Poetics of the Urban, Poetics of the Self: A Comparative Study of Selected Works by Jorge Luis Borges and Jacques Réda



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In memory of tía Leyla,
and my eighteen and twenty-five year-old selves:

'I go forth along and stand as ten thousand'
–Maya Angelou, 'Our grandmothers'

Disclaimer

I declare that this submission is my own written work. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material that has been written by another or previously submitted for credit as academic work, with the exception of cited quotations for which sources have been provided.

Sarah Puello Alfonso
10 October 2014

Abstract

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This thesis explores the poetic representation of Buenos Aires and Paris in selected works by Jorge Luis Borges and Jacques Réda respectively. Its primary aim is to analyse the relational phenomenon between the construction of these poets' personal maps of the city and the concomitant formation of the poetic self. The principal point of departure is Jacques Réda's *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), a collection of essays and poems published individually between 1957 and 1986, where the author expresses his admiration for Borges, shows his broad and critical knowledge of Borges's works and establishes the similarities between their poetics of the urban and poetics of the self. Another important aim of this thesis is therefore to ascertain the extent of Borges's influential role in Réda's poetics, but also how reading Borges through Réda enhances our understanding of Borges's urban poetry. This comparison reveals that Borges and Réda gravitate towards places within the city, but mostly its periphery, characterised by their unpretentious, soulful and heterotopic qualities — places where the poets feel a sense of belonging. Their objective is to restore, through the prism of their minds and their physical investment in space, the provincial spirit of Buenos Aires and Paris, hidden behind the dynamism of the modern metropolises they have become. As a consequence of this communion between self and place they explore the possibility of being on the brink of a revelatory experience that speaks to the enigma of life. The wider scope of the thesis addresses the historical and cultural relationship between Buenos Aires and Paris, Borges's and Réda's redefinition of the centre/periphery dichotomy, the evening as a temporal locale and the distinction between poetic destiny and aesthetic experience.

Long Abstract

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This thesis is a comparative analysis of the literary relationship between Jorge Luis Borges and Jacques Réda, with a specific focus on the poetry they write about their respective cities: Buenos Aires and Paris. The selected primary material for this project — including poetic prose, verse and essays written by Borges and Réda — jointly spans most of the twentieth century, from 1923 to 2004. In their works, Borges and Réda establish themselves as poets of the city independently of each other. They each develop a poetics of the urban in order to develop and delineate their individual personal maps of Buenos Aires and Paris. But these maps are more than a passive description of the urban landscape; they also include the poets' psychological investment in the city — their sense of self as they come in contact with streets and locations around the city and the effects that this urban experience also has on them. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to analyse the interplay between Borges's and Réda's poetics of the urban and poetics of the self, which the comparative approach to their writings will illuminate.

In order to address this main research question, this thesis establishes first the rationale behind the comparison of these two poets' works. The reason for comparing Borges's and Réda's treatment of the urban theme is based on a connection between these two authors that until now had escaped Borges and Réda critics alike. This connection is rooted in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), a collection of essays and poems

written by Réda between 1957 and 1986. Réda compiled the book as a tribute to Borges after his death in 1986, and in doing so he affirmed his critical knowledge of Borges's texts and expressed the ways in which Borges contributed to the development of his poetics. One of the main aims of this thesis is therefore to identify shared characteristics between Borges's and Réda's approaches the city that establish Borges as one of Réda's definitive influences. More significantly, the analysis of Borges's urban poetry through the lens of a younger poet such as Réda reveals new insights into Borges's own relationship to Buenos Aires.

Whilst uncovering the literary connection between Borges and Réda, the narrative arc of this thesis guides its reader through a discovery of these authors' respective poetic cities: from their emotional investment in the streets of Buenos Aires and Paris, through to their repeated visits to certain types of places that exert an affective influence over them, and finally around the peripheral neighbourhoods they consider to have the most poetic potential. Throughout this journey, understanding the two authors' poetics of the urban leads to an analysis of their circulation in and around Buenos Aires and Paris, to a redefinition of the meaning of centre and periphery according to their personal maps of the city, and to the interrogation of their sense of self through their urban experience.

The **Introduction**, entitled **'Towards a Poetics of the Urban and a Poetics of the Self: Space, Place and Subjectivity within an Urban Context'**, explains the rationale behind this comparative analysis of Borges's and Réda's urban writings, and defines the aims, objectives and critical framework of the thesis. It also

contextualises the three main areas of study that converge in these writers' works: poetry, subjectivity and the city. It assesses, first of all, the literary history of writing about cities in general, before focusing on French urban literature in prose and verse and its impact on Spanish American cultural and literary movements. Secondly, some attention is devoted to the architectural influence France bestowed upon Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, which resulted in Buenos Aires becoming known as 'the Paris of South America'. Lastly, it contends that the relationship of the individual with the urban surroundings has in fact become more prominent in the twentieth century since writers — and poets in particular — have become more interested in exploring their place in the world.

Furthermore, in order to contextualise the core of the thesis, **Chapter 1**, entitled **'Cultural Exchange and Literary Influence: Borges's Reception in France and Réda's *Ferveur De Borges*'**, expands the background of the introduction to include further analysis of the connection between Borges and Réda. The chapter explains the relevance of the comparison between Borges and Réda by addressing two important factors. The first factor is that Réda belongs to a generation of French writers who discovered Borges's work when the latter was being translated into French in the 1950s. Réda came into contact with Borges's work as a result of a series of culturally serendipitous events that took place at the time of the Second World War. In 1939, Roger Caillois, a sociologist and former surrealist, was invited to give a series of lectures in Buenos Aires by the editor of the magazine *Sur*: Victoria Ocampo. Caillois was later forced to remain in Argentina because of the breakout of

the war. Upon his return to Paris in 1945, Caillois founded the collection 'La Croix du Sud', a collection published by Editions Gallimard, dedicated to disseminating the works of Spanish-American writers. This turn of events subsequently allowed a young Jacques Réda to access Borges's translated works in the 1950s. The second factor that establishes the connection between Borges and Réda is the latter's composition of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), the collection of essays published a year after Borges's death in 1987, but which contains essays from as early as 1957, thus establishing Réda's life-long interest in Borges. In this chapter, I offer a detailed analysis of this book and by doing so, I establish that Borges and Réda share congenial approaches to the city, later examined in more detail in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2, entitled **'The Poet and the Street: Towards a Map of Borges's and Réda's Poetic Cities'**, first establishes Borges and Réda as poets of the city. It shows that Borges became interested in the urban theme from the time when he and his family lived in Europe. Experiencing life in different European cities whilst also discovering a myriad of writers in French and in German made Borges think about the native city he had left behind, particularly in anticipation of his eventual return. I argue that the scaffolds of Borges's poetic project for Buenos Aires are put in place during this time of poetic and personal self-discovery. The section on Réda describes him as a man born in the provinces who migrated to the big city in search of personal meaning. It shows that Réda adopts an inquisitive and furtive personality when exploring the streets of Paris, a curiosity that encourages a receptivity of the signs offered by the city. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the street as

a fundamental constituent feature of Borges's and Réda's personal maps of Buenos Aires and Paris. For both poets, the street represents the possibility of circulation, of being able to travel and to reach the places that interest them. As a result, the street is also invested with a certain degree of reverence and emotion: in Borges's case it is a sentimental proximity he feels to the streets, whereas in Réda's case it is a more playful sense of emotional discovery. Borges cherishes the opportunity to feel that the streets of Buenos Aires can become part of his sense of self; Réda revels in the freedom that they provide.

The sense of belonging and freedom sought by both of these poets is explored further in **Chapter 3**, **'Atmospheres and Places: The Search for the Provincial in Temporal and Physical Locales of Buenos Aires and Paris'**. In this chapter, I reveal that Borges and Réda are mostly drawn to the city in the evening. Both poets agree that this time of day creates a pleasant atmosphere for the wandering poet because at this point in the day the flow of people around the streets has decreased and the changing colours of the sky as the day turns into night create a mysterious but also expressive urban landscape. In this first part of the chapter, I show Borges's first attempts to establish a myth for Buenos Aires, his desire to leave a poetic legacy of his native city. In Réda's case, the study of the evening in his prose poems exposes an important feature of his work: his intent to create poetic instants, which in fact becomes another way of creating lasting images of Paris as well. The second part of the chapter focuses on the places in Buenos Aires and Paris that Borges and Réda return to. These places combine Borges's and Réda's inclina-

tion for areas around the city that create an atmosphere of intimacy and reflection, places that evoke a provincial essence in contradistinction to the cosmopolitan areas of the city. These are places such as gardens, squares and vacant lots. They offer respite and refuge away from the bustling streets and places of the modern city, and ultimately allow the wandering poets to interrupt their journeys to feel the expanse that surrounds them and to connect emotionally to what they describe as the essence of the city. By examining the places and areas of the city visited by the two authors, the chapter ultimately highlights the main characteristic shared by Borges and Réda: they both establish a critical distinction between the centre, the periphery and the outlying areas of the city. Their sense of self in relation to these spaces varies, which ultimately leads them to designate those where they feel most at ease. The conclusion arrived at in the chapter is that these places recurrently show signs of being provincial, peripheral or marginal, whether they are located in the outskirts of the city or within the urban centre.

Chapter 4, the last chapter of the thesis entitled **'The Neighbourhood: Poetic Destiny and Destination'**, addresses Borges's and Réda's interest in the peripheral neighbourhoods of their respective cities. In this chapter, I define the notions of centre and periphery as seen by these poets, relative also to the specific topographic distribution of Buenos Aires and Paris. I show that the periphery represents for these poets a poetic space of possibility where they can found their own cities, a place defined by geographic and personal characteristics. Borges chooses to (re)found the city of Buenos Aires in Palermo, an *arrabal* at the edge of the city between the mod-

ernised centre and the idyllic pampas. Réda becomes increasingly rooted in the two *arrondissements* of Paris where he has lived over the past fifty years: the 15th and 20th *arrondissements*. I argue that these areas of Buenos Aires and Paris become these poets' periodic destinations, but also the sites for the exploration of their poetic destinies: they base their poetic projects here because this is where they feel a sense of belonging. This is where their sense of self finds grounding. And as a result, this is where the connection between self and place can take flight and achieve a sense of temporary transcendence from reality and into a space of mindful awareness. Borges calls this experience the 'imminence of a revelation', a revelation he hopes to achieve through writing. On the other hand, though Réda concedes that writing can take the poet to the edge of this revelation, he is not interested in tipping over this edge. Instead, Réda explores the boundaries of this perfect moment of intelligibility that does not materialise, because he is fascinated instead with its aesthetic potential. The main difference between Borges and Réda is that whereas Borges wants to define and materialise his poetic destiny, to justify his existence as a poet of the city, Réda is more inclined to enjoy his journey through the city and through the poetic text.

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Introduction

Towards a Poetics of the Urban and a Poetics of the Self: Space, Place and Subjectivity within an Urban Context

> To be at all — to exist in any way — is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact?
>
> Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place* (1997: ix)

This thesis explores the literary relationship between two writers who incorporate the city into their works: Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) from Argentina and Jacques Réda (1929-) from France. In Buenos Aires and Paris respectively, Borges and Réda map their personal and literary lives. Consequently, their relationship to the urban and to each other hinges on three important fields: poetry, subjectivity and the city. These elements converge in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), a collection of essays written and later published by Réda in 1987. This book was compiled as a tribute to Borges after his death in 1986. It gathers texts dating back to the fifties, when Réda first discovered Borges's short stories translated into French. *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) portrays Réda's admiration for the Argentine writer, but also the extent of Borges's influence on Réda, particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to the three fields mentioned above.

Réda has dedicated his life to writing books in prose and in verse about Paris, contrasting personal investment in the peripheral areas and outer-*arrondissements* of the city with purposeful self-effacement. On the other hand, in the 1920s, Borges, focused his poetic output on Buenos Aires and its own marginal neighbourhoods, though his intention was not to efface himself from the urban landscape, but rather to establish himself as the poet of his city. When Réda discovered in Borges's early poetry the Argentine's interest in Buenos Aires, its peripheral *barrios* and his emotional investment in urban space, he found enough common ground to feel inspired to engage critically and imaginatively with the writer's work in his own *Ferveur de Borges* (1987).

The primary aim of this thesis is therefore to bring to light this literary relationship, which has not yet been the subject of any study. To acknowledge, understand and discuss this connection establishes Borges as one of Réda's definitive influences, and therefore makes it necessary to consider Borges's own principles of literature when engaging critically with Réda. Conversely, for Borges scholarship, analysing his texts through the lens of a younger city poet, affirms 'el primer Borges' of the 1920s as an urban poet and confirms his preoccupation during this period and beyond with his native city, Buenos Aires (Olea Franco 1993: 128). At the same time, this thesis will address how the way that Borges and Réda choose to relate to their respective cities also affects them as individuals, how their own subjectivities are invested in the spaces that they travel.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that both authors belong to a category of 'poètes rôdeurs' who travel to the edges of the city, in a deliberate attempt to move away from what they deem as the chaotic central areas of the metropolis (Réda 1987: 93). As the differences and similarities between Borges's and Réda's approaches to Buenos Aires and Paris become clear, the layout of their respective cities will also become clear: the streets they follow, the places and atmospheres they return to and the emotional investment that they put into their journeys. Beyond their experiential mode of engagement, the comparison will reveal that Borges and Réda do more than just describe the urban landscape: their sense of self and their imaginations are involved in the process of (re)creating the city through their writing.

The opportunity to read Borges alongside Réda also brings to the forefront the im-

pact of the dissemination of Borges's work in France. It is widely known that Borges's work became internationally recognised thanks to the translation of his works into French in the 1950s (Molloy 1972: 194-247; Olea Franco 1993: 13-14). However, beyond this initial discovery, the manifest influence that Borges's treatment of Buenos Aires had on a twentieth-century city writer such as Réda is much less recognised. This thesis therefore goes beyond the presentation of Borges's effect on one contemporary French author; it focuses on a specific area of influence, namely, his early urban poetics, and how these affected Réda's own writings about Paris.

Before delving into the analytical and comparative development of this project, I believe it is important to insert the three fields of study mentioned above — poetry, subjectivity and the city — within a wider preceding context. In the pages that follow, I will define, examine and review these fields individually and then in relation to one another — with the aim of later establishing how their interdependence is played out in Borges's and Réda's works.

Literature and the City

In our contemporary world, when we think about space, we often think about the physical territory that surrounds us, the space where we live and where our lives unfold. Beyond that, at a time when over half of the world's population lives in cities, when most of us think about inhabiting space, we think by default about our place in urban space.

Furthermore, our specific movement in and around urban space, in cities — our routine commute to and from work, the errands we run — requires us to navigate its infrastructure (buildings, roads and modes of transport) by adapting to its already established dynamism (crowd mobility, speed and telecommunications). In a general sense, space is the platform that allows us to define and articulate our everyday lives; and in an urban setting, this platform has its own set of rules and challenges, mostly determined by infrastructure and urban planning. To an extent, this means that we have a tendency to understand our presence in the world in relation to our location and role in urban space at any given time. Indeed, our sense of self, our interactions with our environment, even our relationships with people are inscribed in urban space and thus require us to adopt a range of behaviours in order to adapt to it. We are affected by the urban space that surrounds us, just as much as we affect it.

As human beings, in order to make sense of our world, we have been attempting to define space and our relationship to the urban since antiquity. From the 'ideal city' in Plato's *Republic* (380 BC) to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the city has at times been the heart of idealism, possibility and excellence; yet it has also been the Babylonian symbol of corruption and decadence destroyed and rebuilt over and over again. What has changed over the centuries is the way in which writers portray the role of the city in their texts and in their lives, always subject to the cultural values of the times, through changes in ideas, societal structures and/or the material world.

Literature has in many ways contributed to the creation of city space, not only by imagining and dreaming it beyond its existing form, but also by imbuing it with

ideas and culture, political and philosophical significance and social organisation. In *Le Sens de la ville*, Bernard Lamizet describes the way in which literature transforms the city into a 'lieu de sens':

> La ville en s'inscrivant ainsi dans les formes de la littérature, n'est plus seulement un paysage esthétiquement caractérisé: elle devient un lieu de sens, susceptible d'être investi par des idées, par une culture, par les significations politiques et philosophiques d'une réflexion sur l'organisation sociale. (Lamizet 2003: 64)

The impressions and meaning that emerge from the city, as an inanimate structure, depend on the impressions and meaning infused in it by individuals. Therefore, the city becomes a 'place of meaning' thanks to those that use language to describe it. My contention, based on Lamizet's interpretation of the city in literature, is that literature does more than just create a fictional place; it invests the city in real space with character and significance.

Catherine Bernié-Boissard, a French geographer who has specialised in the metropolisation of cities, has also commented on the fact that both literature and geography have thrived, to the same degree, in the construction of cities. She takes Lamizet's claim further by declaring that literature 'multiplies' the city, that it adds another dimension to it beyond the material: 'La littérature multiplie la ville. Car celle-ci est à la fois œuvre de l'esprit et construction matérielle. La ville est de la géographie et de l'imagination. La ville est inscription dans l'espace et description de territoire' (Bernié-Boissard 2008: 120). For Bernié-Boissard, geography and the imagination have equal weight in the construction of cities. This confirms the need to take into account both dimensions in order to grasp the meaning of cities in literature, and in

particular of Buenos Aires and Paris because they are the cities on which Borges and Réda focus on.

Like Bernié-Boissard, Italian author and critic Italo Calvino (1923-1985), presents a like-minded attitude towards cities. For Calvino, city space exists as the 'real' territory where our lives unfold but also as 'imagined' presence and possibility. In *Invisible Cities* (1972), he suggests that the city is where we invest our imagination and our desires. The 'real' city is limited in its concrete structure, but through literature, writers are able endow it with endless potential. Lamizet corroborates Calvino's position: 'habiter une ville dans le réel de ces développements connaît des limites [...]. En revanche, la ville imaginée est sans fin, elle renaît sans cesse' (Lamizet 2003 : 67). Literature, through the imagination, therefore contributes to the regeneration and the perpetuation of cities over time.

Historical Perspectives of Paris in Literature

In France, the literature of Paris in verse and in prose follows two distinct paths. According to Pierre Citron, in his monumental study on the literature of Paris from Rousseau to Baudelaire, 'le thème poétique de Paris n'occupe dans l'histoire de la littérature française jusqu'au romantisme qu'une place assez mince' (Citron 1961: 15). Indeed, until the nineteenth century and before Baudelaire (1821-1867), the natural landscape dominated the thematic dimension of lyric poetry. Though Baudelaire and his successors inherited some aspects of the Romantic tradition, such as the awareness

of self and introspection, never before had the city been explored poetically as an equal to nature. However, the same cannot be said about the city in prose.

Reinhard H. Thum explains that 'the city had become a preeminent literary image before the 1850's in a different genre; that is, in the novel, or more precisely, in the novels of Balzac' (Thum 1994: 3). In his detailed study of Baudelaire's relationship to the city of Paris, he argues that to assume continuity between the novel and lyric poetry of the city for mere chronological reasons is a dangerous assumption, and that any influence Baudelaire might have had on Flaubert (1821-1880), or Balzac (1799-1850) on Baudelaire is relatively circumstantial and superficial: 'a careful scrutiny of the city in both genres reveals that the novelists and the lyric poets depicted the urban landscape from radically different points of view' (Thum 1994: 3). As a poet of the city, Réda follows in the footsteps of Baudelaire's lyrical tradition; still, in order to understand this tradition, it is important to explain briefly how it differs from prose literature.

Writing about the city in prose has existed since the eighteenth century, linked to philosophical reflections and rational thought. Through the works of Rousseau (1712-1778), Diderot (1713-1784) and Mercier (1740-1814), we encounter the dichotomous Paris of the *Lumières*. These writers responded to the rise of a post-feudal urban reality by engaging with its cultural, social and economic repercussions. Often, however, as in the case of Voltaire's *Candide* (1758) or L'Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731), the opportunity to describe the urban landscape became the background for philosophical, political or religious discourses. According to Citron and Thum, it

was not until Restif de la Bretonne's *Le Paysan perverti* (1776) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (1781-88) that an attempt to engage with a more realistic view of Paris took place (Citron 1961: 117; Thum 1994: 4-5).

In the nineteenth century, novelists such as Balzac (1799-1850), Flaubert (1821-1880) and Zola (1840-1902), focused their attention on the growing metropolis and on the realities of Paris. They were all particularly interested in the human condition; that is, on the way that individuals react to their immediate urban environment and the human relationships that they form there. In novels such as *Le Père Goriot* (1835), *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869) and Zola's twenty-novel series Les Rougon-Macquart (1871–1893), these writers formed the identity of their characters through their experiences of the city (Prendergast 1992: 1-3). Influenced by Realism for some (Balzac and Flaubert) and Darwinian Determinism and Naturalism for others (Zola), the city of Paris became, for the most part, the stage for their observation and fictionalisation of the human condition.

These writers' interest in the topography of the city was also in part the result of the physical transformation that occurred during the Haussmannisation of Paris. This took place in stages from 1848 to 1871, by direct orders of Napoleon III (1808-1873). The *grande croisée* that ensued in the 1850s was meant to improve circulation around the city and it corresponded to the imposition of major crossroads in the centre of Paris, initially in the area of Châtelet but later also in the Left Bank (Jones 2006: 354-56). This period is considered by many as the beginning of European modernity, not only because of the infrastructural transformation that took place, but crucially

because the literary and cultural representations of urban space that occurred were tied to the importance of aestheticism, the urban, and the individual's relationship to it (Nelson 2013: 103-119).

Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's (1809-1891) changes contributed to Paris becoming a rational, predictable, visually coherent yet emotionally alienating urban landscape. He intended to modernise the city from the inside out and, in order to do so, he designated five areas to address in his plan: the renovation of the city centre, the expansion of the city limits, the prioritisation of visual perspectives, the development of green spaces and the improvement of hygiene.[1] As a result, the outskirts of the city grew, creating the segregated topography that still exists today, 'with wealthy *beaux quartiers* in the centre and to the west, and working-class *arrondissements* and the suburban *banlieues populaires* relegated to the east and the north' (Jones 2006: 354-56). Haussmann was therefore responsible for creating the squares, parks and building façades that Réda would later visit and write about, as well as the social segregation that would push Réda towards the outer *arrondissements* of the city, in books such as *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004).

If the novelists of the nineteenth century took on the social and topographical realities of the modern city from an observational stance in order to explore the human condition, the poets of the same period reacted with a rather different sense

[1]For a comprehensive account of the Haussmannisation of Paris, see Brian Nelson, 'The Remaking of Paris: Zola and Haussmann', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris*, ed. by Anna-Louise Milne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 103-119, Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), Colin Jones, 'Haussmannism and the City of Modernity' in *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 344-395.

of awareness and nostalgia for the 'disappearing old Paris' (Scott 2013: 85). Rooted deeply in the Romantic tradition, city poets of the nineteenth century held a more subjective view than Realist novelists. They operated from their own personal points of view as subjects of their poetry (rather than from the point of view of an omniscient observer), because they had learned from Rousseau (1712-1778) and the Romantics that self-examination led to the exploration of 'areas of consciousness which were not to be categorized rationally' (Thum 1994: 8). Thus, when poets such as Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Rimbaud (1854-1891) mapped this self-awareness onto their own observations of life in the city, they did more than just give an account of the physical transformation of the city: they provided a psychological as well as an aesthetic response to the urban landscape. Consequently, they divorced themselves from the outright rejection of the city by the nature-loving Rousseau. In the work of Baudelaire, the city finally became a possible and worthy subject of lyric poetry and marked, as the summary above describes, both the departure from and continuation of the Romantic tradition (Thum 1994: 8, 10).

Baudelaire wrote many poems based in and about Paris.[2] For this reason, he is considered 'the father of urban poetry' and 'the great poet of urban modernity' (Scott 2013: 85; Thum 1994: 19). According to Karlheinz Stierle, Baudelaire implemented a new and innovative language to parallel Haussmann's structural innovations in the second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* (1861), augmented with a section entitled 'Tableaux parisiens' and in his *Le Spleen de Paris: petits poèmes en prose* (1869)

[2]In 'Tableaux parisiens', some examples include: 'Paysage', 'Le soleil', and 'Rêve parisien'. See Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996[1857]), pp. 121, 122 and 144.

(Stierle 2001: 413). However, poems such as 'Paysage' and 'Le soleil' show that Baudelaire had in fact an ambivalent relationship with the city: he was at once attracted to and repelled by the realities of urban life, the harshness of the landscape, the loneliness of the city-dweller and the contrast between the privileged and the disempowered:

> Le long du vieux faubourg, où pendent aux masures
> Les persiennes, abri des secrètes luxures,
> Quand le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés
> Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés,
> Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,
> Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,
> Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,
> Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés. [...]
> (Baudelaire 1996[1861]: 122)

In this poem, the lyrical subject presents himself as the figure that is responsible for mitigating the difficulties of living in the modern Paris. In several of the poems of the 'Tableaux parisiens' such as 'Paysage', 'Les petites vieilles', 'Le cygne' and 'Les sept vieillards' and in many of the prose poems of *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), the city becomes a backdrop as the lyrical subject departs on a mental voyage that separates him temporarily from the physical reality of his environment. Baudelaire is important for the contextualisation of Réda's Paris, precisely because by circulating in Paris and staging a temporary encounter that exalts his imagination, Baudelaire established the aesthetics of an instant; in other words, he created in poetry of the city the possibility of the transitory and the site for exploring his own subjectivity.[3]

[3]For a detailed examination of Baudelaire's movement around Parisian streets and his creation of a sense of the transitory and the sublime, see Maria Scott, 'Circulation in Baudelaire's Paris',

Subjectivity corresponds to what the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014) describes as the expression of the individuality and the personality of the artist.[4] Thus, according to Michael Sheringham, at the core of Baudelaire's relationship with Paris was, on the one hand, his interest in modernity and how to lead a 'modern life', as described in his essay 'Le peintre de la vie moderne' (1863); and on the other hand, his obsession with individual self-discovery: 'Urban space becomes the arena in which the poet can explore the impact of the external world on his own subjectivity' (Sheringham 1996: 86-87).

Part of Baudelaire's exploration of life in the modern city considered the image of the modern artist, who possessed the refinement and independence of a dandy and the intellect of the philosopher, but who instead chose to be a passionate observer of his surroundings, a *flâneur.* He modelled this artist on Constantin de Guys, a painter who according to Baudelaire in the essay 'Le peintre de la vie moderne' (1863) was able to 'extract the eternal from the transitory, and to isolate the poetic dimension of modernity from the simply modish by dint of a capacity, grounded in an essentially childlike vision, to crystallize on paper fleeting impressions garnered while in the midst of everyday life' (Sheringham 1996: 86).

The term *flâneur* derives from the verb *flâner*, which means to wander around without aim. After Baudelaire presented, in 'Le peintre de la vie moderne', a mem-

in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris*, ed. by Anna-Louise Milne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 85-101.

[4] In the remainder of this thesis, whenever I speak about subjectivity, particularly regarding Borges's and Réda's relationships to Buenos Aires and Paris, I will be referring to the expression of their individuality, their personality and their feelings, which when perceived by the writers themselves, will also be referred to as their 'sense of self'.

orable portrait of the *flâneur* as the artist *par excellence* of the modern metropolis, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) later studied the concept. Benjamin reaffirmed the idea in *Charles Baudelaire* (1955) that Baudelaire looked for diversity in the crowd, in the arcades and commercial centres of Paris, where he could find *flâneur* versions of himself. He argued that his predecessor blurred the line between lived experience and aesthetic life, and sought to become the embodiment of the aesthetics of modernity proper. Excited by the advance of trade and human communications, Benjamin combined cultural and sociological study with quasi-journalistic work by going out into the streets as a *flâneur* (Benjamin 1993[1939]: 434-472). Ultimately, he defined the *flâneur* as an essential figure of the modern urban city, an observer of modern times alienated by consumer capitalism: '[le flâneur] voit la ville se scinder en deux pôles dialectiques. Elle s'ouvre à lui comme paysage et elle l'enferme comme chambre' (Benjamin 1993[1939]: 435).[5] Inspired by Louis Aragon's (1897-1982) evocation of the Passage de l'Opéra in *Le Paysan de Paris* (1924), Benjamin became enthralled with the Parisian arcades and the city's vision of capitalism, subsequently searching for meaning in the relationship between art and commerce in his unfinished *Passagen-Werk* written between 1927 and 1940 (Sheringham 1996: 97). As a voyeuristic observer, he engaged with the diversity of the urban and suburban experience, passively recording events during his solitary explorations. According to Mary Gluck's well-known and comprehensive study of the *flâneur*, it was, in fact, 'Benjamin

[5]For a thorough and informative account of Benjamin's treatment of the notion of the *flâneur* and in particular its indebtedness to the Surrealists, see Michael Sheringham, 'City Space, Mental Space, Poetic Space: Paris in Breton, Benjamin and Réda', in *Parisian Fields*, ed. by Michael Sheringham (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), pp. 85-114.

who almost single-handedly recovered the figure of the *flâneur* for twentieth-century criticism, establishing the connections between *flânerie* and the urban landscape of modernity' (Gluck 2003: 54).

In this day and age, the term *flâneur* has been loosely used to refer to artists, writers and ordinary individuals who like to explore urban space. For this reason it is important to clarify here that even though Borges and Réda may share aspects of the purposely detached gaze of the *flâneur*, who, in one interpretation, is out to 'complete his otherwise incomplete identity' (Jones 2006: 344-95), or, in another reading, embodies the nightly contemplation of the solitary wanderer, the object of their urban quest differs greatly from that of a *flâneur*. I concur with Susan Buck-Morss, that the *flâneur* was the product of a specific time and place: the industrial capitalism of nineteenth-century Paris to which Baudelaire belonged (Gluck 2003; Jones 2006; Reid 1991). As a result, neither Borges nor Réda could express the same complex and paradoxical combination of excitement for the modern urban environment, contempt for the consumerist society, and fear of the undifferentiated *foule,* simply because they lived in different societies at different times. Rather, both authors celebrate the personal freedom of walking, and a peripheral yet engaged position as witnesses of the urban landscape. Though Susan Harrow (2004), Jason Wilson (2006) and Sylvia Molloy (1972) have individually been quick to call Borges or Réda *flâneurs*, in this thesis I will refrain from categorising either of these authors as *flâneurs*. In fact, Réda divorces himself from the image of the *flâneur* during an interview for the *Irish Times* in April 2010: 'the real flâneur is someone who has their

head in the clouds, who stops everywhere, who has no objective. That's not really my temperament' (Réda and MacCormaic 2010: paragraph 12 of 21).[6]

But, if there is one element that makes Réda an inheritor of Baudelaire's tradition, it is the older poet's exploration of prose poetry as the best medium to describe aesthetic modern experience that set the precedent for more recent descriptions and poetic representations of the city. With great admiration for prose authors such as Poe (1809-1849), Baudelaire ventured into similar explorations of the emotions and psychology of the artist with relation to the modern city. Baudelaire expressed his inclination towards writing prose poetry as being something born out of the experience of the city itself: 'C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant' (Baudelaire 2006[1857]: 104). Baudelaire's obsessive ideal was what he described to his friend Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896) as 'une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience' (Baudelaire 2006[1857]: 104). According to a well-recognised study of Baudelaire by Ross Chambers entitled 'Baudelaire's Paris', Baudelaire was one of the first poets to recognise the need for poetry to accommodate 'to the sometimes exhilarating, but mostly prosaic and alienating mode of existence now led by the inhabitants of cities' (Chambers 2005: 101). *Le Spleen de Paris* is Baudelaire's testimony that the exhilaration of urban life could be conveyed through prose poetry.

[6]This interview was accessed online where no pagination was provided. I have therefore specified the paragraph where the quote was found instead.

Thus, if the poetry of the nineteenth century connected subjectivity and language to the poet's experience of the city, the twentieth century would bring new and different perspectives on the city and its literature, mostly to do with social and cultural diversification and emotional investment. From one of his earliest poems, 'Le Forgeron' (1870), Rimbaud (1854-1891) developed a language for and about the city that culminated in *Une saison en enfer* (1873) and *Les Illuminations* (1886). The latter in particular, shows how the city dominated his poetic language and marks Rimbaud as one of the most provocatively influential urban poets of the turn of the century (Leuwers 1990: 45). This is because, contrary to Baudelaire's representation of the city described above, Rimbaud elevated Paris to a revolutionary and prophetic role, believing in its capacity to create a utopian society (Thum 1994: 92). Chambers argues that as a result, Rimbaud 'liberated prose poetry from the framework of representation which Baudelaire had retained' (Chambers 2005: 101). Along with Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Lautréamont (1846-1870), Rimbaud experimented with radical innovations in language, which 'initiated a kind of self-reflexive writing which was later developed in Laforgue's (1860-1887) and Apollinaire's (1880-1918) *vers libre*' and propelled the prose poem into the twentieth century where it has become an important form of poetic expression in France (Kelley 1985: 39). In addition, poets such as Apollinaire (1880-1918), and later Cendrars (1887-1961) took into account a heightened awareness of individual and social issues in the early twentieth-century French culture and invested it in their poetry. Apollinaire acted as a transitional figure between the Symbolism of the nineteenth century and Surrealist poetry:

> Apollinaire continually sought to identify the new spirit, 'l'esprit nouveau',

> convinced like Baudelaire that it should be the common mission of poet and artist to take the pulse of contemporary life and to find forms appropriate to its articulation. For Apollinaire the central feature of early twentieth-century modernity was the impact of technology and its products [...]. The challenge here was not only to develop *poetic* styles and forms that could reflect these new realities, but to respond more profoundly to the existential disorientation occasioned by the need to jettison established categories of belief and understanding. (Sheringham 1996: 87)

According to Michael Sheringham, one of the 'zones' Apollinaire designated as ideal to respond to the 'existential disorientation' shared later by the Surrealists was the street (Sheringham 1996: 88). This is of some significance to this thesis, because as will be discussed in the second chapter, both Borges and Réda also promote the city street as the starting point of their intimate relationships with their respective cities.

The street is also the starting point of Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) and André Breton's pursuit of his love interest in *Nadja* (1928). Breton (1896-1966) and Aragon (1897-1982) portrayed a city that imposed itself 'comme manifestation d'un réel dénué de sens' (Kelley 1985 : 39). They explored 'le merveilleux du quotidien' by travelling the streets and recording their impressions and feelings on the page mimicking the pace of their walk (Pinçonnat and Liaroutzos 2007: 374). Breton depicted an erotic city haunted by the image of a woman, Nadja, while Aragon grounded his text on a specific place, the Passage de l'Opéra.[7] Aragon endeavoured to create a myth of Paris based on the dynamics, mystery and transience of the disappearing passage, which led to an exploratory prose structure that combined fantasy and the expression of desire. Aragon's mythification of Paris in *Le Paysan de*

[7]The Passage de l'Opéra was a sort of passage with commercial galleries that existed in Paris between 1822 and 1925. It was destroyed and replaced by the boulevard Haussmann.

Paris (1926) follows a long line of city myths established by the nineteenth-century novel, as penned by authors such as Hugo (1802-1885), Balzac (1799-1850), Zola (1840-1902) and Eugène Sue (1804-1957). They focused their exploration of the human condition on the space inhabited by humans and gave Paris the centre stage.

This kind of writing was subsequently followed by a generation of writers — like Perec (1936-1982), Modiano (1945-) and Echenoz (1947-) — whose experience of the city becomes intimately linked to their ordinary and everyday lives. These writers have a desire to break with the surrealist experience and want to establish a more immediate bond with the city based on real life experiences. Within contemporary French literature, Réda is a self-proclaimed disciple of Jean Follain (Réda 1993: 67-68), though also considered as a part of a *lignée* of contemporary poets whose 'moral imperative' is to turn outwards into the city streets to find themselves, the city and each other (Feldman and Romer 2009: 19-20). Stephen Romer explains that these poets — Jean Follain (1903-1971), Henri Thomas (1912-1993), Philippe Jaccottet (1925-), Jacques Réda (1929-), Paul de Roux (1937-), Guy Goffette (1947-) and Gilles Ortlieb — have in common their interest in the quotidian and their rejection of literary labels. Réda is considered a pivotal figure among them, not least because he was editor-in-chief of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1987 to 1996, but most importantly because he heralded a 'movement' termed as 'lyrical-descriptive' and 'urban' (Feldman and Romer 2009: 21). With Réda, the literature of Paris in the twentieth century becomes adorned with topographical specificities, dotted with references to other writers, artists, books, and enriched with humorous puns. It also

becomes the site and the sight of the 'eternal provincial' (Feldman and Romer 2009: 21), the poet who appears to be discovering the city — always and forever — for the first time.

However, despite Réda's desire to break with certain aspects of the writing of some of his predecessors, an interview I conducted in March 2013 confirms that his image of Paris is inevitably conditioned by the writing of authors that he did admire:

> Du point de vue historique et littéraire, j'ai comme chacun une certaine représentation du Paris de Sainte Geneviève, Philippe-Auguste, et ainsi de suite jusqu'à nos jours en passant par la Révolution de 1789 et Napoléon III, ainsi que du ou des Paris de Villon, Boileau, Mercier, Baudelaire, Queneau – pour n'en citer qu'un petit nombre. (Réda and Puello Alfonso 2013)

Conversely, though Réda admits to having a range of different literary influences, when it comes to writing about the city, his choice of Paris is rather more arbitrary: 'Mais Paris ne m'a pas spécialement attiré: je m'y suis trouvé par une succession des hasards de mon existence. Et j'aurais pu m'intéresser de la même manière à Toulouse ou à Strasbourg, à Istanbul ou à Prague' (Réda and Puello Alfonso 2013).

Jacques Réda began writing in the 1950s. His first four books — or *plaquettes* as he calls them — were imbued with existential angst, inquisitive introspection and a passion for jazz.[8] He then lapsed into a thirteen-year poetic silence, which he broke with *Le Mai sombre* (1968), followed in close succession by *Amen* (1968), *Récitatif* (1970) and *La Tourne* (1975). However, Réda's initial poetic considerations change from 1977 with the publication of *Les Ruines de Paris.* With this book, Réda not

[8] *Les Inconvénients du métier* (1952), *All stars* (1953), *Cendres chaudes* (1955) and *Laboureur du silence*(1955).

only breaks with the verse form of his first books, but he ultimately dismisses their self-reflexive and intensely anguished introspection in favour of lyrical depictions of the outside world in a discursive and relaxed style that will permeate the rest of his works.

In his more mature work, Réda intercalates verse and prose, a practice that is clearly steeped in the Baudelairian tradition, and yet that also departs from it because of Réda's resistance to literary classifications or political associations. His approach to writing about Paris is instead ingrained with the simplicity of everyday life as he sees it. Indeed, according to John Taylor, Réda pursues the essential though surreptitious things in life:

> Réda's peregrinations through humdrum provincial towns, drab faubourgs and outlying arrondissements of the capital instead seek to verify whether the small but significant things of life can still be found beneath the harsh surface — what he calls the 'ruins' — of twentieth-century reality. (Taylor 2004: 5)

Réda blends humour with erudition, description of everyday endeavours with questions about the fleetingness of life, precise observations with comments about the inevitability of death. He is interested in philosophical and metaphysical discussions only to the extent that they may feed his nostalgia and cosmological reflections when exploring the city. Over the years, Réda's writing about the city moves consistently towards a more physical experience of space, and his essays become more narrative rather than following the tradition of the *poème en prose* (Sheringham 1992: 81). As I will argue, the connection between Borges and Réda hinges on the fact that urban space becomes central to their poetic imaginations.

Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?

Since the end of the nineteenth century Buenos Aires has been compared to Paris. At times, it has even been called the Paris of Spanish America: 'Buenos Aires es nuestro París, la capital de nuestra América' (Vasconcelos 1966: 206). Up until 1880 and particularly around the time when Napoleon III and Haussmann worked on modernising Paris, Argentina was still an agrarian country and Buenos Aires was a relatively small city, and the capital of a large province of that name in its early years of independence (Williamson 1992: 274-79). In 1880, however, the city of Buenos Aires officially became the capital of Argentina and subsequently embarked on the road to modernisation. As a result of the economic growth that ensued, Buenos Aires transformed itself into a modern city, and in looking for models on which to base its newfound identity, looked to Paris for inspiration, one of the most beautiful cities in the world at the time.

The object of the following discussion is to establish the extent of France's contribution to the development of the architecture and literature of Buenos Aires. Architecturally, on the one hand, in the context of this thesis, France's influence over Buenos Aires is important because it explains some of the spatial similarities found in Borges's and Réda's responses to their urban environments. Culturally, on the other hand, this influence had a direct impact on Buenos Aires's literary production in the first decades of the twentieth century, at a time when Borges was seeking to

affirm himself as a poet. In the pages that follow, I will first address the societal and topographical changes that occurred in Buenos Aires from the end of the nineteenth century, and then explore the literary repercussions of these changes.

At the end of the nineteenth century, countries in Spanish America looked to Europe's culture and architecture — particularly from London and Paris[9] — to inspire its modernisation. However, as a former colony, it lacked the modernity that had already developed in Europe. Spanish American cities were considered to be on the periphery — a colonial periphery — in relation to European cities (Morse 2005: 5). Wilson refers to Buenos Aires for example as a 'colonial backwater' that turned into 'Latin America's grandest city' by means of a rapid metamorphosis (Wilson 2003: 252). This metamorphosis took place in stages from 1880 when Torcuato de Alvear (1822-1890) was named the first mayor of Buenos Aires. This event propelled significant transformations with decisive social and political repercussions for Argentina. Essentially, the province of Buenos Aires and the country in general transitioned from being an economy mostly dependent on cattle and cereals, to a territory invigorated by imported manufactured goods and telecommunications from Britain and by a flood of immigrants who became the new workforce of the capital city (Sebreli 1996: 215-16; Williamson 1992: 277-78). Jason Wilson explains that nearly 10% of Europeans who emigrated to South America in the nineteenth century ended up in Argentina,

[9]In this thesis, I am only looking at the Parisian influence on Buenos Aires. However, it is important to note that other European cities considered 'peripheral' in relation to Paris and London also had a cultural impact on Spanish American cities. For an analysis of the influence of Russian and Austrian literature on Spanish American urbanism, see Susan Harrow, *The Material, the Real, and the Fractured Self: Subjectivity and Representation from Rimbaud to Réda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 53.

allowing the city to triple in population by 1914 (Wilson 2003: 251). This was the Buenos Aires in which Borges was born in 1899.

Alvear executed a plan to modernise Buenos Aires using its traditional, already existing Hispanic grid, which had been conceived in 1580 by the Basque Juan de Garay (1528-1583).[10] This concept of a small and dense city contained — like Paris — by a peripheral beltway and public green areas, would remain the model until the first decades of the twentieth century (Antúnez Olivera 2002: 70). Alvear became the 'Argentine Haussmann',[11] replacing Argentina's taste for Italian-style architecture, with French design emanating from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris (Scobie 1974: 130-132).

Modernisation undoubtedly changed the urban geography of Buenos Aires forever, in great part due to the fact that increasing wealth allowed rich families to travel — particularly to Europe — thus providing the ruling classes with a real model that they could imitate back home. Argentines began to emulate European fashion, culture, literature and even urban planning (García D'Agostino 1981; Wilson 2003: 252). It also meant the exportation of tango, which arrived in Paris through Marseille in 1906 and formally marked the beginning of '[l]a historia de amor entre las dos ciudades'

[10] On June 11 1580, having attained the rank of Capitan General of the Viceroyalty, the Spanish conquistador Juan de Garay founded Buenos Aires for the second time on the banks of the Río de la Plata. The first foundation of Buenos Aires was by Pedro de Mendoza in 1536 under the name of Nuestra Señora del Buen Ayre. The city was later destroyed by the natives. Garay landed on the riverbank in the location of what is today the Plaza de Mayo, calling the city *Ciudad de la Trinidad* and its port *Santa Maria de Buenos Ayres*. Consequently, Buenos Aires would become the main city in the Paraná basin and its most important port. See Luis Priamo (ed.), *Imágenes de Buenos Aires 1915-1940: fotografías del archivo de la dirección municipal de paseos y de otras colecciones* (Fundación Antorchas: Buenos Aires, 1998), p. 7.

[11] Phrase found in Rocío Antúnez Olivera, 'El Buenos Aires del cuarto centenario: construcciones y miradas', *Escritos. Revista del centro de ciencias del lenguaje*, 26 (2002): pp. 67-84, at 70.

(Zalko 2001: 7, 13).[12] Sumptuous mansions rose along French-style boulevards; parks and plazas were built for leisure and exercise; paved streets shone with electric lights; and public transportation moved people around smoothly and inexpensively (Scobie 1974: 13-69).

At the time, Argentina was dominated by cattle-ranchers and wheat-growers who owned extensive tracts of land called *estancias*: farms located in the treeless and vast plains of the countryside also known as the *pampas*. For Buenos Aires, this terrain began just on the outskirts of the city. The new urban model also focused on the development of private space, as opposed to the exaltation of public and social space seen during the colonial period. It was during this time that the large avenues that break up the grid-like structure of the city were built. This happened around the same time as the construction of the Champs Elysées in Paris. The city was beautified with parks destined for leisurely walks, and the structure of the city was divided into residential and working class neighbourhoods. Coffee shops, private clubs and intimate gardens emerged; city police were constituted. The Plaza de Mayo, a modern site that summarized the political, social and cultural shift, replaced the *plaza* of the colonial period.

Alongside the plaza, the construction of the Avenida de had important repercussions in the circulation in and around Buenos Aires, particularly because the city was split in two: north of the avenue was the bourgeois city, whereas south of the av-

[12]For a detailed study of the tango and the relationship between Paris and Buenos Aires, see Nardo Zalko, *Paris-Buenos Aires, un siglo de tango* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2001).

enue was the Barrio Sur together with La Boca and San Telmo, neighbourhoods that housed the working classes. The rich families that once lived in the South of the city moved northward where buildings emulating French architecture were erected close to the new port (Sebreli 1996: 219). This created an interesting yet dysfunctional dynamic in Buenos Aires because it segregated portions of the population according to their socio-economic background, along a north-south divide. It also created a friction within the city between classes and contributed to the wider tension between city and country. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was unsurprising that '[t]o a city-dweller, whether rich or proletarian, urban Europe would have been less alien than the Latin American countryside, where a largely coloured mass of peasants toiled in semi-feudal haciendas or in the Indian communities' (Williamson 1992: 300).

In literary terms, after Argentina's independence from royalist forces loyal to the Spanish crown at the beginning of the nineteenth century, France progressively replaced Spain as a primary cultural model for Spanish America. The aim was to define a cultural identity for the new nation, but paradoxically, in order to do so, Argentina's intellectuals looked towards the more established French model in their quest for an Argentine identity. Initially, after the triumph of liberal republicanism and until the 1840s, French-inspired neo-classical styles and Enlightenment thought dominated the arts (Williamson 1992: 284-87). But, as Williamson explains

> As liberalism acquired a radical political thrust once more, the restraints of neo-classicism gave way to an impassioned romanticism, which made its first appearance in Argentina in the 1830s in the course of the long struggle against the tyrant Juan Manuel Rosas, who embodied for liberals

the worst vices of the Spanish heritage. (Williamson 1992: 288).[13]

Romanticism therefore emerged in Argentina as part of the conflict between liberals and conservatives for an authentic national identity, and it encouraged 'una modificación de la actitud vital del hombre frente al mundo externo' (Loprete 2008: 80). It is generally believed that this early romanticism (1830-1860) imitated the French 'romantisme' of the beginning of the century, brought over to Spanish America by Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851) (Williamson 1992: 288).[14] After spending five years in Paris, Echeverría, who was himself a liberal, returned to Buenos Aires in 1830 to become a politician and a man of letters. He is credited not only with the inauguration of 'the theme of the pampas as an archetypal landscape' in *La cautiva* (1837), but also with political satire in favour of liberalism (Williamson 1992: 288-89).

The gauchesque genre, which had its origins in Río de la Plata during the wars of independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, achieved its most significant and influential work with José Hernández's (1834-1886) *Martín Fierro* (1872, Part One and 1979, Part Two). This genre appealed to the Romantics because it purported to reflect a truly indigenous Spanish American way of life, though initially

[13] Juan Manuel Rosas (1793-1877) was a landowner and popular caudillo who, after years of political struggles, ruled the Argentine Confederation almost uninterruptedly from 1829 to 1852. He maintained a rigid control over the provinces of Río de la Plata and was considered by liberals like Domingo Sarmiento and Esteban Echeverría as a bloodthirsty dictator who stunted the progress and democracy of Argentina. Nationalists, on the other hand, saw him as a leader and defender of the popular masses. See Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo (eds.), 'The Caudillo's Order', in *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 75-79, at 75.

[14] The writers in vogue at the time were Chateaubriand, Hugo, Lamartine, Madame de Stäel, George Sand and Dumas. Some of the most famous magazines read were *Revue de Paris*, *Revue britannique* and *Revue des deux mondes*. For a more comprehensive view of Buenos Aires's cultural life in the nineteenth century see Carlos A. Loprete, *Literatura esencial de la Argentina: desde sus orígenes hasta nuestros días* (San Miguel de Tucumán: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2008), pp. 83-85.

it was influenced by the Spanish tradition of the *cuadro de costumbres*, a sketch of popular life and customs. Still, the genre was met with some ambivalence in the form of Domingo Sarmiento's (1811-1888) liberal and polemical essay *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845). Sarmiento's essentially political and social treatise purports to be a biography of the federalist *caudillo* Facundo Quiroga*,* 'who rose to power in the interior province of San Juan and pursued a violent career in the blood-soaked national politics of the period following independence, until he was treacherously assassinated, probably on the orders of his rival Rosas' (Williamson 1992: 290). Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845) is considered one of the most influential literary works to come out of Spanish America because it addresses the conflict over national identity that continued to divide liberals and conservatives in Argentina. At the same time, it triggered endless controversy over Sarmiento's implied meaning with the terms 'civilización' and 'barbarie'; the first being associated with Europe and the second with Spanish America. However, Edwin Williamson balances out the debate by explaining that 'barbarism for Sarmiento simply meant the lack of good government based on legitimate authority' and that '[h]is essay provided a prophetic insight into the features of populist dictatorships that were to become endemic all over Latin America'. In other words, '[b]arbarism was not a Latin American problem as such, but a perennial risk run by all human societies' (Williamson 1992: 290-91).[15] However, Sarmiento's narrow view of the *pampas* and the *gaucho* as the embodiment of barbarism, contributed to the notion that the South American continent was still culturally and

[15]For a more detailed analysis of Sarmiento's *Facundo,* see Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 290-291.

socially backward compared to its European counterpart, a view that affected the way its literature was perceived by both South Americans and Europeans at least until the twentieth century.[16]

Hernández's *Martín Fierro* (1872, 1879) eventually countered Sarmiento's claim at a time when he had become president of Argentina, and life in the *pampas* was being replaced by 'a modern economy based on well-defined property rights, wheat-growing *estancias,* settlements of foreign immigrants and a network of railways' (Williamson 1992: 291). Part One of *Martín Fierro* (1872) reads, on the one hand, as a celebration of a cultural hero; on the other hand, it is also a lament for a disappearing *gaucho*, who in turn represents the authentic Argentine people. At the time, the *gaucho* had become an ambivalent symbol of national identity. But Part Two (1879) of the story eventually confirmed fears about the loss of a traditional way of life the sake of economic progress.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, French culture continued to inspire Spanish American artists. Parnassianism and symbolism influenced the Hispanic literary movement that became known as *modernismo*:

> El modernismo tomó de los simbolistas franceses, sobre todo de Verlaine, la teoría de la musicalidad del verso (*De la musique avant toute chose*). Tomó también el sentido de matiz *(nuance*) en oposición a la expresión categórica y racional. La penumbra es más poética que la claridad solar. De los parnasianos aprendió la despersonalización de las descripciones, el gusto por la estatuaria, la arquitectura de los jardines, y la técnica de describir y recrear palimpsestos, centauros, blasones, ánforas y todo el repertorio de antigüedades arqueológicas. (Loprete 2008: 169)

[16] See Chapter 1.I.1. Literary Relationship before 1950, p.52.

According to Williamson, the movement was considered 'modern' because of this 'Frenchness' and because of the novel status given to the poet (Williamson 1992: 302). But *modernismo* is not to be confused with *modernism*. The latter is a movement that appeared in Europe and North America in the first decades of the twentieth century, and that made its way to Spanish America in the 1920s. Borges was born and grew up at a time when *modernismo* was prevalent, but wrote at the height of Buenos Aires's modernity.[17] Ruben Darío (1867-1916) is credited for inaugurating *modernismo* with the publication of *Azúl* (1888), a book with an 'extraña y novedosa conjunción de prosas y versos, con reminiscencias e influencias románticas, parnasianas, simbolistas, pero sobre todo, exóticas y principalmente francesas' (Loprete 2008: 168). The Nicaraguan poet is also credited with giving this eclectic mode its international and political character, essentially because he exported it to Buenos Aires in the 1890s and encouraged its dissemination in the adjacent countries where political radicals and writers were attracted to its unapologetic anti-traditionalism. *Modernismo* continued to be widespread in the poetry and prose of Spanish America until the second decade of the twentieth century, though alongside fiction continued to be influenced by French realism and naturalism, particularly in Buenos Aires, where the social transformation of the city captured the attention of its writers. Still, *modernismo* became a seminal movement in Spanish America because, for the first time, Hispanics did not have to see themselves as a backwater of Europe.

[17] Borges was not particularly interested in these movements because by the early 1920s he had discovered German expressionism and was exploring Spanish *ultraísmo*. See Chapter 2.I.1. Borges in Buenos Aires: Scaffolds of a Poetic Project, p. 113.

If, in the nineteenth century, Spanish American writers looked to Europe to inspire their craft, in the twentieth century a desire for self-affirmation and independence from European influence dominated cultural life (Williamson 1992: 521). Spanish American intellectuals became more concerned with the impact of foreign influence and how this might threaten national identity. An early reaction to Darío's cosmopolitanism led to *criollismo*, a literary movement born at the end of the nineteenth century, strongly influenced by the wars of independence against Spain. It exalted epic and foundational elements such as the *pampas* and the *gaucho*, and was based on the desire to create a national identity distinct from that of Spain and other European nations. By the 1920s, writers such as Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927) took up the old debate between civilisation and barbarism initiated by Domingo Sarmiento (1811-1888) in *Facundo* (1845) and offered a fictional resolution to it by reconciling the upbringing of the traditional *gaucho* with the responsibilities bestowed upon him by modern society. In *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), the *gaucho* adopts positive qualities and becomes the model for the modern Argentine. In short, the quest for national identity became a quest to merge national essence with modernity. As I will explain in future chapters, Borges himself attempted to adapt *criollismo* to the culture of the times: the kind of *criollismo* he conceived by the end of the 1920s transcended the reverence for the *gaucho* and the *pampas*: it attempted to incorporate the urban realities of modern Buenos Aires (Williamson 2004: 141).[18]

But before Borges placed a new kind of urban *criollismo* at the forefront of his

[18]See Chapter 4.I.1. Borges, the 'arrabal' and his Urban *criollismo* of the 'orillas', p. 231.

poetic project, he also experimented with the modern avant-garde, and in particular with Spanish *ultraísmo*. By this point, European modernism (and not *modernismo*) had begun to attract Spanish American artists in poetry, fiction and the visual arts, though their societies were still transitioning into modernity. From 1914 to 1921, Borges lived in different European cities, but it was in Madrid that he joined the ranks of *ultraísmo.* Upon his return to Buenos Aires in 1921, Borges published an *ultraísta* manifesto that looked to establish the movement in Spanish America. *Ultraísmo* was an eclectic movement: it borrowed elements from Cubism, Futurism and Dada and its desire was to shock and to experiment, particularly with free verse, in reaction to *modernismo*. Borges's *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) is evidence of Borges's interest in the movement, though by the 1930s he repudiated it and became interested again in metre and rhyme.

The love Borges expressed for Buenos Aires in the period when he wrote *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) led to his conception of an urban *criollismo*. Before Borges became the storyteller he is mostly remembered as today, he considered himself a poet and an essayist of the city of Buenos Aires. Once he returned to the city after living in Europe, he began to discover and appreciate it; he began to invest his personal life (his relationships, his political views and his aspirations as a writer) in urban space. Borges eventually parted ways with the poetry and the *criollismo* of his early days, and engaged more fully with metaphysical ideas, particularly after a life-threatening accident and a resulting case of septicaemia in 1938. Still, Borges never ceased to write and think about Buenos Aires. In his fantastical stories, he did so from the point

of view of a man who is lost in the labyrinth that is the universe and in the labyrinth of time. Borges used these metaphysical and philosophical concepts to create his mythical world and explore the literary possibilities of language: '[E]stimo las ideas religiosas o filosóficas por su valor estético y aun por lo que encierran de singular y de maravilloso' ('Epílogo' in *Otras inquisiciones* [1952] in Borges 2010: 163). The city is therefore a constant in Borges's life and work, and this thesis proposes to explore the reasons for and repercussions of this.

Critical Framework on Borges, Réda and their Cities

The previous three sections of this introduction have presented the literary and cultural background of this thesis and the origins of Borges's and Réda's interest in their respective cities, Buenos Aires and Paris. It is now important to establish the methodology and theoretical framework of the project. This framework hinges on the idea that literature has expressed writers' consistent interest in the city as a theme. More generally, it is also the result of an increased interest in space, because we live in an age in which we are, more than ever before, aware of the space we inhabit: 'Space', said geographer Doreen Massey in recent decades, 'is very much on the agenda these days' (Massey 1992: 1). This is perhaps due to the fact that, along with time, space has been considered one of two dimensions through which we understand our presence in the world.

As a result of its prominence, space has generated interest in a range of critical

fields. It has been studied in relation to notions of history (Braudel, Foucault), politics (Lefebvre), poetic imagination (Bachelard), geography (Tuan, Soja, Relph), sociology (Benjamin, Arendt), nomadism (Deleuze and Guattari) and architecture (Derrida, Eisenman, Tschumi). Although I will draw on some of these sources throughout the coming chapters, my main focus will be on the conceptualisation of space as it exists in a poetic urban discourse. In particular, I have based most of the critical analysis of this thesis on a number of theorists whose approaches to the city from the point of view of history and power, sociology, poetry and geography have aided my understanding of Borges's and Réda's texts and the period in which they were written. This thesis will explore the notion of urban space and place at different levels within the literary texts of Jorge Luis Borges and Jacques Réda.

For this reason, I believe it is important that I establish the defining parameters of the discourse I will be using throughout this thesis, as well as the critical thinking that has helped me in the construction of my arguments. The first of these definitions sets up an important distinction that permeates the chapters of this thesis. It is based on two contrasting definitions of space that emerged centuries ago in Greek philosophy. These definitions outline the two ways in which urban space — in Buenos Aires and Paris — is conceived in this thesis. The first comes from the early Platonic conceptualisation of space as 'chora'. Chora (or khora) was the territory of the polis outside of the city proper. *In extremis*, 'chora' or space is considered the container or receptacle where forms materialise. Everything is contained in 'chora', and its expanse surpasses its perceptibility by the individual. For this reason, the existence

of 'chora' is independent from the individual: when a city is referred to in these terms, it is as the space where our lives unfold, without our control over the entirety of the surrounding space. We cannot visualise 'chora' with the naked eye, but we believe in its existence because we know that it is all around us. In other words, when Borges and Réda describe themselves in Buenos Aires and Paris respectively, it is understood that they know themselves to be contained within a space that has boundaries; they recognise that they belong to these 'chora', known as Buenos Aires and Paris, which by extension respond to certain spatial and structural characteristics. However, they are not able to see these spaces objectively, in their entirety. They assume and believe that Buenos Aires and Paris exist beyond their perception; and yet, the cities that they know and poeticise can only be defined by their own experiences.

Conversely, the second definition of space comes from Aristotle's (384–322 BCE) claim that space means 'topos': a delimited space set up as content within a larger structure. According to this definition, Buenos Aires and Paris are considered 'topoi' or places when they are referred to as locations on a map. Contrary to Plato's 'chora', Aristotle's 'topos' requires the interaction with the space in question. However, by extension, 'topos' can also allude to the specific locations within Buenos Aires and Paris that Borges and Réda visit. Consequently, in the chapters that follow, Buenos Aires and Paris can also be defined by the gardens, piazzas, vacant lots, etc. — 'topoi' — known to Borges and Réda in their poetry. For the purposes of this project, this dual definition of city space helps us to understand what Borges and Réda mean when they mention Buenos Aires and Paris in their writings: on the one hand, Buenos Aires and

Paris can refer to the expanse of the cities that they attempt to conceptualise though they cannot apprehend them in their totality; on the other hand, they correspond to the specific location they use to define the place where they work, the place where they travel to and from, the place that they call home.

Alongside the Greek philosophy of place, postmodern interpretations of space have proved critical to my thinking in the course of this project. This is in part due to the fact that the individual's relationship to space has been central to postmodernism. Foucault (1926-1984) — alongside other postmodern thinkers such as Lefebvre (1991) — was part of the 1970s and 1980s generation that fomented the idea that space and movement within it should be treated with the same level of critical thinking traditionally given to the notion of time (Soja 1989; Warf and Arias 2009):

> En tout cas, je crois que l'inquiétude d'aujourd'hui concerne fondamentalement l'espace, sans doute beaucoup plus que le temps; le temps n'apparaît probablement que comme l'un des jeux de distribution possibles entre les éléments qui se répartissent dans l'espace. (Foucault 1984: paragraph 7 of 28)

One of the main characteristics of postmodernism was that it considered space without the axis of time. Until this point, space and time had always been relative to one another, with the state of space dependent on its condition through time. Thus, even though it is difficult to imagine space without it being inscribed in time, postmodern theory argued that space is not just a 'slice through time', but that it can be studied in its own right, particularly when the 'stuff' of which it is made creates dynamics that are complex enough to be studied on their own (Massey 1992: 9). This indicates that even though we may be determined by the passing of time, postmodern theory

asserts that the space that we inhabit also has an effect on our bodies, behaviours and psychologies. And for this reason space — and city space in particular — has become an important object of study in contemporary literary criticism.

Finally, further to its opposing definitions and the involvement of postmodern thinking in its development, this thesis has benefited from the conceptualisation of space in relation to issues of subjectivity, in other words, in relation to the expression of the individual's sense of self. In this regard, the theme has attracted the attention of urban geographers as well as literary critics. Indeed, human geographers led by Yi-Fu Tuan have chosen to mark a distinction between space and place, by introducing the individual's relationship to it: 'Space is abstract', he contends, '[i]t lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance and illusion; it is possibility and beckoning future' (Tuan 1975: 164). Though this statement appears to be in line with the Platonian notion of 'chora', Tuan's contribution to the meaning of space builds on the ancient legacy because he introduces the importance of the individual in the creation of space through his imagination. As a result, once subjectivity is introduced into the debate, 'chora' is displaced in favour of 'topos': the boundaries and characteristics of space become more defined and space is turned into place. Place, according to Tuan, is a space that is practiced and lived by the individual. It is a 'location, a unit within a hierarchy of units of space' (Tuan 1975: 151) but also 'a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world' (Cresswell 2004: 11). It can be an area within the home or the home itself; an area of a city or the nation itself and it can be a neighbourhood or a far-away destination. Place is

relative to the eye of the beholder. Through place, the individual is able to express his subjectivity or sense of self.

This notion will prove especially informative in my analysis of Borges's relationship to Buenos Aires, where the author openly imagines the city based not only on his sense of self, but also his emotions. Influenced by Heideggerian phenomenology, Tuan believed that human experience is at the basis of the humanised world, and in turn to the humanisation of places: 'places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings' (Tuan 1975: 152). Along with Lynch (1960), Relph (1976) and Canter (1977), Tuan maintained that there is an inevitable correlation between the individual and the genesis of place: indeed, whilst the individual comes to a space with a particular set of feelings and in a particular state of mind, space — which is *a priori* indeterminate — also offers up a series of stimuli to the individual, who eventually forms an idea of space that is also manifested in physical reality. This forms the basis of the reciprocal relationship between the individual and his surroundings that will become crucially important in future chapters. Equally championing the idea of the individual's relationship with the outside world, Lineu Castello, whose book *Rethinking the Meaning of Place* (2010) offers an overview of the various schools of thought that addressed the concept of place in the twentieth century, will inform sections of this thesis where the issue of subjectivity is discussed. Castello argues that it is only when a space acquires meaning through a simple 'feel-good' experience, that it becomes a place (Castello 2010: 4).

Borges and Réda move towards the kind of experience defined by Castello. Through my analysis, I will demonstrate that Borges and Réda continually return to places where they feel a sense of rapture or intense emotional connection. For the most part, they will be quiet places away from the bustle of the city streets and also devoid of masses of people. Some of these places will exhibit heterotopic characteristics; places that are open to other places or that allow communication between different places: for example, a park or a piazza to which different streets converge, or in Réda's case, train stations that connect different cities together. The notion of 'heterotopia' coined by Michel Foucault in the 1960s, was at least in part inspired by Borges's 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' published in *Otras inquisiciones* (1952). Foucault explains, in the preface to his book *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), how he came to define the notion of 'heterotopia' after reading Borges's essay. He later developed the analysis of the term during a lecture given in 1967 that was eventually published as 'Des espaces autres' by the French journal *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* in October 1984. 'Heterotopias' for Foucault are spaces that have the property of being connected to other spaces, but that possess the unique characteristic of allowing the individual who visits that space to subvert his or her normal patterns of behaviour. In other words, these are places such as the ones described above that encourage the individual to interrupt common everyday practices; and as such, admit the possibility of experiencing an event that is out of the ordinary (Foucault 1970: xvi; Richardson 2012: 11-12, 40-41). According to Foucault, the cemetery is an example of a heterotopia because it is a place that has a specific role in society, connecting individuals in the tragedy of death. At the same time, it is a place that forces individuals out of the

dynamic of everyday life (Foucault 1984: paragraph 19 of 28). In Borges's and Réda's case, this occurs when they come across certain places that force them to interrupt their journeys through urban space and engage with the place in question.

I will also explore the role of the home, for which, the theories of Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) have been important. In *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957), Bachelard comments on the experience of personal and intimate space, where the home occupies a principal role, mainly as protector of the imaginative individual. As this thesis will show, however, Borges in particular subverts this notion by rejecting the home environment and embracing the streets of Buenos Aires; Réda on the other hand, sees the home as a refuge away from the overstimulation of the city.[19]

In addition to the multidisciplinary conceptualisations of the city, space and place explored in this introduction, this thesis will show that Borges and Réda also introduce a third 'type' of city: it is the city that is materialised in writing through poetry in verse and in prose. As urban dwellers, Borges and Réda establish unique and intimate relationships with their cities, and I therefore propose to analyse these relationships on the basis that poetry allows these authors to capitalise on the one hand on the urban imaginary that results from their exploration of space, and on the other hand, on their sense of self. This thesis concludes that both authors — albeit in distinct ways — explore the practice of their quotidian lives, in order to articulate fundamental questions about what it means to be an individual but also a writer and a poet of the city, and about what it means to leave a work of art behind.

[19] See Chapter 2.I. Two Poets of the City, p. 109.

In this sense, the theoretical background of this thesis will be closest to the notion of space defined by Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) in *L'Invention du quotidien* (1980). This is because De Certeau focuses on two areas that are crucial to this thesis: on the one hand, the practice of everyday space in an urban context, and on the other hand, the production of urban space in the text. Cresswell suggests that for De Certeau 'place is constituted through reiterative social practice' and for the poet, that practice is performed and reconstructed through the literary text (Cresswell 2004: 39). This line of thinking will also lead to an exploration of the connections between the practice of space, the poets' movement and their subjectivity. The interaction between these elements relates to the epigraph of this introduction quoted from Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place* (1997), but also to Paul Valéry's (1871-1945) thought found in his essay 'Présence de Paris': 'Penser PARIS ?...plus on y songe, plus se sent-on, tout au contraire, pensé par Paris' (Valéry 1960[1937]: 1015).

Valéry believed that there exists a reciprocal relationship between the poet and the city. From his point of view, the conceptualisation of an image of the city begins through a mental process that transforms the poet into an image of the city itself. Valéry's emancipation of the city from the poet's agency results in a sense of freedom for the poet as he wanders the city streets. Valéry's construction of the poetic city is an internal practice ('penser PARIS se compare, ou se confond, à penser l'esprit même' (Valéry 1960[1937]: 1012) that later manifests itself in the poem. This view will be particularly useful in Chapter 3 during my analysis of places in the city that Borges and Réda frequent.

By viewing the relationship between self and place as interactive, we are reminded that it is not only the individual that affects the environment where s/he lives, but that the environment itself shapes the individual. Thus, in order to conceptualise space, particularly in the production of the poetic imagination by Borges and Réda, it is necessary to view its construction as part of a dynamic process involving on the one hand, the individual, whose routine, personal history and emotions are materialised in space; and place on the other hand, as a site susceptible of being transformed by the individual's experience and yet in turn capable of affecting the individual as well.

Review of Existing Literature on Borges and Réda

Considerations about Borges's and Réda's poetic relationships to Buenos Aires and Paris have been made throughout the years in a wide range of literary contexts and perspectives. Though their works have been studied in connection to the notion of space and place, never before have they been studied in relation to one another. Borges began to write about urban space in the early 1920s; Réda, in the 1950s. This confirms therefore that at least in the realm of literature, lived space was already a theme at the turn of the century and that it was throughout the twentieth century that it progressively became a fundamental focus of cultural as well as literary studies.

In particular, a lot of critical material has contributed to the collective knowledge of Borges's writing about Buenos Aires. For biographical and contextual details of Borges, I consulted the works of Emir Rodríguez Monegal (1988), Jean-Pierre Bernès

(2002), Carlos Alberto Zito (1999), León Tenenbaum (2001), Jason Wilson (2006) and Edwin Williamson (2004). For discussions about the notion of space and spatiality in Borges, I am mostly indebted to Bill Richardson's *Borges and Space* (2012), which provides a comprehensive view of the concept, with references not only to Borges's early poems, but also his short stories. I also consulted works by Louis Andrew Murillo (1959), Ana María Barrenechea (1965), Ludmila Kapschutschenko (1981) and Daniel Balderston (1993) in order to have a general understanding of Borges's treatment of space and in particular the theme of the labyrinth.

But, when it came to understanding Borges's relationship with Buenos Aires specifically, I had to turn to more specialised books. For example, Cristina Grau (1989) focuses on Borges and architecture, whereas Rafael Olea Franco (1993) focuses on the city in 'el primer Borges'. Carmen de Mora (1999) offers a general overview of Borges's relationship to Buenos Aires and interestingly makes a connection between Borges and the French Symbolists in 'Borges and Buenos Aires', whereas Beatriz Sarlo (2003) in *Borges, un escritor en las orillas* concentrates on Borges's treatment of the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Equally interested in Borges's relationship to Buenos Aires are Matilde Albert Robatto (1972), Horacio Salas (1992), David William Foster (1998), Gene H Bell-Villada (1999), Jason Wilson (1999), Eduardo García de Enterría (1999) and Marcelo Pichón (1999).

In the case of Réda, the critical bibliography is somewhat limited. Biographical details were extracted from Jean-Michel Maulpoix's *Jacques Réda* (1986), though the first half of the book only covers Réda's early career from 1950 to 1985. The second

half of the book presents an anthology of the author's work from *Amen* (1968) to *Premier livre des reconnaissances* (1985). *Rivage des Gètes: une lecture de Jacques Réda* (1999) by Bernadette Engel-Roux is a poetic, though at times also obscure, critique of Réda's texts until the end of the twentieth-century (Engel-Roux 1999).

In terms of critical compilations, very few have appeared in the English language and those that have, focus mostly on the aspects of Réda's work that have to do with movement. For this thesis, I have consulted three books (though none of them are solely dedicated to Réda): Michael Sheringham edits the first and writes the second; the third is a general overview of twentieth-century French literature written by John Taylor, where the first chapter of the first part, 'The Art of Strolling', is dedicated to Réda and his serendipitous movement around the city, his self-effacement, his interest in the ephemeral instant and his curiosity for metaphysics (Taylor 2004). Michael Sheringham presents us with two books of cultural and literary criticism. In the first, *Parisian Fields* (Sheringham 2006b), we are offered contributions from different perspectives on the social and intellectual life of post-1900 Paris, ranging from literary analysis to urban theory. The chapter that discusses Réda authored by Sheringham himself ('City Space, Mental Space, Poetic Space: Paris in Breton, Benjamin and Réda'), departs from the image of the Benjaminian *flâneur* in order to contextualise the wandering poet of the twentieth century. Sheringham argues, particularly in Réda's case, that there is an important correlation between the city, the mind and the text, based on the poet's act of bearing witness to the city through his movement around it, an act that paradoxically marks his desire to escape from

self (Sheringham 1996). In *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (2006), Sheringham invokes the same time period as in his previous book, but focuses on the concept of the *quotidien*, also known as 'the everyday'. After surveying different historical, cultural and literary approaches to the theme in Lefebvre, Barthes, De Certeau and Perec, Sheringham considers the urban trajectory of Réda in *La Liberté des rues* (1997) and the notion of the everyday as potentiality (Sheringham 2006).

Another critic who has looked at Jacques Réda's movement around the city in conjunction with other twentieth-century authors, but this time in French, is Franck Villain, who compiled *L'Appel: écriture poétique et inscription du dehors de René Char à Jacques Réda* (2004). The article on Réda presented in this book is by Pascale Rougé (2004), and in it, she describes the changing urban image invoked by the poet in meanderings around Paris.

In French, a handful of volumes have been dedicated solely to Réda. Most of them, with the exception of Marie Joqueviel-Bourjea's *Jacques Réda: la dépossession heureuse* (2005), present thematic studies of Réda's works as a whole. *Approches de Jacques Réda* (1994), for example, gathers presentations from a colloquium offered at the University of Pau in 1991, that focus on the rhythm and voice of Réda's poetry, Réda as a *flâneur*, his incursions in jazz, amongst other themes (Favre and Rogger-Andréucci 1994). Hervé Micolet presents *Lire Réda* (1994) with essays by contributors focusing on three different aspects of Réda's work: *les territoires* (space), *la voix* (the poet and his voice) and *les formes* (verse and prose). Though different reflections

throughout the book have contributed to my own understanding of Réda's poetic articulations, I am particularly indebted to the different perspectives offered in the section on space: the articles on movement (Corger 1994), on the gaze (Alhau 1994) and on the centre and decentring (Schapira 1994) have been especially informative. Furthermore, my reading of Réda's treatment of the commonplace in the city owes a lot to Fabienne Reymondet's thesis 'Le prosaïsme dans l'œuvre poétique de Jacques Réda' (1998). As I will mention in Chapter 2, Reymondet argues that all of Réda's poetic devices and practices — including his use of ordinary and lyrical language and his ventures to the periphery — are invested in the construction of an 'archéologie du banal'. Equally, the work of Pascale Rougé in *Aux frontières sur Jacques Réda* (2002), relative to Réda's portrayal of himself in *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986) and his interest in the Parisian peripheries as a poetic subject, has informed Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Though at times tangential — perhaps emulating Réda's own aimless meandering around the city — Rougé is able to capture from a personal but also comprehensive dimension the peripheral, melancholic and mobile qualities of Réda's work (Rougé 2002). However, when it comes to the peripheral and tangential dimension of Réda's poetics, Marie Joqueviel-Bourjea offers the most comprehensive analysis. In *Jacques Réda: la dépossession heureuse* (2005), the author explores the image of the poet of the city, inheritor of Benjamin's *flâneur*, who is desperately after *habiter*, to live happily in the midst of a world in ruins brought about by an early trauma. Joqueviel-Bourjea argues that in order to do this, the poet must — paradoxically — execute a *dépossession* or dispossession of self that in turn propels him into peripheral spaces in the city. In doing so, the author concludes that Réda

manifests in his writing an alternate space where poetry becomes the act of *habiter* itself (Joqueviel-Bourjea 2005).

This brief and by no means exhaustive view of critical material on Réda, suggests nonetheless a lack of attention to Réda's literary influences and their impact on his interest in the Parisian periphery. By demonstrating Réda's familiarity with Borges's works translated into French, and particularly with his interest in the outer neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, this thesis will enrich the scholarship of both Borges and Réda. This connection is evident in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), Réda's critical tribute to Borges, which I will analyse in depth in the first chapter.

Chapter 1

Cultural Exchange and Literary Influence: Borges's Reception in France and Réda's *Ferveur de Borges* (1987)

> Dans le titre de ce petit livre, emprunté à son premier recueil, il faut bien sûr entendre un hommage à la ferveur exemplaire que Borges manifesta durant toute sa vie pour la littérature, mais aussi l'expression de la ferveur plus maladroite que son œuvre n'a cessé de m'inspirer.
>
> Jacques Réda, 'Note liminaire' (1987: 11)

Introduction

The purpose of this first chapter is to narrate the circumstances that led Jacques Réda to discover Jorge Luis Borges's writing and to understand the place that Borges occupies in Réda's poetics. Though Borges began publishing in the 1920s, his works only started to become available in France after the second half of the twentieth century. This occurred as the result of a series of cultural and literary exchanges between French and Spanish American intellectuals. For Borges scholarship, the most salient and course-altering of these encounters was the one between cultural promoter Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) and former surrealist Roger Caillois (1913-1978). Caillois is responsible for translating and delivering Borges's works to the French-speaking world. As I will explain in the first part of this chapter, the contextualisation of the dissemination of Borges's work in France matters because it situates Réda's own discovery of Borges in translation by the end of the 1950s. Réda published *Ferveur de Borges* in 1987, a year after Borges's death. The epigraph above corresponds to the opening lines of the book's preface, 'Note liminaire' (1987). In this preface, Réda communicates that his zealous interest in Borges over the years — an interest that he humbly characterises as a 'ferveur [...] maladroite' — motivated him to write and publish a series of essays and poems that paid homage to Borges's lifelong commitment to literature. Réda illustrated his admiration for Borges by offering an analysis and personal interpretation of some of his works translated into French. By extension, *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) became a testimony of the impact that Borges's ideas had

on Réda's urban poetics.

In the second part of the chapter, I will present a detailed analysis of the essays and poems contained in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), which were written between 1957 and 1986. Their study will prove that Réda combined analytical insight into some of Borges's short stories, essays and poems, with personal commentary and anecdotal accounts. It will also show that Réda recognised Borges's main literary and philosophical themes: his interest in ontology and the foundations of knowledge, as well as his investment in poetry as a platform for pouring forth emotions. Most crucially, this chapter will establish the most important connection between Borges and Réda: their mutual interest in the physical exploration of marginal areas of the city in order to produce deeply personal poetry.

I Cultural Exchange between Buenos Aires and Paris

The arrival and subsequent dissemination of Borges's work in France is a fascinating tale of cultural exchange, literary crossover, proliferation of journals and one or two happy accidents. Though at the beginning of the twentieth century, Borges's texts were known to perhaps a handful of French writers and critics amongst whom were Valéry Larbaud (1881-1957) and Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893-1945), it was not until the second half of the century that the Argentine author rose to a prominent international literary status in France. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to capture the story of the literary relationship between Buenos Aires and Paris that ultimately propelled Borges to international fame. This historical account is important because it establishes a timeline that leads straight to Réda's discovery of Borges's texts. In addition, it also provides a fitting context for some of the essays in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) by suggesting that they might also have acted as reviews of Borges's recently published texts in translation. Finally, by extension, it will also reveal an important critical and expanding Borgesian scholarship that includes the translation of Borges's texts subsequently read by Réda.

I.1 Literary Relationship before 1950

For most of the nineteenth century, cultural movement from France to Spanish America was unilateral. Romanticism and Realism in Spanish America were inspired by

its French counterparts, and French language was considered by the rich elite as 'une langue de civilisation' (Molloy 1972: 15-16). As I explained in the general Introduction, literary movements that emerged in Spanish America, such as Ruben Darío's *modernismo* for example, were based on the response of Spanish American authors to trends and ideas coming from Europe. France was more interested in the politics and economics of intellectuals such as Domingo Sarmiento (1811-1888) and José Martí (1853-1895) than in their literature.

From the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, the literary relationship between Spanish America and France was limited to the occasional dissemination of writings by Spanish American authors with personal contacts in France or who had the means to travel to Europe. In *La Diffusion de la littérature hispano-américaine en France au XX*^{e} *siècle*, Sylvia Molloy mentions for example the isolated cases, in the nineteenth century, of Juan Montalvo (1832-1889) who visited Lamartine (1790-1869) and corresponded with Hugo (1802-1885); Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851) who established a relationship with writers of the 'romantisme'; and Domingo Sarmiento (1811-1888) who managed to negotiate some translations of his work (Molloy 1972: 16-17). However, the reality was that at the time '[o]n n'a pas en France une idée bien nette de ce qu'est la littérature hispano-américaine, et il faut bien se dire que les Hispano-Américains eux-mêmes ne l'on guère davantage' (Molloy 1972: 17).

In Spanish America, by the time political stability was achieved around 1890, career writers also gained a social status that distinguished them from politicians, and

those that could afford travel, or had diplomatic ties, went to Europe. *Modernistas* such as Enrique Gómez Carillo (1873-1927), Rubén Darío (1867-1916), Amado Nervo (1870-1919) and others were part of this contingent (Molloy 1972: 18-19). As more Spanish American writers were able to settle in Paris in particular, they became more involved in the literary and cultural life of the time: for example between 1900 and 1920 several magazines — *El nuevo mercurio, Mundial magazine, Elegancias* and *La Revue Sud-Américaine* — edited by Spanish Americans emerged (Molloy 1972: 19).

After the First World War and Ruben Darío's death, the cultural relationship between Spanish America and France changed, not least because the country that Spanish Americans looked up to was in pieces (Molloy 1972: 89). Thanks to writers like Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959) and Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927) who travelled to Paris during this time, France began to acknowledge Spanish American literature and culture as a whole:

> after exhausting itself with the war, in the 1920s and 1930s Europe needed an infusion of cultural sparks from beyond its borders. Paris during this period eagerly embraced a whole range of New World styles of music: tango, beguine, Cuban and Brazilian forms, and of course, jazz. [...] It was also a time when the avant-garde, the surrealists in particular, showed a special interest in the genius of indigenous cultures. (Weiss 2003: 9-10)

As a result, ties began to emerge between French intellectuals and their Spanish American counterparts. One of these critics, also an important writer, was Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961), who famously said in the preface to *El águila y la serpiente* (1933) by Martín Luis Guzmán: 'le XXI^{e} siècle sera le siècle de l'Amérique du Sud. C'est pourquoi l'Europe et tout particulièrement la France ont tort de se désintéresser complètement des révolutions politiques, économiques, morales, sentimentales,

religieuses du Sud et du Centre Amérique' (Cendrars in Molloy 1972: 95). Cendrars's statement marks a definitive shift in the attitude of French intellectuals *vis-à-vis* Spanish America. More novels and short stories began to be translated and published in French (Molloy 1972: 102).[20]

Other efforts included the foundation of *La Commission Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle* and of its institute in 1926. It was presided over by Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and its main objective was to contribute to international cultural exchanges. In 1936, its seventh meeting took place in Buenos Aires and was presided over by Jules Romains (1885-1972) and Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959). Though this meeting had little political and cultural impact, it manifested the cultural curiosity that Europe began to show with regard to Spanish America after the Great War, and highlighted the fact that the countries involved needed to invest more of their efforts in developing this emergent interest in the literature of the Southern cone (Molloy 1972: 103).

But in addition to growing French awareness of Spanish American culture, it was Spanish American authors who became more conscious of the need to establish their works within the universal canon of literature. This determination had been pioneered by Darío's *modernismo* a decade before: by breaking away from nineteenth-century literature, the movement showed that its richness and its impact surpassed the limits of Spanish America and reversed the dynamics of unilateral literary influence

[20] The list of translated works is too long and beyond the scope of this thesis to present here. For a substantial list see Sylvia Molloy, *La Diffusion de la littérature hispano-américaine en France au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), p. 102.

(Molloy 1972: 38-67). Then in 1931, Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) founded *Sur* in Argentina, establishing a new form of dialogue between Spanish America and Europe. Ocampo conceived the publication so that it could present works of both national and international authors, intending to make literature better known both in America and in Europe. She invited contributors from all nationalities who had a specific interest in the continent: 'de los que han venido a América, de los que piensan en América y de los que son de América. De los que tienen la voluntad de comprendernos, y que nos ayudan tanto a comprendernos a nosotros mismos' (Ocampo in Molloy 1972: 100).

Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) was an Argentine writer, cultural promoter, critic and intellectual, born into an affluent family. María Esther Vázquez, her biographer, described her in an interview as a generous and hospitable woman who did not always have a good relationship with Borges (Vázquez and Perspectivas TV 2010). Even though Ocampo was not formally educated, her family's wealth opened many doors for her, not least the opportunity to attend lectures at the Collège de France during one of her many visits to Paris (Vázquez 1991: 15, 45-46). Having the right contacts, Ocampo dedicated her life to promoting the intellectual scene of Buenos Aires, frequently inviting French intellectuals to give lectures in the Argentine capital. She was linked to the greatest intellectuals of her time and her cultural dealings with many European thinkers was done through correspondence with important literary figures such as Paul Valéry (1871-1945), Stravinsky (1882-1971), H.G. Wells (1866-1946) and Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) (Vázquez 1991: 79-86). But her great-

est legacy to Argentine culture was *Sur*, as it became the most important literary magazine of its time in Spanish America, and was published more or less regularly until 1992. Borges was one of the many writers who frequently contributed in *Sur*.

In 1939, Ocampo was invited by Jean Paulhan (1884-1968) to one of the bi-monthly conferences at the Collège de Sociologie, an institution founded in 1937 by Roger Caillois (1913-1978) and Georges Bataille (1897-1962). There, Jules Supervielle (1884-1960) introduced Ocampo to Caillois. Unbeknownst to either of them at the time, this encounter would change the course of the cultural relationship between Buenos Aires and Paris forever.

Fascinated by the innovations of this new school of sociology in Paris and Caillois's ideas, Ocampo invited the French intellectual to visit Buenos Aires to give a series of lectures about the ideology of the college and about his own research on the origin and anatomy of myths. Roger Caillois arrived in Buenos Aires in May 1939. He explained during an interview that took place in August 1971 for the French broadcaster TF1, that he accepted Ocampo's invitation, intrigued by the opportunity to visit the land of the *gauchos*: 'car c'était la pampa, les gauchos, etc.' (Latouche 1993[1971]). The plan was to stay in Argentina for no longer than three months. However, these plans were altered when the Second World War broke out and Caillois, fearful of the situation back home, was compelled to live and work in Buenos Aires for the next five years. In his interview for TF1, Caillois explained that part of the reason why he had to stay was due to illness; in reality, it was also because he delivered a lecture deploring Hitler's ideology in Buenos Aires, which sparked protests in the German embassy and

made his return to occupied France difficult (Latouche 1993[1971]).

With Ocampo's guidance, Caillois began giving lectures about sociology, the history of religion and the notion of myth in various universities and cultural institutions around Buenos Aires. Eventually, Ocampo entrusted Caillois with the foundation of the Editions *Lettres françaises* and the release of *Lettres françaises*: 'Cahiers trimestriels de littérature française édités par les soins de la revue *Sur* avec la collaboration des écrivains français résidant en France et à l'étranger'. Sixteen issues appeared in total between 1941 and 1945. In 1944, number fourteen was dedicated exclusively to Borges. For Caillois, *Lettres françaises* represented an opportunity to publish authors that were banned in France as a result of the war. Caillois also became one of the foremost translators of many of the Spanish American poets that were coming out of the continent: apart from Borges, he also translated Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) and Antonio Porchia (1885-1968) (Latouche 1993[1971]).

Caillois had the opportunity to meet Borges through Ocampo, but their relationship was initially somewhat tense. According to Odile Felgine, Borges felt uneasy about the power that Ocampo had given Caillois in *Sur* and the romantic relationship they reportedly sustained for some time (Felgine 2002: 72-73). Thus, when Caillois's *Le Roman policier* appeared in 1941 and Ocampo asked Borges to write a review of it, Borges responded by making disparaging remarks about Caillois's historical and sociological competency concerning the origins of the detective novel (Borges 2010c: 953). Borges was certain that the detective novel was born in the novels of Edgar

Allan Poe and not in Fouché's stories as Caillois claimed in *Le Roman policier*. This unleashed a duel of ideas between them that took place within the pages of *Sur*, Caillois answering with 'Rectification', published in *Lettres françaises*, and Borges retorting in the following issue with 'Polémique/Observation finale': 'La conjecture de Caillois n'est pas erronée, je prétends tout simplement qu'elle est inepte et invérifiable' (Borges 2010c: 954). Borges's main defence was that the detective novel was born in England and not in France, as Caillois claimed (Felgine 2002: 72-73). Years later, Borges would step back from this feud in an interview with Napoléon Murat, recognising his debt to Caillois for exporting his work to France: 'Je crois que si Caillois, avec lequel j'étais brouillé à ce moment-là [...] n'avait pas songé à me traduire en français, on n'aurait jamais songé à me traduire en allemand, en suédois, en italien, etc.' (Murat 1964: 379).

Indeed, Caillois helped change the course of Borges's reception in France. As soon as Caillois returned to France in 1945, he collaborated in the publication of *La Licorne*, a literary magazine founded and paid for by a Uruguayan in 1947, aimed at French audiences and promoting Latin American writing and culture. Caillois's most important contribution to the literary relationship between France and Spanish America came in 1951, when he conceived of a collection for Gallimard named 'La Croix du Sud' after the constellation visible from the southern hemisphere. It is in this collection that Borges's first fully translated books reached French audiences. Borges was fully aware of the fact that it was thanks to Caillois that he gained international recognition:

> Néstor Ibarra and Roger Caillois, who in the early 1950's daringly translated me into French, were my first benefactors. I suspect that their pioneer work paved the way for my sharing with Samuel Beckett the Formentor Prize in 1961, for until I appeared in French I was practically invisible — not only abroad but at home in Buenos Aires. As a consequence of that prize, my books mushroomed overnight throughout the western world. ('An Autobiographical Essay' in Borges 1973: 254)

Caillois was on the committee for the Formentor prize (or International Publishers' Prize), and pushed for Borges to receive the award, which is why there was a double recognition that year. Finally in 1964, Caillois also included a study entitled 'Thèmes fondamentaux chez Jorge Luis Borges' in a volume devoted to Borges of the series *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*. In this study, Caillois sets out to analyse Borges's aesthetic preoccupations. The themes Caillois identifies — circular time, the labyrinth and recurrent creation — are close to his own aesthetic concerns, possibly marking Caillois's own apology for their previous altercation.

I.2 Borges and/in France

In the 1920s and before the Formentor Prize in 1961, Borges did not have much contact with France. Between 1915 and 1917, when he lived in Geneva, he read Baudelaire (1821-1967), alongside the works of French Realists like Zola (1840-1902), Romantics like Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and other Symbolists like Valéry (1871-1945), Rimbaud (1854-1891), Laforgue (1860-1887) (Williamson 2004: 55, 59). By 1917, when he decided he wanted to become a writer, he had been influenced by the Symbolists' belief that through art and language he could attain the creation of an ideal world. According to his autobiographical essay and an interview with Antonio Carrizo, Borges learnt

Les Fleurs du mal (1857) by heart and his first sonnets were written in French as well as in English (Borges 1973: 218; Carrizo 1982: 155). In spite of this, according to Sylvia Molloy, Borges 'n'a rien fait pour être découvert en France' (Molloy 1972: 197). In fact, when he was editor with Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927) of the magazine *Proa*, a time when he would have wanted to circulate his first three collections of essays and poems,[21] any contact with France to disseminate his work through Valéry Larbaud (1881-1957) was done with Güiraldes as an intermediary (Molloy 1972: 200). Molloy argues that this was due to Borges's early involvement with Spanish *ultraísmo* and *criollismo*,[22] which occupied the pages of his poems and essays (Molloy 1972: 198-99). Any reference to Europe or France usually constituted either a critique of the stifling influence of Europe over Argentina or of the French-loving *modernistas* ('Ejecución de tres palabras' in Borges 1925a: 153; 'El tamaño de mi esperanza' in Borges 1926: 5).

With regard to his reception in France, before 1950, Borges's writing was limited to a handful of translations: in 1922, one of his *ultraísta* poems appears in *Manomètre*, a provincial avant-garde magazine edited by Doctor Malespine (Borges 2010: XIV). In 1924, Güiraldes sent his friend Larbaud a copy of Borges's *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and of Borges's *Inquisiciones* (1925). In 1925, Larbaud followed up with a laudatory essay on *Inquisiciones* published in *La Revue européenne,* though without any real success (Molloy 1972: 199). In 1931, an article published in *Mercure*

[21] *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925), *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), *Inquisiciones* (1925), *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926) and *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928).

[22] For a more comprehensive overview of the terms *ultraísmo* and *criollismo*, see 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 32.

de France presenting different Argentine writers, mentions Borges in passing after Sarmiento, Hernández, Larreta, Gálvez and Güiraldes (Molloy 1972: 202):

> Parmi ces jeunes qui ont le désir profond de réaliser une œuvre personnelle, nous devons citer, entre autres, Jorge Luis Borges, né en 1900, qui a publié deux livres en vers et deux livres de critique. Il possède une solide et réelle discipline littéraire. [...] Il sait regarder autour de lui et comprendre l'âme de sa ville. (Salaberry 1931: 530)

This early essay comments briefly on Borges's interest in the city; but even then Borges remained fairly obscure to French readers:

> Il [Borges] sait regarder autour de lui et comprendre l'âme de sa ville. Il peint moins les choses que leur reflet sur lui-même. Il surprend l'intimité des quartiers « porteños » et de ses habitants. Sa poésie, si elle est quelquefois discutable, marque une tendance nouvelle du plus grand intérêt, « le porteñisme ». (Salaberry 1931: 530-31)[23]

In 1939, the magazine *Mesures* published a translation of 'El acercamiento de Almotásim' thanks to a connection between Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) and Henri Michaux (1899-1984) (Borges 1939: 115-22).

Along with Larbaud, French writer Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893-1945) — who was invited to Buenos Aires to give a series of lectures by Victoria Ocampo in 1931 — also read Borges's work: 'Borges vaut le voyage' he famously said in an eponymous essay published in the magazine *Megáfono* in 1933. However, despite Drieu La Rochelle's early commentary on Borges, this view would go largely unnoticed until 1964 when the same essay was published in the Borges volume of *Les Cahiers de l'Herne* (La Rochelle 1964: 105). This corroborates the idea that Borges's works

[23] 'Porteño' is an adjective used to refer to someone or something from the city of Buenos Aires as opposed to the province of Buenos Aires. It comes from the idea that Buenos Aires is a port city. Borges's 'porteñismo' refers to a tendency that is authentically Buenos Airian.

continued to go largely unnoticed by the French readership in the 1930s, though from Buenos Aires, Caillois sent a couple of Borges's translated short stories — 'La loterie de Babylone' and 'La bibliothèque de Babel' — that were also published in the fourteenth issue of *Lettres françaises* under the joint title *Assyriennes* (Borges 1944: 13-26).

Molloy suggests a handful of reasons for Borges's continued inconspicuousness: a) Borges's writing did not resonate with European readers yet (because readers could not get a clear picture of his literary outlook); b) his work had not been properly translated; c) his books and poems until that period were relatively preparatory and did not reflect his excellence; d) there were many misconceptions about his personal life and his heritage, which made him unappealing to French readers. Molloy also suggests that Borges remained anonymous because the war limited the availability of Spanish texts in France. 'El acercamiento de Almotásim' had been translated in 1939 by Ibarra as 'L'Approche du caché' for example, and though a worthy short fiction, it remained unknown for years to come until the publication of Borges's collections of short stories in the 1950s (Molloy 1972: 203).

Between the war and Caillois's launch of 'La Croix du Sud', a handful of Borges's short stories were published in *Valeurs, Confluences, La Licorne* and *Cahiers de la Pléiade*: 'La lotería de Babilonia', 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'Las ruinas circulares' and 'Historia del guerrero y la cautiva'. Finally, the first of Borges's books to be published in 'La Croix du Sud' was Borges's *Fictions* in 1951, translated by Caillois. In total, the collection would publish fifty-two titles: thirteen of them were Argentine amongst

which six were Borges titles. In 'De *Lettres françaises* à la collection "La Croix du Sud": Roger Caillois passeur', Odile Felgine explains that the collection eventually ceased to be published in 1970 because writers such as Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012), Julio Cortázar (1914-1984) and Mario Vargas Llosa (1936-) refused to be published in a collection that they believed was 'folkloric', when their aspiration by that point was to acquire universal status (Felgine 2002: 78-79).

The dissemination of Borges's work in France gained momentum in the 1950s with the publication of *Ficciones* (1944), as *Fictions* (1951), in 'La Croix du Sud'. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, this dissemination would go in waves of more or less intensity, his short stories generally becoming popular before his poems. In the 1950s, other translations also appeared, namely of *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935), *Historia de la eternidad* (1936), and the essay collection *Otras inquisiciones* (1952).[24] However, between 1958 and 1965, Borges's books ceased to be translated in France, though the reappearance of his stories in magazines ensured the circulation of his work.

From the mid-twentieth century, reviews of Spanish American literature — including of Borges's recently translated short stories — written by both French and Spanish American critics proliferated in old and new journals in France. These journals included: *Cahiers du Sud, Esprit, Nouvelle revue française, Europe* and *Lettres françaises*. Three of them (*Esprit*, *Lettres françaises* and *Europe*) dedicated entire

[24] The titles in French were respectively: *Fictions* (1951) translated by Roger Caillois, *Histoire de l'infamie, Histoire de l'éternité* (1954) translated by Roger Caillois and Laure Guille and *Enquêtes* (1957) translated by Paul and Sylvia Bénichou.

issues to Spanish American literature, and this reflects the growing interest French audiences developed for the literature of the Southern Cone.

As for Borges's poetry, some of the poems from his first three collections — *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925) and *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929) — were translated in *Les Cahiers du Sud* in 1954 and 1960 and in Federico de Onís's *Anthologie de la poésie ibéro-américaine* in 1956 (Molloy 1972: 198). Today, there are also two French renderings of Borges's collected poems, both published by Gallimard: the first was translated by Caillois and published for the first time in 1965; the second was translated by Ibarra and published in 1970. Neither of these translations includes *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), which was translated later on in 1982. Furthermore, in 1993, Borges became the first Spanish American author to enter *de son vivant* the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade published by Gallimard. This step finally guaranteed Borges's place in the canon of French and universal literatures. However, the two volumes of the Pléiade were withdrawn from circulation soon after their release due to problems with Borges's estate. They were finally republished in 2010 (Borges 2010c and 2010d).

In conclusion, it was Caillois who accelerated the dissemination of Borges's work in France. By extension, the relationship between Caillois, Ocampo and *Sur* contributed to a shift in the relationship between French and Spanish American letters. According to María Teresa Gramuglio, Roger Caillois was the driving force behind this change:

> Pero quizá lo más importante en relación con los proyectos de *Sur* fue que la estadía de Caillois en la Argentina y su regreso a Francia hicieron posible una de las materializaciones más efectivas de aquel soñado puente entre América y Europa que la revista, por sí misma, nunca logró con-

> struir de modo equitativo. Desde las primeras traducciones de Borges al francés, que publicó en *Lettres françaises*, hasta la reconocida labor editorial que desarrolló en "La Croix du Sud", ninguno de los *placements* de Victoria Ocampo, incluidos algunos tan conspicuos como Ortega y Gasset, hizo tanto y tan eficazmente como Caillois por dar a conocer la literatura latinoamericana en Europa [...]. (Gramuglio 1992: 153-54)

As a result of the dissemination of Spanish American literature in France, influence was no longer seen as a unilateral occurrence where writers of the Old Continent inspired those of the New: Borges's example shows that the twentieth century became a century where writers of the Southern Cone began to gain recognition in their own right.

II Literary Influence: *Ferveur de Borges* (1987)

The first translations of Borges's books into French coincided with Réda's move to Paris in 1952 from Lunéville, a town in the Eastern province of Lorraine. As soon as Réda arrived in Paris, he immersed himself in the literary life of the city and this included reading the latest releases. At the time, his own writing career had only just begun: he published his first *plaquette, Les Inconvénients du métier* in 1952. Though it may be a coincidence, the fact that Borges gained recognition in France around the same time that Réda's career took off is significant because it shows that Réda discovered Borges when he was still developing his craft as a writer, when he was perhaps most receptive to outside influences.

Réda wrote the chapters contained in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) progressively from 1957 to 1986, more or less from the time he started reading Borges's works until the year of Borges's death. The book was finally published in 1987. In the space of nearly thirty years, then, Borges became a constant in Réda's thinking and writing and at least until 1986, he kept up to date with new publications of Borges's works in France. *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) therefore offers a comprehensive view of Réda's interpretation of Borges's texts translated into French from the early 1950s to the late 1980s.

The core of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) is made up of six essays and poems written between 1957 and 1986, preceded by a preface entitled 'Note liminaire' (1987). The essays, articles and poems contained in the book are: 'Commençant par la fin' (1957),

'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' (1962), 'Une « Approche du caché »' (1970), 'J.L.B' (1981), 'Les Papiers peints' (1984) and 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986). The first three are essays previously published as articles, whereas the last three are a combination of original poetry by Réda and a critique of Borges's poetry. Collectively, all the texts introduce the characteristics Réda finds in Borges, particularly those related to his personal interests: cities and their *faubourgs* (periphery), poetic freedom and imagination, tangible physical experience of the outside world and emotional poetic investment. Every piece reveals another dimension of Réda's assessment of Borges's work, which in turn provides further insight into the similarities and differences between these two authors.

In order to understand Réda's readings of Borges's works, for the remainder of this chapter, I propose a detailed analysis of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987). My intention is not only to understand Réda as a critic of Borges, but also to grasp the literary connection he made with him. This connection, pivotal to the aims of this thesis, hinges on their common interest in the city and its periphery as poetic subjects, on the physical experience of space and on the emotional involvement of the poet.

II.1 Réda and Borges: 'Note liminaire' (1987)

Réda prefaces *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) with a 'Note liminaire' written just before the book's publication. The purpose of this commentary is to set the tone of the compilation and to explain its rationale. Réda clarifies that the pieces brought together, with the exception of 'Les Papiers peints' — which is a sort of 'fantaisie inédite' — had

previously appeared in now extinct magazines throughout a period of thirty years.[25] However, for their collected publication, Réda admits that he deemed necessary certain 'aménagements de détail', while also specifying their dates of publication and placing them in chronological order within the book (Réda 1987: 11).

This editorial decision is crucial to a coherent and progressive understanding of Réda's discovery and treatment of Borges's texts in relation to his own. It shows, firstly, the evolution of Réda's understanding of Borges's work: as Réda observes in the preface of the book, the critical depth of his commentaries sharpened with the years; they evolved from the 'zèle scolaire et déférent de la paraphrase, au commentaire plus libre qui s'enhardit par une longue familiarité' (Réda 1987: 11). Secondly, the book's chronology establishes a historicity for the publication of Borges's books in France: the reader can clearly see with the first two essays that it was mainly Borges's collections of short stories that had been translated into French up until the early 1960s; his poems mostly being translated singly in anthologies and magazines until 1965. In a note at the start of the second essay in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), Réda confirms this fact:

> A l'époque de la rédaction de ces pages [1962], on ne pouvait se procurer encore, en traduction, que *Fictions* (Gallimard) et, aux Editions du Rocher, *Histoire de l'infamie – Histoire de l'éternité*. Divers contes, articles ou poèmes de Borges avaient paru séparément dans des anthologies ou des revues, notamment dans les *Cahiers du Sud.* (Note de 1987). (Réda 1987: 61)

The tone of the preface is modest and forthcoming: 'Dans le titre de ce petit livre, [...]

[25] Throughout the course of my research, I was unable to find out the names of the magazines where Réda's articles were published prior to the compilation of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987). This could be the object of further research.

il faut bien sûr entendre un hommage à la ferveur exemplaire que Borges manifesta [...], mais aussi l'expression de la ferveur plus maladroite que son œuvre n'a cessé de m'inspirer (Réda 1987: 11). The adjective 'maladroite' is the verbalisation of Réda's modesty. The quote also reveals the origin of the book's title, which is in turn relevant to the comparative nature of this thesis: Réda entitled his book after Borges's first collection of poems *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). According to Réda, this book was not published in French translation until 1982 (Réda 1987: 92); the first edition of Borges's *Œuvre poétique: 1925-1965* in French did not include it (Borges 1970). Thus, Réda is not only paying tribute to the much awaited translation of Borges's first book, but also to its subject matter: the city of Buenos Aires. As further analysis of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) will show, for Réda, discovering Borges's attachment to Buenos Aires as a poetic subject was a momentous event in his career because of their mutual interest in the city.

Réda regards Borges as a complex writer: he equates his approach to Borges's works as a journey towards the centre of a labyrinth where he fears getting lost or falling into an interpretative mimesis (Réda 1987: 11-12). Still, fuelled by 'l'admiration et le plaisir' that Borges's works inspire in him, he expresses a resolve to follow '[s]on propre fil d'Ariane' 'vers le cœur d'un labyrinthe que d'autres, [...] ont approché de plus près' (Réda 1987: 12). Here, Réda acknowledges the work of other critics and places himself in a continuum of Borges commentators.

But in keeping with the metaphor of space used throughout the preface, Réda concludes 'Note liminaire' by humbly pointing out that his contribution to Borges

scholarship perhaps only grazes the periphery of his precursor's ideas and works:

> S'il m'arrive d'estimer que mon cheminement n'aura guère ainsi dépassé la périphérie, je me réconforte en évoquant une définition de Roberto Juarroz: *Borges*, écrit-il infailliblement, *la périphérie de Borges, qui est peut-être son centre*. (Réda 1987: 12)

As with the metaphor of the labyrinth before it, Réda uses one of Borges's recurrent themes — the periphery — to explain his own journey towards understanding Borges. Inspired by a quote from Roberto Juarroz (1925-1995) — a famous Argentine poet, author of *Poesía Vertical I-XIV* (1958-1997) — Réda reflects on the possibility that perhaps not knowing Borges's works completely or understanding them fully is actually integral to the essence of Borges.

Juarroz's quote is from his essay 'Adrogué, Borges et les périphéries', published in the Borges volume of *Les Cahiers de L'Herne* in 1964. In the essay, Juarroz cites the different 'types' of periphery that Borges uses in his works. Adrogué was a town twenty-five miles south of Buenos Aires where Borges's family used to vacation in the summer (Williamson 2004: 33-34, 171, 281-282). The aim of Juarroz's essay was to define the theme of the periphery in Borges's work in order to place Adrogué within the different types of periphery:

> L'œuvre de Borges est une prodigue démonstration de ses projections vers des périphéries historiques (légendes primitives, mythologie nordique, évocation de personnages du passé argentin, etc.) – sociales (inclination pour des types humains périmés – *orillero, compadrito, gaucho* – ou structures de vie collective étrangères au monde aujourd'hui) – littéraires (ultraïsme, littérature fantastique, roman policier, etc.) – géographiques (les faubourgs, les coins sordides ou anachroniques de Buenos Aires, etc.). (Juarroz 1964: 194-195)

Juarroz cites examples of human narratives, social structures, literary movements

and places that are considered marginal in order to suggest that Borges ultimately achieved 'une espèce de « périphérisme » psychologique, personnel, humain, créateur'; that he approached literature from idiosyncratic positions of exteriority (Juarroz 1964: 195). Juarroz implies that Borges's peripheral projections challenged in turn conventional meanings of the notion of centre: if Borges wrote from a peripheral stand point, what are the central conventions of history, society, literature and geography? For Juarroz, Borges is an author who compels his reader to question the meaning of centre from 'le biais marginal' (Juarroz 1964: 194). In sum, 'la périphérie de Borges qui est peut-être son centre' indicates that the centrality of Borges's work came from his ability to dissect central questions about human life from a peripheral approach.

Crucial to the development of this thesis, this observation shows that Réda understood Borges as an author who used his creative abilities to respond to the mysteries of the universe — in other words, that literature was the vehicle through which he navigated the more intangible areas of life. However, according to Réda, the risk for the reader is to become wrapped up in the experience of reading Borges because the mind is entangled in the task of making sense of both the story and the world around it: 'On s'y trouve comme d'avance inclus, et le projet d'observer du dehors ce qui nous enferme en paraît gravement compromis' (Réda 1987: 12). Réda is both captivated by Borges's work and folded into it. The analysis of the essays and poems contained in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) portrays the extent of Réda's fervour for Borges.

II.2 Essays and Poems: 'Commençant par la fin' (1957)

The first essay of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), 'Commençant par la fin' (1957), was written soon after the publication in France of two of Borges's books *Histoire de l'infamie, histoire de l'éternité* (1957) and *Enquêtes* (1957).[26] In its initial stages, the essay was prompted by the sudden (though erroneous) news, in a Spanish newspaper, of Borges's death: 'Voici quatre ou cinq mois, un quotidien de Madrid publiait un bref et consternant écho, annonçant la disparition, à l'âge de cinquante-huit ans, de l'écrivain argentin Jorge Luis Borges' (Réda 1987: 15). Troubled by the news, Réda began writing his essay as an eulogy for the author for whom 'à peine commençait-on, [...], à deviner quel espace durable il allait occuper sur les mouvantes cartes de la géographie littéraire' before 'l'heureux et prompt démenti de cette nouvelle me coupa l'élan' (Réda 1987: 15).[27] The essay that eventually appeared in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) contemplates some of the ideas from Réda's original 'oraison funèbre', but was completed after the information about Borges's supposed death was disproven.

In 'Commençant par la fin', Réda shows that, already by the late fifties, he is well versed on Borges: he is aware that Borges started out as a poet and that he was

[26] *Historia universal de la infamia* was published for the first time in 1935 and revised by Borges in 1954. The stories contained in it appeared separately in *Crítica* in 1933 and 1934. *Historia de la eternidad* is for the most part a collection of essays published for the first time in 1936. In French, both books appeared as *Histoire de l'infamie, histoire de l'éternité* (1957) translated by Roger Caillois and Laure Guille. *Enquêtes* (1957) was known in Spanish as *Otras inquisiciones* (1952). Paul and Sylvia Bénichou translated it into French.

[27] Eventually, the news of Borges's death proved to be an error in the translation of his surname. Sylvia Molloy explains the confusion: a telegram announcing the death of the Italian artist Borgese had lost the 'e' at the end of the surname, leading some people from the press to believe it was Borges who had died. See Sylvia Molloy, *La Diffusion de la littérature hispano-américaine en France au XX^{e} siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), p. 227.

passionate about Anglo-Saxon literature. He is also aware of the fact that by this time, Borges was committed to prose, 'à un fantastique qui peut paraître cérébral, à une lucidité dont s'accommode mal l'idée volontiers pathétique et confuse que nous nous faisons du comportement poétique' (Réda 1987: 16-17). Réda's essay reads as a critical piece where the author weaves together readings from other critics (Roger Caillois and Françoise Eaubonne), quotations from Borges's works translated into French (*Histoire de l'infamie, histoire de l'éternité* and *Enquêtes*) and his own analysis of essays such as 'Histoire de l'éternité' and 'Nouvelle réfutation du temps' (Réda 1987: 18-20).[28]

In essence, Réda expresses admiration for Borges's creative spirit both in his fiction as well as in his essays. He believes that it is Borges's curiosity and inventiveness that nurtured the scepticism over ontological categories that Borges expressed in his essay 'Nueva refutación del tiempo'. In this essay, written between 1944 and 1946 and published in *Otras inquisiciones* in 1952, Borges argues the possibility that following the laws of Berkeley's idealism, time can be conceived as a fabricated category that does not really exist, because life is but a string of individual moments of perception. Réda argues that Borges's 'sensibilité intellectuelle', his ability to manipulate religious and philosophical concepts for their aesthetic purposes, creates the space for shared experience; it gives thought a universal dimension where the reader of Borges's texts, and in this case Réda, feels included in Borges's search to understand the essence of life: 'une dimension épique de la pensée se faisant émotion universelle' (Réda 1987: 16). It also allows him to transcend the limits of his own imagination, thus creating

[28] These two essays were published in *Histoire de l'infamie, histoire de l'éternité* (1957) and *Enquêtes* (1957) respectively.

original thought:

> Bien qu'il se plût encore *à supposer d'avance que la quantité de fables ou de métaphores dont est capable l'imagination des hommes est limitée*, n'aura-t-il pas montré qu'à l'intérieur de ces limites, l'imagination, conçue comme discipline et moyen d'investigation de son propre domaine, se retrouvait soudain multipliée, affranchie du déterminisme ? (Réda 1987: 16)[29]

Réda believes therefore that Borges works within the laws of ambiguity, experimenting with sources and deconstructing patterns of thought by way of his imagination. He discovers that in the process of using his imagination, Borges transcends the limits he believes the human mind to have. In order to achieve this, Réda explains that Borges uses 'la compilation, la falsification des sources, la préméditation de l'équivoque, le calembour métaphysique et la mystification bibliographique' (Réda 1987: 18) but that in the midst of it all, he remains 'irrémédiablement littéraire' because of the importance he ascribes to the act of reading (Réda 1987: 17). Réda concludes his essay by suggesting that beyond his scepticism about the categories of human life — an 'attitude morale' — Borges exhibited a perplexity, an intrinsic receptive attitude that triggered the 'esthétique et métaphysique' and that allowed him to remain curious about the world and open to its manifestations (Réda 1987: 20-21). It showed Borges as a reader as well as a writer.

This essay reveals some of the early insights Réda had about Borges's work. Most importantly, it argues that Borges wrote in order to address an intellectual scepticism and an ontological perplexity, and that his texts are the materialisation of these two dimensions. In the next section, I will look at how Réda interprets them in one of

[29] I have reproduced the italic style as it was found in the original *Ferveur de Borges* (1987).

Borges's most famous short stories 'El inmortal'.

II.3 'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' (1962)

'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' is a commentary on Borges's short story 'El inmortal' (1949), translated as 'L'Immortel' by Caillois and published in *Labyrinthes* (1953). The longest essay in the book, it stands out because it focuses solely on one of Borges's stories, rather than offering general impressions of Borges's aesthetic as a whole. Réda's ambitious task is to 'découvrir ce que cache la virtuosité' he sees in Borges (Réda 1987: 36). By analysing 'L'Immortel', Réda expects to reveal Borges's most important themes and to extract the possible overall significance of Borges's work based on those themes:

> je voudrais simplement montrer comment tous les grands thèmes de Borges y sont inscrits; comment ce conte bref, pareil à la chambre centrale d'un labyrinthe, nous donne accès à toutes les sinuosités d'une œuvre dont je m'efforcerais en même temps, de dégager les significations possibles. (Réda 1987: 28).

Réda begins by summarising the story in his own words: in 1929, a princess from Lucinge receives from a British antiquarian called Joseph Cartaphilus an old edition of Pope's *Iliad*. Inside the book, she discovers a manuscript that narrates in five parts the story of Marcus Flaminius Rufo, a Roman tribune from the third century posted in Africa. In the first three parts of the document found by the princess, Rufo recounts the ordeals he faced when, disillusioned by military life and moved by the apparition of a mysterious cavalryman, he vows to find the river that grants immortality and the City of the Immortals erected beside it. But the perils of his journey through many

deserts leave Rufo thirsty and nearly dead. He begins to hallucinate and collapses from exhaustion. When he finally wakes up, he realises that he is bound: a tribe of mute Troglodytes has imprisoned him. Beyond a sandy stream that runs at the bottom of a slope where Rufo is able to roll over to drink from the murky water, he finally sees, on bedrock, the City of the Immortals. Rufo is then able to free himself thanks to a flint, and followed by a Troglodyte, he makes his way to the City. But the bedrock is too high for him to reach, so, after leaving the Troglodyte outside, he enters the City instead through a cavern that leads into a labyrinth. Once he is there, he notices that the structures that hold the city together are nonsensical. On his way out, Rufo finds his Troglodyte and moved by his loyalty, names him Argos after Ulysses' dog and tries to teach him to speak. The task is in vain until the day when it rains in the desert. When the Troglodyte is able to speak, he identifies himself as Argos but also as Homer. At this point Rufo understand that the Troglodytes are the Immortals because Homer is able to reincarnate as Argos. He also realises that the murky water that he drank was in fact the river of immortality and that he too had become immortal. The fourth part of the document is a series of reflections on immortality where Borges proposes that if the waters of immortality exist, so do the waters of mortality. Rufo concludes that to know of one's immortality is as unbearable as to know of one's mortality and ultimately dreams of finding the clear stream that will render him mortal again. Lastly, in the fifth part of the story, after a quick overview of the narrator's avatars over time, the reader learns that the clear water of a stream in Eritrea renders the narrator mortal, and Rufo, who has now become Joseph Cartaphilus, the antiquarian from London, questions himself about

his destiny and the inconsistencies of his tale.

Réda's lengthy metaphysical analysis of 'L'Immortel' exposes several themes: the quest for and the futility of immortality, the allegorical projection of Borges as Rufo, Borges's intellectual exploration of the problem of eternity, but most crucially the motif of the labyrinth as 'un principe d'égarement et d'organisation' (Réda 1987: 43). This motif is important to Réda primarily because it is a spatial construct that allows a connection to the physical world. It is a theme that has been analysed by many critics of Borges and that Borges uses throughout his short stories to create his fictional worlds.[30] Many of his short stories are set in labyrinthine places ('La biblioteca de Babel', 'El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan', 'La muerte y la brújula', etc.) but equally, like in the fourth part of 'El inmortal', the reflections that Borges produces in these stories have winding paths similar to the passages found in a labyrinth.

In 'L'Immortel', Réda identifies five labyrinths: the organised and symmetrical labyrinth that protects the City of the Immortals, the chaotic and absurd city itself, the concept of eternity as a metaphysical labyrinth, the lives of Rufo-Cartaphilus and the narrative structure of 'El inmortal' itself. These labyrinths all occur in some form of space: either in the physical space or location where the story takes places,

[30] For in-depth works on the theme of the labyrinth in Borges see Ana María Barrenechea, *Borges: the Labyrinth Maker* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), Ana María Barrenechea, *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Borges* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984), Rex Butler, *Borges's Short Stories: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 16-37, Ludmila Kapschutschenko, *El laberinto en la narrativa hispanoamericana* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 1981), pp. 19-55, Louis Andrew Murillo, 'The Labyrinths of Jorge Luis Borges', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 20 (3) (1959): 259-66, Pedro Jorge Romero, 'La casa de Borges: notas parciales sobre los laberintos en dos cuentos de Jorge Luis Borges', *El archivo de Nessus* (1995) <http://www.archivodenessus.com/articulos/001/%3E> [accessed 23 January 2013], Carter Wheelock, *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

or on the space of the page. At the same time they all intend to recreate a sense of eternity, though ironically, they offer but an incomplete image of this infinite on account of the fact that they perpetually open up to other labyrinths. For example, when Rufo enters the cavern that leads to the City of the Immortals, he traverses several labyrinths before moving on to the city; he therefore assumes that the cavern is infinite because of this imbricated structure. He can never actually confirm its infinity unless he gets lost in it.

Rufo's arrival at the City of the Immortals only occurs therefore after he traverses different kinds of physical and mental labyrinths (the peregrinations, the infinite desert, Rufo's premonitory dream, the path leading to the city, the aberrant building). Réda explains that this structure of superposed and interlinked labyrinths within the story creates the impression that 'L'Immortel' itself, the story, is also infinite. There is no real sense of ending in Borges's story; instead the reader is left with questions about the evolution of the plot and whether or not the story is apocryphal. Réda's contention is that Borges uses these never-ending structures in his stories because he believes that they imitate the structures existent in the real world. Roger Caillois agreed that for Borges the labyrinth constituted a symbol that allowed him to reproduce the complex structures of the universe he was attempting to decipher, because 'ces structures et ces correspondances sont aussi celles de l'univers' (Caillois 2009: 10). Both Réda and Caillois argue that Borges creates these labyrinths in fiction so as to show us something about ourselves: '[il] nous offre l'image de notre liberté devant l'obscur, c'est-à-dire devant nous-mêmes aussi et ce monde où nous sommes'

(Réda 1987: 59). The freedom Réda speaks of in the quotation above corresponds to the one Borges offers his readers by presenting them with worlds beyond the limits of imagination; in other words, Borges offers us the possibility of transcending what we think we know and believe. What is at stake in this interpretation of Borges is an important correlation between literature and the world: literature serves to tell us something about the way we live and where we live; at the same time, our lives serve to inspire fictional worlds. This interplay between literature and life involves the role of the individual, the role of the writer, in the creation of these structures. Réda's essay is therefore as much about its author and his world as about the analysis of 'L'Immortel' in itself: 'La grandeur de Borges est d'avoir poussé dans toutes ses conséquences la conscience ironique et tragique aussi d'un jeu qui, à la ressemblance du monde, n'est que l'affirmation de ce qu'il est' (Réda 1987: 59).

II.4 'Une «Approche du caché »' (1970)

The third essay, 'Une « Approche du caché »' is a response to the publication of *Jorge Luis Borges: œuvre poétique (1925-1965)* (1970) translated by Néstor Ibarra. This collection omits the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), which Réda did not read in translation until 1982 (Réda 1987: 92). However, Réda's reference to the poem 'Amanecer' from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) in this essay suggests that Réda did consult Borges's book in Spanish. More generally, the essay is a short commentary on a couple of themes present in Borges's poetry. Réda borrowed the title from Néstor Ibarra's 1939 translation of 'El acercamiento de Almotásim' as

'L'Approche du caché' (Molloy 1972: 203).[31] Though the latter is a short story, the title ironically hints at the little recognition Borges's poems had in France until that point, by suggesting that it is Borges's poetry that has remained 'hidden' or 'cachée', and that it is now, finally, 'approaching' French culture.

In the essay, Réda demonstrates awareness of Borges's poetic trajectory: he acknowledges the existence of Borges's first three collections of poems which he later repudiated: *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925), and *Cuaderno San Martin* (1929). He also knew that Borges did not publish any further poetry collections from 1930 to 1960, until *El hacedor* (1960) and he is aware of Borges's experimentation with both free and metric verse:

> On sait que Borges s'est éloigné de la poésie-genre durant de nombreuses années, celles qui correspondent à l'accomplissement de son œuvre en prose. Après *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925), et *Cuaderno San Martin* (1929), son quatrième recueil (*El hacedor*) ne paraîtra qu'en 1960, ouvrant alors une longue série. (Réda 1987: 66)

Réda's introductory specifications about Borges's poetry indicate that his essay is aimed at a French audience mostly familiar with Borges's fiction and critique. His intention is, on the one hand, to validate the quality of Borges's poetry particularly in relation to the works of prose already known in France, and on the other hand, to show that Borges's poetry could potentially contribute to a better understanding of the poetic quality of his fiction and critical works, which Réda argues have been neglected in favour of 'l'inventeur de labyrinthes':

> Une meilleure connaissance des poèmes ne pourra donc que rendre plus sensible à cet aspect [poétique] des écrits de critique et de fiction, quelque

[31] See Chapter 1.I.2. Borges and/in France, p. 62.

> peu négligé au profit du génie de l'inventeur de labyrinthes. [...] Le poème semble avoir dans son œuvre, par rapport à ce qui n'est pas vers, un double rôle de commentaire (ou de post-scriptum) et de confidence. (Réda 1987: 67)

For Réda, Borges's poetry fulfils at once the role of critical commentary and personal story. This is because, in his view, poetry mediates an intimate connection between the poet and the subject matter, where the sense of self of the poet is involved in the theme of the poem: it expresses what the poet thinks and feels about this theme. It possesses the unique potential for emotional catharsis through philosophic contemplation:

> Des labyrinthes et des miroirs, des jeux de la pensée sur l'identité et le temps, les poèmes de Borges ne cherchent pas à reproduire, comme dans ses méditations et ses histoires la puissante fascination. Ils expriment ce que fut et reste pour lui cette puissance. Ils la questionnent, ils s'en étonnent, laissant parfois une sorte de lassitude ou une mélancolie. D'où le ton tout-à-fait singulier de ce lyrisme intellectuel, qui se déploie aussi bien sur des thèmes philosophiques, et que l'élégie imprègne en même temps de sa poignante douceur. (Réda 1987: 67-68)

In his poems, Borges does not reproduce his fascination for labyrinths, mirrors, mind games about identity and time; instead, he comments on and questions this fascination with those themes, thus offering an emotional response to them. With this, Réda identifies the personal dimension of Borges's poetry, oftentimes melancholic, metaphysical and playful, but mostly expressive of his feelings about both philosophical and non-philosophical themes. Réda calls this — very appropriately — Borges's 'lyrisme intellectuel'.

Apart from his emotional investment in his poems, in *Jorge Luis Borges: œuvre poétique (1925-1965)*, Réda also discovers Borges's interest in the *faubourgs* or

peripheral neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires:

> Les charmes des faubourgs, leur poussière où s'achève et commence celle de la grande plaine [...], leurs « durs » [...], les spéculations ultérieures, autres promenades par les banlieues de l'histoire et de l'imagination métaphysique, ne les ont pas vraiment remplacés (Réda 1987: 68)

Réda appreciates the character and charm with which Borges poeticises the peripheral neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. This charm, Réda argues, is not overshadowed by Borges's other interests in the past of Buenos Aires or his metaphysical imagination. He proposes instead that the theme of the *faubourgs* is of equal weight to the philosophical and metaphysical in Borges's poetics.

In relation to the other essays in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), 'Une « Approche du caché »' introduces a new dimension to Borges's work: nostalgia and affection for the *faubourgs*, which Réda distinctly separates from the highly cerebral and metaphysical labyrinth Borges explores in his narrative. In fact, Réda suggests that the early Borges gravitated towards the *faubourg,* as a way to pose his ontological questions from an emotionally interested point of view, before he turned to the metaphysical ploys of his short stories once he ceased to publish poetry from 1930 to 1960:

> A l'obsession du labyrinthe, [...] se mêle ainsi la nostalgie d'une étendue qui nous tiendrait, bien qu'infinie, dans la douceur distante de son centre. Centre dont Borges perçoit le magnétisme dans les zones périphériques qu'il affectionne. (Réda 1987: 68-69)

'Une « Approche du caché »' complements 'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' because it presents a different and earlier side to Borges. If the study in 'Commentaire' shows the cerebral qualities of Borges's short fictions with an emphasis on the theme of the labyrinth, 'Une « Approche du caché»' demonstrates that there was another dimension to Borges's poetic practice before he turned to fiction: that is, his interest in

direct experience of the marginal spaces in his native city and his emotional investment in these spaces.

Furthermore, the fact that Réda was aware of this by 1970 is significant. Firstly, because it shows that from early on in his career, he had comprehensive knowledge of Borges's works published at least in French. Secondly, because though Réda had yet to publish his seminal work on Paris, *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), he was already thinking about Borgesian space. Lastly, and most importantly, it is significant because Réda's own interest in the *faubourgs* of Paris could in fact have been influenced by Borges's exploration of the *faubourgs* of Buenos Aires. This essay is important in the context of this thesis because it shows Réda's awareness of the themes of subjectivity and urban space present in Borges's poetry, themes that will later on be used to compare Borges's and Réda's approaches to their respective cities.

II.5 'J.L.B.' (1981)

'J.L.B.' (1981) is the first of two poems in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) where Réda uses Borgesian themes as inspiration.[32] In the wider context of the book, the poems offer a different perspective to Réda's understanding of Borges, one that is less analytical and more emotionally invested in Borges's project. The title 'J.L.B.' is at once subtle because it does not explicitly mention Borges, yet at the same time reverential because it hints at Borges as a source of inspiration. The poem describes the poet transported

[32] The other poem appears at the end of 'A propos d'une ferveur', which will be analysed in more detail at the end of this chapter and as epigraphs to the different chapters throughout this thesis.

to a place where he has never been, but that he has read about: Adrogué, the town where Borges spent his summer family vacations. The poem is composed of six stanzas, where the poet describes the writing process of a poem that pays tribute to another poet's experience: in this case, Borges's relationship to Adrogué.

In the course of his career, Borges published several texts about Adrogué: a poem in *El hacedor* (1960) and a slim book entitled *Adrogué* (1977). *Adrogué* is a collection of poems inspired by a lecture Borges gave on the topic 'Adrogué en sus libros' ('Adrogué in his books') on March 19, 1977 in Burzaco (Province of Buenos Aires). It is possible that either or both of these sources inspired Réda. Given that Réda understands Spanish, it is also possible that he came across the following quote by Borges from an article published in *La Nación* in 1981, the same year 'J.L.B.' was published for the first time:

> En cualquier parte del mundo en que me encuentre cuando siento el olor de los eucaliptos, estoy en Adrogué. Adrogué era eso: un largo laberinto tranquilo de calles arboladas, de verjas y de quintas; un laberinto de vastas noches quietas que mis padres gustaban recorrer. Quintas en las que uno adivinaba la vida detrás de las quintas. De algún modo yo siempre estuve aquí, siempre estoy aquí. Los lugares se llevan, los lugares están en uno. Sigo entre los eucaliptos y en el laberinto, el lugar en que uno puede perderse. Supongo que uno también puede perderse en el Paraíso. Estatuas de tan mal gusto y tan cursis que ya resultaban lindas, una falsa ruina, una cancha de tenis. Y luego, en ese mismo hotel "Las Delicias", un gran salón de espejos. Sin duda me miré en aquellos espejos infinitos. Muchos argumentos, muchas escenas, muchos poemas que he imaginado, nacieron en Adrogué o se sitúan en ella. Siempre que hablo de jardines, siempre que hablo de árboles, estoy en Adrogué; he pensado en esta ciudad, no es necesario que la nombre. (Borges 1977: 7)

The town of Adrogué came to be associated with the nurturing stages of the writer's imagination. The writer of the prologue of *Adrogué*, Roy Bartholomew, further in-

dicates that some of Borges's most recognised themes, like the labyrinth, the mirror and the garden, were born out of this magical place (Borges 1977: 8). But it is clear that the emotional depth is the most important characteristic of this passage. What stands out most about the excerpt above is the intense sense of place Borges describes, the feeling of always being mentally transported back to Adrogué and never losing his connection with that place. Réda, who was already sensitive to the urban and suburban themes in Borges,[33] also appears moved and haunted by the power some places occupy in the poet's imagination: 'Et le nom d'Adrogué / M'obsède en ce matin de mai lourd comme un somnifère' (Réda 1987: 75).

In the poem, Réda takes hold of his own surroundings — 'la fenêtre', 'un érable', 'ce jardin de ville' — as an exploratory imaginary space that marks his embrace of and congeniality with Borges's work. The poem is initially set in the city, in France. This is revealed by the type of tree Réda mentions: the 'érable' is a tree from temperate European climates. But then, in an elegiac tone, Réda unleashes his imagination looking outside a window and begins to imagine himself in Adrogué:

> De la fenêtre ouverte juste au milieu d'un érable,
> A travers le feuillage on peut encore distinguer
> Quelques arbres qui font une épaisseur considérable
> A ce jardin de ville étroit. Et le nom d'Adrogué
>
> M'obsède en ce matin de mai lourd comme un somnifère,
> Avez l'oiseau qui balbutie et les nuages bas
> Filtrant une douceur d'automne et, d'un autre hémisphère,
> La lumière continue. [...] (Réda 1987: 75)

The transition between Réda's perceived reality and his imaginary place occurs at the

[33] See Chapter 1.II.4. 'Une « Approche du caché »' (1970), p. 82.

same time as the poem moves from the first to the second stanza. From that moment onwards, the poet is transported into an imaginary Adrogué, clearly signalled by the geographic specification 'un autre hémisphère'. He is then transported to the imaginary *faubourgs* of Buenos Aires: the further two stanzas of the poem describe the 'rayonnement d'épée au fin fond des faubourgs' and 'l'angle de la rue' where 'un homme qui fredonne' puts away his knife. Réda's poem becomes a conflation of the poet's imaginary experience in Adrogué and in Buenos Aires.

Réda alludes to images of Adrogué found in Borges's eponymous 1960 poem. For example, 'l'oiseau qui balbutie' (Réda 1987: 75) is transposed from Borges's 'là où l'oiseau secret / qui module sans fin un même chant' ('Adrogué' [1960] in Borges 2010c: 53). Equally, in the two stanzas that follow — the first from 'Adrogué', the second from 'J.L.B' — a similar colour scheme is used to set the scene:

> Et cette tête de lion qui mord
> Un anneau, et les carreaux de couleur
> Qui à l'enfant révèlent les merveilles
> D'un monde rouge et puis d'un monde vert ('Adrogué' [1960] in Borges 2010c: 53)

> Et derrière un mur rose un parc oublieux s'abandonne
> Vert et rouge à l'eau verticale des miroirs. L'étau
> Se desserre : on dirait de l'heure un homme qui fredonne
> A l'angle de la rue, ayant replié son couteau ('J.L.B' (1981) in Réda 1987: 76)

From Adrogué, the scene is finally transported to the *pampas* and the *gaucho* culture Réda would have read about in Borges's works already translated into French. The poem mentions in particular 'un mur rose' found in 'Homme au coin du mur rose' published in *Histoire universelle de l'infamie* (1957): 'Et derrière un mur rose un

parc oublieux s'abandonne' (Réda 1987: 76). Réda therefore finds inspiration in some of the main symbols of Borges's literary repertoire. But what is more, he reproduces the emotional atmosphere of the place. He achieves this by conflating nostalgic vocabulary ('oublieux', 'douceur', 'merveille') and symbols from other poems contained in *Adrogué*, such as 'l'épée' from 'Le Cauchemar' (published in French in *La Monnaie de fer* (1983)) and 'tango' from the poem 'Le tango' (published in French in *L'Autre, le même* (1969)), images that are also known to appear across Borges's oeuvre.

Réda's appropriation of some of these Borgesian themes marks his ability to connect emotionally with Borges's subject matter. Within the scope of Réda's work, 'J.L.B' is also an indication of the kind of poetic exploration Réda was practicing at the time. It is thus unlike the essays already mentioned in this chapter, which were written at a time when Réda is still in the process of developing his own poetics. In 1981, Réda has already published his most recognised work *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977) and was in the process of writing *Hors les murs* (1982), an important collection of poems in verse centred around the French *banlieue*. 'J.L.B' therefore points to these authors' similar inclination for peripheral spaces; but what is more, to the role of poetry in the expression of the emotions tied to these spaces.

II.6 'Les Papiers peints' (1984)

'Les Papiers peints' (1984) is the penultimate text in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) and the only one not to have been published previously (Réda 1987: 11). Réda describes it as a 'fantaisie inédite' and though it bears some critical resemblance to the other

essays in the book, it is mostly a personal reflection about how the poet elaborates an image in his mind, whether in reality or in his dreams. 'Les Papiers peints' more resembles one of Réda's prose poems than a critical essay on Borges. The title of this sort of *nouvelle* is apparently derived from two sources: the first is Réda's experience of 'chambres d'hôtel' decorated with wallpaper; the other is from Borges's short story 'La espera' ('L'Attente' in French published in 1967 in *L'Aleph*) where there is a brief allusion to the wallpaper of the hotel where the main character stays in the story (Réda 1987: 84): 'le papier était cramoisi, avec, en guise de motifs, de grands paons à la queue déployée' ('L'Attente' [1967] in Borges 2010d: 645). The wallpaper represents the repeated patterns that are formed in the mind and that often lead to incoherent images. Réda concludes the essay by saying that images are usually a conflation of dreams and experiences. One of those experiences for him is reading Borges's texts from which he derives inspiration, like wallpaper: 'je me disais que c'était son œuvre qui, tel un papier peint où reviennent obstinément les mêmes thèmes du miroir et du labyrinthe, interposait entre son lecteur et le monde un trompe-l'œil fascinant' (Réda 1987: 87). This quote indicates the inspiration — conscious or unconscious — that Réda derived from reading Borges's texts.

II.7 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986)

'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986) is the last chapter of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987). The piece is divided into two parts: the first is a short, four-page essay that narrates the circumstances in which Réda came to read *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) after it was

translated into French in 1982. The second is a poem that reassesses in poetic form the ideas articulated in the essay, but also those expressed in 'Une « Approche du caché »'. 'A propos d'une ferveur' is central to this thesis because it focuses solely on Réda's interpretation of Borges's relationship to the city. By extension it also reveals some of Réda's own urban behaviours. In the analysis that follows, I will first discuss the ideas formulated in the essay and then I will see how these are played out in the poem.

At the centre of Réda's essay is the connection between his approach to the city and that of Borges. He reveals, gradually, the different elements that characterise his attitude towards Paris and eventually how these are similar to that of Borges. He describes the need for spontaneity and vulnerability but not of clear direction. He mentions his interest in the periphery of Paris and in a physical experience of space. Most crucially, he emphasises the need to maintain a certain attitude in order to maximise the relationship with the city. In order to explain this, Réda begins his essay with a personal anecdote. He references his own approach to circulating around Paris, traversing its streets and later its suburbs and working class neighbourhoods. He turns his analysis inwards, attempting to define his own identity and methodology as a poet of the city:

> Au cours de ces trajets, mes dispositions n'étaient pas exactement celles de la flânerie, ni l'on s'en doute, celles d'un explorateur. Car la flânerie est plutôt désintéressée, et l'exploration, au contraire, suppose un but et la plus extrême attention. (Réda 1987: 91)

Réda turns the role of the critic onto himself, anticipating that others might label him as a *flâneur* or as an explorer. However, he dismisses these two denominations as ex-

tremes in relation to his own approach to the city: he is neither too nonchalant about his interaction with his surroundings nor too investigative about his expedition. He implies therefore that his approach to space is more open to the city's contingencies. Still, he intuits that there is something, a 'quelque chose', that propels his journey: 'J'étais bien cependant à la recherche de quelque chose, dont les rues indéfiniment suivies ne me livraient de temps à autre que des signaux' (Réda 1987: 91).

Réda admits that though he may not at first know why he feels drawn to exploring the city, once he is out walking the streets, the city manifests signs that allow him to piece together the purpose of his journey. In other words, Réda is describing himself as a spontaneous *promeneur* who does not believe in the necessity of planning a specific journey or destination when walking the streets of the city. He prefers instead to maintain a receptive attitude, open to the 'signaux' offered by the city: 'Mais pour les percevoir je devais, autant que possible, affecter cette humeur rêveuse et détachée qui gouverne vaguement la promenade. Alors seulement les signaux s'enhardissent et se laissent surprendre' (Réda 1987: 91). Instead of walking the streets with a purpose — for example to complete errands, to commute from one place to the next — Réda engages in a leisurely promenade, a kind of contemplative or even poetic walk in which he is receptive to external stimuli to direct his movement. He focuses on the journey rather than on the destination.

It is Réda's state of mind, 'participant à la fois de l'hypnose et de l'éveil du chasseur', that determines his receptivity to the city (Réda 1987: 91). He is at once in a sort of disengaged trance and attentive to the surrounding space, expecting the

'quelque chose' to be revealed to him. Réda unravels here the complex relationship between the poet and the city: it is a reciprocal relationship that hinges on the poet's attitude towards the urban landscape. If the poet's state of mind changes, then so will the response he receives from the city. For example, if the poet finds himself in a distressed state, he runs the risk of falling into a kind of 'hypnose', into a reverie that threatens his attention towards space: 'Si cet état un peu hagard peut sembler favorable au poète, il y court néanmoins le danger de se dissoudre dans le flot tiède et confus de ses impressions' (Réda 1987: 92). In this case, the poet risks being absorbed completely into his thoughts, losing touch with the surrounding space, and writing the kind of literature that is based on intellectualisation rather than on experience.

At this point in the narrative, Réda turns to Borges as an example of a poet who was able to maintain both a receptive state of mind and a physical connection to his city. He cites Borges as an inspiration during a time when he was becoming tired of his suburban wanderings:

> A cette époque, bien que je fusse de longtemps un lecteur assidu de Borges, comme beaucoup de ses admirateurs français je ne connaissais guère de son premier livre que le titre: *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Je ne l'ai vraiment bien lu qu'une fois traduit, au moment où je commençais à me lasser de ces randonnées suburbaines. (Réda 1987: 92)

Réda conveys how pivotal it was for his urban poetics to have read Borges's *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) in translation. Twelve years separate the initial publication of *Jorge Luis Borges: œuvre poétique (1925-1965)*, which did not include *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), and the translation of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in 1982.[34]. Réda

[34] The French translation of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) is based on the 1969-revised edition of the book and not on the first edition from 1923. Allegedly, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) was not

recalls reading Nestor Ibarra's 1982 translation 'qu'une fois traduit, au moment où je commençais à me lasser de ces randonnées suburbaines' (Réda 1987: 92). Crucially, up to this point, Réda's ideas about Borges as a poet of the *faubourgs*, did not derive from the poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), though there is some indication in 'Une « Approche du caché »' that Borges may have at least consulted the original Spanish version of the book. Once he read *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) in French, he understood that his affinity with Borges went beyond their interest in the periphery: both authors shared 'quelques traits spécifiques, certainement communs à toute une catégorie de poètes rôdeurs' (Réda 1987: 92). As a result, Réda sets out to outline a brief 'typologie' of this category of wandering poet of the periphery based on his reading of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923).

Apart from the state of mind already mentioned above, Réda's typology is based on a series of recurrent themes that Réda discerns, which are common to 'le poète des banlieues et des faubourgs' (Réda 1987: 93): a morose or carefree attitude towards the city, a contemplative melancholy, an attraction for the periphery and the evening as the preferred time to experience the city. All of these themes will be analysed in more detail throughout the course of this thesis. Réda describes them as transitional states, 'zone[s] de transition': from the ephemerality of emotion to the physical intermediate position of the periphery in relation to the city centre and its outskirts, Réda believes that the poet of the *banlieues* and the *faubourgs* — and Borges in particular — is characterised by a transient attitude towards space.

translated into French earlier by Caillois because he did not like the *criollo* elements of the book. See Jorge Luis Borges, *Œuvres complètes 1*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2010c), p. XXV.

In Réda's opinion, the urban poet develops a transient relationship with space for two reasons: on the one hand because it makes him available to the 'signaux' delivered by the city, and on the other hand because it makes him more vulnerable to experience a range of emotions:

> le sommeil, la mort, l'ennui, la tristesse, l'indifférence et l'illusion de quelque promesse, apparaissent comme les nuances d'une seule perception de l'univers, et la seule façon de s'y maintenir dans un fragile suspens, une perpétuation chimérique du transitoire [...]. (Réda 1987: 93-94)

In other words, the experience of urban space involves the subjective discovery of the city in question, but also of different dimensions of the poet's subjectivity. To remain in a 'fragile suspens', where the poet is susceptible to his environment is to perpetuate this transient vulnerable state of receptivity.

Réda ends his essay by explaining that Borges maintained this vulnerability towards Buenos Aires even after he repudiated *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) (Réda 1987: 94). Réda argues that Borges saw Buenos Aires throughout his career as a labyrinth where he voluntarily ran the risk 'de s'y perdre, pactisant avec lui dans les faubourgs qui se répètent, avec le soir et son illusion d'éternité' (Réda 1987: 94). For Réda, the main condition for poetic expression is that the poet remains in this state of vulnerability. And in order to exemplify this condition, he follows the essay in 'A propos d'une ferveur', with a poem that shows, in practice the results of the poet's state of mind. In the poem, Réda performs the points argued in the essay as a way to illustrate the mechanics of the 'poètes rôdeurs'. I would therefore like to end this chapter with an analysis of this poem.

The poem of ninety-six lines contained in 'A propos d'une ferveur' follows a rig-

orous structure: it is for the most part written in regular Alexandrines and consists of a sequence of rhyming couplets. The metrical regularity, as well as the compact nature of the repeated rhyming couplets, gives the poem a winding, circular tone, as if the poet were weaving together, line by line, an enclosed poetic universe. Indeed, the poem takes its reader on an ontological journey: it narrates the poet's own experience of the city, one that is based on the poet's realisation that he cannot apprehend the totality of the space that surrounds him (the city is here seen as 'chora')[35] and therefore must rely on his imagination to try to discern it: 'Sans doute inconnaissable est le nombre des rues / Que dans toute une vie on aura parcourues' (l.1-2 in Réda 1987: 95).[36] With this opening couplet, Réda welcomes his reader into his poetic urban world, from which the latter dips in and out of Réda's personal image of the physical urban environment that surrounds him; an environment that is subsequently transformed by Réda's emotional and imaginative approach to it. The poem stretches the limits of time and space; it layers and intertwines different real and imagined locations within equally unstable time frames:

> J'ai parfois commencé: mais compterai-je ou pas
> La ville imaginaire où des ombres de pas,
> Avec une espérance encore inassouvie,
> M'auront souvent conduit au bord d'une autre vie ? (l.7-10)

Réda's poem has an enchanting complexity: his message is that through his imagination, the poet is able to transgress the limits of his immediate perception and be transported to another reality, in the same way that he believes Borges manipulates

[35] For an explanation of this conceptualisation of space, see 'Critical Framework on Borges, Réda and their Cities' in the general Introduction, p. 34.

[36] Henceforth, references to the poem in 'A propos d'une ferveur' will only include line numbers.

literary concepts in order to transcend the limits of his imagination.[37] In this journey that is not only physical — because it occurs as he is walking the streets — but also mental — because it takes places in his imagination — the poet turns into a vector of experience, setting in motion with every step multiple possible journeys. As a result, the city turns into a flexible and infinite canvas for this imaginative and poetic transformation.

The link between the essay that precedes it and the poem is therefore two-fold: on the one hand, the poem is the result, the *fait accompli*, of Réda's promenade; it is the place where Réda translates his encounter with the 'signaux' of the city accessed through his absorbed state of mind. More importantly though, it is the space where the real and the imagined, the internal and the external worlds of the poet can coexist. On the other hand, the poem also poeticises the characteristics Réda discovered in Borges: his attraction to the periphery, his contemplative state of mind, his interest in the labyrinth as a literary theme and his preference for travelling the city in the evening. Ultimately, this poem is the space where Réda is able to imagine himself in Borges's Buenos Aires.

The poem has four main sections based on perceivable shifts in narrative and thematic direction. In lines 1 to 39, Réda describes his mental transition from a suburb in Paris to a suburb in Buenos Aires. The second section runs from lines 40 to 56 and captures Réda's conflicting feelings about the idea of remaining absorbed in his imaginative state or returning to his surrounding reality. In the third section, lines

[37] See Chapter 1.II.3. 'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' (1962), p. 79.

57 to 76, Réda imagines the possibility of both real and imagined places co-existing in a labyrinth that resembles the entire universe and that connects everything together. Lastly, the fourth section, running from lines 77 to 96 closes the circle of Réda's imaginative experience: it refocuses the poet's attention in the surrounding space, in fact creating a loop that takes the poet back to the beginning of the poem, thus suggesting the circularity of poetic experience.

In the first few lines of his poem, Réda conveys that walking the streets of the city is both a physical and a mental journey. His journey is prompted by what he admits is a futile desire to quantify 'le nombre de rues / Que dans toute une vie on aura parcourues' (l.1-2). The task, he says, would perhaps be worthwhile if it were able to reveal 'le sens de notre vie énigmatique' (l.6). This claim underlines the sense of quest that permeates Réda's relationship to the city, already expressed in the essay that precedes this poem, and which he recognises as one of Borges's interests in the preface to *Ferveur de Borges* (1987).[38] Réda propels himself onto the streets of Vanves, only to be transported, mentally, to a 'ville imaginaire' (l.8). Initially, this city appears to be his hometown, '[s]a ville natale' (l.14), which in his reverie, he begins to see on windowpanes and reflected in the sky:

> De sorte que partout où j'ai déambulé
> C'est elle que j'ai vue chaque fois mêler
> Son étendue au fond des vitres des façades,
> Dans le ciel qui s'accoude aux longues palissades. (l.15-18)

Réda's vulnerable state of mind explained earlier in the essay results in his ability to

[38] See Chapter 1.II.1. Borges and Réda: 'Note liminaire' (1987), p. 69.

transcend his surrounding reality and embracing 'une autre vie' (l.19). The reference to another life is significant because it implies a quasi out-of-body-experience, where the wandering poet's sense of self is altered. Experiencing urban space, both physically and imaginatively, alters the poet's subjectivity making him feel, temporarily, in a different reality. Dreams and the imaginary temporarily transform 'notre vie' into an 'autre vie'. Indeed, within the first twenty lines of Réda's poem, the generic 'une vie' (l.2) turns into the inclusive 'notre vie' (l.6), which suggests a common human experience. Finally the subject of the poem enters 'une autre vie' (l.19) when the imaginary transition into an imaginary state of mind is made.

In his mental voyage, the poet eventually sees himself in Borges's Buenos Aires, where he arrives at sunset when silence is broken only by the whistling of a bird and the rustling of a piece of paper as it breaks the air (l.28-31). Réda builds an imaginative scene 'vers les faubourgs aux maisons sans étage' (l.29), where some of Borges's most recurrent elements in his short stories appear: the knife, the street sign and the pink wall on a street corner. Once he has built this picture, the subject of the poem expresses his desire to remain in the scene, indifferent and immobile, waiting in contemplation:

> C'est là sans doute qu'il faudrait savoir attendre,
> Avec la feinte indifférence d'un voyou
> Dur et fermé sur soi comme un simple caillou,
> Alors que monte et se répand de rue en rue
> Le bleu du soir ainsi qu'une insensible crue
> Où l'heure flotte encore avec quelques rayons. (l.34-39)

Waiting or 'attendre' for Réda is akin to losing track of time — 'l'heure flotte' — and being absorbed mentally into the scene. This occurs frequently in Réda's texts;

it is a measure of his admiration for a particular place and of his desire to remain there indefinitely. As the day draws to a close and the streets darken with the fading of the natural light, the poet, in his solitude, imagines himself as a wandering thug, withdrawn and immobile in his wait like a lonesome rock. The rhyming sound of 'voyou/caillou' (l.35-36) draws attention to the physical presence of the subject of the poem in the space described, which is then complemented by 'la feinte indifférence/Dur et fermé sur soi' (l.35-36). Compared to the dreamy and detached state of mind described in the poem's preceding essay, here there is greater emphasis made on the wandering poet's withdrawn state, as if to suggest that when the poet is no longer walking he runs the risk of becoming absorbed into himself and is no longer open to the 'signaux' delivered by his surroundings.

However, as the second section reveals, the wandering poet is also confronted with '[l]e désir de passer' (l.41): the desire to continue his journey through space and not be indifferent to his surroundings. The conflict that begins to unravel here is that the poet, in his imaginary discovery of Buenos Aires as he is walking the streets of a suburb in Paris, is torn between his desire to stay in his reverie risking 'de se dissoudre dans le flot tiède et confus de ses impressions' (Réda 1987: 92), and the need to continue his exploration of space, which will eventually end his imaginative journey. Still, for now, he remains in the scene of his imaginary Buenos Aires captivated by the sun's descent below the horizon:

> Le centre ni les bords pourtant ne nous captivent,
> Mais l'intervalle tout entier d'expectative
> Où le temps absorbé dans un pur maintenant
> Laisse aller chaque pas plus près de l'imminent. (l.45-48)

In these lines, Réda is fixated upon the horizon, expectantly waiting for the imminent sunset. 'L'intervalle' in this case refers to this event, which, though it takes place over a few minutes, Réda describes as a 'pur maintenant'. In this sense, 'pur maintenant' is not a reference to time being suspended, but is rather an indication that the poet is focused entirely on the present moment: 'Il n'est plus d'autrefois pour lui, ni d'avenir' (l.52).

Eventually it is by focusing intently on the present that time appears distended and the subject of the poem enters a timeless condition. In this state of being, the sensation experienced by the poet is one of omnipresence, one that can be explained through the metaphor of the sunset itself:

> Ce qu'il désire, ici — la dernière fenêtre
> Brûle — c'est à la fois durer et disparaître,
> Si disparaître est le seul moyen de durer:
> En tous lieux, nulle part, dissous, régénéré. (l.52-56)

Réda's contention here is that when the sun sets on the horizon, the star only appears to vanish from the sky, when in fact it endures out of human perception until it rises again the following day. In the lines above, the pronoun 'il' represents the sun, and the earth's journey around it is characterised by the cycle of presence and absence in the sky. Disappearing from sight is the only way to endure, because in order to endure — in other words, in order to be perceivable in the sky — the sun needs to set every day. Even though the human eye might not see it, the sun is omnipresent; it is everywhere and nowhere all at once; it is involved in a perpetual cycle of vanishing and rebirth. Equivalently, the pronoun 'il' can represent the poet. When the poet feels elevated to a timeless condition, he is in a state of mind in which he loses all physical bearings,

as if his body was at once present yet mindfully absent from space. Thus, by feeling absent from the surrounding space, he is able to endure in the imaginary world that he has created.

This, however, creates a problem for the subject of the poem, who is split between two personalities. In the third section of the poem, lines 57 to 76, Réda distinguishes between one personality that is constantly moving on from the scene, '[u]n même promeneur que le soir encourage' (l.61), presumably the one that exposes itself to the 'signaux' of the surrounding space; and another personality that is caught in an imaginative state. One could be Réda as the subject of the poem imagining himself in Buenos Aires, and the other could be Borges in his 1920s Buenos Aires. Both are reflections of Réda the poet. Réda describes them as the 'modèle' and its 'double' (l.65), thus referencing Borges's 1972 short story 'El otro', which narrates the encounter between an older Borges and a younger Borges in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Borges 2007[1975]: 13-20). At the end of Borges's story, the older character concludes that the experience was real for him, but a dream for the younger character. In Réda's case, the legitimacy of the experience is not called into question; what is put in question is the identity of each one of them:

> Si par magie ou par hasard se rencontraient
> Dans un quartier désert ce double et son modèle,
> Sait-on lequel des deux se montrerait fidèle
> À sa nature fugitive au cœur battant
> Ou de monstre enfermé dans l'éternel instant ? (l.64-68)

Réda responds to Borges's uncanny encounter with his double in his short story, by humorously imagining that in his case the two characters would not want to reveal

who is real and who is not. Both are trapped, according to Réda, in an imaginary 'faubourg' (l.58-59), which is like a labyrinth.[39] One is therefore Theseus who retraces his steps out of the labyrinth using a thread or 'trois ou quatre vers cassés' (l.71); the other, Réda claims, is the Minotaur 'intérieur' (l.75), the monster that remains locked in a timeless condition, 'l'éternel instant' (l.68). What Réda reveals with this characterisation in the third section of the poem is that when he is walking around the city, he is absorbed into an imaginative state where he is torn between his desire to walk uninterrupted in this newfound place which will eventually lead him back to his surrounding reality, and his desire to remain in this imaginary state where time and space dissolve around him. By using the metaphor of two mythological characters to describe his internal conflict, the complexity of the poet's subjectivity becomes clearer.

In the fourth and last section of the poem, the poet's conflict appears to be resolved: Theseus, the *promeneur*, finds his way out of the imaginary labyrinth and therefore out of the suburb of Buenos Aires. Réda, the walking poet, is therefore back in his surrounding reality: 'Ainsi je sillonnais Vanves' (l.72). At this point, it is evening and Réda is walking under the moon, no longer under the spell of the suburban streets. He begins to take stock of 'ombres, clartés, songes' along 'des massifs blancs et sombres' (l.80-81). He compares his journey across space in the depth of evening to a vessel's voyage from Europe to America, and himself to the vessel that the moon shines on (l.84-88). By doing this, Réda unravels a further

[39] See Chapter 1.II.3. 'Commentaire sur « L'Immortel »' (1962), p. 79.

clue about his mental journey from Paris to Buenos Aires, whilst also hinting at the possibility of returning to that space at any moment:

> Marchons encore un peu. Les faubourgs se ressemblent,
> Même quand les saisons à l'envers font décembre
> Le milieu de l'été, même lorsque les pas
> Qui, dans l'autre hémisphère, effleurent des pampas,
> N'ont ici d'humble écho que vers l'Haÿ-les-Roses. (l.89-93)

Ultimately, as the poet continues to walk, he points to the interchangeability of the two suburbs in question, regardless of the distinct seasons and landscapes. Réda's contention, as he concludes, is that the specific emplacement of any poetic journey is irrelevant. The mind is capable of finding connections between places irrespective of their similarities. What matters, finally, is the journey itself and the discoveries made along the way: 'Je compare l'épreuve et non pas le destin' (l.96).

The conclusion to Réda's poem supports his argument in the preceding essay: it justifies the poet's need for vulnerability when exploring urban space, because only then the mind is able to create connections that excite the poet's imagination, taking him and thus the reader, on a poetic discovery. In terms of the connection between Borges and Réda, the analysis of this poem demonstrates that Réda dedicated considerable thought to Borges's literary themes, and to the potential similarities between the suburbs of Paris and those of Buenos Aires. It shows that Réda succeeded in penetrating the labyrinth of Borges's ideas, as he announced in the preface of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987).[40] Walking the streets of the Parisian faubourgs reminded Réda of his experience of reading Borges's poems about Buenos Aires and inspired him to

[40] See Chapter 1.II.1.Réda and Borges: 'Note liminaire' (1987), p. 69.

imagine himself there, alongside Borges, walking its streets.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the first half of the twentieth century, the literary relationship between Buenos Aires and Paris was strengthened thanks to the emergence of cross-cultural literary figures such as Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) and Roger Caillois (1913-1978). Up until this point, the perception was that South America had more to learn from the centuries-old thriving culture of the European continent and not the other way around. However, the international dialogue sparked by intellectuals who travelled to and from both continents progressively disseminated the work of South American authors in Europe. From the preceding analysis, it is clear that at least in France and Argentina, this practice began with Caillois, the sole responsible for delivering Borges to French readers and to Europe in 1951, with the publication of *Fictions*.

Réda began to read Borges's works in translation from the very moment that they entered the French literary scene. The essays and poems in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) indicate that Réda continued to read Borges's works over the years. They also show, progressively, the maturation of Réda's ideas regarding Borges. Collectively, they point to the fact that Borges became an influential figure in the development of Réda's poetics from the beginning of his writing career. Consequently, they confirm the importance of a comparative study on both of these authors.

The essays in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) reveal the characteristics Réda found in Borges whilst producing insightful knowledge into Borges's poetics. They show a) that Borges used literature and his interest in philosophy and metaphysics —

particularly in his short stories — as a way to question and understand the world around him; b) that Borges used certain symbols, such as the labyrinth, to tackle this ontological quest and to create spaces for shared human experience where both he and his readers could learn something about themselves; c) that Borges's poetry constituted an emotional response to this world and d) that a different approach to this quest involved a physical rather than metaphysical platform, and an emotional rather than a philosophical connection to the world around him. As a result, poetry is shown as a suitable platform for exploring the relationship between the writer and the world, because it is a genre fuelled by the expression of emotion and the closest to the poet's own subjectivity. Finally, Réda was most significantly drawn to Borges because he saw in him a common interest in marginal areas of the city, where their experience and emotional involvement led to flights of the imagination and a challenge to their own subjectivity.

For this reason, in the chapters that follow, I propose to explore Borges and Réda as poets of the city. The next chapter will be based specifically on one locale, namely, the street.

Chapter 2

The Poet and the Street: Towards a Map of Borges's and Réda's Poetic Cities

Sans doute inconnaissable est le nombre de rues
Que dans toute une vie on aura parcourues.
Le connaître serait d'intérêt presque nul,
A moins qu'il n'en sortit, à force de calcul,
La formule aux vertus d'illusion d'optique
Livrant le sens de notre vie énigmatique.

Jacques Réda, 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1987: 95)

Introduction

In the first few lines of the poem in 'A propos d'une ferveur' cited above, Réda draws a connection between an individual's ability to know his or herself (the full apprehension of one's subjectivity) and the experience of traversing the city streets. Speaking about himself, but also generating a sense of the collective through the use of the pronoun 'on', he articulates that it is likely impossible for 'us' to know how many streets we have travelled in our lifetime. Réda implies that this is because our limited subjective experiences prevent us and our minds from remembering and reconstructing an absolute picture of where we have been over the course of our lives. What is more, he suggests that this absolute knowledge would not be of any interest to us, unless it was capable of revealing the more elusive reason of why we are in this world. Though Réda denies the possibility of fully apprehending this ontological understanding, his words convey the sense that we are still motivated to journey through life in search of 'le sens de notre vie énigmatique'. For Réda, who is an urban poet, the city streets represent the path that leads him in this discovery of self.

Based on this premise, in this chapter I propose to study how urban space and subjectivity interact in order to create meaning. I will found this analysis on Réda's journeys around Paris, but also on Borges's interaction with Buenos Aires, because he too expressed a desire to explore his sense of self through the practice of space. However, in order to understand this relationship, it is necessary to establish, first, the reasons why these poets made the decision to adopt their respective cities as enduring subjects in their works. In the first part of this chapter, I will explain how Borges

and Réda became poets of the city, which will require addressing certain aspects of their personal lives, influences and poetic works. Understanding their motivations will explain why they chose to poeticise certain areas of Buenos Aires and Paris. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I will identify the street as the starting point of Borges's and Réda's journeys away from central areas of the city and towards the periphery. The street is a concrete road with pavements and buildings on either side. It indicates to the passer-by where to circulate. It is therefore a means to get from one place to another. At the same time, within the physical limits presented by its delineation, the street is also a point of access to the structure of the city, where the urban poet can trace his own journeys. As such, it facilitates the poets' access to the places (Chapter 3) and neighbourhoods (Chapter 4) around their respective cities where they like to travel. By the end of the chapter, I will have established that Borges and Réda form connections with the marginal streets of their respective cities in an attempt to discover something about themselves, but also about the place where they live.

I Two Poets of the City

Borges and Réda chose Buenos Aires and Paris as the respective locations of their poetic ventures based on a series of personal circumstances and creative choices. Divergent though their foundations may be, further analysis of some of their poems will establish that both authors look for the fulfilment of a sense of poetic purpose in the city: in Borges's case, Buenos Aires progressively becomes the deliberate site of an early aesthetic project; whereas in Réda's case, Paris is turned into a platform for unplanned and spontaneous poetic discovery. In both cases, the analysis will also provide evidence of Borges's and Réda's visceral connection with their urban environments through a language that suggests that their interior realities are also inscribed in Buenos Aires and Paris.

I.1 Borges in Buenos Aires: Scaffolds of a Poetic Project

On 24 March 1921, Borges returned to Buenos Aires, having spent seven years in Europe (1914-1921), initially treating his father's deteriorating eyesight and later sheltering in Switzerland from the threats of the Great War. He anticipated this homecoming in 'Motivos del espacio y del tiempo (1916-1919)',[41] a poem published in 1920, in a Sevillian magazine called *Gran guignol.* In its final stanza, Borges anchors his enthusiasm for his return on his impending sensorial contact with the city's landscape:

[41] This title will henceforth appear abbreviated as 'Motivos'.

A mi retorno
no iré enseguida hacia las gentes que amo.
Caminaré a la sombra de los rugosos muros altos y antiguos
y saciaré mis manos en la taza colmada de la fuente
y arrancaré una brizna de hierba y sentiré su gusto primaveral
en mis labios
y aspiraré la noche, plena de
familiares fragancias...
y sabrán las cosas que he vuelto
y habrá en la noche como una fiesta escondida entre las
viejas casas y mi alma. (Borges 1997[1920]: 41)

In Geneva, Borges formed life-affirming friendships and cultivated literary influences that inspired his lifelong poetic endeavours. In this poem, the reader is privy to some of these influences, in particular, that of German expressionism. At the time, Borges believed in its superiority over other avant-garde movements: 'I became... very interested in German expressionism and still think of it as beyond other contemporary schools, such as imagism, cubism, futurism, surrealism, and so on' ('An Autobiographical Essay' in Borges 1973[1970]: 216). Expressionism's break with objective representations in favour of distorted images created for emotional effect resonated with Borges's interest in the expression of an interior reality through his experience of the outside world. As he explained in an essay entitled 'Lírica expresionista: síntesis', he used his imagination to transcend physical reality and reach what he called 'una ultra-realidad espiritual': 'diríamos que [el *expresionismo*] es la tentativa de crear para esta época un arte matinalmente intuicionista, de superar la realidad ambiente y elevar sobre su madeja sensorial y emotiva una ultra-realidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 52). 'Espiritual' in this case, does not connote a religious experience, but rather the establishment of an immaterial and meaningful connection with the

surrounding space, as Borges expressed in the last line of the poem: 'y habrá en la noche como una fiesta escondida entre las viejas casas y mi alma' (Borges 1997[1920]: 41). The language used in 'Motivos' and Borges's influences show that from early on, Borges articulated a poetic relationship with Buenos Aires based on physical contact and emotion.

Pursuing a connection fuelled by sensitive awareness, Borges generated in 'Motivos' an intense, expressive atmosphere. He was particularly attentive to the textures found in the city: the coarse surface of building walls, the water from a fountain dripping onto his hands and the freshness of a strand of grass as it brushed his lips.[42] In the poem, this sensorial atmosphere is strengthened by the verbs in the future tense and their anaphoric placement. These verbs, as well as the fluid long lines of free verse composed of hyperbolic images describing the poet's surroundings, echo another of Borges's literary influences, Walt Whitman. Borges believed that 'all poets the world over had been merely leading up to Whitman until 1855, and that not to imitate him was proof of ignorance' ('An Autobiographical Essay' in Borges 1973[1970]: 217). Whitman inspired Borges to experience Buenos Aires through his senses ('saciaré', 'arrancaré', 'sentiré' and 'aspiraré' suggest his connection to the scene not only through what he sees, but also through taste, touch and smell), and thus, to establish a communion between the material things of the city — 'las cosas',

[42] Though there is not further scope for this discussion in this part of the chapter, interestingly, Réda also uses the strand of grass as a symbol in his poetry, particularly in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977: 142) and in *L'Herbe des talus* (1984). The 'brin d'herbe' represents, amongst other things, the way that nature breaks through the concrete structures of the city. For a more comprehensive discussion on the signification of the 'brin d'herbe' for Réda, see Jean-Pierre Richard, 'Scènes d'herbe', *Littérature* [Online], no. 67 (1987): 3-19.

'las casas' — and the immaterial and deeply intimate structure of the self: 'el alma'. In doing this, Borges expected to express, as the expressionists, what he called a 'fiesta escondida': the intense joy of forming a unique and personal connection between 'las viejas casas y mi alma', between exterior and interior realities, between the concrete and the immaterial, between city and self.

From 1921 to 1930 and inspired by Whitman, German expressionism and the quest for a 'fiesta escondida', Borges gradually built a poetic project intrinsically bound to the city of Buenos Aires. As he describes optimistically in 'An Autobiographical Essay', the 1920s became a period of true rediscovery of Buenos Aires:

> It came to me as a surprise, after living in so many European cities [...] to find that my native town had grown, and that it was now a very large, sprawling, and almost endless city of low buildings with flat roofs, stretching west toward what geographers and literary hands call the pampa. It was more than a homecoming. It was a rediscovery. I was able to see Buenos Aires keenly and eagerly because I had been away from it for a long time. Had I never gone abroad, I wonder whether I would ever have seen it with the peculiar shock and glow that it now gave me. (Borges 1973[1970]: 223-224)

Borges's enthusiasm is resounding here; perhaps because by the time he wrote this essay in 1970, he was able to look back on the years immediately after his return with fewer conflicting emotions. Although these lines indicate that Borges's poetic investment in the city stems from 'the peculiar shock and glow' that led to a personal reconnection with a transformed Buenos Aires, the reality is far more complex than this. In fact, as I will explain in more detail in the rest of this study on Borges, different elements play into Borges's early poeticization of Buenos Aires, including his family history and his identity, his interpersonal relationships with friends and

love-interests, and also his association with avant-garde movements of the time such as *ultraísmo* and *criollismo*.[43]

Firstly, before Borges committed to his own version of *criollismo*, he had a different aesthetic agenda: 'to renovate the intellectual terrain of Argentina by projecting *ultraísta* aesthetics against a stale *modernismo*' (Kefala 2011: 34). According to Edwin Williamson, the literary scene in Argentina at the time was centred on *modernismo*, a movement based on French symbolism and Parnassianism:[44]

> [Ruben] Darío's disciple in Argentina, Leopoldo Lugones, was the country's pre-eminent poet, and his *Lunario sentimental* of 1909, a late *modernista* work, still enjoyed immense prestige. [...] There was not much else in Buenos Aires at the time; it was a complacent backwater in which the mighty Lugones remained the biggest fish. (Williamson 2004: 99)

Borges's ideological position was vehemently opposed to that of Lugones, particularly towards the end of the 1920s. Borges imported the principles of *ultraísmo* from Spain — mainly the systematic use of metaphor and free verse — after his involvement with its avant-garde between 1919-1920.[45] When he returned to Buenos Aires, his intention was to make the movement known within the ranks of the Argentine avant-garde. However, many critics — and Borges himself — have indicated that despite participating in the launch of the *ultraísta* periodical *Prisma* and in the publication

[43] See 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 32.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Borges wrote several essays about the principles of *ultraísmo* between 1920 and 1925, of which the following stand out: his manifesto of the movement 'Ultraísmo' (*Nosotros*, December 1921), 'Anatomía de mi ultra' (*Ultra*, 20 May 1921), 'La metáfora' (*Cosmópolis*, no. 35, November 1921), 'Examen de metáforas' (*Alfar,* no. 40, May 1924) and 'Examen de metáforas: su ordenación' (*Alfar*, no. 41, June-July 1924). They are all found in Jorge Luis Borges, *Textos recobrados, 1919-1929*, 3 vols (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1997), I.

of articles and manifestos about the movement,[46] Borges would soon become disenchanted with its excesses (Borges 1973[1970]: 225-227; Kefala 2011: 34-35; Williamson 2004: 112-113):

> When I talked things over at the time with fellow-poets Eduardo González Lanuza, Norah Lange, Francisco Piñero, my cousin Guillermo Juan (Borges), and Roberto Ortelli, we came to the conclusion that Spanish ultraism was overburdened... with modernity and gadgets. (Borges 1973[1970]: 225)

Though Borges and his fellow *ultraístas* 'upheld [for some time] the primacy of the metaphor and the elimination of transitions and decorative adjectives', ultimately they committed to writing 'essential poetry': poems beyond the here and now, free of local colour and contemporary circumstances' (Borges 1973[1970]: 225-226). This claim over essentialist poetry placed Borges closer to German expressionism than to *ultraísmo*. Thus, at least until Borges became concerned with *criollismo* and the literary legacy of Buenos Aires,[47] his poems — particularly those of his first collection, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) — reflected a personal and emotive investment in the city.

Secondly, Borges's personal circumstances played an important role in the development of his aesthetics. Borges's desire, when he returned to Buenos Aires at the age of twenty-one, was twofold: on the one hand, he wanted to explore Buenos Aires because he had lived away for so many years and on his return the city felt alien to him; on the other hand, he looked to recover a sense of familiarity in the *barrio*

[46] Borges's *ultraísta* articles, essays and collaborations are: 'Ultraísmo' (Ultima Hora, 1921), 'Manifiesto del Ultra' (*Baleares*, 1921), Anatomía de mi "Ultra" (*Ultra*, 1921), 'Ultraísmo' (*El Diario Español*, 1921), 'La metáfora' (*Cosmópolis*, 1921), 'Ultraísmo' (*Nosotros*, 1921) and 'Proclama' (*Ultra*, 1922). Ibid.

[47] This will be the object of Chapter 4.I.1. Borges, the 'arrabal' and his Urban *criollismo* of the 'orillas', p. 218.

Palermo where he lived until the family moved to Europe in 1914 (Williamson 2004: 93). Indeed, Borges never moved back to Palermo, but he continued to visit it because it was the *barrio* where he had once felt a sense of belonging he no longer felt in the modern Buenos Aires.[48] Still, in both cases, the young Borges found this return to the city problematic. In 'Vanilocuencia', published in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges wrote: 'La ciudad está en mí como un poema / que aún no he logrado detener en palabras' (Borges 1993[1923]).[49] This couplet reveals, on the one hand, Borges's sentiments *vis-à-vis* Buenos Aires. On the other hand, it expresses the tension that existed between Borges, his poetry and the city: that is, that the urban landscape that he has interiorised cannot — 'aún' — be put into words. Amongst other things, this seemingly failed expression of the city in his poetry was due to a clash between the urban landscape he had pictured in his mind before returning to Argentina, and the transformed Buenos Aires he encountered on his return: in his absence, the city had grown exponentially, and was still undergoing important infrastructural changes (Sarlo 2003: 24):[50]

> ¿Para qué esta porfía
> de clavar con dolor un claro verso
> de pie como una lanza sobre el tiempo

[48] In the 1920s, Borges and his family moved various times, initially because their house in Palermo was rented out. Most of the hotels and properties where they lived were located in the *barrio* of Recoleta on Calle Bulnes 2216 (1921), Calle Callao 950 (1924), Calle Quintana 222 (1924) and Avenida Pueyrredón 2190 (1929). The dates that succeed these locations correspond to the year when Borges and his family moved there. See Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 93.

[49] The poems quoted from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* come from the original 1923 publication (later reproduced in a facsimile in 1993), which did not have pagination. Henceforth, references to *Fervor de Buenos* (1923) will not include a page number.

[50] The physical changes incurred by the city of Buenos Aires are analysed in 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 23.

> si mi calle, mi casa,
> desdeñosas de plácemes verbales, me gritarán su novedad mañana?
> ('Vanilocuencia' in Borges 1993[1923])

Even though Argentina had benefitted financially from the First World War, Borges returned to a Buenos Aires plagued by social and political inequities, all in the midst of an opulent modernisation *à la française*.[51] This inspired Borges to think about recovering 'lo olvidado de Buenos Aires en un momento en que eso olvidado comenzaba a desaparecer materialmente' (Sarlo 2003: 25). Ultimately, Borges's perceived discrepancy between the city built upon memories and the city built upon the idea of progress and modernisation goes some way towards explaining the irony of why he found it difficult to articulate in words the disappearing Buenos Aires that he sought to poeticise.

Borges's feelings towards his childhood home in Palermo and towards his relationship with the members of his family also had an effect on the way he embraced and poeticised the city's landscape. A few poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) allude to the difficulties Borges experienced at home. In 'La vuelta' for example, he declared: 'Después de muchos años de ausencia / busqué la casa primordial de la infancia / y aún persevera forastero su ámbito' (Borges 1993[1923]). Borges's feeling of foreignness when he returned to Buenos Aires stemmed from revisiting Palermo and discovering that the *barrio* where he had lived as a child had been significantly transformed both physically and culturally: the neighbourhood where his family moved to, which bordered Palermo, now housed Italian immigrants in working-class dwellings known as

[51] The influence of French architecture on Buenos Aires is summarised in 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 23.

conventillos, as well as seedy taverns and dance halls frequented by delinquents and *compadritos* of ill-repute (Zito 1999: 109-23).[52] Borges did not therefore recognise his immediate environment. For some time, he also had a strained relationship with his parents because of dissenting views on politics, relationships and the family's plans to return to Europe (Williamson 2004: 94-95, 97, 104-105). Thus, though he felt confused by the appearance of Buenos Aires, Borges sought refuge in its streets to get away from the tension at home. Two poems, 'Rosas' and 'Sala vacía', from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) recount the situation.

A year passed between the composition of 'La vuelta' in 1921 and 'Rosas' and 'Sala vacía' in 1922. During this time, Borges's parents postponed the family's planned return to Europe, a return Borges was initally looking forward to.[53] However, according to Edwin Williamson, Borges's enthusiasm turned into worry after he met Concepción Guerrero early in 1922, during one of the *tertulias* at the home of his family friend Norah Lange (Williamson 2004: 102). Guerrero and Borges fell in love very quickly and he became worried at the prospect of leaving her behind if he were to return to Europe. He was also nervous about telling his mother about his relationship because Concepción was the daughter of Spanish migrants living in a peripheral neighbourhood of the city, a heritage Borges's mother as a patrician *criollo*, did not accept. The hostility expressed in 'Rosas' and 'Sala vacía' stems from this bitter relationship

[52] A *compadrito* was a dandified *gaucho* 'turned city slicker with a weakness for sharp suits and flashy jewelry, and whose jeering, effeminate tone of voice belied a tremendous ferocity when roused to combat'. See Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 43.

[53] Eventually, Borges would not want to return to Europe because by the time this trip was scheduled he had fallen in love with a young girl called Concepción Guerrero. See Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 102.

Borges had for some time with his mother.

In 'Rosas', the family home is presented as a loveless and sad place, where time passes without any excitement or curiosity for the world outside:

> En el ambiente desamorado
> de la sala taciturnamente rendida
> cuyo reloj derrama
> un tiempo ya sin aventuras ni asombro... (Borges 1993[1923])

Whereas in 'La vuelta', the passing of time engendered excitement and the possibility of new experiences; in 'Rosas' time is linked to boredom and apathy. The atmosphere generated is therefore inane. The scene is dulled further by comparing Borges's house, his parents and his ancestors with a single lifeless colour — white — which is opposed to the warming colour of the mahogany: red. Not coincidentally, red was also the preferred shade of the federalist tyrant Rosas, whose surname titles the poem, and who Borges's family, and especially his mother, had banned from being mentioned at home. Rosas was the dictator of the Argentine Confederation from 1829 until 1859 when Justo José de Urquiza defeated him.[54] According to Williamson, Borges's family criticised Rosas because he brought about the social decline of Borges's ancestors when he dispossessed Borges's great grandfather Colonel Manuel Isidoro Suárez (1799-1846).[55] Borges's apparent support of Rosas in the poem

[54] For further details about Rosas, see the footnote in the section 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' of the general Introduction, p. 27.

[55] It is important to note, however, that although Borges appears to side with Rosas in this poem, against his ancestors, he manages to avoid criticism by preceding 'Rosas' with 'Inscripción sepulcral' in the collection because Borges dedicates it to his great-grandfather: 'Para el coronel Don Isidoro Suárez, mi bisabuelo'. By doing this, Borges also praises his feat as commander of the Peruvian and Colombian cavalry troops in the war of independence: 'Dilató su valor allende los Andes / Contrastó ejércitos y montes. / La audacia fué impetuosa costumbre de su espada. / Impuso en Junín término formidable a la lucha / y a las lanzas del Perú dió sangre española. See 'Ciudad' in Jorge Luis

is therefore only a manifestation of his unhappiness at home, rather than real political support for the tyrant. Borges's love for Concepción Guerrero becomes the symbol for a more egalitarian Argentina, if only because of familial tensions.

In 'Sala vacía', Borges points strongly towards the idea of emptiness already explored in 'Rosas'. This time, it is related to the epicentre of the family unit, the living room, thus creating a stark contrast between the interior space of the home and the exterior space of the street. Far from meaning a space literally devoid of furniture and objects, the emptiness of the living room — *sala vacía* — refers to a space devoid of affection. In the poem, the living room is ornamented with 'muebles de caoba' (the same colour used in 'Rosas'), 'brocado', 'daguerrotipos' and 'un espejo'; yet, together, these objects seem to create a stale and aging atmosphere. 'Tertulia de siempre', 'vejez enclaustrada' and 'aniversarios borrosos' are expressions that evoke restrictive, repetitive and trivial actions, which convey Borges's gloomy feelings inside the family home. The first two thirds of the poem express the weight of this environment on the soul of its dwellers, like a ghostly voice that 'corre detrás de nuestras almas' ('Sala vacía' in Borges 1993[1923]). These voices, coming from the images of his ancestors hanging on the walls of the living room oppress the poet who cannot move forward into the present. However, though weighed down by the pressures of his family ties, Borges feels that his emotional stagnation can be overcome on the streets of Buenos Aires. This breakthrough is symbolised in the poem by a single ray of light that pierces through the window, annihilating the stale ideas of his parents and bringing

Borges, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Alberto Casares, 1993[1923]).

new potential to his relationship with the city:

> [. . .] la luz a puñetazos
> abre un boquete en los cristales
> y humilla las seniles butacas
> y arrincona y ahorca
> la voz lacia
> de los antepasados. ('Sala vacía' in Borges 1993[1923])

The two poems I have just analysed — 'Rosas' and 'Sala vacía' — show that Borges uses the dejection he feels inside the family home to propel him onto the streets of Buenos Aires.

On the streets of Buenos Aires, Borges searched for comfort through physical interactions with the city: 'he copiado andanzas de antaño / como quien practica un verso olvidado' (Borges 1993[1923]). It is evident from this couplet that Borges's preference for the old streets of the city in the expression 'andanzas de antaño'. It also admits the possibility that after 1921 Borges revisited streets in Buenos Aires that he once knew, but had forgotten since his stay in Europe. Still, there is a deeper meaning at stake here: 'he copiado. . . como quien practica un verso' implies the practice of writing itself. From a topographical line on a map to a poetic line on the page, the street — as further analysis in this chapter will show — reveals the poet actively seeking the words that will lead him to unfurl his personal map of Buenos Aires.

I.2 Réda in Paris: Spontaneous Poetic Discovery

Contrary to Borges, Réda was not born in the city that would become the primary

subject of his books. He was born in Lunéville, a commune in the north-eastern region of Lorraine, in France. He moved permanently to Paris, 'par une succession des hasards de [s]on existence' in 1953 at the age of twenty-four, and since *Les Inconvénients du métier*, published in 1952, he has been chronicling the city's landscape (Réda and Puello Alfonso 2013). Réda appears to have chosen Paris as the subject matter of his books because he was fascinated by the phenomenon of living in a big city where the possibilities of journeys and experiences are endless:

> Ce que j'aime dans Paris c'est l'immensité. [...] Ce que j'aime, c'est le phénomène que constitue une grande ville, avec sa vie et son phénomène historique. [...] Une ville, c'est une possibilité infinie de promenades dans l'espace et le temps de cette ville, mais aussi dans le sien propre, ce qui est une position extrêmement confortable et instructive. De toutes manières, à Paris, on n'est pas seulement à Paris. Je n'arrête pas d'y recevoir d'autres images mentales, probablement fausses, mais qu'est-ce que cela peut faire. (Réda and Leroy 1993: paragraph 12 of 13)[56]

In the lines above, Réda expresses an interest in rooting his relationship with Paris in personal experience. He also alludes to the diversity of the city that inspires his mental journeys into other places such as Buenos Aires.[57] Ultimately, however, Réda appears to have chosen Paris because of life's circumstances: it is the city where he planted roots.

In 1987, during an interview with the French newspaper *Libération*, Réda explained the origins of his interest in writing about the city: 'Il y a des écrivains qui travaillent à partir de leur imagination pure, j'ai besoin quant à moi d'un répondant

[56] This article was accessed online, where pagination was not provided. I have therefore provided the paragraph where the quote was extracted from instead.

[57] In the poem in 'A propos d'une ferveur', Réda images himself in Borges's Buenos Aires. For an analysis of this poem, see Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986), p. 88.

de réalité. J'habite une ville, alors c'est la ville. Si j'avais habité la campagne, tout aurait été différent'(Réda and Wagneur 1987). Réda appears to operate on the basis that he needs to maintain a certain level of contact with his surrounding reality; a contact that, contrary to Borges, is independent of the poet's place of birth. But beyond that, Réda intends to transcend the use of imagination and incorporate a 'répondant de réalité'. He bases his interest in Paris on a need for interaction with space, a principle that affirms his sense of self — physically and mentally — in the French capital.

By the age of twenty-four, Réda had written his first four *plaquettes* — *Les Inconvénients du métier* (1952), *All stars* (1953), *Cendres chaudes* (1955) and *Laboureur du silence* (1955) — which much like Borges and his first collections of poems and essays, he later dismissed as exploratory fantasies and excessive undertakings influenced by Henri Michaux and the Surrealists. Nevertheless, much like Borges's *ultraísta* and expressionist affiliations, these monographs and the early literary interests that inspired them helped to shape Réda's interest in the city as his 'répondant de réalité'.

One of the first examples of Réda's emotional and poetic response to the city is found in *Les Inconvénients du métier* (1952). This slim volume explores different poetic voices, corresponding to different socio-professional categories: a bureaucrat, a sales clerk, a runner, a groom and a *promeneur*. Some of these impersonations are ironic, some sarcastic; others are comical or absurd. Nevertheless, in conjunction, they show signs of the young Réda's quest for emancipation in the city. In the prose poem 'Le promeneur déshabillé' for example, he expresses the fervour and spontaneity

that propelled him onto the Boulevard Raspail, which made him feel a fulfilling sense of rapture:

> La délicate euphorie de n'être plus un matricule, de n'avoir plus aucune raison sociale, un nom, une situation, même précaire, et, pis de tout, la personnalité anthropophage, (ai-je seulement un âge, une mère, un lieu de naissance, une couleur d'yeux particulière ?) – ce bonheur rare me fait bondir comme un oiseau le long du boulevard Raspail, éclaboussé de sang frais et multicolore (Réda 1952: 20).

Réda reminisces about a childhood irreversibly gone and his rapture appears to be the result of his newfound anonymity in the city. In Paris, far away from the familiarity of his hometown, his relatives and his previous small-town-life, the young Réda could challenge the categories of his subjectivity ('un âge, une mère, un lieu de naissance, une couleur d'yeux particulière') that had thus far defined him. The idea of building his own identity in a new city made him feel accomplished. The metaphorical language used to convey this emotion is hyperbolic and oxymoronic ('délicate euphorie', 'bondir comme un oiseau', 'éclaboussé de sang frais et multicolore'); it communicates Réda's regard for the city and his anonymity and freedom within it, all essential characteristics of his future urban writing.

The example above confirms that from early on Réda was concerned with his own presence in the world, which according to some critics, eventually turned into an 'inquiétude ontologique' (Maulpoix 1986: 17). In *Cendres chaudes* (1955), once he had permanently moved to Paris, the euphoria of his initial impressions of the city is replaced by deep distress and existential concerns. This is implied in some of the titles of poems from *Cendres chaudes* (1955): 'Divaguer pour attendre', 'Blocus intérieur' and 'Non-lieu'. The first alludes to the poet's aimless yet expectant walking

also seen in the poem from 'A propos d'une ferveur' analysed in Chapter 1.[58] The second expresses an emotional impasse in his connection to the city; whereas the third questions the existence of the space altogether, indicating that the poet has a deeply problematic relationship with the place where he now permanently resides.

Indeed, *Cendres chaudes* (1955) expresses contrasting feelings of openness and entrapment that suggest Réda struggled to adjust to urban life: 'Le cœur ouvert sur ce grand champ de neige ensoleillé / avec l'amande amère du désir de comprendre / qui n'en finira pas de fondre dans la bouche' ('Station debout pénible' in Réda 1955: 13) and '[j]'écoute sans comprendre [...] / le verdict sans recours qui m'accable et m'assigne / une résidence de feu dont la nuit barricade / toutes les fenêtres' ('Non-lieu' in Réda 1955: 21). These lines show that the poet is at times emotionally and purposely open to self-understanding, evidenced in some of the imagery Réda uses: 'champ de neige ensoleillé', 'fenêtres'. '[C]hamp de neige ensoleillé' conveys the idea of clarity and expansion, whereas 'fenêtre' conveys a possible sense of openness. Together, these words point to the poet's receptive state of mind. However, other images, which are more hermetic and restrictive than the previous ones — such as 'verdict', 'résidence de feu' and 'barricade' — counter the poet's sensitive state. The idea, for example, that the darkness of the night impedes the subject of the poem from seeing out the window creates an atmosphere of entrapment. Moreover, a strong reference to extremes of temperature — the cold air of the open field is placed in direct opposition to the warming sensation of something melting in the mouth —

[58] See Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986), p. 88.

indicates a conflict between the outside environment and the poet's inner reality. This idea is reinforced when Réda uses the phrase 'résidence de feu' to describe his feeling of entrapment. The sense of rapture previously expressed by Réda in *Les Inconvénients du métier* (1952), is replaced here by anguish. In the poems from *Cendres chaudes* (1955), Réda implies that his personality could be on the brink of becoming extinct and turning into 'hot ashes'. This also explains the title of the book. Furthermore, if, by extension, the remnants of the forlorn poet are his ashes, so are his words, and indeed the poetry collection *Cendres chaudes* (1955). Réda's early poetry demonstrates Réda's exploration of the relationship between his presence in the world and his inner reality, which in *Cendres chaudes* (1955) appears to be in turmoil.

A few years after the publication of *Cendres chaudes* (1955), Réda wrote three more collections of poems in verse: *Amen* (1968), *Récitatif* (1970) and *La Tourne* (1975). Later published as one volume in 1988, their subject matter presents Réda's pervasive ontological disquiet. In these books, though the city is still present, 'les lieux précis importent moins que l'imaginaire générique' (Zanghi 2009: 4); Réda appears more concerned with his own sense of self and less with the urban landscape. Considering the claim Réda makes in 1987 during his interview with Jean-Dider Wagneur about the need for a 'répondant de réalité',[59] it appears that there was a shift in Réda's approach to his relationship with Paris. Indeed, Réda progressively focused more on his interactions with urban space from the publication of *La Tourne*

[59] See quote above.

(1975), gradually mitigating the emphasis on his state of being.

It is between the publication of *La Tourne* (1975) and *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), that Réda becomes the great writer of Paris. This is because, as Maulpoix suggests, Réda worked to find a balance, 'une juste mesure', between his exploration of space and his exploration of his sense of self: 'Il y a, au fil de ces livres, comme la recherche d'une plus juste posture vis-à-vis de soi-même, du monde et du temps' (Maulpoix 1986: 15). This came at a time when surrealism and political poetry were no longer the pillars of twentieth-century French poetry, and opportunities for a new lyricism opened up within French literary circles. It is also around this time, in 1987, that Réda became *directeur-en-chef* of the prestigious *La Nouvelle revue française*, which positioned him advantageously for coming in contact with Paris's cultural and literary scene.

As he became part of the cultural life of Paris, Réda gradually turned away from his early introspection, and began to introduce in his texts 'plus de concret, de réalisme et de familiarité' (Maulpoix 1986: 18). He substituted some of the emotional quality and nostalgia of his earlier texts, for a greater focus on his relationship to space and city space in particular:

> tout se passe comme si, des premiers poèmes nostalgiques aux volumes les plus récents, l'écrivain et le rêveur en lui étaient passés progressivement d'un sentiment douloureux de l'écoulement temporel et de la réminiscence irrémédiable de l'enfance enfuie, à une prise en considération de plus en plus dominante et même tyrannique de l'espace. (Pierrot 1994: 31)

According to Pierrot, the difference between Réda's works before 1975 and those published after this date is that the former are based on a greater sense of nostalgia,

whereas the latter show Réda's increasing obsession with the familiarity and everyday qualities of urban space. Réda's Parisian texts, particularly those solely devoted to the French capital — *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), *Hors les murs* (1982), *Beauté suburbaine* (1985), *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), *Recommandations aux promeneurs* (1988), *Le Sens de la marche* (1990), *La Liberté des rues* (1997), *Le Méridien de Paris* (1997), *Le Citadin* (1998), *Moyens de transport* (2000), *Accidents de la circulation* (2001) and *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004) — offer therefore a mediation between the wandering poet and his urban environment, without some of the emotional excesses of his early works.

Réda's different emotional and physical approaches to the city are manifest in the compositional and thematic diversity of his books. After the dispossession of the four *plaquettes* and the ontological explorations of *Amen* (1968), *Récitatif* (1970) and *La Tourne* (1975), the collection that affirmed Réda as a writer of Paris was *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977). The prose poems in this collection are at times dense; they describe Réda's perambulations within the twenty *arrondissements* of Paris, but also in its outskirts and in other countries. The collection exhibits a change in direction from Réda's earlier emotional verse to a poetic prose based on a physical experience of the city. In the book, Réda describes his role as a wandering poet as a 'travail' devoid of excessive fervour: 'Mon travail est de voir, de décrire, et de balayer en somme sans excès de zèle mais avec conscience' (Réda 1993[1977]: 33). Echoing his position from 'A propos d'une ferveur',[60] Réda admits that observation, description

[60] See Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986), p. 88.

and 'sweeping' exploration of his environment were the cornerstones of his job as a poet. However, he had to fulfil this role without excessive enthusiasm but with clear awareness. Ultimately, his intention was not to divorce himself completely from emotions. Rather than dismissing them altogether, Réda focused on the topography of the city as a way to channel them: 'Le désarroi central qui travaillait les précédents recueils prend ici [in *Les Ruines de Paris*] sa figure la plus concrète: le trafic des automobiles, les nuances du ciel ou les saletés qui flottent dans le canal sont autant de signes du désastre [...]' (Maulpoix 1986: 43). As Maulpoix explains, emotions take a concrete form in the cityscape. It is not, therefore, that Réda ceased to have an emotional reaction to the urban space described in his books, but rather that he chose concrete images in space to express these feelings.

These images in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977) are specifically to do with Réda's intention to poeticise the 'ruins' of Paris. As Réda's narrative reveals, ruins are the rundown areas of the city and its outskirts (*terrains vagues*, back streets, abandoned squares and cemeteries), but also neglected *chemins de fer* and canals once destined for transportation and commerce. Ruins are also markets and factories, and essentially any place that challenges the stereotypical image of Paris as a city of lights and monuments such as La Tour Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral and Sacré-Coeur, among others. However, contrary to the normal negative connotation the term 'ruin' might imply, I argue — following Fabienne Reymondet's contention in her thesis 'Le prosaïsme dans l'œuvre poétique de Jacques Réda' — that ruins are in fact part of Réda's poetic representation of the ordinary; what Reymondet calls an 'archéologie

du banal' and which Réda infuses with 'suffisamment de richesse, de valeur poétique' (Reymondet 1998: 25-27).

After a short detour through the verse poems of *Hors les murs* (1982) and *Beauté suburbaine* (1985) where the poet focuses on the periphery of the city, Réda becomes interested in the short essay form and publishes *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986).[61] These texts portray a rather itinerant poet concerned with the exploration of particular neighbourhoods and train stations. As Michael Sheringham contends, the book 'reflected a shift towards the itinerary, the catalogue, the (ironic) treatise, and the experimental project' (Sheringham 2006: 328). At this stage, his approach to the city also becomes more thematised and structured than in the individual prose texts of *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977): the wandering poet begins his journey in the 15th *arrondissement* and then continues on to the 14th *arrondissement*. He then focuses on the description of four locations in this district — a garden, a church, a bridge and an arcade — and on a circular visit of different train stations. Réda's interest in the theme of circulation around the city is later explored in *Recommandations aux promeneurs* (1988), *Le Sens de la marche* (1990) and *Accidents de la circulation* (2001). Together these books describe in more detail the when, why and how of Réda's journeys. *La Liberté des rues* (1997) also explores the theme of travelling and movement around the city, but unlike the other volumes, it thematises these journeys around the lyricism of the night, alongside dissertations on the freedom of the streets to guide the poet on his journey. *Le Citadin* (1998), on the other hand,

[61] Before *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), Réda also published *L'Herbe des talus* (1984). And though this book is also about his travels, the prose and verse texts are more biographical in nature.

published soon after, presents in a series of chronicles, the image of the poet as a man of the city still interested in life in the countryside.[62] As their titles indicate, other volumes such as *Le Méridien de Paris* (1997), *Moyens de transport* (2000) and *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004), each focus on one element of the Parisian landscape that the poet exploits. These are respectively: the meridian that cuts horizontally through the map of Paris, the different forms of transport available in the city and the 20th *arrondissement* where Réda resides to this day.

This short overview of Réda's urban texts points to a complex paradox in Réda's writing. Réda portrays himself as a casual stroller, at times fulfilling his everyday tasks, at other times travelling the city spontaneously, changing directions and objectives in the course of his walk: 'moi qui n'ai pas d'horaire en tête et qui sors de la route' (Réda 1993[1977]: 13). The structure and subject matter of his books present a poet who likes to roam furtively along unconventional or self-imposed routes. This suggests that instead of subscribing to a specific way of exploring the city, Réda's intention is to expose the diversity of urban life: the different ways of travelling space and the varying degrees of involvement on the part of the poet. Thus, it is my contention that Réda's seemingly nonchalant poetic persona subtly masks his intended purpose. Réda's texts obey an internal rationale carefully constructed to communicate something about Paris and himself, all the while giving the impression that the subject is a gratuitously imaginative, spontaneous and at times clumsy stroller

[62] This will be particularly important for Chapter 4, where I will analyse in more depth Réda's suburban perambulations. See Chapter 4.I.2. Réda, the Suburbs and Outer-*arrondissements* of Paris, p. 234.

focused mainly on the urban landscape and less on transcendental issues.

For Réda — as for Borges — the starting point of his urban discovery is the street. The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter revealed Réda's belief that the city streets could harbour and conceal something about the poet's sense of self that he could then set out to find. This implies that it is in the poet's mobile experience of the outside world that he will become aware of his own subjectivity, that a connection with urban space could help him discover both the city and himself.

II The Street

Following in Borges's and Réda's footsteps along the streets of Buenos Aires and Paris shows both authors moving away from central areas of the city and towards the suburban neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires and Paris. In his early poetry, Borges avoided writing about the modernised Buenos Aires altogether. He focused instead on his emotional connection to the streets of the *arrabales*, suburban neighbourhoods located in the northern part of Buenos Aires that in the early 1920s conserved nineteenth-century housing architecture. Réda, on the other hand, maintains a spontaneous reaction to his interaction with the streets of Paris, rather than approaching them from a subjective emotional place: he lets himself be inspired and mobilised by their trajectory and arbitrary configuration (their names and the sightlines that they reveal). In Borges's and Réda's individual journeys, the streets are turned into symbols of their individual poetic endeavours: in Borges's case the streets become a symbol of the *patria* or nation he attempted to reinvent; whereas in Réda's case, after 1975, the streets become a symbol of his dispossession: he surrenders his own subjectivity so that the streets might reveal what Réda considers to be the essence of Paris.

II.1 Nation and Connection: The Streets of Borges's Buenos Aires

Borges's sentimental attachment to the streets of Buenos Aires permeates most of his

early literature. The streets' importance is furthermore highlighted by the fact that Borges chose to title the very first poem of his first collection 'Las calles'. Indeed, in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), the opening lines of the poem attest to the emotional experience the poet already anticipated in 'Motivos del espacio y del tiempo (1916-1919)'. 'Las calles de Buenos Aires / ya son la entraña de mi alma' (Borges 1993[1923]) shows the immediacy of Borges's connection to the streets of Buenos Aires through the adverbial phrase 'ya son'. Implicitly, the phrase 'ya son' refers back to a time when Borges did not yet have a visceral relationship with Buenos Aires. It refers back to the time when he was still living in Europe, when he wrote 'Motivos' in anticipation of his reconnection with his native city. Most importantly though, this phrase marks — with the essentialism and certainty conveyed by the verb 'ser' in the present tense — Borges's attachment to the streets of Buenos Aires once he has had the opportunity to roam them.

Borges's contention that the streets are already 'la entraña del alma', 'the core of his soul', refers to the intimate significance of this urban symbol. It also exacerbates Borges's feelings of foreignness, analysed earlier in 'La vuelta', regarding his home: 'Después de muchos años de ausencia / busqué la casa primordial de la infancia / y aún persevera forastero su ámbito' (Borges 1993[1923]). If Borges feels alienated from his home environment, the streets of Buenos Aires, by contrast, are portrayed as welcoming and offering familiarity to the wandering poet. In 'Las calles', on the one hand, Borges demonstrates thus that the streets are central to his sense of self, that his own identity is bound to them. On the other hand, he implies that the streets

might have a spiritual hold on him that is difficult to put into words.

Borges's inner conflict lies, ironically, in his expressed inability to give voice to the soulful character of the streets of Buenos Aires. This conflict is emphasised by the interplay between the notions of near and far exemplified in 'Calle desconocida', another poem from the same collection. In the poem, a random street is felt as 'lejanamente cercana', though it remains nestled in 'la hondura del alma'. The subject in the poem struggles with feelings of emotional closeness versus intellectual distance: Borges aspires to an expressive bond with Buenos Aires that was initially thwarted by his resistance to the unfamiliar modern city. Still, he establishes, in this random street, a tender connection with its atmosphere: 'Intimo y entrañable / era el milagro de la calle clara' (Borges 1993[1923]).[63] The adjective 'clara' suggests that the walking poet can see the street clearly in front of him. This could simply be due to the fact that the street is illuminated. However, in Borges's search for emotional connection with his surroundings, this clarity is interpreted as a miracle that renders the entire scene more moving to the poet. Borges certainly brings his feelings to his experience of Buenos Aires; yet, it is the atmosphere he interiorises as he traverses its streets that affects his connection to the city. In this particular case, he associates clarity to soulfulness and wonder.

These two qualities are furthermore related to Borges's desire to discover the spirit of Buenos Aires concealed within its streets, an intangible substance that would

[63] For an account of Borges's first reactions to Buenos Aires, see Cristóbal Pera, 'De Europa a América: el nacionalismo del primer Borges en su correspondencia de juventud', in *Nacionalismo y vanguardias en las literaturas hispánicas*, ed. by Rosa García Gutiérrez (Madrid: Palas Atenea, 2002), pp. 129-141.

affirm its genuineness beyond its modern appearance. Borges refers to this spirit — this essence — as 'la divinidad', which also evokes a sense of godliness or sacredness: 'Aquí se oculta la divinidad, habla mi verso para declarar el asombro de las calles endiosadas por la esperanza o el recuerdo' (Borges 1993[1923]). Borges believed that he could unveil the spirit of Buenos Aires by inscribing his hopes and reviving his memories in the streets of the city. This blending of self and space would eventually materialise in his verse, thus facilitating the revelation of the city's deeply rooted essence.

However, Borges's feelings are polarised depending on the street in question. Whereas some streets expose the poet's vulnerability and sensitivity, others — particularly those of the modernised city centre — conjure aggravation and commotion. In the preface to *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges regards the streets of the modernised city centre as noisy, overcrowded and threatening to the *criollo* lifestyle: 'La vocinglera energía de algunas calles centrales y la universal chusma dolorosa que hay en los puertos, acontecimientos ambos que rubrican con inquietud inusitada la dejadez de la población criolla' ('A quien leyere' in Borges 1993[1923]). The *criollos*, as I have explained elsewhere in this thesis,[64] were 'people of Spanish descent born in America... [who] had "resolved to be Spaniards no longer"' (Williamson 2004: 4). The rise of modernisation in Buenos Aires threatened the *criollos*' desire to establish their own autochthonous identity independent of Spain, because the small oligarchy that ruled the country, through an export economy, was now pushing Argentines to

[64] In 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' found in the general Introduction, p. 26.

identify with other European examples such as France or Britain. Thus, to an extent, in the preface to *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges expresses his discontent with the lack of resistance from the *criollos* to this programme of Europeanizing development. He implies that the manifest modernisation of the city showed up instead the conformity of the *criollo* population, which in his view, was enduring the changes imposed on the city without much rebellion. In doing so, Borges established on the one hand his opposition to the noise and bustle of the overpopulated city, and on the other hand, the enervating effect that this had on a residual and threatened *criollo* tradition. Tangentially, it also prefaced the makings of Borges's aesthetic project for Buenos Aires because it is from this discontent that his desire to poeticise a new Buenos Aires is later born.[65]

Indeed, while reconstructing the precepts of Borges's *criollo* project, Eleni Kefala contends that Borges's fervour to rediscover Buenos Aires, was intensified by 'his quest for a cognitive redrafting of cultural nationalism in an era of mass migration and galloping urbanization' (Kefala 2011: 35). She argues that Borges's quest to poeticise Buenos Aires was not solely based on a personal desire to reacquaint himself with a city that felt foreign to him, where he could find himself, but that it was part of a larger nationalist movement in the face of a cultural and structural topography that now included hundreds of thousands of immigrants trying to coexist in a radically transformed urban space.[66] In the face of this transformation, Borges would conceive

[65] See Chapter 4.I.1. Borges, the 'arrabal' and his Urban *criollismo* of the 'orillas', p. 218.

[66] For more details about this nationalist movement and some of its other proponents, see Eleni Kefala, 'Borges and Nationalism: Urban Myth and Nation-Dreaming in the 1920s', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 17 (1) (2011): 33-58, p. 37.

of a counter-movement grounded in a particular image of the city. Borges based this image of Buenos Aires on the opposition between the central streets of the city and the marginal street of the *arrabal*. In 'Las calles' for example, he negates and rejects the streets of the city centre thus:

> No las calles enérgicas
> molestadas de prisas y ajetreos,
> sino la dulce calle de arrabal
> enternecida de árboles y ocasos
> y aquellas más afuera
> ajenas de piadosos arbolados
> donde austeras casitas apenas se aventuran
> hostilizadas por inmortales distancias
> a entrometerse en la honda visión
> hecha de gran llanura y mayor cielo. ('Las calles' in Borges 1993[1923])

Borges displaces the energetic streets of the city centre, and in turn centres 'la dulce calle de arrabal' and 'aquellas más afuera' around an emotional language that evokes tranquillity. Borges places the outer neighbourhoods of the city at the forefront of his literary endeavour, and this, Kefala argues, is the result of a 1920s avant-gardist desire to dissolve the gap between the centre and the periphery of Buenos Aires (Kefala 2011: 35). Borges was joined in this effort by fellow avant-gardists Eduardo González Lanuza, Norah Lange, Francisco Piñero, Guillermo Juan Borges and Roberto Ortelli. They did not just want to conform to the elitist nationalist literature of the previous generation, led by Leopoldo Lugones, who defended *Martín Fierro* as the national epic and Pampean rural life as the true symbol of Argentine culture (Williamson 2004: 15). Instead — and this is crucial to Borges's approach to the streets of Buenos Aires — 'their task was to define national culture anew and

marry it with cosmopolitanism, in particular to read tradition through the precepts of the European avant-garde' (Kefala 2011: 38).

In Borges's case, this meant bringing to fruition 'a dynamic vision of nationhood' by urging 'his fellow *criollos* to look to the future' (Williamson 2004: 15). In order to achieve this, he therefore took it upon himself to develop a new form of *criollismo*, an urban narrative that combined the local (and *criollo*) with the foreign (and modern), whilst also preserving a certain degree of personal investment. This quest led Borges to oppose the aggravation ('molestadas') caused by 'las calles enérgicas' to 'la dulce calle de arrabal'.

In other words, even from the first poem in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), we bear witness to the makings of Borges's newfound *criollo* project. Borges's project for Buenos Aires was set deep into his personal history (his first impressions of the transformed Buenos Aires and his physical experience of urban space), the history of Argentina, and the *criollo* future he believed the country needed. Within this project, the street became an urban symbol that allowed Borges to localise his personal and emotionally structured map of Buenos Aires: 'calles deleitables y dulces en la gustación del recuerdo, largas como la espera, calles donde camina la esperanza que es la memoria de lo que vendrá, calles enclavadas y firmes tan para siempre en mi querer' (Borges 1925a: 91).

As part of his poetic project for Buenos Aires, the street became for Borges a symbol of the 'patria' that he was attempting to reconstitute in his verse:

Hacia los cuatro puntos cardinales

> se van desplegando como banderas las calles;
> ojalá en mis versos enhiestos
> vuelen esas banderas. (Borges 1993[1923])

This stanza summarises Borges's creative intentions: if the streets of the *arrabal* are the flags that solemnise the new Buenos Aires that Borges is looking to put into words; and if his verses are the masts that hold up these flags, then he, the poet, is the patriot who hoists and exalts them. In other words, Borges placed himself at the centre of a patriotic movement to honour and immortalise Buenos Aires. By the time he published his second collection of poems, *Luna de enfrente* (1925), the street of the *arrabal* had become 'el único verso del que sabe mi vida' ('Calle con almacén rosao' in Borges 1925b: 10). As I will address more fully in Chapter 4, Borges loses some of the enthusiasm present in the poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), in favour of a more nostalgic and pessimistic tone in later poems. This reflective reference to the streets as a verse shows that the street becomes to the map of Buenos Aires what a verse is to a poem: the primary unit of its construction.

This analysis of the meaning of the street in some of Borges's earlier poetry has demonstrated that the poet's rediscovery of his native city involved at one and the same time his familiarisation with a transformed city space, his designation of a space that spoke to his memories and emotions, and to his definition of a nation-building poetic project. Together, these levels of discovery converged in what Borges defined as 'mi patria' in 'A quien leyere':

> Mi patria — Buenos Aires — no es el dilatado mito geográfico que esas dos palabras señalan; es mi casa, los barrios amigables, y juntamente con esas calles y retiros, que son querida devoción de mi tiempo, lo que en ellas supe de amor, de pena y de dudas. (Borges 1993[1923])

Borges substitutes here the generic designation of nation as 'la patria' with the possessive 'mi patria'. By doing so, he specifies the personal dimension of his poetic project, even if by virtue of its definition, the term 'patria' also includes the collective. Borges's intention was therefore to form a connection with the elements of this predefined and subjective *patria* — places and spaces where he liked to spend time, and the places and spaces where he developed relationships — and elevate his interaction with them to an 'ultra-realidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 52). Apart from the streets already analysed above, Borges's Buenos Aires was made up of his houses, friendly neighbourhoods as well as places he saw as retreats. Now that I have addressed the significance of the street for Borges, over the course of this thesis I will present the other places that make up Borges's map of the city. But first, it is important also to understand Réda's relationship to the streets of Paris.

II.2 Freedom from Self: Réda's Walk along Parisian Streets

Borges's poeticization of the streets of Buenos Aires was founded on his emotional connection to the streets of the *arrabal* and his desire to exalt an image of the city based on his personal circumstances and aesthetic ambitions. Réda, on the contrary, approaches Parisian streets spontaneously and with a desire for discovery. Réda delineates his map of Paris once he has been surprised by the landscape. He ensures that he exercises an open disposition, surrendering control of his itinerary and allowing the streets to inspire both his physical and poetic journeys. As the following analysis of texts from *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), *La Liberté des rues* (1997) and *Le Vingtième*

me fatigue (2004) will show, in the course of exercising this freedom, two outcomes occur: first, Réda reveals a tendency for his own sense of self to be effaced from space in favour of the exposition of the streets' own character; and second, that he enjoys a relationship with marginal streets in which he can use his imagination to alter his perspective, play with the arbitrariness of street names and find a sense of belonging.

Réda is convinced that in order to immerse himself in the experience of walking, it is necessary to exercise a certain degree of indecisiveness: 'seule une profonde indétermination peut nous plonger au cœur de la promenade' (Réda 1988: 36). It is Réda's indecisiveness that allows 'la découverte de certains lieux, de certains visages, et au même titre que certains événements, certains airs de musique, les phrases de certains livres' (Réda 1997: 71). However, at the same time, Réda does not discard the influence of the 'climat d'un moment de ma vie' (Réda 1997: 71). This means that as well as maintaining a receptive attitude towards his Parisian perambulations, Réda admits the unpredictability of life into his relative approach to the city. His writings, as a result, are a reflection of an immediate and spontaneous experience of city space that begins as he walks down the streets of Paris.

The first few lines of the opening prose poem of *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), 'Le pied furtif de l'hérétique', describe his spontaneous disposition: 'Vers six heures, l'hiver, volontiers je descends l'avenue à gauche, par les jardins, et je me cogne à des chaises, à des petits buissons, parce qu'un ciel incompréhensible comme l'amour qui s'approche aspire tous mes yeux' (Réda 1993[1977]: 9). The rhythm and language of this sentence provides evidence for the paradox of Réda's state of mind when he

goes out into the streets of Paris (in this case an avenue): on the one hand, he presents himself as an eager and prepared casual stroller ('Vers six heures, l'hiver, je descends...'), only to be startled on the other hand, by his own dreamy maladroitness ('je me cogne...parce qu'un ciel incompréhensible...aspire tous mes yeux'). In his writings, Réda often alludes to his own wilful propensity for being surprised by his environment. This propensity is the result of a mental process that Réda compares in *La Liberté des rues* (1997) to the inefficiency of a pendulum clock lodged in his brain: 'je me fie aveuglément aux décisions d'une espèce de pendule, situé dans le même coin du cerveau que l'horloge qui me donne l'heure' (Réda 1997: 55). This sentence indicates that when Réda resolves to surrender his control over his actions, he vaguely imagines a sort of pendulum inside his head swaying him into action. This pendulum, when it is at its optimum capacity makes the decisions for the wandering poet: 'Le pendule aussitôt me dirige vers la droite ou vers la gauche, puis m'envoie à gauche ou à droite au premier croisement, et ainsi de suite' (Réda 1997 : 55). However, when the pendulum 'suspend peu à peu son mouvement', the decisions about his journey no longer come from the pendulum logged in the poet's head, but from the surrounding space: 'On dépend désormais de l'espace' (Réda 1997: 56). In other words, when Réda takes to the avenue in the passage at the beginning of *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), the pendulum is the one propelling him out into the city. Conversely, when he stumbles over some chairs because he has been staring at the sky and not looking at the street in front of him, the surrounding space is commanding his actions.

In *La Liberté des rues* (1997), Réda explores Parisian streets from the point of view

of an observer who wants to get to the heart — or to the essence — of his experience of Paris. Réda believes this experience is possible because the city's streets have an expressive quality; they have the same 'fluidité imprévisible d'une âme' (Réda 1997: 56). Like Borges, Réda attributes a soulful character to the streets of Paris that emanates from the city's history and architecture. Given the idea that space is figuratively endowed with a personality, Réda's objective is therefore to disinhibit the streets, to create the illusion through personalisation that they too have an inner voice or conscience that allows them to communicate freely to the poet-observer (hence the title of the book). Réda wants to create the conditions for the city streets to own their voice. And in order to surrender his control to them, the metaphorical pendulum lodged in his head needs to be stopped: 'c'est là que le vrai trajet débute' (Réda 1997: 55). The authenticity of Paris is therefore revealed to the poet when he is able to disarm his own mental processes in favour of those of the city.

Réda elaborates his poetic urban meditations based on a deliberate surrender to the topography of the city, even when he is required to travel to fulfil routine activities: 'Le plus souvent, c'est une nécessité purement pratique, voire vitale (acheter des timbres ou de quoi se nourrir) qui, à un moment ou l'autre de la journée, nous oblige à sortir quand on a toutes les raisons de rester chez soi' (Réda 1997: 54). Réda suggests that there is a practical dimension to everyone's exploration of space. Still, even on these occasions, Réda can find himself in unexpected situations or in unexpected places when he decides to 'poursuivre l'espace' (Réda 1997: 50). As Sheringham contends,

> When he allows his itinerary to be dictated by a logic apparently inherent in the succession of spaces he traverses, Réda can find himself in quite unexpected locations, for example peering into the window of a smart shop selling ties... And in such cases the impromptu objects of his attention, whilst lacking any transcendent meaning seem to act as relays for the non-stop flow of impressions in which he finds himself immersed. (Sheringham 2006: 329)

Here, Sheringham confirms that Réda imagines an urban space equipped with its own inner subtleties, akin to the mental and emotional processes of the individual. Thus, when Réda is involved in these dynamics he lets go of his own itinerary and enters a continuous movement given to him by the city streets:

> ce sont les rues elles-mêmes qui se déplacent, s'ébattent [...]. Elles s'en vont, reviennent, disparaissent de nouveau. J'ai beau m'efforcer d'en suivre une — puis deux, puis trois — pour composer une sorte d'itinéraire: toujours d'autres se présentent à la traverse et me conduisent ailleurs. (Réda 1997: 59)

Réda's personification of the streets and his contention that they propel him 'là où l'envie leur a passé d'un coup' marks his surrender to the streets' consciousness. In turn, these streets activate not only his circulation around urban space, but also his way of writing about them:

> Il n'y a pas de différence entre ma façon d'écrire sur elles et leur comportement. Chaque phrase, qu'elle s'annonce rectiligne ou sinueuse, demeure exposée à dévier à des intersections. Ou bien elle bifurque, et les mots partent d'un côté, ce qu'ils voulaient exprimer d'un autre. La plus simple conduit toujours à un nouveau croisement; les plus complexes éclatent à des carrefours ou s'achèvent en impasses, après avoir cru capturer plus de sens que le langage n'en détient. On s'en tire par sauts et glissades. (Réda 1997: 60)

'Rue' and 'phrase' are here almost interchangeable, thus suggesting that the lines of Réda's prose poems come from the map of Paris. Réda's point of departure is the streets' capacity to stimulate 'diverses zones de l'imaginaire, du savoir et de la

sensibilité' (Réda 1997: 95) and their potential for revealing something that was previously unknown to the poet. But more than that, the example above suggests that Réda tries to reproduce the same surrender to the streets in his writing as he does in his experience of space.

Furthermore, by surrendering his will to the streets of Paris, Réda demonstrates that the structural organisation and dynamic of the streets exists independently of him, hence 'la liberté des rues':

> Et le vrai est que la liberté des rues ne se plie à aucun type de rangement ; qu'il faut être inconscient ou présomptueux pour imaginer qu'elles coïncident avec nos répertoires, nos graphiques, notre alphabet ; qu'elles se laissent impressionner par les noms et les numéros qu'on leur attribue. Elles ont leur organisation, qui est mouvante, parce qu'elle doit s'adapter aux nécessités contradictoires de leur sort et de leur désir. (Réda 1997: 60)

Réda endows the streets of Paris with their own consciousness and freedom, independent of the individual that traverses them. Even the conventions used to refer to the streets (names and numbers) cannot represent them. All that is left for the poet is to surrender to their organisation.

In *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), for example, Réda's pursuit of the sinuosity of 'la rue des Pyrénées' leads him to explore the flora around 'la porte de Vincennes' all the way to Belleville. In this process, he traverses several peripheral *arrondissements* of the French capital. As Réda notices how the street 'monte et tourne' drawing 'un immense arc de cercle', the sight of different varieties of 'arbres frémissants' commands his attention, leading him towards a square hidden behind 'les buissons des talus'. On one of the benches in this square he begins to play with an apparently abandoned yellow toy truck (Réda 1993[1977]: 91-92). Réda's own self-reflection of

the moment is that 'ces haltes occasionnelles dans de tels lieux m'initient, je ne saurais nettement dire à quoi' (Réda 1993[1977]: 91-92). He does not pretend to be witnessing a transcendent event and he does not express any emotional reaction to the scene. Instead he finds himself engrossed in a moment of inertia: 'je plane dans une sorte de stupeur' (Réda 1993[1977]: 92). Immersed in this instant, he describes how his eye (a metonymy for his consciousness or for the pendulum lodged in his brain) becomes detached from the rest of his body, which has been assimilated into the landscape. This leaves the poet waiting some kind of understanding: 'Et vient l'instant où même mon œil encore lucide déserte, n'étant plus attaché par rien dans ce corps tout en brouillard, mais ouvert du côté de l'espace plus dense qui l'assimile, qui va me révéler du dehors quel rang j'occupe dans son savoir' (Réda 1993[1977]: 92). As a result of the impressions delivered to him by the urban landscape, the poet experiences a disconnection from or dissolution of self, with the expectation of a revelation from the surrounding space. In this moment, the poet is at once immersed in the city's consciousness and receptive to an existential unravelling.

The possibility of revelation in space is created by the arbitrariness that reigns in the urban landscape because it manifests the potential for discovery (Réda 2001: 44). One of the forms taken by this sense of the arbitrary is the way that 'une rue change de physionomie' (Réda 1997: 55); in other words, the street is metamorphosed depending on the angle from which it is being seen. In one of his perambulations around the 8$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement*, Réda is drawn to three little trees 'qui ne grandiront jamais' and a 'rectangle de clarté' outside a hotel (Réda 1997: 20). He continues

to walk towards the trees, fixating his gaze upon a woman whose coat is glistening beside the spotlight. Finally when the woman is out of sight and he turns around to look at her one more time, he realises that what he saw as a glistening light has now turned into 'une ombre lumineuse sur le sol obscur' (Réda 1997: 21), giving a sombre dimension to what appeared before as a clear scene. When Réda changes the angle from which he saw the street, his perception is distorted, thus admitting the possibility of surprise from the cityscape.

Sheringham argues that this sense of arbitrariness is also seen for example in the naming of city streets and buildings, but also in the meaning 'appropriated by city-dwellers, for whom street names are at the same time a practical necessity and important constituents in each individual's private map of the city' (Sheringham 2011: 177). Street names are interesting to Réda because in most cases, they appear to be completely incidental, though as a result they also create the potential for new associations in the city: 'leurs noms, de plus en plus détachés de la réalité topographique, [...] constituent autant de labyrinthes sans issue, de rebus privés de signification' (Réda 1997: 78). At the same time, Réda believes there is a message contained 'dans le grouillement de mots des rues de Paris', and for this reason is set on exploring them: 'je ne me déferai de cette manie invétérée' (Réda 1997: 79). Thus Réda makes physical and thematic associations based on street names, a consistent practice in several of his books, thus ensuring the city's memorable character (Sheringham 2011: 178).[67]

[67] Réda's treatment of street names is too vast to take on in this thesis. For other examples on how Réda interprets street names see *Les Ruines de Paris* (pp. 64 and 106), *Châteaux des courants*

At times, Réda is drawn to certain streets because their proper names are part of the cementing of a cultural history and ethnic identity of certain neighbourhoods. This is particularly true in several texts of *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004) where Réda finds himself travelling along streets such as Rue de Sénégal, Rue de Pékin, and Rue Pali-Kao that point to the cultural diversity of the French capital (Réda 2004: 38). Other times, he is attracted to their humorous nature — 'rue de la Fontaine-au-Roi, rue de la Pierre-Levée, rue du Moulin-Joli' (Réda 1993: 64) — or their lack of poetic inspiration:

> il me faut exprimer combien la coutume de donner aux rues des noms de personnes, en particulier des noms de poètes ou d'écrivains, me paraît discutable et peu poétique. On aurait beaucoup mieux honoré Hugo, Nerval, Baudelaire, La Fontaine, Claudel, Proust, et l'effet poétique en serait formidablement accru, si l'on avait choisi plutôt certaines de leurs œuvres: avenue des Chants du Crépuscule, rue des Chimères, des Fleurs du Mal, du Renard et de la Cigogne, place du Soulier de Satin, boulevard à la Recherche du temps perdu. (Réda 1997: 79)

In any case, Réda maintains that the topography of the city is part of its imaginative fabric, of the city's innate capacity to constantly reinvent itself, drawing the stroller into its perpetual metamorphosis.

In *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004), Réda explores even further his soulful, mental and spontaneous relationship with the streets. Réda suggests that there is a familiar bond between him and certain streets he frequents. Echoing Borges's sentimental identification with the street in 'Calle desconocida', Réda expresses an 'envie de les étudier et de les interroger, comme ces personnes dont la fréquentation a fini par nous

d'air (p.13), *La Liberté des rues* (p. 126), *Accidents de la circulations* (pp. 44 and 76) and *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (pp. 24-29, 43, 60, 75-78, 84-88 and 92-96).

inspirer une sympathie' (Réda 2004: 78-79). Returning to certain streets of the city unravels 'une certaine mesure [de] parenté': 'L'espèce d'affection que j'éprouve pour de telles rues serait donc en un sens fraternelle. J'irais retrouver auprès d'elles ma vraie famille, mon vrai climat' (Réda 2004: 79). Réda is therefore attracted to certain streets of Paris because they offer a space of recognition, a space of belonging.

For Réda, this impassioned pursuit of a sense of self, leads him — like Borges — to explore certain areas of the city where he feels a kinship. Like Borges, many of Réda's references to the city centre in Paris carry negative connotations. What Réda realises is that when 'un détour imprévu peut [l]e plonger au cœur de la métropole', he usually finds this space 'un peu suffocant' (Réda 1997: 50). Following the streets of the peripheral neighbourhoods is instead a means of capturing an image of Paris that Réda can relate to, one that speaks to his sense of self. Instead, he prefers 'l'ampleur' of certain areas of the city, which he deems as 'provinces'. In the text from *La Liberté des rues* (1997), these 'provinces' correspond to wider areas of the city like Vaugirard, Grenelle, Les Invalides and La Concorde where he senses an expanse stretched by 'les nuages horizontaux glissant vers un fond infini de bois de bouleaux et de landes' (Réda 1997: 50). Thus, if the streets of the city are an expression of Paris's influence on Réda and require the dissolution of the poet's self in order to fuel his journey, the gravitation towards certain areas of the city in pursuit of peripheral streets is a way for Réda to impose his will over the city's.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented Borges and Réda as poets of Buenos Aires and Paris respectively. These cities have been important themes in these writers' works since the beginning of both of their careers. Analysing the early stages of their poetic practices has revealed that they both come to the city from a fresh perspective: Borges after spending seven years in Europe from 1914 to 1921, and Réda after he moved permanently to Paris from his hometown of Lunéville in 1952. The emotional response that both authors are seen conveying in their early poetry points to their personal investment in the poeticization of their cities. These emotions vary from extremes of rapture to dejection, suggesting that they both struggled with adapting to their new urban environments. They searched for a connection to space in order to feel a sense of belonging. In this process, Borges and Réda became preoccupied not only with their place within their cities, but also with the cities themselves.

Though both poets wrote about their respective cities from a personal, experiential and emotional point of view, they did so from different perspectives and with different outcomes. Borges was writing at a time when his emotional connection to Buenos Aires — because of his family history, inter-personal relationships and shock at the sight of a modernised city — was also bound initially to an avant-garde *ultraísta* project and later to a creative plan to exalt a *criollo* tradition that was slowly fading in the Argentine capital. He therefore approached Buenos Aires not attempting to find the essence of the city already expressed in its landscape, but convinced that he could bring out this essence in his poems. Réda on the other hand takes a more detached

approach to his exploration of Paris, believing that the city itself can manifest its essence and communicate its authenticity to the poet. Réda therefore sets out to discover Paris, whereas Borges believes he can construct Buenos Aires.

Both poets take to the streets to accomplish their poetic endeavours. Further analyses of Borges's and Réda's treatment of the streets of Buenos Aires and Paris revealed that both authors reflected their own self-consciousness onto the streets; but once again in different ways. Borges invested his emotions in the streets of the *arrabal* in Buenos Aires, to the point where he experienced a soulful intimate connection with them. He went out into the streets to escape the rejection he felt in his home environment and felt a higher sense of belonging and familiarity during his peripheral perambulations. Consequently, Borges acknowledged in his early poetry that his sense of self and his identity were reaffirmed in the marginal streets of Buenos Aires. By contrast, Réda's observed detached attitude towards the city meant that he attempted to efface his own sense of self so that the streets could expose their own essence. Thus, Borges's sense of self is intrinsically bound to his experience of Buenos Aires's marginal streets; whereas Réda's perception of self needs to be undermined for his experience of Paris's marginal streets to occur.

Now that this chapter has established Borges and Réda as urban poets and the street as their first point of contact with their respective cities, in the next chapter, I propose a closer look at the areas of the city that these authors frequent, places that challenge the image of Buenos Aires and Paris as modern cities of their time, in favour of two cities of suburban or even provincial undertones.

Chapter 3

Atmospheres and Places: The Search for the Provincial in Temporal and Physical Locales of Buenos Aires and Paris

C'est une ville énorme et changeante qui peut,
Dans mes rêves surtout, se réduire au très peu
De mouvement et de splendeur monumentale
Qui fait la pureté de ma ville natale.
De sorte que partout où j'ai déambulé,
C'est elle que j'ai vue à chaque fois mêler
Son étendue au fond des vitres des façades,
Dans le ciel qui s'accoude aux longues palissades. [...]
De sa gloire secrète et de quelques misères
Suburbaines, j'aurai bâti le Buenos Aires
Mental où quelquefois, dans un demi sommeil,
Il m'arrive d'errer à l'heure où le soleil
Descend vers les faubourgs aux maisons sans étage. [...]

— Jacques Réda, 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1987: 95)

Introduction

In the lines above from the poem in 'A propos d'une ferveur', Réda visualises the city as a sprawling and budding place. Réda implies that Paris is composed of kaleidoscopic images, crafted at the confluence of the poet's mental ('dans mes rêves surtout') and physical ('partout où j'ai déambulé') movement within urban space. He conveys that this interaction between the physical experience of space and his imagination triggers memories about places in his 'ville natale' (Lunéville). As I explained in the analysis of 'A propos d'une ferveur' in Chapter 1, Réda claims to 'see' Lunéville on windowpanes on the side of buildings, 'partout où [il a] déambulé' (Réda 1987: 95).[68] The image of Paris that results from Réda's experience is therefore built upon the projection of familiar evocations of his hometown, though this is only a starting point. Réda appears to be seeking an undifferentiated feeling of being 'en province' in the city. In French, 'en province' has at times a negative connotation in contradistinction to what is urban, cosmopolitan and modern. It is commonly used to refer to places outside of the Parisian region, regardless of their geography or population size. But for Réda, being 'en province' does not connote negative associations: on the contrary, it is his desire to reconnect with the provincial that prompts him to discover and poeticise the Parisian periphery, its outer neighbourhoods and *banlieues*, as well as places that convey a provincial character. This is because these areas are usually detached from the stereotypical centre of the city where the pace of life is frenzied, and where there is less opportunity to establish meaningful connections. Still, as this chapter

[68] See above, Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986), p. 96.

will show, Réda does not discard the possibility that certain atmospheres and places within the city might also remind him of the province. These atmospheres and places are characterised by their 'pureté': they induce a feeling of openness and simplicity in the poet that mentally transports him to his hometown. The provincial, according to Réda, can therefore be found both in peripheral and central areas of the city; it suffices that they evoke the feeling of being in an environment that is provincial in nature, a place that conjures simplicity and affective connection.

The epigraph above also suggests that the subtle beauty of the sky and the destitution of certain peripheral neighbourhoods in Paris, transport Réda mentally to imagined suburbs of Buenos Aires: 'De sa gloire secrète et de quelques misères / Suburbaines, j'aurai bâti le Buenos Aires / Mental' (Réda 1987: 95). As Réda explains earlier in the essay of 'A propos d'une ferveur', the picture of Buenos Aires that he develops as he walks the *faubourgs* of Paris comes directly from his reading of Borges's portrayal of Buenos Aires in the translated version of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). Borges's plan to exalt a late-nineteenth-century pre-modern Buenos Aires, when it was still the small capital of a large province, suggests that he too sought to expose the provincial in the outer neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. Both Borges and Réda therefore search in their respective modernised metropolis, for cities with provincial undertones. Their maps of the city are composed of marginal streets that extend to the outer edges of the city (Chapter 2), places within the city and in its margins that possess qualities that inspire intimacy, connection and spirituality (Chapter 3) and, as I will show in Chapter 4, neighbourhoods where they feel a strong sense of

belonging. Like Réda, Borges also wrote poems about places close to the city centre. However, unlike Réda who focused on discovering the provincial within these places, Borges instead projected his idea of the provincial onto them. Over the course of this chapter, I propose to describe and compare the atmospheres and places in Buenos Aires and Paris that compose Borges's and Réda's personal maps of the city in order to a) expose their individual portrayals of the provincial, and b) reveal the impact of this relationship to the provincial on their subjectivities.

I have based the structure of the chapter on what Eleni Kefala — with reference to Borges and his relationship to Buenos Aires — calls 'temporal and physical locales' (Kefala 2011: 48). In general terms, my contention will be that temporal locales allude to the lapse of time during which Borges and Réda create a certain atmosphere or ambiance in their poetry — for example, the evening; whereas physical locales are the places that they visit in and around their respective cities. In the first part of the chapter, the analysis of Borges's early poems and essays, as well as a good number of Réda's texts, will demonstrate that Borges and Réda are mostly interested in wandering around Paris and Buenos Aires in the evening, when the day transitions into night. This interest in the evening stems from the fact that in order to be able to imagine the provincial as an alternative to the modern metropolis, both poets need to conceive of a space that is 'other', different from the modern Buenos Aires and Paris. The evening, because of its transitional quality, exposes temporarily the changing urban landscape: colours of the sky take different shades, buildings darken, streetlights come on and sounds become more indistinct. Consequently, in

the evening, both cities offer a temporary space of 'otherness' where they no longer resemble modern and busy conurbations, but rather simple, chromatic and expansive landscapes. Both authors agree that the evening generates an atmosphere that allows them to feel temporarily immersed in what they sense is the essence of Buenos Aires and Paris.

The second part of the chapter will explore the physical places in the city that — like the temporal locales — have transitional characteristics. These places — gardens, squares, cemeteries, and vacant lots — are considered transitional because their purpose within the urban dynamic does not conform to pre-conceived notions of what is modern. Instead of evoking novelty and structural development, these places conjure images of nature, expanse and respite, characteristics more readily applicable to the provinces. Borges and Réda frequent these places precisely because here, they have escaped from modern Paris or modern Buenos Aires into a semi-imaginary territory. Lastly, these places affect their sense of self because the connection they make to them alters their emotional and physical state of being.

I Atmospheres: The Evening and its Affective Power

In *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) Réda claims that 'le soir est évidemment le moment idéal pour entrer dans la périphérie' (Réda 1987: 93). In the evening, the hustle and bustle of the city begins to quieten down, the streets empty and the colours of the landscape change as the natural light from the sun becomes extinct and the fake lights of lampposts illuminate the sky. The evening is a finite period of time during which the city undergoes an observable transformation. It is for this reason that Réda calls 'le soir', 'une zone de transition' (Réda 1987: 93). He believes that entering the periphery in the evening is ideal because when the city metamorphoses from day into night, the urban landscape reveals appearances and dynamics that are no longer under the influence of the modern city.

Furthermore, within the finite temporality of the evening, Réda admits the possibility of experiencing: 'une impossible mais concevable éternité'(Réda 1987: 93). In this sense, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014) defines 'eternity' as the existential idea of 'time without end'; in other words, it is a moment in time that could produce a sudden mental detachment from any notion of past or future, thus elevating the present to a condition that feels never-ending. Réda's contention — particularly regarding Borges but also his own work — is that at any moment in the evening the poet could become absorbed in contemplation long enough for all sense of time and space to be lost, leaving the poet to feel fully immersed — physically and mentally — in this 'zone de transition'. Both writers convey the idea that in moments such as this, they are always on the brink of experiencing an epiphanic revelation about

their sense of self or about the meaning of their urban experience.

Borges sees the evening as an opportunity to unmask what he calls 'el simulacro' of the modern city ('La Recoleta' in Borges 1993[1923]). A simulacrum, in its most general sense, is an imitative representation of something else. By suggesting that modern Buenos Aires is a simulacrum, he implies that the perceivable image of Buenos Aires masks a real but hidden authentic image of the city. This authentic image of Buenos Aires, which Borges hopes to restore, exalt and preserve through his poems, corresponds to a city that conflates Borges's personal experience of the modern city and the city of the end of the nineteenth century. For Réda, the evening is a time for the silence and mystery of Paris to emerge; an opportunity to witness elements of the urban landscape that would not otherwise be appreciated during the day. Ultimately, looking at Borges's works retrospectively through Réda will show that though both poets represent the apparent reality of the city in the evening, Réda looks to blend into the landscape, surrendering his sense of self to a moment in time, whereas Borges purposely looks to establish his presence in the overall picture of an enduring Buenos Aires. Borges's and Réda's gravitation towards evening experiences ultimately show that the atmospheres created by this temporal locale — a transient and transitional zone — echo the provincial qualities of respite and revelation that Borges and Réda look for in Buenos Aires and Paris respectively.

I.1 Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum

Throughout his early works, Borges used different terms to refer to the evening: from

Fervor de Buenos Aires (1923) to *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), when Borges wrote about the evening he invariably used terms such as 'atardecer', 'poniente' or 'ocaso' ('Atardeceres' in Borges 1993[1923]). The time of day for traversing the city was so important to Borges that the first line of his first essay about Buenos Aires, published in *Cosmópolis* in 1921, said: 'Ni de mañana ni en la diurnalidad ni en la noche vemos de veras la ciudad' ('Buenos Aires' in Borges 1925a: 87). For Borges, none of these times of day exposed the most honest image of Buenos Aires. On the one hand, he viewed the morning as excessively and gratuitously bright, because it is the time when the sun breaks through windows and mirrors, forcing the eyes to squint, making it difficult to see things clearly. The day, on the other hand, is the period of time when the city functions in accordance with its 'empeños' and 'inercia'; it is the time to complete errands and follow routines. Lastly, Borges sees the night as 'el milagro trunco': a period of time with the miraculous potential to challenge the bustling city, but where the 'macilentos faroles' perpetuate a false and fabricated image of the city (Borges 1925a: 87).

'Queda el atardecer', says Borges, which he defines as a dramatic dispute between lights and shadows, when the elements that are visible to him become distorted:

> Es la dramática altercación y el conflicto de la visualidad y de la sombra, es como un retorcerse y un salirse de quicio de las cosas visibles. Nos desmadeja, nos carcome y nos manosea, pero en su ahínco recobran su sentir humano las calles, su trágico sentir de volición que logra perdurar en el tiempo, cuya entraña misma es el cambio. (Borges 1925a: 88)

Borges roots his interest in the evening on the visual ambiguity it creates and on the fact that it appears to alter the individual's state of being by rendering him more vul-

nerable and overwhelmed. He also argues that by creating this affective atmosphere, the urban landscape, and the streets in particular, assume an anthropomorphic character: they appear to have feelings; in other words they reflect an emotional substance that is sensed by the observing and wandering poet. This level of human sensitivity lingers in the streets as the day turns into night. By extension, the poet also appears to recognise his own feelings — in the example below, his disquiet — in those generated by the evening: 'La tarde es la inquietud de la jornada, y por eso se acuerda con nosotros que también somos inquietud' (Borges 1925a: 88). Borges's decision to explore Buenos Aires in the evening is therefore part of his intention to seize hold of the conditions where physical experience of space and emotion can coexist.

When physical experience and emotion converge in space, Borges believes they are the result of the practice of an 'estética expresionista' or expressionist aesthetic. In the 1921 essay 'Anatomía de mi "Ultra"', Borges opposes two kinds of aesthetics: the impressionist, which he associates with the passivity of mirrors; and the expressionist, which to him resembles the dynamics of prisms. The difference between a mirror and a prism for Borges is that whereas the first can only reflect back the image of the object that is placed in front of it, the prism has the ability to refract, which means that the resulting image — in this case the poetic image of Buenos Aires — always contains elements of the initial picture (the perceived Buenos Aires) distorted through the prism (Borges's mind, sensations and feelings). The mirror corresponds to description, whereas the prism combines interpretation, imagination and sensation. In Borges's case, his lyrical output or 'esfuerzos líricos' are prompted by his quest

for sensorial and emotional connection: 'Yo busco en ellos la *sensación en sí,* y no la descripción de las premisas espaciales o temporales que la rodean' (Borges 1997[1921]: 95).[69] In other words, his prismatic experience of Buenos Aires involved the purposeful refraction of sensation, which would in turn interact with the external urban space and materialise in words that conveyed raw emotion: 'anhelo un arte que traduzca la emoción desnuda, depurada de los adicionales datos que la preceden' (Borges 1997[1921]: 95).

Borges favoured the evening as the most appropriate time to journey around certain neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, not only because he saw the evening as the time when the bustling city rested before the night lights came on, but because 'al cesar la luz / se acalla el simulacro de los espejos / que ya la tarde fue entristeciendo' ('La Recoleta' in Borges 1993[1923]). In other words, the evening had the capacity to undo the simulacrum of the modern city. The mirror, which Borges associates — as seen above — with an impressionistic and therefore imitative aesthetic represents the inauthentic Buenos Aires modelled on European trends. As a young child Borges was frightened of mirrors because to him, the idea of a copycat reflection robbed the original image of its essential character (Williamson 2004: 38). And so, if Buenos Aires by day took on a cosmopolitan appearance, in the evening as the sunlight diminished the simulacrum did also, leaving things in the city to appear as they really were, or rather, as Borges imagined their essence to be through his own prismatic emotional refraction of the physical space.

[69] The italics are reproduced as they were found in 'Anatomía de mi "Ultra"' (1921).

This is the case for example in 'Calle desconocida' where Borges creates an intimate moment between himself and the city. In this poem, the connection between the poet and the city is mediated by the evening. The poem begins with a biblical image that renders the atmosphere of the poem and of the urban landscape immediately totalising: 'penumbra de la paloma / llamaron los judíos a la iniciación de la tarde' (Borges 1993[1923]). According to this quote, in the Jewish faith, the evening was known as 'the dove's twilight'. 'Penumbra' means half-light, semi-darkness or twilight, and here linked to the dove, which is also a religious symbol of peace and love, evokes — by contrast — the violent end of the day. At the same time, 'la venida de la noche se advierte / antes como advenimiento de música esperada / que como enorme símbolo de nuestra primordial nadería', immediately deters us from the idea that the fall of night might be a negative event; on the contrary, Borges presents it as a welcomed and awaited moment, like an eagerly awaited melody ('advenimiento de música esperada'), which also resounds with the religious convention of church bells marking the hour. Borges is not especially religious; his theological references are rather part of his search for — as discussed elsewhere in this thesis[70] — an 'ultra-realidad espiritual', a reality that is elevated to an immaterial and soulful connection akin to religious experience (Borges 1997[1920]: 52). Spiritual reality for Borges is therefore achieved through emotional connection. In the poem 'Calle desconocida', Borges realises this connection by welcoming the evening and the night as an opportunity that awakens him from his 'primordial nadería'; the philosophical idea of immaterialism borrowed

[70] In Chapter 2.II.1. Nation and Connection: The Streets of Borges's Buenos Aires, p. 110.

from Berkeley (1685-1753), which claims that ordinary objects are but ideas in the minds of individuals and that calls into question the existence of these things outside of human perception. Instead, in this specific poem, Borges's act of witnessing the day transition into night suggests that this moment in time exists even beyond his perception, and that through the prism of his mind the city is transformed into a conflation of visual impressions and emotions. In other words, Borges's experience of the empty streets makes him feel emotionally exposed, and this triggers a refraction of his emotions and the appearance of fixtures, elements and colours of its surroundings that would otherwise not be noticeable during the day:

> En esa hora de fina luz arenosa
> mis andanzas dieron con una calle ignorada,
> abierta en noble anchura de terraza
> mostrando en las cornisas y en las paredes
> colores blandos como el mismo cielo. ('Calle desconocida' in Borges 1993[1923])

Alone in this unknown street, Borges is able to build an emotional connection with the things of the city: 'terraza', 'cornisas' and 'paredes'. This connection is perceived through the use of certain adjectives, like 'fina', 'noble' and 'blandos' that attach positive qualities to the materiality of the city. In this dimly lit Buenos Aires, the colours of the landscape also change, causing a transfiguration of space. The adjective 'abierta' and the gerund 'mostrando', placed at the beginning of their respective lines, heighten the impression of openness and suggest that the observing poet might be exposed to a moment of epiphanic revelation. The 'terraza', 'cornisas' and 'paredes' become more perceptible because, as the city becomes more desolate, these elements begin to stand out. The evening, 'esa hora de fina luz arenosa' is for Borges the most

emotional and honest time of day precisely because it exposes the structures of the city independent of the latter's dynamism.

Eleni Kefala argues that the emotional character of the evening contributes to Borges's plan to exalt the city's nineteenth-century provinciality because the connection that the poet establishes with urban space bonds him in turn to an image of the past that he wants to bring into the present (Kefala 2011: 51). According to Kefala, the evening is a 'temporal locale' during which the poet is able to capture the city in the conflicted moment between day and night (Kefala 2011: 48). During this ephemeral and visually altering moment, the city can be transfigured and all sense of time can be lost. Two examples in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) attest to this. The first is 'Atardeceres', a poem where Borges presents three different scenes of Buenos Aires in the evening. In these scenes, the atmosphere of the city exudes the simplicity and natural landscape of the provincial; it even reproduces the expanse of the *pampas* suggesting a kinship between the Argentine plains and the city that evokes the Buenos Aires of the late nineteenth century. In the second scene in particular, Buenos Aires is transfigured into a pastoral space where the sunset imposes a silence over the sounds of a 'vihuela' (a guitar shaped instrument) similar to the solemnity experienced during religious prayer: 'En el poniente pobre / la tarde mutilada / rezó un Avemaría de colores' ('Atardeceres' in Borges 1993[1923]). Echoing the biblical reference from 'Calle desconocida' mentioned above, the scene is elevated to an 'ultrarealidad espiritual' through the Hail Mary that signifies, based on the Christian faith, the Annunciation of the birth of Jesus by the Archangel Gabriel; in other words the

imminence of new life. This new life corresponds to the city as a pre-modern 'campo atardecido': the chaos of the city by day has transformed into the treeless plains of the *pampas*, which before the modernisation of Buenos Aires could still be seen from the city's horizon.[71] The analysis above shows that the ephemeral moment of the evening, through the poet's refracted experience, has resulted in the transfiguration of the city:

> [...] La luna nueva
> es una vocecita desde el cielo.
> Según va anocheciendo
> vuelve a ser campo el pueblo.[72] ('Atardeceres' in Borges 1993[1923])

The personification of the moon in the quote above adds a human dimension to the city's portrait. The moon for Borges is a symbol of frankness, as he expresses elsewhere in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923)*:* 'La gran franqueza de la luna llena' ('Un patio' in Borges 1993[1923]). As a result, as the day turns into night, the same honesty that characterises the moon is transferred to the city, 'el pueblo', which transitions from modern city back into what Borges implies is a more authentic form: a provincial town still connected to the distant *pampas*. In doing this, Borges ensures continuity between the past and the present Buenos Aires.

The second example of the way in which the evening can create a sense of spatial and temporal distension can be found in another poem of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) entitled 'Un patio'. In the poem, Borges admits the possibility that the evening generates an atmosphere that causes the sense of time to fall away: paradoxically a

[71] The modernisation of Buenos Aires is explained in more detail in 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 23.
[72] Line formatting is reproduced as it was found in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1993[1923]).

moment that is as ephemeral as the time that it takes for the day to turn into night, but a moment in which the poet feels a condition of timelessness, as if the event that he is witnessing could last forever. 'Un patio' describes a courtyard under a torrential rain taking place in the evening: 'Con la tarde / se cansaron los dos o tres colores del patio' (Borges 1993[1923]). With the darkened sky, the mood of the open-air terrace becomes more sombre: 'dirá la agorería que ha muerto un angelito'. Playing against the more positive religious image of 'Atardeceres', in 'Un patio', the reference to a 'dead little angel' points to the gloomy character of the scene. But Borges, who appears at the end of the poem to be sheltered under the eaves of the house, still conceives of the serenity that awaits the city after the rain has passed:

> Serena
> la eternidad espera en la encrucijada de estrellas
> Lindo es vivir en la amistad oscura
> de un zaguán, de un alero y de un aljibe. (Borges 1993[1923])

These lines express Borges's reassurance because he is sheltered from the rain thanks to his 'friendship' with the elements of the house: the hallway, the eaves and the well. Furthermore, the sense of a feeling of timelessness is created through the association of the sky and the elements of the house. For Borges, 'la eternidad' is an experience that never materialises, but that 'espera' or waits for him in the clear starry night. This is because there is an underlying association between the feeling of serenity following a storm and the sense of contentment that the experience of timelessness would produce. The 'patio' represents one of the places where this revelatory event could take place because it is open to the sky. In this sense, 'encrucijada' is also an interesting term because it confirms that the possibility of eternity in this mo-

ment lies at the intersection between something unknowable and unreachable like the stars and the very palpable and habitable elements of the poet's home: the 'zaguán', the 'alero' and the 'aljibe'. The feeling of timelessness or imminent revelation can therefore be associated with specific locations in city. From this example, it becomes apparent that Borges's map of Buenos Aires is composed at the 'encrucijada' of something immaterial or transcendental and the very places and objects that constitute his surroundings. This example also confirms Borges's pursuit of an 'ultra-realidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 52), of a poetic reality that marries feeling with physical experience; it also confirms Réda's reading of Borges's use of the evening in 'A propos d'une ferveur': it is the time of day when he experiences 'son illusion d'éternité' though this sense of eternity might never materialise (Réda 1987: 94).

The examples above from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) have demonstrated that Borges used the evening to explore an emotional, provincial and timeless atmosphere in Buenos Aires. During this authentic — though paradoxically always ephemeral experience — Borges makes a temporary intimate connection with the cityscape, one where he brings his own feelings onto the scene, but also one where he lets the inherent soulfulness of the city affect him as well. In the next section, I will explore Réda's use of the evening in order to ultimately assess whether his approach is comparable to Borges's.

I.2 Paris in the Evening: Réda's 'activité du soir'

Like Borges, Réda is interested in circulating in his city in the evening. This interest

is born from his desire to experience a different side of Paris, one that is distinct from the bustle of the modern metropolis. He believes that the evening can offer different expressions of the French capital, expressions that capture its provincial undertones. In order to depict what he believes is a more affective image of life in the city; Réda sets out to uncover Paris's 'activité du soir', most particularly in *La Liberté des rues* (1997) where he dedicates an entire section to wandering around Paris in the evening (Réda 1997: 11-79). This enterprise entails the description of events that take place in the evening, from encounters between people to the soundscape of the sunset. In this part of the chapter, I propose therefore to analyse how Réda's 'activité du soir' presents an image of Paris focused on ordinary encounters and places rather than on the more renowned image of a monumental Paris. Furthermore, the following analysis will show that Réda explores the evening as a zone in order to isolate moments and scenes within his experience that — like Borges — ultimately allow him to create a temporary sense of timelessness (the experience of eternity in space).

Early on in his poetic career and before defining the evening as a 'zone de transition' in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), Réda already identified events occurring in the evening as different 'zones du soir' in *Cendres chaudes* (1955). At the time, these zones corresponded to moments within the poet's exploration of urban space during which he recorded the changes incurred by the landscape. These changes could be perceived as temporal, like the certainty that the evening is an ephemeral event in the day, or physical, like the observable transition of the day turning into night. Both contributed to the progressive metamorphosis of the city witnessed by the wandering

poet.

In the poem entitled 'Zones du soir', different elements of the urban landscape are exposed and seen through an emotional lens of dejection. Réda was still at this time concerned with existential anxieties as well as with developing a sense of belonging in the city.[73] Therefore the language used in this collection is often intensely poignant, as when he describes the sunset as a self-destructive act performed by the light of day after it has been entrapped by the evening: 'la lumière prise au piège / se débat follement se suicide se rouille' (Réda 1955: 19). Réda's personification of the light of day leads him to associate suicidal qualities to the sunset, and the images of blood or rust to the transitioning colours of the landscape from blue to red. This example shows that Réda's initial treatment of the evening in his poetry is fraught with an intense, emotional and even dramatic language.

Furthermore, throughout the four stanzas of the poem, Réda describes in turn '[l]'herbe à vif du talus [qui] se roule dans son [la lumière] sang', 'les buissons où l'angoisse s'entasse', '[l]a palissade écartelée dans les cryptes de la couleur', 'les rossignols du couchant...[qui] / se taisent' and 'la lune [qui] arrive un peu trop tard' (Réda 1955: 19). These different elements of the changing landscape correspond to either individual 'zones du soir' or alternatively to one comprehensive 'zone du soir'. They each reveal an apparent consequence of the sunset, but at the same time, together they portray a picture of the urban landscape that conveys a conflict between

[73] Réda's early reactions to the city are explained further in Chapter 2.I.2. Réda in Paris: Spontaneous Poetic Discovery, p. 123.

life/brightness and death/darkness, as the colours are affected by the sunset: the grass turns an incandescent violet, the shrubs shine in the rising darkness like the shine emitted by a *cor anglais*, the palisades adopt a cryptic colour and the nightingale is seen perched against 'les braises mortes' of the evening sky. The moon, which also appears in the eleventh-hour in Borges's exploration of Buenos Aires in the evening ('la luna nueva / es una vocecita en el cielo' ('Atardeceres' in Borges 1993[1923]),[74] also finally emerges late in the scene. Though Réda's poem describes a scene dominated by the theme of death and extinction, Réda still has in common with Borges here not only the description of the transitioning urban landscape, but also the emotive language attached to it. This is because, like Borges, Réda experiences the city through what Michael Sheringham describes as 'the prism of his mind, moods and words' (Sheringham 1996: 104).

Likely unknowingly, Sheringham uses the same image of the prism that Borges uses to describe his creative process in his essay 'Anatomía de mi "Ultra"'.[75] Sheringham and Borges coincide in the idea that adopting a prismatic experience of the city allows Borges and Réda to refract their own emotions and thoughts onto the urban landscape, thus resulting in a poetic language that blends together objective observation of the city and subjective experience. In the examples above from *Cendres chaudes*, the emotional tone is particularly evident in the expression 'l'angoisse s'entasse' (Réda 1955: 19) because it suggests that the anxiety refracted onto the vegetation in question is in fact a reflection of the poet's own anxiety. The difference,

[74] See above, Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 165.
[75] See above, Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 160.

however, between Borges and Réda in this case, is that whereas Borges pursued the materialisation of 'la sensación en sí' (Borges 1997[1921]: 95), Réda is instead more interested in the subconscious manifestations of the city itself. As the poem from 'A propos d'une ferveur' cited in the epigraph suggests, the role of the mind of the poet ('dans mes rêves surtout' and 'dans un demi-soleil') is to refract, through sense experience, the emotions that allow the city to expose its own inner workings.

In order to achieve this, Réda embraces the evening as a fleeting event that produces in him a 'saisissement bref' (Réda 1993[1977]: 24). During this brief and engrossing shock, where the poet witnesses the changing colours of the landscape, he falls into a sort of trance, a 'suspens fugitif' (Réda 1997: 31), where he loses his own sense of self in favour of the fleeting instant:

> Tel est mon rôle, aussi modeste que celui de la rivière, dans l'accomplissement de ce moment qui ne durera pas, qui n'est ni du présent puisque je passe ni du passé parce que je le vis — et que si bonne soit-elle un jour j'en aurai perdu la mémoire. Je ne suis là que pour recueillir, et ensuite disparaître au profit de cette lumière qui, elle, fait que rien ne peut cesser de ce qu'elle touche un seul instant. (Réda 1997: 43-44)

Réda is aware of the ephemeral quality of the evening, and so he portrays himself as an instrument of this transience, bearing witness to the scene, allowing the city's own consciousness to emerge and facilitating a poetic image of the urban landscape that could endure in his memory for as long as he has the experience or indeed in his poetic text.

An example of the way Réda uses the evening as a opportunity to retain a lasting impression of the city can be seen in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), during one of Réda's visits to what appears to be a depot or recycling station in the Rue de Belleville, some-

where between the 19th and 20th *arrondissements* of Paris. Réda describes different areas within this market-like space where literal ruins of the city appear to be accumulated: 'châssis de fenêtre', 'briques de dallage', 'pelleteuses', even 'cartes postales' and 'cahiers de géographie' (Réda 1993[1977]): 18-19). Réda realises that it is getting dark and that 'la nuit vient' (Réda 1993[1977]: 19). But he does not want to move on from this scene because there is something provincial about the way that it gathers a small community. To him, it looks like a 'naufrage': 'Du reste, on ne distinguera plus rien de ce naufrage dans cinq minutes. Le rose exténué du ciel résiste sur les toits de zinc, mais déjà les cafés ont éteint autour des petites places, et les rues s'engloutissent parmi les remous de leurs acacias' (Réda 1993[1977]: 19). The evening here is comparable to the material ruins of Paris: as the day transitions into night the landscape adopts the same tiresome character as the second-hand market goods. Réda wishes he could rescue these goods just as much as he would like to prevent the night from setting in. He would like to save this provincial moment from the inevitable night because once the night has set in, this moment amassing these objects in this specific way, will be forever lost: 'On voudrait tout sauver, mais ce ne serait que provisoire au fond de nos caves, et encore plus navrant' (Réda 1993[1977]: 19). Réda is aware of the inevitable transience not only of the evening as such, but also of the urban scene that is slowly transforming in front of his eyes. As soon as the night sets in, the market will close down and never again will Réda be witness to the same exact event. This realisation infuses the present with purpose: the desire to create a lasting image of the scene, but also to experience the feeling of timelessness:

> En premier lieu, Réda donne à l'instant « qui passe » un goût d'éternité,

> une immortalité qui semble échapper à la définition même du mot instant et plus encore à son principe changeant et transitoire; en second lieu, il donne à l'instant la faculté du souvenir faisant ainsi de chaque passage une occasion de revivre le passé et de garder intacte la mémoire du lieu. (DalMolin 2001: 190-91)

In her essay 'Les instants parisiens de Jacques Réda', Eliane DalMolin defines a 'Parisian instant' as a captured moment of Réda's urban Parisian landscape. In this sense for example, the scene of a sunset could be interpreted as an instant; however, more generally, DalMolin contends that Réda's books are collections of snapshots of Parisian life. How then could she argue that a moment that is defined by its inscription in the present and its transience could exude a 'goût d'éternité'; and what is more, could also have the capacity to invoke the past whilst preserving it own memory of place? The analysis of Borges's treatment of the evening in the previous section might offer up some clues. I suggested previously that Borges incorporates into his poetic image of Buenos Aires the past of the city whilst also experiencing the possibility of a sense of timelessness, which was achieved by allowing his emotions to connect with the perceived moment. This is because emotions — which are not bound by time or space — have the capacity to join experiences together. Similarly, in Réda's case, it is the underlying sentiment that he does not want the moment to end that infuses his description with the sense of an impossible but conceivable eternity. In the example from *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977) in particular, the 'goût d'éternité' of the market scene persists because Réda refuses to end his narrative at the point when the night has set in. Instead, he ends the piece with 'Le rose exténué du ciel' resisting surrendering to the night 'sur les toits de zinc' (Réda 1993[1977]:

19). Since the narrative is suspended before night falls, the scene preserves a sense of timelessness.

Réda's depiction of the evening also provides an opportunity to encounter human relationships and transactions that would not otherwise be noticeable during the busy hours of the day. In the first scene of 'L'activité du soir' in *La Liberté des rues* (1997), Réda is walking from Pigalle 'direction nord-sud [quand] il commence à faire sombre' (Réda 1997: 15). He soon notices that the 'activité du soir' — with prostitutes in street corners — is beginning to unfold. However, he prefers not to dwell in that scene and instead focuses on 'une scène, bien différente' between 'une dame âgée tout en beige et l'électricien gris' (Réda 1997: 15). The two characters, involved in some kind of parallel commercial transaction — different to that of the prostitutes — are illuminated by 'une lumière pauvre' that contrasts with the neon lights of the adult establishments. For Réda then, a scene that could embody the decadence of urban life is turned instead into a different kind of intimate exchange: 'Mais l'instant continue avec douceur parmi les petites fournitures en cuivre, en bakélite, une à une sorties d'un carton, et où jamais on ne trouve exactement ce qu'on cherche' (Réda 1997: 15). Réda's physical distance from the scene leaves him with only a visual response that is gentle and relatable. He cannot hear the conversation between the lady and the electrician and therefore is left to interpret the exchange through the emotions that the moment instills in him. 'Que se disent-ils? Ça n'a pas d'importance. On les sent paisibles, protégés. [...] Car ils protègent aussi: quelque chose qu'à son tour, en passant, on préserve dans leur image, dans la ville qui en cinq minutes a plongé

sous la nuit'. In this instant, against the backdrop of a city that will soon turn to night and its nocturnal activities, Réda feels that the evening's event leaves him with a lasting image of authentic human interaction and connection.

The evening also offers Réda the possibility of seeing the city from a different perspective. In another scene from *La Liberté des rues* (1997) that depicts Réda's 'retour' to the Rue du Retrait, he notices that one of the buildings that was there in the morning has been demolished during the day, leaving 'un trou' in its place. This unexpected change in the urban landscape becomes an opportunity for Réda to discover the buildings that remain on the other side of the empty lot, to describe its typical Parisian façades and sculptural motifs. This evening event allows Réda to see a familiar area in a completely new way: 'Je ne découvrais donc pas une ville vraiment différente, mais, projetée hors de son cadre habituel (c'est-à-dire la rue des Pyrénées que j'arpente au moins quatre fois par jour), là même sous un éclaboussement inattendu de lumière, devant une étendue pour elle saisissante de nouveauté' (Réda 1997: 32-33). Paris' quick transformative ability continuously projects new sides of itself to the wandering poet. The city is a constant source of discovery for the poet, though he never gets a sense of being able to apprehend it completely. 'Le soir' is thus a resource to explore the possibility of apprehending the city, only to realise it through isolated instants.

Lastly, Réda uses the evening to explore the soundscape of the city. As the evening settles and slowly turns into night, the streets of Paris become progressively devoid of people: the atmosphere of the streets is transfigured and the poet settles into a

state of melancholy: 'l'inusable mélancolie des rues transfigurées par la lumière du soir' (Réda 1988: 37). As the shape of things in the city becomes more indistinct, Réda appears to pay more attention to the sounds surrounding the urban space. Three different categories of soundscape permeate Réda's city: the sounds that have a recognisable source, the sounds that do not have a recognisable source, and silence as the absence of sound.

The first category of sound appears in *La Liberté des rues* (1997), in the section Réda dedicates exclusively to 'l'activité du soir'. In Réda's narrative, sound has an intense transformative quality. Watching and listening from the street to a young man playing the saxophone in an establishment, Réda notices how the music emanating from the instrument inundates the city streets. The scene creates a space where the observer is enticed by the music and taken in by it. Suddenly he realises that he is engrossed by it, he has lost his awareness of the world around him and all his attention is on the music being played. He realises then the enticing and transformative power of music: 'Mais il est ébloui par ces durs organes labyrinthiques, où le souffle humain peut se transformer en sons, et de sons en émotions sur lesquelles les mots n'ont pas de prise' (Réda 1997: 17). Music is a language in its own right; it can therefore incite emotion and render the need for words secondary.

Borges in fact has a similar view on the power of music, expressed in some of his poems from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). It appears in 'Música patria', personified as a constant that endures through time and the evolution of history. At the end of the poem, the 'guitarra criolla... ha logrado ahondar con tal virtud en nuestra

alma / que ...el caminante / siente como si le palparan el corazón con la mano' (Borges 1993[1923]). Typical of Borges's poetry of this time, his language expresses the desire to create a profound and intimate bond between himself ('alma') and the *criollo* ('guitarra criolla'). The bond established in 'Música patria' is not only emotional but also tangible ('como si le palparan el corazón con la mano'), which in turn enhances the sense of intimacy. In another poem, 'La guitarra', the sounds of the guitar playing overwhelms the scene, just as in Réda's poem — so much so that when the poet-narrator enters 'un patiecito de la calle Sarandí', all he can sense is the music. Contrary to Réda, Borges is not standing amidst the wide streets of the city — he is in an open-air but enclosed *patio* or courtyard, typical in Buenos-Airian households. Here, once the strings of the guitar intensify their sound — the image is akin to someone dishevelling their hair ('se desmelenó') — the poet-narrator's sight is stimulated and begins to visualise what is not necessarily in his purview, but that he begins to imagine:

> Vi muchas brazadas de cielo
> sobre un manojito de pasto.
> Vi una loma que arrinconan
> quietas distancias
> mientras leguas y leguas
> caen desde lo alto.
> Vi el campo donde cabe
> Dios sin haber de inclinarse,
> vi el único lugar de la tierra
> donde puede caminar Dios a sus anchas.
> Vi la pampa cansada
> que antes horrorizaron los malones
> y hoy apaciguan en quietud maciza las parvas. (Borges 1993[1923])

In this poem, Borges blends together the three levels of relationship with the city

explored earlier in this chapter: his desire to establish an emotional connection with the city, his construction of a poetic city of provincial undertones and his quest to elevate urban reality to a spiritual level. This poem is visionary: it shows Borges's image of the city beyond the simulacrum of the modern city. Music is shown up as a tool for the poet to expand his imagination without the need for words (the words come later with the poem). The anaphoric construction of the passage above — which appears elsewhere in Borges's poetry[76] — also reveals that within the possibilities of music, the poet finds himself able to associate and experience the tangible and the intangible: 'pasto' and 'cielo', 'quietas distancias' and 'leguas y leguas', God and himself. This moment, though apparently spatially infinite because it allows the poet to 'De un tirón vi todo eso', also exposes its temporal momentariness:

> Hasta que en brusco cataclismo
> se allanó la guitarra encabritada
> y estrujóme el silencio
> y hurañamente tornó el vivir a estancarse. (Borges 1993[1923])

As soon as the music from the guitar stops, Borges's imaginary voyage ends, and so does the conceivable yet impossible transcendence symbolised by the phrase 'vi el único lugar de la tierra / donde puede Dios caminar a sus anchas'. This example from 'La guitarra' confirms Réda's interpretation of Borges's relationship with space and time in Buenos Aires: a moment of transition, such as the sound of a guitar,

[76] 'La guitarra' was the first of many poems written in the 1920s where Borges used the repetitive anaphoric construction to emphasise different aspects of his urban experience. These poems are mostly found in *Luna de enfrente* (1925), though some also appear in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929): in *Fervor de Buenos* (1923) 'Final de año'; in *Luna de enfrente* (1925), 'Al horizonte de un suburbio', 'Los llanos', 'Antelación de amor', 'Dualidá de una despedida', 'Singladura', 'La promisión de alta mar', 'Casi Juicio Final', 'Patrias', 'Casas como ángeles' and 'Versos de catorce'; and in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), 'Arrabal en que pesa el campo' and 'Elegía de los portones'.

facilitates the poet's flight of imagination; however, the finiteness of the moment, like the evening's, returns the poet to ordinary living. This example also confirms that Borges and Réda manifest similar reactions to transitional moments within their experience of Buenos Aires and Paris.

The second kind of sound Réda is sensitive to during his evening walks is the sound that — as in 'La guitarra' — does not appear to have a recognizable source. In a passage from *La Liberté des rues* (1997), Réda traverses the area of the Champ-de-Mars as the day turns into night. The narrative is strung along by rumble or distant sound, the source of which the poet is not able to discern, but that is cadenced 'grâce à un faible tintement'. The sound appears to come from a distance, just as Borges imagines the guitar playing from the far away and provincial *pampas*. This rumble 'brouille l'espace et les distances' rendering the atmosphere almost diluted like a watercolour painting. The time of day exacerbates the scene:

> Et la nuit tombe, depuis quelques minutes on ne peut plus faire semblant de l'ignorer. On a passé la frontière incertaine où la lumière, si longtemps hésitante, change décidément de camp et ne luttera plus. D'un coup le Champ-de-Mars s'est vidé comme sous une menace. Passent encore des ombres qui vont se fondre entre les bosquets, et paraissent en humaniser les formes qui se mettent en marche. (Réda 1997: 11)

Réda's search to identify the source of the rumble, 'Où est-ce?', coincides with the day turning into night and thus the city becoming quieter and devoid of people: 'On est entré dans la paisible intimité des rues étroites et sombres' (Réda 1997: 11-12). Sound, but also the absence of sound, allows Réda to create an atmosphere of intimacy with the surrounding space. The description is akin to the wide image capture of a camera narrowing down to focus on a specific angle in the shot. The scene sub-

sequently described by the poet confirms this sense of intimacy: a domestic event in the basement of a building where the silhouette of a person is seen manipulating 'avec une tranquille application des ustensiles' (Réda 1997: 12). The poet is transported from Le Champ-de-Mars, a large space typically associated with the dynamic and heavy flux of people, to a quiet domestic scene lit over by a single 'clarté [qui] se répand sur le trottoir humide' and the drowning sound of the deadening city.

The slow deadening of the noise in the city leads into the third and final category of sound present in Réda's 'activité du soir'. This scene takes place in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977). Réda is walking unhurriedly on the grass, alongside a boulevard that has two busy avenues with cars on either side of it. Réda tunes out 'ce vacarme épouvantable' and attempts to tune into the implicit silence found in other things of the city: 'car ma tête un soir s'est ouverte au silence de Paris, silence du ciel, silence du gris, silence de la longue avenue d'herbe sous les branches basses qui se rejoignent, entre le fleuve silencieux et cette illusion de moteurs' (Réda 1993: 56). In this space, imagined by Réda through silence and the growing tranquillity of the evening, he creates a transitory, in-between 'temple où règne l'extrême simplicité du dieu' (Réda 1993[1977]: 56). Echoing Borges's own reference to God in 'La guitarra' and to the religious solemnity often experienced in silence,[77] the idea is that a particular soundscape can connect the poet with a moment in space and time that conveys a sense of sacredness. Reading Réda's interpretation of the evening through the lens of Borges's quest for an 'ultra-realidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 52) suggests

[77] See above, Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 164.

that Réda too is interested in exploring the spiritual within the archaeology of the ordinary that permeates his works.

II Places in the City

The places — or 'physical locales' — in Borges's and Réda's personal maps of Buenos Aires and Paris share similar characteristics: they are manmade structures; they are for the most part — though not exclusively — public; they are located both in central and peripheral areas of the city; and most importantly, I believe they can be interpreted as 'zones de transition' in the same way that Réda understands the evening. This is because, in my view, the role attributed to these places echoes Foucault's definition of heterotopias:[78] the courtyard, the garden, the square and the cemetery in the Argentine capital poeticised by Borges; the squares, parks, gardens and vacant lots of Réda's Paris are by definition places that are visited or passed through by the poets. They are places that function as physical breathing space in the city, where the poets can *be* rather than *do*. By emphasising the act of *being* in space, both authors actively separate themselves from the pressures of *doing* imposed by the dynamics of the modern city. Instead, the places frequented by Borges and Réda are to be observed and contemplated, as they take the poets away from the proverbial centre of the city.

In their trajectories to and from these places, I believe that Borges and Réda establish themselves as what I would label 'mobile centres'. This term suggests that, in their poems, Borges and Réda show their continuous circulation around their respective cities; but more than that, it affirms that the resulting poetic image of Buenos Aires

[78] For a definition of the term 'heterotopia', see 'Critical Framework on Borges, Réda and their Cities' in the general Introduction, p. 39.

and Paris is so centred on their individual experiences that the definition of certain places as either central or peripheral becomes relative to the poets' experience. For example, Réda visits the Jardin du Luxembourg, located in the 6$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement*, one of the districts known for its concentration of some of the most famous Parisian monuments, such as the Abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and educational institutions such as L'Académie Française (Réda 1986: 81-86). Given that this is one of the historic and intellectual hubs of Paris, it is possible to admit that this *arrondissement* is considered, conceptually, as a central area of Paris. However, as I will describe in my analysis below, the experience Réda has there is rather intimate and distinct from what would otherwise be expected from an area crowded with visitors and rooted in history and tradition. During his visit to the Jardin du Luxembourg, the garden emerges instead as a natural space of respite where the poet finds certain provincial characteristics. Through his experience, Réda therefore challenges the conceptual idea of the Jardin du Luxembourg as a central landmark of Paris; instead he admits the possibility that he is at the centre of his interaction with the space, and that as a result, this conventionally central place can also offer up experiences that are 'other', heterotopic, marginal in nature and relative to the poet's experience. This example explains the dynamics at play, not only in Réda's interaction with certain places of Paris, but also Borges's reaction to landmarks in Buenos Aires. I would argue that Borges and Réda do not choose places in Buenos Aires and Paris based on their location within their cities. Instead, they choose places based on their potential to offer alternative and provincial experiences within the modern city.

However, it is what Borges and Réda hope to accomplish in these places that ultimately separates their approaches to space. Borges, on the one hand, departs from the intimate and yet conflicted experience of private space.[79] The 'patio' or courtyard and the 'jardín de casa' or home garden, are private areas located inside the family home. From these places, as a young child, Borges used to contemplate the city outside and wished that he could be out on the streets, exploring Buenos Aires. As a result, private space became the window through which Borges observed public space before he was ever allowed to go outside. When Borges finally took to the streets of Buenos Aires as a young adult, looking to establish the intimacy he could not feel at home, it was always with a sense of the collective in mind, with a larger expectation of what Buenos Aires could be. Réda, on the other hand, appears to take on Paris, not from the narrow perspective of the private space, but rather — as the first lines of the poem in 'A propos d'une ferveur' remind us[80] — from the expansive view of the immeasurable collective space that constitutes the city. Still, as the analysis below will show, and the previous study of the city's atmospheres demonstrated, his objective is to find, within the experience of impassive public space, private urban scenes that inspire familiarity and connection.

Lastly, whether it be in order to gain a larger sense of collective experience, or to experience the more private moments of urban life, both of these authors meet with a feeling of expansion when they visit the places in question: in Borges's case, this

[79] For a review of Borges's tormented relationship with his family at the beginning of the 1920s and of how this influenced his connection to the family home, see Chapter 2.I.1. Borges in Buenos Aires: Scaffolds of a Poetic Project, p. 117.

[80] See the epigraph of Chapter 2, p. 106 or Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur'(1986), p. 88.

will be revealed in the way he sees the sky reflected in the architecture of the city or when he looks out into the horizon; whereas in Réda's case, it is because he feels an inexplicable and unidentifiable 'quelque chose' that he keeps returning to certain places in Paris (Réda 1987: 92).

II.1 From Private to Public Places in Borges's Buenos Aires

Two poems from the 1920s — 'Cercanías' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and 'Patrias' in *Luna de enfrente* (1925) — list some of the places that form Borges's personal map of Buenos Aires. Borges defines these places — 'los patios', 'las alcobas profundas', 'la casa baja', 'los baldíos' and 'la plaza' — as 'los sitios / donde se desparrama mi ternura / y el corazón está consigo mismo' ('Cercanías' in Borges 1993[1923]). In other words, they are places where Borges felt that he could pour forth his emotions, where he felt in touch with his heart. The titles of the poems are also noteworthy. 'Cercanías', for example, has a dual meaning: on the one hand, it is synonymous in English with the word 'outskirts', which confirms Borges's awareness of a sense of place and the places' possible geographical location in relation to the poet. On the other hand, the prefix 'cerca' — 'close to' — evokes the idea that Borges felt emotionally close to these places. The title of Borges's poem therefore creates the dual impression of geographic distance as well as emotional proximity. By extension, in the second poem, Borges associates these places with 'patrias'. In doing

so, he implies that each and every one of them is a symbol — just like the street[81] — of his own personal *patria*, which in turn suggests that Borges wants to establish a shared identity between himself and his city. Thus, the picture that begins to form of Borges's personal map of Buenos Aires is one where the city's private and public places combine the poet's emotional reality and his ambitions for his nation.

The Private Places: 'patio' and 'jardín'

Soon after Borges's birth, his parents moved the family from their house in the centre of old Buenos Aires to the outlying *barrio* of Palermo, to be closer to Borges's paternal grandmother who lived on Calle Serrano. Her house was adjacent to the Borges's garden. Some of Borges's most vivid and recurring memories were created in this house and they often appear in his poems and stories throughout his life (Williamson 2004: 32-33). He describes the house in 'An Autobiographical Essay':

> We must have moved out to the suburb of Palermo quite soon, because there I have my first memories of another house with two patios, a garden with a tall windmill pump, and on the other side of the garden an empty lot. Palermo at that time — the Palermo where we lived, Serrano and Guatemala — was on the shabby northern outskirts of town, and many people, ashamed of saying they lived there, spoke in a dim way of living on the Northside. We lived in one of the few two-story homes on our street; the rest of the neighbourhood was made up of low houses and vacant lots. ('An Autobiographical Essay' in Borges 1973: 203-204)

Borges's family owned one of the more well-off properties of the neighbourhood, which aside from having two levels, also had two *patios* and a garden. These enclosed places

[81] Borges's treatment of the street was analysed in detail in Chapter 2.II.1. Nation and Connection: The Streets of Borges's Buenos Aires, p. 132.

would have had visual access to the street, to the neighbourhood of Palermo and to the sky from which Borges could observe the life of the *barrio* unfold from the inside.

From the garden in particular, Borges claimed that he and his sister Norah were able to witness from a very young age the events happening on their street. Because of the shabby conditions of the neighbourhood outlined above, their mother was wary of the marginal *barrio* of Palermo, and so the young children were not allowed to venture much outside the home: 'Yo creí, durante años, haberme criado en un suburbio de Buenos Aires [...]. Lo cierto es que me crié en un jardin, detrás de una verja con lanzas' ('Prólogo' in *Evaristo Carriego* [1930] in Borges 2010a: 109). The garden in Borges's home was located behind some fencing. The windows of the house also had bars. In the poem 'Cercanías' from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges mentions how from them he could look out into the street: 'Las ventanas con reja / desde la cual la calle / vuélvese familiar como una lámpara' ('Cercanías' in Borges 1993[1923]). These lines express that when Borges looked out the window, the street immediately became recognisable to him. The simile of the 'lámpara' also conveys a sense of warmth that confirms this sense of familiarity, paradoxically attributed to the outside and not to the home. In a more literal sense, however, I would contend that the subject of the poem is simply described as looking out into a lit street. This perspective creates an interesting early experience of Buenos Aires, one that was fuelled by Borges's ultimate desire to escape childhood seclusion and be outside walking the streets of the city.

In the poem from *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929) entitled 'Fluencia natural del

recuerdo', Borges describes with nostalgia his home garden, its windmill and trees, the birds that flew in the vicinity and even the shade under a black grape tree:

> Recuerdo mío del jardín de casa:
> vida benigna de las plantas,
> vida cortés de misteriosa
> y lisonjeada por los hombres.
>
> Palmera la más alta de aquel cielo
> y conventillo de gorriones;
> parra firmamental de uva negra,
> los días del verano dormían en tu sombra.
>
> Molino colorado:
> remota rueda laboriosa en el viento,
> honor de nuestra casa, pues a las otras
> iba el río bajo la campanita del aguatero. (Borges 1929: 19-20)

Beyond these images of the inside of the house and the garden, however, the poem does more than just allude to Borges's emotions regarding the streets of the city and the *barrio* of Palermo. Instead, it describes the life of the *barrio* through the barred windows:

> Jardín, frente a tu virtud retumbaron
> los heroicos carreros criollos
> y también el carnaval charro
> con el ranchito y el candombe y el susto de agua.
>
> El almacén, hermano del malevo,
> dominaba la esquina:
> pero tenías cañaverales para hacer lanzas
> y gorriones para la oración. (Borges 1929: 20)

Adjacent to the rundown and working-class streets of Palermo, the 'jardín' appears in Borges's poem as a virtuous and almost Eden-like place. The vegetation of the garden is set against old *criollo* carriages, the noise from the local festivities ('carnaval') and

the music from the immigrant African community ('candombe'), and the 'almacén' where the delinquents and suburban working-classes used to hang out. Borges portrays the garden as a haven that protects him from the outside by suggesting that the 'cañaverales' could be turned into spears and that the 'gorriones' flying over the garden could inspire a saving prayer. The point of view in this poem contradicts Borges's earlier expressed desire to exalt the neighbourhood and its streets from inside the home. However, as the title suggests, 'Fluencia natural del recuerdo' is built upon a flow of memories that rush to Borges's mind, memories from his childhood before his entire family moved to Europe and away from Palermo for ever. This shows that for the young Borges, the garden was at times an oppressive place, and at other times and place of refuge:

> Jardín, yo depondré mi oración
> para seguir siempre acordándome:
> voluntad buena de dar sombra
> fueron tus árboles. (Borges 1929: 21)

The lines above confirm Borges's intention to remember the 'jardín de casa', to create lasting memories of the place where he grew up 'para seguir siempre acordándome'. Memories captured in Borges's poems ensure that the city also endures over time.

The other half-open space in Borges's house is the *patio*. Patios, in the architecture of Buenos Aires, are open-air colonial courtyards (Benedet 2012: 7). When he was a child, from the *patios* of his house in Palermo, Borges could likely not see the street but he could certainly gaze at the sky. In doing this, he established not only what could be described as a horizontal view of the elements of the home, but also a vertical view of the remaining surrounding space as he looked out to the sky. It is for this

reason that in *Luna de enfrente* (1925) Borges refers to the *patio* as a 'cántaro': a 'cántaro', or jug, is a concave recipient where substances can be poured in and out: 'ciudá de patios ahondados como cántaros' ('Versos de catorce' in Borges 1925b: 41). This simile highlights Borges's distinction between the inside and the outside of the home. It also suggests the flow of visual as well as physical movement that occurs from the street, into the house and vice versa. Lastly it implies a third possibility: the 'substance' poured into the *patio* is the sky. In the poem 'Un patio' dedicated exclusively to this area of the family home, Borges suggests that the sky is 'channelled' into the *patio*: 'patio, cielo encauzado' ('Un patio' in Borges: 1993[1923]). In doing so, he alludes to this vertical perspective of space and creates reciprocity between the inside and the outside of the house: as he looks towards the sky from the *patio*, the sky appears to spill into the home: 'El patio es el declive / por el cual se derrama el cielo en la casa' ('Un patio' in Borges: 1993[1923]). Furthermore, in keeping with some of the other religious images found in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), in order to enhance the feeling of intimacy in his poems, Borges also describes the *patio* as a window through which God can look in and observe the souls of the people living in the house: 'El patio es la ventana / por donde Dios mira las almas' ('Un patio' in Borges: 1993[1923]). In my view, these examples demonstrate Borges's longing for the outside because his experience of the inside of the home in the *patio* is nostalgic and turned to the outside.

However, more than an expression of his longing to experience Buenos Aires, Borges's poeticization of the *patio* is also the manifestation of his desire — as for the

garden — to immortalise the family home where he grew up. In 'Patrias', the poem where he most directly describes the places that form his personal map of Buenos Aires, Borges declares: 'Quiero la casa grande, / La orillada de un patio / Con sus leguas de cielo y su jeme de pampa' (Borges 1925b: 33). The use of the verb 'querer' directly correlates with desire and affection. The word 'orillada' in Argentine Spanish evokes proximity. In these lines, Borges therefore articulates his lingering fondness for the house where he grew up despite also wanting to explore the city. By extension, he also establishes his desire to immortalise the colonial architecture of the houses that preceded the modernisation of Buenos Aires.

Between Private and Public: Other Gardens of Buenos Aires

In *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges wrote about two other gardens distinct from the private 'jardín de casa' analysed in the section above. One of these is the Botanical Garden of Buenos Aires located in Palermo. This garden was designed by the French-born Argentine architect and landscapist Carlos Thays, and inaugurated in 1898. The other garden poeticised in Borges's first collection was a garden he visited as a young man during a family trip to the southern province of Chubut, between the Andes and the Atlantic. Both of these gardens present characteristics that identify them as public spaces. On the one hand, though the Botanical Garden is located within an enclosed area between Avenida Santa Fe, Las Heras and Calle de la República Árabe Siria, as a national site, it allows people free access. The garden in Chubut, on the other hand, is located in an open and accessible 'declive' or slope

and is surrounded by dry desert and extensive space. The abundant greenery of the garden ('una selva de hojas') makes it stand out in relation to the wilderness that is around. Within Borges's early representation of Buenos Aires, these two gardens emerge as places where the wandering poet can suspend his walking activity and search for an alternative experience to the dynamics of modern Buenos Aires.

More specifically, the garden in Chubut is described in the poem entitled 'Jardín' (Borges 1993[1923]). It is presented as an area of respite within an otherwise overwhelming, dense and unkempt provincial landscape: 'Zanjones, / sierras ásperas, / médanos' (Borges 1993[1923]). Though this garden is not in Buenos Aires, it is still important to analyse it here, because it conveys the sentiment that Borges ascribes to the provincial and is therefore an example of what he also looks for in Buenos Aires. Borges depicts this garden as an oasis of light that contrasts with the distant hills that already 'apresuran la noche con su sombra': 'Todo el jardín es una luz apacible / que ilumina la tarde' (Borges 1993[1923]). The garden conjures a placid atmosphere that lingers into the late afternoon. It reminds Borges of the garden where he grew up in Palermo: 'y es también una canción conocida' (Borges 1993[1923]). The adjective 'conocida' provides the clue that links the remote garden of Chubut to Borges's garden in Palermo: one has triggered the memory of the other. The portrayal of the garden as a 'canción' is furthermore a reference to the intuitive connection Borges cultivates in this garden, because music is known to activate the sensorial fibres of a person's being.[82] The final couplet of the poem suggests that Borges considers this garden as

[82] As the previous discussion in 'Paris in the Evening: Réda's 'activité du soir' (Chapter 3.I.2) suggests, the relationship between sound and city is a very interesting one. Though there is not

a recess within the large expanse that surrounds it: 'El jardincito es un día de fiesta / en la eternidad de la tierra' (Borges 1993[1923]). '[D]ía de fiesta in Spanish means 'day off' or 'holiday'. Whilst the use of the diminutive 'jardincito' affirms Borges's affectionate tone towards the place, the metaphor of the holiday evokes celebration and leisure. This is not dissimilar to the expression 'una fiesta escondida' used by Borges in 'Motivos del espacio y del tiempo (1916-1919)': 'habrá en la noche como una fiesta escondida entre las / viejas casas y mi alma' (Borges 1997[1920]: 41).[83] In this earlier example, Borges conveyed the idea of celebration as well; however, a celebration that was indeed more private, between the old houses of Buenos Aires and his soul. Still, seeing the example from 'Jardín' against the example from 'Motivos' suggests that in Chubut too Borges encountered some of the same joy and tranquillity that he sought in Buenos Aires.

In 'Jardín botánico', Borges explores further his connection to place, particularly in the way that his sense of self is projected onto the space. The verb 'buscar', to 'look for', is of utmost importance in the poem because it is through its meaning of exploration that Borges conveys his search to understand his own sense of self in this botanical garden. On this particular day, the weather reigning over the garden is unruly. This creates an introspective atmosphere and a tone in the poem that is fraught with questions about the self. The poet projects his own feelings of loneliness

enough scope in this thesis to analyse this relationship further, future work on Borges's and Réda's poeticization of their respective cities could include an extensive study of representations of sound in their respective poetry.

[83] For an analysis of this poem, see Chapter 2.I.1. Borges in Buenos Aires: Scaffolds of a Poetic Project, p. 109.

and existential angst onto the landscape. More specifically, he relates his footing within the garden to that of the trees that populate it: 'En supremo aislamiento / cada árbol está conmovedoramente perdido / y son sus vidas tan incomunicadas y hurañas' ('Jardín botánico' in Borges 1993[1923]):

> Nosotros mientras tanto
> a la vera de su primordial existencia,
> también oscuramente nos buscamos [...]:
> burdo secreto a voces
> que con triste congoja nos arrastra
> y nos socava el pecho
> con la grave eficacia de una pena. (Borges 1993[1923])

During his visit to the botanical garden, Borges anthropomorphises the trees and imagines that they are people living in seclusion, without possible communication and in isolation. He uses this personification projected onto this inanimate space as a way to relate to human experience: observing the basic existence of the trees in turn makes Borges think about his own *raison d'être*: 'también oscuramente nos buscamos'. Borges describes this quest to gain a deeper ontological understanding as a constant curiosity though its exploration created spiritual and physical angst.

The Public Places: 'plaza' and 'cementerio'

The 'plaza' and the 'cementerio' are two distinct public places within the city's architecture. Still, they have in common the fact that they can be viewed as heterotopias. Plazas, in urban planning, are considered open-air centres for exchange and socialisation that embellish the city with their carefully planned vegetation and designated sitting areas. In the case of the Plaza San Martín, poeticised by Borges in *Fervor*

de Buenos Aires (1923) in a poem of the same name, the plaza is described as a serene space where the poet can pause in the early evening to get away from the fast pace of the streets: 'En busca de la tarde / fui apurando las calles [...] / la tarde toda se había remansado en la plaza / serena [...]' ('La Plaza San Martín' in Borges 1993[1923]). It is as a breathing space within the chaos of the modern city that the plaza is considered as a heterotopia. The cemetery, on the other hand, is the designated resting place for the city's dead. According to Foucault, this kind of place constitutes a heterotopia because it admits, in its premises, the coexistence of life and death (Foucault 1984: paragraphs 19, 21 and 23 of 28).

The 'plaza' and the 'cementerio' provide opposing possible perspectives of the city. Indeed, according to Borges, there are two ways of viewing the city: either along the vertical or the horizontal lines of buildings. Horizontal lines correspond to an eye-level perspective, whereas vertical lines require that the eye follows the lineation of tall building upwards towards the sky. In 'Buenos Aires', Borges argues that in his city horizontal lines are more prominent than vertical ones because of the low rise of the city:

> Aunque a veces nos humille algún rascacielos, la visión total de Buenos Aires no es whitmaniana. Las líneas horizontales vencen las verticales. Las perspectivas — de casitas de un piso alineadas y confrontándose a lo largo de las leguas de asfalto y piedras — son demasiado fáciles para no parecer inverosímiles. En cada encrucijada se adivinan cuatro correctos horizontes. Horizontes que intentan distraídamente escalar mis ojos de miope. Horizontes con esa lejanía exasperante que tienen las mangas de los gabanes, a veces... (Borges 1997[1921]: 103)

Borges's quote suggests that as far as capital cities go, Buenos Aires, at least until the 1920s, was still a relatively low city with very few 'rascacielos'. When out on the

streets, the succession of one-storey buildings allowed the wandering poet to see far ahead into the horizon. For this reason, particularly when Borges is in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, closer to the edges of the extensive pampa and in poems such as 'Último sol en Villa Ortúzar', the street appears as 'una herida abierta en el cielo', then echoed in 'Para una calle del Oeste' with 'calle que dolorosamente como una herida te abres' (Borges 1925b: 31 and 32). The horizontal lines of the city allow the poet to see more easily into the distance. Furthermore, the use of the word 'herida' to express extension conveys a sense of directionality and expansion; moreover, it also expresses sensation, since it alludes to the idea that the streets of Buenos Aires are wounds that have been carved into what was once a nineteenth-century unpaved city.

Equally, from the plaza, Borges can appreciate the expanse of the city: '¡Qué bien se ve la tarde / desde el fácil sosiego de los bancos!' ('La Plaza San Martín' in Borges 1993[1923]). The Plaza San Martín is in fact more than just a square: it is a park located in the neighbourhood of Retiro in Buenos Aires. At its centre is a square with a statue of José de San Martín, the general who in the nineteenth century led the successful Argentine struggle for independence from the Spanish Empire. Several concrete clearings lead to the central statue. When Borges looks at the horizon from these clearings, he gets a sense of expansion that extends beyond the limits of the plaza. This gives Borges the impression that the plaza is 'honda' or deep. This sense of 'spilling over' the poet's field of vision is a characteristic found in another urban poem, 'Ciudad': 'De las plazas rebosan las distancias' (Borges 1993[1923]).

Borges's depiction of the plaza as a calm place from which the poet can observe the spaciousness of the city around him but also over the horizon, instils in him a sense of intimate trust and connection: 'la honda plaza igualadora de almas / ábrese como pecho generoso / que derrama confianza' ('La Plaza San Martín' in Borges 1993[1923]). By extension, with this conclusion to 'La Plaza San Martín', where Borges essentially democratises the plaza, he implies that public open spaces of the city offer opportunities to rebalance the chaotic dynamics of the city. This is because by the end of the poem, the rush with which Borges is seen traversing the streets ('apurando en vano las calles') is suddenly substituted by 'el sosiego de los bancos' and an outpouring of confidence.

In contrast, the cemetery in Borges's poems offers a different perspective on the city, one that follows, in this case, more diffuse and imaginative vertical lines. Borges conceives of a possible vertical perspective from the cemetery because his spiritually elevating experience here, conveys a sense of imaginary verticality. These lines evoke an intangible and spiritual connection between Borges's life and the stereotypical image of heaven where the souls of those who have passed go on to live out eternity. The cemetery is also, at the same time, another place where Borges can pour forth his feelings of belonging to the city. Between 1920 and 1930, Borges published threes poems about two different cemeteries in Buenos Aires: 'La Recoleta' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and 'La Recoleta' and 'La Chacarita' in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), the latter appearing under one section entitled 'Muertes de Buenos Aires'. These cemeteries are depicted as microcosms of the city itself, enclosed by a 'contorno'

(Borges 1929: 39). In 'La Chacarita', he also describes the cemetery as a 'desaguero de la patria' (Borges 1929: 39), as the drain of the nation where all the souls are laid to rest. The cemetery is like a neighbourhood that survives death, but at the same time where death is pervasive: 'barrio que sobrevives y sobremueres' (Borges 1929: 39). Thus, if the cemetery is to be viewed as a neighbourhood inhabited by the city's dead, then its 'veredas' would be the streets. This not only emphasises the necessary social function of the cemetery within the city, but also prompts the poet to question his own mortality and possible permanence beyond death if he were to be laid to rest in a cemetery: 'Lo anterior: escuchado, leído, meditado / lo realicé en la Recoleta / Junto al propio lugar donde han de enterrarme' ('La Recoleta' in Borges 1993[1923]).

Borges's poem about La Recoleta in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) is therefore a meditation about the triumph of life over death. Keeping to the fervour of his earlier years, the fact that Borges compares the architecture of the place to the quintessential elements of the city ('calles', 'casas' and 'patio' in particular), not only cements his emotional connection to the cemetery — as announced in the preface of the book — but goes even further to suggest the poet's experience of transcendence: for if the soul is attached to the permanent structures of the city, if the poet feels a sense of emotional connection to the concrete architecture of Buenos Aires, both he and the city will also endure the passing of time. Conversely, if the connection between the city and the self is destroyed ('arrabales de alma desbaratada'), then so will the presence of the poet in space: 'juntamente caducan el espacio, el tiempo, el morir' ('La Recoleta' in Borges 1993[1923]). For Borges, it is therefore imperative to maintain an emotional

connection to the city for the city to endure in time. The vertical perspective of the city is given in this instance through Borges's metaphorical interrogation of what lies beyond the physical experience of space — an experience that connects the poet to an elevated sense of self.

II.2 The Places in Réda's Provincial Paris

During his urban perambulations, Réda gravitates towards places where the experience of modern Paris is altered in favour of a feeling of being 'en province'. Based on Jean Pierrot's idea that Réda is attracted to places 'où la réalité urbaine n'existe presque plus, où l'on éprouve la tendance ou la possibilité de l'oublier' (Pierrot 1994: 33), I would argue that Réda's pursuit of the provincial is a quest to temporarily do away with certain aspects of urban reality. In his essay 'Problématique de l'espace dans *Les Ruines de Paris*', Pierrot explains that Réda is drawn to areas of the city where he can immerse himself and be divested from the economic, touristic, cultural and routine realities of Paris. This is not to say that the places Réda visits are exclusively provincial. Instead, they are places that have the potential — either because of their character or Réda's own disposition — to offer an alternate experience to the modern city. In these places, Réda is confronted with unusual encounters, unexpected sightings, moments of meditation and in most cases, a sense of communion with the environment. He also likes to return to places in close proximity to nature, trees and water, which provide a breathing space from the dynamics of the ultramodern city. They are places of refuge from the hustle and bustle of the big metropolis and places

where visual stimulation allows the poet's imagination to take flight.

Between Rust and Nature: 'parcs' and 'jardins'

Réda describes his visits to different parks and gardens around Paris in a number of his works. In a general sense, these green areas, designed as spaces of leisurely activity within the city, are often set against the rust and imposing concrete structures of the metropolis. Though parks and gardens around Paris have existed since the Middle Ages, it was during Haussmann's tenure as mayor of Paris that they were incorporated into the city's urban planning out of necessity for 'un peu d'air pur' (Santos 2003: 278). It is therefore thanks to Haussmann's entrepreneurship that all of the *arrondissements* in Paris today have parks, private or public gardens and squares. Réda visits these places precisely with the intention of gaining 'a little bit of fresh air'. Often, as in the following example from *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), he stumbles upon these parks, in the midst of an otherwise industrialised space:

> J'aime les rails, la ferraille, la rouille quand, par-dessus, l'espace inaltérable saute et s'accroît. Puis j'oblique rue Saint-Charles dans un commencement de forêt vierge, sous l'épaisseur d'eau des platanes jamais taillés. Je m'y absorbe en sachant qu'il faut absolument que je rentre (quelque chose comme du veau sera trop cuit), et il est certain que je rentre, que je suis rentré. (Réda 1993[1977]: 50-51)

Réda exits La Gare Boulevard-Victor, knowing that above the rails, the enduring city spreads beyond his perception. As he turns onto Rue Saint-Charles, he unexpectedly comes across 'un commencement de forêt vierge'. Though he does not say this in the text, a map of Paris can confirm that this 'virgin forest' is part of the Parc Citroën. The transition from walking along rusty train tracks in the station to being in the

imposing presence of plane trees represents the kind of contrast that Réda is often faced with in Paris. In this particular instance, he then recounts feeling absorbed into the scene and connecting emotionally to it, before returning home for supper. Still, even after being at home he claims that a part of him stayed at the scene: 'Mais celui que j'ai laissé près des arbres ou de la ferraille, au bord du pont, celui-là ne consent pas à bouger d'un millimètre; il a saisi' (Réda 1993[1977]: 51). 'Il a saisi' conjures the impression that certain moments can inspire an elevated feeling of connection or the feeling that one has understood a deeper ontological truth. It transmits a sense of fulfilment that suggests an intimate if inexplicable connection between the city and the wandering poet. Réda never explains what it is that is grasped, felt or understood in that moment of unexpected, awe-inspiring urban disparateness — but this example certainly echoes the quest for the 'quelque chose' he describes in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987): 'J'étais bien cependant à la recherche de quelque chose, dont les rues indéfiniment suivies ne me livraient de temps à autre que des signaux' (Réda 1987: 91).[84]

A similar contrast between 'la rouille' and nature can be observed elsewhere in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977). This time it is at Montsouris, a park located in the south of the city in the 14$^{\text{th}}$ arrondissement. Réda narrates that the edge of the park connects to the abandoned Petite Ceinture, an old Parisian railway that operated from 1852 and has been in a partial state of abandonment since 1934. Whilst still in operation, the Petite Ceinture offered a circular connection between Paris' main rail-

[84] See Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1986), p. 88.

way stations within the fortified walls of the city. But by 1977, when Réda published this collection of prose poems about Paris, the Petite Ceinture had become more of a scrap iron landfill: 'En métal et en bois parmi des monceaux de charbon et de ballots de paperasses, d'obscurs résidus ferroviaires y jonchent la suie entre les rails, mais beaucoup de bidons jaunes bleus verts s'entassent polyphoniques' (Réda 1993[1977]: 15). Réda contrasts this derelict vision of Paris with two others: first, that of the metropolis imposing its skyscrapers from a distance over the trees and lampposts of the park ('Tout le ciel gris et bleu trempé se remplit instantanément de tours'); and second, that of the 'bec de gaz et de passerelles' and 'des arbres d'un autre siècle et de la boue labourée' (Réda 1993[1977]: 15-16). The superimposition of these different aspects of the city — industrial, ultramodern, provincial — points to its diversity, which Réda attempts to navigate.

However, it is ultimately the way that he feels in these various spaces that determines the outcome of his journey. In this particular visit to the Parc Montsouris, he expresses his preference for the more provincial atmosphere of this place: 'Sans doute j'aimerais mieux pour toujours cette civilisation de becs de gaz et de passerelles' (Réda 1993[1977]: 15). Contrary to Borges, who found the lampposts of Buenos Aires a bothersome expression of the modernised city,[85] Réda feel that the 'becs du gaz' in this park create a welcoming ambiance: he revels in the possibility of lingering in this park because of the tranquil atmosphere reigning along its footbridge lit by gaslight. At the same time, however, he also acknowledges the ephemeral quality of

[85] See Borges's description of the 'macilentos faroles' at the beginning of this chapter in I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 159.

the experience: 'mais ne basculeront-ils pas déjà dans une minute, puisque je passe, et le monde en extension éternelle continuera' (Réda 1993[1977]: 15), thus also denoting the temporary nature of the moment and the passing of time.

This reference to 'civilisation de becs de gaz' is also a reference to Baudelaire's (1821-1867) Paris: gas lights were introduced in modern Paris as a replacement for oil-lighting in 1822, and during the Haussmannisation of the city there was a clear proliferation of this type of street lighting (Jones 2006: 327). Baudelaire was therefore a contemporary of the gaslight and his poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) often evoke the period before and after gas lighting. In *Mon cœur mis à nu* (1887), Baudelaire specifically uses the expression 'civilisation' in relation to the 'becs de gaz' spread around Paris as a way to criticise the modernisation of the city:

> Théorie de la civilisation.
> Elle n'est pas dans le gaz, ni dans
> la vapeur, ni dans les tables tournantes,
> Elle est dans la diminution des traces
> du péché originel. (Baudelaire 2001[1887]: 58)

Contrary to Baudelaire, however, Réda envisages the 'becs de gaz' as concrete structures that evoke familiarity, and which cultivate his emotional response to the city. In essence, Réda sees the Parc Montsouris — and parks in general — as a proliferation of the act of civilising the city, and is therefore critical of those that deceitfully imitate nature, but that are in fact, another way for the modern city to herd its population. Réda prefers instead impromptu spaces of greenery like the 'forêt vierge' mentioned above (Réda 1993[1977]: 50-51) or indeed enclosures where he feels a sense of belonging. He does not discard the possibility of encountering these rather impro-

vised gardens within other man-made green spaces. He also does not the discard the possibility of affectionate connection in them; in fact, that is precisely what happens on one occasion when he visits the Jardin du Luxembourg.

In *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), Réda portrays the Jardin du Luxembourg as one of his favourite spaces of greenery within Paris. He describes it as 'fait de poésie confortable, de majesté, de grand air libre', due to its solemn classical architecture. He is also drawn to its peaceful atmosphere and confesses to visiting it when 'j'éprouve le besoin de remettre de l'ordre dans mes idées et de l'espace dans mes impressions' (Réda 1993: 15). The Jardin du Luxembourg is therefore a physical breathing space of Paris. Furthermore, for the poet who is looking for a mental break, it is also 'une vraie patrie spirituelle' (Réda 1986: 76). This expression is interesting for two reasons: firstly, because Réda compares the garden to a 'patrie'. Echoing Borges's own reference to certain places in Buenos Aires as symbols of his personal definition of 'patria',[86] 'patrie' suggests a strong bond between place and individual, one that involves the definition of a common identity between both parties, which by extension also implies the feeling of belonging. Secondly, the evocation of the place's 'spiritual' atmosphere also affirms — in the same way that it did for Borges — the transcendence of a mere 'réalité urbaine' (Pierrot 1994: 33), in favour of 'una ultrarealidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 52): a mentally and emotionally elevating experience.

Contrary to his experience in the Jardin du Luxembourg, Réda describes other

[86] See section above II.1. From Private to Public Places in Borges's Buenos Aires, p. 186.

green spaces around the city, where he does not feel inspirational connection. For example, the squares in the 15th *arrondissement* 'dissimule[nt] on ne sait quoi de dangereusement hagard', and the parks of Montsouris and of the Buttes-Chaumont are a 'laborieuse et presque parodique' imitation of nature that the poet finds 'déprimant' and off-putting (Réda 1986: 76). Réda prefers green spaces that at least appear to preserve elements of surprise or spontaneity, even if they are manmade gardens. Réda is particularly unsympathetic, for example, towards the green areas of the Buttes Chaumont because of the artificial lake that is built there and the Temple de la Sibylle perched at the top of a cliff fifty metres above the waters of the lake. This park was built in the nineteenth century by Jean-Charles Alphand under the orders of Haussmann and it is clearly inspired by Italian architecture. Réda dislikes it because in his view, '[u]n jardin n'a aucun besoin d'imiter des gorges et des collines. On voit tout de suite qu'il n'est pas cela, et que cet effort sans issue et sans modestie lui fait perdre jusqu'à la faculté de rester tranquillement un jardin' (Réda 1986: 77-78). Réda argues that by trying to imitate the Roman Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, its hills and its gorge, the park loses its potential to be just a garden. He believes that this artifice can only deliver 'de bonheurs intermittents, quand l'illusion du naturel l'emporte sur la réalité sensible' (Réda 1986 : 78); 'l'illusion du naturel', the imitation of what could appear naturally in space, is therefore a vital characteristic of the green spaces Réda likes to spend time in. This example shows that Réda prefers places that evoke authenticity and a naturally appearing landscape, even when they are carefully composed spaces of greenery.

'Terrains vagues': Places of Meditation and Expansion

Réda feels especially attracted to the 'terrains vagues', or vacant lots, of the city. These are, in his opinion, places where the state of abandonment and inactivity induce stillness and promote the erosion of time. They are places, as I stated in the introduction to this part of the chapter, where the poet can *be* rather than *do*. They remind Réda of the spontaneity of gardens where the vegetation appears to grow freely. For this reason, he believes that they create balance in an otherwise chaotic, overcrowded and ultramodern city. As a result, in *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), he campaigns, rather amusingly, for their preservation: 'je me propose de créer l'Union pour la Préservation des Terrains Vagues' (Réda 1993[1977]): 45). Certainly with a playful tone, he adds what he envisages the role of this union to be: 'Qu'elle demeure donc une sorte de confrérie elle-même assez vague, sans statuts, sans cotisations, afin que ni les journaux ni les politiciens ne la dévoient, en dépit de leur utilité pour refréner les promoteurs'(Réda 1993[1977]): 45). Réda maintains this sense of humour vis-à-vis the *terrains vagues* despite their state of abandonment and their 'végétation vigoureuse des ruines' (Réda 1993[1977]): 45).

Indeed for Réda, the *terrains vagues* are also a prime example of the ruins of Paris: 'tas de planches et de plâtre', 'insalubrité de ces épandages d'immondices et d'eaux sales' (Réda 1993[1977]: 46). They are dumping grounds for everything that is residual about the city. However, despite their possible state of neglect and insalubrity, Réda defends their place in the city: 'Une moitié au moins de ces espaces devrait être laissée à l'abandon' (Réda 1993[1977]: 46). This is because in their state

of ruin and abandonment, these spaces devoid of activity also become spaces where the mind can emulate this lack of activity: 'le terrain vague se déploie d'abord, [...] comme un plan de méditation' (Réda 1993[1977]: 46). Réda likes the *terrains vagues* because they tell us something about ourselves and our need for disorder as well as order. They are spaces of reflection. Their quiet existence allows the poet to become absorbed in their midst, which in turn also makes the poet feel part of their dynamic.

As a result, these ruins, which would otherwise be a symbol of the city's destruction, become a possibility for creation: creation of a mental and spiritual transcendence and the dilation of time within the poet's imagination: 'Ainsi, travestir le terrain vague en cour de pouponnière, c'est risquer d'offusquer dans l'être la liberté du dieu, négligeant qu'il enseigne, autant qu'une obscure espérance, la solitude et l'effroi de la mort' (Réda 1993[1977]: 46). In other words, to preserve the *terrains vagues* of Paris is to preserve in the urban landscape, spaces where it is possible to be in touch with the intangible and the inexplicable, the spontaneous and the unexpected, characteristics that are radically opposed to the highly predictable and urbanely designed concrete structures of the modern city. It is also an opportunity to revitalise and re-imagine the city from the depths of its ruins. It is a way to recapture the essence of the city.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have observed Borges's and Réda's treatment of the evening and of certain places within the city. This analysis has revealed that both poets are interested in portrayals of their cities that enhance their apparent realities. Borges is looking to restore — initially — a pre-modern nineteenth-century Buenos Aires because this image corresponds to the Buenos Aires of his ancestors and his mother's stories; it was the Buenos Aires that he was born into. Later on — and this will be the topic of Chapter 4 — he realises that he cannot revert to the past and instead looks to combine the city's past and present into a new image of Buenos Aires. Réda focuses on conjuring a provincial image of Paris because he is perpetually in pursuit of a place of origin, a place that reminds him of his hometown of Lunéville. As he announces in the poem of 'A propos d'une ferveur' quote in the epigraph to this chapter, and confirms in an interview published in 1993 for *Le Quotidien de Paris* entitled 'Jacques Réda: les villes, le temps, les cigarettes': En définitive, je me suis rendu compte que ce que je cherchais à Paris ou dans d'autres villes, c'est un peu l'image de cette ville natale' (Réda and Leroy 1993: paragraph 12 of 13).

The evening contributes to the invention of these personal maps of Buenos Aires and Paris because, in each case, it offers the temporary opportunity to witness the urban landscape transition from day into night. As the event takes place, both authors agree that the city is most likely to reveal impressions that evoke simplicity, expansiveness and communion that are not as readily experienced during the day in the midst of the modern city's chaotic dynamics. What is more, analysing the way

in which Borges manipulates the evening in his poems in conjunction with Réda's conceptualisation of the 'instant' showed that by isolating the moment in time during which the day transitions into night, both poets create the impression that time is distended; in other words, they evoke the possibility of experiencing a feeling of eternity or indeed the possibility for some kind of ontological revelation. The second part of the chapter gave an overview of some of the places Borges and Réda like to travel to in their respective cities. These places — courtyards, gardens, parks, cemeteries, vacant lots — revealed characteristics comparable to the provinces where both wandering poets could establish an emotional connection with the surrounding space. However, beyond that, it is the way in which these places allow them — Borges and Réda — to explore their own sense of self that cements their connection to space. Both of these authors suggest that their identities, their sensations and their emotions are somehow bound to space; that they cement who they are through the prismatic experience of the city; and that in losing their connection to space, they run the risk of also losing their understanding of this subjectivity.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I propose to analyse the designated areas where Borges and Réda feel the most intense sense of belonging; where both of them feel that their identities are reaffirmed and where they feel that their poetic projects are ultimately located. In Chapter 4, I will therefore explore Borges's and Réda's relationship to the aesthetic in relation to the physical destinations where they believe their poetic projects are most successfully realised. These areas are the neighbourhoods where they lived at one time or another: for Borges, Palermo; for Réda the

15^{th} and 20^{th} *arrondissements* of Paris.

Chapter 4

Neighbourhood: Poetic Destiny and Destination

Le centre ni les bords pourtant ne nous captivent,
Mais l'intervalle tout entier d'expectative
Où le temps absorbé dans un pur maintenant
Laisse aller chaque pas plus près de l'imminent;
Où celui qui s'attarde au cœur de l'éphémère
Se croit invulnérable ou savoure l'amère
Suavité d'un long sursis qui va finir.
Il n'est plus d'autrefois pour lui, ni d'avenir.
Ce qu'il désire, ici – la dernière fenêtre
Brûle – c'est à la fois durer et disparaître,
Si disparaître est le seul moyen de durer:
En tous lieux, nulle part, dissous, régénéré.

Jacques Réda, 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1987: 96-97)

Introduction

In Chapter 1, the analysis of the lines above revealed that Réda witnessed the sunset and felt absorbed into the scene transforming the urban landscape from day into night. During this ephemeral moment, the subject in the poem is seized by the sunset: the event, lapse of time or 'intervalle' — when the sun disappears under the horizon. On one level, Réda describes the cyclical nature of the earth's journey around the sun, suggesting that the sun is '[e]n tous lieux, nulle part, dissous, régénéré'. However, on a subjective level, he conveys his own conflicting desire to be present and to disappear into the city's landscape. As I have analysed in Chapters 2 and 3, this fine balance between presence and absence results from Réda's intention to allow the city to manifest its own inner workings through the prism of his mind. In this final chapter, I will further the implications of Réda's urban experience by arguing that at times, when he is absorbed into the scene, he is also exposed to what feels like an imminent sense of revelation: 'Où le temps absorbé dans un pur maintenant / Laisse aller chaque pas plus près de l'imminent'.

As I will show, descriptions of this experience are present throughout Réda's works; however it was in fact Borges who first coined the expression in his essay 'La muralla y los libros' (1950) as 'esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce' (*Otras inquisiciones* [1952] in Borges 2010b: 15). Réda learnt of the expression in the 1950s, when *Otras inquisiciones* (1952) was published in French as *Enquêtes* (1954). This is revealed in 'Commençant par la fin' (1957) from *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) where Réda quotes the phrase (Réda 1987: 21). Perhaps influenced by Borges, Réda

believed that certain experiences could induce the feeling that a sort of revelation was always about to happen. Though neither of them specified the nature of this revelation — in fact, Réda refers to it vaguely as a 'quelque chose' in 'A propos d'une ferveur'[87] — their known interest in issues pertaining to the self and to coming in contact with a deep-seated energy in their respective cities, suggests that the kind of revelation they anticipated was one where they could gain a complete understanding of their place in the world.

But, as both poets explain in their individual texts, this revelation does not in fact take place. Borges states 'no se produce' (Borges 2010b: 15), whereas Réda undercuts it by describing it as a moment of suspended reprieve: 'un long sursis qui va finir' (Réda 1987: 97). My contention is that it is this non-materialisation of a revelation that induces what Réda calls a 'regeneration': in other words, he comes away from the moment with a renewed sense of self that keeps him grounded to space. He is able to continue his journey and to create the cyclical conditions for this experience to take place again. By extension, even though Borges does not explicitly consider the idea of regeneration of self, seeing Borges through Réda's interpretation of 'esta inminencia de una revelación' explains why Borges too believed in the recurrence of this experience and as I will explain below, in fact in its pursuit.

As a climactic moment in Borges's and Réda's experiences of Buenos Aires and Paris, in the following analysis, I propose to look at two aspects of this imminent revelation that never materialises: first, I will expose the conditions that lead up to

[87] See Chapter 1.II.7. 'A propos d'une ferveur' (1987), p. 90.

it, and then I will explain what happens in place of these ontological manifestations. For the first, Borges and Réda feel that a revelation, which is a moment of communion between self and place, must be preceded by a feeling of belonging and connection. As seen in Chapter 3, this sense of belonging is felt most strongly in places — but also in neighbourhoods — that have characteristics associated with the provincial. In the case of neighbourhoods especially, their geographical location away from both the city-centre and the physical centre of the city appears to matter to these poets. Ultimately, the neighbourhoods where they feel the strongest sense of belonging are those where they have both lived at one point or other. In Borges's case, he chose Palermo because even though he never lived there again after he returned from Europe in 1921, as a young adult, he still regarded it as a spiritual home and refuge.[88] It is also in Palermo where he attempts to found his new *criollismo* for Buenos Aires. For Réda, it is at one point the 15$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement* and later on the 20$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement* where he lived after he moved to Paris in the 1950s. The connection with these neighbourhoods is personal and intimate. They also possess some of the provincial and unpretentious characteristics that they cherish in the places around the city analysed in Chapter 3: they are at once peripheral or marginal because, geographically, they border the edges of the city; they are also heterotopic because they lie between the city centre and its outskirts. As a result, these neighbourhoods become their poetic destinations, the site of potential revelation. In the first part of the chapter, I will define the general characteristics of the neighbourhoods to which Borges and Réda become progressively

[88] See the analysis of the poem 'Fluencia natural del recuerdo' in Chapter 3.II.1.i. The Private Places: 'patio' and 'jardín', p. 188.

attached to.

Though the imminence of a revelation is very much plausible for Borges and Réda, the revelation itself is not. As the second part of my analysis will show, for Borges, this becomes a life-long journey, seeking to experience a sense of revelation, whereas Réda welcomes the experience as part of an aesthetic practice. Both poets believe that the conditions for a revelation are met through the physical interaction with space. However, unlike Borges, Réda does not care for the revelation to materialise; he is instead interested in reaching that edge of experience, only to then challenge it by resolving to continue his urban circulation. What is at stake for Borges is his belief that a revelation could uncover a deeper truth about his destiny as a writer and as an individual. It is for this reason that he pursues this revelation in writing: he believes that the act of writing, what he calls 'el hecho estético' (Borges 2010b: 15), embodies the imminent revelation, and he hopes that one day he will be able to write 'la página justificativa', the work of prose or verse that will reveal this clear destiny and purpose to him. Réda, on the other hand, sees the imminence of a revelation as an opportunity to have an aesthetic experience — to feel a sense of intense temporary unity, coherence and communion — distinct from his everyday experience of the city, only to then return to his journey feeling regenerated by this moment of reprieve. Thus, if the aesthetic experience corresponds to the moment when Réda feels on the brink of a revelation, the aesthetic act — like Borges's 'hecho estético' — follows the experience and becomes the poetic text.

I The Neighbourhood

Borges and Réda consider themselves men of the city: Borges calls himself an 'hombre de ciudad, de barrio' (Borges 1925b: 26); whereas Réda defines himself as 'le citadin' in an eponymous book published in 1998. However, neither of them seems prepared to relinquish the quieter, unpretentious spaces in the city, those with provincial undertones and where they feel a strong sense of belonging. As the analysis in this first part of the chapter will show, these spaces correspond to neighbourhoods that evoke a more intimate way of life. In order to visualise the specific location of these neighbourhoods it becomes important to understand the geographic configurations of Buenos Aires and Paris, and what is implied in each case by the concepts of 'centre', 'periphery' and 'outskirts'. These designations vary in Borges and Réda based on the spatial distribution of the cities themselves.

Buenos Aires is located in the pampa region and since the time when Borges began writing about it, its limits have been determined in the eastern and north-eastern parts by the Rio de la Plata and beyond it by the Atlantic ocean; in the southern and the southeast parts by the river called Riachuelo; and in the west and southwest by the Avenida General Paz that separates the city from the larger province of Buenos Aires. This means that beyond its borders in the north, west and south of the city, the province of Buenos Aires was a vast expanse made of plains or *pampas*. These are the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires. Conversely, within its borders, like many cities that possess a port, Buenos Aires established its city centre in the neighbourhoods close to the waterfront and not in the geographical centre of the city's

boundaries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these neighbourhoods were Recoleta, Retiro and San Nicolás, which are located in the southeast part of the city. Lastly, the periphery of the city corresponded to the marginal neighbourhoods north and northwest of Retiro until one reached the *pampas*. Palermo, where Borges lived as a child and until 1921, was one of these marginal neighbourhoods.

Contrary to Buenos Aires' diamond outline, Paris is shaped like a spiral or shell, which emphasises the physical geographic centre of the city. Réda himself describes the geographic structure of Paris in 'Paris spirale' (Réda 1997: 65). From the centre of the spiral, the twenty arrondissements of the city uncoil before reaching the outskirts or Parisian *banlieues*. Even though the spiral itself has a centre, the Île de la Cité in the 1st *arrondissement*; there is a tension between the idea of the physical centre of the city and what is known as the city centre. Though language use suggests that there might be a correspondence between what in French would be termed as 'le centre de la ville' and 'le centre-ville', the two concepts are inherently dissimilar. Therefore, though the shape of Paris indicates that the centre of the city is indeed the Île de la Cité, the city centre, which is in fact a conceptual centre, is more elusive. This is due to the fact that, by definition, the city centre is typically the commercial, cultural and often also the historical and political heart of the city (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2014); but in Paris the places that represent these aspects of urban life are scattered around its territory. For most, the city centre of Paris is determined by the iconic monuments that populate it, for example, the Arc de Triomphe in the 16th *arrondissement*, La Tour Eiffel in the 8th *arrondissement* or Sacré-Coeur in the 18th

arrondissement. Others might believe that it corresponds to La Défense, the central business district of Paris located beyond the Parisian spiral, at the westernmost extremity of what is known as L'Axe Historique of Paris, which starts at the Louvre in the 1st *arrondissement*, and continues along the Champs Élysées and well beyond the Arc de Triomphe. Consequently, in most cases, the use of the term 'centrifugal' to describe Réda's circulation around Paris, corresponds to his movement away from the physical centre of the city and towards the districts at the edges of the city, in the outer-*arrondissements*. However, 'centrifugal' may also refer to his movement away from a place that symbolises the conceptual city centre and towards places that possess marginal or provincial qualities, places that are not defined by the commercial, cultural, historical and political characteristics that define the city centre.

I.1 Borges, the 'arrabal' and his Urban *criollismo* of the 'orillas'

In the preface to *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges announced that the personal Buenos Aires described in his poems, '[m]i Buenos Aires', was made up of suburban streets, low-rooftop houses and friendly neighbourhoods that evoked feelings of friendship and emotional connection ('A quien leyere' in Borges 1993[1923]). The latter, the 'barrios amigables', are the neighbourhoods where he pursued romantic relationships and cultivated friendships with other young writers (Williamson 2004: 102). These neighbourhoods — Villa Ortúzar, Villa Urquiza and Palermo — were located at the time at edges of the city. It is because of their location towards the

extreme end of the city that they are also called *arrabales*.

Throughout his early poetry, Borges used several terms to refer to these outer neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires: in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) he used *barrio* and *arrabal* predominantly, whereas in *Luna de enfrente* (1925), *suburbio* became more established. The transition from *arrabal* to *suburbio* occurred at a time when Borges began to conceive of Buenos Aires as a city that was becoming progressively more urbanised. Finally, towards the middle of the 1920s, Borges embraced the term *orillas* to indicate not only the peripheral location of these neighbourhoods, but most importantly, to show most definitely — linguistically and spatially — the location of his poetic project for Buenos Aires, between the modernised city and the old-fashioned *pampas*.

The *arrabal* designates a neighbourhood of the city away from its modernised areas. At the end of nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, these areas were subject to an expansion that caused a radical redistribution of the city's population due to the thousands of immigrants forced to settle there. Borges's family lived in one of these *arrabales*, Palermo, from shortly after Borges's birth in 1899. At the time, Palermo was still an outlying *barrio* bordered by the Maldonado river, which marked the north-western limits of Buenos Aires. Even though Palermo slowly attracted respectable families such as the Borges' because tracts of land were being divided up into single plots and auctioned for the construction of private dwellings, this *barrio* remained the disreputable home of poor Italian immigrants, petty criminals, pimps, prostitutes and knife-fighters (Williamson 2004: 32).

Borges was exposed to the literary possibilities of the *arrabal* from a very young age. As a child, he often stayed up late listening to the conversations his father held with friends from the Argentine literary scene during the periodic *tertulias* that took place in the Borges home. One of the regular attendees was Evaristo Carriego (1883-1912), a native of the Paraná region who lived in Palermo, very close to Borges's family home. Borges was inspired by Carriego the journalist, poet and social rebel, but most importantly, he learnt the history and culture of the *arrabal* of Palermo from him.

According to Borges, Evaristo Carriego was 'the man who discovered the literary possibilities of the run-down and ragged outskirts of the city' through walking its streets (Borges 1973: 233). Borges was attracted to Carriego because of his romantic idealism and his poetic devotion to the popular culture of the *arrabales* of Buenos Aires. Carriego incorporated in his two collections of poems *Misas herejes* (1908) and *La canción del barrio* (1913) the reality of the *barrio porteño* and especially Borges's own neighbourhood of Palermo: 'Suele afirmarse que Evaristo Carriego es el poeta del arrabal. Creo que fue el poeta de Palermo, sencillamente, y eso basta para su gloria' ('La presencia de Buenos Aires en la poesía' [1926] in Borges 1997: 252).

Borges continued to read Evaristo Carriego during his seven-year stay in Europe from 1914 to 1921, alongside his discovery of Russian and French nineteenth-century literature, German expressionism, Walt Whitman and English and German philosophy. In fact, Carlos Zito contends that Borges fantasised about the peripheral neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires from his adolescence, when he still lived in Switzerland:

'Al evocar su propia adolescencia, Borges cuenta que al viajar a Suiza había llevado un ejemplar de ese libro [*Misas herejes*], que el propio Carriego había obsequiado y dedicado a su padre' (Zito 1999: 29).

Later in Spain Borges continued to cultivate his interest in the *arrabales* through his interactions with another influential figure: Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964). Carmen de Mora reveals that the Spanish writer was also interested in themes such as the *arrabal* 'porque le parecían temas poéticos fundamentales con numerosas posibilidades de tratamiento según la subjetividad del poeta y porque [...] disuelven la continuidad de la vida urbana' (De Mora 1999: 23). Indeed, Cansinos-Asséns published an essay on the *arrabal* entitled 'El arrabal en la literatura' in *Los temas literarios y su interpretación* (1924), where he explained that all cities have *arrabales* inhabited by picturesque people who lead marginal lives and where the bustle of urban life is not yet widespread:

> Toda ciudad tiene sus arrabales, habitados por gentes pintorescas, a un tiempo maliciosas y cándidas, en cuya existencia, algo irregular, hay un tanto del libre vivir de los litorales y donde los modos de vida urbana toman inesperadamente un sentido arbitrario y autónomo. (Cansinos-Asséns 1924: 24)

In his essay, Cansinos-Asséns explored the literary evolution of the *arrabal* and concluded that it was an ideal literary space because its characteristics of indeterminacy, marginality and adventure enriched the stories found in both prose and verse. Furthermore, he determined that its literary potential lay in its destabilisation of preconceived notions and architectural paradigms of the city:

> En él [the arrabal], sus vagos campos sin urbanizar, se sumen y se desfiguran, se hacen imprecisos e incoherentes todos los lineamientos arqui-

> tectónicos y mentales de la ciudad. Las ideologías urbanas, las artes y conceptos urbanos, terminan y se enmarañan en la arbitraria libertad del arrabal. (Cansinos-Asséns 1924: 24)

Cansinos-Asséns contended that the *arrabal* remained an attractive space where the writer could unleash his imagination and construct new literary archetypes. Through Cansinos-Asséns, Borges confirmed what he had learnt from Evaristo Carriego: namely, that the *arrabal* could be developed as a literary theme, and that in fact it needed to be fostered because it contributed specifically to the diversification of Argentine avant-garde literature. In due course, once Borges became faced with the reality of a changed Buenos Aires, he would take Cansinos-Asséns's idea even further. He felt compelled to write about the *arrabal* because it was his home, but also because he wanted to distinguish himself as a novel writer of Buenos Aires. He therefore embraced the *arrabal* as a space with literary potential; based, however on more than just his imagination: he would make the physical exploration of space a fundamental part of his aesthetic project.

Thus, when Borges returned to Argentina from Europe in 1921 and after writing his first avant-garde poems, he focused on the *arrabal* as a central theme in his poetry. His early poetic project included the exaltation of the marginal characteristics of the *arrabal*. In the essay 'Crítica del paisaje', published in *Cosmópolis* in 1921, Borges declared:

> Lo bello es lo espontáneo, lo que carece de últimos planos declamatorios o egocéntricos [...].
>
> Lo marginal es lo más bello.
>
> Por ejemplo: Cualquier cita del arrabal, seria, pueril y sosegada [...].

> El paisaje urbano que los verbalismos no mancharon aún.[89]
>
> (Borges 1997[1921]: 101)

Borges defined the marginal, the *arrabal*, as the most beautiful space, where any individual could experience spontaneity and tranquillity. These seemingly contradictory terms — spontaneity and frivolity tend to not align with a tranquil atmosphere — indicate the richness Borges saw in the *arrabal*. 'Crítica del paisaje', which Borges wrote before returning to Buenos Aires, is an important essay because it is proof that Borges began to positively conceptualise the *arrabal* before he settled back in the city and before the publication of *Fervor de Buenos* Aires (1923).

However, the initial enthusiasm Borges felt when he began to conceive of the *arrabal* as a poetic subject in 'Crítica del paisaje' was marred by the reality he encountered in the modernised Buenos Aires upon his return. Borges captured his reaction to the transformed city in 'Arrabal', one of the first poems he wrote in 1921 and later published in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). In the poem, Borges conveys intense dejection at the site of the periphery: 'El arrabal es el reflejo / de la fatiga del viandante' ('Arrabal' in Borges 1993[1923]). Borges refers here to his return home from Europe after what must have been a tiring journey by boat. In the poem, the subject comes across as an exhausted pilgrim who has been following the Stations of the Cross. Upon arrival at his destination, the subject of the poem stops suddenly at what appears to be the edge of the city: 'Mis pasos claudicaron / cuando iban a pisar el horizonte' ('Arrabal' in Borges 1993[1923]). Being suddenly confronted with

[89] Lines breaks are reproduced as in the original.

a moment of contemplation, the subject has an emotional response to the landscape. Indeed, though Borges had read and heard about the *arrabales* before fully exploring them, once he walked around them, he was affected by the appearance of its houses, which in turn, triggered in him a deep sentiment of empathy:

> y estuve entre las casas
> miedosas y humilladas
> juiciosas cual ovejas en manada,
> encarceladas en manzanas
> diferentes e iguales
> como si fueran todas ellas
> recuerdos superpuestos, barajados
> de una sola manzana. ('Arrabal' in Borges 1993[1923])

Borges describes the houses of the *arrabal* as fragile and vulnerable structures with adjoining walls and identical façades. Borges uses metaphors of entrapment ('encarceladas en manzanas') and of submission ('cual ovejas en manada') to depict the Hispanic grid that characterises the architecture of Buenos Aires. Then, in the second half of the poem, the mood changes as the subject in the poem finds an unexpected resolve:

> El pastito precario
> desesperadamente esperanzado
> salpicaba las piedras de la calle
> y mis miradas comprobaron
> gesticulante y vano
> el cartel del poniente
> en su fracaso cotidiano
> y sentí Buenos Aires
> y literaturicé en la hondura del alma
> la viacrucis inmóvil
> de la calle sufrida
> y el caserío sosegado. ('Arrabal' in Borges 1993[1923])

The sight of a clear green opening transforms what felt before like a site of hopeless 'recuerdos superpuestos' into a space 'desesperadamente esperanzado'. The diminutive 'pastito' captures the attractive quality Borges attributes to the scene. He is surprised and moved by the sunset unfolding in front of his eyes, described as a portrait or a photograph: 'el cartel del poniente'. The unexpected and sudden enthusiasm generated by this discovery centres the subject of the poem in a moment of intense feeling. In the poem, arriving at this moment of intense emotional connection is compared to reaching the final Stage of the Cross, which in religious terms corresponds to the moment when Jesus is laid in the tomb. The final Stage of the Cross and the sunset are comparable in this case because both evoke the end of a journey and by extension the origin of a period of rest. It can also be interpreted as a climactic or potentially revelatory experience. But, instead of experiencing a revelation, Borges's *via crucis* through the streets and houses of the *arrabal*, ultimately inspires him to find the words that connect him emotionally to the scene: 'y literaturicé en la hondura del alma'. This phrase suggests that the words to poeticise Buenos Aires emerge from the depth of Borges's soul, when he is at the height of an emotional and physical communion with space.

One of the ways in which Borges expressed the affective power of the landscape of the *arrabal* was by using religious metaphors. Though Borges was not particularly religious,[90] he believed that presenting reality in this way would transform it into

[90] Borges's relationship to the religious theme is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 162.

a heightened spiritual scene, 'an ultra-realidad espiritual' (Borges 1997[1920]: 41).[91] In 'Barrio reconquistado' for example, Borges maintains the religious undertone of 'Arrabal', though this time he evokes the practice of Christian baptism:

> El temporal desaforado
> maltrató la humillación de las casas
> y aborrecible fué [sic] a las miradas del mundo,
> pero cuando un arco benigno
> alumbró con sus colores el cielo
> y un olor a inquieta tierra mojada
> alentó los jardines
> nos echamos a caminar por las calles
> como quien recorre una recuperada heredad,
> y en los cristales hubo generosidades de sol
> y en las hojas lucientes que ilustran la arboleda
> dijo su temblorosa inmortalidad el estío.
> ('Barrio reconquistado' in Borges 1993[1923])

The lines above depict a scene of torrential rain falling violently over the houses of the *arrabal*. Once the rain has subsided, the sky clears, the colours of a rainbow light the sky and the fresh scent of wet earth spreads through the gardens. At this point, Borges describes how this sunny interval propels him onto the street. The use of the collective plural 'nos' — unusual for Borges's confessional poems — highlights the intensity of his enthusiasm: 'nos echamos a caminar por las calles'. The urban scene is described as expansive and pastoral, and the sun is seen glistening on the windows of a building. The sense of renewal gathered in the poem therefore suggests that the rain has in fact effected a cleansing act that echoes the ritual of baptism. The rain brings forth with it the clarity and virtue of a new day symbolised in the 'arco

[91] This term is explained in more details in Chapter 2.II.1. Nation and Connection: The Streets of Borges's Buenos Aires, p. 110.

benigno' or rainbow. As a result, the subject in the poem finds, in this born-again state, a renewed enthusiasm that motivates him to go out into the streets: he feels he has recovered a part of himself that he had lost in the dejection brought about previously by the torrential rain. Though still fragile — 'temblorosa inmortalidad' — the scene reflects a Whitmanesque harmony between the poet and his surroundings. The religious theme in Borges's early poems about the *arrabal* therefore facilitates the emotional connection between poet and urban space, but also adds a level of intensity to the language that heightens the urgency of the experience.

Borges's interest in the *arrabal* was not only the product of his early literary influences. He was drawn to them because when he returned to Buenos Aires, he wanted to reconnect emotionally with the neighbourhood of his childhood, and because he spent most of his time attending *tertulias*, visiting friends and falling in love in neighbourhoods such as Villa Ortúzar or Villa Urquiza. Poems such as 'Villa Urquiza', 'Sábados', 'Ausencia', 'Llaneza' and 'Despedida' from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) illustrate, for example, Borges's emotional state regarding his relationship with Concepción Guerrero. Concepción is related to the theme of the *arrabal* because Borges met her in Villa Urquiza during one of his Saturday trips to the house of his family friend Norah Lange. Villa Urquiza was a neighbourhood of Buenos Aires located in the northwest side of the city, sandwiched between the city centre and the pampas. Borges and Concepción fell in love in the marginal *barrio* of Villa Urquiza (Williamson 2004: 108); it is therefore not surprising that his feelings about her and the relationship were often captured in his relationship to the urban space.

In the poem 'Villa Urquiza', Borges alludes to his frequent visits to the *arrabal* — 'habitual evocación de mis horas' — and associates images of space with the object of his affection: 'la calle Pampa larga como un beso' ('Villa Urquiza' in Borges 1993[1923]). Borges's relationship with Concepción was an important factor in appeasing Borges's sense of alienation in the newly modernised city. Concepción made Borges feel loved and more comfortable in his surroundings: 'Atendido de amor y rica esperanza / Cuántas veces he visto morir sus calles agrestes / En el Juicio Final de cada tarde!' ('Villa Urquiza' in Borges 1993[1923]). In this example, Borges refers to the countless moments during which he and Concepción watched the sunset, as a couple, over the horizon looking out into the *pampas*. He compares the sunset to the Christian 'Juicio Final', or Final Judgement, thus evoking the religious theme already found in other poems. In this case, this spiritual theme gives a tone of finality to the scene, but also of triumph, because if the Final Judgement signifies the end of days, then Borges would have ended his life in the arms of his loved one.[92]

The feeling of triumph and accomplishment that Concepción instils in Borges also makes him believe in his capacity to effectively find the words to express and give a voice to the *arrabal*: 'La frecuente asistencia de un encanto / Acuña en mi recuerdo con predilecta eficacia / Ese arrabal cansado...' ('Villa Urquiza' in Borges 1993[1923]). The verb 'acuñar', to coin, strongly points to Borges's belief that he can materialise the *arrabal* in his mind and in 'las laudes del verso': 'bástale [al arrabal] para conseguir las laudes del verso / ser el sitio implorado de una pena' ('Villa Urquiza' in Borges

[92] This example also refers to the importance of the 'sunset' in Borges's poetics, already analysed in Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p.164.

1993[1923]). Borges grounds his emotions in space and then cements that space in his verse. The example of 'Villa Urquiza' determines the importance of the notion of place in Borges's poetics: it suggests that feeling ('una pena') can be localised ('un sitio') and that once it has, it becomes possible to give it — and the space itself — an effective voice. The legacy of Borges's relationship with Concepción is her contribution to Borges's designation of the *arrabal* as the location of his new *criollo* dream for Buenos Aires.

By the time Borges published *Luna de enfrente* in 1925, his personal circumstances and his aesthetic interests had changed. Williamson explains that 'Borges's second visit to Europe had brought to the fore the unresolved question of his relationship to Argentina — he was clearly torn between past and present, pampas and city, Mother and Concepción' (Williamson 2004: 118). Borges felt torn because his relationship with Concepción Guerrero was on the verge of extinction because of disapproval from his mother. He was also unsettled by the fact that he was becoming increasingly concerned with the issue of national identity in a country where modernisation was beginning to threaten the survival of the *criollo*. Borges was very attached to the *criollo* culture because his ancestors, and in particular his grandfather Colonel Francisco Borges, had fought in the nineteenth century, to form a *criollo* republic (Williamson 2004: 4 and 9).

He therefore wrote a poem entitled 'Dulcia, linquimus arva' as a swan song for the *criollos* where he called himself a 'criollo final' in the epigraph:[93]

[93] The title of the poem 'Dulcia, linquimus, arva' comes from the opening lines of Virgil's *Eclogues*,

> Mi canción de criollo final
> por la noche agrandada de relámpagos
> en el espreso [sic] del Sur
> que desfonda y pierde los campos. (Borges 1925b: 25)

Indeed, at this point, Borges considered himself to be the last *criollo* in a culture on the verge of extinction. In the poem, Borges praised his ancestors who were 'soldados y estancieros' (Borges 1925b: 25). Ultimately, however, he had to come to terms with the fact that he was no longer defined by this noble but unfortunately remote way of life, because he was instead an 'hombre de ciudad, de barrio, de calles' (Borges 1925b: 26). The 'intimidad de la Pampa' conquered by his ancestors was replaced in his time by 'los tranvías lejanos', just as in the epigraph the 'espreso del Sur', which is also a train, has ploughed through and destroyed the fields (Borges 1925b: 25-26). As a result of this rumination over the issue of *criollo* identity, Borges understood that he needed to develop a poetic project that cultivated a new form *criollismo*, one that blended together the traditional *criollo* and the new man of the city.

In the essay 'El tamaño de mi esperanza', Borges expressed his desire to find a way to exalt his vision of present day Buenos Aires. After a brief examination of the cultural and political successes of Argentine society during the nineteenth century, Borges postulated the lack of effective expression of Buenos Aires's richness:

> Nuestra realidá vital es grandiosa y nuestra realidá pensada es mendiga. Aquí no se ha engendrado ninguna idea que se parezca a mi Buenos Aires, a este mi Buenos Aires innumerable que es cariño de árboles en Belgrano y dulzura larga en Almagro y desganada sorna orillera en Palermo y mucho cielo en Villa Ortúzar y proceridá taciturna en las Cinco Esquinas y

in which the poet regrets leaving his bucolic homeland for the city of Rome. See Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.123.

> querencia de ponientes en Villa Urquiza y redondel de pampa en Saavedra' (Borges 1926: 13).

Borges capitalised on the potential of the different peripheral neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. He emphasised the easy living of these areas, evidenced with references to affectionate feelings ('dulzura', 'querencia') and overall pastoral landscape ('árboles', 'cielo', 'redondel de pampa'). Borges also insisted upon his participation in the creation of this new image of Buenos Aires ('mi Buenos Aires'). The extent of Borges's hope was therefore more than his desire to find 'la poesía y la música y la pintura y la religión y la metafísica que con su grandeza se avienen' (Borges 1926: 14); it was to be the voice of that poetic and artistic renewal: 'Criollismo, pues, pero un criollismo que sea conversador del mundo y del yo, de Dios y de la muerte. A ver si alguien me ayuda a buscarlo' (Borges 1926: 14).

Thus, as Eleni Kefala contends, Borges believed that national identity should be found in *criollismo*, but this *criollismo* needed to be displaced from the countryside to the city, thus becoming a *criollismo urbano* (Kefala 2011: 38). This meant that he had to choose a space within the city's edge to found this new culture of Buenos Aires. *Luna de enfrente* (1925) was essentially an exploration of the initial stages of Borges's new urban *criollismo*. From the preface of the book on, Borges explained that the poems in the collection arose from his nostalgic contemplation of the urban landscape: 'las tapias celestes del suburbio y las plazitas [sic] con su fuentada de cielo' (Borges 1925b: 7). Most importantly, however, he identified the location of his newfound *criollismo*: in the *barrio* or *arrabal*.

Indeed, at this point, Borges remembered that according to Carriego and Cansinos-

Asséns, the *arrabal* was a space waiting to be claimed as the origin of a culture, of an identity. Furthermore, the kind of *arrabal* that Borges was interested in was an ideal space to found Borges's new urban *criollismo* because, coincidentally, it was geographically located between the modernised neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires and the *pampas* that were exalted in the traditional *criollismo* upheld by Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*.[94] This kind of *arrabal* was known as a *barrio* of the 'orillas' because it was located strategically between the centre and the *pampas.*

In *Borges, un escritor en las orillas*, Beatriz Sarlo focused on different definitions of the term 'orillas' and what these might mean to Borges: 'En aquellos años, el término "orillas" designaba los barrios alejados y pobres, limítrofes con la llanura que rodeaba a la ciudad' (Sarlo 2003: 48). Borges specified his interest in the 'orillas' of the northern part of Buenos Aires: 'Decimos con nebulosidad las orillas, pero son una cosa las de la Boca, orillas con marinerío, orillas del agua, y otra las que por Urquiza se alargan: orillas de la tierra, orillas de la nochecita y de la llanura' (Borges 1997c: 252). Borges contrasted the northern *arrabal* of Villa Urquiza to the southern neighbourhood of La Boca and the edges of the port of Buenos Aires in the eastern part of the city. He clearly sided with the pastoral quality of the northern *barrio.*

Not only was the young and ambitious Borges aware that the peripheral *arrabal* remained an unexplored poetic resource, but its main characteristic also benefitted its literary potential. For Beatriz Sarlo, the main characteristic of the *orillas* was their

[94] For a more detailed account on traditional *criollismo*, see 'Buenos Aires in Literature: The Paris of Spanish America?' in the general Introduction, p. 32.

interstitial quality: 'lugar indefinido entre la llanura y las últimas casas, a las que se llegaba desde la ciudad, todavía horadada por baldíos y patios' (Sarlo 2003: 19). Equally, Rafael Olea Franco contends that Borges's 'estética de las orillas' is centred around 'un lugar que pretende ser el no-lugar' (Olea Franco 1993: 219). This quality of an indefinite 'no-place' meant that Borges could inject the *arrabal* with personal meaning and with his idea of a contemporary *criollismo.*

Ultimately, it was the desire for significant meaning that encouraged Borges to establish a soulful connection with the streets of the *arrabal*:

> Son todas ellas [las calles] para el codicioso de almas
> una promesa de ventura
> pues a su amparo hermánanse tantas vidas
> desmintiendo la reclusión de las casas
> y por ellas con voluntad heroica de engaño
> anda nuestra esperanza. ('Las calles' in Borges 1993[1923])

The streets of the *arrabal* were a promise of newfound happiness, because therein lies the hope ('esperanza') of building a likeminded urban *criollo* community ('hermánanse tantas vidas'). More than that, Borges declared in 'El tamaño de mi esperanza' that his ultimate goal was to find a universal identity for Buenos Aires: 'Ya Buenos Aires, más que una ciudá, es un país y hay que encontrarle la poesía y la música y la pintura y la religión y la metafísica que con su grandeza se avienen. Ese es tamaño de mi esperanza, que a todos nos invita a ser dioses y a trabajar en su encarnación' (Borges 1926: 14). Borges poetic project therefore transcended his personal impasse with national identity: he believed that the entire nation of Buenos Aires needed to be culturally reconfigured and that this would become his poetic destiny. Ultimately, 'la poesía y la música y la pintura y la religión y la metafísica' that represented what to

him was the most authentic image of Buenos Aires, was to be found in the *arrabales*, because this is where modernisation had not fully established itself yet and where traditional provincial life still had some vestiges. In the mid-1920s he still believed that he could be the poet to exalt a new myth of the modern and *criollo* city. As the second part of this chapter will reveal, this dream would ultimately be squandered in the second half of the 1920s.

I.2 Réda, the Suburbs and Outer-*arrondissements* of Paris

In an interview published in *L'Œil de bœuf* in 1993, Réda explained that his interest in certain areas of Paris, designated as 'ruins', stemmed from a conscious decision to portray an image of the city distinct from representations that focused on the city's monuments and triumphant history:

> Pour revenir à Paris, si j'ai plutôt évoqué ses « ruines » (mais pas uniquement) c'est parce que son côté monumental et triomphant m'a paru (et en partie à tort, sans doute) pouvoir se passer complètement de ma participation. Alors que les endroits modestes, cachés, menacés, périphériques, voire sordides [...] balbutiaient quelque chose d'intime et à expliciter. (Réda and Roy 1993: 17)

Réda claimed that the grandiose and monumental side of Paris was already well represented in literature. Conversely, he suggested that other places — modest, squalid, hidden, peripheral and under threat of extinction — had literary potential because they offered something intimate to say about life in the city. Similar to Borges's decision to explore the literary possibilities of the *arrabal* in Buenos Aires, Réda chose to base his poetic project on areas with untapped potential.

This meant that he had decided to consciously avoid writing about landmarks such as La Tour Eiffel, L'Arc de Triomphe, Notre-Dame Cathedral or Sacré-Cœur, and focus instead on common places of unassuming character. Over the course of his career, this quest led him to explore the suburbs and outer neighbourhoods or outer-*arrondissements* of the city where the 'côté monumental et triomphant' of Paris did not exist (Réda and Roy 1993: 17). He was particularly interested — especially at the beginning of his career — in the peripheral *faubourgs* and Parisian *banlieues*. Historically, the *faubourgs* in Paris have been known as the marginal neighbourhoods of the city, situated within the city walls though presenting topographical characteristics similar to the architecture of a small town rather than to the buildings of the larger city. They are especially typified by their 'maisons basses d'un étage' (Poussou 1996: 350). The *banlieue,* on the other hand, is a space included in the urban conurbation though not part of the city itself. It maintains certain administrative links to the city and is strongly influenced by it. In Paris, it is considered 'un espace de transition' because it is located between 'la ville centre' and the countryside (Poussou 1996: 341).

In order to follow Réda's gravitation towards the periphery of Paris and away from a cosmopolitan and grandiose image of the city, it becomes important to understand its spatial configuration. Paris is organised around twenty *arrondissements* or districts that spiral out towards the *banlieues*. In *La Liberté des rues* (1997), Réda offers his own description of what he calls 'Paris spirale':

> Pareille à un certain type de nébuleuse et à l'humble coquille de l'escargot, c'est tout simplement la figure en spirale que dessinent les vingt arrondis-

> sements de Paris. A partir du pôle situé à la pointe de l'île de la Cité [...], ils se suivent dans l'ordre numérique et dans le sens des aiguilles d'une montre, pour achever cette révolution le long du cours de Vincennes, à deux pas des colonnes du Trône et de la place de la Nation. (Réda 1997: 68-69)

The numeric distribution of the twenty *arrondissements* of Paris indicates that, at least cartographically, there are clear demarcations between the different districts of the city. To a certain extent, these numbered *arrondissements* convey a sense of order, continuity and even outward directionality in the city.

However, Réda's journey around Paris led him to believe that the topographical reality of Paris was much more arbitrary than might at first appear. First of all, in 'Paris spirale', he counters his previous description of the ordered spiral by highlighting that none of the *arrondissements* is homogeneous: 'Aucun sans doute ne possède une parfaite homogénéité' (Réda 1997: 66). With this statement, Réda implies that the character or personality of the different *arrondissements* of Paris might not be perfectly consistent throughout its space. In fact, he goes on to suggest that he found areas within certain *arrondissements* that resembled either neighbouring or other districts around the city. In *La Liberté des rues* (1997) for instance, he gives the example of a 'zone frontalière' within the 15$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement* that evoked the atmosphere of its neighbouring district, the 7$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement*:

> Dans sa partie nord, par exemple, le XVe arrondissement devrait normalement s'arrêter sur une ligne Grenelle-Garibaldi. [...] Il est certain que le territoire situé au-dessous de l'avenue de Suffren offre un caractère mixte. L'extrémité méridionale des avenues de la Motte-Picquet, de Lowendal et de Ségur, y demeure indiscutablement VIIe, ainsi que les rues du Laos et de la Fédération. Mais le XVe se réaffirme au centre approximatif de ce pentagone, avec la place Dupleix et l'église Saint-Léon. C'est en somme

> une zone frontalière où deux mondes distincts se rencontrent, se juxtaposent, contrastent et n'en font que mieux ressortir leurs particularités. (Réda 1997: 65-66)

The 7th and the 15th *arrondissements* are separated along the Avenue de Suffren. Réda feels, however, that the boulevard Grenelle-Garibaldi located south of Suffren appears as a more significant demarcation between the two districts, because the area that is delimited by these two arteries — though it belongs officially to the 15th *arrondissement* — preserves some of the character of the 7th *arrondissement*. This is conceivably because the imposing École Militaire borders Avenue de Suffren and therefore shows up its adjacent streets as an extension of its grounds. In the 'zone frontalière' south of this building, bound by Rue de la Federation in the northwest, Avenue de Suffren in the North, Avenue de Ségur in the East and the boulevard Grenelle-Garibaldi in the South, Réda argues that two distinct worlds are blended together, thus facilitating an exposure of their singular features. Against the monument of the École Militaire and the Champs de Mars, the modest Place Dupleix and the Saint-Léon church stand out as key constituents of the 15th *arrondissement*, though the rest of the space appears as an extension of the 7th *arrondissement*. With this example, Réda suggests that the districts' limits are not as defined as a cartographic representation of the city would present.

In another example from *La Liberté des rues* (1997), Réda also proposes that beyond resembling the 7th *arrondissement*, the 15th can evoke areas of the 12th and 17th *arrondissements*, districts located at the edge of central Paris:

> J'ai vécu près de vingt-cinq ans en lisière du VIIe, dans une sorte d'avant-poste que le XVe s'y ménage au bord de la place de Breteuil, et où rien dans

> le peuplement ni dans l'architecture ne rompt avec le septièmisme intégral du rivage opposé. Septièmisme qui lui-même, en cet endroit, se rapproche davantage de certains quartiers du XIIe (voyez l'avenue de Saint-Mandé) ou du XVIIe (la zone Villiers-Malesherbes) que de celui de la rue Amélie ou de la rue Rousselet, dont on trouverait sans peine l'équivalent du côté de Vaugirard ou des Batignolles. (Réda 1997: 66)

This example shows that Réda's role as a wandering poet is to establish mental connections between different areas of the city in order to create a multi-layered and dynamic map of Paris.

The superimposition of atmospheres resonant with other districts onto different areas of Paris alters the static configuration of the Parisian spiral. Réda confronts the concept of 'centre-ville': though he does not always make the distinction between the centre of Paris and the city-centre, it is understood that when he speaks about the elusive 'centre de Paris', he is referring to the city-centre. For Réda, the conceptual centre of Paris is fragmented. He therefore challenges the definition of centre by being purposely counter-logical and implying instead that the centre of the city is multiple and scattered, just like the 'identity' of the various *arrondissements*. In *La Tourne* (1975), Réda explains that with the passing of time, cities hide, forget or lose their centre, and that it is eventually up to the individual to reconstruct it from a collection of fragments:

> Mais un centre, à vrai dire [...], les villes en ont un rarement. Ou du moins elles le cachent, à la longue elles l'oublient, elles l'ont perdu; et comment le découvrir sinon par hasard ou par chance; et si ce que l'on trouve alors n'est pas un simulacre, on le devine à la trouble déconvenue où s'étouffe le pressentiment: c'est un simple fragment, qu'il faudrait combiner à d'autres [...] pour obtenir enfin du désordre apparent [...] (Réda 1988a[1975]): 151)

Réda describes the centre of the city or city-centre as an elusive place that is con-

stantly slipping away from the individual's perception.[95] In fact, he contends that its apprehension may only be the product of a collection of fragments revealed to him through his intuition as he travels the city. The examples analysed above have shown that Réda's destabilisation of the cartographic image of Paris, in favour of a personal map where the notions of centre and periphery, are constantly being redefined. For Réda, the centre of Paris could correspond to the combination of different places around the city that evoke the 'côté monumental et triomphant' of Paris ('Entretien avec M. Jacques Réda' 1993: 17); whereas the periphery, by contrast, could correspond to the places that reveal the provincial character of the city.

Réda's quest for the provincial in Paris encouraged him to explore the suburban areas of the city. During his most nostalgic phase at the beginning of his career, Réda explored ways of avoiding dejection by fleeing the places in the city that increased his overwhelmed state of mind, finding a sense of belonging in the *banlieues* or periphery. In *Amen* (1968) for example, he describes:

> Vous n'en finissez pas d'ajouter encore des choses,
> Des boîtes, des maisons, des mots.
> Sans bruit l'encombrement s'accroît au centre de la vie,
> Et vous êtes poussés vers la périphérie,
> Vers les dépotoirs, les autoroutes, les orties... (Réda 1988a[1968]: 24)

'[L]'encombrement au centre de la vie' implies the overwhelming feeling brewing inside the poet as a result of experiencing the bustle of urban life. Internally, Réda feels cluttered. The materiality of life propels him outwards towards the periphery. The

[95] For more discussions on Réda's treatment of the centre of Paris, see Ai Kuroda,'Poésie impersonnelle de Jacques Réda , *Interlitteraria*, 4 (1999), pp. 301-314 and Marie-Claude Schapira, 'Centre et décentrement dans *L'Herbe des talus*', in *Lire Réda*, ed. by Hervé Micolet (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1994), pp. 89-102.

periphery allows him to break away from obtrusive melancholic thoughts, because he finds a sense of familiarity there.

At least until the 1980s, many of his 'randonnées suburbaines' (Réda 1997: 93) take him to the *banlieues* of Paris, though he also wanders its *faubourgs*. The *banlieue* is particularly appealing to Réda because, as Laura Michel describes, it is a 'zone hétéroclite' between the city and the countryside:

> la banlieue est une zone hétéroclite, non que s'y mêlent la ville et la campagne, mais parce que le tout s'est transformé en une sorte de « savane suburbaine ». La banlieue est l'envers de la rigueur haussmannienne, elle est une expérience des limites, où se dissout la frontière qui sépare la ville de la campagne. Elle fait éclater les plans des architectes et tire la ville vers son repoussoir, le désordre. (Michel 1994: 180)

Michel describes the *banlieue* as a heterogeneous zone where the city is no longer subjugated to the grandiose image of Paris born out of Haussmann's modernisation. Instead, located at the edges of the city, the *banlieue* preserves some of the architectural structures and cultural traits of the city, while forcing upon it the dynamics of the countryside. As a result, the *banlieue* blends together characteristics of both the city and the countryside; characteristics that are also found in the provinces. For Réda, the *banlieue* is a heterotopic space of possibility where the wandering poet can find an alternative to life in the modern chaotic city and a kinship with its unpretentious undertones:[96]

> Et ensuite encore une rue, des maisons, plus de maisons, des jardins, plus de rue, plus personne, rien que du ciel comme moi partout présent et partout égaré; du ciel guettant le ciel sous des buissons, dans la profondeur des fenêtres [...]. (Réda 1988a[1975]: 151-152)

[96] For a definition of 'heterotopia', see 'Critical Framework on Borges, Réda and their Cities' in the general Introduction, p. 39.

In this example from *La Tourne* (1975), Réda captures the provincial character of the *banlieue* by alluding to three of its features: the repetitive nature of its spatial configuration and architecture, the calmness of its streets devoid of people, and the open sky clear of tall urban buildings. This example appears in a place in the narrative where Réda has purposely decided to flee the city centre. The sense of flight is recorded in the juxtaposition of clauses: 'une rue, des maisons, plus de maisons, des jardins, plus de rue, plus personne, rien que su ciel' (Réda 1988a[1975]: 151-152). At the same time, this juxtaposition of clauses creates a certain rhythm in the sentence that emulates the act of walking along the street. The effect produced is one where the reader feels included in the poet's journey across space, which in turn conveys his desire for an aesthetic experience. The sentiment that permeates this example and works such as *La Tourne* (1975) is that Réda turns to the *banlieue* or periphery in search of its quiet and modest beauty. He finds there a space of belonging with poetic potential.

Subsequent collections of poems and prose poems at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s affirm Réda's centrifugal movement towards the Parisian *faubourgs* and especially its banlieues. In *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977) for example, there is a clear movement outward, both within the individual prose poems and in the overall organisation of the book. The book is divided into two parts: the first is set within the twenty *arrondissements* of Paris, whereas the second takes place outside of Paris. In the first part, as the text unfolds, Réda appears to travel less around the inner districts — such as the 4^{th}, 5^{th}, 6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th} *arrondissements* — and

more around the outer *arrondissements*. In 'Aux environs', the last prose poem of the first part, Réda recounts his journeys around the suburbs, *banlieues* and *faubourgs* of Paris. Then in the second part of the book, he signposts his exit from Paris in the first sentence: 'Quand on sort de Paris par Austerlitz, on voit tout de suite ces entrepôts bâtis comme des palaces de Cannes' (Réda 1993[1977]: 129). His journey takes him outside of Paris, stopping in Belgium and Luxembourg before returning to France and finishing his trip in the Loire Valley (Réda 1993[1977]: 172).

In the early 1980s, Réda wrote two more collections of poems dedicated to the Parisian *banlieues*: *Hors les murs* (1982) and *Beauté suburbaine* (1985). However, by 1982 — as Réda explained in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) — he slowly began to tire of the *banlieue* and his 'randonnées suburbaines':

> A cette époque, bien que je fusse de longtemps un lecteur assidu de Borges, comme beaucoup de ses admirateurs français je ne connaissais guère de son premier livre que le titre: *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Je ne l'ai vraiment bien lu qu'une fois traduit, au moment où je commençais à me lasser de ces randonnées suburbaines. (Réda 1987: 93)

As I have already described in Chapter 1, Réda read the translated version of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) in 1982, once it was translated into French by Néstor Ibarra. This chronological detail is key to the periodization of Réda's interest in the *banlieues* of Paris, because it means that in the 1980s Réda was less interested in exploring the suburbs of Paris, which gave him an opportunity to focus on the inner Paris and ultimately in its outer-*arrondissements*.

Indeed, from the publication of *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986) onwards and for a period of about ten years, Réda appears to venture less around the *banlieues*

and more around the inner *arrondissements* of Paris. He also shows some interest in books that are centred around specific themes, rather than the devoted exploration of specifics areas of Paris. For example, *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986) is mostly a portrayal of Réda's relationship with the 15th *arrondissement*; whereas *Recommandations aux promeneurs* (1988) centres on advice on the act of walking rather than the places where these journeys take place. Then, in *Lettre sur l'univers et autres discours en vers français* (1991), Réda appears to disengage completely from the Parisian periphery. This is visible in the poet's use of the *futur antérieur*, to express his weariness in relation to the periphery: 'J'aurai beaucoup aimé vos charmes équivoques / Villas, petits manoirs, usines et bicoque [...] / Mais je suis fatigué de vos charmes, faubourgs' (Réda 1991: 15-16). This example confirms that Réda's detour from the periphery of Paris was mainly the result of a certain lassitude and also the desire to explore new poetic themes in *Affranchissons-nous* (1990), autobiographical prose in *Aller aux mirabelles* (1991) and essays about other writers in *La sauvette* (1995).

Eventually by 1995, Réda returns to the suburbs, with the publication of *L'Incorrigible* (1995) in a poem with the same title, which closes the collection: 'Le chaos suburbain, sa magie équivoque, / J'ai cru sincèrement que je ne les aimais / Plus' ('L'incorrigible' in Réda 1995: 105). By the mid-1990s, Réda discovers that the idiosyncrasies of the *banlieues* still appeal to him. Consequently, he begins to explore again the intimate and common beauty in the suburbs of Paris. However, this time, he also looks to strengthen his interest in the outer-*arrondissements* of the city. This is because, as

the analysis in the second part of the chapter will reveal, Réda realised that the *arrondissements* at the edges of the city could also have — in places — similar characteristics to the *banlieues*, and in turn, to the province where he ultimately felt a sense of belonging.

This selective and by no means exhaustive glance at Réda's vast bibliography shows that even though there is not a systematic shift in his writing towards the suburbs of Paris and/or its outer-*arrondissements*, there is a sense of progression that reveals fewer works exclusively dedicated to the suburbs, and more books that focus on specific themes and on the *arrondissements* of Paris. Most importantly, it proves that after the 1980s, Réda became more interested in remaining within the boundaries of the capital city, searching for spaces that had some of the qualities of the *banlieues*, but without having to travel to them. Thus, if we were to establish a parallel between Borges's and Réda's treatment of the periphery, then the outer-*arrondissements* of Paris would correspond to Borges's 'orillas'. In the second and final part of this chapter, I will focus solely on these areas of Borges's and Réda's cities in an attempt to connect their portrayals of these urban destinations to their quasi-revelatory experience and to their aesthetic projects.

II Poetic Destiny and Aesthetic Experience

The outer neighbourhoods of their respective cities become Borges's and Réda's poetic destinations. For both of them, the poetic qualities of space emerge from their physical experience of space which they then also poeticise. As a result, their poetics of the urban and poetics of the self interact to form an expression of their poetic destiny. The definition of 'destiny' in this case is taken from Borges's own description of 'destino poético' as the expression of the self through literature in 'Profesión de fe literaria' (Borges 1926: 127-133). However, in Spanish, 'destino' also means destination. And so, in the analysis that follows, I propose to look at the moment where these two definitions of the word 'destino' coincide: the moment when the poet feels a sense of belonging and feels that he can become absorbed in the urban landscape, thus triggering the imminence of a revelation that ultimately never materialises.

II.1 Borges in Palermo: From the Apogee to the Decline of the *criollo* Project

Towards the mid-1920s, Borges determined that his new *criollo* project would be founded in the *orillas* of Buenos Aires. Many of the poems of this period, particularly those of *Luna de enfrente* (1925) were situated in the outer neighbourhoods of the city. As he refined his project, its location also became more defined: Palermo was the perfect fusion of Borges's personal, cultural and aesthetic interests and thus the place that he felt evoked a sense of poetic destiny: the full expression of himself as

an individual and as a poet.

In the last poem of *Luna de enfrente* (1925), 'Versos de catorce', Borges identified Palermo as his poetic destination. Other poems in the collection, such as 'A la calle Serrano' and 'A Rafael Cansinos-Asséns', also appear to be set in Palermo, but 'Versos de catorce' is the only one where the neighbourhood of Palermo is the focus. I believe it is significant that the poem was kept in the same position in the revised 1969 version of the book: it suggests that Borges chose to conclude his most urban collection of poems by celebrating the *barrio* of Palermo and thus singling it out as the ultimate poetic destination.

The poem recounts Borges's impressions upon his return to Buenos Aires and to Palermo, presumably after the family's first trip to Europe from 1914 to 1921. This assumption is based on the possible meaning of the poem's title: 'catorce' could be an abbreviation of the year 1914 when the family left Buenos Aires, but the title could also refer to the number of syllables of each line of the poem. In the first three stanzas of the poem, Borges describes his reconnection with the 'patios', 'calles', 'esquinas', 'casas' and 'almacenes' of Palermo:

> A mi ciudá de patios ahondados como cántaros
> I de calles que surcan las leguas como un vuelo.
> A mi ciudá de esquinas aureoladas de ocaso
> I arrabales azules, hechos de firmamento
>
> A mi ciudá que se abre clara como una pampa
> Yo volví de las tierras antiguas del Naciente
> I recobré sus casas y la luz de sus casas
> I la luz esquinera que urgen sus almacenes
>
> I supe en las orillas, del querer de una novia
> I a punta de poniente desangré el pecho en salmos

I canté la tristona gustación de esa gloria
I el retazo de pampa colorada de un patio.

Yo sentí que las calles derechas de Palermo
Que estiran el espacio, son dulzura y hombría
I unas balaustraditas me hablaron de Carriego
I un almacén malevo de la plebe rosina.
('Versos de catorce' in Borges 1925b: 41)

Borges implies that upon traversing the long streets of Palermo, he could feel the essence of the *barrio*: 'yo presentí la entraña de la voz *las orillas*' (Borges 1925b: 42). 'Yo presentí' is the third subject-verb pattern that appears throughout the poem: 'Yo volví' in stanza two, '[y]o sentí' in stanza four and '[y]o presentí' in stanza six. The anaphoric repetition of the subject-verb pattern grounds the presence of the poet in the poem. Borges is at the centre of the experience. Moreover, the emotional gradation implied in these three subject-verb patterns — 'yo volví', 'yo sentí', 'yo presentí' — deepens Borges's sense of belonging to Palermo.

Borges translates this feeling of belonging through the use of religious language, also used in other poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and *Luna de enfrente* (1925):[97] the street corners are haloed by the sunset, the *arrabales* reflect the blue firmament, and the poet recounts the experience by pouring out the glorified landscape in psalms. The apparent boundlessness of the city also contributes to the religious theme because it adds an enigmatic profundity to the scene. The feeling of expanse is emphasised through the anaphoric repetition of 'a mi ciudá' and of 'I', then accentuated with images of spatial depth: 'patios ahondados', 'calles que surcan

[97] See the analysis of the poems above in I.1. Borges, the 'arrabal' and his Urban *criollismo* of the 'orillas', p. 218.

las leguas como un vuelo', 'arrabales hechos de firmamento', 'ciudá clara como una pampa'. This anaphoric construction of the poem echoes 'La guitarra' from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), where the repetition of 'Vi' created the same effect of cumulative visual impressions found here.[98]

Palermo finally appears by name in the fourth stanza: 'Yo sentí que las calles derechas de Palermo / Que estiran el espacio, son dulzura y hombría' ('Versos de catorce' in Borges 1925b: 41). The sense of extension produced by this imagery allows the poet and the reader to visualise Palermo as a flat and horizontal surface that spills over onto the Argentine countryside. It contributes to the image of Palermo as a vast and infinite space. At the same time, it adds to Borges's emotional connection to his *barrio*: for example, 'patios ahondados' is relative to the impression Borges receives as he enters the courtyard of a typical *porteño* home: the depth of the house is only revealed once he finds himself in the *patio*. However, the adjective 'ahondados' also conveys emotion: it expresses the depth or intensity of a feeling. In other words, with this single adjective Borges effectively expresses both an image of physical space and a feeling of intimacy. Similarly, the expanse of Palermo suggested in the quote above deepens Borges's own feelings of 'dulzura' towards the *barrio*.

With the last poem of *Luna de enfrente* (1925), 'Versos de catorce', Borges began to think about Palermo as a place that he could use to represent his new urban *criollismo* because of his personal attachment to it. In the same year of its publication,

[98] See complete analysis of 'La guitarra' in Chapter 3.I.2. Paris in the Evening: Réda's 'activité du soir', p. 177.

1925, he began conceiving of a history of Argentina in verse. This book would be entitled *Cuaderno San Martín* after a brand of copybook of the same name (Williamson 2004: 136). In the early stages of the planning of the book, Borges wrote two poems that gave the impression that the collection would incorporate historical fact, emotional investment in space and invention of past events. The first was 'Fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires' and the second, 'Arrabal en que pesa el campo'. The latter is set in Villa Ortúzar one of the north-western neighbourhoods of the 'orillas' of Buenos Aires. The tone conveyed is one of loneliness and despair, particularly through the lines: 'En Villa Ortúzar / [...] la luna está más sola' and 'la desesperación se mira en los charcos' (Borges 1929: 13-14). This sadness is triggered in the subject of the poem as he walks through the neighbourhood on his own lamenting his solitude, but also his singleness: 'En Villa Ortúzar / el deseo varón es triste en la tarde / cuando hay caderas que pasean en la vereda' (Borges 1929: 14). The line 'el deseo varón es triste en la tarde' is particularly suggestive because it is repeated twice in the poem, grounding the subject's feelings onto the space around him. At the same time, however, his dejection is paralleled by a sense of nostalgia also imbedded in the *barrio*; a nostalgia that results from the impossible desire to connect with the provincial and distant *pampas*, and which appears to leave a sense of emptiness or 'hueco': 'En Villa Ortúzar [...] / hay unos huecos hondos / huéspedes del poniente y la pampa' (Borges 1929: 13).

'Fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires' is altogether a different poem because it incorporates the historical dimension Borges was interested in portraying. Most

importantly it lays the groundwork for Borges's urban *criollismo* to be founded in Palermo. In the first four stanzas of the poem, Borges establishes a panegyric discourse recounting the journey of the conquistadors and the sixteenth-century foundation of the city:

> Y fué 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 repleto 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.
> Fué una manzana entera y en mi barrio: en Palermo. (Borges 1929: 9-10)

The first three stanzas of the poem recover images from the time of the conquistadors, whereas the fourth establishes Palermo as the birthplace of the nation. He expressly dismisses La Boca as the neighbourhood where Buenos Aires was founded, and presents Palermo instead as the epicentre of national identity. From this point onwards, the stanzas that follow revisit some of the images of Palermo and the *barrio* already found in his previous two collections: 'la manzana cuadrada', 'la calle', 'un almacén rosado', 'la esquina', 'los zaguanes', 'la vereda de enfrente'; but also includes new images of Palermo that evoke in particular the presence of people in Borges's *barrio*:

> El primer organito salvaba el horizonte
> Con su achacoso porte, su habanera y su gringo.
> El corralón seguro ya opinaba IRIGOYEN,
> Algún piano mandaba tangos de Saborido.
>
> Una cigarrería ahumó como una rosa
> La nochecita nueva, zalamera y agreste.
> No faltaron zaguanes y novias besadoras.
> Sólo faltó una cosa: la vereda de enfrente.
>
> A mi se me hace cuento que empezó Buenos Aires:
> La juzgo tan eterna como el agua y el aire. (Borges 1929: 10-11)

The references to the politician Irigoyen (1852-1933) who was president of Argentina on two occasions (from 1916 to 1922, and again from 1928 to 1930), and the tango player Saborido (1877-1941) indicate that the narrative of the poem leaps from the conquistadors of the sixteenth century at the beginning, to the nineteenth century. By fast-forwarding time, Borges succeeds in creating the illusion of an immemorial past of a city that — as he confidently concludes in the final couplet of the poem — is 'tan eterna como el agua y el aire'. At the same time, it incorporates recent events of Buenos Aires' history, thus demonstrating Borges's interest in representing an image of Buenos Aires that conflated the past and the present. The final couplet furthermore summarises the fact that Borges intended to invent a new tradition for his city borne out of his imaginative and personal history, suggesting that any other accounts of it were pure 'cuento'.

Borges chose Palermo as a destination for his new urban *criollismo* for Buenos Aires because it possessed what he believed were the right personal and geographic conditions to fulfil the project. Palermo was located between the *pampas*, which represented the traditional agrarian culture of Argentina, and the neighbourhoods of

the city centre, where modernisation was most rife. But most importantly, Borges believed that Palermo possessed an inherent poetic quality because it implied the manifestation of 'un destino' — because it represented the expression of aspects of his own subjectivity: 'hay cosas, que por solo implicar destinos, ya son poéticas: por ejemplo, el plano de una ciudad' (Borges 1926: 130). For Borges, destiny was the equivalent of a 'plena confesión de un yo, de un carácter, de una aventura humana' (Borges 1926: 131).

In his conceptualisation of destiny, Borges therefore introduces the empirical experience of place. Borges's definition of aesthetic experience implies that the poetic potential of a place is determined by its capacity to reveal a sense of destiny and purpose to the person who experiences it. But at the same time, for that poetic potential to exist, a direct relationship with the place in question needs to be established. This is due to another claim Borges makes in an essay published in the same year: 'Las cosas (pienso), no son intrínsecamente poéticas; para ascenderlas a poesía, es preciso que las vinculemos a nuestro vivir' ('Otra vez la metáfora' in Borges 1928: 50). In order for things to become poetic, it is necessary to link them to one's life, it is necessary for them to become part of one's life experience. Above all, Borges believed that this life-experience moment could only take place through physical connection with space and that its poetic expression could only be preceded by 'living' the words that would eventually go on the page:

> Pienso que las palabras hay que conquistarlas, viviéndolas, y que la aparente publicidad que el diccionario les regala es una falsía. Que nadie se anime a escribir suburbio sin haber caminoteado largamente por sus veredas altas, sin haberlo deseado y padecido como a una novia; sin haber sentido

> sus tapias, sus campitos, sus lunas a la vuelta de un almacén, como una generosidad... ('Profesión de fe literaria' in Borges 1926: 132)

Thus, if Palermo was to become poetic in Borges's new urban *criollismo*, it was crucial for him to experience it physically. Only then, could a moment of imminent revelation emerge.

One of the most salient examples of this sudden communion between self and place occurred during an evening's leisurely walk around the peripheral neighbourhood of Barracas. The experience was recounted in 'Sentirse en muerte', an essay published for the first time in *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928):[99]

> No quise determinarle rumbo a esa caminata: procuré una máxima latitud de probabilidades para no cansar la expectativa con la obligatoria antevisión de una sola de ellas. Realicé en la mala medida de lo posible, eso que llaman caminar al azar; acepté, sin otro consciente prejuicio que el de soslayar la [sic] avenidas o calles anchas, las más oscuras intimaciones de la casualidad. (Borges 1928: 123-124)

Allegedly, Borges had been feeling dejected because he had been rejected by his most recent romantic interest, Norah Lange (Williamson 2004: 156-157). He had decided to walk aimlessly around the city, leaving his trajectory to chance. He let the familiarity of certain *barrios* determine his gravitation towards them (Borges 1928: 124). He then happened upon a street with low-rooftop houses and a pink wall lit by moonlight, whose 'asombro' and 'sencillez' moved Borges to the point where he suddenly felt time dissolve and the scene elevate to a timeless condition. Borges's sudden uncanny

[99] 'Sentirse en muerte' was published four times as part of three different texts in the course of Borges's career: first in *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928); then as part of the essay from the eponymous collection, *Historia de la eternidad* (1936); and finally as part of the essay 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', first published as a pamphlet by the (apocryphal) Oportet & Haereses (1947) and later incorporated in *Otras inquisiciones* (1952). The version used in this thesis is the one from *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928) because it is contemporaneous with the analysis of the poems presented in this chapter.

abstraction from time also had an effect on his sense of self:

> Me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo [...]. No creí, no, haber remontado las presuntivas aguas del Tiempo; más bien me sospeché poseedor del sentido reticente o ausente de la inconcebible palabra eternidad. (Borges 1928: 126)

His surrender to the streets of the neighbourhood connected his emotions to the space around him, thus revealing the poetic qualities of the place and also affecting his own sense of self. His 'feeling in death' meant that for a moment, the intensity of his emotions allowed him to abstract himself from self and time, and to become a detached witness of the world. It is the feeling of abstraction that gives the impression that something more profound about his destiny and the space around him might be revealed to him at any moment.

Later on in his career, in an essay entitled 'La muralla y los libros' (1950), Borges gave examples of different kinds of events that embody this imminence of a revelation. These events, as the quote below shows, have in common the fact that they produce emotions. '[C]iertos lugares' in particular, evokes the spatial dimension analysed in this thesis:

> La música, los estados de felicidad, la mitología, las caras trabajadas por el tiempo, ciertos crepúsculos y ciertos lugares, quieren decirnos algo, o algo dijeron que no hubiéramos debido perder, o están por decir algo; esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético. ('La muralla y los libros' [1950] in Borges 2010b: 15)

Borges suggests here that certain experiences convey the sense that there might be a larger truth concealed within them. They are always about to tell us something. However, this revelation of a deeper, ontological essence never materialises. Instead, it is replaced by 'el hecho estético'. '[E]l hecho estético' or aesthetic act, corresponds

to the materialisation of the previous aesthetic experience; it is indeed the literary text.

In 'Profesión de fe literaria', the single most important essay of Borges's youth because in it he defends his interest in the peripheral neighbourhoods on Buenos Aires, Borges says that 'toda literatura es autobiográfica, finalmente' (Borges 1926: 128). Anticipating what he will determine later on in 'La muralla y los libros', Borges believed that all literary texts have the capacity to reveal aspects of the self, the poet's destiny. In other words, the literary text is the aesthetic act that contributes to the materialisation of an essence of self — or indeed of place — that is otherwise concealed in 'los accidentes que la encarnan' (Borges 1926: 130).

Thus from 'Profesión de fe literaria', Borges worked towards writing poems that brought him closer to a revelation. Contrary to what he would expound in 'La muralla y los libros', in the 1920s, Borges still believed that through writing, this revelation could one day occur. For Borges, this revelation meant that he would one day conquer the words on the page that would embody the full expression of his destiny, and that would ultimately justify him as an individual and as a poet:

> Yo he conquistado ya mi pobreza; ya he reconocido, entre miles, las nueve o diez palabras que se llevan bien con mi corazón; ya he escrito más de un libro para poder escribir, acaso, una página. La página justificativa, la que sea abreviatura de mi destino, la que sólo escucharán tal vez los ángeles cuando suene el Juicio Final. ('Profesión de fe literaria' in Borges 1926: 132-133)

At the end of 'Profesión de fe literaria', Borges explains that he has already identified some words that he believe speak his truth, his destiny, his self. He adds that his objective is now to search for the page that will represent the essence of his self, the

page that would encapsulate him as an individual and a poet, the page that would justify his existence. This moment, where all the elements of his poetic project — place, self and urban *criollismo* — would align perfectly, would justify him as a writer, would make his cause worthwhile and would guarantee his posterity as the poet of Buenos Aires.

Thus, as part of his plan to develop a history of Argentina in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929) and to use Palermo as the ultimate poetic destination, Borges designed two more poems that were to appear in the collection: 'Elegía de Palermo' (later published as 'Elegía de los Portones') and 'Versos con ademán de recuerdo' (later published as 'Fluencia natural del recuerdo') (Borges 1997: 270-271, 278-279). What is interesting about these poems is that when they were first written in 1926, Borges still wanted to portray a positive and hopeful image of his *barrio*. However, by the time they appeared in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), their tone was more melancholic. Instead of being the poetic embodiment of a flourishing urban *criollo* Palermo of Borges's time, the *barrio* was relegated to a nostalgic past and a distant memory. In these poems, Borges does not appear capable of achieving the reconciliation between the old and the new: any *criollo* references are expressed with nostalgia, and any references to modern Buenos Aires are met with disgust and scorn. Why did Borges's new urban *criollo* project ultimately fail and what became of Palermo in his poems by the end of the 1920s?

According to Edwin Williamson, the end of the 1920s were difficult for Borges because of his failed relationship with Norah Lange, the political situation of Argentina

and the disputes over the running of the literary journal *Martín Fierro.* In 1928, Borges also underwent an eye operation and his creative output was temporarily diminished (Williamson 2004: 160-74). As a result, the enthusiasm registered in some of the poems of *Luna de enfrente* (1925) — particularly 'Versos de catorce' — and in 'Fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires', was no longer present in the rest of the poems of *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929). This is particularly evident in the versions of 'Elegía de Palermo' and 'Versos con ademán de recuerdo' that appeared in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929).

'Elegía de Palermo' was originally published in the magazine *Nosotros* in 1926. It is an elegiac piece that honours a past image of the *barrio*, from the way the daylight shone deep into its vacant lots, to the airs of tango that sounded in the streets. Though its tone is nostalgic, some of the imagery in this earlier version of the poem reflects a joyful atmosphere that later disappears from the version in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929). For example, there is the reference to the kites that 'hacían fiesta en el cielo' or the nights 'en que ardió la milonga' ('Elegía de Palermo' [1926] in Borges 1997: 270). These images disappear from the later version, and the poem is left instead with a more apathetic outlook, emphasised throughout by the use of the past tense: 'Palermo desganado, vos tenías / un alegrón de tangos para hacer valiente...' (Borges 1929: 17).

To a lesser extent but with the same effect, Borges creates a more sombre atmosphere in the second version of 'Versos con ademán de recuerdo'. He replaces in particular the exalted expression '¡qué lindo ver por una hendija / tu calabozo de

agua sutil!' ('Versos con ademán de recuerdo' [1926] in Borges 1997: 278) — in reference to the well he had in his garden — with 'daba miedo entrever por una hendija / tu calabozo de agua sutil' (Borges 1929: 20). Borges purposely removed the more optimistic images of Palermo in the second versions of the poems to deepen the rift between the past and present of Palermo.

These poems show therefore an evolution in tone since 'Versos de catorce'. Memory begins to acquire a more dominant role in Borges's portrayal of Palermo. Borges is no longer the excited young poet who is convinced he has a role to fulfil in the exaltation of the *barrio*: in 'Elegía de los portones', the *barrio* persists solely in the memory of the jaded poet, whereas 'Fluencia natural del recuerdo' is a prayer sung by the poet in remembrance of his *barrio*: 'Yo depondré mi oración / para seguir siempre acordándome' (Borges 1929: 21).

The epicentre of 'Elegía de los portones' is indeed the theme of remembrance: 'Esta es una elegía / De Palermo pintado con vaivén de recuerdo' (Borges 1929: 16). Though the elegy is written in the present tense, Borges alludes to a time that is past. This temporality is marked by the use of contrasting adverbs and verbs in the past tense: 'Esta es una elegía / de *cuando* los portones de Palermo *hacían* / sombra' (Borges 1929: 15).[100] Moreover, it reveals different layers of memory. Borges remembers first the atmosphere of the *barrio* as the sun set over vacant lots: 'Esta es una elegía / que se acuerda de un largo resplandor agachado / que los atardeceres daban a los baldíos'. He then remembers the people and places that populated Palermo, particularly the

[100] The emphasis in italics is my own to mark the reference to a remote past.

quintessential *compadritos* and *guapos* of the *esquinas*. He contrasts their liveliness ('mayorales de corneta fiestera' and 'veredas de guapos en que flameaba el corte'), with a lingering feeling of 'desgano' (Borges 1929: 16). This reflects Borges's emotional disconnection from the life of the *barrio*. There is no longer a sense of empathy between his soul and the essence of the place:

> Había cosas felices,
> cosas que solo fueron para alegrar el alma:
> el arriate del patio
> y el andar entonado del compadre [. . .]
>
> El día era más largo en tus veredas
> que en las calles del Centro,
> porque en tus huecos hondos se aquerenciaba el cielo. (Borges 1929: 16-17)

The 'joy of the soul' and the feeling of timelessness expressed in earlier poems are here presented in the past tense. Time no longer appears to slow down on the streets of Palermo, and the sky, which inspired a meditative stillness in Borges amid the bustling city, is no longer reflected in the *barrio*.

By the end of the poem, Borges resigns himself to walk the streets of Buenos Aires, not in search of the new *criollo* qualities of the *barrio*, but rather of memories from his past: 'Desde mi calle de altos (es cosa de una legua) / voy a buscar recuerdos a tus calles nocheras' (Borges 1929: 17). In this couplet, Borges confirms that he was not living far away from Palermo at the time when he composed this poem. His intention upon revisiting Palermo was therefore to revive memories of his childhood. Indeed, in 1929, Borges and his family moved to Avenida Pueyrredón in the *barrio* of Recoleta located about 'una legua' south of Palermo. Thus, contrary to the exaltation of a

present image of Buenos Aires that one finds in poems such as 'Versos de catorce', here the experience of the *barrio* is a way of recovering an image of a time that has passed.

By the end of *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), the nostalgic image of Palermo would be replaced by an acute sense of loss. Borges began to lose faith that his emotional and physical investment in space could help him establish himself as the poet of Buenos Aires. Instead, he began to rely more heavily on words. In 'Barrio Norte', the penultimate poem of the collection, Palermo is no longer the *barrio* whose image Borges can recover by walking its streets; instead it is a *barrio* that has become unrecognisable and almost invisible to the poet. In fact, Borges describes it as only existing in the realm of language; it is a 'secreto / que está vedado por la inutilidad y el descuido' (Borges 1929: 45). Borges portrays Palermo in this way because, as the analysis above has shown, he has lost all sense of emotional connection to the *barrio*, and also possibly because of his failed romantic relationships with Concepción Guerrero and Norah Lange (Williamson 2004: 168). Thus, by the end of the 1920s, Borges was no longer as optimistic about Palermo being the destination of his poetic project. Without this emotional connection to space, Borges would also begin to doubt the possibility of aesthetic revelation. In fact, he no longer believed he could accomplish his urban *criollismo* through verse because, in losing love, he had a lost his poetic voice (Williamson 2004: 168). However, as the last lines of 'Barrio Norte' convey, Borges continued to believe in the power of words:

> Pero sin ruido y siempre,
> en cosas incomunicadas, perdidas, como lo están

> siempre las cosas,
> en el gomero con su veteado cielo de sombra,
> en la bacía que recoge el primer sol y el último,
> perdura ese hecho servicial y amistoso,
> esa lealtad oscura que mi palabra está divulgando:
> el barrio. (Borges 1929: 46-47)

Though Borges relinquished the possibility of becoming the bard of Buenos Aires, he did not give up hope in the possibility of invoking the *barrio* of Palermo in essays and thus continue to promote his urban *criollismo*. In 1929, he began writing a biography of Evaristo Carriego,[101] which would eventually turn into an exaltation of Palermo.

To conclude, the analysis above has shown that Borges initially embraced the 'orillas' of Buenos Aires as a way to live, love and write. He thought he had found in Palermo the ideal space to stage his mythologisation of Buenos Aires. However, in the poems published in *Luna de enfrente* (1925) and later in *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929), Palermo goes from being represented as a physical place that recalls Borges's personal history and his cultural past, to being a place that is solely the product of the poet's memory and imagination. Borges loses all sense of emotional investment in his *barrio*, thus challenging the possibility of the communion between self and place and consequently of the 'hecho estético'. At the end of the 1920s, he still believed in the possibility to exalt place, but without the investment of the dejected self. He would eventually rebuild his belief in the imminence of a revelation and the aesthetic act through his short stories.

[101] I do not consider Borges's portrayal of Palermo in *Evaristo Carriego* (1930) because it is a work of prose and thus goes beyond the scope of this thesis, which is concerned with the poetics of the urban.

II.2 Towards the Meta-Physical: Réda in the 15th and 20th *arrondissements*

Over the course of his life in Paris, Réda has lived in two different *arrondissements*: the 15th and 20th. Both of these districts are located in the outer edges of the Parisian spiral. Throughout his career, he has written about numerous experiences in these *arrondissements* and wandered around them in search of unpretentious corners that remind him of the province. This capacity to become something 'other' than the traditional image of the metropolis establishes these *arrondissements* as places with poetic potential, as heterotopias of the city's landscape.

The 20th *arrondissement* is the second district of Paris where Réda has lived and where he still lives today. He narrates his experience of living in this district in *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004). The book is divided into two parts where he plays with the dual meaning of its title: in the eponymous first part, 'le vingtième me fatigue' refers, on the one hand, to the fatigue caused by the overwhelming excitement of the turn of the millennium, which is sarcastically paralleled, on the other hand, by the fatigue he experienced after journeying the 20th *arrondissement* for some time: 'En évoquant le Vingtième, je ne pensais pas d'abord au siècle qui s'achève, mais à l'arrondissement parisien où je vis depuis dix ans' (Réda 2004: 9). The second part of the book includes a series of shorter pieces collectively entitled 'Supplément à un inventaire lacunaire des rues du XXe arrondissement de Paris', presenting a kind of archaeology of the streets in Réda's district.

Part of his initial complaint regarding this *arrondissement* is the lack of attention he accorded it throughout his writing career, having focused instead on other 'arrondissements limitrophes' such as the 19th and 18th (Réda 2004: 10). He only truly began to explore the 20th *arrondissement* once he moved there. Compared to the 15th where he lived previously, Réda describes the 20th as a self-contained enclave, easily accessible but plagued by an overly-urbanised space: 'A sa position périphérique en bordure d'une banlieue de plus en plus urbanisée, s'ajoute, aggravée les jours de fête, l'indigence des moyens publics de transports. C'est en somme une enclave' (Réda 2004: 11). For this reason, it is difficult at first to imagine the 20th *arrondissement* as a destination that evokes a provincial character. Réda feels somewhat trapped in the 20th, seized by 'le spectre' of the *arrondissement*. This spectre is described as an invisible presence — perhaps an internal force or voice — that coerces Réda into staying within the bounds of the *arrondissement*:

> Tandis que si je suis allé traîner tout bonnement aux Lilas ou me dissiper le long du bassin de la Villette, j'ai l'impression d'avoir trahi. Le spectre qui me le reproche a pris de plus en plus de conscience depuis cinq ou six ans, à l'époque où, passé une période animée de découvertes et d'explorations dans les limites de son enclave, j'ai commencé à prendre mes distances avec cet arrondissement. Or ma fréquentation assidue était devenue pour lui une habitude et, comme certains amis abusifs, il s'est mis à souffrir de jalousie. [...] Durant des mois encore j'ai simulé l'enthousiasme ou au moins la curiosité. J'ai compté des briques rue Louis-Ganne, visité des bazars rue d'Avron, courtisé des raseuses démoralisantes comme la rue des Couronnes, la rue de la Plaine, la rue Haxo, entassé les croquis de Saint-Jean Bosco et des ponts de la Petite Ceinture. (Réda 2004: 13)

Whenever Réda attempts to leave the 20th *arrondissement* (to wander around the Lilas or the Villette both located in the 19th *arrondissement*), the so-called spectre of the *arrondissement* expresses jealousy and forces Réda back to reluctantly remain

within its bounds.

Réda's negative impressions of the 20th *arrondissement* indicate that at least in part, this district counteracts Réda's search for a sense of belonging. However, *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004) suggests that as he begins to discover the cultural diversity of the district, he bares witness to the mutational character of the space, thus creating a potential for poetic exploration. This capacity of being 'other' is mostly imbedded in the streets, markets and shops that reflect the city's diverse cultural identity. For example, many street names of the *arrondissement* are named after other cities and countries. He mentions Rue de Sénégal, Rue de Pékin, Rue Pali-Kao, Rue de l'Amman, Rue de la Chine, Rue du Cambodge and Rue du Japon (Réda 2004: 37-38).[102] He also describes businesses and restaurants that have a multicultural character. Réda believes that these elements trigger Paris' 'otherness' and separate Réda's experience of the peripheral *arrondissement* from the traditional image of modern Paris. Consequently, the 20th *arrondissement* might not feel like a place of refuge or belonging to the poet at first; however, its capacity to be 'other', still preserves its appeal as a poetic destination.

In 'Une lettre de Vaugirard', a poem in *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), Réda declares that: 'Tôt ou tard, / Au besoin par raison il faut choisir une patrie, / Or je sens que la mienne en définitive est bien là' (Réda 1986: 28). Contrary to the 20th *arrondissement*, the 15th *arrondissement* did convey this inherent sense of belonging.

[102] For a more comprehensive study about Réda's exploration of street names around Paris, see Michael Sheringham, 'Paris – City of Names: Toponymic Trajectories and Mutable Identities' in *The Cultural Identities of European Cities*, ed. by Katia Pizzi and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 166-184.

This 'là' refers to the neighbourhood of Vaugirard, in the 15th *arrondissement*, where Réda lived for some time before moving to his the 20th *arrondissement*. These lines point to the fact that Réda recognises the importance of having a place of belonging, a 'patrie'. The neighbourhood where Réda resides is a point of reference, a point of departure and arrival, and a refuge for the wandering poet. Moreover, the meaning of 'patrie' is much more personal for Réda than it is for Borges: whereas towards the end of the 1920s Borges expanded his definition of 'mi patria' to include the issue of national identity, Réda remained focused on his relationship to his neighbourhood. Still, the word 'patrie' conveys the same sense of honour and belonging as it does for Borges.

The 15th is a largely residential district in the southwest of Paris. It is, according to Réda, a 'zone frontalière' because it borders the *banlieues*, and geographically it is 'le plus étendu de la ville' (Réda 1986: 31; 1997: 66). It also borders the 6th and 7th *arrondissements*. In *Les Ruines de Paris* (1977), Réda flees the 'désespoir' caused by the chaotic dynamics of cosmopolitan Paris by returning to his neighbourhood: 'C'est pourquoi je vais vite et droit devant moi vers la rase campagne à fourrés qui règne autour des Invalides' (Réda 1993[1977]: 14). Interestingly, the image Réda associates with home is a pastoral one: 'la rase campagne à fourrés'. He does not associate returning home with the geographical location designated by street names or buildings. Instead, returning home means returning to what symbolises home for him: '[i]l y a des œufs, du fromage, du vin, beaucoup de disques...' (Réda 1993[1977]: 14). Being able to return to his place of refuge, where he finds a sense of familiarity in the quo-

tidian, induces a primal state of sensation in him: 'Je ne suis plus que la vibration de ces cordes fondamentales tendues comme l'espérance, pleines comme l'amour' (Réda 1993[1977]: 14). Contrary to Borges, who sought the outer neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires in order to escape the home environment,[103] for Réda, his home is a restorative place of comfort. In this place of belonging, Réda is therefore able to surrender his sense of self and become like 'string vibrations'; he is able to tune in to the essence of the space around him.

The district has a tranquil atmosphere that reminds Réda at times of Lunéville, his hometown: 'Les façades claires et modestes des petits immeubles anciens qui la [rue Borromée] bordent, et sa tranquillité, me rappellent agréablement ma ville natale' (Réda 1986: 40). Indeed, Réda believes that his *arrondissement* possesses a charm that is at times 'plus rébarbatif encore qu'équivoque', and that allows him to imagine himself in other destinations (Réda 1986: 31). In *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), Réda devotes an entire section of the book to the 15$^{\text{th}}$. Throughout the nine short texts of 'Le XV$^{\text{e}}$ magique', in both prose and verse, Réda describes the *arrondissement* as being 'aux confins du banal et du magique' (Réda 1986: 31). The 'banal' corresponds to the everyday life of the district, which Réda illustrates by describing journeys around his *arrondissement* and offering a picture of its commerce, its 'richesses indispensables' and the 'satisfaction des besoins fondamentaux de la vie' (Réda 1986: 22-23). The 'magique', on the other hand, corresponds to the district's ability to evoke other places, to give Réda the impression that he is temporarily

[103] Borges's relationship with his family and his reaction to his home were analysed in Chapter 2.I.1. Borges in Buenos Aires: Scaffolds of a Poetic Project, p. 117.

somewhere else. For instance, at one point in the narrative, Réda cannot help but to think about the suburbs of Buenos Aires in one of the neighbourhoods of the 15th *arrondissement*: 'Mais de quelque façon que l'on s'y prenne, et surtout si jamais on n'y est allé, il est difficile de ne pas penser aux anciens faubourgs de Buenos Aires quand on erre dans ce quartier' (Réda 1986: 35).

Réda argues that this capacity for transmutation is part of the city's own quest to define itself through the prism of the poet's mind. As a result, Réda is not interested in imposing an identity for the city, as Borges is in his writings; he is instead a vehicle through which the *arrondissement* — and the city in general — expresses itself:

> c'est la ville qui se rêve et navigue en tout sens à travers les strates de pierre, de vie et de mémoire qui forment son épaisseur, réinventant à mesure les lois de son instable gravitation. Car si Paris semble devenir par instants une ville imaginaire, il faut dire qu'elle est avant tout une ville imaginative, voire jusqu'à un certain point mythomane (tous ces endroits où elle se prend pour Changhai, Chicago, Conakry), sans cesse en quête d'elle-même sous le front rassurant que nous tendent les monuments de sa gloire. (Réda 1986: 13)

Echoing Borges's idea of the simulacrum in his poem 'La Recoleta',[104] Réda implies that the monuments and buildings of the city hide the real identity of the neighbourhood, which the city desperately tries to uncover by reflecting other cities such as Shanghai, Chicago or Conakry. The city becomes 'imaginaire' through its own tendency to resemble places and its reflection through the poet's mind.

In turn, the transformation of space leads to a transformation of the poet's subjectivity: 'peu à peu ses métamorphoses influent sur le promeneur. Il se pressent à

[104] This was analysed in Chapter 3.I.1. Buenos Aires in the Evening: Undoing the Simulacrum, p. 158.

son tour imaginé, promené comme l'antenne vagabonde et réflexive de la ville dans ses humeurs passagères' (Réda 1986: 13). Réda's reflexive relationship with the city suggests on the one hand that the city can only find expression through the poet's mind and subsequent act of writing; on the other hand, it suggests that by adopting this purposeful desire for self-dissolution in order to blend with the city, the poet is exposed to his own metamorphosis. Ultimately, it is this subjective vulnerability that places the poet on the brink of the so-called revelation announced in the epigraph of this chapter: 'Où le temps absorbé dans un pur maintenant / Laisse aller chaque pas plus près de l'imminent' (Réda 1987: 97).

So much is evident in *Châteaux des courants d'air* (1986), for example, where Réda narrates one of his journeys around the area of La Rue du Commerce located in the 15$^{\text{th}}$ *arrondissement* (Réda 1986: 22-27). In the first couple of pages of the piece, Réda pays attention to the density of 'magasins' and 'négoces voués à la concentration de besoins fondamentaux de la vie' juxtaposed along the various streets (Réda 1986: 22). Through his rich descriptions of a certain 'opulence capitaliste', he conveys the busy and charismatic atmosphere of the neighbourhood (Réda 1986: 24). As he bears witness to the scene, he visualises the commercial transactions between pedestrians he either imagines or sees on the street. In the following example he describes those of a hypothetical passer-by:

> Revenant maintenant à notre personnage d'hypothèse, rien ne lui serait donc plus aisé que d'acquérir, en plus de l'indispensable et d'une motte de beurre, des boules Quies, une montre, un parapluie quelque œillets, une *Enéide* en traduction française, des lunettes pour la relire, voire un sac de voyage s'il compte poursuivre son chemin même jusqu'aux antipodes, l'aérogare des Invalides étant à quatre stations de métro. (Réda 1986: 24-

25)

Réda's descriptions in the piece establish a veritable microcosm of the bustle and hustle of the city, which suddenly, as the evening sets in, turns into a scene on the brink of a revelatory experience: 'L'une après l'autre s'allument les flammes pointues et vacillantes du gros brasier d'étoiles, [...] et le sentiment d'une trêve, ou de l'imminence d'un coup de théâtre, attire au-dehors tout un monde que l'heure des courses absorbe dans son animation' (Réda 1986: 26). Réda's use of the word 'imminence' here echoes Borges's own reference to the word in 'La muralla y los libros' (1950). It is the momentary sense that 'un quelque chose' is about to happen, that he will gain a complete understanding of his place in the world. In Réda's scene, however, this 'trêve' does not materialise because as he feels its essence around him, the activities of the city's rush hour undercut it. Furthermore, Réda grounds the scene to the physical experience even more by humorously including himself in its dynamic: 'Et, après un détour par l'obscure rue des Ecoliers, à peine reconnaît-on la rue du Commerce maintenant déserte, [...] avec la liste des commissions oubliée dans une poche' (Réda 1986: 27). Réda closes his narrative by focusing in on the image of 'la liste des commissions' forgotten in his pocket. This detail in particular draws attention back to the materiality of life and away from the immateriality of the revelation. The effect that Réda creates thus is that the imminence of a revelation is in fact part of the cycle of the experience of being in the city, and that it comes and goes just as the passersby do. Consequently as Réda returns to his circulation of space, his subjectivity — which was previously dissolved into the landscape in order to reach the brink of a revelation — is renewed again, regenerated.

During a conversation with his English translator, Jennie Feldman, held at the University of Oxford in March 2013, Réda explained that his interest in the meta-physical, in the possibility of a revelation, particularly in his later works, stemmed from his fascination with the concepts of time and space. However, he insisted on an alternate spelling of the term: 'meta-physique'. Though Réda did not at the time elaborate on what he meant with the hyphenation of the term, it was clear that in part he was referring to *La Physique amusante*, a book of poems in verse published in 2009, in which he explores the notions of time and space from the point of view of physics. With this in mind, it is possible to determine that the main meaning of the meta-physical for Réda points towards what is beyond (meta-) 'la physique'; in other words, the poetic exploration of the scientific. Indeed, in the interview I conducted during one of Réda's visits to Oxford, he expressed that '[i]l me semble que je suis devenu au contraire plus « physique », c'est-à-dire attiré par la physique' (Réda and Puello Alfonso 2013).

However, considering Réda's lifelong relationship with the study of space and time in the city, I would contend that the term meta-physical is also relevant to his aesthetic experience, in other words, a temporary unity, coherence and communion in this case with surrounding space. In a general sense, the prefix 'meta' at the beginning of a word means that a term is beyond or above the intrinsic level or value of the word on its own. 'Beyond the physical' is therefore a reference to the revelation that does not occur. At the same time, however, the hyphenation of the word 'meta-physical' highlights the importance that Réda continues to accord to the experience of

space, thus suggesting that his intention is to attempt to attain the aesthetic without compromising his interaction with the city.

The examples throughout this chapter have demonstrated Réda's 'meta-physical' relationship with the neighbourhoods of Paris because they have shown their capacity for imaginary and imaginative transmutation, for being other, as well as their potential for transcending the apparent reality, but always remaining in the realm of the concrete. The extracts from 'Le XV^{e} magique' and *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004) have highlighted the fact that Réda's physical experience of space leads to mental and spatial transformation that is temporary and that always culminates in the poet's return to his journey. In this sense, Réda's relationship to Paris is different from Borges's relationship to Buenos Aires, because Réda is not moved by the desire to make his destiny the experience of the transcendental moment of revelation. Instead, he is moved by the journey that includes the perpetuation of a multitude of these experiences and the discoveries made along the way: 'Je compare l'épreuve et non pas le destin' (Réda 1987: 98).

Lastly, this transformation of mental and physical space, the aesthetic experience, is furthermore enacted in the practice of writing. Réda explores on the page the possibilities opened up by the poetic potential of the outer-*arrondissements* of Paris. The triangular relationship between city, poet and text is therefore resolved in the practice of writing, in the aesthetic act. In *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004), for instance, Réda explains that his promenade around the district is followed by the act of describing his experience: 'A la corvée à peu près supportable de la promenade,

succédaient les travaux forcés de la description' (Réda 2004: 14). However, he quickly realises that the same spectre — the voice within him — that had a hold on him when he wanted to venture outside of the 20th *arrondissement* is making it difficult for him to decide the structure of his narration. He cannot choose between buildings, directions or movements. Thus, in order to confront the spectre within him, he resolves to abandon himself to the writing in the same way that he would abandon himself to the experience of the city. By surrendering his sense of self to the page, the language of the city can manifest itself. In the example from *Le Vingtième me fatigue* (2004), it is prose he falls into: 'Autant alors m'adonner à nouveau à la prose et, si tel était mon destin, à une prose des rues' (Réda 2004: 18). Contrary to Borges, whose sense of destiny implied the revelation of what he believed was a hidden dimension of the self, Réda believed that if indeed there was a *destin* for him, it would lay in the aesthetic practice of navigating the streets of the city. Réda remains therefore attached to the physical experience of the city, and the ephemeral moments where he feels the possibility of a revelation are only part of his aesthetic experience. Réda always undercuts the imminence of a revelation by returning to himself in the city. Unlike Borges, who wants to be actively involved in the mythologisation of Buenos Aires, Réda wants to remain but a witness of Paris, involved in its continuous dynamics, its 'universelle giration' (Réda 1997: 41):

> Le voici confondu avec les rues, avec la lente, expansive giration que la ville opère continûment sur son axe invisible qui est le temps, où — comme l'énonce la devise de ses armes — elle flotte et ne sombre jamais, liant à sa pérennité ces promeneurs dont le destin et peut-être le dessein secret sont de disparaître. (Réda 1986: 14)

Conclusion

> The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.
>
> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855 Preface)

In 'Kafka y sus precursores', an essay about the ways in which texts relate to one another and about the reversals of linear temporality, Borges famously said: 'El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro' (Borges 2010b: 95). This last sentence encapsulates well the dynamics at play in Borges's and Réda's urban writings analysed in this thesis. The idea that Réda, a contemporary poet, is able to *create* his precursor Borges becomes conceivable the moment some of Réda's urban idiosyncrasies are found in Borges's early poems about Buenos Aires. Consequently, reading Réda's work modifies our conceptualisation of the past because it changes our perception of Borges as a 1920s urban poet; it also modifies our conceptualisation of the future because, having read this thesis, never again can their works be understood without the effects of one on the other.

This thesis has proven, especially through the analysis of *Ferveur de Borges* (1987), that from the beginning of his literary career in the 1950s, Réda was inspired by Borges's belief that literature can be used to explore and imitate the structures of the world, and by extension that poetry is a vehicle for expressing the intangible parts of the self. However, more importantly, though this study has shown that certain aspects of Borges's poems about Buenos Aires foretell Réda's work — particularly their mutual interest in the periphery — it is the exploration of Réda's texts that has given new insight into our understanding of Borges's early poetry, a factor that has escaped Borges and Réda critics alike until now.

The beginning of this thesis announced that the literary relationship between

Borges and Réda hinged on three important fields: poetry, subjectivity and the city. In each chapter, I explored and compared how Borges and Réda related to each of them in order to form their poetic maps of their respective cities, Buenos Aires and Paris. With regards to the city, the most significant contribution of this thesis has been the identification of Borges's and Réda's quest to establish an alternative poetic image of their respective cities, one that relinquished descriptions of the modern and busy metropolis in favour of the discovery of an expansive, soulful and harmonious urban landscape. I have proven that in order to bare this essence of Buenos Aires' and Paris' provincial 'otherness', Borges and Réda chose to journey through temporal and physical locales that embodied the characteristics and conditions of Foucault's heterotopias. Through my reading of Réda, I concluded that the evening and the places where they both circulated — *patios*, private and public gardens, plazas and cemeteries in the case of Borges; and parks, gardens and vacant lots in the case of Réda — constituted zones of transition by virtue of their unfolding within the cityscape and, at the same time, by their ability to offer meditative experiences to the poets. Similarly, it was Borges's identification of the *arrabal* of the *orillas* — another zone of transition — as the quintessential space to marry being in the city with wanting to experience its unpretentious side, that led me to notice Réda's own gravitation towards the outer-*arrondissements* of Paris.

Within the field of subjectivity, throughout the chapters of this thesis, I argued that Borges and Réda sought to establish an affective connection with their respective cities with provincial undertones because this created the conditions for them to

explore their sense of self and belonging. I also showed that whereas Borges felt that his identity was deeply bound to his conceptualisation of space, Réda was mostly involved in a cycle of self-dissolution and regeneration as part of his desire to bear witness to the idiosyncrasies of the city. However, the most compelling discovery I made with regards to the relationship between self and place, was that both writers approach their cities through a mental prism that results in the imaginary and emotional projection of their own selves onto the urban landscape. This is significant because it shows that through the language of poetry, they could contemplate emotional catharsis and ontological perplexity.

Lastly, the study of Borges's and Réda's poetics of the urban and poetics of the self allowed me to assert that writing about Buenos Aires and Paris became a way for Borges and Réda to write themselves into the city and a way of creating poetic instants where they felt the imminence of a revelation about what Réda called 'the enigma of life'. Though through Borges I established that this revelation never materialises, the analysis of their poems revealed that Borges wrote in hopes of manifesting this revelation, which would then become the justification of his destiny as a poet. Réda on the other hand explored the boundaries of this impossible revelation but remained deeply attached to the physical journey of the city. His interest in brushing this imminence was due to its aesthetic potential, because of the possibility for temporary aesthetic communion and fulfilment and not because this would somehow determine his destiny: 'Je compare l'épreuve et non pas le destin' (Réda 1987: 98). Our journey through Borges's and Réda's poetry has ultimately revealed that the poetic text is,

for the poets, a substitute for this imminence of a revelation that never materialises; and for us, the readers, a way to experience it — a way to lose ourselves in it. Réda's words in *Ferveur de Borges* (1987) — if we extrapolate its emphasis on Borges's short stories — captures this conclusion best:

> Les contes de Borges ne sont-ils pas comme *la musique, les états de félicité, la mythologie, les visages travaillés par le temps, certains crépuscules et certains lieux (qui) veulent nous dire quelque chose, ou nous l'ont dit, et nous n'aurions pas dû le laisser perdre, ou sont sur le point de le dire?*
>
> Jacques Réda, *Ferveur de Borges* (1987: 21)

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