Discuss the representation of marginality in ANY TWO OR MORE urban texts.

Situated in periods of considerable transformation and upheaval, Roberto Arlt’s *El juguete rabioso* and Carlos Fuentes’s *Agua quemada* present the theme of marginality as an extremely important but ambivalent one. This ambivalence stems from the intensely polemical socio-historical situation at the times during which these novels are written. *El juguete rabioso* is set against the chaotic background of Buenos Aires in the early twentieth century. Argentina in the 1920s ranked among the five or six most successful nations in the world and, according to all standard indicators, Argentina’s education level, access to health care and decent housing, and quality of life compared favourably with that of England, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Furthermore, the city’s spectacular economic development attracted immigrants from all over the world, and it seemed that the path to prosperity had finally appeared. The fact, however, that an extensive amount of shantytowns were built on the city’s margins and remained there through to the 1950s, debunks this myth of economic prosperity. Arlt follows the plight of a poverty-stricken and frustrated youth who is shunned from society and is consequently drawn to gangs and a life of petty crime. By contrast, Fuentes explores the theme of marginality in the context of a violently scarred political history that goes back to the bloody Mexican Revolution of 1910. Although the Revolution, after several years of bloodshed, instituted a political regime which brought nearly six decades of relative political and social stability, the turmoil of the Revolutionary period itself profoundly affected Mexican society. Fuentes powerfully demonstrates how the influence of the Revolution can be felt right up to the present day, through characters that live on the margins of reality because they are so caught up in the past.

The theme of marginality is represented through Silvio in *El juguete rabioso* and his ‘lucha por la vida’. Silvio learns throughout the novel that he is unable to succeed in society, primarily due to the fact that he is often judged on what he has, rather than what he can offer or whom he is. Society has reduced him to the status of object and has condemned him to a miserable life of unemployment and Arlt traces his attempts to transcend this marginality. He rebels against the economic limitations of his class firstly through robbery, secondly through employment, and finally through invention and literature. This is evident in the first chapter of the novel, whereby Silvio and his companions carry out a rather comical robbery in a library. Theft allows Silvio and his friends to attain freedom from alienation and to temporarily live en société:

*sí vivíamos días de sin par emoción, gozando del dinero de los ladrecitos, aquel dinero que tenía para nosotros un valor especial y hasta parecía hablarnos con expresivo lenguaje.* (p.105)

The mention of ‘*expresivo lenguaje*’ is significant in that theft almost expresses an existential desire to assert one’s being. The impossibility of living a comfortable life in modern society drives Silvio towards transgression as a form of transcendence. As he is unable to sustain an identity within a capitalist society, he asserts his existence through immoral acts and the rejection of traditional values. Hence marginality leads to a desire for immortality, which ironically leads to the path of self-destruction, which is perceptible through his suicide attempt.

Silvio also tries to integrate himself into society through various forms of employment, which paradoxically serve to expose the corrupt dealings and arbitrariness of the society that has excluded him. For instance, when he works for Don Gaetano, Silvio sees in his boss everything that he does
not want to become; “Una sensación de asco empezó a enorajinar mi vida dentro de aquel antro...” (p.154). Furthermore, his hopes are dashed when he approaches a wealthy businessman who promises to employ him but who humiliates him by shouting at him and throwing him out.