

*RESCATANDO AL TANGO PARA UNA NUEVA
MÚSICA: RECONSIDERING THE 1965
COLLABORATION BETWEEN
BORGES AND PIAZZOLLA¹*

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Anyone who remembers the 1965 collaboration between Jorge Luis Borges and Astor Piazzolla, probably also remembers that it ended badly. It left an LP album, entitled *El tango*, which consisted entirely of Borges texts set to music by Piazzolla (Piazzolla *El tango*).² It also left an

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2 The tracks on this album are “El tango,” poema musical (recorded 6/21/1965), “Jacinto Chiclana,” milonga (recorded 6/21/1965), “Alguien le dice al tango,” tango (recorded 6/21/1965), “El titere,” milonga tanguera (recorded 6/21/1965), “A don Nicanor Paredes,” Milonga (recorded 6/15/1965), “Oda íntima a Buenos Aires,” oda porteña (recorded 6/15/1965), and “El hombre de la esquina rosada,” suite para recitante, canto y doce instrumentos (recorded 7/5-6/1965) (Saito 274). The project featured legendary singer Edmundo Rivero, as well as the prominent actor Luis Medina Castro, who recited the texts of “El tango” and “Oda íntima a Buenos Aires.” Responsibility for rendering the instrumental parts fell primarily on the members of Piazzolla’s groundbreaking Quinteto Nuevo Tango. A number of tracks also feature notable instrumentalists, such as cellist José Bragato and contrabassist Kicho Díaz. Piazzolla scored “A don Nicanor Paredes” for orchestra, and “Oda íntima a Buenos Aires” for orchestra and chorus. In

irresistibly quotable trail of invective. Two samples, one from each side, encapsulate the tone of the protracted exchange:

En Astor Piazzolla, que no tiene oído, se conjugan la sordera musical y la poética (Borges and Matamoro 91).

Borges me contestó que él de música no sabía nada, ni siquiera diferenciar entre Beethoven y Juan de Dios Filiberto. No sabía quién era quién, y además, no le interesaba. Después salió opinando como un gran experto. Creo que era un mago. Yo nunca he leído poemas más bellos que los que escribió Borges, pero en materia de música era sordo (Gorín and Piazzolla 106).³

The accusations of deafness are certainly hyperbolic. That Borges and Piazzolla had trouble hearing each other, however, is evident in an article that appeared in the literary supplement of the daily *La Nación*, just a few months before the *El tango* recording. This article announces that Borges and Piazzolla, “two international eminences in their respective artistic fields,” were writing tangos and milongas in collaboration (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges”, 22). Read against the grain and with the benefit of hindsight, this article provides a valuable point of entry to understanding why the collaboration took place, how each person approached it, and why it ultimately unraveled. The perspective provided by this understanding, in turn, invites us to reconsider the broader impact of their collaboration, especially on the development of Piazzolla’s music, and consequently, on the music of Buenos Aires.

Borges’s account of the project to the reporter from *La Nación* suggests that he was not only writing tangos and milongas *for* Piazzolla, but also

1997, “hoping to rescue this work by Astor Piazzolla,” producer Envar el Kadri gathered a distinguished group of performers and, following the original arrangements, recorded new versions of the tracks on this album. See Astor Piazzolla, Jorge Luis Borges, Jairo, Lito Cruz, Daniel Binelli and Ensemble Vocal Rioplatense.

³ Piazzolla misses the irony in Borges’s claims of ignorance. Borges knew Filiberto well enough to describe him as “a pair of sideburns and an accordion that are going around saddening the Riachuelo” (“un par de patillas y un acordeón que andan enristeciendo el Riachuelo”). Borges used this description in a 1927 essay in which he contests the tripartite classification of the milonga that Filiberto, a composer best known for the tango “Caminito,” had recently proposed in a weekly magazine. See Filiberto, “Las tres vidas de la milonga?” and Borges, “Apunte férvido sobre las tres vidas de la milonga.” Borges included this essay in *El idioma de los argentinos*.

with Piazzolla, that is, that he viewed this work as a collaborative effort: “Fue Astor Piazzolla —dice Borges—, por intermedio de un amigo común, Félix Della Paolera, quien me invitó a *colaborar* en esta labor” (J. L. Borges “Vicente Rossi, - Cosas De Negros. Córdoba, 1926”); “*Juntos* estamos creando este trabajo consistente en milongas y tangos” (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges” 22, my emphasis).⁴

How Borges created these milongas and tangos together *with* Piazzolla, however, differs sharply from his collaborative work with Adolfo Bioy Casares. As Piazzolla described the process to Eduardo Lagos, Borges would periodically visit the composer’s home and recite his verses into a tape recorder. Then, the musician would set them to music. Piazzolla had given a similar description of the collaborative process a few months earlier. Borges, he told the reporter, “was enthusiastic about the idea of working together, and would come to my house every day to bring me a poem or two” (“Astor Piazzolla” 51).

The milongas that Borges handed over to Piazzolla may in fact have resulted from a different collaboration. According to biographer María Esther Vázquez, Borges originally wrote these and other milongas at the request of classical composer Carlos Guastavino (254).⁵ This is certainly the case with the first milonga that Borges is known to have written: “Milonga de dos hermanos.” On Christmas day 1963 Borges presented the *letra*, along with a musical setting by Guastavino, to Silvina Ocampo (Bioy Casares 996). The text of “Jacinto Chiclana” quite likely preceded the project. When asked why he had written this, and milongas more generally, Borges responded:

Bueno, Guastavino me dijo si yo podía escribir una milonga y yo le dije: “No sé, yo nunca he escrito ninguna.” Y luego recordé el nombre de aquel Jacinto Chiclana, y una vaga historia de que lo mataron peleando con muchos. Y luego, sin querer —yo iba caminando, sí, por la calle Perú— sin querer, de pronto, sentí que algo iba a ocurrir y ese algo era la milonga esta. Y lo demás salió todo, como les digo, de mi sangre (Borges and Carrizo 62).

⁴ Alberto Salem, a well-connected friend of Piazzolla, also participated in the gestation of the collaboration, according to Azzi and Collier (90).

⁵ Borges provided a trenchant definition of the milonga genre in a 1969 interview: “las milongas son temas populares y la métrica es el octasílabo” (Borges and Mateo 93).

If Borges's recollection is accurate,⁶ it is puzzling that Guastavino, a prolific composer, never set "Jacinto Chiclana", one of the poet's most felicitous exercises in the genre.⁷ Nor did Guastavino set any other milongas that Borges supposedly wrote at his request. If, as Vázquez suggests, Borges had already written the milonga texts before meeting Piazzolla, why would he give them to the musician in installments, rather than all at once? If they had previously been written and copied, why record any of them on tape? There is certainly evidence that Borges wrote other, specific milongas with other specific projects in mind. In 1966 he wrote the "Milonga de Albornoz" for producer Ben Molar (Bioy Casares 1055-56). Molar then included this milonga, set to music by José Basso, in *14 con el tango*.⁸ A few years later, Borges wrote the "Milonga de Manuel Flores" for the 1969 film *Invasión*. It is the director of the film, Hugo Santiago, who most likely chose Aníbal Troilo to set the text to music.⁹ Several years later,

6 How Borges's recollections varied considerably from telling to telling is evident in the following excerpt from the epilog he wrote for the 1983 edition of *Milongas*: "La escritura de este libro se debe a una amistosa sugestión de Carlos Guastavino. Hace más de veinte años el azar (salvo que no hay azar) hizo que me cruzara con él en una esquina de la calle Florida. Cambiamos unas palabras y me dijo que si yo le entregaba una milonga, él le pondría música. Le contesté que nunca había ensayado ese género. Meses después, recorriendo las galerías de la Biblioteca Nacional (que sigo extrañando) sentí que algo iba a suceder. Ese algo fue la milonga de Jacinto Chiclana" (*Milongas* 48). In a stunning display of how Borges's literary and public personas overlapped, especially in his later years, consider how he described the origin of the milongas in an 1984 interview with Roberto Alifano: "La escritura de *Para las seis cuerdas* se debe a una amistosa sugestión del masetro Carlos Guastavino. Mis fechas son imprecisas, pero sin duda hace ya más de veinte años, el azar (salvo que no hay azar) hizo que nos encontráramos en una esquina de la calle Florida. Guastavino *conocía algunos de esos versos míos y me dijo que si yo se los entregaba él* les pondría música. Así lo hizo y de esa manera nacieron mis milongas" (44-45, my emphasis). Note how Borges reproduces extended passages from the epilog verbatim. In the passage in italics, however, Borges seems to imply that he had written the verses before this meeting. He provides yet another of the story in a 1978 interview with César Menotti (!) (Borges and Mateo 182).

7 For Borges it was so good he had to disown it: "Y la letra, es tan buena, que no ha de ser mía. Tiene que ser de algún Acevedo perdido por ahí, o Borges... pero no mía, personal" (Borges and Carrizo 60).

8 It was Molar, not Borges, who chose José Basso, although Borges may have been consulted. José Basso (1919-93) was a pianist, director, and composer of tango music.

9 This is what Borges told an interviewer in a 1969 interview: "Fíjese que dos días después que la compuse, Hugo Santiago, el realizador del film, me dijo que a la milonga le ponía música Troilo" (Borges and Mateo 96). Aníbal Troilo (1919-93) bandoneon

Borges wrote two milongas for Sebastián Piana.¹⁰ The fact that only one setting of each milonga was ever published or recorded further suggests that Borges's usual practice was to write each milonga with a specific project or composer in mind.¹¹

Pace Vázquez, it is possible that one or more of the texts that Borges handed to Piazzolla were original to the project. It is also possible that these texts include not only the four settings that appeared on the album, but also those of another two settings that did not. In the Biblioteca de Música Astor Piazzolla, located in the city of Mar del Plata, I discovered copies of three unpublished and, to my knowledge, unnoticed and unperformed settings of Borges milongas by Astor Piazzolla: "Milonga de dos hermanos," "Milonga para los orientales," and "Milonga de los morenos." The musical scores, signed by Piazzolla's long-time copyist José Bragato, indicate when these settings were copied—1993—but not when they were composed. It is likely that they were composed before or during their collaborative period, however, because their texts were included in the first edition of Borges's collected milongas, *Para las seis cuerdas*. The following chart juxtaposes the contents of this collection with Piazzolla's settings of Borges's texts:

player, orchestra director, and composer, was a leading figure in the tango of the 1940s, the height of the Golden Age.

10 These are the "Milonga del muerto" (also known as "Milonga del soldado") and "Milonga del infiel".

11 This practice most likely reflects commercial considerations, specifically, concerning copyrights.

<i>Para las seis cuerdas</i> (1965)	Piazzolla's settings of Borges texts
"Milonga de dos hermanos"	"Milonga de dos hermanos" (unpublished)
"¿Dónde se habrán ido?"	
"Milonga para Jacinto Chiclana"	"Milonga para Jacinto Chiclana"
"Milonga de Nicanor Paredes"	"Milonga de Nicanor Paredes"
"Un cuchillo en el norte"	
"El títere"	"El títere"
"Alguien le dice al tango"	"Alguien le dice al tango"
"Milonga de los Morenos"	"Milonga de los morenos" (unpublished)
"Milonga para los orientales"	"Milonga para los orientales" (unpublished)
"Los compadritos muertos"	

Piazzolla set all but three of the poems that Borges included in this collection. It seems unlikely that Borges presented "Los compadritos muertos" to Piazzolla since it features hendecasyllable verses, not the characteristic octosyllable versification of these tangos and milongas. Considerations of content, not form, may have excluded "¿Dónde se habrán ido?": its use of the *ubi sunt* convention overlaps with that in the poem "El tango", which appears on the first track of the album. The existence of a prior setting of "Milonga de dos hermanos" by Guastavino may explain why Piazzolla avoided recording or publishing it. Conversely, the fact that Piazzolla avoided recording or publishing "Milonga para los orientales" may explain why it was eventually set by José Basso. To my knowledge, these are the only concordances of Borges milonga texts.¹²

Though we cannot be certain whether the texts that Borges provided to Piazzolla had already been written, we can be certain that, in the months that preceded the album, Borges voiced enthusiasm for the proj-

12 In 1975, Piazzolla recorded a setting of Borges's poem, "1964". Borges included this poem in the 1964 collection, *El otro, el mismo*. Brazilian musician Ney Matogrosso sings the lyrics on the original recording (Matogrosso). The published score describes this Piazzolla's setting as a milonga (Piazzolla and Borges, *Mil novecientos sesenta y cuatro*). In both its recorded and score versions, the composition renders only the first of the two stanzas that constitute Borges's poem. It is unlikely that Borges handed this text to Piazzolla to set as a milonga since it is not in octosyllable verse.

ect and described it as a collaborative effort.¹³ We can also be certain that, for Borges, the collaborative effort ended when he handed the verses to Piazzolla, at the end of their passage from the poet's veins to composer's the magnetic tape. From then on the weight of the collaboration rested solely on Piazzolla's shoulders. One can imagine Piazzolla in his attic studio, composing at the piano to the hissing voice of Borges's shadow. The composer may have preferred this spectral interaction since, according to Lagos, he had initially feared the responsibility of having to share preoccupations ("inquietudes") with a poet of Borges's stature (Lagos "Borges Con Piazzolla"). For Borges, therefore, collaborating with Piazzolla did not mean working together, but rather, an alignment in their aesthetic aspirations for tango music.

Over four decades, Borges had insisted on a sharp distinction between two types, or more accurately, two periods of tango music.¹⁴ He repeats this by then well-honed distinction to the reporter from *La Nación*: "Entre los tangos me gusta el tango-milonga y siempre me ha desagradado el tango canción, es decir, he preferido el tango valeroso al llorón, quejumbroso" ("De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges" 22). By tango-milongas, Borges meant tangos composed between the last years of the nineteenth century and the second decade of the twentieth.¹⁵ For Borges these first tangos expressed the brave, insolent, and joyful qualities that he associated with certain marginal social types who inhabited the outlying slums of fin-de-siècle Buenos Aires.¹⁶ Composed by semi-professional musicians, these tangos were

13 If further evidence is to be found, it most likely will be in the extant papers and manuscripts of Guastavino. From the existing evidence, it seems likely that Borges composed the following texts especially for the project: "Alguien le dice al tango," "El títere," and "Nicanor Paredes." This seems less likely, but still possible, in the case "Jacinto Chiclana."

14 He first puts forth this distinction in "Carriego y el sentido del arrabal," and "La pampa y el suburbio son dioses." Borges included both essays in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*.

15 Over the years, Borges used various adjectives to describe this category of tangos: old (*viejos*), primordial (*primordiales*), first (*primeros*), antique (*antiguos*), and primitive (*primitivos*).

16 For an introduction to the social types of the outskirts (*las orillas*) of Buenos Aires, see Sorrentino and Zlotchew ix-xi. The standard interpretation of how the "orillas" and its "orilleros" shaped Borges's literary project is Beatriz Sarlo 20-49. For a historian's perspective, and an account of the origins of the tango, see Collier.

simple in their musical construction. Just as simple, and often incidental, were their lyrics, when they had any at all.¹⁷ The instrumental versions, which Borges in fact preferred, were more common.¹⁸ The ensembles that typically performed them were small—trios and quartets—and amateurish. The standard term for tangos composed before 1920 is *tangos de la Guardia Vieja*, which Borges used from time to time. The term he uses in this interview and ultimately favors, “tango-milonga,” makes explicit the relation between the tango and the milonga, a genre that Borges and most tango scholars believe to be the precursor of the early tangos.¹⁹

For the second, “lamentable,” category of tangos, Borges first used temporal adjectives such as “actuales,” “contemporáneos,” and “nuevos.” After decades of perceived decay, however, these terms lost their currency. Borges avoided the common designation for tangos composed between 1920 and 1950, “tangos de la Guardia Nueva.” For obvious reasons, he also avoided the common alternative, “Edad de Oro.” Borges most likely prefers the term “tango-canción,” however, because it names the two aspects of later tangos that he found most offensive: their lyrics and how they were sung.²⁰ Borges disliked these lyrics when they were maudlin and artificially burdened with arcane slang.²¹ He disliked them most, however, when they were tearful, lamenting, and sad. This view emerges most elo-

17 Despite their simplicity, many of these early tangos are remarkable in their melodic and rhythmic invention. Much like the role that Tin Pan Alley tunes played in the development of North American jazz music, the early tangos provided fertile ground for further musical elaboration and development by later generations of tango musicians, who in increasing numbers, came to the tango with formal conservatory training.

18 Among the tangos Borges frequently cites are “Don Juan” (1898, composed by Ernesto Poncio with lyrics by Ricardo J. Podestá), “El choclo” (1903, composed by Ángel Villoldo), “La morocha” (1905, composed by Enrique Saborido with lyrics by Ángel Villoldo), “El apache Argentino” (1913, composed by Manuel Aróztegui with lyrics by Arturo Mathon), and “El Marne” (1918, music by Eduardo Arolas).

19 Borges’s views on the relationship between the milonga and the tango were influenced by Vicente Rossi’s *Cosas de negros*. Also influential was Carlos Vega (see Vega 231-74). For a scholarly and comprehensive discussion of the milonga, Selles, “La milonga” and “El tango y sus dos primeras décadas (1880-1900).”

20 Borges frequently expressed scorn for legendary singer Carlos Gardel, not only for his singing style, but also for his influence on the development of the *tango canción*.

21 As Borges often pointed out again, he did not hate all tango lyrics. He praised the lyrics of “Campana de Plata” by Samuel Linning (*El tamaño de mi esperanza* 29). He was especially fond of several lyrics by Pascual Contursi, such as “Ivette” and “Flor de fango”

quently in his 1955 essay, *Historia del tango*: “La milonga y el tango de los orígenes podían ser tontos o, a lo menos, atolondrados, pero eran *valerosos y alegres*; el tango posterior es un resentido que deplora con lujo sentimental las desdichas propias y festeja con desvergüenza las desdichas ajenas” (OC. 1923-1949 267, my emphasis).²² Clearly Borges expected Piazzolla’s settings to express courage and joy. Besides affect, what were Borges’s expectations concerning musical style?

We can tease out what these musical expectations could have been from a declaration to the trendy weekly, *Primera Plana*. Once again, we find Borges actively promoting his collaboration with Piazzolla, the great revelation delayed to the very end of the article. Borges, the reported announces, “is writing tangos and milongas for Astor Piazzolla.” Something seems to have changed in the two weeks since the *La Nación* article. The poet’s latest description of the project betrays a sense of urgency: “El tango fue siempre llorón; *yo lo estoy rescatando para una música nueva*” (“Literatos” 74, my emphasis). Borges makes himself out to be the savior of the tango. This optimistic tone is surprising, since even as a young man, Borges faced the decline of the tango with stoic resignation:

Alguna vez —si los primitivos tangos no engañan— una felicidad sopló sobre las tapias rosadas del arrabal y estuvo en el empaque dominguero del compadrito y en la jarana de las chiruzas en el portón. ¿Qué valentías la gastaron, qué generosidades, qué fiestas? Lo cierto es que pasó y que el bandoneón cobarde y el tango sin salida están con nosotros. Hay que sobrellevarlos, pero no les digan porteños. (*El idioma de los argentinos* 116)

Even more surprising, however, is the notion that he is saving tango for a new music. Now, saviors typically operate in a linear universe, one where only two movements are possible, towards the past or towards the future. Saviors moving in one direction seek to replace existing forms by restoring those from the past, while those moving in the other direction replace

(Bioy Casares *passim*). Borges also wrote a frequently cited categorization of tango lyrics. See OC (265-66).

22 In this stark opposition between old and new tangos, we witness what Alan Pauls has identified as Borges’s “true and relentless passion for discord.” The origin of Borges’s literature, according to Pauls, is the duel (33-34). Borges’s notions on the tango, and music more generally, are considerably more nuanced than this opposition suggests. In his 1955 *Historia del tango*, Borges places the tango in the context of his metaphysical preoccupations with memory, time, and immortality.

them by inventing new ones. For our purposes, let us call the first approach antiquarian, the second avant-garde.

Piazzolla's discourse on music during the 1960s displays the typical modernist aspirations espoused by most composers of Western concert music at the time. He consistently presents himself to the public as an avant-garde composer ("Interpelación a Piazzolla"). To support his position he often drops the names of prominent avant-garde composers, whose names clearly mystified the reporters taking notes: "Shomber [sic], Albany [sic], Berg, Boules [sic], Krenek, Stock, Hausen [sic], Luigi-Nono [sic]" ("Así son sin maquillaje! Astor Piazzolla"). Argentina's strictly enforced boundaries between classical and popular music, however, compelled Piazzolla to position himself in one realm or the other.²³ Rather than "Shomber" and "Hausen," he chose the realm of popular music; he was a "vanguardista del tango" ("Interpelación a Piazzolla"). Though not the only and perhaps not the first, Piazzolla was the most forceful exponent of this tendency.²⁴

In several 1960s interviews, Piazzolla defines his avant-garde tango aesthetics as the search for new musical forms ("busco nuevas formas musicales") ("Astor Piazzolla y el llamado tango vanguardista"). In its renovation of musical forms, Piazzolla frequently noted, the tango lagged behind the popular musics of other countries, especially Brazil and the United States ("Interpelación a Piazzolla"). The renovation of tango is urgent, even inevitable, Piazzolla asserts, because the tango is in crisis: "Para mí esa crisis es valiosa porque supone *la quiebra* de un tango que ya no es tango y la aparición de *una forma de expresión nueva*; algo similar a lo que significó De Caro en el 30" ("Astor Piazzolla y el llamado tango vanguardista", my emphasis).²⁵ As a "vanguardista del tango," therefore, Piazzolla was indeed trying to rescue the tango for a new music.

Perhaps ironic intentions, or just being caught up in the moment, explains why Borges laced his description of the project with catchwords

23 Piazzolla's music, of course, frequently breaches these boundaries.

24 A list of the most influential of Piazzolla's fellow travelers in the tango avant-garde certainly include Horacio Salgán, Eduardo Rovira, and Atilio Stampone. The precursor, of course, is Osvaldo Pugliese.

25 Regarding the role of the avant-garde, Piazzolla, in a more literally messianic tone than that of Borges, describes the tango as a "a corpse that is reborn (un cadáver que renace)" ("Astor Piazzolla").

copied from Piazzolla's avant-garde discourse. Nevertheless, his openness to new musical forms is not inconsistent with his earlier views on the tango: "Ciertos compositores actuales buscan ese tono valiente y elaboran, a veces con felicidad, milongas del bajo de la Batería o del barrio del Alto, pero sus trabajos, de letra y música estudiosamente anticuadas, son ejercicios de nostalgia de lo que fue, llantos por lo perdido, esencialmente tristes aunque la tonada sea alegre" (OC. 1923-1949 264). For Borges, therefore, an effort to reconstruct and reestablish the musical forms of the early tangos, a strict antiquarian approach, would not suffice to rescue the tango. For the tango once again to express courage and joy, musicians had to discover new musical forms.

Borges had other reasons for rejecting an antiquarian approach at the time. A recent discovery had undermined one of the most basic tenets of his tango aesthetics. On July 4, 1964, he shared this discovery with Bioy Casares:

Dice: "Compré unos discos de trapo, que no parecen naturales. Se doblan todos, como los relojes de Dalí. Forman una historia o antología del tango, y están los tangos viejos, *El chocho*, *Unión Cívica*, *Don Juan*, en versiones originales, tocadas por orquestas de entonces. El efecto —bueno, contra lo que he sostenido a lo largo de toda la vida— el efecto de esos tangos rápidos es de una increíble trivialidad. Gardel habrá dramatizado el tango; el *jazz* habrá influido, pero el tango que sentimos no es el primero, sino el que vino después, o las interpretaciones que después hicieron con los primeros tangos. Ahí están, desde luego, *El chocho*, *Don Juan*, reconocibles, pero en vano: ni siquiera parecen tangos. Y *Unión Cívica*, que tanto gusta a Peyrou, no sabés lo que es..." (Bioy Casares 935)

It seems unlikely, therefore, that when Borges accepted Piazzolla's invitation to work together, a few months later he would have insisted on antiquarian setting for this texts.

The authors of a recent book on Astor Piazzolla attribute Borges's decision to work with the composer entirely to media considerations. Otherwise, they argue, it is difficult to explain not only the decision itself, but also how the relationship unraveled.²⁶ Although one should not underestimate

26 "Después de arduas negociaciones, Borges accedió colaborar con Astor. La elección debió ser puramente mediática. De lo contrario resulta poco comprensible y no explica

how media considerations influenced Borges's decision, interpreting it as his only motivation oversimplifies the complex web of aesthetic, social, and even personal motivations that led to their intersection of Argentina's greatest modern writer and her most influential musician. Ignoring these motivations, in turn, closes a crucial interpretive window into the texts this intersection left behind, as well as their broader significance.

As noted above, Borges wrote his first milonga after a casual suggestion by Carlos Guastavino. By agreeing to write milongas for Piazzolla, and subsequently for Ben Molar, Hugo Santiago, and Sebastian Piana, Borges could continue to pursue this exercise in a popular genre. This pursuit proved significant for Borges's broader literary project. After describing how he and Piazzolla were working together, Borges provides what may be the first printed version of how he began writing milongas:

Cuando Piazzolla propuso este trabajo me sentí honrado, pero dudaba, —aclara— de mi capacidad para este *ejercicio un tanto inusitado para mí*. Luego combrobé, no sin algún asombro, que las letras de milongas y tangos se abrían paso a través de mí, espontáneamente, casi sin intervención de mi voluntad, y que un *antiguo fondo criollo* componía esos versos, como si mis mayores lo hicieran. (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges” 22, my emphasis)

Borges credits Piazzolla, not Guastavino, for inspiring this exercise in a popular genre.²⁷ More significantly, this exercise allowed Borges to channel his *antiguo fondo criollo*, and thus, achieve what Nicolás Lucero has identified as one of the poet's earliest and most elusive aspirations: “cantar en una voz coloquial, acriollada.”²⁸

Viewing the Borges/Piazzolla encounter as entirely media driven ignores Borges's sustained preoccupation with tangos and milongas. He

el desenlace del vínculo” (OC 244).

27 Ultimately, Borges probably had already begun writing or considering milongas, even before his encounter with Guastavino. One can infer this if one reads the quotation above against the grain, and notices Borges's slip when he says that Guastavino had heard of his simple verses.

28 Use locution from final version of article. Nicolás Lucero, this issue. Lucero has suggested that one could view Borges's milongas as an attempt to rewrite José Hernández's *Martín Fierro*. But, Borges also had another nineteenth-century interlocutor in mind: “Yo querría —manifiesta— que estos versos, que necesitan, desde luego, el sostén de la música, puedan gustarle a la sombra de Hilario Ascasubi” (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges” 22).

wrote two substantial essays on the subject, one early in his career, the other as an established cultural figure.²⁹ He lectured publicly on the topic.³⁰ Borges was familiar with most of the contemporary secondary literature on the tango, and had consulted numerous relatively obscure nineteenth-century sources.³¹ His knowledge of the tango was not only acquired through books. Early in his career, when he wrote for popular magazines and newspapers, Borges sought out and interacted with a variety of informants related to the beginnings of the tango, including musicians and their relatives, guapos, compadritos, and policemen. But the poet's interest in the music was not only intellectual; Borges felt his favorite tangos viscerally.³²

Milongas and tangos are a recurring topic in Borges's poetry and short stories.³³ Indeed, the milongas and first tangos provide the music of the spheres in Borges's mythical Buenos Aires. Like the dirt alleys, the pink corner stores, and the vacant lots, the milongas and first tangos define the landscape of the *orillas*. But it is the aural image of the milongas and tangos that most directly expresses the insolent bravery of the famous fighters and the epic dimension of their knife fights.

More personal considerations may have piqued Borges's desire to participate in a highly visible project on the tango. Borges had a well-known,

29 Borges published his first essay on the tango, “Ascendencias del tango” in 1927. This essay is collected, with minimal revisions, in *El idioma de los argentinos* 111-21. The second essay, “Historia del tango,” appeared in 1955, as an addition to the second edition of *Evaristo Carriego*. It is surprising how often critics and scholars, assuming mistakenly that this essay formed part of the first edition of *Evaristo Carriego*, identify 1930 as the year of its publication.

30 One of these lectures is transcribed in *El círculo secreto* (86-96).

31 Ascertaining Borges's sources often requires reading between the lines. For example, in “Ascendencias del tango,” the clause “La cuestión fue muy conversada en el año trece” clearly refers to the first published history of the tango, penned under the pseudonym Viejo Tanguero.

32 Miguel de Torres Borges, nephew of the poet, narrated his view of what Borges viewed as the primordial tangos: “tangos que oía como en éxtasis, cerrando los ojos y acompañando los acordes con movimientos del torso y de los pies” (32).

33 He wrote two poems on the tango, one querenciero; the other pendenciero: “Soneto para un tango en la nochecita” *Caras y caretas* March 3 1926, collected in *Textos recobrados. 1919-1929*, and “El tango,” first published in *Sur* julio y agosto 1958.

long-running feud with Argentine writer Ernesto Sabato.³⁴ In 1963, Bioy Casares reports a significant development in this feud:

Borges: “En Losada, unos cuantos discípulos de Sabato, porque por increíble que parezca, hay discípulos de Sabato, van a publicar un libro sobre el tango, un tanto injustificable, ya que no contiene nada que no se haya dicho en Bates y los otros libros sobre la materia. También, ese libro es como un puente que se me ofrece para la reconciliación con Sabato.” (Bioy Casares 935)

And an offer of reconciliation was, indeed, extended. Sabato dedicated *Tango discusión y clave* to Borges:

Luego, años más tarde, el rencor político nos alejó; y así como Aristóteles dice que las cosas se diferencian en lo que se parecen, quizá podríamos decir que los hombres se separan por lo mismo que quieren. Y ahora, alejados como parece que estamos (fíjese lo que son las cosas), yo quisiera convidarlo con estas páginas que se me han ocurrido sobre el tango. Y mucho me gustaría que no le disgustasen. Creameló. (“Los dos Borges” 9)

If Borges entertained the idea of reconciliation with Sabato after reading this dedication, the contents of the next page surely gave him second thoughts:

Los millones de inmigrantes que se precipitaron sobre este país en menos de cien años, no sólo engendraron esos dos atributos del nuevo argentino que son el resentimiento y la tristeza, sino que prepararon el advenimiento del fenómeno más original del Plata: el tango... Pero Enrique Santos Discépolo, su creador máximo, da lo que yo creo la definición más entrañable y exacta: “es un pensamiento triste que se baila.” (*Tango, discusión y clave* 11)

For Borges, it seems safe to surmise, Discépolo’s definition of the tango was neither profound nor accurate. And, his views in 1963 probably had not changed much by 1969, when he offered the following dissection of this definition:

34 For a summary of Sabato’s debates with Borges in the 1950s, see María Luisa Bastos 151-62. Sabato articulates his aesthetic discrepancies with Borges in Ernesto Sabato, “Los dos Borges.” For an enlightening perspective on Borges’s contentious relationship with Sábato et al, see Pauls 30-43.

Y últimamente, alguien que no parece haber escuchado *El cuzquito* o *Rodríguez Peña* o “El choclo” [sic] ha dicho: “El tango es un pensamiento triste que se baila”. Y yo querría oponer tímidamente, *tímidamente* porque ciertamente mis conocimientos de música y de baile se confunden con la nada absoluta, querría oponer unas tímidas objeciones. En primer término, no creo que la música siendo un arte proceda de un “pensamiento”; yo diría, de una emoción; luego “triste”, ¿por qué triste?, habrá tangos tristes, pero para mí el tango es todavía una expresión de valentía, de alegría, de coraje, (es verdad que estoy pensando en el tango milonga y no en el tango canción); y luego, “que se baila”, me parece algo agregado, porque si yo voy caminando por la calle y veo que alguien silba, reconozco inmediatamente el tango. (*El círculo secreto* 93)

From the preceding, I would suggest, also tentatively, that after the publication of Sabato’s *Tango discusión y clave*, Borges may have been more predisposed to accept an invitation to participate in a project that concerned the tango. Indeed, on September 30, 1963, soon after Borges had heard about the book, he proposed a novel project to Bioy Casares: “Me propone escribir la letra de una suerte de Historia del tango, en *sketches*, para Julio De Caro” (Bioy Casares 954). So by 1964 Borges had several reasons to be interested in a high profile project on the tango. The question now, is why Piazzolla?

It seems likely that Julio De Caro, a violinist, director, and composer would have been the most comfortable fit for Borges. They were from the same generation; indeed they were born the same year. Borges also knew him personally.³⁵ Also, as noted above, Borges heard the first tangos not in their original versions, but in the more polished versions that he heard during the 1920s and 1930s. Many of these versions were probably by De Caro. That De Caro’s tango recordings are mostly instrumental probably raised them in Borges’s esteem. De Caro was one of the most important musicians in the history of the tango. During the 1920s, he played a central role in reshaping and refining its musical language.³⁶ In the decades that followed, however, De Caro never changed his style, and as a result,

35 Around the time of the collaboration, Borges said to Bioy Casares “[q]ue tiene en la cartera una tarjeta de Julio De Caro: tal vez éste haga un trabajo más adecuado (Bioy Casares 1056).

36 And, like Piazzolla thirty years later, De Caro faced considerable resistance from the more conservative factions. See Ferrer 215-17.

was increasingly on the sidelines of the tango world. He made his last recording in 1953. By the mid 1960s, moreover, tango music was in a tail-spin.³⁷ There were fewer and fewer venues for performance, the radio stations played it less and less, and the number of recordings diminished drastically. As a result, most orchestras disbanded (Ferrer 618). A Borges/De Caro collaboration, therefore, would not have gone much further than a manuscript score and a semi-private performance or two. Collaborations with most other musicians at the time would have faced similar fates. So, if Borges hoped to participate in a high-profile project on the tango, Piazzolla was his best bet.³⁸

During the 1960s, Astor Piazzolla was a central figure in Argentine musical culture. He still faced fierce resistance from the tango establishment, but the general decline in the popularity of tango music had dampened the critics' voices. One can imagine their consternation when they saw Piazzolla's confidently staring back at them from the cover of the trendy magazine *Primera Plana*. The heading read: "Astor Piazzolla: La música de Buenos Aires." At the time Piazzolla had a fiercely devoted following that patronized his performances and bought his records. That the youth was with Piazzolla, the youth that bought record albums, surely must have caught the attention of the record company executives.

The LP album that emerged from the Borges/Piazzolla collaboration was an expensive proposition. It involved the members of Piazzolla's Quinteto Nuevo Tango, several of the best instrumentalists of the time, a full orchestra, and a chorus. It featured the great singer Edmundo Rivero, one of a handful of few tango musicians doing well at the time, and the famous actor Luis Medina Castro. The recording required four days in the studio. The album cover features an original artwork in the *nueva figuración* style. I doubt any other tango musician at the time could have gotten this project off the ground. The imprimatur of Borges certainly helped.

That such an album could be recorded in the 1960s is already a significant accomplishment. The album even had a degree of commercial

37 Julio Sosa, a Uruguayan singer, created a temporary surge in interest for tango music, but this interest collapsed after his tragic death in 1964.

38 It is interesting to note that Piazzolla also had a falling out with Sabato, who described his music as "helada and cerebral." Sabato had used similar images in his critique of Borges's works.

success. It topped the rankings of record sales compiled by *Primera Plana* ("Records"), and it was reissued multiple times. Even though this success was short lived, it is significant because, at the time, very few tango recordings even made it to these charts, much less to top. Why was Borges so disenchanted with the project?

In his liner notes to *El tango*, Piazzolla speaks of the "great responsibility" that he felt collaborating with Borges. The composer's stated efforts to follow the form and meaning of Borges's lyrics suggest that there is a degree of truth and sincerity in this statement.³⁹ More telling of the weight of responsibility that Piazzolla felt, however, is his choice of musical language. The composer did not use Borges's lyrics as a springboard for the discovery of new musical forms, but rather, "constrained himself to the type of music from the beginning of the century."⁴⁰

Piazzolla approached the task of setting Borges's tangos and milonga as an exercise in model composition. The album has four settings of lyrics that Borges wrote especially for this project. Each setting represents a different genre or style of tango. Piazzolla composed a tango that, in its melodic and harmonic design, follows the tango style of the 1940s: "Alguien le dice al tango." He composed a milonga in the style of the "payadores," with its characteristic guitar figuration and improvisatory air: "Jacinto Chiclana." He composed a milonga tanguera, featuring the fast, playful, and tough rhythms that characterize the simple, primitive milongas of the turn of the century: "El títere." ("De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges") and (*El Tango*).

Borges was satisfied with these three settings, or so he told Bioy Casares on March 30: "Las otras [milongas] no me parecen mal" (Bioy Casares 1056) His opinion of these milongas was more sanguine a few weeks later, according to the reporter from *La Nación*: "Borges sostiene que Piazzolla

39 Fischerman and Gilbert assert that Piazzolla lacked an ear for poetry and that this weakness is evident in his settings of Borges texts (245-48).

40 The preceding is based on the following passage from the *La Nación* article: "Cuando se le pregunta acerca de las posibilidades interpretativas de estas letras, Piazzolla contesta que se ajustó mucho a la letra y que se remitió al tipo de música de principios de siglo con un vuelo muy especial; además siguió estrictamente el sentido que le ha dado Borges." "De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges."

ha ido siguiendo admirablemente todos los movimientos de la pasión de los versos” (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges” 22)

It was the fourth milonga setting, and only this setting, that upset Borges. One does not have to listen to Piazzolla’s setting to understand why Borges was upset, one only has to read how the composer characterized it to the *La Nación* reporter: “una milonga lenta y tristoná” (“De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges” 22) Through Bioy Casares, we know how Borges characterized this slow and sad milonga:

La música de milonga que Piazzolla hizo para Paredes, como éste es un difunto, es tristísima. Comprenderás que si Paredes murió en el veintitantos yo no puedo estar muy apenado por su muerte. Además lo vi siempre a Paredes como un personaje genérico. Yo imaginé una milonga casi alegre, por cierto épica: ésta es quejumbrosa. Dijo Piazzolla que por primera vez se llevan los cantos gregorianos a una milonga. Así salió. También tiene final de canto jondo. Es una porquería. (Bioy Casares 1056)

Prima facie, Piazzolla’s slow and sad setting of Borges’s texts suggests that he was either not listening to, or completely disregarding the poet’s desire for brave and joyful tangos. Closer consideration suggests a misunderstanding, though not a simple one. If, during their first meeting over tea at the Confeitaria St. James, Borges voiced his usual complaints about the sadness of the tango-canción, Piazzolla would certainly have agreed. The composer had voiced similar complaints during the presentation of a new quintet in 1961. The new generation, he asserted, “was indifferent to the tango because it was sad, and that this was a vital problem (“Amigos del buen tango”)

But it was not the sad affect of the tango-canción that concerned Piazzolla, but how the lyrics expressed them. During the 1960s, he repeatedly bemoaned the poor quality of tango lyrics, and called attention to his “struggle” (*lucha*) to recruit younger, authentic poets (“Interpelación a Piazzolla”) and (“Astor Piazzolla y el llamado tango vanguardista”). For Piazzolla, therefore, the reliance on hackneyed themes of sadness and resentment was only a symptom of a larger problem, that is, the poor quality of the lyrics of the tango-canción. It can be safe to assume that Piazzolla did not question the quality of the poems that he received from Borges.⁴¹

41 Piazzolla seems to have made minor suggestions about versification and word choices, suggestions that garnered scornful comments from Borges. See Bioy Casares 1056 and 108-09.

He just did his best to follow the meaning of the texts. In the case of “A don Nicanor Paredes,” this pursuit led him to a slow and sad setting.

What Piazzolla most likely intended to achieve in his setting of “A don Nicanor Paredes,” the model he was trying to emulate, becomes clear when viewed against the backdrop of tango history. Musicians of Piazzolla’s generation did not learn to write milongas from turn-of-the-century models, but rather, from the series of milongas that composer Sebastian Piana and lyricist Homero Manzi wrote in the 1930s. The fifth milonga that they wrote together is “Milonga triste” (1931). This milonga, I believe, is the model for Piazzolla’s setting of “A don Nicanor Paredes”.

Piazzolla included a version of “Milonga triste” in *Nuestro tiempo*, which was recorded and released in 1962.⁴² This is the first album that he records with the “Quinteto Nuevo Tango.” The liner notes to this album contains hints of an intertextual relationship between “Milonga triste” and “A don Nicanor Paredes:” “Sentí la necesidad de hacer un arreglo de cámara, para esta fabulosa obra de Sebastián Piana y Homero Manzi. Quise ambientar todo el tema en un *clima medieval*, empleando solamente violín, guitarra y bajo para acompañar el canto” (*Nuestro tiempo*, my emphasis).

This version of “Milonga triste” has several features in common with “A don Nicanor Paredes:” a slow tempo, a sparse opening texture, and a climactic fugato passage. The most telling intertextual relationship, however, is that they both feature allusions to Medieval music. The chant-like repeated notes that characterize the melody “Milonga triste” may have inspired Piazzolla to create a medieval atmosphere.⁴³ Repeated notes also predominate in the melodic theme of “A don Nicanor Paredes,” which Piazzolla claimed to have based on eight measures of Gregorian chant (*El tango*). Since this phrase consists of a repeated four-measure unit, it does not provide enough information to identify the source chant. Like “Milonga triste,” “A don Nicanor Paredes” is composed in a minor key, an obvious choice given the sad affect of both pieces. While “Milonga triste” uses the leading tone characteristic of common-practice music, “A don Nicanor Paredes” uses the natural seventh. As a result, it has a modal quality that

42 Piazzolla recorded a new version of this milonga in 1970, arranged for doubled bandoneon. Piazzolla plays both parts in the recording. See Saito (279).

43 Oscar del Priore and Irene Amuchástegui have noted, I believe correctly, that Piazzolla’s arrangement is more Baroque than Medieval (273).

Piazzolla may have associated with medieval music.⁴⁴ This allusion of Gregorian chant, with its mystical connotations, suits the affect that Piazzolla intended for his setting: “very simple, very heartfelt, and sincere” (“todo muy simple, muy sentido, y sincero”, *El tango*). *Pace* Borges, there is not a dint of *canto jondo* in this setting.

Piazzolla’s setting of “A don Nicanor Paredes,” moreover, displays none of the musical features that Piazzolla typically used to express grief and death.⁴⁵ These features, musicologist Alan Atlas has noted, include large melodic leaps, descending “lament” bassline, chromaticism, and especially, “blue notes.” The most effective collusion of these features occurs in the lyrical theme of Piazzolla’s most famous and personal piece, “Adiós nonino,” which commemorated the death of his father (Atlas 79). Heard against the backdrop of this lyrical theme, the melody of “A don Nicanor Paredes,” which is built entirely from repeated notes, steps, and an occasional skip and contains not a single chromatic semitone, sounds serene and sober. If one were to ascribe an affect to it, it is not extreme sadness but melancholy perhaps tinged with nostalgia. If, as Piazzolla told a reporter at time, “he was strictly following the meaning that Borges gave to the *letras*,” the choice of a melancholic affect may not have been that off the mark. Indeed, a man whom Borges thought of as “intelligent and discreet” offered a similar interpretation (Bioy Casares 1561).

After hearing the recording of “A don Nicanor Paredes” during a radio interview with Antonio Carrizo, Borges remarked: “Bueno, esta letra es inferior a la otra, desde luego.” The other *letra*, which had been heard and discussed earlier in the interview, was “Jacinto Chiclana.” Carrizo disagreed. “I like it very much. It has something that other one lacks: it has a melancholy, it has....” “Bueno,” Borges interrupted “porque yo lo quería mucho a Paredes.”⁴⁶ Paredes, the poet continued, did not want to be seen

44 The theme of “A don Nicanor Paredes” is composed in the so-called Aeolian mode. The lowered seventh degree corresponds with the first syllables of “ustedes” and “Paredes.”

45 For discussions of Piazzolla’s musical language, see García Brunelli, Mauriño, Kuss, and Pelinski. For an indispensable discussion of the composer’s music and aesthetics, Kuri, *Piazzolla, la música límite*. Kuri devotes a chapter of his book to the intersection between Borges and Piazzolla (193-220).

46 Nicolás Paredes was a *caudillo* in Palermo, the neighborhood of Borges’s childhood. Borges changed the first name to Nicanor in deference to Paredes and his family. He discusses his relationship with Nicolás Paredes in considerable detail in Alifano (40-43).

as a generic character, but as a man. And he may have succeeded because Borges remembered him as a very brave and generous man (Borges and Carrizo 64-65). These memories may have tinged “A don Nicanor Paredes” with the melancholy tone noted by Carrizo, and rendered musically by Piazzolla. And this is perhaps why Borges considered “A don Nicanor Paredes” inferior to “Jacinto Chiclana.” In the end, it was Borges who had failed to write a joyful and epic milonga for Paredes.

In a conversation with Bioy Casares, Borges describes a form of immortality that is not only very nice (muy linda), but also unassailable (inexpugnable). It is the immortality of those remembered solely through a piece of music, like “la zamba de Vargas” or “la milonga de Morales” (Bioy Casares 481). If Borges was sincere in his appreciation of Paredes, then he may have done his friend Paredes a bad turn. By handing Piazzolla an inferior lyric, amplified by what he supposed an inferior musical setting, Borges had condemned Paredes to a dubious immortality, not as the epically brave and joyful strongman of Palermo, but as a sad melancholy, and lamenting shadow.

In the end, it was not the name of Nicanor Paredes that attained musical immortality but that of Jacinto Chiclana. The original recording of this milonga has appeared in multiple anthologies, due in no small part, to the wonderful rendition by Edmundo Rivero. There have been well over a dozen recordings by other artists, in various musical traditions and styles. Does anyone remember Albornoz?

With the milongas Borges realized an elusive literary aspiration, that of finding his criollo poetic voice. Now, Piazzolla was not the catalyst for Borges’s first incursion in the genre. He had already written at least one milonga by 1963, which was set to music by Guastavino. There is less certainty concerning which if any milongas he wrote specifically for *El tango*. It is possible, as I suggest above, that he wrote at least six milongas for this project.⁴⁷ If this is the case, then his collaboration with Piazzolla provided a stimulus for continuing this exercise in a popular genre, one that may have yielded a significant portion of the milongas collected in the first edi-

47 I have also suggested the possibility that Borges was writing milongas even before Guastavino supposedly encouraged the poet to experiment with this popular genre.

tion of *Para las seis cuerdas* (1965). One could thus view the milongas he composed for this project as an transitional stage between the first milonga, which he supposedly wrote for Guastavino, and those that he wrote for subsequent projects over the next decade. But what if any is the significance of the Borges/Piazzolla collaboration in the development of the tango? Did Borges succeed in rescuing the genre for a new music, even if ultimately, he could not identify with its new forms?

In principle, Borges did not seem to espouse an antiquarian approach as the way to rescue the tango. Nevertheless, this is how Piazzolla claimed to have approached the project, that is, he set Borges's milongas in the style of the 1900s tangos. Although Piazzolla may have asserted such an approach to secure Borges's participation in the project, the tracks on the album suggest a *bona fide* effort. In the milonga settings, one hears Piazzolla's compositional voice recede to the background, making intermittent appearances, like an omniscient narrator.

In themselves, the milonga settings on the album do not display significant changes in musical style. The most successful of the pieces, "Jacinto Chiclana," is also the most conservative. Of the four, only "A don Nicanor Paredes" contains novel features. But, despite its skillful orchestration, the lovely oboe obbligato performed by Roberto Di Filippo, and the inimitable vocal rendition by Rivero, this piece sounds dated and, in the larger picture, seems to have been inconsequential. "A don Nicanor Paredes" is not worth all the trouble it created.

If the milongas were not innovative in themselves, the exercise in modeling various styles from the past must have been a useful exercise for Piazzolla. It certainly stimulated his continued elaboration and development of the milonga genre, which had begun in 1962, with the "Milonga del ángel." This exercise must also have encouraged Piazzolla to see himself and his music from a broader historical perspective. Indeed, it may have marked the beginning of Piazzolla, the music historian. This historiographic impulse manifests itself in the two 1967 albums devoted to the history of the tango (*La historia del tango. Vol. 1: La Guardia Vieja*) and (Piazzolla *La historia del tango. Vol. 2: Época Romántica*), and most successfully, in the composition for flute and guitar, *Histoire du tango*.

It is the two pieces on the album that we know, with certainty, did not emerge directly from the Borges/Piazzolla partnership that were to prove

most consequential to the discovery of new musical forms. One of these pieces, a ballet suite based on Borges's story "El hombre de la esquina rosada," was composed in 1960. The other, which appears on the first track of the album, is a setting of Borges's 1958 poem, "El tango." According to the April 1965 *La Nación* article, Piazzolla had not yet composed this piece.⁴⁸

In these two settings, Piazzolla does not curtail his musical language to please Borges the man. Instead, he expands it to match Borges the poet. The texts become an excuse to experiment with twelve-tone rows and aleatory techniques, to break free from the ABAB form that structured most of the tangos he had composed up to this point, and ultimately, to transgress the boundaries between the classical and the popular music. Although these works are rougher, less developed, more groping than later works, such as "La camorra," they signal important changes in the music of Buenos Aires.⁴⁹ There was one perceptive critic who, in his review of the album, recognized the watershed moment: "El tango de antes es reflejo del hombre de su tiempo, de su velocidad, de su progreso. Hoy el hombre vuela y dialoga con el progreso. Su posición es otra, su música también. Hasta Piazzolla suena diferente" (Lagos). Borges, it turns out, did play a role in rescuing the tango for a new music, even though his body never recognized this music as tango.

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⁴⁸ Interestingly, Piazzolla states that this piece would be for reciter and orchestra ("De Gardel a Jorge Luis Borges" 22). On the album, however, the piece is performed by Piazzolla's Quinteto Nuevo Tango.

⁴⁹ For a different perspective on these works, see Fischerman and Gilbert 247-8.

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