



Audio guide On the way of Adam Buenosayres



INTRODUCTION- FIRST STEPS

We begin our tour in Tres Arroyos 280

This is an invitation to travel through the space and time of the writer Leopoldo Marechal and his novel *Adam Buenosayres*.

An extraordinary novel, a masterpiece of Argentine literature inspired on the *Odyssey* and *The Divine Comedy*.

According to Marechal:

When I wrote my Adam Buenosayres I did not intend to move away from poetry. At an early stage, basing myself on Aristotle's Poetics, I thought that all literary genres have been and should be poetic genres, of an epic, narrative, or lyrical nature (...) I considered that the novel, a relatively modern genre, could not be anything else but the legitimate substitute of the epic poem. With that intention I wrote Adam Buenosayres and I adjusted it to the norms that Aristotle indicates for the epic genre.

But *Adam Buenosayres* is set right here, in a Buenos Aires that can still be recognized even though more than a hundred years have gone by. We invite you to walk through Adam Buenosayres' neighborhood, at the same time as you move back to the past.

Let us travel to the first half of the XXth century to find ourselves at the heart of a land of immigrants: Spaniards, Italians, Jews, Turks, Syrians, Lebanese... an industrial and prosperous Buenos Aires, but also, a city of men and women of Literature and the Arts.

A city which is open to the world and offers a hopeful future for those who want to work.

To be more precise, we are exactly in Villa Crespo, one of the 100 "barrios porteños" (neighborhoods of the capital city), as recalled in the famous tango; a centric neighborhood, next to Caballito, where at the time the population gathered around the National Shoe Factory and the tannery which provided it



with its materials. Leather, abundant in the land of cattle, was an important landmark in the history of the neighborhood. Let us look around as we take some steps to get to know the houses, the streets and the people of Villa Crespo. In our tour, we will follow the protagonist of the novel *Adam Buenosayres*, during his metaphysical awakening in a boarding house at 303 Monte Egmont Street.

Today Monte Egmont has changed its name to Tres Arroyos, but Adam's spirit remains intact. The protagonist's geographical trip through the map of the city corresponds to another interior trip towards his affections, the exploration of his identity and the conversion of the heart.

The dates in the novel are eloquent. Our character starts his pilgrimage precisely on April 28th, on Maundy Thursday in the nineteen twenties.

But, who is Adam Buenosayres?

As the proverb indicates, "in the details of your village you will find the universal". Leopoldo Marechal gave the protagonist a name which unites the local with the global; "Adam" makes reference to the origin of humanity, anybody and everybody could be Adam. "Buenosayres" evokes what is close and tangible of our idiosyncrasy as "porteños" (inhabitants of the city of Buenos Aires).

Let's start the tour in Tres Arroyos- or Monte Egmont- 280, which is where Leopoldo Marechal lived between 1910 and 1934. At this address you will find a plaque evoking the life of this author, with a QR code which you may scan with your cell phones to learn more about the history of the neighborhood and its illustrious inhabitants.

Hand in hand with Leopoldo Marechal we initiate the tour at the first of our nine stations around Adam's world and the gallery of characters who interact with him. The memories of Jorge Luis Borges, Xul Solar, Jacobo Fijman, Victoria Ocampo, Norah Lange, Oliverio Girondo, among other writers and artists, accompany his walks around this Buenos Aires of the past and appear transformed in the pages of *Adam Buenosayres*.

All of them make the city come alive, a city which promised prosperity to men and women of all the world.

So, here we go!

FIRST STATION - ADAM'S CORNER

Tres Arroyos and Olaya Streets

From Tres Arroyos 280, at the house once inhabited by Leopoldo Marechal, we can see the corner of Tres Arroyos and Olaya, the first station of our tour.

There lies, precisely, the boarding house where Adam Buenosayres lives. The exact address is Monte Egmont 303 although nowadays it does not exist as such in the map of Buenos Aires. We do not know whether it ever did, but in the fictional reality of the novel, the corner of Tres Arroyos and Olaya was Adam Buenosayres' home.

At the corner somebody is sweeping the sidewalk. It 's young Irma, who at the beginning of the novel sings some verses of the tango *El Pañuelito*, by Juan de Dios Filiberto. Her voice is as tempting as she is, and Adam thinks that "*Irma was one big unabashed shout. But an eighteen-year-old shout...*". With Adam's awakening the city also wakes up, evoking the majestic tone of an old Greek epic text.

Orchestral trains entered the city, or departed for the woods of the north, the vineyards of the west, the Virgilian Central plains, and the bucolic pastures of the south. From industrial Avellaneda to Belgrano, the metropolis was girded with a belt of belching smokestacks that scrawled wrathful sentences by Rivadavia or Sarmiento across the manly sky. 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. Here the bankers of Reconquista Street drove the mad wheel of Fortune; there the engineers as grave as Geometry contemplated new bridges and roads for the world. Buenos Aires in motion was laughing; Industry and Commerce were leading her by the hand.

Half asleep, in his room at the boarding house, Adam snatches his pipe and lights it, as he gradually wakes up and recalls memories of his childhood: the farm at Maipú, in the province of Buenos Aires, the Headmaster's face at the school where Adam is a teacher, the countenance of his beloved Solveig

Amundsen, in a mansion at Saavedra, a religious card with the figure of Christ, inherited from his grandmother:

Adam passed in review the pomegranate and the rose, the fraternal pipes, the books on their shelves. His gaze then paused on the print of the Cristo de Lezo being crucified between sun and moon, a family heirloom brought from Pamplona by his grandmother Ursula that had fallen to him as the eldest grandson.

As he wakes up, in the midst of this parody of the Genesis which takes place in his room, Adam remembers his friends and companions in literary adventures: Schulze, the astrologist, and his neighbor Samuel Tesler, characters who in the novel represent the artist Xul Solar and the poet Jacobo Fijman. Finally, he opens his eyes and greets the world:

—Good morning, planet Earth!

The voices and sounds of the street invade him: children shouting “goal!”, insults and laughter. Doña Francisca’s voice, quarreling with Alí, the greengrocer, who pulls a cart full of vegetables and fruit. The smell of autumn and of dead leaves rises towards the window in his room.

He was at number 303 Monte Egmont Street in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Spanish America, southern hemisphere, planet earth, solar system, Macrocosm, and therefore was subject to incessant movement, to the vertiginous spiralling dance resulting from the triple movement of the earth, in its rotation on its axis, its orbit around the sun, and its flight through space along with the entire planetary system toward the constellation of Hercules as the speed of 1,170 kilometers a minute.

These cosmic thoughts contrast with the daily reality which brings our character back to the present: underneath the bed lie the chamber pot and the frayed slippers. On the table, the books and notes of lessons, mixed up with his students’ writings...

In the same boarding house lives his friend, the eccentric Samuel Tesler, who represents Jacobo Fijman, the poet. Adam knocks on his door and Samuel opens it wearing an extravagant dressing gown.

The kimono, egg-yellow in color, presented two faces: front and back, ventral and dorsal, diurnal and nocturnal. On the right flank of the ventral face were depicted rampant neocriollo dragons furiously biting their tails. On the left flank, a field of ripe wheat seemed to billow beneath the dragons' panting breath. (...) Also, on the front of the kimono appeared the preamble of the Argentine Constitution written in the uncial characters from the sixth century, the twelve signs of the Zodiac, represented by the country's flora and fauna; a table for multiplication and another for subtraction, both identical; the ninetyeight amorous positions from the Kama sutra, very vividly rendered, along with an advertisement for Doctor X, a specialist in venereal disease.

Adam and Samuel Tesler chat, think, philosophize, fix the world... At noon they say goodbye to each other. Adam goes down the stairs quickly and leaves, breathing in the fresh air of a new day.

Our character, whom we can easily imagine as an *alter ego* of Leopoldo Marechal, can hear some children squabbling who provoke the Chacharola, an old Sicilian woman, bad tempered and coarse, who comes walking along Hidalgo Street. The author of *Adam Buenosayres* knew the real Chacharola and was very fond of her. She lived round the corner of his house, on Olaya street. In the character of Chacharola, Leopoldo Marechal condenses the temperament of so many Italian immigrants who came to Argentina towards the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XXth. Between 1876 and 1930 it is estimated that around two and a half million Italians arrived in the area of the River Plate. The country, under the motto of "Progress and Order", generously offered land, education and shelter to millions of people who abandoned the Old World with the illusion of prosperity. After a brief exchange, Chacharola walks away along Monte Egmont Street, today called Tres Arroyos, towards Olaya Street. Meanwhile, we will go from our spot in Tres Arroyos towards Hidalgo street, closer to our next stop. Along that same street Adam meets Polyphemus, an old, blind beggar who is always in the neighborhood. He can be easily

distinguished by his dark green coat, an abundant beard, the eyes of a prophet and a menacing arm, which he usually points at the statue of Christ with the Broken Hand, in San Bernardo Church.

What a wonderful actor Polyphemus was! Tra-la-la! Business was great, and nobody in Villa Crespo suspected that inside the mossy old coat lurked the owner of three rental properties, with a bid pending on a fourth, all of them won through the steady practice of his art!

SECOND STATION - THE DEATH BOULEVARD

Warnes and Tres Arroyos

Following Adam's steps, we are now standing at the corner of Tres Arroyos and Warnes. This diagonal, where we can now find garages and shops selling auto parts, was known at the time as the "Death Boulevard", the street which connected Villa Crespo with the Chacarita cemetery. In his epic walk, Adam meets a funeral procession.

The cortège was advancing amid the flutter of somber plumed helmets and the solemn clatter of iron shod hooves. Six black horses, glistening all over with sweat, foaming at the muzzle, their proud necks arched forward as they pulled the funeral coach, were guided by white reins in the hands of two rigid charioteers gazing westward. Hurrah! Behind them came the carriage, loaded down with flowers, palm branches, crowns and purple ribbons. Then the family members in landaus with shrouded lamps, and another twenty vehicles in single file, their lacquered surfaces shimmering. Hurrah, hurrah! Long live the dead man!

The procession rouses Adam's metaphysical concerns: life and death, body and soul. He looks around and sees men bowing and removing their hats as the carriage goes by. He doubts: should he remove his hat, as a sign of respect?

They're all removing their hats. Why? An instinctive hatred of death, but a reverential hatred. (...) a body minus its soul, a tool with no craftsman, a ship with no pilot. To hell with matter without form! I am not taking off my hat.

But something was amiss in his proud reasoning, and Adam caught it right away.

Still, an immortal soul lived in that already decomposing body. A soul exercised its terrible freedom in that body, performed a thousand gestures, worthy or abominable, prudent or crazy, ridiculous or sublime. (...) Okay, I'll take off my hat!

Adam also removes his hat, and at that moment we get a hint of the events which will take place at midnight of the following day, in which angels and demons fight for his soul in front of San Bernardo church and the still statue of Christ with the Broken Hand. Adam sees himself as “*a fish in the hook, a fish which has taken the invisible bait and writhes at midnight*”. He thinks that the “*fishing rod of the fisherman is, without doubt, in that broken hand*”.

The image of Christ as a Fisherman had already appeared in a poem written in 1940 by Marechal. It constitutes one of the “Sonnets for Sophia”, for which he was awarded the National Poetry Prize. Listen to it read by Marechal himself, in a recording made in 1967:

Perdido manantial, llanto sonoro

Dilapidado ayer en la ribera

De la tribulación, quién me dijera

¡Que pesarías en balanza de oro!

Rumbo de hiel que todavía lloro,

Crucero sin honor y sin bandera,

¡Quién me diría que a la primavera

Del cielo caminaba tu decoro!

*Y cuando recelosa y desvelada,
Puesta en su mismo llanto la mirada,
Mi soledad entre dos noches iba,

¡Quién le dijera, para su consuelo,
Que abajo estaba el pez en el anzuelo
Y el admirable Pescador arriba!*

Without further distraction, Adam looks in the direction of “La Nuova Stella de Posilipo”, a small bar close by where the drivers of the funeral carriages play cards and have some drinks. The name of the bar, La Nuova Stella de Posilipo, was taken by Marechal from a restaurant in the centre of Buenos Aires where the members of the literary group Martín Fierro used to gather. Adam looks at the funeral drivers. He is about to cross Warnes Street:

However, he knew that upon crossing Warnes Street he'd enter a universe of agitated creatures. In that other sector of Monte Egmont, 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, joys, loves and hates.

Let us cross Warnes with Adam, taking first a small detour to Serrano Street; we will take a glimpse of life at the tenements in Buenos Aires in the past, which inspired the farce, a typical local dramatic genre.

THIRD STATION - BUENOS AIRES, A DIVERSE CITY

156 Serrano Street

Let us walk towards 156 Serrano Street. Here we will find the tangible remains of a Buenos Aires of the past, the famous Conventillo de La Paloma, built towards the end of the XIX century. The building, which originally had 112 rooms and only two shared bathrooms, became famous thanks to the homonymous farce by Alberto Vacarezza. Overcrowding in this tenement and other similar ones in Buenos Aires was the cause of frequent quarrels, as reflected by Marechal in *Adam Buenosayres*.

Let us walk a few meters towards Murillo street, where we can now find a group of skyscrapers.

In the past, the tannery La Federal could be found on the block limited by Gurruchaga, Murillo, Serrano and Padilla Streets. Creoles and immigrants from all over the world found work here. One last vestige of this tannery, a brick that belonged to its chimney, located on the corner of Padilla and Serrano, is kept in the Alberdi Library, one of our next stops.

Adam can feel the stench of the tannery, typical of the neighborhood, and describes it as “*a stench of rotten fat and rancid leather*”.

His nostrils sense the first emanations from La Universal tannery, looming now only a stone's throw away, with its reeking walls and blind windows. Viscous and shiny under the rain, it looks like a malignant mushroom.

With this memory in mind we will continue along Murillo Street up to Gurruchaga, resuming Adam's way.

FOURTH STATION - LA HORMIGA DE ORO (THE GOLDEN ANT) AND ADAM'S WOMEN

Gurruchaga between Murillo and Padilla Streets

Somewhere on Gurruchaga Street, between Murillo and Padilla, Adam Buenosayres crosses the threshold of the store “La Hormiga de Oro” to buy cigarettes. Initially, the shop was situated at Gurruchaga 410, close to “Izmir Cafe”.

The name “La Hormiga de Oro” was inspired by a store whose founder saw in Marseille during a stop of his long boat journey to Argentina.

Ruth, the saleswoman of “La Hormiga de Oro”, appears to

be as tempting as Circe the sorceress, who held Ulysses prisoner on his long trip back home.

This is the way Leopoldo Marechal narrates the incident:

Adam Buenosayres crossed the threshold of La Hormiga de Oro and was immersed in a grotto. Faintly limned, the store's thousand-and-one items appeared to cohabit on the most intimate terms: packs of cigarettes, twenty-cent dolls, shaving soap, detective novels, and boxes of caramels. All was steeped in the reek of fried fish. If the smell brought down the tone of the place, suggesting a low-life tavern, the ambience was somewhat redeemed by the uncertain strains of a shimmy being played further inside, on instruments forced into a grudging attempt at harmony. But where was Ruth? AS soon as Adam wondered about her, Ruth appeared, a spider attracted by the buzz of the fly. She emerged through the green curtains separating the store from the backroom (...)

— You! she exclaimed, surprised, jubilant.

— Good afternoon, Ruth! Adam greeted her festively. How're things at «La Hormiga de Oro»?

— Not good, pouted Ruth. Our friends never visit.

A nervous hand flew to fix her tousled hair- oh my gosh, her head, an owl 's nest! With the other hand she gave her eyes a quick remedial rub - no traces of tears, please! Then she pulled up her stockings and gave her dress a quick shake -might've picked up a stray fish scale, anything's possible in that infernal kitchen.

— Stay away from «La Hormiga de Oro»? Adam rejoined, giving her an appreciative look. You do yourself and injustice, Ruth!

— It's been exactly eight days since you last dropped in, she sulked.

'A prettier creature was never conceived by woman after lying with a man', Adam classically opined to himself.

Finally, Adam leaves Ruth behind, a woman of flesh and blood who tempts him. His soul is faithful to Solveig, the ethereal and distant woman whom he admires and to whom he dedicates his Copybook of Blue Covers (Cuaderno de Tapas Azules). To her he devotes his heart and his poetry.

And what to say now about Solveig Amundsen? Everything and nothing. Solveig Amundsen was the primordial matter of any ideal construct, the clay from which fantasies are fashioned. She was still proof against description, like water that has not yet taken on form or color.

As Dulcinea was for Don Quixote, as Beatrice was for Dante, Solveig is for Adam Buenosayres the ideal woman, symbolized in the pure figure of a white rose. So ideal that he resists the temptation of touching her:

She too was a white rose, a rose of damp velvet. Her voice must have had some intimate affinity with water, for it was liquid, diaphanously resonant, like the well-water back in Maipú, when a stone fell in and aroused recondite music. Being alone in the floral nursery brought us closer together than ever. It was my great opportunity and my inevitable risk, because at her side I suddenly felt the birth of an anguish that would never leave me, as if at the moment of our greatest closeness there was already opening between us an irremediable distance, just as two heavenly bodies, as they reach their maximum degree of proximity, simultaneously touch the first degree of their separation.

In the creation of the character of Solveig Amundsen, Leopoldo Marechal was inspired by the Argentine writer Norah Lange, who was Oliverio Girondo's beloved, another famous Argentine poet. She was the sixth daughter of a family of Norwegian origin. Red-headed, striking, with dazzling light-coloured eyes, she inspired several juvenile loves among the writers in her time. She was also a valuable writer and poet. A distant relation of Jorge Luis Borges and faithful partner of Girondo's adventures, in her *Childhood Copybooks (Cuadernos de Infancia)*, she

immortalized the house at Tronador and La Pampa Streets, where the intellectuals in the city of Buenos Aires used to meet at the time. Among the frequent visitors were Horacio Quiroga, Alfonsina Storni, Jorge Luis Borges and Leopoldo Marechal, who represented Norah as Solveig in the novel by giving her the name of a character in the play *Peer Gynt*, by Henrik Ibsen, and the surname of the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen.

Let's leave behind "La Hormiga de Oro" and the image of the ideal woman. Adam will now come across three very real women which he identifies by the color of their dresses:

Theoneinblue, Theoneinwhite, Theoneingreen. Three young and sturdy bodies, lying down in the hallway on the fresh tiles, oh grace!

From the doorstep they can see, they hear and whisper. They are the ears and eyes of the neighborhood.

Adam prefers to ignore the gossip girls who criticize his hat. In the house next door he meets another protagonist of Villa Crespo:

Decked out and heavily made up as usual, the Flor del Barrio stood in her doorway, facing down the street in the same direction as always, showing no other sign of life than the feverish activity of her eyes. He would find her standing like this at any time, in any season, peering eternally at the same point. The bride waiting in ambush, perhaps, a terrible image of waiting. So, too, did the men on the street see her, never getting to the bottom of her mystery, maybe not even noticing the presence of an enigma in those unhinged womanly eyes, never wondering what absent love, what stranger might arrive through that sector of the street watched over so agonizingly by the Flor del Barrio.

Later on, in his night walk along these same streets, Adam will meet "La Flor del Barrio" once more. This time the woman has become some sort of ominous cardboard mask, which "his fingers are left holding" as he attempts to touch her face.

And behind it appears the true countenance of the Flor del Barrio: concave eyes, gnawed-away nose, the toothless mouth of Death.

FIFTH STATION – RIVALRIES IN THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES

Gurruchaga and Padilla Streets

Let's continue walking along Gurruchaga towards Corrientes Avenue, as we imagine the tannery on our left. Just like Adam, who holds his breath, speeds up his pace and covers the forty meters of the pestilent area until he gets to Padilla street. He is accompanied by old Pipo, with his "sabbatical bender", "his moment of exultation and freedom".

This is also a meeting place with an old woman who is eating a crust of bread, sitting on her bench, as she knits scarves, slippers and caps... Adam calls her Clotho, because she reminds him of the mythological Fates. He wonders whether the old woman could be spinning the destiny of the whole street and its inhabitants.

Along these blocks, which take Adam closer to Corrientes Avenue, he walks past "Cafe Izmir", which used to be at Gurruchaga 434. Sitting at a table, three men argue as they drink anisette and smoke. A Christian, a Muslim and a Jew, a perfect synthesis of the melting pot of races which characterized Villa Crespo at the time.

A few steps beyond, Adam walks into the barber's shop belonging to Don Jaime from Andalucía.

The barber shop was an ordinary space, its walls grimy and the ceiling speckled with fly droppings. It was meagrely furnished with two barber chairs in front of a long tarnished mirror, four Vienna chairs, plus a little table heaped with old issues of El Hogar, El Gráfico, and Mundo Argentino.¹⁴ That's not counting the two colourful posters pinned up on the left wall, one exalting the tragic death of Carmen, the other celebrating the hearty toast of Cavalleria Rusticana.

(...)Meanwhile, Don Jaime was shaking the hair out of a none-too-clean apron and Adam was slicking back his hair with a generous dollop of hair cream. Just then, the first rumblings of war were heard in the barber shop.

“The sector of Gurruchaga Street running from Camargo to Triunvirato was already a-boil, and the clamorous multitude poured out through doors, windows, and skylights.

Leopoldo Marechal locates the greengrocer’s at Gurruchaga, between Camargo and Corrientes. With satirical humor, he narrates a street fight as if it had the dimensions of the War of Troy. The combat unfolds in front of Adam’s eyes:

Doña Filomena, drawn up to her full majestic height, her cheeks red as a rooster’s crest, stood at the centre of a vast circle of men and women. Holding her son Yuyito by the suspenders as he thrashed in vain against her iron grip, she ferociously faced an implacable enemy. Opposite her, pale as the angel of death, Doña Gertrudis took the heat of that gaze, with her son Juancho’s head locked tight against her gut. Between the two champions stood the tano Luigi, owner of La Buena Fortuna. Staring at the shattered glass of his display window, the Italian broke into grand lamentations.

It was football which gave origin to the conflict. On the first row of the circle, Adam Buenosayres studies the combatants:

There were the 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 practised in the art of 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. Dalmatians of well-riveted 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.*

One by one, all of them enter the brawl. Sargeant Pérez arrives from Police Station 21, some blocks away from the fight, and finally stops them. *“The quarrel ceases as if by magic.”*

Following Adam’s steps we walk away once again along Gurruchaga Street and move forward towards Triunvirato, nowadays called Corrientes, a street which never sleeps, always awake among its treasures of books, history, music and art.

SIXTH STATION - CORRIENTES STREET: MUSIC AND BILLIARDS

Corrientes 5436

As he runs away from the brawl, Adam gets to Triunvirato Street, today the great Corrientes Avenue. Just as he did in the novel, we turn right in Corrientes and stop at “San Bernardo Cafe”. If we cross the street we will be able to appreciate the old decorative friezes and the facade of the upper floors of the building.

The street that never sleeps has been for decades the staging of the most authentic cultural life in the city: theaters, cinemas, restaurants, book stores and, of course, tango! The first floor of this historic bar was used for “milonga” (another popular dance closely related to tango) and Leopoldo Marechal was a frequent customer.

The poet Francisco Luis Bernárdez narrates that “ he was famous in our group for his skills as tango dancer, as well known as those of Raúl González Tuñón in these places. We had proof of this, week after week, in Norah Lange’s house. But his temple was situated in Villa Crespo. Logically, I am referring to Club San Bernardo, where our great friend surprised us for a long time with his “cortes”, “sentadas” and other figures of this local dance.”

The orchestra of one of the legends of tango music played here: Osvaldo Pugliese’s. This composer was born in Villa Crespo in 1905, in a family of musicians. He included the first female accordionist in the country in his orchestra, Francisca Cruz

Bernardo, otherwise known as “La Flor de Villa Crespo”. In his extended career, Pugliese composed more than 150 songs and recorded a hundred more, as the one which resonates in Adam Buenosayres: “Cascabelito” (Little bell). The song goes “Bell, little bell, laugh, don’t cry”, and Marechal continues:

Your story was fit for the lyrics of a tango, it blossomed in the intricate arpeggios of the bandoneón, became legendary in the plangent voices of malevos.

With Osvaldo Puglieses’ chords, and Adam’s silhouette in the distance, possibly dancing a tango, we leave behind the cafe and walk along Corrientes Avenue in the direction of the traffic. We will get to know another facet of our character: Adam the teacher.

SEVENTH STATION -ADAM THE TEACHER

Corrientes 5332, Primary school N°01 Tomasa de la Quintana de Escalada

Adam Buenosayres, just like his creator, is a school teacher. In the novel, the author and the protagonist, at times, blend into one. It will be a teacher in Maipú, a location in the province of Buenos Aires where Leopoldo Marechal used to spend his holidays, who will point out young Adam’s early literary inclination:

Don Aquiles had read aloud in class the first stammerings of Adam’s ecstasies and pronounced judgment: “Adam Buenosayres will be a poet.” The other children clapped astonished eyes on Adam; he turned pale, his essence laid bare, the exact form of his anxieties exposed by that pedant from Maipú who, moreover, believed in the immutable regularity of the cosmos and who, every morning, watch in hand, used to invigilate the sun’s rising, lest it deviate from the hour specified in the almanac and incur his reproof.

Francisco Chapo, 5th grade teacher of Mariano Acosta school, was the one who observed Marechal as a boy and declared

that he would be a poet.

During the first decades of the XXth century, Argentina counted on education as a means of progress and social mobility. Public, lay and free education allowed millions of children into the classrooms of a country that was considered among the most thriving in the world. The school Tomasa de la Quintana de Escalada, which can be found in Corrientes 5332 since 1910, is only a part of the extensive network of public schools; like a Kindergarten located only three blocks away, at Aguirre 752, which is called after our writer Leopoldo Marechal.

In the pages of the novel which follows his steps around Villa Crespo, Adam Buenosayres represents one of many anonymous teachers who, in the many schools scattered along the territory, contributed to the shaping of the national identity, a blend between the idiosyncrasy of native inhabitants and the massive contribution of immigrants.

The classroom is on the top floor, olive-coloured, with a big corner window overlooking the intersection of two little suburban streets. The rows of desks are all oriented toward the light of the window. On the right stands a wardrobe; (...) Facing the pupils' seats is the teacher's desk, its only decoration a globe of the world with a cracked and fissured surface (a symbol?). Two chalkboards extend their black expanse across the front and lefthand walls."

"While the pupils write in silence, Adam leans on the windowsill. Leaning out toward the street, he lets his eyes wander. The pregnancy of the air resolves now into a very fine drizzle which, veil-like, shrouds the suburb and softens its harsh contours.

Adam leaves the school but his thoughts linger there. He thinks about his life and the lives of so many children who expect a better future. As he walks and turns in Gurruchaga Street towards San Bernardo church, he tells himself:

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.

Adam, who is at the same time a local and a universal citizen, feels like *“an Argentine living in hope”*.

We will now leave the school and walk, this time, in the opposite sense of the traffic. Let us cross Corrientes and turn at Acevedo. At exactly 666 we will find the Public Library “Alberdi”, our next stop.

EIGHTH STATION - AN ARGENTINE LIVING IN HOPE

Acevedo 666, Public Library “Alberdi”

Following Adam’s footsteps we reach the Juan Bautista Alberdi Public Library, where Leopold Marechal worked between 1919 and 1923 as he was studying to become a teacher. His father had died in 1919 and he took up teaching, which was his passion, to collaborate with his mother and siblings.

This is our penultimate stop, “la Biblioteca Alberdi” (Alberdi Public Library), which pays tribute to Marechal by showcasing samples of almost all of his published books and his resignation letter to the library.

Thanks to one of those rare coincidences of destiny, we are exactly at 666 Acevedo Street. This number has a special somber significance; it reminds us of Adam’s journey to the dark city of Cacodelphia, similar to Dante’s inferno.

This part of the novel starts two days after Adam’s promenade around Villa Crespo and takes us to another local neighborhood, Saavedra. In his trip to Cacodelphia, an invisible city in the entrails of Buenos Aires, Adam will go accompanied by Schultze, the astrologist -alter ego of the Argentine artist Xul Solar.

In this way, Adam Buenosayres shares this experience with other heroes who passed the test of descending into Hades or hell in order to be reborn; from Ulysses to Aeneas, and most especially, Dante Alighieri.

What is this infernal Buenos Aires like? Adam’s traveling companion, the astrologist, explains it like this:

– Cacodelphia, he announced, is a helicoid track that spirals downwards. It is made up of nine stages or turns of the spiral, each of them being the site of an infernal barrio or cacobarrio. Where one turn of the helix ends, another begins, with no other complications than a tricky access whose dangers the curious tourist.

From this location, at the door of the public library, we can hear the bells of San Bernardo Church, where the Christ of the Broken Hand, a fisherman of souls, still holds an invisible rod.

During this midnight which is central to the novel, after his epic promenade around Villa Crespo, Adam Buenosayres will turn his steps towards the church. We will also go towards San Bernardo: let's walk along Acevedo towards Corrientes, cross the avenue and continue forward to Murillo Street, where we will turn right and advance towards the corner of Gurruchaga.

As we look towards the left, we will see the bell tower. Now, we have finally arrived at our last stop, in front of San Bernardo church.

NINTH STATION - STATUE OF THE CHRIST OF THE BROKEN HAND

Gurruchaga, between Muñecas and Murillo Streets

It is a dark, cold and rainy night.

As he approaches San Bernardo Church, Adam sees:

The ghostly ambience of Gurruchaga Street, a tunnel burrowing into the very flesh of the night, elongated between two rows of shivering paradise trees, their feet bound in metal rings, like two files of galley slaves trudging toward winter. Phosphorescent like the eye of a cat, the clock of San Bernardo peeps out from its tower. Not a single tremor of the final bell-stroke remains in the air, and silence flows now from above, blood of dead bells.

We are now here, with Adam Buenosayres, in front of a church that is part of the local cityscape. The parish church of Abbot San Bernardo was inaugurated in 1896. The church has an altarpiece made of marble of different colors which is its most striking feature, but what made it famous is the statue of Christ, known for many years as “The statue of Christ of the Broken Hand”, which dominates the facade.

In 1996 the damaged statue of Marechal’s time was replaced by the effigy of the Sacred Heart, which you can see as you look up, whose hands are intact. Passersby may not know this as they walk distractedly along the street, ignoring that once, in this same place, our hero was assaulted by an inner struggle; a combat between invisible creatures fighting for his soul.

The bell tower of San Bernardo rises in the night. The wrought-iron gate is closed, the atrium deserted; no other life than the palm trees dishevelled by the wind. There Adam Buenosayres stops, his breath agitated, heart pounding.

In the infinite night, in the blurred street, Adam feels the certitude of a great prediction. What he does not know is that, around him, a thousand attentive eyes follow him while the battle for his soul becomes more difficult, as the final instances approach. Gasping for breath and with a beating heart, holding hard to the railings of the church, our character looks around him and listens:

*No one, nothing. The voices are quiet, the images have vanished.
Then the dense cloud of his fears, anxieties, and regrets explodes in a
wracking sob, smothering him, like the nausea at the tannery. Next,
without letting go of the grille, he looks up at the Christ with the
Broken Hand. And there he remains, staring and weeping gently.*

A few moments later,

*Adam crosses Warnes Street and heads down Monte Egmont.
The crisis in his soul is succeeded now by a great inner silence, a
muteness of memory, mind, and will.*

Finally, Adam has returned home and has closed the circle
of his journey:

*A great stillness reigns in the room. The silence would be complete
now but for the rain's whisper and the bed creaking under Adam
Buenosayres as he stirs in his sleep. Baleful presences recede:
defeated, they flee reluctantly to the four corners of the chamber.
Standing by the head of the bed, Someone has laid down his arms
and, leaning on them, keeps eternal watch.*

After the night of the revelation in front of San Bernardo church, the novel is imprecise and does not provide us with the details of our hero's fate. However, since the first sentences of the *Indispensable prologue*, where Marechal evokes the genesis of his novel, the readers know that Adam Buenosayres will die one day in October in the nineteen twenties, a few months after his metaphysical awakening, his walks along Monte Egmont street and his descent to Cacodelphia. This is the way Adam's burial is narrated:

*On a certain October morning in 192—, at not quite noon, six of
us entered the Western Cemetery,² bearing a coffin of modest*

design (four fragile little planks), 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.

“Springtime laughed above the tombstones, sang in the throats of birds, waxed ardent in the sprouting vegetation, proclaimed amid crosses and epitaphs its jubilant incredulity toward death. And there were no tears in our eyes, nor sorrow in our hearts, for in that simple coffin (four fragile little planks) we seemed to bear not the heavy flesh of a dead man but the light material of a poem concluded.”“We arrived at the newly dug grave; the coffin was lowered to the bottom. From the hands of friends, the first lumps of earth drummed upon the bier, then the gravediggers’ brutal shovels took over. Samuel Tesler, proud and impudent, knelt down on the abundant earth to pray a moment, while at the head of the grave the men proceeded to erect a metal cross bearing, on its black tinplate heart, the inscription:

ADAM BUENOSAYRES

R.I.P.

Then we all made our way back to the City of the Tobiano Mare.

A century has gone by since Adam Buenosayres’ spiritual journey, but his essence remains intact.

The first repercussions of the novel were varied. Some of his companions of literary adventures rejected their portrayal in the novel and turned their backs on the author.

But there were also words of praise, as the ones by young Julio Cortázar, who greeted the publication as “an extraordinary event in Argentine literature”. Cortázar recognized “the anguish that defines Adam Buenosayres’ walks” as a “projection of another anguish that comes from the origins of humanity and looks at our destiny”. He remembered Adam as “someone who has been forever uprooted from perfection, from unity; from that which we call heaven.”

With his words, we say farewell to this short literary trip around Villa Crespo. Thank you for walking with us!
Let's carry on, remembering that Adam's shadow may be following our steps as an invisible guide in our walks around Buenos Aires.



MECENAZGO
Participación Cultural
BA Buenos Aires Ciudad



Hoja por Hoja

A project by Graciela Cutuli, with the collaboration of Teresa Tέραmo, Florencia Agrasar and Pierre Dumas.

Music by Román Dumas

Voice by Livio González

Design by Axel Dumas.

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