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Cosmopolitanism and the Nation: Reading Asymmetries of Power in Victoria Ocampo's "Babel"

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October 1944, in the sky above Paris, sheets of paper are floating down to the ground. A few people below are looking up, waiting for the sheets to reach them. Most pay no particular attention, accustomed as they are to receiving political pamphlets in such a fashion.

These sheets may look the same as all the rest, but they are not. These pages are different, both in nature and purpose. These are not political propaganda pages. They are pages of a literary review. The review is *Lettres Françaises*, edited in Buenos Aires by an exiled French writer, Roger Caillois. The pages are written in French, but they come from far away: from across the ocean, from Argentina. The pages include Néstor Ibarra's French translations of

Jorge Luis Borges' stories "La lotería en Babilonia" and "La biblioteca de Babel".¹

Caillois published *Lettres Françaises* in Buenos Aires with full financial backing from Victoria Ocampo.² From the corpus of Borges' texts, Caillois and Ocampo chose "La biblioteca de Babel" and "La lotería en Babilonia" to be disseminated from the air in a format resembling that of a political pamphlet. However, Borges' stories go beyond the particularism of a political message: Their appeal is universal, stripped of any specifically local or historical allusions to either Argentina, the locus of the texts' production, or France, their final destination.

Over the course of the 20th century whenever the Argentine nationalist fervor was on the rise, Borges repeatedly appealed to "heavenly patriotism." This brand of patriotism, unlike traditional territorial patriotisms, is adhered to the air. It thus implies adherence not to one's nation and its territory, but to what is beyond, belonging to no nation.³ In August of 1944, Borges referred to the liberation of Paris in terms of an important personal discovery: "que una emoción colectiva puede no ser innoble."⁴ Because of their universal content and as they are disseminated in the air, Borges' stories flying above Paris become indeed metaphorical "patriots to heaven."⁵

¹ Roger Caillois published his own *Babel* in 1948. Also in France, René Crevel wrote *Babylone*, a colonial critique and a parody of surrealism, in 1927 (*Babylon*. Transl. Kay Boyle. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985).

² On the relationship between Caillois and Ocampo, see Victoria Ocampo/Roger Caillois, *Correspondencia (1939–1978)*, Ed. Odile Felgine (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1999).

³ For a discussion of cosmopolitanism as a counter discourse to nationalism, see Bruce Robbins, "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms" in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 246–265.

⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944," *Otras inquisiciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 1993) 130.

⁵ *Borges para millones*. Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities, 1983. (Script by Ricardo Monti and Vlady Kociancich). Interview in the Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires, 1978.

Borges' stories about the Tower of Babel and Babylon are both literally and metaphorically "transcendent" in nature. Yet, the scenario of airborne dissemination implies an inevitable paradox, particularly in its dimension of 'transcendence' or going beyond. In this scene, Borges' stories floating in the air are above and beyond French territory, to which they paradoxically descend. These texts, floating in the air, also go beyond the immediate context, on the ground, of the Second World War.⁶ They even go beyond their own author whose agency is transmitted by others, namely Caillois the editor, Ibarra the translator, and Ocampo the financier and coordinator.

This dissemination scene is exemplary of many similar cosmopolitan situations, I would argue, in which there are numerous international intermediaries and transmitters. Significantly, the stories that are disseminated from the air are those referring to the Tower of Babel and Babylon tropes. As they continue the Avant-garde's desire to occupy public space, these tropes are constructed as sites of multiple disseminations, of crisscrossed languages, places, and discrepant histories.⁷

Twenty-four years prior to this 1944 dissemination scene, Victoria Ocampo had written her own version of the Tower of Babel story. In fact, her first published essay was entitled "Babel". It was written in French and then translated to Spanish and published in *La Nación*, the major Argentine newspaper of the time. Writing in French was both expected of and socially acceptable for a woman of Ocampo's social status in Argentina. The essay's very circumstances of publication were Babelic in nature in that they were conditioned

⁶ This dissemination scene is mentioned in John King's influential *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and Its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931–1970*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

⁷For a discussion of the Argentine Avant-garde's desire to occupy public space see Francine Masiello's *Lenguaje e ideología: las escuelas argentinas de vanguardia* (Hachette, 1986).

by translation. Translation, in fact, was going to be one of Ocampo's lifelong interests, to such a degree that Beatriz Sarlo recently referred to the whole production of Ocampo's literary magazine *Sur* as "a translation machine."⁸

From the foundation of *Sur* in 1931 until her death in 1979, Victoria Ocampo was a constructor of the cosmopolitan "bridge" between Argentine literary production and that of the world. *Sur* greatly informed Latin American cultural circuits about "literatura universal," as world literature is called in Spanish. However, "Ocampo left unaltered a sense of the bourgeois space for public action," Francine Masiello points out, and "class pyramids were not disturbed in her imagination" (156). In fact, Ocampo's journal conceived of cosmopolitanism as an ideology that fuses elite national culture with selected versions of internationalism. This particular brand of modernist cosmopolitanism functions in order to reinforce both 'universal' and national(ist) bourgeois values.

Ten years before *Sur*, there was "Babel". Its title refers to the Biblical story about how original language and original unity were shattered. At the beginning of her essay, Ocampo sees as Jehovah's punishment of humanity the diversification of perceptions, rather than the multiplication of languages. "El castigo debió ser como sigue," Ocampo writes, "Jehová no alteró las palabras de los que hijos de Noé se servían: pero modificó la percepción que cada uno de sus cerebros tenía de esas mismas palabras" (46).⁹ Jehovah did not alter words themselves, but rather the perception of them. Furthermore, Victoria Ocampo herself alters things. She transposes texts comprising the first in her series of ten *Testimonios*. The way in which she juxtaposes texts in subsequent publications is also

⁸ Beatriz Sarlo, "Victoria Ocampo o el amor de la cita," *La máquina cultural: Maestras, traductores y vanguardistas* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1998): 93–195.

⁹ Victoria Ocampo, "Babel," *Testimonios: 1920–1934* (Madrid: Revista de occidente, 1935): 43–53.

strategic. Ocampo's selective transposition of texts, with "Babel" as a significant part of this process, inflects cosmopolitanism and other universalist tendencies of the time.

While referring to the "original" story about the Tower of Babel, as told in Genesis 11.1-9, Aleida Assmann highlights a key word in it, that of "One" (ekhad):

In the original state, the whole earth was united in one language...This state of oneness is to be manifested in a name, and the name is to be represented in a colossal monument reaching up to heaven. God recognizes this act as a dangerous provocation; and seeing that the oneness of their language and words is condition for further dangerous projects, he descends to obstruct their work by multiplying their languages...A point of the story seems to be that the One is reserved for God, while the Many is proper dimension for man (86).¹⁰

According to Assmann, and more recently, to Ana Diz, the Tower of Babel story came to define a myth about multiplicity that has generated a series of visions in which the shattered unity is either restored or perpetually postponed. The Babel story, in fact, generated guiding fictions of western history that have defined images of the self and the other, "oriented action in history, supported institutional and political claims, motivated attitudes of aggression and tolerance" (Assmann 85). On the one hand, this story includes different ideological frameworks in which "the One" plays the dominant role, and on the other, it suggests discrepant possibilities of multiplicity:

se trata de la Antigua Guerra entre el uno y los muchos, atestiguada en debates filosóficos, en proyectos políticos nacionales, en utopías sociales, en las ilusiones de una lengua única, de máquinas instantáneas y perfectas de traducción. Este sueño de domesticar lo multiple y lo diferente en un orden Uno, nítido, transparente, anima asimismo la singularización de los orígenes y de los poderes (Diz 3-4).

¹⁰ Aleida Assmann. "The Curse and Blessing of Babel; or, Looking Back on Universalisms." *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser eds. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996): 85-104.

Multiculturalism and mixture have often defined Argentine culture and its literature has been frequently characterized as cosmopolitan. In many instances, however, the tropes of Babel and Babylon have been also used to refer to the principle of “oneness,” especially while alluding to the Argentine nation. Contact, conflict or at times fusion between cosmopolitanism and the nation is particularly pronounced in a corpus of texts based on different uses of the Tower of Babel and Babylon tropes. The present essay traces out the specificity—in time and place—of writing the Tower of Babel trope. What does Ocampo mean when she uses this trope? What kind of audience is her writing directed to? Why the choice of this particular metaphor, at a particular place and time: Buenos Aires at the beginning of the 1920s? What kind of cosmopolitanism is forged in the process?

Traditional cosmopolitanism was constructed as a unifying, universalizing system, as in the “cosmos” component of the term. By contrast, Babel is a dispersing, disruptive, chaos-provoking discursive force. “Universal or traditional” cosmopolitanism is a system of values, hierarchically divided and closely linked to the colonial expansion of European empires, to subsequent economic growth, and to other privileged conditions for intellectual production. Enlightened cosmopolitanism is an enclosed, unified, and unifying system of values deposited in the cultural and political archive of major Western European nations. In this light, cosmopolitanism is a metaphor of contact, albeit of the select few, and Babel that of separation—of confusion and conflict.

Ocampo’s 1920 “Babel” reads as follows:

Y menos mal si cada uno de los infortunados albañiles de la infortunada torre hubiese tenido el buen acuerdo de no permitir a sus hijos el menor intento de casamiento con los hijos del albañil vecino, pues entonces se habrían poco a poco formado algunos grupos capaces de entenderse. Pero aquellos insensatos se mezclaron los unos con los otros de una manera inextricable y decisiva. Y jamás saldremos de ese enredo. (47)

The “enredo” or confusion of the Argentine demographic and linguistic conditions in 1920, with half of the population of Buenos Aires consisting of immigrants speaking foreign languages, makes one wonder about the actual objective of Ocampo’s Babelic lamentation. Furthermore, she is inspired by fury at and contempt for the concept of equality:

Hay en este momento una gran palabra henchida de vacío que nos lanzamos uno a otro; palabra en que, so pretexto de justicia, se oculta una absoluta injusticia; palabra que se esfuerzan en aplicar de un modo tan absurdo que nos reiríamos hasta llorar, en vez de indignarnos, si lo que hay de agudo en la risa no superase la comprensión de los que emplean esta palabra, blandiéndola a cada minuto:

¡Igualdad! (47–48)

She goes on to highlight the inadequacy of so-called equality, apostrophizing it with words such as “amputadora” and “verdugo”:

Como si la Libertad pudiera existir allí donde rige esta amputadora que llamamos Igualdad. Como si la Fraternidad pudiera nacer allí donde el verdugo Igualdad te ayudara, sonriendo, a sacar los ojos de tu hermano, si los ojos de tu hermano ven mejor que los tuyos. (48)

By departing from the French Revolution’s concepts of liberty, fraternity, and equality, which are intertwined with those of the European Enlightenment (themselves self-proclaimed as universal humanism), Ocampo returns to a kind of positivistic differentiation. However, she does not revert to Comte or Spencer, but instead bolsters her argument with quotations from Dante and Virgil. These quotations lead her to justify human inequality in biological terms. “Quanto natura a sentir ti dispouse...” is quoted from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and she uses it as a closing point in her Babelic argument for/against Argentina: “quiere esto decir que hay seres en que la naturaleza puso más sensibilidad que en ti, y otros, también, menos sensibles” (52).

Ocampo reminds her *La Nación* readers that human perception and sensitivity vary from one individual to another, and they are thus of universal nature. Awareness of this fact is the true basis of human happiness. Any attempt to transgress this order leads to false aspirations of equality. Therefore, the very act of transgression is the true curse on the “herederos de los albañiles de Babel”: “¡Qué te importa! No puedes contener más goce que el que te permita la capacidad de tu ser; sería en vano verter algo más dentro de ti, porque desbordaría” (52). The limits of one’s self, Ocampo fears, could overflow. If the “overflowing” metaphor is extended from the Argentine individual to the nation, then the Argentine national confines of established order could dangerously spill over. It is those national boundaries of order and the fixed positions within a hierarchical national structure that Ocampo proposes as “naturally” unequal.

Ocampo’s 1920 reading views the original national unity of Argentina as being in a dangerous state of potential dispersal. It is to the dispersed forces brought about by immigration that she directs her claims of Argentine unity. Not only were the immigrants viewed as the new “barbarians” as early as 1887, but the country itself was seen as Babylon. However, immigrants are not explicitly mentioned in Ocampo’s text. They are effaced, and by effacing them, Ocampo’s “Babel” apparently seeks to present itself in a more general and universal scope. The choice of the Tower of Babel metaphor and its implied “confusion” thus provides the author with a suitable space to employ paradoxical strategies. A case in point is Ocampo’s discussion of equality. Here, the author positions herself as a champion of “difference.” It seems especially important to ask how she defines difference. The insistence on the concept of equality makes one wonder further about the actual nature of proposed difference. It could point to multiplicity, but Ocampo does not promote it in such terms. Rather, she chooses to conceal the

opposing concept of unity by substituting equality. It is this (national) unity that Ocampo reads as “difference.” Multiplicity and equality, associated with immigrants and their social rights, thus become its counterparts.

Ocampo’s 1920 “Babel” legitimizes a certain kind of Babelic internationalism. This kind of internationalism stands in direct opposition to that of the immigrants, which she sees as threatening to, and an ultimate perversion of, the national order. Given that 80 percent of the immigrant population came from poorer regions of the Mediterranean, one could also question the racial implications of the “natural” order that Ocampo defends. Her biological justification of inequality can be read as yet another example of scientific racism inherited from the 19th century.

The space of Ocampo’s “Babel” is limited only to those who are “Argentines without the effort.”¹¹ Newcomers to Argentina are left out of the confines of her “Tower of Babel.” Ocampo’s attempt to refute the notion of equality through a reconfiguration of the Biblical myth crystallizes her position within the legacy of the Argentine national “Centenario” (1910). In fact, Ricardo Piglia referred to Ocampo’s project as a reconfirmation of the liberal program of the Argentine generation of 1880: “*Sur* ... es una revista de la generación del 80 publicada con 50 años de atraso.”¹²

Antonio Argerich in his 1887 novel *Inocentes o culpables* makes the term *barbarie*, which had been used since Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845) designate the untamable forces of nature and describe the newly arrived immigrants. Argentina provides a major cultural space in Latin America where the recurrence of the Tower

¹¹ This is Beatriz Sarlo’s expression for the “hispano-criollos.” Sarlo also raised an important issue about the difference between legitimate internationalisms and those that pervert and threaten the Argentine nation. See Sarlo’s *Borges, un escritor en las orillas* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995), originally published as *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993).

¹² Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1990): 132.

of Babel and Babylon tropes has been significantly mingled and juxtaposed with previously established connotations of barbarism. The meaning of *la barbarie* as a constitutive part of the dichotomy civilization-barbarism, has shifted many times throughout the history of Argentine literature. “Generations of writers from Sarmiento to Borges have rehearsed this dualism in Argentine culture,” Masiello points out, “as if to mark the achievement of the nation by proclaiming the triumph of the civilizing cause over the barbaric “other” (9). The main component of *la barbarie*, though, has always been associated with the untamable: nature in general, the *Pampa* and *gauchos* more specifically. Later on, barbarism is associated with immigration, anarchism, socialism, Peronism, or any other force ostensibly destructive to the person who is employing the term.

As it faces the threatening immigrant “other” and continues the nation’s civilizing mission, Argentine history for Ocampo is always “un album de familia.” The project of national history is identified with her personal projection. Ocampo’s “I” and that of the Argentine nation are one. “She reads her body as the geography of an autonomous nation in formation (164),” as Masiello succinctly summarizes Ocampo’s inscriptions of a gendered nation.¹³ Masiello focuses on the closing scene in the second volume of Ocampo’s *Autobiografía* in order to illustrate how self-representation in Ocampo comes to stand for national culture:

Referring to a representation staged on a transatlantic steamer (a locus beyond the restraints of national boundaries), Victoria Ocampo enjoys the full support of her compatriots, who for

¹³ See Francine Masiello’s “Victoria Ocampo: Memory, Language, and Nation.” *Between Civilization & Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina*. (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992): 156-164.

a fleeting moment celebrate her as Miss Argentina: “They proclaimed me the Argentine Republic,” she concludes (164).¹⁴

While braving through male patriarchal hegemony that constitutes the Argentine nation, Ocampo nevertheless continues an identification that is rooted in the 19th century writings of Sarmiento and other nation builders.¹⁵ Likewise, Attilio Dabini in his essay on Eduardo Mallea, Ocampo’s contemporary and a frequent *Sur* collaborator, sees Mallea’s writing as an “elevation” from the “cosmopolitanism,” which Dabini associates with immigration, to a “universality” with Argentine roots.¹⁶ Notions of difference, elevation, and universality all point to the changing landscape of what had traditionally been perceived as distinctively Argentine. In this regard, one might assume that Ocampo’s “Babel” connotes a multiplicity of ideological options, of languages, of peoples, as all part of the changing landscape.

However, Ocampo’s “Babel” is nation-bound, with the inherited liberal *criollo* foundation at the core of her ‘Tower of Argentina.’ Her essay is consequently written as a recasting of the old models. Rather than calling for a new construction, it calls for a reconstruction of the already existing Tower/Nation. Only the essay’s title resonates with what later will indeed become Ocampo’s main interest in Argentine letters: cosmopolitanism—a bridge connecting the world’s languages and literatures as Babel, and the Latin American South, and more specifically, Argentina.

María Cristina Arambel-Guiñazú’s reading of Ocampo’s “Babel” points out the discursive mobility in which language is always

¹⁴ The scene on a transatlantic steamer is described in Ocampo’s *Autobiografía, vol. 2, El imperio insular*. (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1980): 181.

¹⁵ See David Viñas’ *De Sarmiento a dios: Viajeros argentinos a USA* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998).

¹⁶ *Historia de la literatura argentina 4: Los proyectos de la vanguardia* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982).

subject to a process of translation.¹⁷ Interestingly, in Ocampo's "Babel" there is mobility, but there is also the fixing of discourse that Ocampo proposes in her appropriation of the Babelic myth. In fact, in Angel Rama's view, the enclosed rigidity of cosmopolitanism, forged either as Europeanist imposition or as passive adoption, is a counterpart to an active process that he calls transculturation.¹⁸

By erasing the significance of the social and by privileging the individual, Ocampo posits the cosmopolitan Babel as a convenient "no-place." The cosmetic nature of her writing, which embellishes an embattled social reality of the immigrants' struggle for equality, leads to a peculiar interpretation of "cosmogony," or worldview. This cosmetic, embellished worldview stands in direct opposition to the "ugliness" of social reality brought on by the arrival of immigrants to Argentina. The cosmetic metaphor in relation to cosmogony, which I associate with certain traditional views of cosmopolitanism, is indebted to a remark by Severo Sarduy in an interview with Roberto González Echevarría.¹⁹ Bruce Robbins also reminds us that "cosmetics preceded totality": "Cosmos (world) in 'cosmopolitan' originally meant simply 'order' or 'adornment'—as in cosmetics—and was only later extended metaphorically to refer to the 'world.'"²⁰

The strategic erosion of the social in Ocampo's Tower of Babel is further reflected in *Sur's* policy of a supposed lack of political commitment. By constructing a worldview in such a way while alluding both to the individual and to the elevation of the universal through the erasure of social and historical specificity, Ocampo is

¹⁷ María Cristina Arambel-Guiñazú, "Capítulo I: La palabra difícil, II "Babel," *La escritura de Victoria Ocampo: Memorias, seducción, "Collage"* (Buenos Aires: Edicial, 1993): 30–36.

¹⁸ Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982).

¹⁹ This interview was filmed at Sarduy's French residence for *Ediciones del Norte* in 1984.

²⁰ Bruce Robbins, "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms" in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 253.

able to justify her claims. Moreover, the cosmopolitan camouflage of specifically Argentine national interests is yet another feature of her Babelic strategies. Even more than national camouflage, she perpetuates class camouflage in this process. Thus, 'Babelic' cosmopolitanism provides Ocampo with an ideal shelter for strategic cultural maneuvers in the years to come.

In her autobiographical writings at the end of the Preface to *Archipiélago*, Ocampo writes of the acquisition of international culture in terms of a conquest:

Y como don Manuel Hermenegildo se trajo de Norteamérica el *Horacio* y el *Curiacio*, y armas que le costaron tantos dolores de cabeza, yo soñé con traer otros veleros, otras armas, para otras conquistas. (15)

Despite the possible democratizing effects of translation, Ocampo's elitist views of "cultural conquests" persisted throughout her career.²¹ Forty years after the foundation of *Sur*, Ocampo writes from San Isidro:

Quizá por mucho tiempo la continuidad de la cultura tendrá que ser mantenida por un pequeño número de personas...y no necesariamente por personas provistas de *wordly* [sic] *advantages*." (*Sur*, No. 325, 1970; 304–305).²²

Specially chosen agents of cultural transmission ensure the inheritance and maintenance of culture. In fact, one of the worldly transmitters of culture, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, suggested the journal's name *Sur* to Ocampo. In the following

²¹ For a discussion of translation as democratizing practice see Patricia Willson's *La constelación del sur – traductores y traducciones en la literatura argentina del siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2004, especially Chapter 5, pp.229-267. For a splendid discussion of translation in Latin America see also Sergio Waisman's *Borges and Translation: the Irreverence of the Periphery*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005, and *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*. Daniel Balderston and Marcy Schwartz, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

²² The italics are Ocampo's. Eduardo Paz Leston, "El proyecto de la revista *Sur*" *Historia de la literatura argentina 4: Los proyectos de la vanguardia* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982): 289–312.

passage, Ocampo defines the capacity to express herself in a number of foreign languages as due to an Argentine “national disposition”:

Mi facilidad para expresarme en varias lenguas, mi dificultad para reencontrar, para descubrir la mía propia, ¿serán acaso particularidades mías? No lo creo, esto debe existir entre nosotros como una disposición nacional. El inmenso trabajo de traducciones que muele todos los idiomas unos con otros y que va conquistando el mundo, como dice Drieu, se ha hecho carne en nosotros.²³

Ocampo does not perceive herself as unique when it comes to knowledge of foreign languages. Oblivious to class differences where access to travel and foreign languages has always been limited to privileged classes, she chooses to interpret her linguistic mastery as a national disposition of *all* Argentines. Furthermore, she bolsters her argument with the words of one whom she sees as another authority on the subject, the French writer Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle. Ocampo’s position is thus solidified through approval from a foreign source. The legitimization of Argentine worldliness is completed only if assisted by the mediation of foreign authorities. In addition, Ocampo sees translation processes as a “grinding” enterprise. This metaphor, a grinding mill of languages, can potentially lead to a world vision in which the hierarchies between the languages and their discrepant national origins are “ground up,” resulting in the disappearance of their historical and socio-economic asymmetries. Inevitably, however, the asymmetries and the differences remain.

Ocampo is eager to reestablish the crucial difference between a South American and a Spanish cultural identity, a difference that dates back to the turn-of-the-century *modernista* writing. As part of the quest for cultural autonomy, the ability to speak foreign languages and consequently to have access to the non-Spanish

²³ Ocampo’s essay “Ramón Gómez de la Serna en Buenos Aires,” published in the second issue of *Sur*, is quoted in Hebe Clementi’s *María Rosa Oliver* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1992): 89.

literatures attests to the Argentine and the Latin American openness to the outside world. In the study of the Latin American *modernismo* and its cultural politics, Gerard Aching summarizes this crucial difference between Spanish and Hispano-American cultural identities, the former as nation-oriented and the latter as cosmopolitan:

Cosmopolitanism was the discourse that they used to differentiate themselves from former colonial powers only so far as that differentiation gave them access to an equal status, to a prestige that was on par with that of former colonizers.²⁴

In the Argentine context of the 1920's and 30's, where there is a strong adherence to the Spanish cultural heritage, Ocampo's statements offer a counter argument to such cultural alliances. Her statements propose, in fact, a new set of literary and artistic alliances between the Argentine cultural production and that of the world. Rather than looking at Spain, Ocampo promotes cultural ties with France and the English speaking countries. For it is through the construction of their interconnectedness that Ocampo's and her journal's cosmopolitanisms are forged.

When in 1944 Ocampo chooses Borges' stories about Babel and Babylon to be dispersed from the air over France, she is an important cosmopolitan intermediary. In the context of World War II, her pacifist cosmopolitanism is acted on and translated into French in a serious and hopeful manner. And yet, despite Ocampo's interest to always go "más allá"—beyond the local context—her cosmopolitan encounters are paradoxically inseparable from the nation to which she is bound. In other words, cosmopolitanism in Ocampo goes beyond, and at the same time descends back to, the Argentine elite national stage. What is striking about the texts and scenarios that include Ocampo's cosmopolitan mediation is the

²⁴ Gerard Aching, *The politics of Spanish American modernismo By Exquisite Design*. (Cambridge; Cambridge UP, 1997): 21.

strategic ways in which they layer elite cosmopolitanism and national cultural production. The national-foreign encounters orchestrated by Ocampo point to the paradoxical nature of gestures of “transcendence” or of aiming to go beyond. For, indeed, if traditional and universal cosmopolitanism ascends “beyond” the local and the national, it also descends, in varying degrees, toward the very same notions it aims to transcend.

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