage arranged to solidify the peace between the Polentas of Ravena and the Malatesta of Rimini. Her husband to be, deformed and ugly, sent his brother Paolo in his place to ask her hand in order to avoid rejection. One of the servants in the house, believing Paolo to be the future groom, saluted him as if he was her new master. From this error, follows the tragedy.

The deceived Francesca spends the first night in the castle with her husband without however seeing him, given the obscurity of their nuptial chamber. The morning’s disillusionment proves devastating for the unsuspecting young bride, who wakes up “en los brazos del monstruo” [in the arms of a monster]. Lugones seeks to augment our pity for Francesca and our contempt for the tyrant who violated her trust by detailing the violence of Giovanni’s passions and his cold calculation in satisfying them. A master of black magic, he somehow foresaw where the youths were destined in the afterlife, and he considers their demise the work of his own hands.

While Francesca’s husband represents tyranny, ignoble deceit, and cowardly dishonesty, Paolo represents youthful satisfaction and tender beauty. He does everything in his power to make Francesca’s confinement in the castle more tolerable, such as writing her affectionate letters containing enigmas which are reproduced in the manuscript. For example, “la cruz de amore”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{E} & \quad \text{C} & \quad \text{A} & \quad \text{T} & \quad \text{E} \\
\text{N} & \quad \text{E} & \quad \text{M} & \quad \text{E} & \quad \text{A} \\
\text{A} & \quad \text{M} & \quad \text{O} & \quad \text{R} & \quad \text{E}
\end{align*}
\]

329 Ibid., 347.
Charmed by such playful displays of devotion, as readers we cannot help but understand how Francesca’s affection for Paolo grew to love. That autumn she and Paolo had spent more time together than ever reading saints’ lives, but one ill-fateful day, they came across the Novellino, which had been carefully planted just within their reach by Giovanni, part of his evil plan to drive them to sin to justify their murder. But it was not, our narrator explains, the story of Lancelot’s love for Guinevere that awakened them to their mutual love. Dante had it wrong: “Galeoto fué el libro…--dice el poeta. ---Oh, no, Dios mío! Fué el astro.” [A Galeotto was the book…says the poet.---Oh, no, my God! It was the moon.] The moon, catalyst of all the tales in the volume, is here too the culprit. The moon, which “seguía su obra, su obra de blancura y de redención, más allá del deber y de la vida…” [continued its work, its work of whiteness and redemption, beyond duty and beyond life…] Here, to evoke the melancholy mood of twilight Lugones quotes from the Divine Comedy, but not, as we might expect, from Canto V. Instead he chooses to include the opening lines of Purg VIII.331

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330 Ibid., 350-351.

331 This is the second time in Lunario that he quotes from Purg VIII. The other instance is the aforementioned lines in the first poem of the collection, Che cotesta cortese opinione/ Ti sia chiavata in mezzo della testa.
Che paia’l giorno pianger che si muore.\textsuperscript{332}

The bell which morns the dying light (also mentioned by Lugones, “el crepúsculo llorado por las esquilas”) refers to the bell marking Compline, the last canonical hour of the day when the hymn *Te lucis ante terminum* [‘Before the Ending of the Light’] is sung. As Grabher notes in his gloss to line 5 of *Purg* VIII, one purpose of the hymn is to invoke divine assistance against the temptations of the night,\textsuperscript{333} and thus these lines are particularly fitting as Francesca and Paolo are tortured by the temptations of the moon.

But as the moonlight illuminates the lovers’ pale faces, it reveals that in Francesca’s eyes there is no sensual pleasure to be found—only pain, and in her silent suffering she is Christ-like, a heroine. Furthermore, Poalo and Francesca do not kiss; they do nothing more than cry:

\[\text{Pálidos hasta la muerte, la luna aguzaba todavía su palidez con una desoladora convicción de eternidad; y cuando el llanto desbordó en gotas vivas—lo único que vivía en ellos—sobre sus manos, comprendieron que las palabras, los besos, la posesión misma, eran nada como afirmación de amor, ante la dicha de haber llorado juntos.}\]

[Pale as death, the moon sharpens their paleness with the discolored conviction of eternity; and as tears overflowed in pure drops,-- they realized that words, kisses, and even love-making were not near as great an affirmation of love as the joy of having cried together.]

And then a shadow emerges—Giovanni Malatesta, the hunchback of the castle, come to conduct some astrological consultation on the balcony. He catches a glimpse of their eyes, shining like stars of eternal damnation with all the narcotic poison of the moon. For Giovanni this is confirmation of their guilt, but the narrator affirms that they are in fact guiltless.

\[\text{Materialmente, no habían pecado, pues ni a tocarse llegaron, ni a hablarse siquiera; pero el esposo \textit{vio} en sus ojos el adulterio con tan vertiginosa claridad, con tal}\]

\textsuperscript{332}Ibid., 353; *Purg* VIII, 1-6.

\textsuperscript{333}See Carlo Grabher’s gloss (1934) to verse 5 of *Purg* VIII. The hymn is sung after Vespers, ideally accompanying the setting sun.
Thus Lugones’s creative reinvention of the fifth canto ends. Like the narrator, departing from the original manuscript as he pleases, Lugones playfully deviates from Dante’s original text. Firstly, he chooses to tell Francesca’s story in prose rather than poetry. This decision is all the more marked given that “Francesca” is one of the few prose short stories in Lunario, which is comprised primarily of poems. Given that poetry is by its very nature concise, and Dante the most concise of poets, we have very few details regarding the two male characters. Of Giovanni we are told only that “Caina attende chi a vita ci spense.” Of Dante’s Paolo, we know simply that he is a man with a “fair form” who weeps incessantly but is otherwise silent. Lugones, on the other hand, writing in prose, gives us detailed character sketches of his protagonists. He paints a fairy-tale inspired and princely portrait of Paolo, the sweet and handsome composer of enigmas, and a monstrous caricature of Giovanni, who seems to be a ghastly mixture of hunchback and sorcerer.

Of Dante’s Francesca, we have much more information, conveyed primarily through her speech addressed to the pilgrim. She is a dazzling rhetorician who blames Love (ch’a nullo amato amar perdona), her gentle heart, and even a book, the novellino, for her adulterous behavior. Although her story makes Dante weep for grief and pity, it is questionable as to whether we as readers should weep as well, for ultimately she is guilty and justly condemned to the second circle for all eternity. Lugones’s Francesca, on the contrary, is a picture of innocence. She has been mercilessly deceived and tortured, but yet remains Christ-like in her innocence—a martyr to true love. From the onset we are made to feel sympathetic toward her character. Another major
innovation, is that Lugones eliminates the climactic moment of Canto V--the kiss: “la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante.” Rather than focus on the mouth, he emphasizes her tear-filled eyes, “aquellos ojos negros como dos golondrinas de la Pasión, qué sacrificio de ternura abismaban en el heroismo de su silencio!” [those black eyes like two swallows of the Passion. What sacrifice of tenderness plunged in the heroism of her silence.]334

Lugones’s version of the Francesca story, which insists upon her innocence, belongs to a long line of adaptations of the Vth Canto, namely from the Romantic period, which seek to exonerate Dante’s lustful heroine.335 Aesthetically Lugones’s story also has something of European Romanticism in its validation of intense emotion (the central moment of the story), the sublimity of nature (the moon), and the embracing of the medieval and the exotic. The latter is most evident in his repeated use of the word “Byzantine” in association with Francesca, (en quien los refinamientos todavía bizantinos de su ciudad natal, habían profundizado sensibilidades)336 and in his description of the exotic decorations in the room: “Sobre la inmensa chimenea, una licorera bizantina que acababa de regalarlos con el delicioso licor de Zara, despedía en la sombra de la habitación el florido aroma de las guindas de Damacia.”337

It may seem surprising that Lugones, who had clearly sought in Lunario to bring in exotic, cosopolitan elements into his writing, would not long thereafter turn away from these tendencies

334 “Francesca,” 352.
335 During the 19th century the story of Francesca inspired numerous theatrical, operatic and visual adaptations of the story, many of which portray her as a tragic heroine.
336 He continues with “No alcanzaba a perder en la ruda prueba su gusto por las sederías suntuosas, por las joyas y el marfil; y es de creer que en su dulce molice entrara no poco el espíritu de aquel legendario malvasía, que consolaba la decadencia de los Andrónicos, sus contemporáneos, inmortalizando la ruda pequeñez de la helénica Monembasía. Magias de Bizancio, que el viento conducía a través del Adriático familiar; filtros de Bizancio diluidos en su sangre antigua; pompas de Bizancio, aun coetáneas en el lujo y en el arte, predisponíanla ciertamente al amor; a aquel amor más deseado en lo extremo de su crueldad. “Francesca,” 349-350.
337 Ibid., 352.
to embrace a rural, gauchesque poem as the national epic. In my opinion, this is because despite all the innovations made on models of Western European literature, *Lunario* still possesses a decidedly European and cosmopolitan flair. Could the poem and the stories therein be said to be “uniquely Argentine?” Not, at least, in an easily definable way. Furthermore, because it builds on European models, most notably Italian (Dante, Petrarch, and Commedia dell’arte) it does not exclude the culture of origin of the recently immigrated, as has been argued Lugones is trying to do with his lectures on *Martín Fierro*.\(^{338}\) *Lunario* does not evoke Argentina’s pre-migratory past. And finally, this collection of poems is not an epic poem, in his view the ideal genre for representing Argentine national essence. For these reasons, Lugones would later write *El payador* to promote the epic of José Hernández. He was largely successful in his endeavor to elevate the status of *Martín Fierro*, which was accepted by many as the height of Argentine national literature and as the literary representation of the national spirit.

Borges, however, was at odds with Lugones’s thesis. In the following section I will examine his response to the debates regarding national identity and Argentine literary tradition, followed by his own rewritings of Dantinean episodes. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Borges mocks Lugones’s poetics as well as his theories regarding Argentine literary tradition.

**Borges vs. Lugones, a new set of solutions to the “problem” of National Identity**

…debemos pensar que nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara. Creo que si nos abandonamos a ese sueño voluntario que se llama la creación artística, seremos argentinos y seremos, también, buenos o tolerables escritores.\(^{339}\)

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\(^{338}\) Sarlo, Olea, and myself are of this opinion, to name a few.

\(^{339}\) Borges, “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” in *Obras Completas*, 273-274.
[…we must believe our patrimony to be the universe; we should essay all themes, and we cannot limit ourselves to purely Argentine subjects in order to be Argentine; for either being Argentine is an inescapable act of fate, in which case we will be Argentine no matter what we do, or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask. I believe that if we lose ourselves in the voluntary dream which is artistic creation, we shall be Argentine and we shall also be good or tolerable writers.]

Borges’s entire oeuvre could be considered a quest to determine what constitutes and how to create a uniquely Argentine literature. The above quote is from his famous essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” (1951), in which he concludes that one need not write of gauchos or paint scenes abounding in local color in order to be Argentine. In his early career, however, Borges too had jumped on the criollista bandwagon. His nationalistic 1926 essay, “El tamaño de mi esperanza,” is no less an exaltation of creoles and an exclusion of immigrants than Lugones’s El payador. In the opening, he addresses himself to a specifically creole audience.

A Los criollos les quiero hablar: a los hombres que en esta tierra se sienten vivir y morir, no a los que creen que el sol y la luna están en Europa. Tierra de desterrados natos de ésta, de nostaljiosos de lo lejano y lo ajeno; ellos son los gringos de veras, autorícelo o no su sangre, y con ellos no habla mi pluma. Quiero convencer con los otros, con los muchachos querencieros y nuestros que no le achican la realidá a este país. Mi argumento de hoy es la patria: lo que hay en ella de presente, de pasado y de venidero.340

[It is to the criollos that I wish to speak—to the men who feel their life and death inextricably linked to this land, not to those who think the sun and the moon are in Europe. This is a land of born exiles, of men nostalgic for the far-off and the foreign: they are the real gringos, regardless of their parentage. With them my pen does not speak. I wish to speak to the others, to our own boys attached to this earth who do not belittle the reality of this country. My topic today is the patria: her present, past, and future.]

The patriotism of this paragraph is not without the xenophobic tendencies common among many creole authors at the time. A more mature Borges would be ashamed of the kind of nationalism he

was guilty of in his youth, and for this reason he later sought to destroy works like El tamaño de mi esperanza (1926), Inquisiciones (1925), and El idioma de los argentinos (1928).

In “Invectiva contra el arrabalero” (1926), Borges acknowledges Martín Fierro as an adequate symbol of rural Argentina, but laments the fact that the great city of Buenos Aires remained un-poeticized.

Pero Buenos Aires, pese a los dos millones de destinos individuales que lo abarrotan, permanecerá desierto y sin voz, mientras algún símbolo no lo pueble. La provincia sí está poblada: allí están Santos Vega y el gaucho Cruz y Martín Fierro, posibilidades de dioses. La ciudad sigue a la espera de una poetización.341

[But Buenos Aires, despite the two million inhabitants that cram her streets, remains deserted and without a voice, with no symbol to populate her. The provinces on the other hand are populated: there are Santos Vega and the gaucho Cruz and Martín Fierro, possibilities of gods. The city yet waits for a poetization.]

The challenge at hand for Borges during this period, which has been referred to by Beatriz Sarlo as “urban criollismo,” was to populate with symbols his beloved Buenos Aires.342 In “El tamaño de mi esperanza” he explains that his goal is to create for his city a literature that would correspond to her “grandiose vital reality.”343 For Borges, Buenos Aires is “more than a city, it is a country and we must find the poetry, the music, the painting, the religion and the metaphysics appropriate to its greatness.”344 From these words two things become clear 1) he views Buenos Aires as a city which lacks not only a poetic identity, but also a musical, visual, and religious identity, in other words, a cultural failure of sorts 2) he clearly envisions writers and artists as those who must consciously work to remedy what at the time he evidently considered a pertinent problem. He


343 Ibid., 17.

continues, “That is the size of my hope and I invite you all to become gods to work for its fulfillment.” As here expressed, Argentina’s cultural identity (or at least the cultural identity of Buenos Aires) does not exist and remains to be constructed. This is diametrically opposed to Lugones’s argument that Martín Fierro exists, it reflects Argentine national identity, and therefore Argentine national identity exists.

One of his most famous attempts from the time period to write a mythology of a city he felt was lacking one is his poem “Fundación Mítica de Buenos Aires” (1929). Here too, the construction of the mythological foundation at hand is seen as something which is collective (“supondremos”). I have included the poem in its entirety, which is extremely self-aware that all literature is artifice.

**Fundación Mítica de Buenos Aires**

¿Y fue por este río de sueñera y de barro que las proas vinieron a fundarme la patria?
Irían a los tumbos los barquitos pintados entre los camalotes de la corriente zaina.

Pensando bien la cosa, supondremos que el río era azulejo entonces como oriundo del cielo con su estrellita roja para marcar el sitio en que ayunó Juan Díaz y los indios comieron.

Lo cierto es que mil hombres y otros mil arribaron por un mar que tenía cinco lunas de anchura y aun estaba poblado de sirenas y endriagos y de piedras imanes que enloquecen la brújula.

Prendieron unos ranchos trémulos en la costa, durmieron extrañados. Dicen que en el Riachuelo, pero son embelecos fraguados en la Boca. Fue una manzana entera y en mi barrio: en Palermo.

Una manzana entera pero en mitá del campo

345 Ibid.
expuesta a las auroras y lluvias y suestadas.
La manzana pareja que persiste en mi barrio:
Guatemala, Serrano, Paraguay, Guruchaga.

Un almacén rosado como revés de naípe
brilló y en la trastienda conversaron un truco;
el almacén rosado floreció en un compadre,
ya patrón de la esquina, ya resentido y duro.

El primer organito salvaba el horizonte
con su achacoso porte, su habanera y su gringo.
El corralón seguro ya opinaba Yrigoyen,
algún piano mandaba tangos de Saborido.

Una cigarrería sahumó como una rosa
el desierto. La tarde se había ahondado en ayeres,
los hombres compartieron un pasado ilusorio.
Sólo faltó una cosa: la vereda de enfrente.

A mí se me hace cuento que empezó Buenos Aires:
La juzgo tan eterna como el agua y el aire.346

The Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires

[And was it along this torpid muddy river
that the prows came to found my native city?
The little painted boats must have suffered the steep surf
among the root-clumps of the horse-brown current.

Pondering well, let us suppose that the river
was blue then like an extension of the sky,
with a small red star inset to mark the spot
where Juan Diaz fasted and the Indians dined.

But for sure a thousand men and other thousands
arrived across a sea that was five moons wide,
still infested with mermaids and sea serpents
and magnetic boulders that sent the compass wild.

On the coast they put up a few ramshackle huts

and slept uneasily. This, they claim, in the Riachuelo, but that is a story dreamed up in Boca. It was really a city block in my district – Palermo.

A whole square block, but set down in open country, attended by dawns and rains and hard southeasters, identical to that block which still stands in my neighbourhood: Guatemala – Serrano – Paraguay – Gurruchaga.

A general store pink as the back of a playing card shone bright; in the back there was poker talk. The corner bar flowered into life as a local bully, already cock of his walk, resentful, tough.

The first barrel organ teetered over the horizon with its clumsy progress, its habaneras, its wop. The cart-shed wall was unanimous for Yrigoyen. Some piano was banging out tangos by Saborido.

A cigar store perfumed the desert like a rose. The afternoon had established its yesterdays, and men took on together an illusory past. Only one thing was missing – the street had no other side.

Hard to believe Buenos Aires had any beginning. I feel it to be as eternal as air and water.

The foundation of Buenos Aires is for Borges a question worthy of our imaginations, but all responses are but dreams. “Sueñera” (drowsiness), which is used to describe the river, contains the root of sueño, (dream). It is a collective dream (supondremos), and one that is an idealized version of what actually happened, given that the imagined river is blue instead of “horse-brown.” What is presented as fact is that the inhabitants of Buenos Aires arrived from Europe: “But for sure a thousand men and other thousands/ arrived across a sea that was five moons wide.” They came from lands whose own mythological foundations were no less artificial. What Borges seeks to

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highlight is that the mermaids, sea serpents, and magnetic boulders of Homer’s *Odyssey* are no less fictional or fantastic than more recent attempts to create a mythology of Argentina. It is just as far-fetched to assume that the “torpid, muddy river” was once blue, or that the settlers built their huts in the Riachuelo (“a story dreamed up in Boca”).

But Borges’s recognition of the highly fictional nature of mythological foundations does not deter his search for symbols to populate his city. In his early years and at the time of this poem from his *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), Borges chose the “almacén rosado” and the “compadre” as his preferred symbols. But he in no way tries to conceal the fact that they are symbols, essentially no different from the use of rose as a symbol of love. The symbols of Buenos Aires just happen to be decidedly more rugged and significantly less refined than those of Western Europe, which recalls the civilization/barbarism contrast: “una cigarrería sahumó como una rosa/ el desierto” [the tabacco shop perfumed the desert like a rose]. His descriptions of the city involve dusks, dusty streets, compadres, arrabales, and of course, a nod to the national dance, the tango. In the key line of the poem Borges indicates a self-awareness of his collective involvement in constructing a past which is more invention than fact: “La tarde se había ahondado en ayeres, los hombres compartieron un pasado ilusorio” [The afternoon had established its yesterdays, and men took on together an illusory past.]\(^{348}\) In saying that a particular afternoon had established *yesterdays* (plural), Borges indicates that the vision of the past is constantly evolving from day today, and that even at one moment in time, yields multiple versions of the past. “Ilusorio,” here translated as “illusory,” can also mean “empty” or “ineffective,” and seems to hint that the aforementioned symbols of Buenos Aires are not ideal icons for something “as eternal as air and water.” Nevertheless, the illusory past is necessary, and effective so long as men can share it.

The perceived need of a collective mythology was also what had driven Lugones to write El payador. But Borges was not agreed that Martín Fierro could serve such a purpose. Although he proclaims Martín Fierro to be the “obra máxima” of gaucho literature, he did not believe it to be an adequate reflection of the Argentine national essence. In his essay on gauchesque poetry, written in 1932, he counters the argument put forth by Lugones in El payador. Of all the heroes of gaucho poetry, he identifies Fierro as “el más individual, el que menos responde a una tradición…¿Qué fin se proponía Hernández? Uno, limitadísimo: la historia del destino de Martín Fierro, referida por éste.” [the most individual, the one that least corresponds to a tradition…What purpose did Hernández have in writing it? A most limited one: to relate the history of one man, Martín Fierro, as told by Martín Fierro]. Of the literary criticism generated by the work he writes: “Sospecho que no hay otro libro argentino que haya sabido provocar de la crítica un dispendio igual de inutilidades.” [I suspect that no other Argentine book prompted such a waste of useless criticism.]

He criticizes the hyperbolic praise that has been lavished on the novel and which makes “una forzada igualación con el Cantar del Cid y con la Comedia dantesca” [a forced comparison with El Cid and Dante’s Comedy.]

Part of the erroneous thinking that leads to such comparisons, he argues, is that “certain literary genres (in this case the epic) are worth more than others.” This criticism is clearly directed at Lugones who declared epic poetry to be the expression of the heroic life of a people. He does not even agree with Lugones’s supposition that Martín Fierro belongs to this genre in the first place:


350 Ibid.

351 Ibid., 193.

352 Ibid.

353 Ibid.
La estrafalaria y cándida necesidad de que el *Martín Fierro* sea épico ha pretendido comprimir, siquiera de un modo simbólico, la historia secular de la patria, con sus generaciones, sus destierros, sus agonías, sus batallas de Tucumán y de Ituzaingó, en las andanzas de un cuchillero de mil ochocientos setenta. Oyuela desbaratado ya ese complot. “El asunto del *Martín Fierro,*” anota, “no es propiamente nacional, ni menos de raza, ni se relaciona en modo alguno con nuestros orígenes como pueblo, ni como nación políticamente constituida. Trátase en él de las dolorosas vicistudes de la vida de un guacho, *en el último tercio del siglo anterior,* en la época de la decadencia y próxima desaparición de este tipo local y transitorio nuestro, ante una organización social que lo aniquila, contadas o cantadas por el mismo protagonista.”

[Borges strongly contends against the association of this work with epic: “asimilar el libro de Hernández a esa categoría primitiva [epic] es agotarse inútilmente en un juego de fingir coincidencias, es denunciar a toda posibilidad de un examen. La legislación de la épica – metros heroicos, intervención de los dioses, destacada situación política de los héroes- no es aplicable aquí.”]
political situation of the heroes – is not here applicable.]\(^{355}\) Shooting a hole through Lugones’s argument, Borges instead affirms *Martín Fierro*’s affinities with the modern novel.

Borges would continue to counter Lugones’s arguments regarding gauchesque poetry and *Martín Fierro* in “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (1951) by far the most important essay as regards the problem of the argentine writers and tradition. Originally prepared for a lecture given at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, in this essay he questions the validity of the “problem.”

Quiero formular y justificar algunas proposiciones escépticas sobre el problema del escritor argentino y la tradición. Mi escepticismo no se refiere a la dificultad o imposibilidad de resolverlo, sino a la existencia misma del problema. Creo que nos enfrenta un tema retórico, apto para desarrollos patéticos; más que de una verdadera dificultad mental entiendo que se trata de una apariencia, de un simulacro, de un seudoproblema.\(^{356}\)

[I would like to formulate and justify some skeptical proposals concerning the problem of the Argentine writer and tradition. My skepticism does not relate to the difficulty or impossibility of solving this problem, but rather to its very existence. I believe we are faced with a rhetorical topic which leads to pathetic elaborations, rather than with a true mental difficulty. I understand that we are dealing with an appearance, a simulacrum, a pseudo problem.]

If the question of the Argentine writer and tradition is, as Borges says, a “pseudo problem,” then all attempts to resolve it must therefore be “pathetic.” Borges follows this pronouncement with a debunking of various theories, most notably that of Lugones. As aforementioned, Lugones had argued in *El payador* that Argentine literary tradition exists in *gauchesque* poetry, and that *Martín Fierro* is for Argentines what the Homeric poems were for the Greeks. Borges refutes this assertion, taking great care to make his criticism of Lugones’s argument without however slighting

\(^{355}\) Ibid., 197.

\(^{356}\) Presented in 1951, the work was first published in 1953 in *Cursos y conferencias*. Borges, “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), 267.
*Martín Fierro*, which he calls “the most lasting work we Argentines have written.”

Although he recognizes the literary merit of the work, he does not believe that it can be considered the canonical book of all Argentines. According to Borges, Lugones is making a nationalistic argument and erroneously seeking a national epic to fulfill the role of a *Don Quixote* or *Divine Comedy*. Even worse in Borges’s view are the conclusions of Ricardo Rojas, who claims that gauchesque poetry is a continuation or expansion of the poetry of the *payadores*. Borges sees this affirmation as fundamentally flawed. He suspects that Rojas made this “skillful error” in order to give the gauchesque poetry a popular basis.

As Nicolas Shumway rightly points out, Borges’s intention was to “depoliticize the gauchesque for which Argentine nationalists were making quite extravagant claims.” In his book *The Invention of Argentina*, Shumway documents the transformation of the term *gauch* into “a nationalist rallying cry that in this century has made *gauch* synonymous with *authentic Argentine*.” He outlines the process by which the term came to label “one of Argentina’s principal guiding fictions.” Lugones’s *El payador*, of course, played a major role in this process. But where Lugones had argued for authenticity, Borges emphasized artificiality: “gauchesque poetry…is a literary genre as artificial as any other.”

To highlight the genre’s lack of correspondence to the poetry of the gauchos, he points out that gauchesque poetry is composed in hendecasyllables, a meter which was not used by the *payadores*, whom he claims could not perceive its harmony. He also contrasts the vocabulary and

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357 Ibid.


359 Ibid., 70.

360 Ibid.

themes of the payadores (whom he claims to have heard in person), with those of the gauchesque poets. While the payadores employ a general vocabulary to sing of abstract themes like time, space, the sea and night, the gauchesque poems feature a forced preoccupation with local color and abound in criollismos. In other words, gauchesque poetry is extremely recherché: “The proof is this: a Colombian, Mexican or Spaniard can immediately understand the poetry of the payadores, of the gauchos, and yet they need a glossary in order to understand, even approximately, Estanislao del Campo or Ascasubi.”

In Borges’s view, not only do nationalist theories such as that proposed by Lugones lead to erroneous conclusions as regards literature, they also greatly limit the creativity of authors:

los nacionalistas simulan venerar las capacidades de la mente argentina pero quieren limitar el ejercicio poético de esa mente a algunos pobres temas locales, como si los argentinos sólo pudiéramos hablar de orillas y estancias y no del universo.

In other words, gauchesque poetry is extremely recherché: “The proof is this: a Colombian, Mexican or Spaniard can immediately understand the poetry of the payadores, of the gauchos, and yet they need a glossary in order to understand, even approximately, Estanislao del Campo or Ascasubi.”

In Borges’s view, not only do nationalist theories such as that proposed by Lugones lead to erroneous conclusions as regards literature, they also greatly limit the creativity of authors:

Borges desired to be considered, and felt himself to be, like Dante, an author of the universe. He insists that for literature to be Argentine, it does not have to be chock full of Argentine architecture and imagery or of supposedly Argentine themes.

creo que Racine ni siquiera hubiera entendido a una persona que le hubiese negado su derecho al título de poeta francés por haber buscado temas griegos y latinos. Creo que Shakespeare se habría asombrado si hubieran pretendido limitarlo a temas ingleses, y si le hubiesen dicho que, como inglés, no tenía derecho a escribir Hamlet, de tema escandinavo, o MacBeth, de tema escocés. El culto argentino del color local es un reiente culto europeo que los nacionalistas deberían rechazar por foráneo.

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362 Ibid.
363 Ibid., 271.
364 Ibid., 270.
[I think Racine would not even have understood a person who denied him his right to the title of poet of France because he cultivated Greek and Roman themes. I think Shakespeare would have been amazed if people had tried to limit him to English themes, and if they had told him that, as an Englishman, he had no right to compose *Hamlet*, whose theme is Scandinavian, or *Macbeth*, whose theme is Scottish. The Argentine cult of local color is a recent European cult which the nationalists ought to reject as foreign.]

To prove his point he gives the now famous example of Gibbon, who in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* had remarked upon the lack of camels in the Koran. Borges believes the absence to be sufficient proof that the work is indeed Arabian.

Fue escrito por Mahoma, y Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad, no tenía que distinguirlos; en cambio, un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe, lo primero que hubiera hecho es prodigar camellos, caravanas de camellos en cada página.\(^{365}\)

[It [the Koran] was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian; for him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page.]

Similarly, Argentine authors are still Argentine, even if they do not have gauchos running across every page. He confesses that his “happily forgotten” book *Fervor de Buenos Aires* does indeed abound in local color and words such as “*cuchilleros*” “*milonga*,” and “*tapia*.” But this he sees as a mistake of his youth, an overzealous attempt to appear Argentine, hence his omission of “El tamaño de mi esperanza” (1926) and “El idioma de los argentinos” (1928) from *Obras completas* (1974).

The second solution to the “pseudo problem” that Borges counters is the belief that Argentine writers should adhere to Spanish literature. This is very easily argued against given that

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\(^{365}\) Ibid.
“Argentine history can be unmistakably defined as a desire to become separated from Spain.”"366

In conclusion, he dismantles the assumption that Argentina is in essence cut off from the past. Belief in a discontinuity between Argentina and Europe leads to the opinion that searching for European themes is an error. He argues that it is reasonable for Argentines to be cosmopolitan and to recognize their European roots.

¿Cuál es la tradición argentina? Creo que podemos contestar fácilmente y que no hay problema en esta pregunta. Creo que nuestra tradición es toda la cultura occidental, y creo también que tenemos derecho a esta tradición, mayor que el que pueden tener los habitantes de una u otra nación occidental.367

[What is Argentine tradition? I believe we can answer this question easily and that there is no problem here. I believe our tradition is all of Western culture, and I also believe we have a right to this tradition, greater than that which the inhabitants of any other Western nation might have.]

Being non-European, in fact, leads to a certain advantage when reworking Western themes. Because Argentines act within Western culture, but yet are not tied to it by any special devotion, it is easier for them to affect innovations.

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, (…) podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas.368

[I believe that we Argentines, we South Americans in general (…) can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences.]

He interprets the frenzy of discourses related to the “problem” of Argentine tradition as nothing more than a fad, “a contemporary and passing form of the eternal problem of determination.”369

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366 Ibid., 271.
367 Ibid., 272.
368 Ibid., 273.
369 Ibid.
conclusion, he declares the Argentine patrimony to be the universe and encourages authors to essay all themes:

no podemos concretarnos a lo argentine para ser argentina: porque o ser argentina es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentina es una mera afectación, una máscara. Creo que si no abandonamos a ese sueño voluntario que se llama la creación artística, seremos argentinos y seremos también, buenos o tolerables escritores.370

[we cannot limit ourselves to purely Argentine subjects in order to be Argentine; for either being Argentine is an inescapable act of fate—and in that case we shall be so in all events—or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask. I believe that if we surrender ourselves to that voluntary dream which is artistic creation, we shall be Argentine and we shall also be good or tolerable writers.]

If the Argentines had any hope of creating a masterpiece as lasting as the Divine Comedy, then they must, like Dante, be authors of the universe. His argument is also a way to affirm his own breadth of theme.

Similar countering of Lugones’s nationalistic argument in El payador and also his poetics can be found in Borges’s fiction. In the following section I will discuss how he makes a mockery of Lugones style of writing in “The Aleph” and parodies the notions advanced in El payador with his short story “The Intruder.”

**Lugones Makes a Poor Dante**

Lugones, poeta no indigno de recordar a Hugo, crítico más adicto a la intimidación que a la persuasión ha simplificado hasta lo monstruoso nuestros debates literarios. Ha postulado una diferencia moral entre el recurso de marcar las pausas con rimas, y el de omitir este artificio. Ha decretado luz a quienes ejercen ese artefacto, sombra y perdición a los otros.371

[Lugones, a poet reminiscent of Hugo, a critic more devoted to intimidation than persuasion, has simplified to a monstrous degree our literary debates. He has

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370 Ibid., 274.
postulated a moral difference between marking pauses with rhyme and choosing not to do so. He declared light to those who make use of this device, and darkness and perdition to those who don’t.

The above citation is from Borges’s essay “Roberto Godel: Nacimiento del fuego,” a response to the polemic started by Lugones’s prologue to Lunario sentimental. Borges imagines Lugones in the role of Dante, determining the afterlife of his contemporaries. Similarly in “The Aleph” we find Lugones mascarading as Dante in figure of Carlos Argentino Daneri. I will begin my discussion with “The Aleph,” one of Borges’s most popular stories. It held a special place in the author’s eyes as well, given that “The Aleph” is the title not only of the story, but also of the whole collection of stories in which it first appeared. In “The Aleph,” Borges re-writes Dante in order to engage in the literary polemic regarding Argentine identity.

Dante was one of Borges’s favorite poets. His influence is omnipresent in Borges’s work, and a thorough study of Dante in Borges would provide enough material for many books.372 I will limit myself only to Dante parallels in works pertaining directly to the question of national identity and those which are a veiled critique of Leopoldo Lugones. According to Borges himself, the first time he read the Comedy was shortly before the dictatorship. He chanced upon a bilingual edition with an English translation by Thomas Carlyle. He would pour over it on the long tram ride from his home to the library at Avenida La Palta and Carlos Calvo where he worked at the time. First he would read the text in English, then in Italian, until finally at the moment in the text when Dante is abandoned by Virgil in Paradise, he found that he was able to read the Italian directly, only occasionally referring to the English. He had never formally studied Italian, and learned it

primarily from Dante and later Ariosto. Subsequently, he reread the work many times, “in all of the editions I could find.” 373

Mentions of the *Comedy* occur frequently in Borges’s non-fiction. In 1949 he wrote essays on Ulysses, Ugolino, and Beatrice as part of an introduction to a Spanish translation of the *Commedia* (“Estudio preliminar”). Between 1948 and 1962 he wrote several more essays, including one on the Vth Canto of *Inferno* (“El Verdugo piadoso”) and one on Dante’s limbo (“El noble castillo.”) His essays were later published as *Nueve ensayos dantescos*. 374 The number of essays in this collection is no coincidence. It had to be nine, a miracle, like Beatrice. Nine essays with a prologue brings the total parts to ten, the perfect number.

In various essays and interviews he identifies the *Divine Comedy* as one of his favorite books, and his opinion did not change over the course of his lifetime. In his 1943 essay “Sobre el ‘Vathek’ de William Beckford,” he proclaims the work to be “the most justifiable and the most solid book of all literature.” 375 In 1977 when he was asked to give a series of seven lectures on various cultural themes in Buenos Aires (later published as *Siete noches*), he dedicated his first lecture to Dante: “I have chosen the *Commedia* for this first talk,” he explains, “because I am a man of letters and I believe that the apex of literature, of all literature, is the *Commedia*.” 376 In an interview with Roberto Alifano in the early 1980s, when asked if he still considered the *Comedy* the highest work of literature, he responded:

Yes, certainly. The *Comedy* has given me highly intense aesthetic emotions; it is a book that all of us must read. Not to read the *Comedy* is to deprive ourselves of the


greatest gift that literature can give us. Dante, moreover, is one of the most extraordinary personages in all of literature. I always say that I read for pleasure, that I seek emotion in books. The emotion that I felt in my many readings of the *Comedy* will be with me until my end; it is an emotion that goes beyond my wakeful hours.377

From the last quote we can see that the primary reason for which he praised the *Divine Comedy* was for the emotional response it engenders.

His works of fiction are a further testament to his great admiration for Dante. Among the poems inspired by the *Comedy* are most notably the “Poema conjectural” and “Inferno V: 129.” He also wrote the parables “*Inferno, I, 32,”* and “*Paradiso, XXXI, 108*” published in *El Hacedor* (1960). His short stories also abound with allusions and references to Dante. One of challenges Borges constantly posed himself as a short story writer was how to capture the universe in words, a feat which he believed Dante had somehow miraculously accomplished. In the “Estudio preliminar” to the *Divine Comedy* he compares the book to an intricately painted panel “whose edges enclose the universe”:

> Imaginemos, en una biblioteca oriental, una lámina pintada hace muchos siglos. Acaso es árabe y nos dicen que en ella están figuradas todas las fábulas de las *Mil y una noches*; acaso es china y sabemos que ilustra una novela con centenares o millares de personajes. En el tumulto de sus formas, alguna – un árbol que semeja un cono invertido, unas mezquitas de color bermejo sobre un muro de hierro- nos llama la atención y de esa pasamos a otras. Declina el día, se fatiga la luz y a medida que nos internamos en el grabado, comprendemos que no hay cosa en la tierra que no esté ahí. Lo que fue, lo que es y lo que será, la historia del pasado y la del futuro, las cosas que ha tenido y las que tendré, todo ello nos espera en algún lugar de ese laberinto tranquilo…He fantaseado una obra mágica, una lámina que también fuera un microcosmo, el poema de Dante es esa lámina de ámbito universal.378

[Imagine, in an Oriental library, a panel painted many centuries ago. It may be Arabic, and we are told that all the legends of *The Thousand and One Nights* are


represented on its surface; it may be Chinese, and we learn that it illustrates a novel that has hundreds or thousands of characters. In the tumult of its forms, one shape – a tree like an inverted cone; a group of mosques, vermilion in color, against an iron wall – catches our attention, and from there we move on to others. The day declines, the light is wearing thin, and as we go deeper into the carved surface we understand that there is nothing on earth that is not there. What was, is, and shall be, the history of past and figure, the things I had had and those I will have, all of it awaits us somewhere in this serene labyrinth…I have fantasized a magical work, a panel that is also a microcosm: Dante’s poem is that panel whose edges enclose the universe.]379

Many of Borges’s stories involve similar attempts to describe the universe or recall what is infinite in words. In “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the protagonist and other intellectuals attempt to reconstruct the entire history, culture, and languages of an imaginary world. In “La Esfera de Pascal” Hermes Trismegistus is said to have dictated books “in whose pages all things were written.”380 Mention, of course, is made of Dante who long before him “preserved Ptolemaic astronomy, which for 1,400 years governed the imagination of man.”381 In “Funes el memorioso” the main character possess the capacity to remember everything that ever happened to him and everything he ever read. Funes could reconstruct what he did on any given day, but doing so would take him the course of an entire day.382 There is always in Borges the problem of enumeration, the impossibility of conveying the infinite and simultaneous through language, which necessarily requires a sequential order.


381 Ibid., 637.

Borges’s most notable attempt to capture the infinite within the confines of a story is “The Aleph.” The Aleph is “one of the points in space that contain all points” or in other words, a point in the universe where “without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist.” Its contents cannot be related in their entirety:

[Arribo, ahora, al ineffable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; ¿cómo trasmitir a los otros el infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca? (…) Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que trascribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es.]

[I come now to the ineffable center of my tale; it is here that a writer’s hopelessness begins. Every language is an alphabet of symbols the employment of which assumes a past shared by its interlocutors. How can one transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my timorous memory can scarcely contain? …What my eyes saw was simultaneous; what I shall write is successive, because language is successive.]

Borges’s eventual description is partly inspired by Dante the pilgrim’s vision of God in the Empyrean, the realm of pure light. Like God’s intolerable brightness, the Aleph is “a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brightness.” And like Dante the poet, Borges protagonist in the above passage laments the impossibility of describing what he saw. Borges’s descent into the cellar mirrors Dante’s descent into hell. Also like the Divine Comedy and Vita Nuova, Borges is both author and protagonist of his story.

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385 “The Aleph,” 129.

386 Ibid.
Another obvious parallel with the *Divine Comedy* is Borges’s love for an unattainable lady, Beatriz Viterbo, a more awkward, un-idealized version of Dante’s Beatrice. Although Beatriz is said to have passed away in 1929 (the story takes place in 1941), Borges’s unrequited love is stronger than ever. Every year on her birthday he visits her house in Calle Garay, still inhabited by her cousin, Carlos Argentino Daneri. Every year Borges stays a little longer: first only for twenty-five minutes, then (thanks to a fortuitous downpour) for dinner, and finally, by the time the story takes place, he has become the sole person whom Daneri entrusts with a great secret. In desperation Daneri discloses to Borges the existence of the Aleph hidden in his cellar, which risks being demolished as a pair of business men plan to expand their already enormous café. He insists upon Borges’s descent into the cellar and guides him through the process, thereby taking on the role of Virgil in this Dantesque catabasis. Although Borges does in fact see the Aleph, he pretends otherwise in order to make his arch-nemesis Daneri doubt its existence and believe himself to be mad.

Critics who have glossed the allusions to Dante throughout “The Aleph” have often read Carlos Argentino Daneri as a parody of Dante. This hasty conclusion is arrived at by combining the first three letters of *Dante* with the last three letters of *Alighieri*. This is hardly sufficient

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388 See for example Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, 138. This is also the opinion of Jon Thiem, 100. Others have read the figure of Daneri as a parody of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, although this would hardly make sense given his middle name “Argentino,” and the fact that his poem is published in a series “Argentine pieces.” Nuñez-Faraco suggests the possibility of parallels with the Nicaraguan writer Ruben Darío, but ultimately concludes that Daneri “embodies a complex web of literary references.” See *Borges and Dante*, 45.
evidence for such a sweeping conclusion. Such an interpretation ignores both the definition of parody and the details of the story. To parody is to deliberately exaggerate the particular style of an author for comic effect, and a close-look at Daneri’s verses, as we shall see, shows no sign of similarities with Dante’s. Furthermore, a great majority of the story is dedicated to the derision of this character. The predominant emotion in the tale is not love for Beatriz, but spite for Daneri, her first cousin. As the story progresses, this spite escalates to bitter hatred and ends with Borges protagonist enacting his revenge against this figure (“instantly I conceived my revenge”)---leading Daneri to believe he is mad.389 But revenge for what? And why would Borges seek revenge upon a character associated with Dante, one of his favorite authors whom in all other instances he praises? Jon Thiem has suggested that this is a case of Bloomian “anxiety of influence” in regards to Dante. But a close examination of the story (and the reason behind Borges’s protagonist’s derision of Daneri) reveals that Borges’s anxiety is on account of one of his more immediate precursors: Leopoldo Lugones--the true alter-ego of Carlos Argentino Daneri.390

Prior to Lugones’s death, Borges was actively antagonistic towards Lugones’s poetry and also towards his theories regarding Argentine literature laid out in *El payador*. Following his death, however, decorum and tact required him to write humble homages in the place of biting critiques. At this juncture, Borges’s fiction, and specifically “The Aleph” (written eleven years after Lugones death) became an outlet for his pent up hostility. His animosity is the expression of what he could no longer voice through criticism. A close look at Daneri’s verses and the critique of them waged by Borges protagonist reveals striking parallels with criticisms launched against Lugones’s


390 To my knowledge, the only other person to have identified Daneri as Lugones is Marisa Martínez Périsco in her essay “El Dilema de los críticos practicantes: un discurso que no puede exceder sus propios márgenes. L. Lugones a través de J.L. Borges,” *Cartaphilus* 2 (2007): 107-118.
Lunario sentimental and Los crepúsculos del jardín in Martin Fierro in his literary criticism. Borges’s parody of Lugones’s verses, the pedantic commentary of Daneri, and the ensuing critique of Borges protagonist take up approximately three pages of the twelve-page story, whereas his description of what he saw within the Aleph (i.e. the entire universe) takes up little more than a page.

With this in mind Borges’s clever choice of his protagonist’s name makes more sense. Carlos is the name of Lugones’s younger brother, Carlos Florencio Lugones, born in 1885. The middle name “Argentino” is significant because Lugones was considered the “primer escritor argentino,” and the Day of the Argentine author is celebrated on his birthday, June 13th. Finally, the surname Daneri is a distortion of Dante, perhaps because this pathetic poet does not live up to the great master’s name.

The first thing we learn about Carlos Argentino is that he is a “gray-haired man of refined features” who holds “some sort of subordinate position in an illegible library in the outskirts toward the south of the city.” In 1915 Lugones became the director of the Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros, a public library specialized in pedagogy. Secondly, we are told that he is “authoritarian, though also ineffectual”; Lugones, although fickle in his political views, ultimately defended an authoritarian state. We then learn that “until very recently he [Daneri] took advantage of nights and holidays to remain at home,” and that his chef-d’œuvre was written, “leaning always on those twin staffs Work and Solitude.” This depiction of Daneri as an eccentric and solitary

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391 Lugones was born on the 13th of June 1874. The Sociedad Argentina de Escritores (SADE), which he founded during his lifetime, designated his date of birth as the “Dia del Escritor” in his honor following his tragic suicide; Périsco, 111.


393 Périsco, 110.

394 “The Aleph,” 199-120.
man is much in line with Borges’s characterizations of Lugones to be found in his literary criticism. In 1955 in collaboration with Betina Edelberg, Borges wrote a long essay intended as an introduction to Lugones’s work, in which he describes him as a proud and solitary poet, unable to express true feeling. He declares that his introduction will leave to others the “exhaustivos análisis estilísticos y la historia de un hombre solitario, orgulloso y valiente, cuyos libros despertaron la admiración, pero no el afecto, y que murió, tal vez, sin haber escrito la palabra que lo expresara” [exhaustive stylistic analysis and the history of a solitary, proud, and brave man whose books earned him admiration but not affection, and who died, perhaps, without having written a word that expressed himself.]\textsuperscript{395} Similarly, in the closing paragraph of the work he refers to Lugones as “un hombre que, sin saberlo, se negó a la pasión y laboriosamente erigió altos e ilustres edificios verbales hasta que el frío y la soledad lo alcanzaron” [a man who, without knowing it, rejected passion and laboriously erected tall and illustrious verbal edifices, until the cold and solitude caught up with him.]\textsuperscript{396} Similarly, the verses of the solitary Daneri, a parody of Lugones, are all verbal pomp and pedantism, minus the passion.

Furthermore, Daneri is said to be obsessed with Paul Fort, whom he deems “the prince of the poets of la belle France.”\textsuperscript{397} Fort was associated with the symbolist movement, which was influential to the development of modernism in Latin America, and therefore to Lugones who was Argentina’s most famous practitioner of this aesthetic. Lugones, a big fan of Fort, featured his poetry in not one but two of only seven issues of the \textit{Revue Sud-Américaine},\textsuperscript{398} a journal published


\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., 508.

\textsuperscript{397} “The Aleph,” 120.

\textsuperscript{398} Fort’s poems appear in both Vol. I, no. 2 (February 1914) and Vol. II, no. 4 (April 1914).
entirely under Lugones’s direction. This seemingly ironically-named journal (it was printed in Paris, in French) frequently featured French poets such as Fort, Emile Verhaeren, and Francis Vielé-Griffin.\textsuperscript{399} Daneri, Lugones’s literary alter ego, waxes defensive in response to Borges protagonist’s criticism of Fort’s poetry: “You assail him in vain; you shall never touch him—not even the most venomous of your darts shall ever touch him.” His polemical tone is not appreciated by Borges who deems his observations and ideas so “witless,” “sweeping” and “pompous in the way they are expressed” that he “immediately associates them with literature.”\textsuperscript{400} As is readily apparent from the first few pages, the Aleph is an extremely metaliterary text, and its protagonists Borges (Borges) and Daneri (Lugones) stand on opposite ends of the literary spectrum.

Daneri’s masterpoem, \textit{La Tierra [The Earth]}, dedicated to the “terraqueous orb,” is a jab at Lugones’s masterpiece dedicated to a lesser orb, the moon (\textit{Lunario}). An allusion to \textit{Los crepúsculos del jardín} is to be found in Daneri’s appellation of his work as “a broad garden of rhetorical devices, figures, charms.”\textsuperscript{401} A few verses from Daneri’s work are presented and then ridiculed by Borges protagonist in the same way that Borges criticized Lugones’s poetry during his lifetime.

\begin{flushright}
He visto, como el griego, las urbes de los hombres,  
Los trabajos, los días de varia luz, el hambre;  
No corrijo los hechos, no falseo los nombres,  
Pero el \textit{voyage} que narro, es …\textit{autour de ma chambre}.\textsuperscript{402}
\end{flushright}

[I have seen, as did the Greek, man’s cities and his fame,  
The works, the days of various light, the hunger;]

\textsuperscript{399} See Emilio Carilla’s article “La revista de Lugones,” \textit{Thesaurus}. Tomo XXXIX, no. 3 (1974): 501-525, 506. As Carilla points out, the journal was typical of “el enciclopedismo lugoniano” and featured articles on politics, sociology, natural science, folklore, and mathematics, in addition to literature.

\textsuperscript{400} “The Aleph,” 120.

\textsuperscript{401} “The Aleph,” 125.

I prettify no fact, I falsify no name,
For the voyage I narrate is...autour de ma chambre.]403

The obviously laughable lines are followed by Daneri’s pompous explanation of their significance, which merits being quoted at length. It is a parody of what Borges perceives as the erroneous principles behind Lugones’s poetics:

- Estrofa a todas luces interesante –dictaminó–. El primer verso granjea el aplauso del catedrático, del académico, del helenista, cuando no de los eruditos a la violeta, sector considerable de la opinión; el segundo pasa de Homero a Hesíodo (todo un implícito homenaje, en el frontis del flamante edificio, al padre de la poesía didáctica), no sin remorzar un procedimiento cuyo abolengo está en la Escritura, la enumeración, congerie o conglobación; el tercero –¿barroquismo, decadentismo, culto depurado y fanático de la forma?– consta de dos hemistiquios gemelos; el cuarto, francamente bilingüe, me asegura el apoyo incondicional de todo espíritu sensible a los desenfadados envites de la facecia. Nada diré de la rima rara ni de la ilustración que me permite ¡sin pedantismo! Acumular en cuatro versos tres alusiones eruditas que abarcan treinta siglos de apretada literatura: la primera a la *Odisea*, la segunda a los *Trabajos y días*, la tercera a la bagatela inmortal que nos deparan los ocios de la pluma del saboyano…Comprendo una vez más que el arte moderno exige el bálsamo de la risa, el *scherzo*. ¡Decididamente, tiene la palabra Goldoni!404

[“A stanza interesting from every point of view,” he said. “The first line wins the kudos of the learned, the academician, the Hellenist—though perhaps not that of those would-be scholars that make up such a substantial portion of popular opinion. The second moves from Homer to Hesiod (implicit homage, at the very threshold of the dazzling new edifice, to the father of didactic poetry), not without revitalizing a technique whose lineage may be traced to Scripture—that is, enumeration, congeries, or conglobation. The third—baroque? Decadent? The purified and fanatical cult of form?—consists of twinned hemistichs; the fourth unabashedly bilingual, assures me the unconditional support of every spirit able to feel the ample attractions of playfulness. I shall say nothing of the unusual rhyme, nor of the erudition that allows me—without pedantry or boorishness!—to include within the space of four lines three erudite allusions spanning thirty centuries of dense literature: first the *Odysseys’,* second the *Works and Days,* and third that immortal bagatelle that regales us with the diversions of the Savoyard’s plume…Once again,

403 “The Aleph,” 121.

I show my awareness that truly modern art demands the balm of laughter, of scherzo. There is no doubt about it—Goldoni was right!”]405

Not only is Daneri’s gloss of his own verses pedantic, it is also extremely elitist and condescending towards “would be scholars” and “popular opinion.” Daneri’s commentary is Borges’s way of poking fun at Lugones’s well-known elitism, as well as his tendency to be classicizing. Lugones proudly considered himself a Hellenist, and his publications include Prometeo (1910), El ejército de la Iliada (1915), Las industrias de Atenas (1919), Estudios helénicos (1923), and Nuevos estudios helénicos (1928). Borges acknowledges his well-known reputation as a Hellenist in the section “Lugones y lo Helénico” his book Leopoldo Lugones.406 Like the other sections of this introduction to Lugones’s work, it is not without a pointed critique. First quoting Lugones to demonstrate his haughtiness, he follows up with a criticism of the laboriousness and insensitivity of his translation of the Iliad.

“Tengo la convicción—escribe Lugones—de que mi comentario es interesante y de que mis traducciones son buenas.” Acaso le parecieron buenos porque en cada palabra seguía oyendo el texto original; tal ilusión es frecuente en los traductores, y casi inevitable. Esa iluminación indirecta no alcanza al lector, que no ve sino el resultado último del trabajo.
Más atento al significado de las palabras que a su valor estético, Lugones las combinaba y las prodigaba con extraña insensibilidad. Construía así dificultosos pasajes como éste:

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Oh hermano, el raudo Aquiles te acosa grandemente
Con pie veloz, en torno de la ciudad de Príamo.
Maa, ea, detengámonos ya y hagámosle frente.
Contéstole el grande Héctor del casco tremolente:
--Siempre fuiste, Deífobo, mi hermano más querido
Entre los que hijos de Hécuba y Príamo hemos sido;
Pero aun sabrá mi estima crecer en adelante,
Pues a dejar los muros por mí te has atrevido

405 The Aleph and Other Stories, 121.

Al ver mi riesgo, mientras los demás se quedaron.
Y la ojizarca Atena dijole:

--Hermano, es cierto

Que padre, augusta madre y amigos, abrazaron
Mis rodillas rodeándome, y harto me suplicaron
Quedase allá (pues todos de terror están vertos.)

(Ilíada, canto XXII)^407

[“I am convinced”—wrote Lugones—“that my commentary is interesting and my translations good.” Perhaps they seemed good to him because he continued to hear, in every word, the original text. This delusion is frequent among translators and almost inevitable. But this indirect clarification is not perceptible to the reader, who only sees the final result of the work. More focused on the meaning of the words than on their aesthetic value, Lugones combines them and squanders them with a strange insensibility. He constructed passages as laborious as this:...]

It is significant that this passage from the *Ilíad*, which Borges decrees produced according to flawed principles of translation and resultantly awkward, is the only thing he quotes from any of Lugones’s Hellenistic works. The lines also serve as the closing to the section, providing a rather negative impression of Lugones as a Hellenist. Rather than mention any positive aspect of Lugones’s many publications, Borges chooses to highlight his arrogance and cheapen his contribution.

In an interview with Fernando Sorrentino, Borges quotes Paul Groussac (a much admired mentor of his), whose manner of articulating criticism was far more unabashed than Borges’s. Borges relates that once when Groussac was asked in an interview what he had been doing as of late, Groussac quipped: “What can I do in a country in which Lugones is [considered] a Hellenist?”^408 Elsewhere Borges laments the Latin nostalgia found in Lugones verses, such as “El

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**hombre numeroso de penas y de días**” (Man abundant in days and sorrows), which Borges complains reads and feels like Latin.⁴⁰⁹

Returning to “The Aleph,” secondly Daneri is depicted as a devotee to the “fanatical cult of form,” baroque poetry. Borges disliked poets such as Quevedo and Góngora, whom he calls “vain, baroque people who wanted to dazzle the reader.”⁴¹⁰ He lumps Lugones into the same category. In his literary criticism, Borges berated Lugones for his verbal ostentation, the baroque aspect of his writing (which lends itself to parody), and the selection of words based on rhyme and sound rather than meaning. For example, in reference to *Los crepúsculos del jardín*. Borges writes:

> En este libro, Lugones logra una mayor destreza formal, no así un mayor rigor. Su empeño es ser original y no se resigna a sacrificar el menor hallazgo. Cada adjetivo y cada verbo tiene que ser inesperado. Esto lo lleva a ser barroco, y es bien sabido que lo barroco engendra su propia parodia.⁴¹¹

[With this book Lugones achieves a greater formal dexterity, but not a greater rigor. His goal is to be original, and he doesn’t hesitate to sacrifice everything for this goal. Every adjective and every verb must be unexpected. This makes his writing baroque, and it is well-known that the baroque lends itself to parody.]

Finally, perhaps the clearest indication that Daneri is Lugones is his use of “unusual rhyme.” In the prologue to *Lunario Sentimental*, Lugones had declared rhyme to be the essential element of the modern strophe. In Borges’s opinion, this strict adherence to rhyme often leads to ridiculous word choice and metrical clumsiness. Of *Los crepúsculos del jardín* he had written that “la abundancia léxica y metafórica de este libro habrá despertado sonrisas” [the lexical and

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⁴¹⁰ Seven Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges, 21.

metaphorical abundance surely aroused smiles.)\textsuperscript{412} Of Lugones’s Lunario sentimental, Borges complains:

La rima –dice Lugones en el prólogo--, es el elemento esencial del verso moderno. En el texto se prodigan las rimas insólitas: apio –Esculpio, astro-alabastro, sarao-cacao, ampo-crisolampo, copos-Atropos, anda-Irlanda, garbo-ruibarbo, apogeo-Orfeo, oréganos-llecanos, insufla-pantufla, pícara-jícara, hongos-oblongos, orla-por la, petróleo-mole o, náyade-haya de, pretéritas-\textit{in vino veritas}...\textsuperscript{413}

[Rhyme—says Lugones in the prologue—is the essential element of modern verse. This text abounds in unusual rhyme: apio –Esculpio, astro-alabastro, sarao-cacao, ampo-crisolampo, copos-Atropos, anda-Irlanda, garbo-ruibarbo, apogeo-Orfeo, oréganos-llecanos, insufla-pantufla, pícara-jícara, hongos-oblongos, orla-por la, petróleo-mole o, náyade-haya de, pretéritas-\textit{in vino veritas}...]

Borges’s ridiculous list of unusual rhymes has the same comical effect and intention of debasing Lugones’s rhymes as do Daneri’s verses.

Let us look first at Borges protagonist’s response to Daneri, followed by the literary criticism of Lugones which is strikingly similar. Borges protagonist reacts to Daneri’s verses as follows:

Otras muchas estrofas me leyó que también obtuvieron su aprobación y su comentario profuso. Nada memorável había en ellas; ni siquiera las juzgué mucho peores que la anterior. En su escritura habían colaborado la aplicación, la resignación y el azar; las virtudes que Daneri les atribuía eran posteriores. Comprendí que el trabajo del poeta no estaba en la poesía; estaba en la invención de razones para que la poesía fuera admirable; naturalmente, ese ulterior trabajo modificaba la obra para él, pero no para otros. La dicción oral de Daneri era extravagante; su torpeza métrica le vedó, salvo contadas veces, trasmitir esa extravagancia al poema.\textsuperscript{414}

[Carlos Argentino read me many another stanza, all of which earned the same profuse praise and comment from him. There was nothing memorable about them; I could not even judge them to be worse than the first one. Application, resignation,

\textsuperscript{412} Jorge Luis Borges and Bettina Edelberg, Leopoldo Lugones, in Obras Completas en Colaboración (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1997), 473.

\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 474.

\textsuperscript{414} “El Aleph,” OC, 619-620.
and chance had conspired in their composition; the virtues that Daneri attributed to them were afterthoughts. I realized that the poet’s work had lain not in the poetry but in the invention of reasons for accounting the poetry admirable; naturally, that later work modified the poem for Daneri, but not for anyone else. His oral expression was extravagant; his metrical clumsiness prevented him, except on a very few occasions, from transmitting that extravagance to the poem.]415

Daneri’s poetry is then described as “laborious” and lacking “the relative agitation of the prologue,” a further allusion to Lugones’s polemical prologue to Lunario sentimental.416 Later, when Daneri rereads four of five pages of his poem aloud, Borges has the same reaction:

Me releyó, después, cuatro o cinco páginas del poema. Las había corregido según un depravado principio de ostentación verbal: donde antes escribió azulado, ahora abundaba en azulino, azulencio y hasta azulillo. La palabra lechoso no era bastante fea para él; en la impetuosa descripción de un lavadero de lanas, prefería lactario, lacticinoso, lactescente, lechal.417

[Then he reread four or five pages of his poem to me. Verbal ostentation was the perverse principle that had guided his revisions: where he had formerly written “blue” he now had “azure” “cerulean,” and even “bluish.” The word “milky” was not sufficiently hideous for him; in his impetuous description of a place where wool was washed, he had replaced it with “lactine,” “lactescent,” “lactoreous,” “lacteal.”]418

On both occasions Daneri’s lines leave Borges protagonist cold. He finds them to be devoid of emotion, and coldly constructed according to a “deprevado principio de ostentación verbal.” The word choice of “deprevado” to describe Daneri’s verses is significant, “deprevado” meaning depraved, or morally corrupt. As Marisa Martínez Pérsico has shown, Borges makes similar condemnations of Lugones’s poetry in his 1955 book written with Bettina Edelberg, criticisms which un-coincidentally coincide in some places word for word with those found in “The Aleph”:

416 Ibid., 122-123.
417 “El Aleph,” OC, 621.
Bajo la pluma de Leopoldo Lugones, el *mot juste* degeneró en el *mot surprenant* y la página proba en la mera página de antología hecha de triunfos técnicos, menos aptos para conmover of para persuadir que para deslumbrar. Su literatura, por exceso de aplicación o por un *aplicación perversa*, quedó así maculada de vanidad; detrás de los epítetos inauditos y de las metáforas alarmantes, el lector percibe, o cree percibir, ese **grave defecto moral** (…) Para el diccionario las voces azulado, azuloso, azulino y azulenco son estrictamente sinónimas; asimismo lo fueron para Lugones, que sólo atento a la significación, no advirtió, no quiso advertir, que su connotación es distinta. Azulado y tal vez azuloso son palabras que pueden entrar en un párrafo sin destacarse demasiado; azulino y azulenco pecan de énfasis.419

[In Lugones’ s hands the *mot juste* degenerates into the *mot surprenant* and proves to be a page from an anthology of sheer technical triumphs, less apt at conveying emotion or persuading that at simply dazzling. His literature, on account of its excess or perverse implementation, is tainted by vanity; behind the outrageous epithets and the alarming metaphors, the reader perceives, or believes to perceive, this grave moral defect (…) For the dictionary azulado, azuloso, azulino and azulenco are strictly synonymous; and the same was true for Lugones. Mindful only of the meaning, he did not notice, did not want to notice, the distinct connotations. Azulado and perhaps even azuloso are words that can be included in a paragraph without standing out; azulino and azulenco sin of emphasis.]

The second strophe of Daneri’s which appears in “The Aleph” serves as a further example of his unusual rhyme, audacious word choice, and his ridiculous use of neologisms.

*Sehan. A manderecha del poste rutinario*
*(Viniendo, claro está, desde el Nornoroeste)*
*Se aburre una osamenta -¿Color? Blanquiceleste—*
*Que da al corral de ovejas catadura de osario.*420

*[Hear this. To the right hand of the routine signpost*
*(Coming—what need is there to say?—from north-northwest)*
*Yawns a bored skeleton—Color? Sky-pearly—*
*Outside the sheepfold that suggests an ossuary.]421

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420 “El Aleph,” 620.

421 *The Aleph and Other Stories*, trans. Andrew Hurley, 123.
These laughable lines parody what Borges found to be most obnoxious about some of Lugones’s poetry. In the pompous commentary that follows, Daneri praises himself for his originality and his “picturesque neologism” blanquiceleste.

-¡Dos audacias- gritó con exultación- rescatadas, te oigo mascullar, por el éxito! (...) El segundo hemistiquio entabla animadísima charla con el lector; se adelanta a su viva curiosidad, le pone una pregunta en la boca y la satisface… al instante. ¿Y qué me dices de ese hallazgo, blanquiceleste? El pintoresco neologismo sugiere el cielo, que es un factor importantísimo del paisaje australiano. Sin esa evocación resultarían demasiado sombrías las tintas del boceto y el lector se vería compelido a cerrar el volumen, herida en lo más íntimo el alma de incurable y negra melancolía.⁴²²

Two audacious risks!” he exclaimed in exultation, “snatched from the jaws of disaster, I can hear you mutter, but success! (...) The second half-line sets up the most animated sort of conversation with the reader; it anticipates his lively curiosity, puts a question in his mouth, and then… voilà, answers it… on the instant. And what do you think of that coup sky-pearly? The picturesque neologism just hints at the sky, which is such an important feature of the Australian landscape. Without that allusion, the hues of the sketch would be altogether too gloomy, and the reader would be compelled to close the book, his soul deeply wounded by a black and incurable melancholy.”⁴²³

Daneri’s commentary serves to reduce the lines (and by association Lugones’s poetry) to mere pompous explanation of outrageous phrasing. Secondly, Daneri’s dialogue (or rather monologue) is a parody of Lugones as a poor conversationalist. In an interview with Osvaldo Ferrari Borges confessed:

I have talked to Lugones five or six times—he was a rather sad man who found conversation difficult. Or, rather, conversation was impossible with him.⁴²⁴

⁴²² “El Aleph,” 620-621.
⁴²³ “The Aleph,” 123.
And in another interview with César Fernández Moreno, Borges described the difficulty of interacting with him socially:

a solitary and dogmatic man, a man who did not open up easily…Conversation was difficult with him because he [would] bring everything to a close with a phrase which was literally a period (…) Then you had to begin again, to find another subject (…) And that subject was dissolved with a period (…) What he wanted was to control the conversation. Everything he said was final.  

To parody this personal trait of Lugones, Borges ends Daneri’s comments not with a period, but with an exclamation mark. Although Borges protagonist is thoroughly at odds with everything Daneri asserts throughout the story, he realizes the futility of contradicting him. In response to Daneri’s request that he persuade Lanifur of the “formal perfection” and “scientific rigor” of his work in order to elicit from him a prologue, Borges cannot but acquiesce: “Asentí, profusamente asenti.”

Although in the case of Lugones Borges sees adherence to rhyme as the primary culprit of irreverent word choice, that is not to say that he disapproved of rhyme in general. In his criticism of Lugones’ Romancero he makes a distinction between the rhyme and word choice of classical texts with that of Lugones.

Si un poeta rima en ía o en aba, hay centenares de palabras que se le ofrecen para rematar una estrofa (…). En cambio, si rima en ul como Lugones, tiene que azular algo en seguida para disponer de un azul o armar un viaje para que le dejen llevar baúl u otras indignidades. Asimismo, el que rima en arde contrae esta ridícula obligación:  

Yo no sé lo que les diré, pero me comprometo a pensar un rato en el brasero (arde) y otro en las cinco y media (tarde) y otro en alguna compadrada (alarde) y otro en un flojonazo (cobarde).

Así lo presintieron los clásicos, y si alguna vez rimaron baúl y azul o calostro y rostro, fue en composiciones en broma, donde esas rimas irrisorias caen bien. Lugones lo hace en serio. A ver, amigos, ¿qué les parece esta preciosura?: “ilusión que las alas tiende/ en un frágil moño de tul/ y al corazón sensible prende/ su


\[“El Aleph,” \textit{OC}, 622.\]
insidioso alfiler azul.” Esta cuarteta es la última carta de la baraja y es pésima, no solamente por los ripios que sobrelleva, sino por su **miseria espiritual**, por lo **insignificativo de su alma**. Esta cuarteta indecida, pavota y frívola es resumen del Romancero. El **pecado** de este libro está en el no ser: en el ser casi libro en blanco, modestamente espolvoreado de lirios, moños, sedas, rosas y fuentes y otras consecuencias vistosas de la jardinería y la sastrería. De los talleres de corte y confección, mejor dicho.

[If a poet rhymes in Spanish with words that end in *ía* or *aba*, there are hundreds of words available to finish off a stanza (…). On the other hand, if he rhymes using a word ending in *ul*, as Lugones does, he has to *azular* (to blue) something right away and then arrange a trip so he can carry a *baúl* (suitcase) or other indignities. In the same way, someone who rhymes using *arde* commits himself to this ridiculous obligation: *I don’t know what I’ll say to you, but I commit myself to think awhile about the “brasero” (because it burns—“arde”) and yet another while about five-thirty (afternoon, “tarde”), and yet another while about bragging (alarde), and still another about some yellowbelly (coward, “cobarde”).

The classics felt that way, and if they ever rhymed *baúl* with *azul*, or *calostro* (colostrum) with *rostro* (face), it was in joking compositions where those rhymes are appropriate. Lugones does it seriously. Let’s see, friends, what do you think of this little gem?: “illusion that its wings doth spread/ in a fragile bow of tulle/ and in the sensitive heart doth stick/ its insidious pin so blue.”

This quatrain is the last card in the deck, and it’s terrible not only because of the spiritual misery, because of the insignificance of its soul. This say-nothing quatrain, silly and frivolous, sums up the **Romancero**. The sin of this book resides in its nonexistence, in its being almost a book of blank pages annoyingly dotted with lilies, ribbons, silks, roses, fountains, and other colorful consequences of gardening and tailoring.]

This caustic critique is from an article written in 1926, long before Lugones’s death, after which Borges would creatively veil his criticism, as in “The Aleph.” But as Fernando Sorrentino correctly affirms, “despite a bit of ambivalence and a certain repentant attitude (purely exterior), Borges

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would retain, till the end of his life, a generally averse and disdainful opinion of the literature of Leopoldo Lugones.”

It is interesting that on this occasion Borges happens to use Dantesque vocabulary to condemn his rival. The “sin” of his book is the result of his “spiritual misery,” the “insignificance of his soul.” In “The Aleph,” Lugones is depicted via the figure of Daneri as an anti-Dante. They are on opposite ends of the poetic spectrum. Daneri/Lugones’s poetry is driven by the “perverse principle” of “verbal ostentation,” and Borges disapproved of writers whom he deemed overly focused on form: “Rhetoric should act as a bridge, a road, but generally it is a wall, an obstacle. That can be seen in such different writers as Seneca, Quevedo, Milton, Lugones; in all of them, what they say comes between them and us.” Elsewhere Borges says that in Quevedo and Lugones “words came before emotions”:

With both of them [Quevedo and Lugones] you feel that each poem is a sort of verbal object, a verbal structure. That gets in the way of these two poets and their emotions, yet creates its own emotion. In Lugones, for instance, there is no intimacy; Lugones was a proud man. Each of his poems is a verbal object that lives beyond the author’s intention.

Borges insists that it is important for a reader to feel like they are “receiving something fresh, not a labored structure, which is what always happens with Quevedo and Lugones.” Furthermore, he says that Lugones never created a symbolic character that will live in people’s imaginations.

429 Fernando Sorrentino “Borges y Lugones,”: “a pesar de alguna ambivalencia y de cierta actitud de arrepentimiento (puramente exterior), Borges conservó hasta el fin de su vida una opinión en general adversa o desdeñosa sobre la literatura de Leopoldo Lugones.”

430 Twenty-Four Conversations with Borges, 96.

431 Ibid., 111-116.

432 Ibid., 113.

433 Ibid.
Borges labels Lugones as “a formalist writer whose main concern was words,” and in his opinion, such poetry was doomed to failure.\(^{434}\) In an interview on poetry with Roberto Alifano, he emphasizes the importance of emotion:

BORGES: For poetry to move us we must feel that it corresponds to an emotion. That is, if we read the poem as a linguistic exercise, if we believe that poetry is a mere word game, poetry fails.

ALIFANO: What you have just said suggests that the only criterion for poetry is its affective quality, a hedonistic criterion, isn’t it?

BORGES: Yes! If a text gives us pleasure, moves us, that text is poetic. If it doesn’t move us, it is a wasted effort to point out to us that it has novel rhymes, that the metaphors are unique to the author’s style or that they fall within a certain poetic movement. All that is worthless.\(^{435}\)

In contrast to the form-focused but failed poetry of Lugones is that of Dante. Borges considered Dante an affective writer who also achieved formal perfection. He certainly praises the metrics of the *Comedy* (“an element which is to me one of Dante’s greatest virtues”), but what he most values in the work is its “tenderness.”\(^{436}\) His love for the *Comedy* is primarily because of the emotion it engenders: “The emotion that I felt in my many readings of the *Comedy* will be with me until my end; it is an emotion that goes beyond my wakeful hours.”\(^{437}\) In Dante it is the content and emotions that first and foremost drive the verse, not word-play. When asked by Roberto Alifano if he agrees with of Benedetto Croce’s contention “that the *Comedy* sustains itself, never falters, mainly because of the unique narrative style created by Dante?” Borges agrees and praises

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\(^{434}\) Ibid., 111.

\(^{435}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{436}\) Ibid., 93.

the “almost magical way” in which Dante introduces us to the narration. He continues, “As I’ve said, I have always let myself be carried by the act of reading the narrative, by the aesthetic emotion which every turn of the page gave me.” In Borges’s opinion, Dante is so convincing as a poet that the illusion of reality he gives is “so vivid, so precise, that we come to suppose that he truly believed in his other world—in that world imagined by his poetic vision, by his poetic faith.”

Dante was for Borges the perfect synthesis of content and technique. It would hardly make sense that he would seek to parody him in the character of Daneri. As an author he earned nothing but praise from Borges’s pen, and it is clearly the character of Borges who is identified with Dante throughout the story. It is Borges who suffers from the unrequited love and loss of Beatriz, Borges whose description of the aleph we are reading, and Borges whose reaction to his total vision is “infinite veneration, infinite pity,” pity being a marked word that immediately associates him with Dante the pilgrim.

Lugones on the other hand, is envisioned as the anti-Dante. A devotee of the “fanatical cult of form” and stranger to emotion, in Borges’s eyes he has no right to re-write the story of Francesca. An author as cold as Borges’s imagines Lugones to be couldn’t possibly understand a heroine who submits all reason to desire. Lugones is the poet who “died perhaps without ever having written a word that expressed himself,” the poet who always subjected emotion to form. He is simultaneously the anti-Francesca, the anti-Dante, and the anti-Borges. Indeed, it could be said, perhaps, that Borges developed his particular style of writing to counter that of Lugones, to come out from behind his shadow. As Harold Bloom argues in The Anxiety of Influence, poets

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438 Ibid., 96.
439 Ibid.
440 Jorge Luis Borges and Betina Edelberg, Leopoldo Lugones, 457.
must develop an original poetic vision in order to guarantee their survival into posterity. The influence of precursor poets results in a sense of anxiety in living poets. This anxiety can be seen in both “The Aleph” and the prologue to *El Hacedor* which he dedicates to Lugones.

First let us return to “The Aleph” and the increasing resentment which Borges protagonist feels towards Daneri. Apart from his appalling verse, Borges protagonist is frustrated by Daneri because 1) he fears having to write prologues for a poet he despises (“deep down, we had always detested one another”) and 2) he is jealous that Daneri gets all the recognition despite his bad poetry. When he decides to publish the first cantos of his poem, he calls up Borges and suggests they meet to “imbibe the milk of the gods together in the nearby salon-bar.” Daneri tells Borges that he desires a prologue written by another author, “an accolade penned by a writer of stature, of real import.” Borges protagonist, mortified, suddenly realizes the purpose of the invitation: “the man was about to ask me to write the preface to that pedantic farrago of his.” His fears turn out to be unfounded, for instead Daneri asks him to persuade a friend of his, Alvaro Melián Lafinur, to write the called-for foreword. This is a further slight to Borges’s ego, given that he initially imagined himself to be the “writer of stature, of real import,” but instead finds himself as nothing more than a middle-man. Daneri instructs Borges to speak to Lanifur “on behalf of the poem’s two incontrovertible virtues: its formal perfection and its scientific rigor—“because that broad garden of rhetorical devices, figures, charms, and graces will not tolerate a single detail that does not accord with its severe truthfulness.” Borges, between a rock and a hard place, weighs his options. He could “(a) speak with Alvaro and tell him that that the first cousin of Beatriz (…) had

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443 Ibid., 125.
444 Ibid.
written a poem that seemed to draw out to infinity the possibilities of cacophony and chaos;” or “(b) not speak with Alvaro.” He opts for the second, and dreading the inevitable follow-up phone call from Daneri, the telephone becomes “a constant source of anxiety.”

In my opinion, “The Aleph” is a nightmarish literary expression of the situation Borges found himself in following Lugones’s death, when he was asked to write not only prologues but also tributes to his rival. As Estela Canto explains, despite his more humble homages following Lugones’s passing, Borges continued to have a dismal opinion of his poetry.

[...]
Here we can see essentially the same criticism of Lugones’s writing found first in his literary criticism, and later in the parodic critique in “The Aleph.” We can see the similarity between Borges and the literary version of himself, who upon rereading his rival’s verses has the same gut reaction and confirmation of his first impression. Borges feels dumbfounded that such verses could be considered good writing by his generation. In “The Aleph” Borges protagonist likewise feels incomprehension and envy as a result of Daneri’s popularity. After the demolition of Daneri’s home, “Procrustes Publishers, undaunted by the length of Carlos Argentino Daneri’s substantial poem, published the first in its series of “Argentine pieces.” This specification that Daneri/Lugones’s work is particularly Argentine is all the more frustrating for Borges. While Daneri’s poem earns him second place in the National Prize for Literature, Borges’s work does not even receive a single vote: “Once more, incomprehension and envy triumphed!”

A poem entitled “La Luna” published in 1960 in El hacedor is a further expression of the anxiety of influence Borges felt towards Lugones. At the opening of the poem Borges imagines a man who desires to “cifrar el universo/ En un libro y con ímpetu infinito” [to record the universe/ in a book and with the energy of the infinite]. He creates an “alto y arduo manuscrito” but ultimately fails at this task because he forgets the moon. This made-up story, Borges writes, encapsulates the dilemma of writers, who must “cambiar en palabras nuestra vida./ Siempre se pierde lo esencial” [change our life into words/ The essential is always lost]. Again we see Borges’s Dantean desire to capture the universe in words, and the linguistic impossibility of such a task. What is interesting is that the poet (Borges) fails precisely in regards to Lugones’s greatest success:

448 Ibid.
Lunario sentimental. Borges openly admits to his anxiety of influence when divulging the story of his personal relationship with penning the orb of poets:

Cuando, en Ginebra o Zürich, la fortuna
Quiso que yo también fuera poeta,
Me impuse, como todos, la secreta
Obligación de definir la luna.

Con una suerte de estudiosa pena
Agotaba modestas variaciones,
Bajo el vivo temor de que Lugones
Ya hubiera usado el ámbar o la arena.450

[When, in Geneva or Zürick, fortune
Desired that I too become a poet,
I assumed, as all poets do, the secret
Duty to define the moon.

In a studious struggle
I exhausted all modest variations,
Living in intense terror that Lugones
Had already employed amber or sand.]

His response to this anxiety is, in-line with Bloom’s theory, to forge an original poetic identity in order to ensure his survival into posterity. Although he had once sought to imitate him, he later came to disdain his extravagant vocabulary and constant invention of new metaphors. Contempt for Lugones’s creativity in this respect was made possible by interpreting Lugones’s focus on formalism as pompous and lacking in sincerity. The birth of Borges’s new poetic identity, which allowed him to step out from behind the shadow created by the gleaming moon-light of Lugones, is described in the latter half of the poem:

Y, mientras yo sondeaba aquella mina
De las lunas de la mitología,
Ahí estaba, a la vuelta de la esquina,
La luna celestial de cada día.

450 Ibid., 819.
Sé que entre todas las palabras, una
Hay para recordarla o figurarla.
El secreto, a mi ver, está en usarla
Con humildad. Es la palabra luna.

Ya no me atrevo a macular su pura
Aparición con una imagen vana;
La veo indescifrable y cotidiana
Y más allá de mi literatura.451

[And while I sounded the depths of that mine
Of all the moons of mythology,
There it was, at the turn of the corner,
The everyday celestial moon.

I know that among all the words,
There is one that can rightly represent it.
The secret, in my opinion, is to use it
With humility. It is the word moon.

Now I shall never dare to stain
Its pure appearance with a futile image;
I see it indecipherable and daily
And out of reach of my literature.]

These lines describe the formation of a distinct poetic theory, which was in fact a slow evolution, as a sort of instantaneous revelation. Rather than trying to beat Lugones at his own game of writing extravagant metaphors employing all the words in the dictionary, Borges recognizes the path to originality as a return to the everyday. Rebelling against the “fanatical cult of form” he parodies in “The Aleph,” a more mature Borges focused on content, employing straightforward vocabulary with so-called humility. This change in strategy can be seen by comparing the original edition of Fervor de Buenos Aires (1923) with his later rewriting of the work for Obras completas. In the prologue written in 1969 he explains that he made substantial changes in order to eliminate the “baroque excesses.” One of the tendencies that the elder Borges laments of his earlier career was

451 Ibid., 820.
his preoccupation with discovering “las metáforas que Lugones ya había descubierto” [the metaphors that Lugones had already discovered].\textsuperscript{452} In his later work he would eliminate not only “baroque excess,” but also neologisms and forced attempts to appear Argentine. Commenting on his literary transformation, he writes:

> Es curiosa la suerte del escritor. Al principio es barroco, vanidosamente barroco, y al cabo de los años puede lograr, si son favorables los astros, no la sencillez, que no es nada, sino la modesta y secreta complejidad.\textsuperscript{453}

[A writer’s fate is strange. At first he is baroque, vainly baroque, as the years pass, he can achieve, if the stars favor him, not simplicity, which is nothing, but modest and secret complexity.]

Having developed his own literary theories, which in many ways are diametrically opposed to those of Lugones, and having achieved an enormous amount of success, a sixty-year-old Borges continued to fear how his works would fare in the future. Would posterity perceive him as the greater author, or would his literary legacy be confused with that of his greatest rival? These fears are voiced in his famous foreword to \textit{El Hacedor}, “A Leopoldo Lugones,” written eleven years after “The Aleph.” Dedicating the prologue of one of his own books to Lugones would seem to be an extremely honorific gesture, but Borges’s mixed feelings toward his predecessor are in full evidence. The prologue can be read as an attempt to come to terms with his influence.

Borges imagines himself entering the library where Lugones works. To the left and right, he sees the profiles of readers in the light of “lámparas estudiosas,” como en la hipálage de Milton.” This reflection in turn reminds him of one of Lugones’s lines from \textit{Lunario}, “el árido camello,”\textsuperscript{454}


\textsuperscript{453} Jorge Luis Borges, second prologue to \textit{El otro, el mismo}, in \textit{Obras completas}, 858.

\textsuperscript{454} “Arid camel” also brings to mind Borges ridiculing of Gibbon’s remark that there are no camels in the Koran (see “El escritor argentino y la tradición”). Borges’s argument is that there is no need for an Arab to put camels on every page in order to be Arabian. He likely perceived a similar futility in combining the adjective “arid” with “camel.”
which leads him to cite the hexameter from the Aeneid *Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram*.

Borges was not fond of Milton, whom he considered, like Lugones, a formalist writer void of feeling. But sandwiched between Milton’s line and that of Virgil, Lugones’s “arid camel” appears particularly absurd, and would lead one to believe that Lugones should leave aside trying to imitate the literary devices of the classics, just as elsewhere he had criticized Lugones for his “Latin nostalgia.” 455

With these reflections in mind (i.e. reflections on what he deems failed versification), he enters his office and presents Lugones with a copy of *El Hacedor*.

Si no me engaño, usted no me malquería, Lugones, y le hubiera gustado que le gustara algún trabajo mío. Ellos no ocurrió nunca, pero esta vez usted vuelve las páginas y lee con aprobación algún verso, acaso porque en él ha reconocido su propia voz, acaso porque la práctica deficiente le importa menos que la sana teoría. 456

[Unless I am mistaken, you didn’t dislike me, Lugones, and you’d have liked to like some work of mine. That never happened, but this time you turn the pages and read a line or two approvingly, perhaps because you’ve recognized your own voice in it, perhaps because the halting poetry itself is less important than the clean-limbed theory.] 457

We can only assume that the “sana teoría” refers to Borges’s poetics, which in this imagined scenario Lugones is said to prefer over his own “prática deficiente.” Andrew Hurley, in his translation makes an interesting translational choice of giving further indication of what these theories are: “perhaps because the halting poetry itself is less important than the clean-limbed theory.” 458 Borges’s version is more ambiguous on this point but establishes a clearer dichotomy

455 Specifically Borges criticizes the line “*El hombre numeroso de penas y de días.*” Twenty-Four Conversations with Borges, 112-113.


457 Translated by Andrew Hurley, “Foreword to *The Maker,*’ in The Aleph and Other Stories, 139.

458 Ibid.
between good and bad: “sana” and “deficiente.” Thus we see that the prologue is really not laudatory at all. Just as in his introduction to Lugones’s work written in collaboration with Betina Edelberg, an ostensibly honorific text is ultimately a vehicle for insults.

In the next paragraph Borges admits that all of this has been imagined:

Mi vanidad y mi nostalgia han armado una sena imposible. Así será (me digo) pero mañana yo también habré muerto y se confundirán nuestros tiempos y la cronología se perderá en un orbe de símbolos y de algún modo será justo afirmar que yo le he traído este libro y que usted lo ha aceptado.459

[My vanity and my nostalgia have confected a scene that is impossible. Maybe so, I tell myself, but tomorrow I too will be dead and our times will run together and chronology will melt into an orb of symbols, and somehow it will be true to say that I have brought you this book and that you have accepted it.]460

The underlying cause of Borges’s imagined scenario is his anxiety that the two of them will be confused by posterity. Perhaps it was a way for him to come to terms with Lugones’s influence, while at the same time attempting to exert his own influence over posterity’s vision. Lugones was Borges’s precursor, but here he is acknowledging Borges talent.

In “Kafka y sus precursores” Borges also inverts the order of influence. He recognizes Kafka in Kierkegaard, Robert Browning, and other authors. Although chronology would have it the other way around, Borges insists that after Kafka, our readings of his precursors are forever altered.

En el vocabulario crítico, la palabra precursor es indispensable, pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación polémica o de rivalidad. El hecho es que cada escritor crea a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro.461

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460 “Foreword to The Maker,” in The Aleph and Other Stories, 139.

In the critic’s vocabulary, the Word “precursor” is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, just as it will modify the future.

Borges no doubt hoped to exert his influence over our impression of Lugones’s legacy. As we have seen, his literary criticism provides a stark critique of Lugones’s poetics and refutes his theories put forth in El payador. In his short story “The Aleph” he parodies Lugones in the figure of Carlos Daneri. In the final section of this chapter, I will look at another Dante-inspired piece which simultaneously mocks El payador and Lugones’s short story “Francesca.”

The Intruder: A Francesca of the Pampas

Borges short story “The Intruder” is inspired by Dante’s Vth Canto of Inferno, Lugones’s “Francesca,” and El payador. Borges was no stranger to Lugones’s short story “Francesca,” which unlike the rest of Lunario earned Borges’s approval. In 1985 the editor Franco Maria Ricci came up with the idea of publishing a series of fantastic literature. Each volume was to feature the works of a particular author, and Borges was responsible for the story selection and the prologue. The 19th edition was devoted to Leopoldo Lugones. Thus, Borges once again found himself writing a prologue and confronting himself with Lugones’s influence. He opens the prologue by saying,

Si tuviéramos que cifrar en un hombre todo el proceso de la literatura argentina (y nada nos oblige, por cierto, a tan extravagante reducción) ese hombre sería indiscutiblemente Lugones.462

[If we had to summarize in one man the entire process of Argentine literature (and no one, of course, forces us to make such an outlandish reduction), this man would without a doubt be Lugones.]

After this grand acknowledgement Borges returns to his former tactics of subtly demeaning Lugones’s verse, and in particular “su tendencia a encarar el ejercicio de la literatura como un

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juego verbal, como un juego con todas las palabras del diccionario” [his tendency to view literature as a verbal game, a game involving all of the words in the dictionary.] He then criticizes Lugones’s reduction of verse to a series of metaphors. This time he uses Dante to disprove this theory.

Quince años antes que la secta ultraísta quiso reducir la poesía, tan diversa y tan misteriosa, a una sola figura, la metáfora. En rigor, basta un solo verso sin metáfora (la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante) para invalidar ese dogma. 463

[And this was fifteen years before the ultraist group wanted to reduce poetry, so diverse and mysterious, to a single literary device, the metaphor. Strictly speaking, only one verse without metaphor is needed to invalidate this dogma: (la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante).]

Thus, in a collection of Lugones’s stories that includes a re-writing of Dante, Borges specifically uses Dante to demean his poetics. He then goes on to paint his usual picture of Lugones as an arrogant, solitary, and contrary individual, much like the character Daneri.

Guardo la imagen de un hombre solitario y soberbio, que tendía a negar lo que le decían y buscaba razones ingeniosas para justificar sus negaciones. 464

[He gave me the impression of being a solitary and arrogant man, who tended to negate everything that was said to him and then search for ingenious justifications of his negations.]

As regards his fantastic short stories, (the focus of the edition), Borges remains positive. The collection includes “Yzur,” “La lluvia de fuego,” “La estatua de sal,” “Los caballos de Abdera,” “Un fenómeno inexplicable,” “Abuela Julieta,” and “Francesca,” of which he says simply, “In “Francesca” Lugones dares to compete with the Vth canto of *Inferno* and the discovery of this adventure is an intimate tone.” 465 In this case, I believe we can take Borges’s admirative words in earnest, given that he chose the story to be included in the collection. It is the only commentary

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463 Ibid. 10.

464 Ibid., 12.

465 Ibid., 13.
we have regarding the story in this short prologue which allots only a sentence or two to each tale. What is noteworthy is that the one thing Borges chooses to praise about the work is the very thing that he lamented was absent from all Lugones’s poetry: an intimate tone. As a writer of prose inspired by Dante, Lugones had conveyed the emotion that Borges was looking for as a reader, and which he claims not to have found in his poetry. In fact, Lugones’s story seems to have influenced his writing of the poem “Infierno V: 129,” which begins:

Dejan caer el libro, porque ya saben
que son las personas del libro.
(Lo serán de otro, el máximo,
pero eso qué puede importarles.)
Ahora son Paolo y Francesca,
no dos amigos que comparten
el sabor de una fábula.
Se miran con incrédula maravilla.
Las manos no se tocan.466

[They let the book fall, when they know
that they are the ones in the book.
(They will be in another, greater,
but what can that matter to them.)
Now they are Paolo and Francesca,
not two friends who are sharing
the savor of a fable.
They gaze at each other with incredulous wonder.
Their hands do not touch.]

The line “their hands do not touch” is likely inspired by Lugones story, which emphasizes three times that they do not touch, focusing specifically on their hands: 1) “Ya no leían; y así pasaron muchas horas, con las manos tan heladas sobre el libro,” 2) “el llanto desbordó en gotas vivas—lo único que vivía en ellos—sobre sus manos,” and finally, 3) “materialmente, no habían pecado,

pues ni a tocarse llegaron.” Whether Borges was conscious of this influence is difficult to say. What is without a doubt, however, is that his second re-writing of the Francesca episode, “La intrusa,” takes Lugones’s version head on.

“The Intruder” is the story of two rough and tumble brothers, Eduardo and Cristián, living on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. When it comes to women, they usually frequent whorehouses after one of their drunken outings, but one day the eldest brother Cristián brings home a girl, Juliana de Burgos, to live with them. Eduardo falls in love with her, and Cristián agrees to share her. This love triangle leads to dissention between the brothers, and they agree to sell her to a whorehouse to save their relationship. Both, however, continue to secretly visit her, until one day they run into each other while waiting their turn. This leads them to buy her back, but her renewed presence in the house revives the former jealousies. In the end, Cristián kills her, and the brothers bury her together on the pampa.

At first glance, it would seem that “La intrusa” has little to do with the Vth Canto of *Inferno*, but as has already been noted by Sylvie Davidson, the story is “diametrically opposed” to that of Dante. Both stories involve a love triangle. In the Vth Canto, two cousins are in love with the same woman who loves the younger of the two in return. The jealousy of the elder cousin, Giovanni causes him to murder both Paolo and Francesca. In “The Intruder” we have two brothers in love with the same woman, mutually jealous, and she is the only one who loses her life. In Dante, lust overpowers reason, and in Borges fraternal bonds prove stronger than lust or love.

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The character of Julian de Burgos is the antithesis of Francesca. In Dante, Francesca is the only figure who has a voice. She is the one who eloquently narrates her story and defends her point of view. In “The Intruder,” not only does Juliana have no voice, but she has virtually no control over anything that happens throughout. She is treated as a servant and whore who “attends both men’s wants with an animal submission.”469 Nothing is said of her reaction to the suffering she is forced to endure, and we know nothing of her feelings except that she had “a certain preference, probably for the younger man.”470 As Borges himself clarifies, Juliana is not a main character of the story: “Really there are only two characters: the two brothers. Of them, we are allowed to hear only what the elder brother says; it is he who takes all the decisions, even the last one.”471 Thus the elder brother, Cristián, takes on the role of Francesca who speaks on behalf of Paolo (Eduardo).

The story is also clearly in opposition to Lugones’s “Francesca.” Lugones’s version of Dante’s story is a tender tale of innocent love, characterized (in the words of Borges) by “an intimate tone.” It is also markedly European, taking place in Italy and involving a medieval palimpsest, a castle, and a moonlit balcony. Borges, on the other hand, writes a callous tale of the cruelty of two “hard-bitten men living on the edge of Buenos Aires before the turn of the century.”472 Herein lies the key to the story: the idea behind Borges’s “The Intruder” was to rewrite Lugones’s “Francesca” in accordance with Lugones’s nationalistic theories regarding Argentine literature. Lugones had proclaimed the gaucho to be the “archetype” of “argentinidad,” and Borges’s playful objective is to write a Francesca of the pampas featuring two gaucho outlaws.


470 Ibid., 72.


472 Ibid., 68.
In “El escritor argentino y la tradición” he had complained that “the nationalists pretend to venerate the capacities of the Argentine mind but want to limit the poetic exercise of that mind to a few impoverished local themes, as if we Argentines could only speak of orillas and estancias and not of the universe.” Here he seeks to do just that, to abound in local color and to humorously “argentinize” this western love story by filling it with mate, horses, whorehouses, and hides.

The story starts off with the narrator’s explanation of how he first heard the story, “between one sip of mate and the next.” This mention of Argentina’s national drink immediately locates our story. Like Lugones’s narrator who confesses his version will be told “tan libre come me plazca” [as free as I please], the narrator of the “The Intruder” admits that he will “give in to the writer’s temptation of emphasizing or adding certain details.” These details serve to paint a picture of gaucho way of life of the Nilsens. He begins by describing the meager dwellings of the two brothers. They live in a rambling old house of “unplastered brick,” “sleep in bare rooms on cots,” and own only one book, a worn Bible with names and dates written on the back flyleaf: “the roaming chronicle of the Nilsens.” In true gaucho fashion, their luxury consists in their freedom, and “their extravagances were horses, silver-trimmed riding gear, the short-bladed dagger, and getting dressed up on Saturday nights, when they blew their money freely and got themselves into boozy brawls.” The tale holds true to all of the characteristics of the gaucho outlaw, detailed in Sarmiento’s Facundo. The brothers are said to be “drovers,” “teamsters,” and “horse thieves,” and like Juan Quiroga Facundo, they have a propensity for gambling and violence,

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473 Ibid., 67.
475 Ibid., 68.
476 Ibid.
477 Ibid.
heightened by excessive drinking. They are hardly the noble picture of the gaucho promoted by Lugones.

As regards their amorous habits, they usually satisfy themselves “in darkened passageways or in whorehouses.”[^7] Frequent reference is made to the rampant prostitution in the outskirts of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, including mention of the forbidden dance that is said to have originated in the brothels of poor neighborhoods—the tango, the preferred pastime “at those dingy parties held in tenements, where suggestive dance steps were strictly forbidden and where, at that time, partners still danced with a good six inches of light showing between them.”[^8] It is a rough, chauvinistic society “where drudgery and neglect wear women out.”[^9] Cristián and Eduardo treat Juliana as a servant and sexual slave. When Cristián decides to share his possession (Juliana), he says to his brother: “if you want her, use her.”[^10] In their backwards community, they view love as something which is shameful:

> En el duro suburbia, un hombre no decía, ni se decía, que una mujer pudiera importarle, más allá del deseo y la posesión, pero los dos estaban enamorados. Esto, de algún modo, los humillaba.[^11]

> [In tough neighborhoods a man never admits to anyone—not even to himself—that a woman matters beyond lust and possession, but the two brothers were in love. This, in some way, made them feel ashamed.]

These rough gauchos are incapable of dealing with feelings, and instead take them out on others: “on strangers, on dogs, on Juliana.” After selling her to the whorehouse, they go back to “their old

[^7]: Ibid., 69.
[^8]: Ibid., 70.
[^9]: Ibid.
[^10]: Ibid., 71.
life of men among men…to cardplaying, to cockfights, to their Saturday night binges.” In true gaucho fashion, they prize their horses more than anything else. Their excuse for eventually buying Juliana back from the madame is so as to not “wear out the horses” running back and forth to the whorehouse.  

The climax of the story takes place under a starry sky out on the pampa where our protagonists set out to bury Juliana’s corpse. The burial scene is worthy of any gauchesque novel. They pack up her body up with a bunch of hides, and once arrived at a secluded spot, Cristián throws down the cigar he has just lit and says matter-of-factly, “Let’s get busy, brother. In a while the buzzards will take over.” The tale ends in the middle of the pampa with the brothers embracing.

Borges accomplishes multiple objectives in this brief tale. He re-writes both Dante’s Francesca and Lugones’s version while un-romanticizing the picture of the gaucho that Lugones declared to be the “archetype” of the Argentine. He makes use of the polemic regarding the Argentine author and tradition to fuel his literary creation. In two different stories, then (“The Aleph” and “The Intruder”), he uses Dante to parody a literary rival (Lugones). In the next chapter, I will examine a similar operation on a much larger scale. Leopoldo Marechal, with his novel Adán Buenosayres (1948), rewrites Dante while at the same time parodying the divergent viewpoints in the literary polemics concerning “argentinidad,” including that of Borges (Luis Pereda). The result is a polyphonic novel of epic proportion that seeks to convey the complexity of Argentine identity.

484 Ibid., 73.

485 Ibid., 74.
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Chapter 3

Dante and Leopoldo Marechal: The Divine Comedy and Adán Buenosayres

“Extravíe los caminos y en ellos me demoré; hasta olvidar que sólo eran caminos, y yo sólo un viajero, y tú el fin de mi viaje.” (465)

[I lost my way and tarried on paths until I forgot they were only paths, and I but a traveler, and you the end of my voyage] (353).

Leopoldo Marechal, Adán Buenosayres

Leopoldo Marechal’s Adán Buenosayres, like the Divine Comedy, is the story of a poet’s journey towards God. One can also read this 620-page novel as Marechal’s response to the question “What is Argentine Identity?” within the confines of a work of narrative fiction in which the narrative voice and many characters directly and indirectly address issues about what it means to be Argentine. I will begin this chapter with biographical information on Marechal which is necessary to understand his political position as a supporter of Juan Domingo Perón, and his subsequent use of Dante to promote a pro-Perón Catholic nationalism while parodying the anti-peronist viewpoints of the literary elite. Before turning to the novel itself, I will examine Marechal’s nationalistic poetry in which he personifies Argentina as a young girl in a difficult stage of coming of age, a stage in which her identity is not yet fully formed. This poetry with its militaristic sentiments depicts Argentina as a nation in need of a new spiritual order. In my analysis of how Dante factors in Adán Buenosayres, I will outline the various Dantean appearances in Books I-V, but will give pride of place to the two final books. Book VI, “The Blue-Bound Notebook,” is based closely on Dante’s Vita Nuova, while Book VII, the “Journey to the Dark City of Cacodelphia,” is an infernal journey based on Dante’s Inferno and Purgatory.

Leopoldo Marechal was born in Buenos Aires in 1900 to Lorenza Beloqui and Alberto Marechal. His mother was Argentine and his father an Uruguayan of French descent who was a
self-taught mechanic. In 1910 the family moved to Monte Egmont 280, a neighborhood of Villa Crespo. Every summer he travelled to Maipú, in the province of Buenos Aires, and these summers of his childhood would always be remembered with nostalgia. As the only child from Buenos Aires who travelled there every summer, he earned the nickname “Buenos Aires.”

Marechal had his first job in 1913 at the young age of thirteen working in a factory. He had socialistic sentiments from an early age, and was fired from this job for having incited the employees to ask for better wages. In 1919 his father fell ill with the flu. When he was still convalescing, he was forced to return to work to maintain his wages. On July 7, he died. The death of his father would mark Marechal’s political outlook, as his support of workers’ rights and populist government stemmed from very personal experiences. Alberto’s passing left the family in a difficult financial situation. Nevertheless, they decided that Leopoldo should continue his studies. He also began working as a librarian at the Biblioteca Popular Alberdi. In 1921 he became a schoolteacher.

Although Marechal did not, like many other Argentine authors such as Lugones and Borges, have the privilege to focus primarily on literary pursuits, he did somehow find time to publish even from a young age. In 1922, at the age of twenty-two, he published his first book of poems, *Los aguiluchos*. In 1923 he became involved with the journal *Proa* and was part of the *martinfierrista* avant-garde movement. He also collaborated with the journal *Martín Fierro*, publishing poems and essays.

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488 Ibid., 80.
In 1925 Marechal decided to travel to Europe, and his mother and siblings began to help save for the trip which took place the following year. During his travels he took active part in the cultural life of the cities he visited. In Paris he met Picasso, Unamuno, and the argentines Horacio Butler, Héctor Basaldúa, Antonio Berni, and Raquel Forner, among others. In 1929 he would return to Europe, and in the following year begin writing *Adán Buenosayres*. It was at this time (1930) that he travelled to Italy, and became an avid reader of Dante.\(^{489}\) His fascination with Florence and its most famous author would have a lasting effect on his writing, especially on *Adán Buenosayres* which was published in 1948. After a return from Europe in 1949, he was shocked at the hostile reaction the work had generated among his friends and fellow men of letters.\(^{490}\)

Perhaps the main factor that led to Marechal’s later ostracization from the intellectual elite was his political views. He was an active supporter of Perón from the 40s onward. He endorsed Perón’s “doctrina justicialista” known as “Justicialismo,” which was, according to Perón, “una nueva filosofía de la vida, simple, práctica, popular, profundamente Cristiana y profundamente humanista.” [a new philosophy of life, simple, practical, popular, profoundly Christian and profoundly humanist].\(^{491}\) Perón proposed a more even distribution of wealth and appealed especially to the working class. His popular appeal during the years following the 1943 coup d’état led to his first presidency in 1946.

Critics of Perón and his administration could not accept the president’s subversion of freedoms through actions such as nationalizing the broadcasting system, centralizing the unions under his control, and shutting down opposition newspapers such as *La Prensa*. Perón’s supporters

\(^{489}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{490}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^{491}\) Juan Domingo Perón, *Perón en Doctrina*. Comp. Juan Carlos Rousselot (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2008), 63; quoted in Picech, 81.
saw his more anti-democratic moves as acceptable because they conceived of Perón as the incarnation of the will of the people, and as the leader who best organically expressed their desires.\textsuperscript{492} Marechal was one of the later who strongly felt the fervour of this charismatic leader perceived as a God-like figure chosen by the people. On October 17, 1945 when the public demanded Perón’s liberation, Marechal wrote:

\begin{quote}
El coronel Perón había sido traído ya desde Martín García. Mi domicilio era este mismo departamento de calle Rivadavia. De pronto me llegó desde el Oeste un rumor como de multitudes que avanzaban gritando y cantando por la calle Rivadavia: el rumor fue creciendo y agigantándose, hasta que reconocí primero la música de una canción popular y, enseguida, su letra:

\begin{quote}
“Yo te daré
  te daré, Patria hermosa,
  te daré una cosa,
  una cosa que empieza con P
  Peroong.”
\end{quote}

Y aquel “Perón” resonaba periódicamente como un cañonazo.

Me vestí apresuradamente, bajé a la calle y me uní a la multitud que avanzaba rumbo a la Plaza de Mayo. Vi, reconocí, y amé los miles de rostros que la integraban no había rencor en ellos, sino la alegría de salir a la visibilidad en reclamo de su líder. Era la Argentina “invisible” que algunos habían anunciado literariamente, sin conocer ni amar sus millones de caras concretas, y que no bien las conocieron les dieron la espalda. Desde aquellas horas me hice peronista.”\textsuperscript{493}

[Coronel Perón had been led as far as Martín García street. My home was this same apartment in Rivadavia street. I soon heard a murmur from the East as crowds advanced yelling and singing in Rivadavia street. The murmur grew louder and more agitated, until I could recognize first the music of a popular song, and secondly, its lyrics.

\begin{quote}
“I will give you,
give you, beautiful Patria,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{493} Fragment from an interview “Palabras con Leopoldo Marechal” with Alfredo Andrés, 1968. Published as “Desde el Oeste un rumor,” in \textit{La jornada de 17 de Octubre por cuarenta y cinco autores}, Fermín Chavez, ed. (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1996), 35-36.
I will give you something, something that starts with a P
Peroon.”

And that “Perón” resounded periodically like a cannon fire.

I got dressed in a hurry, descended into the street, and joined the multitude that was advancing in the direction of Plaza de Mayo. I saw, I recognized, and I loved the thousands of faces that made up this crowd. There was no rancor in them, just the joy of coming out in the open and claiming their leader. It was the “invisible” Argentina that some had spoken of in literature, without knowing or loving the millions of actual faces. And as soon as they knew them, they turned their back on them. From this moment, I became a Peronist.

Under Perón’s government, Marechal held a number of important positions. First he was president of the “Consejo General de Educación” and director of the Schools of Santa Fe. Later he was appointed “Director General de Cultura de la Nación.” He was also the national director of Enseñanza Superior y Artística. It was during these years he wrote Adán Buenosayres (1948) and Antígona Vélez (1951), which received much acclaim. In the same year, it was performed at the Teatro Cervantes (directed by Enrique Santos Discépolo) and won the Primer Premio Nacional de Teatro. After the fall of Perón, however, Marechal’s literature suffered a decline in popularity. Many of the intellectual elite could not forgive his support of Perón, and the late 50s and 60s were for Marechal a period of solitude and intellectual isolation. In the years following 1955, his works were not taught in schools and largely ignored, most likely because of Marechal’s Peronist views. Since then, however, his work has been re-evaluated and Adán Buenosayres has emerged as one of Argentina’s most important novels.

As the title suggests, Adán, the book’s protagonist, is the first man (Adam), as well as the primary representative of Buenos Aires. The story is his spiritual (or more precisely his “metaphysical”) journey towards redemption, having been separated from God since original sin. Just as the protagonist of the Divine Comedy is also its author, so too Adán is the literary
incarnation of Marechal. He is a poet and a self-proclaimed “investigador metafísico” [metaphysical investigator].

The “Indispensable Prologue” begins with a description of Adán’s funeral. It is initialed by our narrator, L.M. (Leopoldo Marechal), who assures us that the novelistic devices of the work are employed in order to render Adán Buenosayres “with rigourous accuracy, and not out of vain desire for literary originality” (5). The narrator declares his possession of two manuscripts which Adán entrusted to him before his death: the “Blue-Bound Notebook” and the “Journey to the Dark City of Cacodelphia.” Although he claims to be sure that they will “find a place of honour in Argentine literature,” he fears that no one will understand such obscure writings if he does not first sketch a portrait of their author. But the complexity of his character, the “epic figures cut by his companions,” and their memorable exploits make any simplistic representation impossible. Thus, he decides to write Books I-V, which present Adán Buenosayres “from the moment of his metaphysical awakening at number 303 Monte Egmont Street until midnight of the following day, when angels and demons fought over his soul in Villa Crespo” (4). Adán’s journey takes place over the course of three days, April 28-30, 192-. It begins at 10 am on the 28th. Books I-V occur from April 28-29, Book VI is atemporal, and Adán and the astrologer Schultz (based on artist Xul Solar) begin their infernal journey on midnight of the 30th.

The novel, Marechal admits, is highly autobiographical. He explains that when in Paris in the 1920s he experienced a profound spiritual crisis during which time he began to mistrust “exterioridades” and to look to the core of things for what moves them. It was by re-reading the classics that he experienced a “realización spiritual” or “experiencia metafisica.”

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495 Ibid.
“metaphysics” is notoriously hard to define, but for the purposes of my study I will use Marechal’s own definition: “La metafísica. La ciencia del Primer Principio, sin limitaciones, sin contradicciones” [Metaphysics: the science of the first principle, without limitations, without contradictions].\(^{496}\) It is the branch of philosophy that studies the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, time, space, and very important for us, identity.

The novel takes place in the 1920s, and the protagonists correspond to important members of Argentina’s literary elite [Borges (Luis Pereda), Xul Solar (the astrologer Schultze), Francisco Luis Bernardez (Franky Amundsen) and Jacobo Fijmann (Samuel Tesler), etc.]. By parodying their viewpoints throughout the novel, Marechal shuts down anti-peronist viewpoints, puts into evidence the contradiction of trends of the avant-garde, and ridicules previous attempts to create literary identity via figures such as the gaucho and compadrito. In their place he offers a totalizing novel (620 pages) whose cast of characters takes into account the vast demographic and complex identity of porteños, who tend to define themselves more by their barrio (neighborhood) than by their city or country. The protagonists are divided in opinion but united in their endeavor to observe the true porteño reality, from its center to the periphery, and their nocturnal wanderings expose a world that is neither the elegance of Europe nor the stomping ground of the gauchos.

In one of their identity-angst ridden conversations, Adán is asked about his “position as an Argentine.” He responds, “Muy confusa […] No pudiendo solidarizarme con la realidad que hoy vive el país, estoy solo e inmóvil: soy un argentino en esperanza” (239)\(^{497}\) [Very confused […] Unable to endorse the reality our country’s currently living, I’m alone and motionless: I’m waiting,


\(^{497}\) All Spanish quotes from *Adán Buenosayres* are from the following edition: Leopoldo Marechal, *Adán Buenosayres*. Edición crítica, introducción y notas de javier de navascués. Ediciones Académicas de Literatura Argentina Siglos XIX y XX (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2013).
I’m an Argentine in hope”] (135). As Norman Cheadle points out in the notes, Adán’s words echo the title of Scalabrini Ortiz’s *El hombre que está solo y espera* (1931); but in contrast to Scalabrini’s *Hombre* who cuts his ties with European tradition, Marachal’s Adán wishes to reform them:

> En cuanto a mí mismo, la cosa varía: si al llegar a esta tierra mis abuelos cortaron el hilo de su tradición y destruyeron su tabla de valores, a mí me toca reanudar ese hilo y reconstruirme según los valores de mi raza. En eso ando. Y me parece que cuando todos hagan lo mismo el país tendrá una forma espiritual. (239-240)

[As for me, the situation is different: if upon arriving in this land my grandparents cut the thread of their tradition and destroyed their table of values, it’s up to me to re-tie that thread and reconstruct myself according to the values of my race. That’s what I’m trying to do. And it seems to me that when everybody does the same, the country will have a spiritual form.] (135)

As we shall see in this chapter, this is the reason that Marechal turns to Dante, to reconstruct himself according to the values of his race, and to highlight the necessity of spiritual direction for the creation of great art. Furthermore, as already indicated, the central motif of the work is entirely Dantesque: Adán’s journey is a “vía penetencial” that ends in spiritual realization.500

The second most important motif that can be found in almost all of Marechal’s narratives is also Dantesque: the *Mujer Celeste* or *Madonna Intelligenza*. The very nucleus of *Adán Buenosayres*, the “internal motor,” is Adán’s notion of Solveig Amundsen, the Beatrice figure in the novel. As Marechal himself explains in *Las claves de Adán Buenosayres*, at first Adán mistakenly seeks the terrestrial Solveig, abandoning the unity of his interior world (and behaving

498 All English translation of quotes from *Adán Buenosayres* are from the following edition: *Adam Buenosayres*, translated and edited by Norman Cheadle (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).


500 *Claves*, 13-14.
as a love-sick poet). Thus he is exposed to risks, temptations, and battles of the street in the first chapters. Over the course of the novel, he realizes that possessing the terrestrial Solveig should not be the aim of his loving. Just as in the *Vita Nuova*, when the hero realizes that the terrestrial woman will die, he dedicates himself to praising “Solveig Celeste.” The result of this resolution is “El Cuaderno de Tapas Azules,” a philosophical reflection close in structure to the *Vita Nuova*, and heavily influenced by the doctrine of the *Fedeli d’Amore*.501

As regards structure, *Adán Buenosayres* can be divided into three main parts: the “Indespensible Prologue” which opens with the funeral of Adán; Books I-V which recount the adventures of the protagonist and his closest friends during the last days of his life; Books VI and VII which are said to be manuscripts of Adán himself. Book VI is the aforementioned “Cuaderno de Tapas Azules,” dedicated to Solveig Amundsen. Book VII is the infernal journey, the “Viaje a la oscura ciudad de Cacodelphia” [Journey to the Dark City of Cacodelphia] in which Adán, guided by the astrologer Schultze (Virgil), descends through limbo (“un arrabal” [slum]) and then through nine circles of hell (an inverted cone) which are divided into sectors, or “barrios.” During his journey Adán will encounter historical figures, contemporary politicians, invented characters, beasts, and even his former friends (the aforementioned members of the literary “grupo martinfierrista”) who occupy the lowest circles. The book ends abruptly with Adán and Schultze in the ninth circle, almost as if Adán’s manuscript dropped off when he died.

501 In *Interpretaciones y Claves de “Adán Buenosayres”* Marechal acknowledges Dante’s influence as the “integrante y jefe de los “Fedeli d’Amore,” and provides the following summary of their doctrine of love: “Me limitaré a decir en síntesis: a) que los “fíeles da Amor” celebraron, en lenguaje amoroso, a una Dama enigmática; b) que dicha Señora, pese a los nombres distintos que le da cada uno de sus amantes (Beatriz, Giovanna o Lauretta), se resuelve al fin en una Mujer única y simbólica; c) que la noción de tal mujer se aclara en Dino Compagni, cuando ese “fíel de Amor” la designa con el nombre de *Madonna Intelligenza*; d) que Madonna simboliza el Intelecto transcendente por el cual el hombre se une o puede unirse a Dios, y que lo simboliza en su “perfección pasiva o femenina”; e) que, por tanto, Madonna e la Juana Coeli (Puerta del Cielo) y la Sedes Papientae (Asiento de la Sabiduría) que los cristianos entendemos en la Virgen Madre.” *Claves,* 11.
In what follows, I will examine how and why Marechal draws from Dante. With Borges, re-writing Dante had become a way to engage in the literary polemic regarding Argentine identity. Marechal’s own rewriting of Dante is a caustic critique of the elitism and lack of consensus among the intellectuals who dominated Argentina’s literary circles. In Book VII, which closely follows the structure of *Inferno*, Marechal depicts Buenos Aires of the 1920s as a chaotic world without direction; Dante provides the framework for his criticism of the status quo and his call for a spiritually-directed cultural production. But before turning to *Adán Buenosayres*, let us examine various essays and poetry on the “Patria” to see what Marechal had to say about national identity and the need for its literary articulation.

**Patria – The Need to Define National Identity**

*La Patria es un dolor que aún no sabe su nombre.*

~Leopoldo Marechal “Descubrimiento de la Patria”

The poem *Descubrimiento de la Patria* is about a poet grappling with Argentine national identity and how to express it. It is the second part of a two-part poem, *La Patriótica*, first published in 1960 and later included as the second day in Marechal’s book of poems, the *Heptamerón*. The poet narrator describes the metaphysical pain of being an inhabitant of a country that has not yet reached an understanding of its essence or found its expression. He writes from Buenos Aires, “Ciudad de la Yegua Tordilla” (City of the dapple-gray mare), declaring “La Patria es un dolor que aún no tiene bautismo.”\(^{502}\) This line is taken from an earlier poem, *De la Patria*

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joven, which Marechal wrote in 1929.\textsuperscript{503} In this earlier poem, which has as its epigraph a line by J. Chassaing, “Melancólica imagen de la patria,” Marechal also defines the patria as a pain that must be borne without the possibility of expression: “un dolor que nuestros ojos/ no aprenden a llorar” (5-6).\textsuperscript{504} The uncried tears signify that there is no release and no expression of this suffering. In this poem Argentina is personified as a young girl in a difficult stage of coming of age, a stage in which her identity is not yet fully formed: “un pie arraigado en la niñez y el otro/ ya tendido a los bailes de la tierra.” The narrator wants to immortalize her through his writing, but his efforts are deemed premature:

Y quisiera grabar en el día su sombra,
y decir las palabras
que castigan al tiempo
como a un noble caballo.
Pero vacila su talón ardido:
“¡No es hora!” canta el año junto al Río. (11-16)

The speaker is denied his desire, even though he believes himself to be more passionate than other countrymen, and therefore perhaps more apt at expressing his nation’s destiny: “¡Yo soy un fuego más entre los hombres/ quemados junto al Río!” But as the last stanza explains, despite the zeal of the poet, the infancy of the Patria is destined to continue long after his death.

La infancia de la Patria se prolonga
más allá de tus fuegos, hombre, y de mi ceniza.
La Patria es un dolor
que aún no tiene bautismo:
sobre tu carne pesa lo que un recién nacido. (26-30)


The poet, then, must bear the existential angst in silence.

The idea of the difficulty to define a land in its infancy (first articulated in *La Patria joven*) is then further elaborated in the aforementioned poem “Descubrimiento de la Patria.” Throughout the poem the poet distinguishes himself from those responsible for the material progress of the country: in the first stanza these are “los apisonadores de adoquines” who stare at him blankly as they devour their bread and onions.

Dije yo en la ciudad de la Yegua Tordilla:
“La Patria es un dolor que aún no tiene bautismo.”
Los apisonadores de adoquines
me clavaron sus ojos de ultramar;
y luego devoraron su pan y su cebolla
y en seguida volvieron al ritmo del pisón.505

The construction workers, with their “ojos de ultramar” are clearly immigrants who remain indifferent to (or who perhaps simply do not comprehend) the poet’s cry. Their reaction calls him to question his vocation and his timing.

¿Con qué derecho definía yo la Patria
bajo un cielo en pañales
y un sol que todavía no ha entrado en la leyenda?506

Rather than attempt to define the Patria yet in its infancy, he continues to distinguish himself from the immigrants.

y en sus pies forasteros ya moría una danza.
“Ellos vienen del mar y no escuchan,” me dije.
“Llegan como el otoño: repletos de semilla,
vestidos de hoja muerta.”
Yo venía del sur en caballos e idilios:
“La Patria es un dolor que aún no sabe su nombre.”507

505 “Descubrimiento de la patria,” 303.
506 Ibid.
507 Ibid.
Since the Patria is a metaphysical pain with no name, her identity cannot be expressed. This causes the poet to question his own identity as a first generation inhabitant of the pampas. His first instinct is to separate himself from the newly immigrated, whose autumn contrasts with the birth of the nation and his own horses and idylls. But subsequently, he admits that after all he is really an immigrant too.

Una lanza española y un cordaje francés
riman este poema de mi sangre:
yo también soy un hijo del otoño,
que llegó del oriente sobre la tez del agua.
¿Qué harían en el Sur y en su empresa de toros
un cordaje perdido y una lanza en destierro?

Here he wonders how immigrants from different European nations will fit in to this new landscape dominated by livestock. In the next stanza, he returns to emphasizing the youth of the country, calling it “una niña de voz y pies desnudos.” This time focusing on the tilling of the land in the countryside, he continues the contrast between himself (poet concerned with the metaphysical) and the other men of his lineage (concerned only with the physical).

La Patria era una niña de voz y pies desnudos
Yo la vi talonear los caballos frisones
en tiempo de labranza;
o dirigir los carros graciosos del estío,
con las piernas al sol y el idioma en el aire.
(Los hombres de mi estirpe no la vieron:
sus ojos de aritmética buscaban
el tamaño y el peso de la fruta.)

In the fifth stanza, the established pattern repeats: 1) The first line emphasizes the youth of the Patria: “La Patria era un retozo de niñez.” 2) The body of the stanza paints a picturesque image of an aspect of the Patria, in this case sheep shearing in the countryside, accompanied by the melodic

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508 Ibid., 304.
509 Ibid.
music of guitars. 3) And the last lines of the stanza relate the indifference of workers to the poet’s song. This time the “hombres de mi clan” do not notice the glorious frolicking of the young patria because “sus ojos verticales se perdían/ en las cotizaciones del Mercado de Lanas).”

As the poem progresses, the personifications of the Patria mature from an infant to a nearly pubescent girl. While in the first stanza he mentions “un cielo en pañales,” by the time we reach stanza six the Patria is “dormida y con los pechos no brotados aún.” The poet considers her with a paternal uneasiness as regards her imminent development. In stanza eight he expresses the solitude of his encounter with the Patria and the resultant existential angst.

la descubrí yo solo allá en Maipú.
Y de pronto, en el mismo corazón de mi júbilo,
sentí yo la piedad que se alarmaba
y el miedo que nacía.
“La Patria es un temor que ha despertado”,
me dije yo en el Sur y en su empresa de toros.
[...]
El temor de la Patria y su niñez
me atravesó encostado (la cicatriz me dura).510

The side wound is an obvious reference to Christ, who suffers for the sins of his fellow men. The poet returns to Buenos Aires (la Ciudad de la Yegua Tordilla) with the pain of his discovery and tries to communicate what he has seen to the architects and the businessmen.

“La Patira es un dolor en el umbral,
un pimpollo terrible y un miedo que nos busca.
No dormirán los ojos que la miren,
no dormirán ya el sueño de los bueyes.”511

Those conscious of the Patria (the poets) will not sleep, much like Adán and his other literary-minded friends in Adán Buenosayres, the group that Marechal in another essay calls the creators

510 Ibid., 305-306.
511 Ibid., 306.
of culture (as opposed to the consumers). But here the would-be consumers of culture, the 
apisonadores de adoquines, continue to chew their bread and onions, oblivious to the anguished 
song of the poet. He tries yet again to communicate, this time addressing his poetry to the builders 
(albañiles).

La Patria es un peligro que florece. 
Niña y tentada por su hermoso viento, 
necesario es vestirla con metales de guerra 
y calzarla de acero para el baile 
del laurel y la muerte.”

The militarization of the State suggested by these lines echoes of Italian fascism and especially of 
futurist poetry. These lines also suggest that the Patria is being courted by an unknown destiny and 
must be prepared for a future of war but also poetic glory. The poet seems to suggest that this 
tender age is crucial, but his cries continue to fall on deaf ears. Marechal’s depiction of the workers 
as unresponsive seems to indicate that they are incapable of thinking for themselves. A similar 
attitude towards the masses emerges in Adán Buenosayres:

Es el pobre Demos […] la mayoría nuestra que, inclinada igualmente al bien y al 
mal, sigue la dirección de cualquier viento. Sus actos y voces anuncian a las claras 
que hoy la solicitan vientos despreciables. Pero con ese mismo barro un Neogogo 
hará maravillas. (521)

[It’s poor old Demos […] our great majority, equally inclined to good and to evil, 
who go whichever way the wind blows. These days, it’s clear from their actions 
and words that the majority is wooed by contemptible winds. But with his very 
clay, a Neogogue will work wonders.] (405)

“Neogogo” is a neologism that combines neo, meaning new, and demogogo, or demagogue, a 
political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular desires and prejudices rather than by 
using rational argument. Given Marechal’s political stance, one can hardly read this passage 
without thinking of Perón. The metaphor of Perón as a God-like figure molding clay can also be

512 Ibid.
found in his essay “Proyecciones culturales del momento argentino,” in which he wrote that Perón, “trabajaba la materia real del país con un conocimiento exacto de la misma”\textsuperscript{513} [worked the real material of the country with an exactly knowledge of its essence].

Returning to the poem, the following stanza contains the solution to the problem of poetic national expression. This time the poet speaks to the blacksmiths.

“No solo hay que forjar el riñon de la Patria, sus costillas de barro, su frente de hormigón: es de urgencia poblar su costado de Arriba, soplarle en la nariz el ciclón de los dioses. La Patria debe ser una provincia de la tierra y del cielo.”\textsuperscript{514}

The verb “forjar,” meaning to forge, to create (nation), or to invent, emphasizes that the Patria is being constructed. It is a metaphysical construction of which he speaks, which runs parallel to the physical construction of the city by the builders and blacksmiths. It is a metaphysical construction that, according to Marechal, must take place with spiritual direction: “de Arriba,” “dioses,” “de cielo.” But the blacksmiths too pay him no heed “me clavaron con sus ojos en ausencia.” In fact, no one in the city hears his words, for he comes from the South, an idyllic place of horses and eclogues. As Fernanda Bravo Herrera points out, Marechal’s “Sur” is not that of the criollistas which Marechal parodies in \textit{Adán Buenosayres}.

El Sur assume auténticos rasgos elegíacos y heroicos que se oponen al estereotipo vacío y falso del sur criollista, malevo y orillero parodizado en la excursión nocturna por Saavedra en \textit{Adán Buenosayres} (1948).\textsuperscript{515}


\textsuperscript{514} Ibid., 306-307.

\textsuperscript{515} Fernanda Elisa Bravo Herrera, “Lo épico en ‘La Patriótica’ de Leopoldo Marechal,” 270.
The South assumes authentic elegiac and heroic characteristics which contrast with the empty and false stereotype of the *criollista, malevo, and orillero* parodied in the nocturnal excursion to Saavedra in *Adán Buenosayres* (1948).

The extended lament ends with the poet giving up because he concludes that it is simply too early to sing of the Patria.

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Y descubrí en mi alma: “Todavía no es tiempo: 
no es el año ni el siglo ni la edad. 
La niñez de la Patria jugará todavía 
mas allá de tu muerte y la de todos 
los herrerors que truenan junto al río.”
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The argument made by the poet narrator in *Descubrimiento de la Patria* is very similar to what Mitre articulated in his letter to Señor don Miguel M. Ruíz (1887): that true poetic expression of nation in the early years of nationhood is premature. In Marechal’s poem, through the use of repetition, we see five main points driven home: 1) the Patria is yet in her infancy, and will be for quite some time 2) the Patria must be militarized for her glorious destiny 3) the inhabits of the Patria are migrant workers from Europe 3) the poet too is a migrant, and he comes to recognize other immigrants as “his clan,” although this “clan” yet lacks self-expression 4) the majority of Argentines are concerned only with material progress and do not experience the existential angst of the poet. They are not conscious of the Argentine identity crisis. It is for this reason that the poet must suffer in silence and solitude his inability to sing of the Patria. It must remain “un miedo inevitable/ y un dolor que se lleva en el costado/ sin palabra ni grito./ Por eso, nunca más hablaré de la/ Patria.” Here his suffering for his country is Christ-like, and he suffers because his country has stumbled from the spiritual path. The poem ends in metaphysical pain due to the failure to grasp the essence of the Patria and successfully express it.

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This same idea of pain resulting from failed national expression can be found in a letter from Marechal to Eduardo Mallea regarding his *Historia de una pasión argentina* (1937). In this letter Marechal writes of “la pena metafísica de ser argentinos” (the metaphysical struggle of being Argentine), transcribing the concluding verses from the aforementioned poem *La Patria joven*:

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La Patria es un dolor
que aún no tiene bautismo:
Sobre tu carne pesa como un recién nacido. 517
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He refers to Mallea’s description of America as a continent that had not yet found its expression, and likens Mallea’s book to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*:

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Tu historia es la historia de un alma, y por lo tanto es la historia de un despertar, como la mía; como la de todos los despiertos: Dante despierta una vez, espiritualmente, y se halla en la selva oscura. [...] Lo que podemos afirmar en lenguaje directo es que nuestra Argentina irá levantándose a medida que crezca el número de los despiertos, entre los dormidos, y el de los “sobrios,” entre los “ebrios.” 518
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[Your story is the story of a soul, and thus it is the story of an awakening, like my story, like the story of all the awakened: once Dante awakens spiritually and finds himself in a dark wood. [...] What we can declare with direct language is that our Argentina will continue to rise up as the number of awakened among the sleeping, and the number of the “sober” among the “inebriated” increases.]

Marechal laments that the majority of Argentines are ignorant of their own perdition and lack of self-expression, much like the workers in *Descubrimiento de la Patria* who remain deaf to the poet’s cries. What is needed in his opinion is a spiritual awakening (hence his mention of Dante). In fact, he ends his letter by proclaiming Mallea’s idea of a spiritual reorientation as worthy of further study:

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518 Ibid., 290.
Hay otras observaciones interesantes en tu libro: aquella de que nuestro país debe reintegrarse a una línea spiritual que ya tuvo y que perdió luego, me parece digna de ser estudiada con mayor amplitud.  

There are other interesting observations in you book. For example, the idea that our country must reintegrate itself in a spiritual trajectory that it once had and then lost, seems to me an idea worthy of further study.

The idea that Argentina has strayed from her spiritual path is also at the heart of a talk entitled “Fundación Espiritual de Buenos Aires,” given in 1936 for the fourth centenary of the founding of Buenos Aires. The title is clearly a reference to Borges’s 1926 poem, “The Mythological Foundation of Buenos Aires,” discussed in Chapter 2. Marechal begins by asking the question “adónde se dirige la ciudad, hacia qué rumbo tienden sus pies tan sólidamente calzados de metal y de piedra” [where is the city going, towards which course do its feet so solidly shod in metal and stone march]. He laments that this great city in full growth lacks the spirituality to guide its greatness:

Vemos la frente de la ciudad, cada vez más alta; los pies de la ciudad, cada vez más hondos; el cuerpo de la ciudad, cada vez más grande; y la ciudad nos duele, porque no vemos aún la forma espiritual de su cuerpo, la forma de su vida, y porque sabemos que sin esa forma espiritual ningún cuerpo vivo tiene vida auténtica, sino un mecanismo helado que se resuelve, como todo mecanismo, en un triste parodia de la vida.

We see the forehead of the city getting higher and higher; the feet of the city deeper and deeper; the body of the city, bigger and bigger; the city causes us to ache, for we do not see the spiritual form of its body, the form of its life, and because we know that without this spiritual form, no live body can have authentic life, but only a frozen mechanism that ends up, as do all mechanisms, as a sad parody of life.]

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519 Ibid., 291.
521 Ibid., 106. My emphasis.
Argentines feel an existential pain as they watch their city grow aimlessly. It is a city which has not yet reached its full potential, is not yet fully formed.

En nuestro amor de Buenos Aires predominía, en cambio, una rara inquietud paternal, como si todavía, y en cierto modo fuéramos los constructores de la ciudad que crece a nuestro lado, como si la infancia de la ciudad se prolongase más allá de nuestra muerte; por eso es que nuestros ojos no se apartan de su estatura, y es por eso que la contemplamos como se contempla a un niño, vale decir, en enigma, en recelo y en esperanza.522

[Instead, what predominates in our love for Buenos Aires is a rare paternal anxiety, as if we were the builders of the city that grows at our side, as if the infancy of the city will go on long after our death. It is for this reason that we can’t take our eyes off its stature, and for this reason that we contemplate it as we would contemplate a child, that is to say as an enigma, with suspicion and hope.]

Essentially this paragraph is the prose version of what he expresses poetically in Descubrimiento de la Patria. Argentines who are aware experience something of a paternal uneasiness at thinking of their daughter’s eventual coming of age, something which will happen after their deaths. This paternal metaphor conveys a sense of powerlessness, but also that as “fathers,” they are responsible for Argentina’s guidance.

His words of concern are addressed above all to those who “padecen la ciudad como un dolor íntimo” [endure the city like an intimate pain] and he speaks to them of the spiritual vocation of Buenos Aires, it’s “llamado spiritual” [spiritual calling].523 To begin, he specifies that the lack of spirituality is not just unique to Buenos Aires, but is a widespread problem pertaining to the century. But according to Marechal and his spiritually-oriented friends, the effects are worse in Buenos Aires than elsewhere: “la deserción spiritual es más completa en Buenos Aires, tal vez porque su fondo tradicional no es tan antiguo y fuerte como el de otras ciudades…” [the spiritual

522 Ibid.
523 Ibid.
desertion is more complete in Buenos Aires, perhaps because its traditional foundation is not as ancient or as strong as that of other cities...]. The inhabitants of Buenos Aires lack a history to anchor them down. Detached from their spiritual vocation, they wander aimlessly in a world of rampant materialism.

Y es que la historia moderna, fiel a su siglo, sólo se mueve en el plano de lo natural y temporal, totalmente desvinculada de lo sobrenatural y eterno, que es la causa de las causas. Es así que la historia, por no transponer el círculo de las causas segundas, se hace de más en más ininteligible. [Modern history, faithful to its century, only moves in the plane of the natural and the temporal, totally detached from the supernatural and the eternal, that is the cause of the causes. It is such that history, by not getting beyond the circle of the second causes, becomes more and more unintelligible.]

The citizens of Buenos Aires have lost their way and have found themselves in a dark wood, so to speak. Marechal laments that the city (“consagrada, desde su origen, a los amorosos trabajos del espíritu,”) has forgotten its noble birth. The solution is a spiritual reorientation.

“Didáctica de la Patria” – A Spiritual Itinerary

The second part of the second day of Heptamerón is the poem “Didáctica de la Patria,” which follows “Descubrimiento de la Patria.” The poem offers a solution to the problem of Argentine poetic expression presented as a lament in the previous poem. It is a call for a spiritual reorientation. Marechal begins the poem by stating, as in the “Fundación Espiritual de Buenos Aires,” that the problem pertains to the whole century: “conozco a los varones de mi tierra y mi siglo:/ inciertos en el mal y en la virtud.” However, in Argentina it is of particular cause for

524 Ibid., 107.
525 Ibid., 110.
concern: “es fatal en esta Patria joven.” As in “Descubrimiento de la Patria,” the infancy of the country is predicted to last far beyond the years of the poet: “la infancia de la Patria jugará todavía.” Because poetic expression of the infant nation is premature, and because of the lack of spiritual direction, no poetic greatness is possible: “nos legaron/ un tiempo sin destino que merezca un laurel.” Just a few lines after this mention of a lack of destiny, Marechal alludes to Dante’s *Paradise*:

Nos enseñaron que la Patria era  
no sé yo qué juicioso paraíso  
de infalibles trigales y vacas repetidas.  

Argentina is the direct inheritors of the ideas from Western culture (in this case a judicious paradise such as Dante’s). These traditions are then melded with national particularities such as the landscape and livestock. Although there is no current possibility of poetic greatness, the poet declares, “algo debemos hacer en esta infancia.” The rest of the poem provides a spiritual and moral itinerary to be followed for the benefit of future generations. The dichotomy tierra/cielo is repeated throughout: “yo siempre fui un patriota de la tierra/ y un patriota del cielo.” Whereas “Descubrimiento de la Patria” is an anguished lament at lack of current expression, here, thanks to the spiritual itinerary, the poet is hopeful for the future provided that Argentines look to the heavens in order to realize their destiny.

El nombre de tu Patria viene de *argentum*. ¡Mira  
que al recibir un nombre se recibe un destino!  
En su metal simbólico la plata  
es el noble reflejo del oro principal.  
Hazte de plata y espejea el oro  
que se da en las alturas,

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527 Ibid.  
528 Ibid., 310.  
529 Ibid., 311.
The poem is about the individual moral work necessary to elevate the Patria: “Hazte pilar, y sostendrás un día/ la construcción aérea de la Patria.” This effort of today will yield the fruit of tomorrow: “hazte carozo de la Patria en ti mismo,/ y otros verán arriba la manzana/ que prometiste abajo.” Subsequently, there will be poetic glory among the generations to come: “otros recogerán, a su tiempo laureles.”

The population of recently immigrated must realize their spiritual vocation individually through Christ.

Somos un pueblo de recién venidos.
Y has de saber que un pueblo se realiza tan sólo cuando traza la Cruz en su esfera durable.
[…]
Josef, si como pueblo no trazamos la Cruz,
porque la Patria es joven y su edad no madura,
la debemos trazar como individuos.

What follows is similar to the Divine Comedy in that it features the motif of the journey and is intended to deter sinners from sinning. The poet names certain sins “que asaltan a los hombres junto al Río,” namely Envy and Gluttony. He also explains how to avoid cowardice, temptation, and robbery, and what to do if chosen as a political leader: “Si acaso gobernaras a tu pueblo,/ no has de olvidar que todo poder viene de Arriba.” In addition to the Dantesque theme, there is reference to Dante’s cosmology: “Imita, si gobiernas, a ese Motor Primero/ que hace girar al

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530 Ibid.
531 Ibid., 312.
532 Ibid., 313.
533 Ibid., 312-313.
534 Ibid., 317.
cosmos/ y es invisible y a la vez inmóvil.” The conclusion of the poem is that if the itinerary of inner development is followed, then the Patria will grow as consequence.

Es mejor construirse y apretarse uno mismo  
(ya te hablé del pilar y la semilla),  
y crecer por adentro lo que afuera se poda  
y ganar por arriba lo que se pierde abajo.  
Si así lo hicieras, crecerá la Patria.\textsuperscript{535}

As we have seen from Marechal’s poetry, it is the spiritual component that Marechal feels is lacking in his generation of poets. Their lack of spiritual direction goes hand in hand with a lack of community. In a talk given in 1936 for the fourth centenary of the founding of Buenos Aires, Marechal highlighted the lack of cohesion among his literary colleagues:

No creo que haya una comunidad de orientación entre los escritores de mi época. Hay entre ellos algunos espíritus dignos de atención, pero sus esfuerzos son aislados y de una diversidad desconcertante.  
No nos conocemos: falta entre nosotros esa vinculación espiritual de cenáculo, que permite el intercambio de valores y sirve a la juventud de disciplina y estímulo.\textsuperscript{536}

[I don’t think there is a community of common direction among the writer of my epoch. There are some spirits worthy of attention, but their efforts are isolated and of a disconcerting diversity.  
We don’t know each other. What is lacking is this spiritual bond of community that permits an exchange of values and which serves to discipline and stimulate young people.]

In \textit{Adán Buenosayres}, Marechal chose to parody the discordancy among Argentine authors because he believed them to have lost the spiritual direction necessary to produce great works of art. The \textit{Divine Comedy} functions as a metaphor for the whole nation that has strayed from the

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 318.  
spiritual path. Another reason for his use of Dante is because he considered Dante part of the rightful Argentine cultural patrimony. In a letter written in 1949 to Dr. Atilio Dell’Oro Maini, Marechal writes:

Somos herederos de la ‘sustancia intelectual’ de Europa, herederos legítimos y directos. Alighieri, Cervantes y Shakespeare son tan mías como podrían serlo de un italiano, un español y un inglés. Aristóteles y Santo Tomás son tan mías como Jacques Mariain. Somos legítimos herederos, profesores y continuadores de la civilización occidental; y con una ventaja en nuestro favor: la que nos da el ‘hecho americano,’ en el sentido de la ‘no retórica’ y del no ‘parti pris’ nacional.”

[We have inherited the ‘intellectual substance’ of Europe as their legitimate and direct heirs. Alighieri, Cervantes, and Shakespeare belong to me just as much as they do to an Italian, a Spaniard, or an Englishman. Aristotle and Saint Thomas are just as much mine as Jacques Mariain. We are the legitimate heirs, professors, and continuators of Western civilization; and with an advantage in our favor: that which we gain from “the American condition,” which amounts to ‘no rhetoric’ and no national bias.]

Argentines are the rightful inheritors of European intellectual history. They will continue Western tradition but yet have the advantage of not being tied down to any one ideology. Their cultural pluralism is advantageous:

Razones de linaje físico e intelectual han determinado que nuestro pueblo manifestase desde su origen una decidida vocación por todas las formas de la cultura; y la historia de nuestras ciencias y nuestras artes lo está demostrando suficientemente. Los grandes flujos inmigratorios, que multiplicaron el caudal de nuestra población hacia fines del siglo pasado y comienzos del que transcurre, no sólo dejan intacta esa vocación, sino que la corroboran y magnifican gracias al aporte de sangres hermanas y de mentalidades afines.

[On account of their physical and intellectual lineage our population has manifested since its origin a strong vocation for all forms of culture, and the history of our sciences and our arts is demonstrating this sufficiently. The great migratory fluxes

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that multiplied the volume of our population since the end of the last century and the beginning of the current, not only leave this vocation intact, but they also corroborate and magnify it thanks to the addition of fraternal blood and related mentality.]

In an essay entitled “Sobre la inteligencia argentina” (1941) Marechal defines Argentine intelligence as “Hispanic,” “Mediterranean,” and “classical”:

La inteligencia argentina, en razón de su origen y por gravitación de raza, es una inteligencia “hispánica”: si quisiéramos extender los límites de nuestra definición, diríamos que es una inteligencia “mediterránea” y, sobre cualquier otro adjetivo, una inteligencia “clásica.” Lo es en su esencia, no obstante la desviación accidental con que ha pagado su tributo al siglo.

[Argentine intelligence, because of its origin and race, is a “Hispanic” intelligence. If we wanted to extend the limits of our definition, we would say that it is a “Mediterranean” intelligence, and above any other adjective, a “classical” intelligence. It is such in its essence, despite the accidental deviation with which it paid tribute to the century.]

Politically speaking this classical intelligence translates into an intellectual minority who decide for the majority, in other words, it is “aristocratic”:

la inteligencia clásica trabaja sobre las cosas, las comprende y clasifica en un orden armónico: es una inteligencia realista y jerárquica. […] Hay una desigualdad y nace un principio de jerarquía entre el hombre que entiende (hombre intelectual) y el hombre que asiente (hombre sentimental).

[classical intelligence works on things, it understands them and classifies them in a harmonious order: it is a realistic and hierarchical intelligence. […] There is inequality and it a principle of hierarchy is born between the man who understands (the intellectual man) and the man who assents (the sentimental man).]

539 Sobre la inteligencia argentina in “Nueva Política” 4 de septiembre 1941. In Obras completas, 313-319.


541 Ibid., 314.
He is critical of Romantic sentimentalism which he describes as a rebellion against intelligence which leads to an inversion of order, and which makes the religious individual turn against his spiritual authority. Philosophically speaking, he says, “it will end in the most pure agnosticism, by turning philosophy into a mere game of literary creation.”

In its origin, Argentine intelligence is classical. He then describes it having lived through the Renaissance and the Reformation. The defining moment of independence was when Argentine intelligence gained the opportunity to “flower and bear fruit on its own within this tradition.” This moment coincided with the French Revolution, and unfortunately, in the opinion of Marechal, on account of romantic sentimentalism, Argentine intelligence “renounced an inheritance that meant its liberty” and fell into “the servitude of bad imitators.”

The problem of foreign imitation is at the crux of discourses on Argentine literature. Argentines it seems were always either trying too hard to imitate, or trying too hard to be original. Borges eventually concluded that the problem of how to be uniquely Argentine in writing was a “pseudoproblem,” and that all Argentine authors were inherently Argentine regardless of the subject matter of their literary creations (“El escritor argentino y la tradición). For Marechal, the expression of Argentine identity is a very real problem, the crux of which lies at the intersection of the indigenous and the foreign.

**Lo autóctono y lo foráneo**

In a conference talk given on June 23, 1949, Marechal elaborated on the difficulties of being Argentine and an author. He characterizes being an Argentine author first and foremost as being plagued by anxiety over lack of national expression:

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542 Ibid., 315.

543 Ibid., 317.
En primer lugar, imagínense ustedes al poeta, rodeado de formas naturales, que son las de su país; conviviendo con hombres que son sus paisanos en esta provincia de la tierra que constituye los que llamamos “una patria”; solicitado de amores y odios, júbilos y llantos, que arrancan de un vivir común, en una misma tierra, bajo un mismo cielo, y necesariamente cobran el sello de tradiciones y modalidades que no deben, ni pueden, ni quieran ser olvidadas o violadas; imagínense ustedes al poeta frente a ese mundo de formas y sentires que hacen una patria, e imagínenlo acuciado por el ansia de encarecer el esplendor de las formas o la intensidad de los sentimientos, ansia irresistible, comezón de música, en que se resuelve toda vocación poética digna de tal nombre.\footnote{Leopoldo Marechal, “La poesía lírica: lo autóctono y lo foráneo en su contenido esencial” in Obras completas, compilación y prólogo de Pedro Luis Barcia, edición coordinada por María de los Ángeles Marechal (Buenos Aires: Libros Perfil S.A., 1998, 144. A conference talk given on June 23, 1949, the eighth of a series organized by the Subsecretaría de Cultura de la Nación. In Primer ciclo cultural de conferencias organizadas por la Subsecretaría de Cultura de la Nación (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos del Ministerio de Educación, 1950), vol. I, serie III, no. 4, 181-192.}

[Marechal laments that it would be a great shame if in lieu of poetizing this world around him, the poet instead took up foreign elements. For art to be authentic, he argues, it must affirm itself within its cultural context and not be a grotesque and subservient imitation of the foreign. Furthermore, he continues, the poet should address an audience who is close to him, i.e. those who inhabit the same land and share the same traditions. And how could he address these listeners, Marechal asks rhetorically, through exotic forms which would fall on deaf ears? Foreign elements, in his opinion, would not foster the vital relationship that must occur between the creator and the contemplator of his work.]
Unfortunately, according to Marechal, the tendency to imitate the foreign was a continuous crutch of Argentine literature. Many authors explicitly set out to imitate foreign works, looking to European cultural centers such as Paris for their every inspiration. Although they had gained political independence, this did not mean immediate cultural independence:

Consolidada nuestra soberanía política y lograda nuestra soberanía económica, el problema de la soberanía cultural está debatiéndose ahora en la conciencia de nuestros intelectuales.
Muy cierto es (y nadie puede negar el hecho) que la tiranía de lo foráneo logró muchas veces inducir a nuestro arte en el más grotesco de los mimetismos.

Recuerdo una edad en que muchos pintores argentinos no se atrevían a tomar la paleta, si no estaban informados previamente sobre cómo era la pintura en París y en ese instante preciso.  

[Our political sovereignty consolidated and our economic sovereignty reached, the problem of cultural sovereignty is currently being debated in the conscious of our intellectuals.
Very certain is (and no one can deny this fact) that the tyranny of the foreign often managed to lead our art to the most grotesque mimicry.

I remember a time when many Argentine painters didn’t dare take up a palette if they were not previously informed of who painting was in Paris at that very instant.]

Marechal does not believe that this slavish imitation has occurred because Argentines lack talent, but rather because they suffer from an inferiority complex, the consequence of which is blind mimesis. In his explanation of this tendency, Marechal returns once again to the image of the Patria as a young girl:

Lo que pasaba realmente (y hay que admitirlo con toda honradez) era que sobre tales artistas argentinos pesaba un complejo de inferioridad con respecto a lo foráneo […] En una palabra, esos artistas viajaban en fiacres galos o en troicas rusas, mientras el alma nacional, fresca y niña, galopaba sola en redoblantes caballos patrios.  

545 Ibid., 146.
546 Ibid., 147.
[What really happened (and in all honesty it has to be admitted), is that an inferiority complex regarding the foreign weighed down on Argentine authors. [...] In a word, these artists travelled in French carriages and Russian troikas while our national soul, fresh and childlike, galloped alone to the drumming sounds of our native horses.]

He concludes that although strict imitation of the foreign is undesirable, so too is the overzealous inclusion of the indigenous. Both tendencies are the butt of his parody in Adán Buenosayres.

**Marechal contra criollismo**

In the following section, I will outline Marechal’s aversion to a literary glorification of the gaucho, followed by his interpretation of the significance of *Martín Fierro*. In 1926 he wrote an article entitled “El gaucho y la nueva literatura rioplatense” intended to warn against what he considered a “disease” that was spreading throughout Argentine letters, namely a literary nationalism consisting of the pseudo-archetype of the gaucho and other forced localisms:

Las letras rioplatenses, tras un discutible propósito de nacionalismo literario, están a punto de adquirir dos enfermedades específicas: el gaucho y el arrabal. Nada habría de objetable en ello si se tratara del campesino actual, que monta un potro y maneja un Ford con la misma indiferencia; pero se refieren a ese gaucho estatuable, exaltado por una mala literatura; a ese superhombre de cartón que, abandonando su pobre leyenda, quiere hoy erigirse en arquetipo nuestro.547

[The literature of Río de la Plata, following the debatable aim of literary nationalism, is at the point of coming down with two specific diseases: the gaucho and the arrabal. There wouldn’t be anything objectionable if this were about the present-day farmer, who mounts a colt with the same indifference as he drives a Ford, but this is about the gaucho, exalted by bad literature, this cardboard superman who, abandoning his poor legend, wants to become our archetype.]

Essentially he deems the sustained imitation of gauchesque literature no better than imitation of the foreign. He points out that in foreign countries with a secular tradition rich in episodes and

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types, new art tries to forget the past, rather than prolong it. It is all the more ridiculous, he explains, that Argentina, with such a meager past, should latch on to “una tradición que no se anima a serlo todavía y nos pongamos a llorar la desaparición de un pseudo-arquetipo o a gemir poemas de ropavejero sobre ponchos, chiripás y otros cachivaches en desuso” [a tradition that is not ready to be one yet, and we start crying over the disappearance of a pseudo-archetype or moaning poems by second-hand-clothes dealers about ponchos, chiripás, and other pieces of junk in disuse]. (236)

He pleads with fellow writers to forget the gaucho: “Olvidemos al gaucho. En el umbral de los días nuevos crece otra leyenda más grande y más digna de nuestro verso, puesto que está en nosotros y se alimenta con nuestros años” [Forget the gaucho. On the threshold of new days another greater legend will grow that is worthier of our verse, given that it is within us and is nourished by our years]. (236)

In Adán Buenosayres, he parodies these criollista tendencies to poeticize the gaucho and the arrabal in Books I-V, in particular through the scenes that take place at the social gatherings at the Amundsen house and also in the group’s nocturnal excursion to Saavedra. In a key scene that takes place after the characters decide to embark on an “aventura criolli-malevi-fúnebri-putani-arrabalera” (327) the omnipresence and the problems of criollismo are elaborated upon by our narrator who describes the adverse reaction of Samuel Tesler (the philosopher) to the phenomenon and his uneasiness regarding his friend’s unbridled enthusiasm for the gaucho and the arrabal. Franky Amundsen had exclaimed, “¡Nos hundiremos hasta la verija en el criollismo! ¡Patearemos el fango del arrabal!” [We’ll get down and dirty on the outskirts of town and up to our balls in criollismo] (328). Adán and Tesler, however, do not jump on the bandwagon as concerns criollismo:

Una mezcla de irritación y de lástima se había traslucido en el semblante del filósofo villacrespense [Tesler]. No ignoraba él los estragos que venía produciendo
en la última generación una doctrina herética en sus principios y dudosa en sus fines la cual, elaborada tal vez en el sucio crisol de algún cenáculo irresponsable, había tomado un vuelo sin paragón en la historia de nuestra metafísica nacional y justificaba los alarmados gritos que ya se oían por doquiera: “Criollismo” era el nombre de tan oscura heterodoxia; y si fue inspirada o no por el propio Mandinga es cosa que sabremos el Día del Juicio hacia el anochecer. Hurgando el cuerpo de aquella doctrina con el celoso bisturí de una ortodoxia sin claudicaciones, fácil era ver que se trataba de levantar hasta el nivel de los dioses olímpicos a ciertos personajes del suburbio porteño cuyas hazañas aparecían cuidadosamente registradas en los archivos policiales de la ciudad. (328-329)

[A look of irritation mixed with pity suffused the face of the philosopher from Villa Crespo. He was not unaware of the harm suffered by the current generation due to a doctrine of heretical principles and dubious ends. Concocted in the impure crucible of some irresponsible coterie, it had taken off in a manner unprecedented in the history of our national metaphysics, fully justifying the cries of alarm being heard on all sides. Criollismo was the name of this obscure heterodoxy, and whether it was inspired by Old Nick himself, we’ll only know on Judgment Day toward nightfall. Upon dissecting that body of doctrine with the zealous scalpel of inflexible orthodoxy, one quickly came to realize that it was all about taking certain shady characters from suburban Buenos Aires, whose deeds were memorialized in police files, and raising them to the level of Olympian gods.] (132)

One of the most notable things about this lengthy explanation of criollismo is the profusion of religious vocabulary: “doctrina herética” (heretical doctrine), “cenáculo” (Last Supper), “oscura heterodoxia” (obscure heterodoxy), “Mandinga” (Devil), Día del Juicio (Judgement Day), “ortodoxia” (orthodoxy), “dioses olímpicos” (olympian gods). In labeling the tendency a heresy, he implies that the criollistas have strayed from the true path. Inspired by the dirty melting pot (sucio crisol) of Buenos Aires, the criollistas glorified outlaw personages such as the gaucho and the malevo whose stories belong in the criminal records of the city rather than in her literature. But while Marechal was decidedly against the glorification of the gaucho authors of his generation, that is not to say he was against Martín Fierro itself. In fact, he has nothing but praise for what he considers one of Argentina’s greatest masterpieces.
Marechal on *Martín Fierro*

Like Lugones, Borges, and nearly every Argentine author concerned with the literary expression of Argentine national identity, Marechal publically voiced his opinions of Hernández’s *Martín Fierro*. The text, later published as “Simbolismos del *Martín Fierro*” was originally read as “La conferencia de Hoy” for LRA Radio del Estado in 1955, seven years after the publication of *Adán Buenosayres*.\(^{548}\) Marechal begins by explaining that his will not be a critical study, as there are enough of those given the fortuitous reception of the work. Instead of considering the book as art for art’s sake, he explains that in light of the recent historical consciousness he will consider it in regards to “aquellos valores que trascienden los límites del arte puro y hacen que una obra literaria o artística se constituya en el paradigma de una raza o de un pueblo en la manifestación de sus potencias íntimas, en la imagen de su destino histórico” \(^{549}\) [those values that transcend the limits of pure art and make it so that a literary or artistic work is established in the paradigm of a race or a people in the manifestation of its intimate power, in the image of its historic destiny]. His view of the role of great literature in society seems to echo Lugones’s statement that great literature (and specifically *Martín Fierro*) expresses “the heroic life of our race.”\(^{550}\)

Marechal’s essential question is this: does Hernández’s poem have the capacity of transcendence along the lines of classical epics? If the answer is yes, “el *Martín Fierro* no solo constituirá para nosotros la material de un arte literario, sino la material de un arte que nos hace


\(^{549}\) Ibid., 157.

[Martín Fierro will not only constitute for us the material of a literary art, but also the material of an art we need to cultivate now more than ever: the art of being Argentines and Americans]. Marechal does more than just praise the work as a good book; he calls it a miracle, “un hecho libre,” at once outside of and above natural laws and ordinary circumstances. It is a “grave and solitary monument,” unlike any other literature created at its time. It cannot be compared to the simple folkloric poetry nor to the poesía erudita, which, he claims, suffered from a “inferiority complex.” While the poesía erudita imitated French romanticism and pseudo Spanish classicism, Martín Fierro was a unique creation which did not bow down to foreign predecessors. He declares the work to be an anomaly and focuses on three main aspects that make it a truly one of a kind Argentine literary creation: 1) it was written without an inferiority complex 2) its timeliness 3) its lack of imitation:

Sin complejo ninguno, “con toda la voz que tiene,” Martín Fierro se parece bastante a un hecho libre de la literatura nacional, producido, como todo milagro aleccionador, en el instante justo en que se lo necesitaba, es decir, cuando la nueva y gloriosa nación, habiendo nacido recién de la guerra, como todo lo que merece vivir, debía reclamar con las obras su derecho a la grandeza de los libres, tal como había reclamado su derecho a la existencia en la libertad.

[Without any hang up, and “with all the voice it has,” Martín Fierro resembles a free act of national literature, produced, like all instructive miracles, in the precise moment when it was needed, that is to say, when the new and glorious nation, recently born of the war, and like everything that deserves to live, had to claim through its works its right to literary greatness, just as it had already claimed the right to exist as a free nation.]

Not only is Martín Fierro an exemplary work of literature, in his opinion, but it was also written at a crucial time in Argentine history, and was a reflection of her identity in this moment.

551 Ibid.

552 Ibid., 158.

553 Ibid.
Furthermore, he interprets the work as a message directed towards future generations and concerning the future of the nation. He calls the work “una invitación a la grandeza, cumplidos en el alborar de una patria que puede, quiere y debe merecer su futuro.”\textsuperscript{554} [an invitation to greatness, written in the during the dawn of a nation that can, wants, and must merit her future.] Marechal’s nationalistic view of the significance of the work shares many similarities with Lugones’s discussion of its significance, while contrasting starkly with the anti-nationalistic views of Borges, who saw the work not as a reflection of Argentine national essence, but as the story of the changes in fortune of an individual gaucho. Of all the heroes of gaucho poetry, Borges explains, Fierro was “el más individual, el que menos responde a una tradición”\textsuperscript{555} [the most individual, the one that least corresponds to a tradition]. For Borges the story of Martín Fierro is not national, nor the story of a race, nor in any way related to the origins of a people.\textsuperscript{556} For Marechal, on the other hand, the book is something akin to the voice of the people which had previously been neglected by the ruling and intellectual classes. In the next section, he asks the question to whom the book is addressed, and the answer is to all members of the nascent nation:

--Va dirigido a la conciencia nacional, es decir, a la conciencia de un pueblo que nació recién a la vida de los libres y que recién ha iniciado el ejercicio de su libertad.\textsuperscript{557}

[It is addressed to the national conscious, that is to say, to the conscious of a people who were born only recently to the life of books and who only recently began to exercise their liberty.]

\textsuperscript{554} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{555} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{556} Ibid., 194.

\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., 160.
In Marechal’s anti-liberal opinion, the leaders of the nation did not exercise well its newly-gained liberty. He views the period immediately following independence as a time of alienation of the nation in its material, moral, and spiritual aspects. He interprets Martín Fierro as an alarm to citizens that the nation was going down the wrong path, claiming that the book expresses “un estado del alma nacional en el punto más dolorido de su conciencia.”\textsuperscript{558} [a state of the national soul in the most painful moment of its conscious.]

Marechal puts the blame for what he identifies as a loss of spiritual and moral values on the ruling and intellectual class: “con la acción de aquellas dos clases dirigentes, se inicia ya la enajenación o el extrañamiento del país con respecto a sus valores espirituales y materiales.”\textsuperscript{559} [with the actions of those two ruling classes began the alienation or the estrangement of the country from its spiritual and material values]. He points out that the elite sector of Argentine society, either chose to ignore the book when it came out, or they accepted it as a literary work with little consequence other than entertainment value:

\begin{quote}
 el mensaje dramático del poema no puede llegar a la clase dirigente, que sufre ya una considerable sordera en lo que atañe a la voz de lo nuestro, ni puede hacerse oír de la clase intelectual, que ya busca en horizontes foráneos la materia de su creación y su meditación.\textsuperscript{560}
\end{quote}

[the dramatic message of the poem cannot reach the ruling class, who suffer from a considerable deafness when it comes to that which concerns the voice of our people, nor can it be heard by the intellectual class, who already look to foreign horizons for creative and meditative material.]

The pueblo, on the other hand, embraced Martín Fierro from the get go, buying copies sold in the pulperías, rural stores. The message, ignored by the upper classes, thereby returned to the people

\textsuperscript{558} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{559} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{560} Ibid., 161.
from which it came. “¿Para qué vuelve a su origen ese mensaje no escuchado? Para mantenerse allí, vivo y despierto como una llama votiva.”561 [Why did this unheard message return to its origin? To maintain itself there, alive and awake like a votive flame]. In addition to the word votive, he also uses the word “occult” to describe the work. In short, Martín Fierro is the reflection of the “national essence,” and being such, “it opens a path to the popular conscious.”562 Martín Fierro, like classical epics, has symbolic meaning:

El Martín Fierro es, como las epopeyas clásicas, el canto de gesta de un pueblo, es decir, el relato de sus hechos notables cumplidos en la manifestación de su propio ser y en el logro de su destino histórico. Ya se verá que la de Martín Fierro es una gesta ad intra, vale decir, hacia adentro, que el ser argentino ha de cumplir obligado por las circunstancias. Es la gesta interior que realiza la simiente, antes de proyectar ad extra sus virtualidades creadoras.563

[Martín Fierro is, like the classical epics, the heroic song of a people, that is to say, it is the story of the notable deeds accomplished as the manifestation of its essence and the achievement of its heroic destiny. Already one can see that Martín Fierro is an epic ad intra, that is to say, an inward epic, that the Argentine essence is obliged by circumstances to observe. It is the interior epic produced by the seed, before projecting its creative potential in the world at large.]

He reads Martín Fierro on a literal and symbolic level. Literally, the book’s hero is a gaucho of the pampas, but symbolically, he is “el ente nacional en un momento crítico de su historia: es el pueblo de la nación, salido recién de su guerra de la independencia y de sus luchas civiles, y atento a la organización de fuerzas que ha de permitirle realizar su destino histórico.”564 [the national essence in a critical moment of its history: it is the people of the nation, just after the war of independence and civil wars, attentive to the organization of forces needed to realize its heroic

561 Ibid., 161.
562 Ibid., 162.
563 Ibid., 166.
564 Ibid.
destiny.] Thus, Fierro’s journey into the desert is interpreted as an expulsion of the national essence, which, no longer the protagonist of his own destiny, withdraws himself from the drama. Fierro’s sojourn in the desert is the “suspension de su destino”565 [suspension of its destiny].

Marechal’s views on Martín Fierro are typical of the Peronist populists, who, as Nicolas Shumway puts it “made of Martín Fierro a battlecry against the abuses of Argentine liberalism.”566 A similar interpretation of the work was articulated by Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz in a lecture entitled “The Enemies of the Argentine People” (1948): “the oligarchy governed the country with no concern beyond the ambition and selfishness of their own… Martín Fierro is the tragedy of the entire pueblo.”567 For populists, the work became a symbol of populist protest. Although fond of what he interpreted to be the original political message, Marechal did not approve of the frenzy of criticism and imitation the work spawned half a century later. Although he says he can pardon some of the early ethnographic criticism which focused on the gaucho as prototype of the two races, destined to disappear, what he cannot pardon is “el torrente de mala literatura que nos trajo después, como natural consecuencia”568 [the torrent of bad literature that came after, as a natural consequence]. The forced and exaggerated criollismo of the 1920s will be the butt of his parody in Adán Buenosayres.

In summary, in Marechal’s opinion, the Argentines do have and are capable of having national expression which is universal and transcendent. Martín Fierro, however, he sees as relevant to the birth of the nation, rather than as a reflection of its current identity. With Adán

565 Ibid., 168.

566 Nicolas Shumway, The Invention of Argentina, 277.


568 Ibid., 163.
Adán Buenosayres

In *Adán Buenosayres* Marechal takes on problems of national identity, immigration, and the difficulty of developing a populist literature that reflects the multiplicity and complexity of Argentine identity, while parodying the viewpoints of the anti-Peronist elite. In the first two chapters, he seeks to depict the ethnically diverse population. The very street that Adán inhabits is described as “a river of multiplicity,” where “peoples from all over the world mixed languages in 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, loves and hates” (62).

Chapter 1 opens with a bird’s-eye view of Buenos Aires, a chaotic and sprawling city: “Wide awake and gesticulating beneath the morning sun, the Great Capital of the South was a gaggle of men and women who fought shrieking for control over the day and the earth” (9). It is a convening point of races and seas, a melting pot which is bustling but also grotesque and violent: “If from there you’d followed the Riachuelo upstream to the refrigeration plants, you’d have seen the young bulls and fat heifers jostling out of crammed holding-pens and bellowing in the sun as the waited for the blow between the horns, the deft knife of the slaughter man that would offer a sacrificial hecatomb to the world’s voracity” (9). He links the city to antiquity by describing the central plains as “Virgilian” and the pastures of the south as bucolic. The idyllic countryside is contrasted with the noisy and overwhelming city driven by capitalism: “Murmurs of weights and
measures, the clink of cash registers, voices and gestures clashing like weapons, heels in flight: all these seemed the very pulse of the throbbing city” (10).569

In following Adán and his friends we are exposed to the various neighborhoods and outskirts of Buenos Aires with all their local color. Adán lives in Monte Egmont Street in Villa Crespo, a neighborhood comprised of many immigrant communities. We journey through his street in Book II and in Book III become acquainted with Saavedra, “a frontier zone where burg and wilderness meet in an agonistic embrace, like two giants locked in single combat” (149). It is a mysterious expanse where civilization meets barbarism, a “vast desolation” where the traveler may suddenly find himself in the face of mystery. It is here that our adventurers go looking for answers to questions about their ethnic origin and Argentina’s literary past. The two areas create a juxtaposition of Argentina’s conflicting identities, urban and rural, civilization and barbarism. As Norman Cheadle explains in the prologue to his translation of Adán Buenosayres:

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 at the edges of metropolis in a new subculture of the arrabal.570

Our first encounter with Adán’s surroundings occurs when he ventures out from his apartment into his street, Monte Egmont Street, which is described as “One hell of a street, or a street from hell! The melting pot of races. argentinopeya?” (62). This clever neologism is a combination of “Argentina” and “epopeya” or epic. In this interior monologue Adán goes from

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569 Sebastián Hernaiz reads the opening passage of the bird’s-eye view of Buenos Aires as an example of “Buenos Aires en marcha.” “En Marcha” was a Peronist slogan, and the titles “La Nación en marcha” or “La Provincia en marcha” were also frequent in official publications. In 1947 Marechal published his article “Proyecciones culturales del momento actual” in the book titled Argentina en Marcha, edited by Homero Guglielmmini from the Comisión Nacional de Cooperación Intelectual, which was part of the cultural plan of political revolution lead by Perón.

musing on the hodgepodge of races in their “barbarous dissonance” to questioning the very possibility of their literary expression. As a poet, he is inclined to ask himself how the epic of such a land can be written, epic being the genre believed to best express the values of a race. This is, in fact, the central question of the novel: How to write the epic of modern-day Argentina? The novel itself is the response. The only way to depict such diversity and dissonance is to strive for an all-encompassing work which includes the various personas and their divergent viewpoints as characters in polyphony. A great deal of Book II is devoted to character sketches of the heterogeneous inhabitants of Buenos Aires.

One passage that demonstrates the degree of ethnic diversity to be found in his city occurs soon after Adán ventures out on the street. He witnesses a fight break out in front of the grocery store La Buena Fortuna and joins the curious crowd. Standing in the midst of the mob, he finds himself marveling at the faces surrounding him:

Allí estaban los iberos de pobladas cejas que, desertando las obras de Ceres, conducen hoy tranvías orquestales; y los que bebieron un día las aguas del torrentoso Miño, varones duchos en el arte de argumentar; y los de la tierra vascuence, que disimulan con boinas azules la dureza natural de sus cráneos; y los andaluces matadores de toros, que abundan en guitarras y peleas; y los ligures fabriles, dados al vino y a la canción; y los napolitanos eruditos en los frutos de Pomona, o los que saben empuñar escobas edilicias; y los turcos de bigote renegrido, que vendan jabones, aguas de olor y peines destinados a un uso cruel; y los judíos que no aman a Belona, envueltos en sus frazadas multicolores; y los griegos hábiles en las estratagemas de Mercurio; y los dálmatas de bien atornillados riñones; y los siriolíbaneses, que no rehúyen las trifulcas de Teología y los nipones tintóreos. Estaban, en fin, todos los que llegaron desde las cuatro lejanías, para que se cumpliese el alto destino de la tierra Que-de-un-puro-metal-saca-su-nombre. Y estudiando aquellas fachas inverosímiles, Adán se preguntaba cuál sería ese destino; y era grande su duda.571 (194-195)

[There were Iberians of thick eyebrows who’d left northern Spain and their dedication to Ceres to come here and drive orchestral streetcars; there were those who drank from the torrential Miño River, men practiced in the art of

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571 My emphasis.
argumentation; those from the Basque countries, the natural hardness of their heads concealed by blue berets. Then there were the Andalusian matadors, abundant in guitars and brawls. And industrious Ligurians, given to wine and song. Neopolitans erudite in the fruits of Pomona, who now wield municipal brooms. Turks of pitch-black mustachios, who sell soap, perfumed water, and combs destined for cruel uses. Jews wrapped in multi-coloured blankets, who love not Bellona. Greeks astute in the stratagems of Mercury. Dalmations of well-rivetted kidneys. The Syrio-Lebanese, who flee not the skirmishes of Theology. And Japanese dry-cleaners. In short, all those who had come from the ends of the earth to fulfil the lofty destiny of the Land-which-from-a-noble-metal-takes-its-name. Adam studied those unlikely faces and wondered about that destiny, and great was his doubt.]

The passage displays a consciousness of ethnic diversity and an inclusionary attitude towards the migrant workforce seen as responsible for carrying out Argentina’s destiny, a stance for which Perón gained his support.

In this passage, Adán as poet and self-proclaimed metaphysician is particularly concerned with questions of identity and destiny. At his funeral he is said to be more metaphysical than physical. His coffin is said to be “so light that it seemed to carry within not the spent flesh of a dead man but rather the subtle stuff of a concluded poem” (3). Not every Argentine, however, is conscious of the identity crisis. The metaphysicians, Adán and Tesler, a “metaphysical animal” (49), are distinguished from the migrant workers who are oblivious to such concerns. In part 2 of Book I, the poet and the philosopher are contrasted with the Italian construction workers munching raw onions across from Tesler’s apartment. They stare at him as he stands in the window and laugh at his elaborately decorated kimono, the description of which is a parody of Homer’s description of Achilles’ shield (43). This associates Adán and Tesler with epic and high culture, but makes them a silly spin-off thereof. The scene also recalls the aforementioned lines from Marechal’s poem “Descubrimiento de la Patria” which details the metaphysical pain of the poet unable to describe the Patria, while the workers go on munching their onions and staring blankly:

Los apisonadores de adoquines
me clavaron sus ojos de ultramar;
y luego devoraron su pan y su cebolla
y en seguida volvieron al ritmo del pisón.\footnote{572 “Descubrimiento de la patria,” 303.}

So too, these workers are oblivious to the metaphysical concerns of Adán and Tesler. Similarly, when Adán walks by the smelly Universal Tannery, he passes the third shift workers who are stretched out on the ground sleeping and says, “They can’t hear, the way I do, the subtle tempting voices” (83).

It is perhaps failed self-expression that accounts for the characteristic melancholy of those few Argentines who are concerned with metaphysics: “The thirty-two foreign philosophers who dishonored us with their visits, who took Buenos Aires’s pulse and inserted a thermometer into her anal orifice, finally came up with the diagnosis that our city is sad” (48). Here, as Norman Cheadle points out in his notes, Marechal is referring to Count Hermann Keyserling’s \textit{South American Meditations} (1932) in which Keyserling argues in the chapter entitled “Sorrow” that South Americans suffer from a passive melancholy, as well as Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz’s essay “El hombre que está solo y espera” (1931) [The Man Who Is Alone and Waits/Hopes].\footnote{Barcia; Navascués n 55; Cheadle, n23.} But, Adán continues, these philosophers did not correctly identify the reason behind the Argentine sadness: “The gringos didn’t realize that Buenos Aires is an archipelago of men, all islands unto themselves” (49).

The problem, according to Adán, is that there is no unity or spiritual direction uniting the population. The immigrants coming to Argentina had somehow been stripped of their community. Many of the character sketches in Book II serve to support the idea of Argentines as uprooted immigrants, adrift in a chaotic and materialistic world with nothing to anchor them. They have
different strategies for dealing with their lost sense of identity. Old Pipo for example, whom Adán runs into when passing the smelly tannery, has turned to alcohol. He is the local drunk, an Italian immigrant who has a weekly bender on Saturdays, his day of freedom from the work week. Pipo is but a shadow of a man: “The man said nothing and gave no sign of any memory at all. Of the man who had immigrated, all that remained was a machine: a faithful mechanism that got drunk every Saturday” (84). But not all immigrants are in the same condition. Old Lady Clotho is the counter example, an Italian immigrant who fought to maintain her identity and tradition through faith:

Regresaba luego a su cuartito, encendía su lámpara de querosén, y puesta de codos en su mesa temblequeante hojeaba la Biblia de letras gordas y papel amarillento que había traído de Italia y salvado heroicamente de todos los desastres, junto con aquella estampa de Nuestra Señora de Loreto que presidía su cabecera y aún conservaba su marco aldeano de latón. (185-186)

[She would go back to her room, light her kerosene lamp, sit with her elbows on her rickety table and leaf through her yellowing Bible with the large print. She’d brought it all the way from Italy, heroically saving it through thick and thin, along with the picture of Our Lady of Loreto, still in its original brass frame and keeping watch over the head of her bed.] (86)

She is extremely nostalgic for the countryside of Piedmont and acutely aware of her uprooted condition in this new country. She remembers when they immigrated to Argentina:

Y de pronto aquel extraño viaje marítimo: un tirón brutal que los arrancaba de la tierra y los había dejado a todos con las raíces en el viento. (¡Santa Madonna! ¿Por qué y para qué?) Su desembarco en Buenos Aires y sus cuarenta y cinco años de fajina con aquellos hijos rebeldes (¡malas cabezas, los pobres!), ella lavando ropa de sol a sol, su viejo encanecido en los andamios. (186)

[And suddenly that strange sea voyage: they were cruelly ripped out of the earth and left with their roots to wither in the wind. (Santa Madonna! Why? What for?) They got off the boat in Buenos Aires, then came forty-five years of toil with their unruly sons (wrong-headed, the poor dears!), washing clothes from dawn till dusk, her old man growing grey up on the scaffolding.] (86)
Uprooted and exposed to grueling labor, immigrants experienced a lack of purpose. Old Lady Clotho is said to have been wise enough to understand that the only stability in the midst of chaos is her faith:

La vieja Cloto ya no tenía lágrimas que llorar, y su escepticismo frente a lo mudable de las cosas le inspiraba un gesto reservado que no era indiferencia sino recelo y acaso sabiduría. Pero alguna visión alcanzaba ella de lo inmutable, y era cuando, al finalizar la misa de alba, se acercaba lentamente al comulgatorio de San Bernardo: le parecía entonces que no bien el oficiante levantaba la hostia blanca de desvanecía en torno suyo toda penuria y contradicción, y que algo eterno andaba por allí, algo que había sido, era y sería siempre igual a sí mismo. (186)

[Old Lady Clotho had no more tears to weep and she had become reserved, skeptical because of the way things change and change. It wasn’t indifference, just caution, perhaps wisdom. But she also glimpsed something that never changed. At the end of early mass, she would shuffle up to the communion rail of San Bernardo; when the officiating priest raised the white wafer, all poverty and strife seemed to melt away around her, and something eternal moved in, something that had been, was, and ever would be one with itself.] (86-87)

Faith is the answer to her identity crisis. Adán sees her as something mythological, eternal. He compares her to the Fates, tirelessly “spinning the destiny of the street, the fate of men” (88). Old Clotho, however, is an exception. The other immigrants, without spiritual direction uniting them, are lost and unsure of their identities. Ruth of “La Hormiga de Oro,” for example, represents the Argentines who desperately want to identify themselves with civilization and culture while denying their uncouth environment. She washes greasy dishes with calloused hands while dreaming of poetry and calling the out-of-tune jazz musicians “Barbarians.” She admires Adán who has the special vocation of poet.

Adán has been rather painfully aware of his vocation since childhood. In Book V he reminisces on the days when he became aware of this calling and the accompanying pressure to develop a poetics of identity. But doing so would prove difficult given the odd conglomeration of inhabitants who had come to call Argentina their home:
¿Qué viento extraño (providencia o azar) ha reunido esa falange de hombres a la que ahora perteneces, esa mazorca de hombres musicales que han llegado, como tú, de climas distintos y sangres diferentes? (422)

[What strange wind (providence or chance) has gathered the phalanx of men to which you now belong, that sheaf of musical men come, like you, from different climates and diverse bloods?] (312)

The problem for Argentine poets is how to unite these disparate identities, and how to create something cohesive that is also uniquely Argentine? Unfortunately for Adán, what he finds is that there is no consensus regarding what direction should be taken:

Y no bien se han reunido todas aquellas voces, empiezan a combatir y a combatirse, hermanas en el fervor, pero enemigas y en el rumbo y en el idioma. (423)

[And no sooner have all those voices gathered together than the battle is joined; they fight among themselves, brothers in their fervour, but already enemies in direction and language.] (313)

Marechal’s main purpose in writing the conversations between Adán and the members of his social circle is to demonstrate this lack of consensus as regards origin and direction. Each character represents one of the divergent viewpoints popular during the 1920s. Among Adán’s friends are:

Luis Pereda, criollista teórico, llamado hasta poco antes “el hombre fortachón y bamboleante como un jabalí ciego”; Arturo Del Solar, criollista práctico, que a la sazón oficiaba de guía; Franky Amundsen, speaker y animador, conocido por “el de la voz humorística”; y el petiso Bernini, sociólogo al que veníamos llamando “el hombre de la talla diminuta.” (259)

[Luis Pereda, theoretician of *criollismo*, the robust man who sways like a wild boar gone blind; Arturo del Solar, activist of *criollismo* and acting leader of the seven; Franky Amundsen, radio host and animator, heretofore known as the man of the jesting voice; and the pipsqueak Bernini, sociologist, the one we’ve been calling pint-sized.] (155)

Lucio Negri represents progress, positivism, and science:

Lo que Lucio Negri no podía entender era la cerrazón mental o la inteligencia obtusa o el espíritu cavernario de los que aún se obstinaban en desconocer la dirección ascendente del Progreso, realidad tan visible ya que sólo podía ocultarse
a los ojos cegados por las viejas lagañas del oscurantismo. Porque, ¿cómo no gritar de admiración y reír de gozo ante las maravillas del mundo contemporáneo, tan lleno de sorpresas renovadas y tan fértil en inventos mediante los cuales el hombre, por una superación de sí mismo, dominaba ya las fuerzas oscuras de la Naturaleza y las ponía incondicionalmente a su servicio? ¿Y qué decir de la Ciencia, fruto de obreros pacientes, a la cual se iban rindiendo uno tras otro los enigmas del universo que habitamos? (222-223)

[Lucio Negri could not understand the closed-mindedness, the obtuse intelligence, the stone-age mentality of those who refused to recognize the ascendant direction of Progress, a reality so obvious that only eyes blinded by outmoded obscurantism could fail to see it. How could one not cry out in admiration and laugh with joy at the marvels of the contemporary world, so full of novel surprises and so fertile in inventions, through which man, surpassing himself, now dominated the dark forces of Nature and reduced them unconditionally to his service? And what about Science, which through the effort of patient workers was cracking, one by one, the secrets of the universe we inhabit?] (119)

Adán and his best friend Samuel Tesler represent the spiritual/metaphysical and humanistic perspective. Tesler may appreciate mechanical inventions such as airplanes, refrigerators, and radios, which “produced an instant erection in his virile member” but “when he considered that this whole conquest had come at the cost of the most formidable spiritual regression of all time, he, Samuel Tesler, trusted in the sanction of his bladder and pissed buckets on Progress and every single one of its miracles” (119). Also in the metaphysical corner is Schultz, who will be Adán’s guide in Cacodelphia. This character is based on the avant-garde painter Xul Solar, the theoretician of the “Neocriollo.” Luis Pereda is a parody of Jorge Luis Borges, “a blind boar.” (123) Franky Amundsen is associated with Oliverio Girondo, Francisco Luis Bernardez, and Ilka Krupkin. Navascués concluded that he is a composite of traits of martinfierristas. Bernini is Raul Scalabrin Ortíz.

574 See note 34 to page 227 of Adán Buenosayres.
The conversations in the salon center around demographic concerns and national identity, “Namely, what was the exact nature of the Compadrito mil novecientos, the Turn-of-the-Century Dude? And what changes had this amazing human type undergone as a result of the influx, since 1900, of new racial contingents to the Great Capital of the South?” (124) Through these dialogues, Marechal parodies the divergent attempts of the elite to create cultural identity. Their viewpoints are contrasted with that of Adán, whose argument shares similarities with Marechal’s essay “Proyecciones culturales del momento argentino,” published in Argentina en Marcha in 1947, a year after Perón was first elected president.

One of the harshly-parodied intellectuals of the avantguard in Adán Buenosayres is Jorge Luis Borges (Pereda). The character is a parody of a young Borges, yet in his nationalistic phase, during the 1920s. Marechal has him consider anything criollo to be authentically Argentine. When they put on a record of a taita from 1900, he proclaims, “Listen to that voice! […] It’s the original malevo, the gaucho who’s just come into the city. Not a trace of Italian influence yet!” (125) But the rest of the group finds his criollismo pride and snobbism ironic, given that his own upbringing took place far from the pampas: “They send him to study Greek at Oxford, literature at the Sorbonne, and philosophy in Zurich. And when he comes to Buenos Aires, he goes soft in the head over record-industry criollismo, poor sod!” (125) This passage pokes fun at Borges who was educated abroad but who embraced criollismo in his early years as a writer.

The worldview of Bernini contrasts with that of Borges. Bernini is the sociologist of the bunch and simplifies the philosophical metaphysical questions into sociological explanations: “Intellectual squabbles, he pontificated, brawls at the soccer stadium, back-biting in the political meeting hall. What are they, when all’s said and done? Escape valves for a sexually repressed people” (127). What he is referring to is another problem of Buenos Aires, the imbalance in the
ration of men to women. This is a reference to a passage in *El hombre que esta solo y espera* (1931) by Ortiz in which he claims that Buenos Aires has 120,000 fewer women than men, also to be referenced in the circle of the lustful in Cacodelphia (60).

The group’s discourses on identity remain unresolved, with each character holding his ground. Amundsen says “To think that my ancestral home has degenerated into a philosophical bordello!” (126) Since they realize that they will not find solutions by bickering amongst themselves, they turn to the land for answers. Their next move is to undergo “un *Aventura crioll-malevi-fiñebri-putani-arrabalera*” (a creoley-toughguyee-whorey-suburby funeral adventure) in order to collectively get answers from the Spirit of the Earth (131). In the next section (Book III) they will journey to Saavedra to converse with literary and folkloric figures from Argentina’s past:

Será una noche de todos los diablos –anunció ¡Por las barbas del Profeta! ¡Nos hundiremos hasta la verija en el criollismo! ¡Patearemos el fango del arrabal! ¿Se trata o no de un viaje al infierno? ¿Sí? Entonces el poeta y el filósofo deben acompañarnos, o yo no entiendo una miercoles del clasicismo. (236)

[One hell of a night it’s gonna be, he [Franky Amundsen] announced. By the beard of the Prophet! We’ll get down and dirty on the outskirts of town and up to our balls in *criollismo*. Are we or are we not talking about a journey to hell? So that’s why the poet and the philosopher’ve gotta come along, or I know bugger all about the classics.] (132)

Tesler does not understand *criollismo*, which, as we have seen earlier, he considers “a doctrine of heretical principles and dubious ends” (132). He considers this tendency bad literature and is opposed to turning thugs into national heroes (132). The reality is Italian migrant workers, not the gauchos and *compadritos*. These pseudo-myths, in his opinion, have nothing to do with actual Argentina:

Estoy harto de oír pavadas criollistas—dijo--. Primero fue la exaltación de un gaucho que, según ustedes y a mí no me consta, haraganeó donde actualmente sudan los chacareros italianos. ¡Y ahora les da por calumniar a esa pobre gente del
suburbio, complicándola en una triste literatura de compadritos y milongueros!

(237)

[I’ve had it up to here with criollista nonsense, he said. It started with singing the praises of that gaucho who bummed around out there on the pampa – or so you people say, though it cuts no ice with me – out there where nowadays Italian farmers are sweating in their fields. And now you’re picking on those poor sods in the suburbs, mixing them up in a sorry literature of tough guys and dance-hall Romeos!] (133)

But Del Solar argues that devout remembrance of things native is “all we criollos have left, ever since the wave of foreigners invaded the country” (133). Del Solar sees foreigners as a corrosive to the criollo culture: “It’s true the influx of foreigners put us on the road to progress. On the other hand, it has destroyed our traditions. We’ve been tempted and corrupted!” (133) Adán sees this the other way around, that Argentina is the one that tempts and corrupts and the foreigner the one tempted and corrupted. This produces shocked reactions from his friends:

Hablo como argentino de segunda generación y como descendiente cercano de hombres europeos –comenzó a decir Adán Buenosayres, arrepentido ya de haberse lanzado a esa polémica inútil--. Para ver con alguna claridad en mi país y en mí mismo fue necesario que yo visitara las tierras de Europa, cuna de nuestros padres, y viese cómo eran aquellos hombres antes de su emigración. Los vi en sus aldeas y terruños, puestos en una vida penosa, y con un sentido heroico de la existencia que los hacía o alegres o resignados en su disciplina, en la fe de su Dios y en la estabilidad de sus costumbres. (238)

[I speak as a second-generation Argentine and as a close descendant of Europeans, --Adam began, already regretting that he’d got himself into this futile controversy-- To get some insight into my country and myself, I needed to visit the old country, the land of my parents, and see how those people lived before emigrating. I saw them in their villages, where they scratched out a tough living from their fields. They had a heroic sense of existence; whether happy or resigned, they had discipline, faith in God, the stability of their customs.] (134)

Contrasting Argentina with Old World Europe, Adán’s argument is that Argentines do not have a heroic sense of existence. Lacking discipline, faith in God, and tradition grounded in centuries, they question their identity and place within the world. He goes on to say that Argentina tempted
the European workers with the perspective of getting rich. Instead of new customs to replace the old, they were confronted with rampant materialism because there was no new value system in place to welcome them:

Y cuando esos hombres llegaron –prosiguió Adán--, ¿qué sistema de orden les ofreció el país a cambio del que perdían? Un sistema basado en cierto materialismo alegre que se burlaba de sus costumbres y se reía de sus creencias. (238)

[When they got here, Adam continued, what system of order was on offer in this country that would replace the one they were losing? A system based on a sort of gleeful materialism that mocked their customs and laughed at their beliefs.] (134)

The “system” that Adán is here criticizing is the liberalism of Mitre’s Argentina. Adán’s characterization of the first years of the country as a place without order or values can be perhaps better understood if compared to Marechal’s arguments of a similar nature made in the non-fictional essay, “Proyecciones culturales del momento argentino.” In this essay, Marechal identifies Perón as the leader who will bring about a return to tradition and order that is the solution to the rampant materialism brought about by capitalist and marxist currents of thought. In regards to the coup d’état of June 4, 1943 that led to Perón’s presidency he writes:

su originalidad consiste en un retorno a los conceptos tradicionales acerca del hombre y su destino, y en un rappel a l’ordre, lanzado entre dos corrientes, el capitalismo y el marxismo, antagónicas entre sí, pero vinculadas entrañablemente por un común denominador materialista, ya que una y otra ven en el hombre sólo a un “individuo” económico, y no, también, a una “persona” intelectual.575 (133-134)

[it’s [the movement’s] originality consists in a return to traditional notions of man and his destiny, and in a rappel a l’ordre, launched between two currents of thought: capitalism and Marxism. Although in opposition, these currents are deeply linked by a common denominator which is materialism. This is because they both see man as an economic “individual,” and not also as an intellectual “person.”]

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Compare this to Adán’s explanation of what happened to immigrants once they arrived:

Decía que los extranjeros hallaron en el país, no un sistema de orden, sino una tentadora invitación al desorden. Casi todos eran ignorantes: no tenían defensa. Y olvidaron su tabla de valores por aquel fácil estilo de vida que les enseñaba el país. Y la obra de corrupción iniciada en los padres fue concluida en los hijos: los hijos aprendieron a reírse de sus padres emigrados, y a ignorar o esconder su genealogía. Son los argentinos de ahora, sin arraigo en nada. (239)

[I was saying that what immigrants found in this country was not a system of order but a temptation to disorder. Most of them had no education: they were defenseless. They forgot their scale of values for the easy lifestyle our country showed them. The process of corruption began in the fathers and was completed in the sons. Children learned to laugh at their immigrant parents, to ignore or hide their genealogy. They are the Argentines of today, uprooted and adrift.] (135)

Adán, a literary rendering of Marechal in the 1920s, sees the state of Argentine workers and immigrants of the 1920s as deprived of their values and directionless. His dismal rendering of the state of the nation leads Luis Pereda (Borges) to ask Adán, “If that’s your point of view, what is your position as an Argentine?”:

Muy confusa –le respondió Adán--. No pudiendo solidarizarme con la realidad que hoy vive el país, estoy solo e inmóvil: soy un argentino en esperanza.576 Eso en lo que se refiere al país. En cuanto a mí mismo, la cosa varía: si al llegar a esta tierra mis abuelos cortaron el hilo de su tradición y destruyeron su tabla de valores, a mí me toca reanudar ese hilo y reconstruirme según los valores de mi raza. En eso ando. Y me parece que cuando todos hagan lo mismo el país tendrá una forma espiritual.

[Very confused, Adam answered. Unable to endorse the reality our country’s currently living, I’m alone and motionless: I’m waiting, I’m an Argentine in hope. That’s how I relate to the country. Personally, though, I feel that, since my forebears cut the thread of their tradition and destroyed their scale of values upon arrival here, it’s up to me to retie that thread and rebuild my identity according to the values of my race. That’s where I am now. And I think that when everyone does likewise, the country will have a spiritual form.] (135)

576 As Cheadle points out in the notes, Adán’s words “estoy solo e inmóvil: soy un argentino en esperanza” echo the title of Scalabrini Ortiz’s El hombre que está solo y espera (1931). On the intertextuality between Scalabrini’s essay and ABA, see Cheadle “Twentieth-Century homo bonaerense.”
In Marechal’s Catholic and anti-liberal opinion, here articulated in the voice of Adán, hope for the country is constructing an identity and providing its inhabitants with spiritual direction.

Adán’s speech, which is not parodic in nature, contrasts with the comically exaggerated viewpoints of the other members of the salon (i.e. caricatures of the anti-Peronist elite) who do not take Adán’s discourse seriously. Bernini argues that the Spirit of the Earth will give Argentina her soul. The vulgar and irreverent Tesler says, “One fine day the pampa will spread her legs and give birth to a metaphysics” (135). The philosopher is guilty of “a ferocious racism that rendered literally the entire universe mulatto” (134). In Del Solar’s opinion, Argentina is not even a country, but “a colonial trading post” (136). Their only point of convergence in the conversation is their mutual aversion to Britain’s colonialism in Argentina: “Then, instinctively, those men of such diverse origin, humour, and mindset moved closer together, as if closing ranks before a common threat” (136). Although Adán’s friends are unable to define Argentines in positive terms, they do have some sense of identity in terms of what they are not, in this case their English enemies.

**Book III: Excursion to Saavedra- Literary Encounters**

In Book II, Marechal parodies the total lack of consensus among Argentine intellectuals as regards national identity. In book III, the focus shifts to questions of national literature. As in book II, “discord reign[s]” among the group (156). In this chapter the members of the salon are divided into two main camps, the Dante camp, composed of Adán, Tesler, and Schultz, and the criollista band, led by Pereda and Del Solar. While the former try to enlighten the others to the music of the spheres, the later are blinded by criollismo and therefore misinterpret everything. In this section, I will provide a panorama for the various allusions to Dante which set the stage for the heavy borrowing from Dante’s *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* in Books VI and VII.
As readers, we have already been introduced in chapter one to Tesler and Adán’s views on the state of Argentine literature. In a key discussion between Tesler and Adán, Tesler presents the idea that the perfect symbol for Buenos Aires is the hen, “the most grossly diurnal bird” and proclaims to be writing a book called *The City of the Owl Against the City of the Hen*. Adán jokes that the book will be “a real criollo hash. [...] That’s our literature, all right!” (39) But Tesler quips back, “-You mean yours, you bunch of mulattos! Corrected the philosopher, visibly piqued. In mine, you’ll see a cackling people who busily scratch and peck at the earth, night and day, never remembering sad Psyche, never turning their eyes heavenward, deaf to the music of the spheres” (39).

This key passage encapsulates what the two characters believe to be the main problems with Argentine literature. Firstly, the term “criollo hash” refers to the lack of unified direction and the scattered multiplicity among authors. Tesler preys upon the preoccupation over race and identity by calling Adán a mulatto. To write a literature of the people of Buenos Aires at present is to write the story of “a cackling people who busily scratch and peck at the earth” because they lack spiritual direction. “Music of the spheres” is a clear reference to the *Divine Comedy*, a book which unlike the extent works of Argentine literature, provides spiritual guidance to its readers. Buenos Aires is a city without spiritual direction: “There lies Buenos Aires, the city whose symbol is the chicken, not so much for its ineffable grease as for the elevation of its spiritual flight, comparable only to that of the ample bird” (43).

Tesler will continue to voice these views once they set off on the excursion to Saavedra, to seek answers regarding the national literature from the Spirit of the Earth. Saavedra an ideal place for discussions of literature, as it is the place where civilization meets barbarism, “a frontier zone where burg and wilderness meet in an agonistic embrace, like two giants locked in single combat”
(149). It is a mysterious region of “vast desolation,” where the traveler may suddenly find himself face to face with mystery. Here, just as in the salon, no consensus can be reached among the group. They argue first over the problem of mythologizing Argentina, secondly over the origins of Argentines, third over the treatment and status of the indigenous population, and finally over the figure of the gaucho in Argentine letters. Here Marechal parodies the literary polemics among the Argentine litterati regarding this famous figure. Del Solar depicts the gaucho as a hero “labouring on the foundations of the nation” (175), but Tesler and Schultz are wholeheartedly opposed to the glorification of the gaucho in any way. “Pestilential literature!” Tesler scoffs, “They’ve invented an incredible fable around a pathetic half-breed. The gaucho glorified by legend never existed” (175). Schultz admits the gaucho existed, but, then declares, “if he was anything like the way he’s described in poetry, rebelling against all law and order, a thuggish drifter with no respect for hierarchy, then I think it’s a good thing he disappeared” (175). As Cheadle points out, Schultz’s comment shares similarities with Leopoldo Lugones’s position in El payador, where he argues that the gauchos’ disappearance is a good thing for the country due to an inferior element in his partially aboriginal blood.”

This in turn sparks protest among the criollistas. “Lord, what a fuss the criollista faction made upon hearing such an outrageous blasphemy!” (175) It becomes a battle between the gauchos and the gringos: “If the gauchos have died out, Del Solar yelled at him, it’s because gringo immigrants like you killed them off!” (175)

Their argument is interrupted by the sudden materialization of Santos Vega, the payador. His appearance is then followed by that of Juan Sin Ropa, and the characters ask him about his infamous payada with Vega. They have wildly different interpretations of this famous Argentine

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577 Lugones, El Payador, 83; see Cheadle note 34, pg 175.

578 Santos Vega was a gaucho and masterful payador who, according to legend, was finally defeated in a payada with the devil who appeared in the form of Juan sin Ropa in 1824. This oral tale inspired many written works, the first of
legend. Bernini’s view is that “Santos Vega is barbarism and Juan Sin Ropa is progress; it’s about progress defeating barbarism” (178). Del Solar, the folklore expert, views Juan Sin Ropa as the “naked gringo who defeated Santos Vega in a fight our countryman didn’t understand: the struggle for life” (178). Interestingly this literary duel takes a Dantean turn, as the figures begin to shift shape. This section shares similarities with Dante’s canto of the thieves, who undergo metamorphoses as punishment. Juan Sin Ropa mutates first into the Cocoliche, a late nineteenth-century vaudeville character who imitated the broken Spanish spoken by Italian immigrants. He cries “Sono venuto a l’Argentina per fare l’America, he declared. E sono in America per fare l’Argentina” (178). This plays on the Italian expression “fare l’America,” to make one’s fortune. Del Solar accuses him of robbing the local folks of their land with sharp practices and mortgages, but Cocoliche shows them his big calloused hands and says, “Io laboro la terra, he said. Per se me mangia il pane” (179). The episode demonstrates the xenophobia regarding Italian immigrants that was developing at the turn of the century when many came to see Italians as materialistic and unscrupulous. Del Solar is not persuaded by the gesture and shouts: “All he cared about was getting rich!”, while Pereda supports his claim. The group then cannot agree on the role of the gaucho, nor on the role of the Italian immigrant in their society.

Other Dantean parallels include encounters with monsters and mythological figures who inhabit various circles of the Inferno. The Neocriollo farts much like Dante’s demon, Barbariccia, who makes “a trumpet out of his ass.” Early in Book III our heroes battle Cerberus, guardian of the gates of Hades (158). In Dante’s 6th Canto, Virgil launches mud at the ferocious Cerberus to

which was a 1838 poem by Bartolomé Mitre, “A Santos Vega, payador argentino,” which was later published in Rimas (1854). Other important versions of the story include Santos Vega o los mellizos de la flor (1872) by Hilario Ascasubi; the history of Santos Vega and his friend Carmona by Eduardo Gutiérrez first published in installments in La Patria Argentina (1880); and the poem Santos Vega (1885) by Rafael Obligado.
subdue him. In Marechal’s parody, Franky Amundsen declares that all they need to do in the case of attack is throw one of Tesler’s smelly socks (158). Later in the second chapter of Book III, the episode involving the Necrophile Sisters-in-Law is Marechal’s version of the Harpies, and Mágara is associated with Medusa. She is said to have “a snarl of snaky curls lashing about her Medusa-like head” (206). In one of her dramatic fits she beats her ears with her fists and shakes “the snakes of her Gorgonian head” (207).

Even the landscape of Saavedra and in particular the muddy ditch evokes Dante’s *Inferno*:

> Estos lugares—dijo al fin Samuel Tesler con voz reconcentrada—evocan la ribera maldita: un río negro como el asfalto; la muerte del espíritu, eterna ya sobre las aguas; el silencio del espíritu, sin la esperanza del Verbo; y sombras mudas agolpándose, como nosotros ahora, en la orilla fatal. [...] Las aguas infernales – expuso gravemente—no son un accidente arbitrario del paisaje dantesco. (293)

[Places like this, Samuel Tesler said at last in a pensive voice, evoke the shore of damnation: a pitch-black river; the eternal death of the spirit hovering over its waters; the silence of the spirit, bereft of hope in the Word; and voiceless shadows, like us, crowding round the fatal riverbank. [...] The infernal waters, he [Schultz] pontificated, are no mere accidental feature of Dante’s mise-en-scène.] (184-185)

The plank that they use to cross over the ditch is “the bridge across the abyss.” The muddy ditch reeks of putrefaction. The landscape is infernal and the characters must climb banks like Dante and Virgil: “Sometimes they would climb a hill only to find that on the other side it fell away in a nearly sheer cliff” (187). Also like Dante and Virgil, they are chased by what they believe to be devils as they exit Saavedra. Tesler and Schultz insist “on dragging Juan Roble’s soul through every infernal twist and turn and turn imaginable” (195).

Chapter 2 of Book III could perhaps be considered a history of mythological and folkloric figures, both European and *criollo*. The allusions to Dante (representing European high culture) are intertwined with the appearances of *payadores*, *taitas*, and *malevos* (representing Argentine popular culture). The convergence/divergence of high culture and popular culture continues in
Book IV, as the characters leave Saavedra and move to an Italian restaurant called Ciro’s Gazebo located in Triunvirato Street.

Book IV: Ciro’s Gazebo

Book IV is a symposium that occurs in Ciro Rossini’s restaurant when the characters return from Saavedra. Adán and his friends dine with the popular art performers, the payador Tissone, the poet Prince Charming, and the three standup comics known as “The Bohemians.” Their meeting is a convergence of popular and high culture. When Adán and friends enter the restaurant, they embrace the artists, the significance of which is symbolic: “Popular art and intellectual art have just met in an embrace” (240). It is also a symbolic convergence of criollo and Italian culture. In this Italian restaurant on Argentine soil, they order a parrillada, accompanied by Italian wine and food: “The criollo wine, as well as the Sicilian, flowed in tandem, from bottle to glass and from glass to brain” (241). But the convivium soon comes under strain when the payador Tissone and Franky Amundsen become antagonistic towards one another. Pereda invites the two payadores to “lay aside their personal vanity for the sake of tradition, for their native art and for Argentina” (243). The situation escalates when the group disagrees on the origin and identity of payador, Tissone. Pereda (Borges) considers him the epitome of a criollo: “A real, honest-to-goodness criollo! he cried at last. Tissone, a name redolent of clover and prairie grass!” But Ciro points out that “Tissone” is an Italian name. Indeed, Tissone admits that his father came from Italy. “Impossible! thundered Pereda, riveting him with disconcerted eyes. And even if it were true, you were born on the pampa, you grew up soaked to the balls in tradition. You can’t deny it, Tissone old pard’!” (243) A confused Tissone confesses that he was born in Buenos Aires in the barrio La Paternal, and that he has lived there his whole life. Adán sees this as phoniness and reproaches him for not really knowing the criollo disciplines such as tethering a horse to a post with the proper
knot or wrestling a young bull to the ground. Adán is intent on exposing the falsity of the payador tradition. But Pereda sees this as proof of the strength of the criollo tradition. “Gentlemen! he exclaimed. What a great country is ours! What character! What strength in its tradition! This man, Italian by blood and native of La Paterna, never having left his neighborhood, never having seen the pampa or its ways, one fine day picks up a guitar and becomes a payador! Gentlemen, that’s greatness!” (243-244)

The Convivium quickly becomes clamorous as everyone seeks to tell their own story of origin all at once, each one talking over the other. The only one not boisterously joining in is the poet Prince Charming, and Adán asks him if he too “cultivate[s] the national tradition.” Prince Charming claims he is a poet of the present and that the past is nothing but a joke. Next they get into disagreements regarding poetics. Here we find that once again Adán provides a Dantean perspective. In his explanation of a comparison of two unlike things in poetry, he echoes Dante’s letter to Can Grande della Scala by saying that a poetic comparison frees the two unlike things from the limits within which they live, “restoring to them a shadow of the unity binding them in the Divine Intellect. Our intelligence, after acknowledging the absurdity of such a linkage on the literal level, can then find some correspondence on the allegorical, symbolic, moral, or anagogical level” (247).579 These are the four levels of interpretation mentioned by Dante in his letter to Can Grande della Scala regarding how to read his Divine Comedy. Marechal makes the Dantean association even clearer by describing Adán as “beaming with an inspiration that was irrepressible, even if fermented and bottled on Italic soil” (248).

Eventually the divergent views regarding poetics produce a schism in the group that leads to its dissolution: “discord reigned within every breast.” Pereda, Schultz, and Ciro Rossini follow

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579 Dante’s authorship of this letter continues to be disputed.
Adán Buenosayres to a second table (the round table of the wise), while Tesler remains with “the rebels” at “the square table of the madmen” (249). The narrator urges the reader, in turn, to choose between the two camps. At the square table is the boisterous drunken singing of the payador Tissone, while at the second table the conversation continues in the manner of a Platonic dialogue. But the polite philosophical conversation soon gets feisty when Pereda accuses Adán of “speculating with phantasmic entities,” and Adán strikes back with, “So is it my fault that your professors in Geneva turned you into a pint-sized agnostic?” This is another joke at the expense of Borges who was educated in Geneva at the Lycée Jean Calvin. 580

The battle between Pereda (Borges) and Adán (Marechal) continues as Adán launches into a tour de force discourse on poetics and the need of the poet to create. He explains the hierarchy of angels and compares it to the poet’s need to communicate to those who do not receive poetic inspiration, declaring the poet to be “an instrument of the First Love” (259). When a skeptical Pereda questions whether the poet is motivated by ambition for glory, Adán mentions Dante: “Dante speaks of the glory his work will earn him. And he talks about it so seriously, one can guess it isn’t a human prize but a divine reward he hopes for” (260). When Schultz asks if he would still write if there were no one on earth to read him, Adán exclaims, at the height of exultation, “Imagine a rosebush on the verge of producing a rose, and just then the angel’s trumpet announces the end of the world. Would the rosebush stop? […] Thus is the poet” (261).

Engaging in lofty discourses regarding poetic creation eventually works Adán into a state, and he has a small breakdown. Meanwhile, at the other table the payadors are engaging in a poetic duel, “a first-class criollo competition” (264). The juxtaposition of the platonic discourse and the crass material of the payada makes the later appear ridiculous. In such a poetic duel between two

580 Cheadle, 661.
payadores, one singer puts forth a difficult question, and the other must respond in clever rhyme.

Here the rhymes parody the low material of this popular poetic tradition:

Aparcero don Tissone,
yá que me lo pintan franco
dígale a este servidor:
¿Por qué el tero caga blanco? (375)

[My countryman Don Tissone,
if you really know what’s right,
then tell me, your humble servant:
Why does the seagull shit white?] (265)

The response is equally ridiculous:

Caga blanco el tero-tero,
yá lo ha dicho el payador,
porque, de juro, no sabe
cagar en otro color. (375)

[White shits the seagull-seagull,
like the payador said so true
because, sure ’nuff, it don’t know
how to shit in no other hue.] (265)

Marechal makes the poetic material of the payadores crass and vulgar in order to contrast it with the lofty and spiritually satisfying poetry yearned for by Adán. The mini-breakdown suffered by the poet in Book IV foreshadows a larger spiritual crisis and conversion that is the focus of Book V.

**Book V: Poetic Vocation and Spiritual Conversion**

Book V opens with the poet waking up from his drunken rampage. He lights his pipe and takes a voyage through his memory. Marechal presents in the form of a flashback the story of how Adán realized he was a poet, and how this realization caused him to turn to his roots, to Europe. Adán recalls that originally he did not take part in the polemics regarding Argentine identity and literature:
Escuchas todas las voces amigas que se combaten; pero callas aún, porque el silencio y la reserva son estigmas que se adquieren en la llanura, donde la voz humana parece intimidarse ante la vastedad de la tierra y la gravitación del cielo. Y cuando logras hablar por fin, lo haces en un idioma que se cree bárbaro y en un tropel de imágenes que se cree desordenadas. Tus partidarios elogian: “Una poética virgen, sin número ni medida, como los grandes ríos de la patria, como sus llanos y sus montes.” (423)

[You listen to the voices of friends in combat, but you do not speak yet, for silence and reserve are the stigmata one acquires on the prairie, where the human voice feels intimidated before the vastness of the earth and the gravitation of the sky. And when at last you manage to speak, you do so in an idiom that people find barbarous, in a throng of images they find confused. Your supporters shower praise: “A virgin poetics, without number or measure, like the great rivers of our country, like her plains and mountains.”] (313)

Here Adán explains how his poetic voice is influenced by the land. It recalls a passage in *Facundo* in which Sarmiento describes the effect the vastness of the Argentine landscape has on the psyche of her inhabitants.

Now I inquire, what impressions must be made upon the inhabitant of the Argentine Republic by the simple act of fixing his eyes upon the horizon, and seeing nothing?—for the deeper his gaze sinks into that shifting, hazy, undefined horizon, the further it withdraws from him, the more it fascinates and confuses him, and plunges him in contemplation and doubt. What is the end of that world which he vainly seeks to penetrate? He knows not! What is there beyond what he sees? The wilderness, danger, the savage, death! Here is poetry already; he who moves among such scenes is assailed by fantastic doubts and fears, by dreams which possess his waking hours. Hence it follows that the disposition and nature of the Argentine people are poetic.”581

But for Marechal’s Adán, more influential than the land for his poetry is his blood. Adán goes on to explain a need for direction and order in his poetry, and his belief that these aspects must necessarily be found in Europe:

Enajenada ya de su metafísico anhelo, tu poética no es, en el fondo, sino un caos musical: y ese caos te duele. Sí, un llamado al orden, que sin duda viene de tu sangre. Te será preciso buscar la cifra que sabe construir el orden: contra lo que afirman tus partidarios, no es la tierra innúmera quien te dará ese guarismo creador:

bien sabes que la tierra, lejos de darlo, recibe su número del hombre, porque el hombre es la verdadera forma de la tierra. Y es en tu sangre donde buscarás aquella medida, la que trajeron los tuyos del otro lado del mar: necesitas readquirir ese número; y para ello es menester que lo veas encarnado en la obra de tu estirpe, allende las grandes aguas. (424)

[Unhinged from its metaphysical yearning, your poetics is basically just a musical chaos; and that chaos is painful to you. Yes, a call to order, which no doubt comes from your blood. You will need to look for the code that can construct order. Contrary to what your supporters affirm the creative cipher will not come from the earth, which itself has no code. You know well that the earth, far from giving, receive its measure from the human, because humankind is the true form of earth. And it is in your blood that you will seek that measure, the one your grandparents brought from the other side of the ocean. You need to rediscover that measure, and to do so, you must see it incarnate in the works of your lineage, beyond the great waters.] (314)

For this reason Adán goes soul searching in Europe. The autobiographical aspect of the book becomes clear in this part, as Marechal himself went to Europe in 1926 and 1929-30 and also had a spiritual conversion. Speaking about his own life, he used the phrase “a first call to order” to describe the evolution of the avant-garde poetry of his mid-twenties to the “metaphysical” poetry of Odas para el Hombre y la Mujer (1929). 582

In Rome Adán visits a solitary monastery where he marvels at the frescos, bas-reliefs, and carvings. He is startled when the monks begin to say a mass, because he has come there strictly for aesthetic rather than religious reasons. Adán reflects on how absurd it is that the mass is being carried out for no one:

y, no sin inquietud, piensas ya que tan solemne liturgia se desarrolla sin espectador alguno y en un desierto rincón de la montaña, tal una sublime comedia que actores locos representasen en un teatro vacío. (432)

[Not without anxiety, you think now that such a solemn liturgy is being carried out with no spectator whatsoever, in a deserted spot on the mountain – a sublime comedy performed by mad actors in an empty theatre.] (321)

582 See Palabras con Leopoldo Marechal, 30 and Cheadle n8, 666.
At first the ritual is meaningless and comic to Adán given his lack of spirituality. As Marechal wrote in “Fundación Espiritual de Buenos Aires,” life without authentic spiritual form is nothing but a sad parody of life. But as Adán continues watching what seems to him to be a mad comedy, he has a spiritual conversion. At the moment the Eucharist is held up, he senses the presence of God, “an immutable Spectator” (322). Adán then undergoes a period of seclusion during which he reads books of forgotten sciences. But he becomes lost in the books: “But your reason stumbled in that grove of symbols that hadn’t been designed for her [...] the ways were so dark and the itineraries so indecipherable that your reason fell faint over the books” (322). Once Adán has returned home to Argentina, he is not sure how to process what he refers to as “the confrontation of two worlds” (323):

A tu regreso habías realizado aquella nueva confrontación de dos mundos. Volvías a tu patria con una exaltación dolorosa que se manifestaba en urgencias de acción y de pasión, y en un deseo de hacer vibrar las cuerdas libres de tu mundo según el ambicioso estilo que te habían enseñado las cosas de allende. Pero tu mundo escuchaba en frío aquel mensaje de grandeza; y en su frialdad no leías, ciertamente, una falta de vocación por lo grande, sino el indicio de que todavía no era llegada la hora. (434)

[You came back to your county with a painful exultation, a passionate urge for action, and a desire to make the free strings of your world vibrate in the ambitious style you’d seen overseas. But your message of greatness left your world cold; and in that coldness you did not read, certainly, any lack of vocation for grandeur, but only that the hour had not yet arrived.] (323)

This idea of the prematurity of Argentine literary greatness shares some similarity with Mitre’s perspective, the difference being that Mitre felt no poet had yet been born on Argentine soil to produce greatness, while Adán sees the problem as lying on the side of the population that will receive the poetic message.

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583 Ibid., 106.

584 This foreshadows the story of Don Ecuménico, the worst sinner encountered in Cacodelphia.
The chapter ends with Adán trying to cling to the images he has delved up, but they flee: “The past is now a dry branch, the present announces nothing to him, and the future is colourless before his eyes” (324). He remains “empty” before a deserted window. The chapter ends mysteriously with the words “Which was leading him to so sorry a pass…” (324) At this juncture in the narrative he is like Dante the pilgrim at start of the Comedy, lost in a dark wood.

In Chapter 3 of Book V, however, he undergoes a spiritual conversion while on the walk home from the school where he teaches. As he walks his mind is on “Heroic lives without laurels, on the prairie: unsung heroic deaths” (347). He ponders the soul’s free will and responsibility, and thinks himself to be alone and defeated: “And he does not know that invisible armies have just gathered around him and are now fighting for his soul, in a silent clash of angelic swords and demonic tridents!” (348) There is a great battle over his soul. “Angelical swords and demonic tridents clash noiselessly on Gurruchaga Street, fighting over the soul of Adam Buenosayres, wordsmith” (350). Just then he walks past the hellish La Universal tannery, the “ulcer of the suburb: soulless capitalists and corrupt inspectors” (350) and its accompanying stench of rotting carrion which draws worms and flies. The passage through this hellish landscape is necessary for him to arrive at the Church of San Bernardo.

In front of the Christ with the Broken Hand, Adán begins to weep when he realizes he has strayed from the true path. Like Dante the pilgrim, he is lost and wants to journey to God: “I lost my way and tarried on paths until I forgot they were only paths, and I but a traveler, and you the end of my voyage” (353). He confesses to God that “in sad pathways I wasted and offended the intelligence you gave me as a gift” (353). He prays for a sign from the Christ of the Broken Hand. When he makes his way home he sees a linyera, a hobo, whom he offers shelter. The man then disappears and Adán has a vision that the man is flogged and made to carry a cross, thereby
realizing that he was Christ. He also imagines personifications of the sins Lust, Greed, Sloth, and Wrath:

Esta cara de tinte amarillento, con bolsas azules debajo de los ojos, es el mismo semblante de la Lujuria; en esa otra de nariz encorvada, filoso mentón y ojitos de clavo se nombra la Avaricia; allí están la Perez de ojos lagañosos, la Cólera de apretadas mandíbulas, la Gula de doble papada y la Envidia royéndose los pulgares. Llorando de pavor, Adán tantea sus propias facciones, y en ellas descubre los mismos rasgos odiosos, mientras el cortejo se abre camino en la multitud ciega y el hombre azotado cae y se levanta. (468)

Eventually the “baleful presences recede,” defeated, and Adán’s soul is saved. This is the end of the section of the novel said to be written by our narrator L.M. The next two sections, Book VI “The Blue-Bound Notebook” and Book VII “Journey to Cacodelphia” are said to be found manuscripts of Adán himself. The story of Adán’s soul lost and then saved sets the stage for the story of his love for Solveig (Beatrice) in Book VI.

**Book VI: Solveig as Argentina**

Whereas the other sections of the novel are a parody, Book VI, in contrast, is sublime and lofty in nature. In “El cuaderno de tapas azules” [The Blue-bound Notebook] Marechal draws extensively from Dante in order to tell the story of the poetic development and spiritual growth of Adán, the poet/lover. The book is modeled after Dante’s *Vita Nuova* which tells the story of Dante’s learning to love Beatrice properly. At first Dante feels physical love for his unattainable lady, but eventually through a process of devinization, Beatrice becomes a Christ-like figure who leads him to God. In Marechal’s version of the story Solveig is not only a Christ-like Beatrice
figure, but also a national-allegorical figure for Argentina. The soul’s journey of learning how to love is both national and spiritual.

The many parallels between Book VI and Dante’s Vita Nuova have been pointed out by scholars such as Washington Benavidez, Donald L. Shaw, and Fernanda Elisa Bravo Herrera, and more thoroughly examined by José Ignacio Gallardo Ballesteros.585 Both works are an interior monologue of the lover divided into sections headed by Roman numerals. They are similar in tone, featuring a high style of prose. Both are philosophical reflections on the nature of love. While the prose of the Vita Nuova is structured around thirty-one poems, the “Notebook” is primarily prose, but does feature a few of Marechal’s verses. Both are works of transcendant love for an unattainable, Christ-like lady.

Adán’s journey starts off much like Dante’s with symptoms of lovesickness due to an unattainable lady. Early in the first book of Adán Buenosayres we are introduced to his love for Solveig and the longing and suffering he must endure on account of it: “That empty hopeless feeling and the sting of humiliation were mellowing into something like nostalgia for a cherished impossibility” (13). Adán loves her, “in his role as poet without apparent prospects” (14). We learn more about his love for Solveig when Adán explains to Tesler that his love is a construct. He confesses that his love has “only the fragile essence of an ideal construct, although this was based on a flesh-and-blood woman” (53). Tesler questions if Adán is “making incursions into the realm of Celestial Aphrodite.” He documents his hypothesis with examples from ancient literatures, and

Adán is forced to admit that his is fashioning a heavenly woman on the basis of an earthly woman (54):

el Visitado [Tesler] lo confirmó en aquella dichosa hipótesis, haciendo gala de una ejemplificación elocuente que dijo extraer de las antiguas literaturas orientales y occidentales, en las que hablar del amor divino con el lenguaje del amor humano era cosa frecuente hasta el galimatías. Vencido ya por una documentación tan sólida, el Visitante admitió estar edificando una mujer de cielo sobre la base de un mujer terrestre. Por lo cual el Visitado, atento a la obra metafísica del Visitante, le preguntó si la mujer terrestre continuaba siendo indispensable a sus trabajos de sublimación. (151-152)

[The Visited [Tesler] proceeded to convince him of his happy hypothesis by means of an eloquent display of examples he claimed to have drawn from ancient literatures, both Oriental and Occidental, wherein discourse on divine love was so frequently couched in the language of human love that it bordered on gibberish. Convinced by such solid documentation, the Visitor admitted he was fashioning a heavenly woman on the basis of an earthly woman. The Visited, attentive to the metaphysical work of the Visitor, asked if the terrestrial woman was still indispensable to his labours of sublimation.] (54)

What Tesler is referring to is the tradition of poets in both Eastern and Western literature to write of their love for God in terms of human love. Adán makes clear that his specific model is Dante. When Tesler asks Adán how he defines love, Adán says, “I’m looking for something transcendental, a definition in three bound volumes” (49). Marechal too was also very clear about the influence of Dante and the Fedeli d’amore. In “Claves de Adán Buenosayres” he calls Dante, “mi terrible maestro,” and explains that he exerted his “great” and “definitive” influence not as author of the Comedy, but as the leader of the ‘Fedeli d’Amore.”586 He continues to give a brief description of the fundamental principles of the Fedeli d’Amore in order to shed some light on Adán Buenosayres:

Me limitaré a decir, en síntesis: a) que los “fieles de Amor” celebraron, en lenguaje amoroso, a una Dama enigmática; b) que dicha Señora, pese a los nombres distintos

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586 Claves, 11: “el enflujo es tan grande come “definitorio”, y mi terrible maestro lo ejerce, no como autor de la Commedia, sino como integrante y jefe de los “Fedeli d’Amore.”
que le da cada uno de sus amantes (Beatriz, Giovanna o Lauretta), se resuelve al fin en una Mujer única y simbólica; c) que la noción de tal mujer se aclara en Dino Compagni, cuando ese “fiel de Amor” la designa con el nombre de Madonna Intelligenza; d) que Madonna simboliza el Intelecto trascendente por el cual el hombre se une o puede unirse a Dios, y que lo simboliza en su “perfección pasiva o femenina”; e) que por tanto, Madonna es la Janua Coeli (Puerta del Cielo) y la Sedes Papientae (Asiento de la Sabiduría) que los cristianos entendemos en la Virgen Madre.

[I will limit myself to the following, in synthesis: a) the “fieles de Amor” celebrated, in the language of love, an enigmatic Lady; b) this woman, despite the different names given to her by each of her lovers (Beatrice, Giovanna, or Laura) is, in the end, a single and symbolic Woman; c) the notion of this woman is clarified in Dino Compagni when this “fiel de Amor” designates her by the name Madonna Intelligenza; d) Madonna symbolizes the transcendent Intellect through which man unites or can unite himself with God, and which is symbolized in her “passive or feminine perfection”; e) therefore, Madonna is Janua Coeli (Gate of Heaven) and the Sedes Papientae (Seat of Wisdom) that Christians understand as the Virgin Mary.]

Marechal owned five of Luigi Valli’s texts which today are kept in his personal library.587 In 1968 he mentioned one of these texts in particular (Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei “Fedeli d’Amore”) and the influence it had on his work. In 1969 he explained in a public conference that Dante, along with Guido Cavalcanti, Cino Da Pistoia and a whole group of “metaphysical poets” belonged to a “secret organization.”588 Valli had a very esoteric reading of Dante influenced by Gabriele Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti and Giovanni Pascoli. Valli believed that there existed a secret language of the Fedeli d’Amore that Dante knew, and that words such as Amore, Madonna, Salute had secret meanings which were known only to the initiates of the group. He also believed that all

587 The Luigi Valli books owned by Valli are: Ritmi (Roma: Optima, 1929); Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei “Fedeli d’Amore.” (Roma: Biblioteca di Filosofia e Scienza, 1928); Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei “Fedeli d’Amore.” Vol. II (Roma: Biblioteca di Filosofia e Scienza, 1930); La struttura morale dell’Universo Dantesco. (Roma: Tipografica Sallustiana, 1935); Il secreto della Croce e dell’Aquila nella Divina Commedia (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1922).

the women in the lyric poems of Dolce Stil Nuovo were the personification of Divine Wisdom, and that every word of Dante’s *Vita Nuova* has a symbolic meaning.⁵⁸⁹

In what follows, I would like to focus on the symbolic meaning behind Marechal’s version, by arguing that Solveig can be read as a national-allegorical figure for Argentina. Such a reading has already been suggested by Barcia, although only in the form of a brief note in his edition, a note which accompanied a key passage in which Solveig is described as a girl coming of age: “With one foot still in childhood and the other in the dance of the world.” This is, as Barcia points out (293n), a reference to Marechal’s poem “De la Patria joven” in which he says of the Patria: “Un pie arraigado en la niñez y el otro / ya tendido en los bailes de la tierra.”⁵⁹⁰ In the poem discussed previously in this chapter, the youthful Argentine nation is equated to a young girl at a crucial point of maturation. Now, considering that Solveig is declared to be “the primordial matter of any ideal construct” (105), and that the entirety of *Adán Buenosayres* makes clear that the construction of Argentina is the work of poets/intellectuals, it follows that Solveig may be associated with Argentina.

In both cases, the actual entity does not correspond perfectly to the ideal construct which it inspires. Adán fears greatly that he will no longer recognize the physical Solveig after having elaborated to such an extent the metaphysical Solveig:

Retrocediendo en la conocida pendiente de sus imaginaciones, Adán cayó en una duda final que interesaba igualmente a su naturaleza de enamorado y a su índole de artista: después de tan largo distanciamiento y de la poética transubstanciación que había realizado con una leve figura de muchacha, ¿reconocería él a la Solveig ideal de su cuaderno en la Solveig de carne y sangre que lo había llamado y a la que se aproximaba en aquel instante? (161)

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⁵⁸⁹ For more on Esoteric Interpretations of the *Divine Comedy* by Valli and others, see Massimo Ciavolella, “Esoteric Interpretations of the *Divine Comedy,*” in *Dantean Dialogues: Engaging with the Legacy of Amilcare Iannunci,* edited by Maggie Kilgour and Elena Lombardi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 215-230; and Stefano Salzani, *Luigi Valli e l’esoterismo di Dante* (San Marino: Il cerchio, 2014).

[Sliding down the same old slope of his imagination, Adam hit a final doubt concerning himself both as lover and artist. After so much distance, after having transubstantiated the girl with his poetry, would he recognize the ideal Solveig of his notebook with he saw the flesh-and-blood Solveig?] (63)

Furthermore, his ideal construction of Solveig is somewhat fragile considering that when she laughs at one of his verses, her laughter “detonate[s] the collapse of a poetic construction and the ruin of an ideal Solveig” (14). But ultimately, he knows his love for her is good, as it encourages him to effect reality with his spiritually driven good deeds: “What exemplary acts, what Franciscan gestures would he bring to bear against the thoughtless cruelty of Monte Egmont Street?” His love for Solveig makes him want to be a better person and causes him to reason in spiritual terms: “Looking critically at this latest wave of spiritual schmaltz, Adam understood it was linked to his anticipation of transcendental events in Saavedra.”

Argentina, too, then could profit spiritually from such an ideal construction. But the Argentina described throughout the novel is chaotic, complex, and her inhabitants are described as lost, confused, and lacking consensus. We could read Adán’s journey of how to love properly as the explanation of how to love his country properly, and as a guide for how poets should find the spiritual direction needed to create cultural cohesion.

The first indication that this book of love is also about Argentina and not just about a woman occurs in first sections, I-VII which contrast with Dante’s Vita Nuova. Dante begins his story with the famous lines:

In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: Incipit vita nova. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d’assemblare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenzia.591

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With these words he informs his readers that in this book they will find everything he remembers pertaining to his new life, i.e. pertaining to his love for Beatrice. True to his word, the first chapter details his first encounter with his love when she was but nine years old. He includes no information about his life prior to this fateful encounter.

“The Blue-Bound Notebook,” on the other hand begins: “My life, for the first ten years, offers nothing that merits the honour of the pen or the exercise of memory” (359). Marechal also begins with the idea of memory, and although he claims that the first ten years of his life are of no interest, goes on to describe early childhood memories of his homeland. In these sections (I-VII) he does not follow the plot of the *Vita Nuova*. He does, however, say that he writes “in the hope that my story, should it one day be published, may give consolation and support to those who follow the paths of Love” (359). We could interpret these lines as directed at those who will love women, or, given the content of the following pages, those who love Argentina.

The first part of Book VI is, according to Adán, “the story of my soul in its abstract aspect.”

He writes of the time when he had “one foot still in childhood”:

Mi universo infantil era la llanura de Maipú, abierta de horizonte a horizonte, y la casa erigida en terrenos bajos que favorecían la presencia del agua y el afincamiento de un mundo volátil cuyo millón de alas negras, blancas y rosas herían el aire y escandalizaban la luz por cualquier motivo, ya fuera la irrupción de un jinete que se abría paso en los juncales, ya las evoluciones de algún nutriero que armaba sus trampas en el cañadón. (472)

[My childhood universe was the prairie of Maipú, open from horizon to horizon, and the house built in the lowlands, where the ever-present water attracted an avian world whose myriad black, white, and pink wings cut the air and furled back the light at the slightest provocation – the sudden intrusion of a horseman making his way through the trees, or the movement of an otter hunter setting his traps in the glade.] (360)

In addition to describing the “infinitude of the countryside,” he also describes the family house, and the rooms, faces, voices, and objects that were dear to him. Overwhelmed by his surroundings,
he burst into tears, and his tears are not understood by the others of his lineage, “who laughed and cried for concrete reasons only” (360). His strong emotions are the foreshadowing of his vocation as poet, and the accompanying anxiety and yearning for expression. What causes him the most anxiety is the way things come into being and then decay. What he desires through poetry is a stability of Time and Space.

The next section describes in detail his memory of a wedding party held in the big house at Maipú. On this joyous occasion, with his whole family, including his grandfather Sebastián, dancing a mazurka, he has a macabre vision:

me pareció ver la obra del tiempo adelantándose ya en aquellas mujeres y aquellos hombres que bailaban enlazados; vi arrugarse las caras, hundirse los ojos y devastarse las encías; los vi a todos, retorciéndose y quemándose como las hojas de un árbol en un incendio; y vi, además, cómo se agrietaban las paredes, cómo ennegrecían los techos, cómo se derrumbaba hecha polvo la casa de Maipú. (473)

[I seemed to see time racing ahead in those women and men entwined in dance; I saw time working on them, making faces wrinkle, eyes grow sunken, gums deteriorate; I saw all of them twitching and curling like leaves in a burning tree; and I saw as well how the walls cracked, how the rooftops blackened, how the house in Maipú crumbled to dust.] (361)

In other words, he realizes that his loved ones will die, and that even their beloved home is not eternal. This passage corresponds to Dante’s vision of the old woman and his realization that Beatrice will die (VN, XXIII). Adán, who has yet to mention Solveig, is distraught because Argentina as he knows it, will die.

In parallel, the notion of Space brings him sorrow, “a perception enhanced by the prairie, whose expanse is measured in the lather of horses, and where east and west, north and south were roads sliding away to absence, points where eyes searched longingly for someone’s return” (362). The great expanses cause him to sob “like a child lost in a wood” (362). Recalling his childish tears, he remarks that “many children must still weep on the prairie, beneath the oppressive weight
of southern nights, in order that joyous ascending pathways might be opened up in the pure sky of
the Argentine fatherland” (362). It makes sense then, that when he says he writes the work to “give
consolation and support to those who follow the paths of Love” that he is referring to fellow
Argentines who deeply love their country.

Luckily the splendor of the forms on the prairie (the spikes of wheat, horses, and flowers)
do not die. He dreams of the stability they will enjoy when he is able to immortalize them in the
language of beauty. “And I knew that my destiny was to pursue beauty according to the movement
of love” (363). He understands his vocation as poet. The emotions he feels at watching the passing
of the seasons on the prairie awaken in him the urge to express himself. At first, possessing no art
whatsoever, he resorts to incoherent words or free-form phrases, but later “art succeeded chaos,
and musical order replaced incoherence” (364). This leads to his teacher Don Bruno exclaiming
“Adam Buenosayres is a poet” when he was fourteen years old.

At the beginning of section III he explains to the reader the divergent quality of this book,
which will not contain anecdotes, “for its purpose has been to trace the story not of a man, but of
his soul” (364). The soul’s journey begins when the “uncertainty of her [the soul’s] destiny then
began to afflict her in such a way that finally, in looking at herself, her eyes filled with tears” (365).
In contemplating her sorrow and regarding herself one day “in the bitter mirror of her tears” the
soul realizes that she is “alone and immobile” (365). This is another important clue that Book VI
is really the story of the search for national identity and expression. This same phrase is used by
Adán to describe how he views his position as an Argentine: “[m]uy confuso…No pudiendo
solidarizarme con la realidad que hoy vive el país, estoy solo e inmóvil: soy un argentino en
esperanza” (166). [Very confused…Unable to feel solidarity with the reality currently experienced
by the country, I am alone and immobile: I am an Argentine in hopeful expectancy].
Adán continues to describe the soul as “lost,” and “always alone in the group of gathered beings, always immobile in the circle of those who moved” (366). This recalls Adán’s behavior at the end of book II. While the other characters are “wheeling to the strains of the “Blue Danube,” Adán stands “immobile in the centre of the round, as he was yesterday, as always. Until when?” (145) It is also important to recall that while Solveig is present at the salon, he has very little interaction with her. The focus of the chapter is on the discussions of national identity that take place between him and the other characters. Similarly, while Book VI may seem ostensibly to be about Adán’s love for a lady, the true focus, at least for sections I-VII, is his inexpressible love for Argentina.

The soul’s journey of learning how to love is not only national, but also spiritual. In section III, his soul sprouts a dove’s wing, a Christian symbol for the Holy Spirit. This wing “spoke to her [the soul] of the potential for flight” (366). It is after the growth of the wing that Adán realizes that what is required is not only a moveable Lover, but also “an immobile Beloved” (366). But at the time the figure of the Beloved remained hidden from her. If we continue our national-allegorical reading, this necessity could be interpreted as a need to create a fixed construct out of what is the complex flux of Argentina.

In section IV Adán describes a vision in which he finds himself “in an immense wasteland.” He tries to advance through the “desolate place” but struggles greatly until a graceful Man (Christ) appears and speaks to him in a “fiery idiom.” Adán follows him into the blackness, and the “wasteland, at the mere touch of his feet, turned into a most pleasant garden where, amid the flowers, thronged bright and nimble beings who, seeking one another, joined to dance in a thousand rounds.” This section contrasts what Marechal believes to be the current state of Argentine letters (a wasteland) with her potential glory (a luscious garden) that can only be achieved through Christ.
The direction found by following Christ results in community: “amid the flowers, thronged bright and nimble beings who, seeking one another, joined to dance in a thousand rounds” (368). But this glorious vision is fleeting. When Adán loses sight of the man, a chill wind blows across the garden and he finds himself once again on the barren plain.

In section V the soul loses herself in her love for her surroundings and becomes divided on account of the multiplicity of her love:

[And I emphasize the nature of her [the soul’s] movement so that my reader (should these pages of mine ever have one) may follow the soul on her path of love and surmount the obscurity, more apparent than real, of her story. I said she distanced herself from her centre in each revolution of the spiral; I say now that, from call to call and from love to love, she went so far away that she eventually lost and forgot herself. In forgetting her own essence, she was converted to the essence of what she loved; a singular being, she found herself divided into the multiplicity of her loves.] (369)

Adán, like Dante, realizes the failure of his many earthly loves and repents: “she [his soul] came to suspect the failure was due not to the nature of her movement but to its direction” (370). In other words, his soul realizes that there is failure in multiplicity and direction is to be found in Christ. The soul, realizing she’s “lost deep in a wood” tries to return to the first intimacy with Christ (370). From that point on the soul belongs neither to life nor death, but to a “frontier position” where life and death were both similar and different from one another.

As in the *Vita Nuova*, dreams are key to the interpretation of the narrative. In section VII, Adán describes a strange dream that begins in a barren landscape. He sees a star with an axis of
the naked body of a woman, which commanded the four directions of the sphere: the head to the north, feet to the south, right arm to the east, the left to the west. Adán has trouble looking directly at this glorious vision: “I understood in my dream-state that as soon as my eyes looked up toward the prodigious vision, they wanted to lower again, as though they refused to contemplate it. Seeing this, the Lord of the night repeated his command: “Look!” (371) This is similar to Dante’s difficulty in gazing at Beatrice in *Paradiso*. First in Canto I, Dante looks as Beatrice looks into the sun, but cannot sustain the vision: “Molto è licito là, che qui non lece/ a le nostre virtù, mercé del loco/ fatto per proprio de l’umana spece./ Io nol soffersi molto, nè si poco,/ ch’io nol vedessi sfavillar dintorno, com’ferro che bogliente esce del foco;” (55-60). Again in Canto XXXIII, his eyes cannot sustain the brightness, and Beatrice commands him to look upon her again: “e per la viva luce trasparea/ la lucente sustanza tanto chiara/ nel viso mio, che non la sostenea […] “Apri li occhi e riguarda qual son io;/ tu hai vedute cose, che possente/ se’ fatto a sostener lo riso mio.” (31-33/46-48)

Adán, like Dante, stresses the difficulty of communicating his vision and feelings in language. He hears the sound of the spheres, “a deep sound, like a bow drawn across a string,” which recalls the music of the spheres in the *Divine Comedy* (372). When his eyes reach the image of the woman crucified on the sphere (she is clearly Christ-like), he surrenders utterly to her. He admits that she was not the same lady he had seen before, but rather a sublimation of the other one.” He realizes that the light emanating from her does not come directly from her, but yet he doesn’t yet realize it comes from God: “Afterward, the spell seemed to break when it occurred to me that the light shining from the woman of the sphere was not hers, but that it came from some sun, not yet visible to me, of which she would be the moon or mirror” (373). This vision of the woman on the cross is the vision of Argentina as seen through his soul’s newfound spiritual lens.
The emphasis on the cardinal directions enforces the idea that the interpretation of this vision should be linked to land.

With the end of the dream he closes the story of his soul in its abstract aspect. While sections I-VII shared little similarity with the *Vita Nuova*, sections VIII and onward mirror the plot closely. Section VIII begins, “It was springtime in Buenos Aires the day and the hour when she first appeared to me; her real name will not be written in these pages” (373). These lines reinforce the connection between Argentina and the beloved lady and will be repeated in section IX. The fact that Solveig’s name is not mentioned is in accordance with the conventions of courtly love which require that the beloved remained unnamed so as to protect her identity. In this section, Adán attends a gathering in a garden at Saavedra, where he talks to the women of the house, “all young and of gracious aspect” (373). It is like chapter XIV of *Vita nuova*, where Dante accompanies a friend to a gathering of gracious ladies where he knows Beatrice will be present:

Appresso la battaglia de li diversi pensieri avvenne che questa gentilissima venne in parte ove molte donne gentili erano adunate; a la qual parte io fui condotto per amica persona, credendosi fare a me grande piacere, in quanto mi menava là ove tante donne mostravano le loro bellezze.

When Dante sees his beloved, he is assaulted by spiritelli, and fears giving his love away to the others present who start noticing his strange, lovesick behavior. Similarly, when Adán sees Solveig, he is overwhelmed by her presence, finds himself incapable of response, and is fearful that others might notice his confusion. While the only colors of clothing said to be worn by Beatrice are crimson and white (II/III), Solveig is dressed in azure (the color of the Argentine flag) both here in this section and later in section XI when she meets Adán in a garden wearing a “sky-blue

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592 “I’ve already said that springtime in Buenos Aires and the woman of my sleepless nights had manifested themselves at the same time”, 377.

593 *Vita Nuova* XIV, 19.
dress.” (384) Adán, like Dante, is captivated by his lady’s smile, which “went before her like an emissary” (374). She chastely lowers her eyes in greeting. Marechal describes her as being at the brink of her coming of age, much like he describes the Patria in “De la Patria joven” and “Descubrimiento de la Patria”:

No se hallaba todavía en la flor de sus años; pero toda ella, según vi, no era sino un gesto de amanecer comparable al del alba cuando quiere y no quiere ser el día. (487)

[Her youth was not yet in full flower, but rather the whole of her, in my eyes, hinted at a dawn comparable to the moment of first light hesitating at the brink of day.] (374)

He also describes her as “fragile clay” and says that “her form seemed ready to sprout, painfully, like the bud of the leaf that swells and breaks and ventures a new lobe.” This recalls Adán’s speech on how the poet would sacrifice all for his vocation and stop at nothing: “Imagine a rosebush on the verge of producing a rose, and just then the angel’s trumpet announces the end of the world. Would the rosebush stop?” (261)

Her grace makes Adán recall “the friend’s” poem. While Dante mentions repeatedly in Vita Nuova his “first friend” (generally believed to be Cavalcanti), here Marechal’s “friend” is in this case himself, for the verses come from one of his own poems, “De la adolescente” [On the Adolescent Girl] first published in Odas para el hombre y la mujer (1929):

Entre mujeres alta ya,
la niña quiere llamarse Viento.594

His response to witnessing her beauty is to leave the gathering and return to his room, “wishing to measure in solitude the proportions of that new conflict” (375). This is similar to Dante’s reaction to encountering Beatrice in chapter III: “ricorsi a lo solingo luogo d’una mia camera, e puosimi a

When Adán arrives home he begins to mentally reconstruct “The One,” and his reconstruction is so perfect “that my soul again trembled in wonder before the image alone” (375). The verses that come to mind when he is in this state of contemplation are yet another indication that this reconstruction of Solveig should also be read as a metaphysical construct of Argentina. As Adán is gazing at the stars, a chorus of childish voices reach his ears:

Entre San Pedro y San Juan
hicieron un barco nuevo:
las velas eran de plata,
los remos eran de acero…

[Between Saint Peter and Saint John
they build a new boat:
the sails were of silver,
the oars were of steel.]

These lines, the only ones in Book VI besides Marechal’s own verses from “De la adolescente,” are taken from a traditional Argentine children’s song that continues: “Saint Peter was the pilot, / Saint John was a sailor,/ and the captain-general/ was Jesus of Nazareth.” The rather unexpected inclusion of these lines here once again links Solveig both to Argentina and to Catholicism.

Adán, having finally properly learned to love his lady, fears straying from the divine love back to the earthly love. “Will you again descend into the finitude and danger of earthly love, after having attained the notion of an infinite love?” (375) He fears that perhaps this too might be earthly love, but quickly discards this possibility due to the newfound rhythm of his soul. It is his love for Solveig that has given him a new life. Before loving her, his soul knew only “the sterile flight of my intelligence above its own ruin” (377). After finding Solveig he has one divine purpose and direction: “I’ll say now that, under the sole influence of the creature revealed in Saavedra, my

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595 *Vita Nuova*, 3; Ballestero, 308.

596 Quoted in Barcia 648n and Cheadle, 670.
whole being seemed to surrender to the rhythm of a nascent life and to a feeling of astonishment, a rising-up from the ashes” (377). He is like a phoenix, born again. He becomes a better person and is better able to love those around him “a delicious intelligence of love was one with a desire to press the living sheaf of creatures tightly to my soul” (378). The phrase “intelligence of love” recalls Dante’s famous canzone “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore.”

Like Beatrice, Solveig is associated with a “harmonious number” (379). In Dante it is the number nine, in order to associate Beatrice with the Holy Trinity. Once he learns to love properly, Adán cannot think of Solveig without thinking of God, her maker. His lady is not the object of his thoughts, but rather “a bridge of silver offered to I knew not what new pilgrimage of my mind” (38). These lines strengthen the connection between Solveig and Argentina (which takes its name from the Latin word for silver, argentum), while perhaps also referencing Dante the pilgrim.

When Adán urgently wants to see Solveig again, he knows not how to arrange a meeting. He doesn’t want to go alone to Saavedra for fear of revealing his secret. He instead tries to encounter her in the Barrancas de Belgrano park where he knows she walks home from school with classmates. Awaiting her appearance on the horizon, Adán experiences all the typical symptoms of love-sickness, such as a rapidly-beating heart, which plague Dante in the Vita Nuova:

> clavé mis ojos en el extremo del camino por el cual amanecería ella. Mi corazón había empezado a batir fuertemente, y acrecentaba sus redobles a medida que se acercaba la hora. (494)

[I kept my eyes on the path’s most distant point where she would rise like the dawn. My heart had begun to beat frantically, its drumbeats intensifying as the moment of truth approached.] (381)

When Solveig doesn’t appear, he experiences chills, pity, and wants to weep but finds no more tears. He looks into his being for the image of “The One” and the truth comes to him: “until that

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597 Vita Nuova, XIX, 27.
moment I’d believed that the woman of Saavedra, in all the empire of her truth, was within me; as it turned out, however, she did not reside within me, but I within her (382).

In section XI he does encounter Solveig again when he goes with the “friend” to the garden of their first encounter. Her arrival is heavenly. He hears her speak, and her voice is “warm, dry and golden as a spike of wheat” (384). This unusual use of synesthesia (voice is related to hearing and a spike of wheat is related to sound) is a clear indication that we are to associate Solveig with Argentina, wheat being one of the country’s main agricultural products. He also continues to associate her with memories of his childhood in Maipú.

In her presence he feels “the strange beatitude of living in poetry” (385). Everything is music, poetry, understanding of the divine: “she would say “bird” and the essence of the bird appeared in the mind of her listener in a hitherto unknown light, as if The One somehow had the virtue of recreating the bird merely by saying its name” (385).

Then comes an interesting passage in which Adán recounts how his “Friend” taught him about love. As aforementioned, the “friend” in Dante’s Vita Nuova is generally believed to be Cavalcanti. In Book VI, Adán’s first mention of the “Friend” refers to Marechal himself. Here the friend gives him advice on loving:

Y lo primero que señaló fue aquella virtud amorosa por la cual el Amante, con los ojos vueltos hacia el Amado, se olvida de sí mismo, trueca su forma por la forma de lo que ama, va muriendo a su propia vida y resucitando a la vida del Otro; hasta que por fin el Amante se convierte en Amado. (498)

[The first thing he pointed out was the loving virtue thanks to which the Lover, with eyes turned toward the Beloved, forgets himself, exchanges his form for the form of what is loved, dies by degrees to his own life, and comes to life again in the life of the Other; until finally the Lover transforms into the Beloved.] (385)
Fernanda Bravo Herrera believes the friend in this case to be Dante himself, who has taught Marechal (Adán) all that he knows about love. This is a viable possibility, as is the possibility, that the Friend is, as before, Marechal, who has in turn learned how to love from Dante. It could be that a more mature Marechal instructs Adán (the literary version of his younger self during the 1920s) what he has since learned.

Then it is Adán’s turn to speak, and he relates the drama of the Lover converted to the Beloved who hides or flees or ignores the Lover. As he describes the anguish of the Lover, his lady looks at him with great compassion. He visits her many times, which are glorious and light-filled days, but one afternoon, as they stroll through the perfumed garden, he comes to the painful realization that one day she will die:

En aquella luz de gruta que, lejos de roerlas, conseguía exaltar las formas hasta el prodigio, la de Aquella cobraba para mí un relieve doloroso y una plenitud cuya visión me hacía temblar de angustia, como si tanta gracia, sostenida en tan débil engarce, me revelara de pronto el riesgo de su fragilidad. Y otra vez empezaron a redoblar en mi alma los admonitorios tambores de la noche, y ante mis ojos alucinados vi cómo Aquella se marchitaba y caía, entre las rosas blancas, mortales como ella. (499)

[The grotto-like light, eroding shapes and forms, managed to exalt them miraculously; and the form of The One assumed for me a painful relief, a plenitude which, once glimpsed, made me shake with anguish, as if so much grace, so slightly supported, suddenly revealed to me how perilous her fragility was. And again the admonitory drums of the night began to beat in my soul, and before my terrified eyes I watched as The One withered and fell among the roses, she as mortal as they.] (386-387)

He starts crying. She asks him why he is crying. Upon hearing her pronounce his name, it is as though he witnesses the complete revelation of his being. He cannot shake his fear that she will one day die. So distressed is he that he cannot return to the garden to visit her. But he recovers her

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in thought. After constant meditation on “The One” and her death, he reconstructs her in his soul. His resolution is to immortalize her in poetry. He says that he described the details of his love for his lady in an “obscure poem,” the scope of which his friends did not understand. This corresponds to the end of the *Vita Nuova* when Dante declares his intention to say of Beatrice what has never been said of any woman: “Si che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d’alcuna.” Adán hopes that one day his friends will be able to discern the hidden meaning of his verses:

> Espero que si algún día estos renglones caen debajo de sus ojos, recuerden mis amigos el poema, den al fin con su oscura significación, y se digan que no en vano, al describir la última fase del encantamiento, llamaba yo a la mujer así transmutada: “Niña-que-ya-no-puede-suceder.” (501)

> [My hope is that, should their eyes chance upon these lines some day, my friends will remember the poem and finally discern its obscure meaning; I hope they’ll see why in the last phase I called the transmuted woman: *Niña-que-ya-no-puede-suceder*, “Girl-who-can-no-longer-happen.”] (388)

This mysterious line suggests that Adán’s poetry has secret symbolic meaning, just as Luigi Valli believed Dante’s poetry to contain secret meanings only apparent to the *Fedeli d’Amore*.

The notebook, allegedly written by Adán, is then abruptly interrupted by a note from its transcriber, L.M. (Leopoldo Marechal):

> (Nota: lo que sigue es el final del Cuaderno de Tapas Azules, escrito, sin duda, por Adán Buenosayres después de su tertulia definitiva en Saavedra. Tengo ahora el texto manuscrito bajo mis ojos, y antes de transcribirlo contemplo sus líneas atormentadas, llenas de tachaduras y enmiendas, tan diferentes de aquellos renglones que forman la primera parte del Cuaderno y cuya pulcritud anuncia un lentísimo trabajo de artista. Empieza con una fábula o apólogo extravaganté. Dice así:)

> [(Note: The following chapters bring the Blue-Bound Notebook to a close. They were written, no doubt, by Adam Buenosayres after his definitive salon in Saavedra. The manuscript lies before me now, awaiting transcription. But before continuing,)]

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599 *Vita Nuova*, XLII, 70-71.
I contemplate its tormented lines, full of scratched-out phrases and corrected words, altogether different from the handwriting in the first part of the Notebook, whose exquisiteness speaks of an artist’s slow, painstaking work. This part begins with an extravagant fable or apologue.] (388)

In the last part of the Notebook, he gives a detailed account of how he stores the virtues of Solveig in his soul, “where they might acquire the stability of things spiritual” (389). At this juncture he becomes aware of the opposition between the earthly woman and the celestial woman whom he is building in his soul. As the spiritual creature grows, the earthly creature diminishes, until the death of the earthly Solveig becomes inevitable. When “The One” dies, he is devastated, much like Dante upon losing Beatrice.

The final section of Book VI, section XIV, describes a strange vision. Adán dreams he is in a rickety boat, paddling ceaselessly over the waters of a lagoon. The corpse of The One lays across the bow of the boat. As he rows he stirs up chunks of dead meat. He takes her body in his arms up a stairs and deposits it inside a room. The door closes, and he is separated from her body. An old man appears and says, “Let death take its own.” It is God: “I am he who has moved, moves, and will move your steps.” God instructs him to “Pay no more mind to multitudinous images, and seek the single, true face of The One” (391). Ever since then his life has had a well-defined direction:

Desde entonces mi vida tiene un rumbo certero y una certera esperanza en la visión de Aquella que, redimida por obra de mi entendimiento amoroso, alienta en mi ser y se nutre de mi sustancia, rosa evadida de la muerte. (505)

[Ever since then my life has had a well-defined direction, a well-placed hope in the vision of The One who, redeemed by the work of my loving mind, breathes in my mind and is nourished by my substance, rose that eludes death.] (391-392).

The image of the Beloved being “nourished” by the substance or heart recalls Dante’s dream (chapter III) in which the personification of Love feeds Dante’s bleeding heart to Beatrice. But
whereas Dante’s vision at the beginning of the *Vita Nuova* when the lover’s love is yet physical and sexual, Marechal’s version at the end of the soul’s journey is strictly spiritual. His lady exists in his mind as a construct, and is nourished as the fruit of his thoughts.

The Notebook ends with Adán saying that Solveig now triumphs in her immutable springtime and that she continues to transform and grow according to his soul’s desire. He says that he will know her perfect form and unique form if, as he hopes, he has eternal life, just as Dante closes the *Vita Nuova* with the hope of seeing Beatrice in the afterlife: “E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna.”

**Book VII: The Journey to Cacodelphia: A Parody of the Divine Comedy and modern-day Argentina**

The “Journey to Cacodelphia” is by far the longest section in the book, spanning a total of 223 pages, or approximately 1/3 of the entire novel. Marechal’s inferno is a downward-spiraling helicoid track ordered loosely after Dante’s Inferno and Purgatory, where each spiral corresponds to a different infernal barrio or *cacobarrio* [shit neighborhood] (403). As Schultz, the creator of this infernal realm explains to Adán, Cacodelphia (hell) and Calidelphia (paradise) are two aspects of the same city: “And that Urb, visible only to the eyes of the intellect, is the counterfigure of the visible Buenos Aires” (397). But Calidelphia has yet to be written, thus leaving only an inferno as the intelligible representation of Buenos Aires. The concept of the “visible” and “invisible” Buenos Aires alludes to Eduardo Mallea’s 1937 essay “Historia de una pasión argentina.” For Mallea, the visible Argentina was false and inauthentic, while the invisible Argentina was the true, spiritual nation. Marechal, seeking to highlight the spiritual depravity of the city, makes the invisible

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600 *Vita Nuova*, XLII, 71.

601 Cheadle, 671.
Buenos Aires an inferno that exaggerates elements of the visible Buenos Aires depicted in Books I-V.

The journey begins on Saturday April 30 in the lowlands of Saavedra, at midnight. The astrologer Schultz is Adán’s “strange Virgil” and is also the demiurge who created Cacodelphia. They depart on a night when the “calm, humid air creates a dense and static atmosphere, like a womb pulsing with the seeds of future upheavals” (398). The association of the city with a womb indicates that Buenos Aires is only in embryo, while “seeds of future upheavals” seems to prophecy a potentially tumultuous future.

When Schultz announces to Adán that he is destined to make the journey, Adán is plunged into doubt, for it is, “a descent undertaken by precious few heroes even in antiquity, and by not a one, as far as I know, in the vulgar, prosaic age we live in now” (395). He is unsure if he is worthy: “Even if we were crazy enough to follow in the footsteps of Ulysses, Aeneas, Alighieri, and other infernal tourists, what merit do we have that would make us worthy of such an adventure?” Schultz’s response is that Adán has the merit of “penitence.” Adán’s reluctance mirrors Dante the pilgrim’s humility and doubt when he learns of his predestined voyage. But given the national-allegorical significance of the novel, we might also read Adán’s response as follows: Adán is the primary representative of Argentina, a new modern nation, and he doubts his position with regard to other world cultures, specifically with regard to European high culture. Shultz’s response signifies that the country is in a state of penitence, having lost is spiritual path, and must regain this path before finding self-expression.

To enter hell the two perform a ritual which involves tying a string to the trunk of an ombú and inscribing names into the sand: Santos Vega, Juan Sin Ropa, and Martín Fierro. Whereas

602 Santos Vega was an Argentine guacho who was eventually defeated by the Devil, disguised as the payador Juan sin Ropa. Mitre wrote a poem about the legend.
previously Adán expressed his feeling of inferiority with respect to classical heroes, here he is forced to acknowledge Argentina’s greatest literary heroes. As they enter hell through the ombú, Adán loses consciousness, which echoes Dante’s falling into unconsciousness in Canto III, vv. 134-136. Adán warns readers at this point to think about whether they hadn’t better flee the ombú and go back to the visible Buenos Aires instead of making the difficult descent. (402)

Once in the suburbs of Cacodelphia, they find themselves in a dense fog that hinders their progress, and they stop to wait for it to pass. This mirrors the pause made by Virgil and Dante in Canto XI so that they might become accustomed to the stench of lower hell. In both instances, the hindrance, whether visual or olfactory, serves as a pause in the narrative action so that the structure of hell can be explained. Here Schultz sketches the basic outline of Cacodelphia’s architectural plan and tells how he constructed the city:

--Cuando me resolví a dar una imagen visible de la Cacodelphia inteligible—comenzó a decir el astrólogo--, mi principal cuidado era el de no caer en torpes imitaciones. Temeroso, pues, de construir un Infierno vulgar y silvestre, concebí la forma de un cono-hueco-invertido, al que llamé Divicono, dentro del cual se ubicarían los cacodelphenses, como en el interior de un vaso gigantesco y según el mayor o menor lastre de sus almas [...]--Una idea poética—le dije yo entonces.--Poética, eso es—admitió Schultze--. Nada más que poética. Me vi obligado a desecharla.

Tu alma puebla los desiertos, 
y del Sud en la campaña 
al lado de una cabaña 
se eleva fúnebre cruz; 
esa cruz, bajo de un tala 
solitario, abandonado, 
es un símbolo venerado 
en los campos del Tuyú.

Bartolomé Mitre, «A Santos Vega, payador argentino»

Thereafter Ascasubi composed the long poem “Santos Vega o los Mellizos de la Flor” and Gutiérrez wrote “Story of Santos Vega and his friend Carmona prosecuted by justice.” The most famous work about the legend is Rafael Obligado’s 1885 Santos Vega, considered along with Martin Fierro to be one of the most important works of Argentine Literature.
--¿Por qué?
--Esa idea tenía la imprecisión de todo lo poético; y yo necesitaba organizar matemáticamente mi espacio infernal, de modo que fuera inteligible y transitable. Entonces imaginé un rascacielos infernal […]
--Una idea prosaica. (519)

[--When I decided to give a visible image to the intelligible Cacodelphia, the astrologer began, my first concern was to avoid crass imitations. Wary, then, of building a garden-variety Inferno, I conceived the form of the inverted-empty-cone, which I called Divicone, within which the Cacodelphians would be placed as though inside a gigantic glass, according to the greater or lesser burden of their souls […]
-A poetic idea, I commented.
-You’re right, poetic, Schultz allowed. Merely poetic. I was obliged to discard it.
-Why?
-Because of its imprecision, typical of everything poetic. I needed to organize my infernal space mathematically so as to make it comprehensible and passable. So then I dreamed up a subterranean skyscraper […]
-A prosaic idea.] (403)

In the end, fearing that the inverted skyscraper with an elevator would look like “the Gath & Chaves department store during a liquidation sale,” Schultz decides on a downward-spiraling helicoid track for his design: “It is made up of nine stages or turns of the spiral, each of them being the site of an infernal barrio or cacobario [shit neighborhood]” (403).

The nine circles in question are:

Circle 1: The Neutrals
Circle 2: Lust
Circle 3: Gluttony
Circle 4: Avarice and Prodigality
Circle 5: Sloth
Circle 6: Envy
Circle 7: Wrath
Circle 8: Pride
Circle 9: The Great Pit

Dante’s *Inferno*, on the other hand, proceeds in the following manner:

Circle 0: The Neutrals;
Circle 1: Limbo
Circle 2: Lust  
Circle 3: Gluttony  
Circle 4: Avarice and Prodigality  
Circle 5: Anger and Sullenness  
Circle 6: Heresy  
Circle 7: Violence  
Circle 8: Simple Fraud  
Circle 9: Treachery

The order of sins dealt with in Cacodelphia is actually closer to an inverted Mount Purgatory than it is to the Inferno, given that Marechal leaves both Limbo and Heresy out all together and deals differently with the lowest circles. But if Schultz’s Helicoid followed an inverted order of Mount Purgatory, the order of progression would be Lust; Gluttony; Avarice; Sloth; Wrath; Envy; Pride. We can see then, that Marechal has inverted the order of Wrath and Envy, making wrath the more intellectual of these two sins.

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<tr>
<td>The Neutrals</td>
<td>Earthly Paradise</td>
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<td>Lust</td>
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<td>Gluttony</td>
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<td>Avarice and Prodigality</td>
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<td>The Great Pit</td>
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One thing that he adheres to closely, is that the severity of the sin is linked to the degree of intellectualism with which the sinner committed it. While the circle of the neutrals and the sins of incontinence are associated with the Argentine masses, the lowest rings of the Helicoid are reserved for the intellectuals, and it is there that we will encounter most of Adán’s friends. In fact, his best friend, the philosopher Samuel Tesler, will be our guide through the lowest circle, that of Pride.
The worst sinner we encounter in Cacodelphia, Don Ecuménico, is an uber-intellectual and failed poet. He has one of the longest speeches of any of the characters to explain his story of perdition, which at twenty pages comprises approximately 9% of the entire inferno. His is the most intellectual of sins, and his punishment is to remain in the form of a gigantic insect. His head is like that of a common butterfly, with a pair of protruding eyes, two fuzzy palpi, and a spiral-proboscis. His thorax has little legs and wings that are yellow, red, and blue. He is a talking bug who tells Adán and Schultz his whole life story, without however, repenting: “when Don Ecuménico spoke of “punishment” his tone was shamelessly cold and academic, with none of the contrition that would have been good to hear from a creature thrown by the gods into the eighth circle of an inferno” (599).

Don Ecuménico’s sin is agnosticism. Already as a child, he claims, his “metaphysical distrust grew to the point that I came to doubt the regularity of natural phenomena” (600). He had a “curiously premature “tragic sense of life” and was prone to crying fits over the instability of life” (601). When he falls in love with a young woman named Dolores, the two poetically-minded youths living in a practical and unpoetic world, fall in love and begin “a poetic dialogue whose sublimity alienated me from the terrestrial globe” (605). But their literary love story is cut short when Dolores suddenly disappears and marries an obese importer of wines. Furthermore, as Don Ecuménico later finds out, the verses she sent him were not her own, but had been cribbed from Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer.

Later Don Ecuménico marries a woman named Raimunda and has a child, but his two loved ones die suddenly for unnamed reasons, and afterwards, he begins to reflect “on the mysterious cause, the invisible motor that so easily built up and tore down the things of this world”

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603 Book VII, “The Journey to Cacodelphia,” is 223 pages long.

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He seeks a life of penance and begins lashing himself daily, but neighbors in his apartment complex begin to hear things and think he has gone crazy, so he is forced to stop. His true perdition comes subsequently and is attributed to literature: “I had previously renounced the deceitful parade of images, passions, and sentiments, that constitute a human existence – and what did literature do, if not multiply those images, stylize the passions, and fictionally prolong the colourful lie of worldly things?” (610)

The metamorphosis of Don Ecuménico begins with his discovery of a mysterious secret room, “Room Number Three,” at the local library. When the “Librarian Who Peered Out from Hazy Distances” asks him one day, “What do you seek?” Don Ecuménico tells his whole life story and his desire to discover the Absolute. The Librarian grants him entrance:

En el recinto número tres el Fundador había coleccionado gruesos volúmenes de páginas amarillentas y duros lomos: aquellos libros contenían todas las iluminaciones del alma, todas las locuras de la intelección, todos los razonamientos prudentes y las audacias blasfematorias a que había llegado el hombre mortal en su buceo de lo Absoluto. Pues bien, señores: yo buscaba lo Absoluto, no sabía claramente si en alas del amor o del rencor; y me lancé a la lectura de aquellos libros, con una voracidad que se agudizaba según iba yo encontrando en ellos o una imagen de mi sentir o una contestación a mis viejas preguntas interiores. Y, ciertamente, fue un bien trazado camino de perdición. (740)

[In Room Number Three, the Founder had collected thick, stiff-spined volumes with yellowed pages: books containing all the illuminations of the soul, all the mad flights of the intellect, all the prudent discourses of reason and the blasphemous audacities come up with by mortal man in his attempts to plumb the Absolute. Well, then gentlemen, I was seeking the Absolute, whether on the wings of love or of rancour, I wasn’t too sure; and I threw myself into reading those books with a voracity that grew keener every time I found an image of what I felt or an answer to my old inner questions. And, sure enough, it was a well-laid road to perdition.] (611)

The room is small, with a small skylight and drab colors. At first Don Ecuménico only comes in the afternoons and evenings, but when he realizes that he is slowly becoming invisible, he is able to avoid the patrol of the librarian and remain in there round the clock. His perdition, or fall, occurs
in three stages which he refers to as “somersaults.” In the first somersault he reads texts of orthodox theologians; in the second, stranger conceptions about the Divinity; and in the third, he devours oriental texts about a Non-Being anterior to God.

These readings bring about the metamorphosis of his soul. He starts out by fading and becoming ghost-like. He is increasingly lethargic and eventually undergoes a gradual process of metamorphosis into an insect. As a bug he ravenously devours the books in the room, becoming larger and larger until a cocoon forms around his body. When he breaks free from the cocoon in the form of a butterfly, he flies out the opened skylight and descends directly into Cacodelphia.

Don Ecuménico’s metamorphosis is what Marechal invents as punishment for intellectuals whose intellectualism and literary endeavors are not guided by a belief in God. For Marechal, agnosticism was a dangerous path. In the essay, “Sobre la inteligencia argentina,” he criticizes Romantic sentimentalism which he describes as a rebellion against intelligence which leads to an inversion of order, causing the religious individual to turn against his spiritual authority. Philosophically speaking, “acabará en el más puro agnosticismo, por convertir a la filosofía en un mero juego de creación literaria” [end in the most pure agnosticism by converting philosophy into a mere game of literary creation]. Interestingly, this is how the “Journey to Cacodelphia” and indeed the whole book will end, in a mere game of empty literary play. When Don Ecuménico, the epitome of pure agnosticism, flies away, Schultz and Adán enter the ninth and final circle of hell, which is a giant pit inhabited by a gelatinous mass known as the Paleogogue:

Volví a contemplar el monstruo, y aunque no le noté forma de maldad alguna, me pareció que las reunía todas en la síntesis de su masa ondulante, y que las abominaciones del Infierno schultziano tomaban origen y sentido en aquel animal gelatinoso que se retorcía en la Gran Hoya. (747)

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[I turned again to contemplate the monster, and although I noted no particular evil, it seemed that all forms of wickedness were synthetically united in its undulating mass, and that the abominations of Schultz’s hell found both their origin and their meaning in the gelatinous beast writhing in the Great Pit.] (618)

Schultz asks Adán, “What do you think?” And Adán, although speechless after the story of Don Ecuménico, now launches into a steady stream of absurd metaphors:


[Nastier than a fright at midnight. Got more gills than a dorado. Serious as a monk’s codpiece. More ingratiating than a rich man’s dog. Sharp-pointed, like an old man’s knife. More puckered than an immigrant’s tobacco pouch. Shit-smeared, like the boot of a Basque dairyman. More ornery than a draw-wheel nag. Uglier than a pig’s somersault. Tougher than a vizacacha’s paw. Skittish as a washerwoman’s pony. Solemn as the fart of an Englishman.] (618)

The text ends abruptly there, which seems to imply that Adán’s mad string of metaphors will continue ad infinitum, or, at least as long as it takes him to find spiritual direction. His metaphors are descriptions of the Paleogogue, which is the conglomeration of all the sins encountered in Cacodelphia’s many barrios.

**The barrios of Cacodelphia**

Each barrio, or “cacobarrio” (shit neighborhood) of Cacodelphia is equated to an area of Buenos Aires or its surroundings. Where the neutrals are punished, the landscape is said to be like that of the pampas:

Miré y dudé un instante sobre si lo que veían mis ojos entraba en el dominio de la realidad o en el de la ficción. Mezcla de salina y arenal, una triste llanura dilatábase hasta el horizonte, árida y monótona, resquebrajada por la sequía, brillante de salitre. (520)
[I looked and for an instant wondered whether what my eyes were seeing was in the realm of reality or fiction. Extending as far as the horizon, in a patchwork of salt flats and sand dunes, was a cheerless plain, arid and monotonous, cracked and furrowed by drought, shiny with saltpeter.] (404)

Adán, who as we know from Books I-V is used to conflating reality with flights of imagination, here also has difficulty distinguishing between the two. The “monotonous” plain is home to the neutrals, equated with the Argentine masses:

Hombres y mujeres, en número infinito, corrían y se amontonaban en aquella planicie, acá y allá, sin orden alguno, como torbellinos de hojas otoñales al soplo de contrarios vientos: la multitud se detenía súbitamente, y sus millares de cabezas giraban en redondo, semejantes a otras tantas veletas indecisas; (520)

[Men and women, infinite in number, were swarming in throngs over the plain, running here and there, randomly, like autumn leaves swirling in unsettled winds: the multitude would pause suddenly, its thousands of heads swiveling round like so many indecisive weathervanes;] (404)

After devouring the newsprint, magazines, and posters that rain upon them like “manna,” they pull down their pants, lift up their skirts, and “solemnly defecate.” (405) Adán asks:

¿Qué pueblo es ese que tanto se agita en la llanura? Todas esas caras me son familiares, como si las hubiera visto mil veces en la calle Florida, en el Luna Park o en el estadio de Boca Juniors.
--Es el pobre Demos —respondió Schultz—: la mayoría nuestra que, inclinada igualmente al bien y al mal, sigue la dirección de cualquier viento. Sus actos y voces anuncian a las claras que hoy la solicitan vientos despreciables. Pero con ese mismo barro un Neogogo hará maravillas. (521)

[What people are they, writhing in such agitation on the plain? All those faces look familiar to me, as if I’d seen them a thousand times on Florida Street, in Luna Park, or at the Boca Juniors’ stadium.
-It’s poor old Demos, answered Schultz, our great majority, equally inclined to good and to evil, who go whichever way he wind blows. These days, it’s clear from their actions and words that the majority is wooed by contemptible winds. But with his very clay, a Neogogue will work wonders.] (405)

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this mention of a Neogogue who can work wonders is undoubtedly a reference to Perón, who in Marechal’s opinion had given direction to the otherwise
directionless masses. Their place in Cacodelphia is this suburb of the irresponsible, those who cannot be held accountable. As Schultz explains to Adán, those who bear responsibility are to be found inside the Helicoid. They enter by sliding down a holitoboggan, Schultz’s neocriollo word for a holy slide. Virgil slides down first and is followed by a reluctant Adán who hurls himself down after him, “cursing in pectore the infernal inventor who’d dreamed up that puerile transit system” (406).

As in the Divine Comedy, living souls who wish to enter the realm of the dead must first contend with Charon the ferryman. In Marechal’s version Charon is an immigrant from Galicia wearing blue overalls. Adán recognizes him as the bus driver of Number 38. Charon refuses to give them crossing stating, “I’m taking a grievance to the Union!” Both Schultz and Adán are hostile to him and as in the Comedy, it is the guide who sees to it that he follows his duty, begrudgingly or not. Schultz scolds him for having lost all the dignity he once had prior to his immigration:

--Arabas tu tierra, podabas tu viña, matabas tu chancho, cantabas los villancicos de tu madre y profesabas la sabiduría de tus abuelos. ¡Confesá, gaita, que tenías entonces una dignidad maravillosa! ¿Lo confesás o no?
--Confieso—balbuceó el de azul intimidado.
--¿Y qué hiciste, no bien llegaste a Buenos Aires? –le preguntó Schultze en tono dolorido.
--Pues, yo…
--Te dejaste crecer una melena de compadrito, te anudaste al cogote un pañuelo de seda; y se te vio en las milongas de barrio, enchándotelas de matón y haciendo esfuerzos inauditos por imitar a los personajes de Vaccarezza.
--Pero…
--Hay un pero, lo sé –continuó Schultze--. No bien abrías la boca, mostrabas la hilacha. Entonces eliminaste las jotas y las úes que te hacían sospechoso; y aprendiste la jerga del bulín, la gayola, el che, la mina. En una palabra, olvidaste aquella dignidad que sin duda tenías, para entregarte a un mimetismo grosero. (523-524)
--You used to plough your land, prune your vineyard, slaughter your pig, sing the
carols your mother taught you, and profess the wisdom of your grandparents. Admit
it bagpipe: you use to have wonderful dignity [in Galicia]. Do you admit it or not?
--I admit it, stuttered the fellow in blue, intimidated.

--And what did you do, as soon as you got to Buenos Aires? Schultz asked him in
a pained tone.
--Well, I…

--You let your hair grow like a compadrito, you tied a silk scarf around your neck.
You were seen in the neighborhood dance halls, strutting like a bully and making
unheard-of efforts to imitate characters straight out of Vacarezza melodramas.

--But…

--There’s a “but,” I know, continued Schultz. No sooner did you open your mouth
than you gave yourself away. So you started to swallow the “j”s and the “u”s that
made you suspect, and you learned the local argot: cathouse and broads and
slammer and hey buster! In a word you forgot the dignity you surely once had, and
crassly imitated your new environment.] (407)

As we will learn a few pages later, this is the only time Schultz will get so angry at one of the
inhabitants of Cacodelphia. Schultz’s tirade against Charon brings up two key themes of Book
VII: loss of values and crass imitation. This passage reiterates the ideas articulated by Adán in
book II at the salon at the Amundsen house, namely that the recently-immigrated have lost touch
with their roots and suffered a moral degeneration following the process of immigration.

Charon is only the first of the degenerate immigrants encountered in Cacodelphia. Once he
boats them across the lagoon full of black monoliths, Adán and Schultz find themselves in an
impoverished shantytown, reminiscent of a conventillo:

Al principio no vi más que un cielo gris brillante, del cual se descolgaba un apretado
aguacero. Pero en seguida, y a través de la lluvia, distinguí una barriada en
anfiteatro, compuesta de casuchas informes distribuidas al azar y edificadas en el
lodo con viejas chapas de cinc, latas de querosene, barriles desfondados y restos de
automóviles en desuso. Una multitud gritona chapaleaba en el fango de las
callecitas: hombres y mujeres, vestidos con sus ropas civiles y embarrados hasta
los ojos, hundían un pie aquí, arrancaban el otro allá, caían y se levantaban sin dar
señales de incomodidad alguna. (526-527)

[At first, I could see only a lustrous grey sky, a dense shower falling from it. But
then, through the rain, I could make out a shantytown, a random scatter of shapeless
shacks with battered zinc roofs. They were built right in the mud out of kerosene drums, bottomed-out barrels, and shells of old cars. A loud-mouthed multitude squelched around the muddy little streets: men and women, dressed in city clothes and covered in mud up to their eyeballs, plopped a foot down here, pulled the other out there, fell down, and got up again with no sign of distress.]

Marechal continually emphasizes the cacophony of the immigrant masses. Here they are said to be a “loud-mouthed multitude.” Just lines later he mentions their shouts and “strident conversations filling the shacks” (411). Earlier the zone of the neutrals was compared to the tower of Babel, and the comingling of all the languages and voices creates a dull roar which was at first indistinguishable, “the diapason of a thousand human accents, a thousand interwoven voices, neither happy nor sad, reverberating as though inside a cavern” (404). The cacophony of Cacodelphia signifies linguistic, and therefore ethnic, diversity, but it also symbolizes lack of consensus, as throughout the novel myriad of voices speak over one another.

Adán runs into people he knows from Monte Egmont Street, such as his neighbor Campanelli, who embodies all of the negative stereotypes about Italian immigrants at the turn of the century: namely, that they were materialistic and greedy. Everything boils down to a question of income for Campanelli, even the fact that Adán, who lived in the apartment just underneath him, could not tolerate all the noise he made. He imagines Adán to be disgruntled because he has a social inferiority complex due to his low salary as a teacher:

Señor, yo tenía mi tabla de valores: la renta mensual era para mí el fundamento de las jerarquías humanas; y supe que usted sólo tenía un sueldito de maestro, reforzado con algunas colaboraciones poéticas muy mal retribuidas. Además, yo tenía un automóvil de ocho cilindros, y me dijeron que usted sólo viajaba en tranvía. No es extraño, pues, que su queja me sonase a bofetón e injuria: era un bofetón que se quería dar a mi libreta de cheques, una injuria que se deseaba inferir a todos y cada uno de mis ocho cilindros. Pero lo que me llevó al colmo de la exasperación fue la reverencia con que hablaba de usted el portero castellano, ¡de usted, que a lo mejor sólo le daba las buenas noches! (530-531)
[Sir, I had my values: for me, one’s monthly income was the foundation of the human hierarchy. And I knew that all you had was your measly teacher’s salary, supplemented by the odd poorly remunerated poetic collaboration. Besides, I had an eight-cylinder automobile, whereas they said you had to get around by streetcar. So it’s no surprise I took your complaint as a slap and an insult: it was a slap at my cheque book and an insult to each and every one of my eight cylinders. But what really exasperated me was the reverential way the Castillian concierge would talk about you – you, who probably wished him a good evening as your only tip!]

Campanelli doesn’t understand the actual human connection Adán has with the Concierge. Only materialism makes sense to him, and he has lost the values of his homeland.

While Campanelli represents unbridled materialism, Doctor Scarpi Núñez, son of a Ligurian shoemaker, represents “not the learned ignorance that bore such good fruit in better days, but rather ignorant learning and titled illiteracy” (417). Núñez was corrupted by “a city where every single useful trade or virtue of the heart cowered before the pompous affectation of a university degree” (417). In order to overcome his feelings of social inferiority within Argentine society, he turned not to materialistic pursuits, but to higher education:

Noche y día se puso a clavetear los trajinados botines de Saavedra, se quitó el pan de la boca y sacrificó el sueño al ensueño, mientras este pelmazo rendía exámenes a regañadientes, cuidaba sus uñas, perdía sus noches en los dancings y agregaba un Núñez a su Scarpi nativo, no sin lanzar a su futuro una mirada recta y a su pasado una mirada oblicua. (534)

[Day and night he hammered away at worn boots in Saavedra, taking bread from his own mouth and sacrificing sleep for daydreams, whilst this lump of coal reluctantly sat exams, pared his nails, wasted nights at the dance halls, and added the Castilian Núñez to his native Italian Scarpi, looking straight to his future and askance at his past.] (417)

Núñez represents the second generation of immigrants who ascended the social ladder. They were able to attend school, and were also quick to forget their roots. Schultz accuses Doctor Scarpi Núñez of being ashamed of his origins, to which an indignant Núñez calls Schultz a “dime-store Virgil” (418). Schultz continues to criticize him:
Este hombre adquirió indudablemente la técnica del picapleitos, como lo hace un deshollinador con la suya; pero el núcleo de su ser permaneció inculto, basto, rechoncho de grosería. ¡Peor aún! La soberbia de su nuevo estado le hizo perder hasta el último vestigio de las virtudes natales; de modo tal que, si los comparásemos ahora, el zapatero ligur frente a su hijo nos parecería un dechado de finura y sensibilidad. (535)

[Sure, he probably did acquire the skills of pettifoggery, just as the chimney sweep acquires his, but in his core he remained uncultivated, coarse, grossly crude. Even worse, the pride of his new status made him forget every last vestige of his native virtues. If we were to compare them now, the Ligurian shoemaker would seem a paragon of refinement and sensibility alongside his son.] (418)

The sons of immigrants are characterized by “vulgar opinions and fundamental ignorance” (419). Marechal exaggerates all the negative stereotypes of the impoverished immigrant population and attributes such behavior to lack of values, lack of identity, and loss of spiritual direction.

In the second circle of Hell, that of the Lustful, Marechal takes on a major social issue of turn-of-the-century Argentina—the problem of prostitution. Because many male migrant workers came alone before sending for their wives and families, there was a predominantly male society which resulted in prevalent prostitution. This circle of Hell is enormous in scope and is divided into seven sections. At first their entrance is blocked by the gigantic figure of a naked woman, Dame Lust, who has two barking dog-heads as breasts, a crab for her genitals, and a gallinaceous wind protruding from her buttocks:

Pero doña Lujuria se animaba en ese instante; sus dos tetas perricabezunas alargaron los hocicos y se pusieron a ladrar furiosamente; nos tendió el sexicangrejo sus pinzas amenazadoras; y las dos torpes nalguialas batieron el aire con fuerza, en una infructuosa tentativa de vuelo. Dando saltitos de gallina, la mujer se nos plantó frente a frente:—¡A ver, muchachos! ¡A ver, muchachos!—canturreaba doña Lujuria, retrocediendo a saltitos delante de nosotros. (538)

[But Dame Lust was stirring; her two dogshead hooters stuck their muzzles out and began to bark furiously; her sexcrab extended menacing pincers; and the two ungainly gluteal wings started flapping vigorously in a futile attempt to take flight. Hopping like a chicken, the woman came closer and stared us in the face.
-How ’bout it, boys! She cood in a monotone. How ’bout it!] (421)

This monstrous Madame is an absurd and grotesque symbol of the promiscuity of the city. This circle is not a barrio but a movie-production lot, “where weird set-designers had seemingly mounted, one next to another, six heterogeneous sets unconnected by any passage” (421). These various sets are then referred to as “scenes.” The first scene is decorated with pornographic plaster figurines, threadbare curtains, and fly-specked mirrors. Randy men fill the orchestra seats and galleries. Odors of cigarette smoke, animal heat, old sweat, garlic soup, and cheap perfume hang heavily in the air. The crowd consists of “the ornate jackets of milkmen, the blue overalls of mechanics, the shiny suits of office workers, the wide-brimmed hats of students, the top hats of aristocrats, and the Perramus trench coats typical of burghers,” i.e. all social strata (421-422).

Here Adán encounters one of his friends, the pipsqueak Bernini, who stands up in front of the crowd and pontificates about the problem of prostitution not in moral and ethical terms, but in strictly economic terms of supply and demand:

-Tan alto problema –continuó el petiso—adquiere hoy entre nosotros una gravedad catastrófica. No ignoráis que el desequilibrio entre la oferta y la demanda encarece los artículos de primera necesidad, justamente cuando la demanda es superior a la oferta. Pues bien, señores, esto sucede con la mujer en nuestra ciudad de Buenos Aires. (540)

[-In today’s society, the pipsqueak resumed, this perennial problem has taken on catastrophic proportions. As you are all no doubt aware, an imbalance between supply and demand drives up the price of articles of prime necessity, precisely when the demand for them outstrips their supply. Well, gentlemen, that is just what’s happening in the case of women in our city of Buenos Aires.] (423)
He attributes the famous Argentine melancholy to the lack of women: “I’ll show them the sole cause and origin of our famous melancholy: it’s that the opposite sex condemns us to solitude!”

(424) It is, he continues, a serious national problem that may bring about the ruin of their country:

Y no estaría yo en esta tribuna si nuestra causa no tuviera un interés nacional mucho más valioso que la suma de todos los intereses individuales. Porque me pregunto ahora: ¿qué será de la patria, si continúa esta onerosa separación de sexos? ¡Ah, señores, me parece oír cómo las osamentas de nuestros antepasados crujen en sus tumbas! Sus bocas desdentadas se abren para gritarnos: “¡La Patria está en peligro!” (541)

[I wouldn’t be standing here before you if our cause were not also of concern to the nation, whose interest far surpasses the sum of our individual interests. For I wonder now: what will become of our homeland if this oppressive separation of the sexes continues? Ah, gentlemen, I seem to hear even now the bones of our forefathers turning in their graves! Toothless mouths open and cry out to us: “The Fatherland is in danger!”] (424)

Within the separate sectors (the Pornographic Theatre, the Pond of the Lustful, The Ravine of the Adulterers, the Wall of Dirty Old Men, the Meadow of the Ultras, The Canefield of the Sodomites, and the Labyrinth of Solitary Souls), Argentines suffer punishments unique to their specific sin. Marechal parodies the Dantean contrapasso by combining various aspects of different Dantean punishments, exaggerated to the point of absurdity. Let us look for example at the punishment of the sinners in the Pond of the Lustful:

Entonces, a través del vapor que ya se desleía, vi un estanque inmenso en el cual, hundidos hasta las rodillas, vegetaban millares de hombres y mujeres desnudos. Y digo que “vegetaban”, porque tal idea sugerían aquellos torsos inmóviles, pero abrazados entre sí, unidos hasta la tortura según todas las formas imaginables del amor, incrustados los unos en los otros y apretándose como las mil ramas de una floresta. Soles artificiales, estratégicamente distribuidos, hacían llover su fuego sobre aquella multitud, arrancándole densos olores cabreños y ríos de sudor que corrían por los cuellos, las espaldas lustrosas, los vientres estrujados, las pelambreras y los muslos. El agua del estanque parecía muerta bajo una costra de mohos rojizos y putrefacciones vegetales: aquí y allá, entre la maraña de los cuerpos

605 An allusion to Hermann von Keyserling’s South American Meditations (Südamerikanische Meditationen). Barcia, 640n23; Cheadle 424n35.
desnudos, crecían plantas de flores carnosas cuya hermosura espantaba, hongos de colores malignos y juncos afilados como leznas en los que se agrupaban rosados huevos de caracol. Enloquecidos por el olor humano, cantáridas brillantes y tábanos rabiosos caían sobre la multitud y la acribillaban. (542-543)

[Standing in the water up to their knees, thousands of naked men and women were vegetating. I say “vegetating” because such was the idea suggested by those torsos locked in motionless embraces, united to the point of agony in every form of love imaginable, encrusted in and clinging to one another like the myriad branches of a leafy glade. Artificial suns, strategically distributed, rained fire down upon the multitude, wringing from them dense goat-like odours and rivers of sweat which flowed over necks, gleaming backs, bellies pressed against one another, hairy tufts, and thighs. The pond water seemed dead beneath a scum of reddish mildew and vegetal putrefaction. Here and there, amid the welter of nude bodies, grew plants with fleshy flowers of frightful beauty, evil-coloured mushrooms, and reeds as sharp as awls covered in pink snails’ eggs. Crazed by the human stench, swarms of flossy Spanish flies and horseflies furiously bombarded the multitude, stinging them repeatedly.] (426)

Marechal’s punishment is a hodge-podge of Dantinean contrapassi pertaining to different sins. The nakedness and “torsos locked in motionless embraces” recalls Dante’s second circle, where Francesca and Paolo are punished. Raining fire, however, is Dante’s punishment for sodomites in circle seven, and the Spanish flies and horseflies recall the flies and wasps that sting the neutrals. Furthermore, the synesthesia, the “evil-coloured mushrooms” and “reeds as sharp as awls covered in pink snails’ eggs” is not poetic, but ridiculous.

Other contrapassi are not conglomerations of Dantinean punishments but are creative new punishments that nevertheless employ Dantinean principles, i.e. that the sinner must suffer for all eternity a twisted version of what they did in life. The term contrapasso comes from the Latin contra and patior, “suffer the opposite.” Within the context of the Inferno, it refers to the punishment of souls “by a process either resembling or contrasting with the sin itself.”606 For example, the lustful are blown about by violent winds, which represents how they were controlled

by passion during their lifetime (resemblance), while the diviners have their heads screwed on backwards because during lifetime they were constantly looking forwards (contrast). Marechal devises a punishment of the winemakers of Mendoza that resembles their occupation but contrasts with their sin. Schultz describes how he cleverly invented a punishment for these winemakers, who in order to keep wine prices high, dumped perfectly good wine into the sewers:

--Los he puesto en un lugar –se apresuró a tentarme el astrólogo--, donde pisan eternamente uvas podridas, al son de un violín agrio, rechinante, diabólico, rascado por cierto violinista sanjuanino. Vargas de nombre y tuerto de condición, el cual, de pie sobre un barril y con Mandinga en el cuerpo, ejecuta día y noche su estúpido Malambo de Cabra Tetona. (592)

[I’ve put them in a winepress, said the astrologer, pushing his advantage, where they eternally stomp rotten grapes to the sound of a sour, screeching, diabolical fiddle being scratched by a one-eyed fiddler from the province of San Juan, Vargas by name; day and night, standing on a keg in a state of demonic possession, he plays his moronic Malambo de la Cabra Tetona.] (472)

Here, their punishment of eternally making wine contrasts with their sin of throwing it away. The added musical accompaniment by the fiddler of San Juan makes the punishment uniquely Argentine (the Malambo being an Argentine folk dance), and hysterically absurd.

Another tendency of Marechal’s when devising contrapassi is to come up with extremely vulgar punishments. The punishment of the adulterers is to drag their genitals over sharp stones: “Approaching the bank of the riverbed, I saw what workers had in tow: their own sexual organs, but grown to incredibly monstrous proportions; they were tugging and jerking them over to the sharp stones of the ravine” (426). Here and elsewhere in Cacodelphia, there is no lack of vulgarity, although Adán insists that his descriptions are toned-down because he holds back “certain crude details ill-suited to the decorum I wish for my story; indeed, the reader will often find me teetering on the edge of indecency” (425).
Although we might expect to find a female counterpart of Francesca in the Ravine of the Adulterers, the overwhelming majority of sinners punished here are male. The principle female figures in Marechal’s circle of the Lustful are to be found in the Meadow of the Ultras. Here we encounter Lady Titania, a parody of Victoria Ocampo, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. Adán also sees friends from the salon and his neighborhood, such as Marta Ruiz and Ruth of “The Golden Ant,” who “hugged their lyres of gilded cardboard” or “belligerently brandished toy popguns” (430-431). Only then does he notice “the excessive theatricality of both scenario and actors – a hyperbolic falseness that seemed intentional” (431).

The sixth scene of the circle of Lust is the Labyrinth of Solitary Souls, where Adán and Schultz encounter “the Grand Solitary.” He expresses himself in confusing metaphors rather than plain language. He is looking for Valeria, who represents the new Argentine aristocracy:

Valeria es el gajo final y sublime de una familia de estancieros. “Aristocracia nueva,” me dirá usted. ¡Bah! Los alambiques argentinos destilan rápidamente. Verdad es que su abuelo, un antiguo resero del sur, no se acostumbró jamás a dormir en un lecho corriente, habituado como estaba él a pasar la noche sobre su caballo y al aire libre. Dueme aún en un caballo de talabartería instalado en un lujoso dormitorio: a su alrededor se alzan decoraciones de teatro que representan la llanura; y cuando el viejo dormita en su alazán de madera y envuelto en su pijama de raso en forma de chiripá, ventiladores especiales ubicados en el dormitorio le arrojan un pampero de imitación, y fonógrafos ocultos lo arrullan con el balido de las majadas. (552-553)

[Valeria is the last, sublime descendant of a ranching family. “New aristocracy,” you’ll say. Bah! The alembics of Argentina distill rapidly. True, her grandfather was an old cowboy from the south, accustomed to spending nights on horseback out on the range – never got used to sleeping in a regular bed; still sleeps on a saddlery horse installed in his luxurious bedroom decorated with prairie landscapes. There the old man dozes on his wooden sorrel horse, his satin pyjama swathing him like a chiripá, while a simulated pampero blows over him from strategically placed fans, and the lowing of cattle comes from hidden phonographs to lull him.] (434)

The episode of the Grand Solitary and his poetic creation, Valeria, makes fun of the image of the ideal Argentine (a cultured, Europeanized aristocrat) fostered by Mitre and Sarmiento’s
generation. Although her grandfather is a gaucho, completely unaccustomed to “civilization,” Valeria has a bathroom of porcelain, “with illustrations from Ovid, Boccaccio, and other great masters of universal literature” (434). But she is only a product of the Grand Solitary’s imagination. When Schultz and Adán tell him to forget about his “delirious metaphors,” he insists that he no longer has to write because she is a reality:

"¡Valeria existe!—declamó en tono fanático—. El viento que mece las azucenas de su jardín calza chapines de agua y silba los preludios de Debussy. Nuestro paso se convirtió en un trote violento. --Los camisones de Valeria —insistió él, trotando a nuestro lado—fueron tejidos en los rumorosos telares de la aurora...(553)

Valeria exists! He declaimed fanatically. The wind that sways the lilies of her garden wears slippers of water and whistles the preludes of Debussy. Our pace became a frenzied trot. -Valeria’s nightshirts, he insisted as he trotted at our side, were woven at the murmuring looms of aurora…” (434-435)

The episode shows that the construction of the image of an ideal Argentine, is no different than the construction of a poetic image, or ideal lady. The parody also evidences Marechal’s level of contempt for the airs of the land-owning elite.

**Gluttony: Meat and Mixed Identity**

Exiting the Circle of the Lustful, Adán and Schultz come to two huge doors covered in bas-reliefs with Edenic garden scenes on the left and of scenes of endless toil and strife on the right. Adán must decipher “their occult allegorical meaning” in order to gain entrance into the Hell of Gluttony. The two sides of the door “tell stories in contrast and opposition” (436). While the left side depicts the Golden Age, the right symbolizes the Iron Age.

Since Cacodelphia is said to be the counterfigure of the visible Buenos Aires, Marechal mentions many local eateries and traditional foods like the *parrillada criolla*. We also encounter
Ciro Rossini, whose restaurant Ciro’s Gazebo was the setting of Book IV. Immediately upon entering the circle Adán is bombarded by nauseating sights and smells:

las primeras [sensaciones] en ofenderse fueron mis narices, al recibir una tufarada nauseabunda que me hizo pensar si Schultze no habría reunido en aquel antro todos los bodegones de la cortada Carabelas, todas las cantinas de la Boca, todas las churrasquerías de los Mataderos, todas las lecherías de la Paternal y todas las pizzerías del Paseo de Julio. (558)

[My sense of smell was hit first, and by a stench so nauseating that it made me wonder if Schultz hadn’t gathered all the eateries in Buenos Aires into that hole – inns in Carabelas Alley, cantinas in the Boca, grills in Mataderos, dairies in Paternal, plus every last pizzeria on the Paseo de Julio.] (438)

The circle of Gluttony is a monstrous banquet, consisting of kitchens, dining area, and “vomitoria.” The cooks are the Cyclops who tend the endless quantities of meat:

Unos [Cíclopes] hacían girar monstrosos asadores, ensartados en los cuales se doraban enteros los gordos novillos de la invernada, las grasientas vaquillonas con cuero, y las potrancas de jugoso matambre, caras a los ranqueles devoradores de yeguarizos; otros hacían llover un diluvio de salmuera sobre lechones y corderos asados verticalmente, o bien sobre parrillas inmensas en las que se tostaban a millares los chinchulines, las tripas gordas, los riñones, las ubres, los testículos y otros órganos internos y externos de bestias mamíferas, junto a sus hermanos de fuego, los chorizos criollos, las cantábricas morcillas, los codeguines itálicos, las longanizas béticas y los salchichones tudescos; (559)

[Some chefs were turning monstrous spits on which whole animals were impaled and roasting golden brown: there were steers fat from winter pasture, greasy heifers with the skin on, and fillies that provide the juicy flank steak so dear to the Ranquel Indians, devourers of horsemeat. Other chefs were basting the suckling pigs and lambs roasting on vertical spits with copious brine, or pouring it over immense grills where thousands of chitterlings, large intestines, kidneys, udders, and testicles, as well as other internal and external mammalian organs were sizzling, alongside their brothers in fire, the sausages: chorizos criollos, Cantabrian blood sausage, Italian cotechini, long Andalusian sausages, and Teutonic frankfurters.] (439)
As we can see from this playful passage, even the selection of meat varieties reflects the many ethnic influences present in Argentina. Perhaps the only common denominator among Argentines is their carnivorous habits.

Just as Dante’s characters dialogue with different speech patterns depending on their social status and city of origin, Marechal’s sinners speak in ways that mimic their cultural origin and occupation. Ciro Rossini’s speech mixes Italian and Spanish: “¡Una fiestita in familia! ¡Bravo! A tavola!” (560) Such speech patterns were common among Italian immigrants who arrived with little or no schooling in Spanish, and therefore mixed Spanish with their native dialects. Their mixture of Spanish and Italian was dubbed cocoliche (a derogatory term) by the locals.

The speech of Don Celso, the priest, is laced with Latin and biblical terms and retains the rhythmic quality of the liturgy:

-Mis amados hermanos en Cristo, si la premura de vuestra excursión os deja tiempo aún para escuchar otra historia, no cerréis vuestros oídos a la mía, que deseo referiros ahora, no tras un vanidoso afán de literatura, sino con el deseo de que sus enseñanzas os adviertan, edifiquen y hagan fructificar en la virtud que me faltó arriba. Peccavi tibi, Domine! Mea culpa! (567)

[-My beloved brethren in Christ, should the pressing demands of your excursion allow you sufficient time to hear another story, close not your ears to the one I wish to relate to you now, motivated not by literary vanity, but rather by the desire that its lessons may instruct and edify you, and render you fruitful in the virtue I lacked there above. Peccavi tibi, Domine! Mea culpa!] (446)

He also employs metaphors from the Bible, for example that of Christ as shepherd:

-Almas buenas que me escucháis, aquel rebaño villacrispino era el que me confió Nuestro Señor para que lo vigilase, asistiera y encaminase a los prados eternos. De todas y cada una de mis ovejas debería darle cuenta yo en su hor, como lo hizo El mismo con su Padre Celestial: “Tui erant, et mihi eos dedisti, et sermonem tuum servaverum”, vale decir: “Tuyos eran, y me los diste a mí, y guardaron tu palabra.” (567)

[Gentle souls who listen to me, the Villa-Crespian flock of yesteryear was the one Our Lord entrusted to me, that I might watch over it, care for it, and lead it to the
eternal meadows. To Him must I account for each and every one of my sheep when their hour arrives, as did He Himself to his Heavenly Father. "Tui erant, et mihi eos dedisti, et sermonem tuum servaverunt." In the vernacular: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them to me; and they have kept thy word."] (446-447)

The priest’s speech patterns and quotes from the Bible (in this case John 17:6) contrast with the brutish utterances of the Cyclops, who use lunfardo terms and speak with a lisp. Marechal marks this orthographically by replacing all “s”s with “z”s:

“¡Seleuco! –gruñó, dirigiéndose a su camarada --¿Qué hacen aquí estos dos tirifilos? Mironex, de juro –le respondióceceando el otro Cíclope--¡Dejámeloz a mí, Crizanto!” (569)

[-Seleucus! he grunted to his companion. What’s this pair of patsies doing here? -Rubberneckerth, for sure, lisped the other Cyclops in response. Leave’m to me, Chryanthuth!] (449)

Schultz has a hard time controlling the unruly Cyclops:

-¡Ralea despreciable! Los he rescatado graciosamente del bric-a-brac de la Mitología, donde se amontonaban como trastos viejos, y les he dado aquí un destino muy superior al que se merecían. ¿Y ahora se me hacen los gallitos? ¡Así paga el diablo! (570)

[-Despicable wretches! I did you the favour of rescuing you from the junk bin of Mythology, where you languished like old bits of bric-à-brac, and gave you a destiny much better than you deserve. And what do the arrogant little pups do in return? That’s the Devil’s gratitude for you!] (450)

This prompts the theological question from Adán of how the created can rebel against its creator.

The two narrowly escape with their lives.

Avarice: The Plutobario

While circle 3 took us through the myriad eateries of the “invisible” Buenos Aires, circle 4 is a tour of its downtown financial district. Here, where the sin punished is avarice, the focus is

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607 “tirifilo” is a derogatory lunfardo term which means a person who puts on airs. It is synonymous with “petimetre,” which derives from the French “petit-maitre.”
on corruption in banking and big business and on the uneven distribution of wealth. The landscape evokes the industrial areas of the city:

[I could now make out the irascible multitude shouting and pushing and shoving each other before us in a kind of vast arena or battlefield, which was ringed by a belt of ruined factories, broken smokestacks, truncated skyscrapers, and crumbling mansions. Everything my eyes took in, plafond and ground, city and men, faces and clothes, was tinted the same hypocritical, shitty yellow I just mentioned – a colour that could not hide its falsity, a trinket-like colour of gilded brass. Only later did I find out that Schultz, when he used it in his Plutobario, was trying to suggest the notion of corrupt gold, gold that betrays its destiny, gold in a state of mortal sin.] (455)

This section is populated by businessmen (capacious Perramus coats and fat cigars), heroes of the Stock Exchange (sporty suits and congested faces), merchants in stiff tuxedos or impeccable workcoats, directors of companies, and alchemists of speculation (456). They are all running, colliding with one another, and falling in the yellow dust, “in the midst of a hurly-burly of bonds, banknotes, securities, and shares that a great, erratic wind swept and swirled over the ground according to no other law than its own caprice” (456). Adán recognizes familiar faces, such as the blind beggar, Polyphemous. Adán is puzzled at his presence here among the filthy rich, but the omniscient reader remembers him from Book II as the con-man beggar of San Bernardo.

One specific section of the circle of Avarice is dedicated to the Buenos Aires lumberyard. Adán and Schultz enter a gigantic shed:
Entonces nuestro andar se volvió difícil, pues acabábamos de meternos en un cobertizo gigante, donde se amontonaba y corroía todo un escorial de hierro viejo: locomotoras en desuso, calderas despanzurradas, rieles y engranajes comidos por la herrumbre detenían nuestro paso y nos obligaban a dar fastidiosos rodeos. [...] Era la playa de un vasto corralón de madera, con sus apilamientos de troncos, rollizos y tablones en rústica sobre los cuales un guinche negro mantenía extendido su brazo de horca: en el fondo se levantaba el edificio industrial, cuarteado de paredes, roto de claraboyas, ciego de ventanas y hundido de techos; diez pasos al frente, una chimenea resquebrajada parecía trastabillar sobre su pie de ladrillos; el silencio, la frialdad y el abandono manaban de aquellas ruinas como el sudor de un muerto. (579)

[There we had to slow down to a tortuous walk, for we had just entered a gigantic shed, where rusty old iron was piled up everywhere in a veritable slag heap: abandoned locomotives, blown-out boilers, rust-eaten rails and cogs [...] It was a vast lumberyard full of stacks of logs, rounds, and rough-hewn timber; above them, a black crane extended its gallows arm. At the back of the yard rose an industrial building; its walls were cracked and split, its skylights broken, its windows blind, its roof caving in. Ten paces ahead, a crumbling smokestack seemed to totter on its brick footings. Silence, cold, and a sense of abandon seemed to ooze from the ruins like sweat from a dead man.] (459)

At the saw mill they run into Señor Lombardi, of the industrial Villa Crespo. He is the infamous boss of the sawmill, and the character who earlier in the novel would pass by the San Bernardo Church and raise his hat and pretend to scratch so as not to let on he was saluting. In Hell he is tormented by the one-armed man, one of his former employees who lost his limb at the mill and was denied by Señor Lombardi the insurance that was due him. His second demon is the old man, the stoker, whom he mercilessly threw out of the sawmill, “when he could no longer lift a shovel. Forty-six years at the boiler had consumed his eyes, dried out his body, and had his nostrils constantly dripping yellow mucous into his mustasche. But can he ever handle a shovel now! He’s the right-hand man of old One-Arm!” (461) The two victims of Señor Lombardi seek retaliation in Hell. Interestingly, he actually repents, unlike Dante’s sinners in Hell who are generally incapable of fully admitting their guilt. For Dante, repentance is something which only pertains to
Purgatory. Señor Lombardi realizes that not only did he deprive his employees of money by paying them minimum wage, but he also deprived them of “human time”:

Al afirmar que les robé su tiempo de hombres, digo su tiempo de cantar, de reír, de contemplar y de saber. ¡Y aquí viene la gran diablura teológica! Porque, al robarles todo eso, les he robado quizás el instante único, la sola oportunidad a que tiene derecho hasta el hombre más ruín: la oportunidad de mirar sin sobresaltos una flor o un cielo; la de oír sin angustia la risa de sus chicos y el canto de sus mujeres; la de hallar, entonces, que la vida es dura pero hermosa, que por un Dios les fue dada, y que ese Dios es bueno…(582)

When I say I robbed them of their human time, I mean their time for singing, laughing, contemplating, and knowing. And that’s where the great theological mischief comes into play! Because by robbing them of all that, I robbed them perhaps of that special moment, the unique opportunity even the lowliest man has a right to: the chance to look in peace and quiet at a flower or a skyscraper, hear without anxiety his children laugh and his wife sing, and so discover that life is hard but beautiful, God-given by a good God…](461-462)

The greedy business owners in Cacodelphia are responsible in part for the poor living conditions of the citizens of Buenos Aires. After witnessing the desolation of the sawmill, they have to pass through factories, foundries, spinning mills, and washing plants. The next area where they pause is an urban housing development under construction. “There were scaffoldings and heavy machinery; bricks and bags of cement were stacked here and there. […] The first building was a mere skeleton of reinforced concrete: an enormous cage, an outline of ten floors and twenty apartments” (462). Here they meet Don Abel Sánchez de Aja Berija y Baraja, who has amassed a fortune by exploiting renters in the tenements he builds. Here Marechal makes use of sarcasm to censure the corruption of Buenos Aires real estate moguls:

-Este hombre –continuó Schultze--, haciendo gala de un lirismo raro en nuestros días, viene consagrándose a la difícil misión de aposentar a sus conciudadanos; para lo cual ha erigido en Buenos Aires treinta mansiones colectivas, de veinte

--Abel Sanchez (1917) is a novel by Miguel de Unamuno treating the Cain and Abel theme.
departamentos cada una, donde, sólo con pagar un alquiler exorbitante, sus conciudadanos pueden gozar de una existencia verdaderamente paradisíaca. El origen de su vocación es oscuro, aunque no menos honroso, pues viene de los tradicionales conventillos que don Abel Sánchez poseyó a su hora, y donde, según rezan los archivos de la Justicia de Paz, abundó él en obras tan altruistas como la de lanzar a una saludable intemperie al huérfano, a la viuda o al desvalido que se le atrasaba en el pago de sus irrisorias mensualidades. (583)

[-This man, continued Schultz, displays a lyrical virtue rare in our time. He has been devoting himself to the difficult mission of providing chambers for his fellow citizens. To that noble end, he has erected in Buenos Aires thirty apartment buildings, with twenty suites apiece, wherein his fellow citizens may enjoy a veritably paradisal existence, if only they pay an exorbitant rent. The dawn of his vocation, though obscure, is nonetheless honourable, for it stems from Don Abel Sanchez’s past practice in the traditional conventillos where – as recorded in the archives of the Justice of the Peace – he performed a great many altruistic deeds, such as throwing out orphans, widows, and the destitute who fell behind in their ludicrous monthly rent.] (463)

Marechal criticizes the squalid living conditions of conventillos and evidences the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Although various episodes in Cacodelphia such as this one have a moral message, morality is not the primary focus of Marechal’s inferno. He clarifies this in “Las claves de Adán Buenosayres”: “Si yo hubiera querido fustigar, en moralista o en perverso, a mis alegres conciudadanos, habría concebido un Infierno solemne y rabioso, a la manera de Dante.” [If I had wanted to whip, as a moralizer or a pervert, my happy fellow citizens, I would have imagined a solemn and angry inferno, à la Dante]. The majority of Marechal’s inferno, rather than focus on the moral depravity of Argentines, focuses on the inadequacies of their national literature. Marechal’s Cacodelphia is comprised of myriad metaliterary moments that highlight the challenges of creating meaningful, transcendent literature while avoiding crass imitation.

609 Claves, 16.
Metafiction is a literary device used self-consciously and systematically to draw attention to a work’s fictional status. It poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. All of *Adán Buenosayres*, and the “Journey to Cacodelphia” in particular, is marked by metaliterary moments. In most of the episodes, a writer or storyteller’s attempt to create fiction results in failure, a failure which is acknowledged either by other characters, or by the storyteller himself. The constant second-guessing of the storytelling process and the resultant bickering over stylistic choices creates a work which is so self-consciously fictional as to convey the Argentine sense of insecurity with regard to their national literature. In the following section, I will divide these metaliterary moments into four main types: 1) Schultz, creator of Cacodelphia, must tell stories with a certain bravura to pass from one circle of hell to another; 2) Adán, our poet protagonist, must come to terms with failed experiences in storytelling; 3) secondary characters encountered in Cacodelphia share stories involving failed storytelling; and 4) comparisons are made between this story and its inadequacy in regards to other infernal journeys.

Let us begin with Schultz, the ostensibly arrogant but inwardly insecure creator of Cacodelphia. At the beginning of the journey he explains to Adán that his priority in designing the Helicoid was to avoid the crass imitation of the classics. “--When I decided to give a visible image to the intelligible Cacodelphia, the astrologer began, my first concern was to avoid crass imitations” (403). Schultz is constantly preoccupied with being original, and becomes highly defensive when his originality is put into question. This happens, most notably, when Midas denies our heroes passage until Schultz can prove his identity through storytelling prowess.

Whereas in the *Divine Comedy* Midas is concerned with judging the morality of the sinners and assigning them to their due circle, Marechal’s Midas is concerned only with judging the
storytelling skills of his creator. When Schultz demands that as author of this inferno he should have the right of way through it, Midas calls him “a liar and yellow-bellied coward” (473) and forces him to undergo questioning to prove he is the demigurge. This identity-verifying, storytelling exam turns into an “exemplary display of pedantry on both sides” (474).

The question of the examination is: “Do you think […] that the iniquities and depredations committed by the so-called bourgeois class, or third estate, warrant its being amputated from the social body?” (474) What ensues is a tour de force of argumentation. What matters most to Midas is that the content be expressed with “grace, concision, and brevity,” and he finds many elements of Schultz’s response unsatisfactory. His first reproach of Schultz’s performance is on account of his use of stale metaphors. When he speaks of how every organ must function for the good of the body, Midas scoffs, “A comparison as old as the hills!” When Schultz nevertheless continues with the metaphor Midas shouts “Enough of the organ, already!” (475)

Midas’ second reproach is that Schultz is overly pedantic and exaggerated in his use of metaphor. He interjects, “Whoa there, mister! […] Spare me the metaphorical ballistics!” But Schultz persists in his pedantry, citing both Seneca and verses from Psalms 2:10 in Latin. This causes Midas to draw the line: “I beg you! Midas reprimanded him again. State your case in straightforward language. Have you forgotten you are addressing the general public?” (476) This criticism causes Schultz to shift gears, but in doing so he overshoots his mark:

--Decía – sentenció Schultze –que no hay bien que dure mil años. En lo mejor se da vuelta la taba, y, tras de suerte, culo; porque nunca falta un buey cornet, y el mundo es una bola que rodando y rodando… (596)

[-I was saying, said Schultz sententiously, that all good things come to an end. Just when the going looks good, somebody’s gotta upset the applecart, because there’s always one bad egg, and that’s just the way the cookie crumbles…] (476)
The extreme pedantry, abandoned for a ridiculous string of colloquial phrases intended to be intelligible to the “gran público” is a parody of two major tendencies of Argentine literature: one, which Marechal’s portrays as Eurocentric and pedantic, and the other, which he portrays as colloquial and uncouth.

As Schultz continues his response to Midas’ question, Midas responds that it is “accurate in substance” although “vulgar in form.” “Don’t forget that I’m addressing the general public,” Schultz reminds him venomously. (476) Although nothing seems to please Midas, Schultz does not lose confidence, and instead starts to build momentum. This elicits a “not bad” from Midas, who then goes in for a major blow to Schultz’s story-telling ego by pointing out that his ideas, far from being original, have been influenced by a “certain Gallic metaphysician.”610 This criticism in particular causes the previously composed Schultz to turn visibly red, which he later tells Adán is “not with embarrassment” but out of “righteous indignation.” Not only does he later defend his originality in front of Adán, but he also becomes flustered on the spot:

- Vea, señor –le dijo tartamudeando-- sí utilicé un esquema de otro, ¡y nada más que un esquema!, lo he revestido en cambio de una carnadura bastante original. Por otra parte, ahora viene lo de mi cosecha. (597)

[- Look here, sir, he stammered. If I used someone else’s schema, and nothing more than a schema, I have on the other hand fleshed it out in quite an original fashion. Moreover, my own contribution is coming up.] (477)

His defensiveness indicates insecurity. As an Argentine author trying to be original, he is particularly concerned about being viewed as an imitator. Since his inferno is based on Dante’s schema, his first preoccupation with regards to its creation was to “avoid crass imitations.” But yet even the neogogue will at times be guilty of the very imitation he claims to despise. For example,

610 This metaphysician is René Guénon, whose 1921 *Introduction générale à l’étude des doctrines hindous* are the basis of Schultz’s discourse. Barcia 626n20, 628n6, and 637n7.
in Circle 3, when telling the story of a former love, Nora, whom he abandoned prior to their wedding, he employs an artificial style typical of romance and melodrama:

“¡oh primavera!, ¡oh juventud! ¡adiós, adiós! [...] ¿Quiénes andaban por el jardín? ¡Tristán e Isolda, Romeo y Julieta, Abelardo y Eloísa! Adiós, juventud! El romance ha muerto. ¡Una lápida! ¡Que pongan una lápida sobre la tumba del romance! Con un epitafio que diga: “Pasajero, aquí yace un amor”. (564-565)

[“Oh, springtime! O youth! Farewell, farewell! [...] Who was that couple walking in the garden? Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Abelard and Heloise! Romance has died. A tombstone! Place a tombstone on the grave of romance! With the epitaph: “Wayfarer, here lies a love affair.”] (444)

On this occasion his storytelling is so bad that he is reprimanded by Adán, his pupil: “Take it easy! I said. And speak naturally! Can’t you spare us that ghastly language of melodrama?” (444) At least on this occasion with Midas, Schultz is able to tone down his pedantry, reign in his colloquialisms, and produce a brilliant discourse on how the inferior class, the Vaishya, will usurp the true mysticism of the Brahmin and impose his gross mystic cult of materialism (478). Schultz concludes his story with descriptions of Vaishya’s fundamental vulgarity, which actually get Midas to laugh. Schulz later recounts that “only after that moment did the crowned man put aside the stiff demeanor of the examiner.” He completely wins over his audience by imitating the thoughts and speech of the vulgar Vaishya. This causes Midas to proclaim, “I can just hear him!” At the conclusion of Schultz’s examination, Mr. Midas “warmly congratulated him.” His other audience member, Adán, however, is fast asleep. Still, Schultz interprets the event as a victory, and, his usual arrogance restored, assures Adán in his “infinite modesty” that his discourse “sums up the greatest wisdom ever uttered in the philosophy of history” (481). This also pokes fun at Dante’s the poet’s feigned humility.

This is not the only occasion that Schultz will have to story-tell his way into the next circle. A similar rite of passage occurs prior to his encounter with Midas, when passing from the circle
of Gluttony to the Circle of Avarice. Here the heroes come face-to-face with a gaunt and menacing judge seated on a courtroom dais. When they approach him, he asks “How were the poor devils?” and Schultz is required to tell three Argentine folktales before they are allowed to pass. They are part of a tradition of stories that begin with this formula, which is the equivalent of “How did the trouble start?” The first is the story of the fox and the sheep, the second of the woodtick and the roadrunner, and the third of the farmer, the tiger, and the fox. For each story correctly told, the judge advances a step down the dais.

Adán, perplexed, asks, “And what meaning is there in that mishmash of little fables you’ve just fed me?” Schultz responds that “Tomorrow’s researchers, the astrologer pronounced modestly, will bust their butts trying to dig out the admirable meaning hidden in those little fables” (455). According to Cheadle, this is a pointed reference to Joyce’s well-known explanation of Ulysses: “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of ensuring one’s immortality.”

This is another example of Schultz’s literary arrogance, and a reminder that storytelling can be reduced to a clever game with no underlying meaning.

The third time Schultz must resort to storytelling to gain passage to a deeper circle of Cacodelphia is to conquer Geryon. A far cry from Dante’s great mythical beast, Marechal’s Geryon is “a dwarf dragon.” It has eyes which sparkle mischievously and a toothless mouth: “this was a happy dragon, a decent sort. So, the animal was watching us and smiling at us; at the same time it was gently wagging its tail, not without jiggling a bunch of olive-green fecal marbles tinkling

611 Cheadle, n59, p. 677.

612 The dragon is Schultz’s totemic animal. As Cheadle points out, Xul Solar painted several watercolors with the motif of the dragon: Dos Dragos (1920), Dama, pájaro, drago (1922), Hombre y dragón (1922), Drago y dama fluctúo (1923), Drago San Jorge (1923), and Drago (1927).
like glass beads as they bounced against one another” (482). Adán naively asks, “what are we supposed to do with this creature?” Schultz quips, “If you’d paid more attention to your classics, he answered, you’d know that in cases like this, facing a dragon, you’ve got to make it fall fast asleep.” He looked around, suddenly anxious: “--Son of a bitch! He groaned. Where did I put my arsenal of hypnotics? (482) The so-called arsenal of hypnotics is not drugs as one might expect, but Argentine literature. They attempt to put the dragon to sleep with poetry: “Doing as I was told, I showered the dragon with a terrific flood of metaphors, and was lucky enough to see the monster’s eyelids droop for a moment, as if an irresistible torpor had overcome it” (483). Ultimately the poetry is not enough to defeat the dragon. It recovers and smiles at Adán “with the utmost tenderness and wag[s] its tail in a show of delight” (483). To get the resilient dragon to doze off, they have to read it the Code of Mining Regulations, the Telephone Directory, a Dissertation by the Council of History and Numismatics, and other such documents. Referring to Argentine literature as a “terrific flood of metaphors” also foreshadows how the book will end when Adán and Schultz come face-to-face with a more formidable monster, the Paleogogue.

The False Parnassus

The problem of bad Argentine poetry will be addressed head-on in the sector known as the False Parnassus. Schultz explains that it is the sector “where the pseudogogues metaphorically display their peacock tails, under the direction of the false muses or Antimuses, as I’ve named them” (555). Adán is reluctant to tour this sector because he does not want to converse with men of his métier, many of whom are his former friends encountered in Books I-V. Furthermore, he is uncomfortable here because he knows himself to be guilty: “Truth be told, my own tail of straw made me vulnerable”613 (556).

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613 This idiom means to feel guilty or at fault.
This episode is perhaps the most metaliterary of them all. Those punished here are guilty of crass literary interpretation. The new environment is said to be “decked out in all the poetic colours imaginable” (555). The setting for the false poets is a “cardboard Parnassus”:

As they enter, Schultz takes on “a certain quizzical look typical of artists who, being not quite satisfied with a piece of work, hesitate to display it” (555). The first contingent of pseudogogues to appear is lead by the False Euterpe (the muse of music in Greek mythology), who is an elderly and constipated spinster who hacks up greenish phlegm. Among her group of sinners Adán encounters Luis Pereda (Borges), whose presence here incites his outrage. Although Adán and Pereda were often at each other’s throats in the literary disputes in Books I-V, here Adán comes to his defense. Like Dante encountering Brunetto Latini, he shows affection for his literary friend,
but unlike Dante (who comes to understand the decisions of a just God in condemning sinners),

Adán protests with Schultz regarding Pereda’s placement:

-¡Eso no está bien! –le dije a Schultze--. No hay duda que, según las más respetables
tradiciones, el inventor de un Infierno tiene la prerrogativa de acomodar en él a
todos sus enemigos; así se obró hasta el presente, y si alguna vez el arquitecto
infernal introdujo a un amigo en la ronda, fue para darle un papel vistoso en el que
pudiera lucirse. Entonces, ¿qué necesidad había de inflijar a nuestro camarada
Pereda el bochorno de figurar en este burdel? (681)

[This isn’t right! I told Schultz. Sure, according to venerable tradition, the inventor
of an Inferno enjoys the right to put his enemies in it; it’s been common practice up
to the present. But if the creator of an Inferno brought a friend in on the act, it was
to give the friend a chance to look good in a smart role. So, what need was there to
inflict upon our comrade Pereda the ignominy of showing up in this bordello?] (556)

But the False Euturpe argues that Pereda has been justly placed in this inferno. She explains that
he stands accused of “wandering around the barrios of Buenos Aires playing the malevo, his bully-
boy glances slanting off left and right, spitting between his teeth, and muttering the poorly learned
lyrics of some tango” (557). In other words, he is accused of imitating and glorifying an immoral
figure. The malevo was a favorite character of a young Borges who sought to mythologize the
space where the pampa and Buenos Aires meet. Beatriz Sarlo refers to his specific type of
criollismo as “avant-garde urban criollismo.”614 The False Euturpe continues her accusation: “Don
Luis wanted to give literary expression to his mystico-suburban fervour; he went so far as to invent
a false Mythology in which the malevos of Buenos Aires acquire not only heroic proportions but
even vaguely metaphysical dimensions” (557). Adán defends Pereda and says that for this very
reason he deserves laurels:

-¿No se ha dicho que sobre nuestra literatura viene gravitando un oneroso espíritu
de imitación extranjera? ¡Se ha dicho, no lo niegue! Y cuando un hombre como
Pereda sale a reinvindicar el derecho que lo criollo tiene de ascender al plano

universal del arte, se lo ridiculiza y zahiere hasta el punto de hacerle sufrir las incomodidades de un infierno. Pues bien, señora, yo me inclino ante nuestro campeón; y me descubriría reverentemente, si no hubiera perdido mi sombrero en este condenado Helicoide. (682)

[Has it not been said that a heavy cloud has been hanging over our literature, a tendency to imitate foreign models? It’s been said, you can’t deny it! And when a man like Pereda goes out and vindicates the right of the criollo spirit to ascend to the universal plane of art, he gets mocked and ridiculed and subjected to infernal indignities. Well, Madame, I bow before our champion; and I’d reverently take off my hat to him, if I hadn’t lost it somewhere in this damned Helicoid.] (557)

It’s as if Marechal, who may not have agreed with Borges’s poetics, and certainly not with the criollismo of his early years, is here acknowledging that whatever their differences, they both had the same mission at heart: to make Argentine literature universally influential and original. Marechal places him in the inferno but has Adán support him.

Pereda thanks Adán and promises that when he gets out of here, he’ll buy Adán a gin at the pink general store on the corner (an allusion to one of his favorite symbols for Buenos Aires).615

But the False Euterpe insists that he is guilty and attacks his orthographic imitation of rural speech:

“Does that circumstance give him the right to geld the words of our language and write soledá for “soledad” and virtú for “virtud,” or pesao for “pesado” and salao for “salado”? (557) This is making fun of Borges’s imitation of gauchesque poetry which mimics the colloquial speech patterns of the rural Argentines. The next aspect of Borges’s writing that is under attack is his neologisms: “This gentleman has had the cheek to coin terms like “tile-floorishness” and “cisternism” and “bannisterdom” that scream bloody murder” (557).

The next group of writers on the chopping block are the ultraists, which Marechal had already belittled in the circle of the Lustful with his parody of Victoria Ocampo. The poetry read

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615 One of Borges famous symbols of Buenos Aires that appears in his early poetry. “Calle con almacén rosado” in Luna de enfrente, 1925 and in (Borges, OC, I, 57) and in “Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires” (OC, I, 81).
to the dragon (“the terrific flood of metaphors”) and the grand finale paragraph of the book may also both be parodies of *ultraísmo*, which had given metaphor such a privileged place. Borges described the primary principle of the movement as “the reduction of lyric poetry to its primordial element: the metaphor.” Borges, along with Marechal, Eduardo González Lanuza, Francisco Luis Bernardez, Oliverio Girondo had all, at one time, practiced *ultraísmo*.

The ultraist contingent of the pseudogogues wears pompous purple tunics. The False Euterpe accuses one man in particular of “the reprehensible mania of stringing together comparison after comparison, with no restraint whatsoever, and against the fundamental dictates of prudence” (558). Her accusations against him involve a ridiculous set of arbitrary comparisons:

Este señor, por ejemplo, ha colgado en la percha de su corazón el sobretodo gris de la melancolía; con alarmante frecuencia, se ha venido poniendo y sacando el camisón de la esperanza; comparó sucesivamente sus amores con un bar automático, una caja de fósforos y un par de botines. Ahora se ha envuelto en la frazada caliente de la duda, y no hay Dios que lo haga subir al tranvía del misterio. (683)

[This gentleman, for example, has hung on the hanger of his heart the grey overcoat of melancholy; and with alarming frequency he has donned and doffed the nightshirt of hope. He has compared his love, successively, to an automatic bar, a box of matches, and a pair of boots. Now he has muffled himself in the warm blanket of doubt, and no power in heaven could make him climb aboard the streetcar of mystery.] (558)

Upon hearing this sorry string of metaphors, Adán looks at the Purple Tunic with a “fraternal gaze.” He feels pity for this sinner because he himself is guilty of the same sin. This mirrors how the lustful Dante feels so much pity for Francesca’s story that he faints. Adán identifies with the man in the Purple Tunic, but corrects him by saying that metaphors should not bring what is superior down to the level of the inferior; rather they should raise the inferior to the superior: “To compare the sky with a water-closet is to offend the sky and heap ridicule on the water-closet”

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616 Cheadle, 685.
(558). At this bit of criticism, things get heated. The man in the purple tunic strikes back at Adán: “look who’s talking! A parrot of the new generation who has mortified us with the most absurd metaphors. Wasn’t it you who wrote that line about “love more joyous than a child’s funeral”?” (559) Next he attacks Adán’s lines “your sky is round and blue like the eggs of a partridge” and “in the climbing vines of her voice, a bird of grace broods over three little eggs”? (559) As Navascués and Cheadle point out in the notes, both verses are Marechal’s. The first is from “Poema sin título” (Días como flechas, 1926; OC I, 93-4), and the second is from “Elogio” published in the magazine Caras y Caretas (issue 1446, 19 June 1926; OC, I, 476). This brings up an interesting point, because it makes clear that Adán (Marechal) is as guilty as the rest of them, so much so that the False Euterpe wants to add Adán to her entourage. It is as if, then, Marechal is placing himself in hell rather than claiming, as Dante did, that he was the only one to enter hell who was saved. In Claves de Adán Buenosayres Marechal emphasizes the fact that he was also making fun of himself throughout the novel. One of his goals in writing Claves was to calm some of his literary colleagues who had taken offense at his parody. He defends himself by affirming that there was no aggression in this endeavor and that after all, he too was among those parodied:

Cierto es que los embarqué, junto con Adán, en aquella simbólica “Nave de los locos” (también al uso del medioevo) que recorrió la ciudad y el bajo de Saavedra; pero no lo hice con la intención maligna de exponer o ridiculizar sus estéticas (al fin y al cabo Adán es otro loco de la Nave), sino con el objeto de pintar los fervores, manías y gracias que lucimos todos en aquel movimiento literario. (17)

[What’s certain is that I embarked, along with Adam in the symbolic “Ship of fools” (also in use in the Middle Ages) that crossed the city and the lowlands of Saavedra. But I didn’t do it with the perverse intention of exposing or ridiculizing their aesthetics (after all, Adam is another fool of the Ship); rather I did it with the objective of depicting the fervour, manias, and joys which we all exhibit in that literary movement.]
Marechal explains that he wrote the work in the intellectual climate of the literary revolution and in the spirit of the journal *Martín Fierro* that was a “Parnaso Satírico.” It was to his great surprise that his colleagues reacted with unexpected hostility, and Marechal’s only explanation for this is that they had grown old, lost their sense of humor, and become defensive of their laurels (17). On the one hand, it’s easy to understand their vexation, considering that Marechal is depicting their literary attempts as failures, but on the other hand, the main point of his work is not to ridicule his fellow authors, but to make light of how desperately, fervently, and with great egoism, they all sought to produce poetry that was simultaneously universal, local, transcendent, and unique. Authors of Argentina felt a pressing need to prove themselves, and *Adán Buenosayres* is an expression of the collective lunacy of the literary sector in the early twentieth century as they fervently latched on to various trends. A metaphor for this frenzy, which Marechal very much considers a national problem, is to be found at the end of the episode of Don Moses Rosembaum, who abruptly runs off the stage where he life story is being told. As he makes his escape, the orchestra starts playing with gusto:

> el telón acababa de caer sobre la bacanal, y los músicos, para disimular el contratiempo, retomaban con brío su tema único, disfrazado ahora de pericón, mientras que los bailarines, heridos de un súbito frenesí, se movían en ronda, zapateaban como energúmenos, reían y gritaban, haciendo flamear pañuelos blancos y celestes. (590-591)

[The curtain had just come down on the bacchanal, and the musicians were trying to cover up the glitch by playing con brio the same old tune, tricked out now as a River Plate folk dance, while the dancers, lashed into a sudden frenzy, went round and round, stamping their feet like madmen, laughing and shouting, waving white- and-blue kerchiefs.] (470)

This is a metaphor for Argentine literature. Despite the nationalistic intent symbolized by the waving of the blue and white kerchiefs (the colors of the Argentine flag) and the great desire of
her artists (symbolized by the frenzy of the dancers and the gusto of the musicians), the end result does not rise above crass imitation (“an old tune, tricked out now as a River Plate folk dance”).

The poets of the False Parnassus are all guilty of imitation within their respective genres. After the criollistas and the ultraistas, Marechal mocks the religious poets, libertarian poets, erotic poets, dramatic poets, and comic idyllic poets. Although in this sector he limits his parody to poetry, in other sections he addresses failed attempts in writing prose. I would like to look at one such episode which is of primary importance in the novel, the story of the “Personage,” which spans twenty-one pages.

The story of the “Personage” is the story of a failed Argentine historical novelist. It is about loss of identity and the failure of the political system of a country. We meet the Personage in the sector of the Homoglobes, or balloon-men:

En aquel pedazo de atmósfera, y casi dos metros de tierra, flotaba una multitud de hombres de goma inflados casi hasta reventar: al soplo del viento se movían en una contradanza grotesca; chocaban entre sí, dándose panzazos y cabezadas, todo ello sin perder la gravedad risible de sus gestos fríos y solemnes. (607)

[In that portion of the atmosphere, at just about six-feet above the ground, floated a multitude of rubber men inflated to bursting point. They blew around in the wind in a grotesque contredanse, heads butting together and bellies bouncing off one another, all the while keeping up their ridiculously grave demeanour, their cold solemn expressions.] (487)

Adán runs into a deflated homoglobe lying on the ground, recalling how Dante bumps into Ugolino’s head on the frozen pond of circle nine. Schultz and Adán reflate the deflated balloon, and get him to tell them his story, which he titles “Invention and Death of a Personage” (488). As Cheadle explains in the note accompanying the episode, “personaje” (translated as personage) has a dual meaning in Spanish: 1) a public persona of note, and 2) a character in a literary, theatrical, or cinematic work of fiction.
The Personage belongs to the Argentine landowning class. He is said to be from an “illustrious family”; his great-grandfather was Colonel X, who fought alongside General San Martín in his cavalry charge at San Lorenzo. He was one of the first generation heroes, for whom “Patria was not a mother or even a bride; she was their newborn daughter, whose childhood would continue beyond their deaths” (490). His grandfather participated in the “desert” campaigns, the aim of which was to take possession of the land occupied by native peoples. He was a ranch owner and lover of the wilderness. When he died his sons divided up their ranch, La Rosada. The Personage’s father “dreamed of establishing a “patrician order” that might endow the wilderness with human forms and laws, and populate it with fervent multitudes who, by settling in our land, would add a new note to the universal cord” (490). His father’s vision is that of Mitre’s generation.

But his father’s dream is not to be realized. With “infinite bitterness” his father watches as the patricians abandon their family and lands in order to give themselves over “to such dubious interests and pernicious ambitions as seethed in the abstract heart of the City” (491). His father witnesses the waves of immigration, and the people who came in search of a way of life to replace the one they’d left behind. They did not find what they were looking for on the prairie, “in its state of abandon and formlessness” (491). Sadly, the father proclaims: “The era of the patricians is over; now comes the time of the lawyers.”

We learn early on in the tale that the Personage, like Adán, is prone to “literary inclinations” (491). He yearns to write the story of his family and of life on the pampas, but whenever he puts pen to paper, “all the talent I displayed so ardently at tertulias would peter out and vanish, like a ghost refusing incarnation.” In irritable discontent, he tells himself, “as so many others have done,” that his sterility might be due “to the lack of a propitious environment” (492). The Personage at this point interprets his failure as an author to a culturally-barren Argentina. His solution is to go
to the cultural center of Europe, Paris. While there, his father dies, and he and his brothers inherit the land. While his brothers sell their shares to finance electoral campaigns, he retains his land and returns from Paris, after realizing that his identity did not lie there. His purpose in going home is to reconstruct his identity, but upon arrival he is confronted with a bleak landscape void of the vivacity of Paris. The deserted countryside is “dotted with cow skeletons blanching under the sun” which represent Argentina as an inhospitable and desolate land with respect to Europe.

He tries in vein to rekindle the memories from childhood: “I went out to the park, searched for traces, invoked ghosts, stroked the odd tree, and chewed blades of grass in my desire to reconstitute my childhood – if only for a moment! But sources of freshness and flavours had died, and they refused to come back to life for me” (493). He describes his generation as “a generation quite without grandeur or lyricism” (494). Having given up on himself, he places his hope in his nephew Germán, a fellow intellectual who sets out to write *Song in the Blood*, a novel covering five generations of Argentines. 617 When Germán and his father get into a fight and Germán calls him a *cipayo* (a popular term meaning those selling out the nation), he is kicked out of the house. The Personaje sells his land to finance Germán’s passage to Europe. Although Germán succeeds in his endeavor to write the story of their family, the Personage leads a dejected existence, hanging out in dance halls on Maipú street, “where vacant beings like me, females for rent, and tangos grubby with sadness attempted to construct an impossible architecture of jubilation” (500). Once again Argentina is depicted as “vacant,” melancholy, and in need of meaning and identity.

The Personage gets himself into some trouble at these squalid hangouts, which merits the concern of his two brothers who are involved in politics. To keep him on a straight path, they offer him a job as “the General Directorate Z.” In order to succeed in this position, the Personage sells

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617 Cheadle claims that Germán may be a homage to Ricardo Güiralde who wrote *Cuentos de muerte y de sangre* [Stories of Death and of Blood]. Cheadle, 679.
out and becomes nothing but an empty mask. He tells Schultz and Adán that the job “methodically
destroyed all that was human in me,” and explains, “we were in a country where no man was
allowed to exercise government who did not have one foot already in the grave” (506).

The story can be interpreted as three failures, all of which are linked: failure to find personal
identity; failure of a political system to provide identity, and failure to write the story of Argentine
identity. Firstly, the Personage fails to find personal identity. His trip to Europe followed by his
return home only complicates the matter so that he feels that he belongs neither to one nor the
other continent. Secondly, the story of the Personage is a story of national-political failure, as the
country is unable to provide the Personage with a meaningful position in society. After failed
attempts as a landowner, he becomes a sort of malevo, and then a corrupt politician. Although
Argentina was once a promising country, it has not realized its potential:

lo cierto es que nuestro país, tras haber florecido en la primavera de sus héroes
militares y fructificado en el estío de sus próceres civiles, caduca hoy en el otoño
imbécil de sus Personajes o Figurones. (608)

[what’s certain is that our country, after having flowered in the springtime of its
military heroes and borne fruit in the summer of its civilian founding fathers, today
languishes in the imbecilic autumn of its Personages or Poseurs.] (488-489)

Argentina is a nation that produces Personages but fails to produce heroes: “The Hero was a
chieftain, a leader; the Personage is a bureaucrat.” Since heroes are the stuff of great literature,
particularly of epic literature, the country is at a loss on the literary front. The personages, unlike
heroes, do not help to provide identity, because they themselves are void of it:

el Personaje no es un “ente real”, sino un “ente de razón” inventado por alguien);
pero lo que constituye la esencia del Personaje es, justamente, una falta de esencia, un
vacío absoluto, una desolación interna que lo hacen capaz de asumir todas las
formas e imitar todas las actitudes. (608)

[the Personage is not a “real entity” but rather an “entity of reason” invented by
someone). But what constitutes the essence of the Personage is precisely his lack
of essence, an absolute void, an internal desolation enabling him to assume all shapes and imitate all attitudes.] (489)

The Personage is “nothingness” in a plush top hat,” which the Old Oligarchy produces “by the truckload, in order to give at least some “official” life to its otherwise lifeless, desiccated scions” (489).

Finally, the story of the Personage is the story of an unsuccessful literary endeavor. On every occasion, the Personage is unable to articulate the story of his family. The culturally vibrant environment he finds in Europe distracts him, and the culturally barren environment in Argentina sends him down a path of moral corruption. Although Germán’s *Song in the Blood* is said to have been published to great acclaim, the Personage falls asleep on the second page. Furthermore, the oral tale that the Personage tells Adán and Schultz receives mixed reviews. Adán feels compassion at his sad story, so much so that he and Schultz untie the string around the homoglobe’s nozzle so that his divine *pneuma* can have freedom. But we must remember, that Adán, like Dante, feels pity towards sinners who share the same sins. His story leaves the unbiased Schultz disgruntled:

--¡Que su *pneuma* divino recobre la libertad! --refunfuño Schultzze--. Nos ha encajado una historia quilométrica y abusó, a mi juicio, de las “frescuras” y de los “sabores”; pero defendió su alma, y si cayó no fue sin lucha. ¡Diablo de hombre! ¿Qué necesidad tenía de remontarse hasta su bisabuelo? (626)

[Let his divine pneuma have its freedom back! grumbled Schultz. He bored us long enough with his shaggy-dog story, going over the top, in my opinion, with his “freshness” and “flavours.” But he defended his soul, and didn’t go down without a fight. A real son of a gun! Why did he have to go all the way back to his great-grandfather?] (508)

Schultz does not judge the morality of the character, but is critical of his over-the-top storytelling style and the length of his tale, proving that Marechal’s inferno is more about storytelling than about morality as is Dante’s. On several occasions, Marechal directly addresses the reader to draw his consciousness toward the differences between his inferno and that of his literary predecessors.
In the early circles of Cacodelphia he plays with our cultural knowledge of literary catabasis to inform us that his inferno will not be like Dante’s in every respect:

Aquellos de mis lectores que tengan algún saber en materia de correrías infernales aguardarán aquí una invocación a las Musas o cualquier otro arrebato poético de los que tradicionalmente se estilan en estos lances. Y aguardará en vano, porque hasta en los portones de Cacodelphia me cortó Schultz las alas de todo posible lirismo. (526)

[Those of my readers who have some knowledge of infernal excursions will be expecting here an invocation to the Muses or some other flourish of poetic rapture as has traditionally been the fashion in these situations. Well, such readers are just going to have to do without, because right from the get-go at the gates of Cacodelphia, Schultz clipped the wings of any possible lyrical whimsy I might have indulged in.] (409)

He also informs us of the risk involved in undertaking a parody of the inferno:

Encasquetarse una aureola falsa, esgrimir endebles rayos de latón y parodiar el gesto de Dios en trance de manejar la balanza, es exponerse a dar en el sacrilegio y a ser silbado por la galería. (649)

[By putting on a false halo, brandishing feeble brassy thunderbolts, and parodying God’s handling of the scales of justice, one risks falling into sacrilege and getting jeered at by the peanut gallery.] (527)

These metaliterary moments, along with the many instances of failed storytelling in the book, make for a very self-conscious storytelling which takes into account the great potential for failure lurking at the turn of every page. It conveys the great insecurity felt by Argentine authors of the early twentieth century who had as their measuring sticks the great European classics. Marechal states the inadequacy of his own work with respect to Dante’s. In a direct address to the reader, Adán points out the fundamental difference between his infernal journey and that of his ancestral predecessor:

Lector amigo, si yo necesitara justificar la sueña que se apoderó de mí en el cuarto infierno de Schultze, te recordaría cien ilustres antecedentes registrados en otras tantas excursiones infernales. Alighieri, con ser quien era, durmió no poco en la
suya; y si el carácter metafísico de su viaje nos permite asignar un valor simbólico a las siestas de aquel bardo, podemos decir que Alighieri durmió en el lugar y hora debidos. Menos afortunado, realicé yo un descenso infernal sin proyecciones teológicas; y no dormí cuando hacerlo debía, sino cuando humanamente pude. ¡Bien dichoso eres tú, lector, que, sin obligaciones metafísicas ni otro cuidado alguno, puedes hacer tu siesta en cualquier página de mi verídica historia! (601)

[Reader, my friend, if I had to justify the drowsiness that came over me in the fourth circle of Schultz’s inferno, I should remind you of a hundred illustrious precedents recorded in as many infernal excursions. Alighieri, being who he was, slept quite a bit in the descent he made. If the metaphysical character of his journey allows us to assign a symbolic value to that bard’s siestas, we can say that Alighieri slept in the proper place at the proper time. Less fortunate than he, I made an infernal descent without theological projections. I didn’t sleep when I should have, but rather when it was humanly possible to do so. How lucky are you, reader! For, having no metaphysical obligations or any cares whatsoever, you can cop a snooze on any page at all of this, my true story!] (481)

Here it makes little difference if the reader snoozes because the story, without theological projections, is reduced to an empty literary game ending in a silly string of metaphors. The parody of the “Journey to Cacodelphia” is meant to contrast with Book VI, which is written in a refined style with theological implications as the internal motor of the story.

While Book’s VI and VII are based on Dante’s Vita Nuova and Inferno respectively, Books I-V are generally not associated with Dante. Albert de la Fuente, however, goes a step further, insisting that the internal structure of the entire novel is linked to that of the Divine Comedy. He associates Books I-V with Purgatory in that they relate the purification process of Adán on earth, a process which culminates in the salvation of his soul in front of the Christ of the Broken Hand. Book VI he relates to Paradise, as it describes the abstract journey of the soul and its understanding of divine love. Book VII, of course, is the parallel of Inferno.618 What is interesting then is that Adán’s journey occurs out of order. While the progression from purgatory to paradise makes sense,

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it is noteworthy that the book should end in the middle of the lowest circle of hell. A likely answer is that Marechal wanted to emphasize that the city of Cacodelphia represents the Buenos Aires of the 1920s, in his opinion not yet emerged from a state of chaos, corruption, and crass imitation. Book VII is the story of Argentines in potentia. Although Adán declares that he is “unable to endorse the reality our country’s currently living,” he describes himself as an “Argentine in hope” (135).

The problem, in Marechal’s opinion (which is voiced by Adán in Book II), is that those who immigrated to Argentina “cut the thread of their tradition and destroyed their scale of values upon arrival.” Adán’s proposed solution is to “retie that thread and rebuild my identity according to the values of my race.” The construction of identity is also seen as something which must be done collectively. When everyone does likewise, “the country will have a spiritual form” (135). Adán’s voice corresponds to Marechal’s opinion that the “doctrina justicialista” was the best solution for Argentina. He was attracted to the promise of spiritual betterment of the masses through culture. It makes sense that he would turn to Dante, a Catholic poet known for social justice, to advocate the necessity of spiritual direction for the creation of great art.

At the same time, however, Marechal’s Adán Buenosayres is not meant to be a guide against moral depravity like the Divine Comedy. As I hope to have shown, most of the “sins” of Marechal’s Cacodelphia are not the Catholic sins of Dante’s Inferno. Rather, the focus is on the division among the intellectual community, their snobbism, and what he perceived as the inadequacies of Argentina’s national literature. The lowest circles of his hell are reserved for the anti-Peronist intellectuals from different ideologies. I would like to conclude by looking at one such parody. Punished in the Meadow of the Ultras in the circle of the Lustful, we encounter Lady
Titania, a parody of Victoria Ocampo. Ocampo was a famous female writer, intellectual, and editor of the literary magazine *Sur* (1931-1932).

Lady Titania (Ocampo) is punished along with other ultras: “[u]ltra-courtesans, ultra-poetesses, ultra-intellectuals: super-females, as finely tuned as lutes” (430). Although Jorge Luis Borges referred to her as “la mujer más argentina,” Marechal depicts her as a total phony. The focus of the episode, in fact, is not promiscuity, but imitation of foreign culture:

---¡Ay! --suspiró Schultz--. Usted las ve imitar el aire de Sappho y la pose de Lisistrata; y si se les acerca, las oirá debatir arduos problemas de filosofía, de arte o de ciencias económicas. Pero fácil es advertir que sólo hablan con el sexo. (547)

[Alas! Sighed Schultz. There you see them, trying to look like Sappho and imitating the pose of Lysistrata. If you draw near, you’ll hear them debating arduous problems in philosophy, art, or economics. But it’s easy to see they speak only through their sex.] (430)

Lady Titania holds a balance-scale made of gold, and on each of its plates a human brain. She speaks out against the condition of inferiority imposed upon women by patriarchal society.

The interaction gets heated when she accuses Schultz, and all men, of being patronizing. Schultz in turn accuses her of being a pseudo-intellectual:

diga si es verdad que, víctima de cierta exaltación nada intelectual, se entregó a una cosecha bárbara del continente americano.
--¿Y qué? --repuso la Ultra en tono desafiante.
--Diga si es cierto que, no bastándole la producción local, se dedicó a la pesca en otros continentes, atrayendo a sí a numerosos ejemplares masculinos, todos afinados en el uso y abuso de la inteligencia.
--Necesitaba documentarme --objetó la Ultra.
--Y algo más --insistió Schultz--. Diga la acusada si es verdad que, regresando luego al país, se obstinó en la tarea ridícula, peligrosa y afortunadamente inútil de refinarn a los peones de su estancia, obligándolos a escuchar conciertos de Honegger, novelas de Lawrence, páginas de Gide y lecciones de Freud.

[Victim of a fervour not at all intellectual, did you or did you not outrageously troll the American continent?
-So what? rejoined the Ultra defiantly.
- Is it true that local production wasn’t enough for you, so you went fishing in other continents and managed to attract numerous male specimens, all of them refined in the use and abuse of intelligence? (431)
-I had to do my research, objected the Ultra.
-And something else, insisted Schultz. Let the accused declare whether or not she persisted, on her return to Argentina, in the ridiculous, dangerous, and fortunately useless task of trying to refine the peons of her estancia, forcing upon them Honneger’s concertos, novels by D.H. Lawrence and Andre Gide, as well as Freudian doctrine.] (431-432)

Marechal depicts Ocampo as a patronizing, elitist, Eurocentric author, guilty of forcing European high culture down people’s throats. She is condescending towards the average Argentine: “Brutish peasants! Muttered the Ultra. They used to fall asleep at the first chord or sentence. Impossible to get a single line of Mallarmé into their thick skulls” (432). Here and in his non-fiction, Marechal was critical of the elitism of the producers of culture in Argentina. In “Proyecciones culturales del momento argentino” he warns against their isolation in an “ivory tower”:

Dentro del conjunto social los creadores forman, empero una minoría, una élite, que puede ser fecunda si con su actividad trasciende a los otros, o puede malograrse en el estéril aislamiento de una ‘torre de marfil.’ (136)

[Within the whole of society, however, the creators make up a minority, an elite which can be fertile if their creative activity reaches others, or it can be wasted in the sterile isolation of an ‘ivory tower.’]

Marechal’s uses Dante to create a caustic parody of Ocampo, depicting her as a condescending elitist. This is particularly ironic, because Ocampo herself had written a book about the Divine Comedy which is nothing of the sort. In her 1924 book entitled De Francesca a Beatrice: a través de la Divina Comedia, she tries to make Dante accessible and relatable.619 Writing for a non-academic audience, she explains that she will not create a commentary plagued with erudition and

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taking an aggressive stance on every canto. For Ocampo, the power of Dante’s poem has no need of explanation of this kind in order to traverse centuries and touch present day readers:

Yo no creo que una gran erudición – que, desde luego, se hace indispensable si nos proponemos seguir el Poema paso a paso – sea la condición *sine qua non* de que dependen la enseñanza y el deleite que un lector cualquiera puede derivar de esta lectura, que aun a los menos informados logra conmover.  

[I do not believe that a great erudition – which is, of course, indispensable if we intend to follow the Poem line by line – is a *sine qua non* for the instruction and pleasure that any given reader can derive from [the Comedy], which succeeds in moving even the least informed.]

What Ocampo is saying here is the opposite of Lady Titania’s claim that high-culture cannot be forced into the “thick skulls” of the masses; rather she is arguing that poems like Dante’s can touch everyone, regardless of their background. Hers is an anti-pedantic approach. What she seeks to do is to make the three canticles more accessible by elaborating upon what she considers the most personally poignant episodes. In her opinion, “it’s easier to remain at the door of the *Divine Comedy* on account of a certain lack of feeling than because of a deficiency of erudition or cerebral ineptitude.”

Marechal, however, spitefully depicts Ocampo as condescending towards the “peons of her estancia.” The passage is also critical of Ocampo’s “sensibility.” Schultz says to Adán:

--Lo más oneroso que hallo en Titania es su manía, ciertamente aborrecible, de subordinar las cosas del espíritu a las vagas, exquisitas e inefables titilaciones de su “sensibilidad.” No hay trozo de música, ni pensamiento metafísico, ni observación psicológica que no refiera ella inmediatamente a tal o cual manifestación de su gran simpático. (551)

[What I find hardest to take about Titania is her detestable mania for subordinating things of the spirit to the vague, exquisite, ineffable titillations of her “sensibility.” There isn’t a single piece of music, not a metaphysical idea or psychological

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620 Victoria Ocampo, *De Francesca a Beatrice: A través de La Divina Comedia* (Madrid: Rivista de Occidente, 1924), 10.

621 Ibid., 11.
observation, that she doesn’t immediately refer to her all-embracing sympathetic nervous system.\] (432)

If Marechal had read Ocampo’s commentary on the \textit{Divine Comedy}, it would have annoyed him to the quick, for it is filled with personal and hyper-sentimental reflections. In the following passage from the book, she relates how she felt the first time her professor of Italian read her certain passages from \textit{Inferno}:

\begin{quote}
La impresión que me causó la lectura sólo es comparable a la que sentí, de muy niña, la primera vez que, bañándome en el mar, fui envuelta y derribada sobre la arena por el magnífico ímpetu de una ola. En todo mi ser recibí el bautismo de aquellas \textit{parole di colore oscuro}, como tan cabalmente dice el mismo poeta, y salí de aquella inmersión tambaleándome, saturados los labios de amargura.\footnote{Victoria Ocampo, \textit{De Francesca a Beatrice: A través de La Divina Comedia} (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1924), 27.}\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
[The impression that this reading had on me is comparable only to what I felt as a small child the first time that I went for a swim in the ocean and was enveloped and knocked flat onto the sand by the magnificent impact of a wave. In all of my being, I received the baptism of those \textit{words of obscure color}, so perfectly said by the author, and I arose from the emersion staggering, my lips saturated with bitterness.\footnote{Ibid., 7.}]
\end{quote}

Her “all-embracing sympathetic nervous system” here seems to be turned upside-down by this reading of the \textit{Comedy}. Her reason for writing about the \textit{Comedy} is that it moved her. In the place of a lengthy preface, she transcribes a single verse: “\textit{Amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.}”\footnote{Ibid., 7.}

Marechal’s original parody of Ocampo was apparently too over-the-top for his times. Jorge Lafforgue and Fernando Colla found a longer and more detailed version of this section in Marechal’s original proofs (reproduced by Navascués [AB 549n]), but the editor of \textit{Sudamericana} told him to tone it down, which resulted in the version we have today. Given such unkind treatment of fellow Argentine authors, it’s not surprising that \textit{Adán Buenosayres} garnered harsh literary criticism. González Lanuza’s review published in \textit{Sur} in 1948 announced that “\textit{Adán Buenosayres}
will corrode for centuries in the dust of the libraries.”

During the fifties and part of the sixties, the novel and its author would largely remain in oblivion until the storm of anti-Peronist sentiments subsided and a new group of literary critics less effected by the political divide were able to reevaluate his work and renew interest in it.

**Conclusion**

The *Divine Comedy*, a work widely acknowledged to have played a key role in the emergence of Italian national conscious, was an important font of inspiration for a several major Argentine authors concerned with developing Argentine national literature. During the nation-building period of the nineteenth century, Mitre associated Dante with political unity, morality, and high culture. His 1897 translation of the *Divine Comedy* was marketed to an elite readership of Argentine men of letters who considered themselves the inheritors of European civilization.

Linguistically and aesthetically, the translation contrasted with José Hernández’s *Martín Fierro* (1872), while offering a different social message. As a liberal leader Mitre had an inclusive vision of the nation that welcomed Italian immigration as well as Italian culture. His friendship with Giuseppe Garibaldi and his familiarity with the doctrine of Young Italy and Giuseppe Mazzini’s reading of Dante indicate that Mitre associated Dante primarily with political unity.

By the turn of the century, the influx of immigration promoted by Mitre’s generation had resulted in a rapidly-changing Argentina and ever-increasing concerns among Argentines regarding their cultural identity. Xenophobic sentiments developed among the creole elite. One author and literary critic who was particularly influential in articulating Argentine national identity

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was Leopoldo Lugones. Early in his career, as one of the leaders of the modernist movement in Argentina, he had embraced European high-culture and Dante as a source of inspiration for poetic innovation. The Vth Canto of the Inferno also inspired his euro-centric short story “Francesca.” Subsequently, however, his vision of culture began to take on fascistic elements, and he advanced a cultural nationalism that glorified the by-then-almost-obsolete gaucho and rural creole culture.

Jorge Luis Borges, on the other hand, took on a contrasting approach. Although he had experimented with literary nationalism in his younger years, he later came to be ashamed of such outlooks and instead took on an anti-nationalistic, universalist approach in his writing. He did not approve of the nationalistic arguments advanced by Lugones in El payador, and he was critical at times of his poetics which he interpreted as pedantic verbal play lacking true emotion. On two separate occasions, Borges used Dante to create cleverly-veiled criticism of his distinguished antecedent. In “The Aleph,” with its many parallels to The Divine Comedy, Borges parodies Lugones’s poetics with the character of Carlos Daneri, while Borges protagonist is the Dante figure in love with Beatriz. In “The Intruder,” he subverts the Vth Canto of the Inferno, while rewriting a Francesca story that takes place on the pampas and which parodies Lugones’s nativist theories in El payador.

Marechal too would employ Dante to parody his literary colleagues in Adán Buenosayres. In this 620-page polyphonic novel he depicts the diverse demographic of Buenos Aires in the 1920s and the lack of consensus among Argentina’s intellectual elite as regards cultural production. His rewriting of Dante conveys the great anxiety over lack of national expression felt by Argentine authors who had as their measuring sticks the great European classics. Frustrated by seeing European high-culture as something reserved for the elite, in Adán Buenosayres Marechal uses Dante to mock the anti-Peronist intellectuals whom he believed conserved a cultural
hegemony which excluded the masses and lacked a spiritual order. He likewise ridicules *criollismo* and the mythologization of figures such as the *gaucho* and *compadrito*. Through the voice of Adán, who is both a Dante-the-pilgrim figure and Marechal’s literary alter ego, he advocates for the necessity of spiritual direction for the creation of great art.

For Italianists, I hope to have shed light on several diverse interpretations and reappropriations of Dante in the works of Mitre, Lugones, Borges, and Marechal, and to have explained how these various rewritings of Dante relate to questions of Argentine national identity. For Argentines, I hope to have enriched their reading of classics through new-found knowledge of how the *Divine Comedy* influenced the writings of these works. I hope that this study engenders further comparative research on Dante in Argentine literature. There is much more to be said about Dante and Echeverría, Borges, Marechal, Ocampo and others. Contemporary Argentine poets such as Alberto Girri, Horacio Castillo, and Alejandro Bekes have also drawn from Dante.

Argentina is just one of the many South American nations where Dante’s presence is persistent and pervasive. Dante was particularly influential for modernist poets. In addition to Lugones, he inspired the Nicaraguan poet of international influence, Rubén Darío, and the Argentine Enrique Banchs. Traces of Dante are also to be found in Mexico in the poetry of Octavio Paz and the novels of Juan Rulfo and Ignacio Padilla; in Brazil in the oeuvre of Machado de Assis; and in Uruguay in the narrative of Carlos Martínez Moreno, just to name a few. In Peru, Dante’s presence is particularly prolific in books such as Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* (1987), Enrique Verástegui’s *Angelus Novus* (1989), Santiago del Prado’s *Camino de Ximena* (2003), Jorge Wiesse’s *Vigilia de los sentidos* (2005), Eduardo González Viaña’s *El corrido de Dante* (2006), Marco Martos’ *Dante y Virgilio iban oscuros en la profunda noche* (2008), Miguel Ildefonso’s *Dantes* (2010), and several poems by Eduardo Chirinos. These myriad
reappropriations of Dante in Latin American literature call for more comparative studies investigating the resonance of the *Divine Comedy* in the New World.
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