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### Abstract

Ocampo (Argentina, 1890-1979) and Reyes (Mexico, 1889-1959) were arguably Latin America's most influential writers and cultural catalysts in the first half of the twentieth century. They met in Argentina in 1927 and their friendship and correspondence lasted until Reyes's death. Over three decades of private and public discourse, they articulated a similar vision of Latin American identity and its future potential. Because they were both internationally known—Ocampo as founder and director of the literary review SUR, and Reyes as a diplomat and intellectual leader—their ideas found resonance in the Americas and Europe. Two dramatic works they wrote before meeting, *Ifigenia cruel* (Reyes) and *La laguna de los nenúfares* (Ocampo), prefigure their approach to the Latin American condition through the themes of displacement and self-renovation. Ocampo and Reyes believed that it would be the task of an educated elite to lead Latin America toward a transnational cultural synthesis and renewal. Ulysses's malady was their metaphor for the postcolonial condition that enabled Latin American minds to be open to exploration and dialogue in search of an authentic identity.

### Keywords

Ocampo, Argentine literature, Reyes, Mexican literature, Latin American identity, identity, *Ifigenia cruel*, *La laguna de los nenúfares*, displacement, self-renovation, transnational, transnationalism

## Victoria Ocampo and Alfonso Reyes: Ulysses's Malady

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The juxtaposition of these two names—Victoria Ocampo and Alfonso Reyes—so familiar to contemporary Latin Americanists, offers the possibility of drawing parallels not only between two major literary figures of the same generation but also between the way they interpreted the Latin American condition and how we see it today. My objective in this study is to seek correspondences between Ocampo and Reyes that transcend specific geographies and cultures. By introducing them in this framework, I suggest that they were “hermanos naturales”<sup>1</sup> or siblings-in-spirit whose vision for Latin America was founded on a moral imperative particular to an educated elite of their generation whose intellectual consciousness was matched by a sense of social responsibility.

More than two decades ago, when I was writing a biography of Victoria Ocampo, she was relatively unknown in the United States. In the academic community, among those who knew of her, she was rarely included on reading lists and generally tagged as a privileged and influential woman of letters for whom the social realities of Argentina were of little concern. Alfonso Reyes, on the other hand, was admired as a scholar/diplomat and widely studied as a master of the essay genre and an eloquent interpreter of Mexican culture. I won't belabor here the gender and class prejudices that worked against Ocampo, but I do want to underscore that her knowledge of the injustices suffered by women in Argentina was central to her need to find a liberating space for her own self-expression as well as an openness to international

dialogue which Alfonso Reyes also considered essential to affirming the authentic reality of Latin America. These two authors, who have both frequently been called “universal Americans,” had a lot in common—not the least being a friendship that began in 1927 and lasted until Reyes’s death in 1959.

When they met, they were both in their late thirties. Products of countries and cultures at opposite ends of the continent, Reyes and Ocampo were emotionally tied to their homelands while also drawn to communities of the intellect and spirit that were far removed from their birthplaces. Both of them were from families of nation-builders, military heroes and statesmen, but neither Ocampo nor Reyes had any use for war or politics, except as necessary to affirm a fundamentally ethical belief in democracy and human rights. Reyes, from the sun-baked city of Monterrey in northern Mexico, was only eleven months older than Ocampo, who grew up on the leafy banks of the Rio de la Plata. When they met in 1927 in Argentina, he had already established himself in the academic and diplomatic worlds, published some of his most important works and won respect as a man of luminous intelligence in the literary circles of Mexico and Spain. After having lived in Europe for the better part of fourteen years, Reyes had just been appointed Mexican ambassador to Argentina. Ocampo, on the other hand, was just breaking out of constricting social molds and beginning to spread her intellectual wings in public. She had not yet published any significant corpus of work, nor had she discovered what her role in the literary world would be. During the next three years, from 1928 to 1931, while she carried on nurturing dialogues with Reyes and her two principal mentors, José Ortega y Gasset and Waldo Frank, Ocampo became the founder and director of *Sur*, a modernist journal of literature and the arts that would profoundly affect the intellectual development of Latin America. She would also begin to make her mark as an essayist.

From their earliest correspondence, we can see that a bond of trust and affection grew quickly between the two of them, encouraged no doubt by discoveries of mutual friendships (Ortega, Frank, Ricardo Güiraldes, Gabriela Mistral, Adrienne Monnier, to mention just a few) and shared enthusiasms (from French lit-

erature and fine food to the wonders of nature and pet dogs). Ocampo regularly began her letters to Reyes—many of which were written in French as was her custom—with “mi querida flor azteca” ‘my dear Aztec flower,’ a reference to the Aztec symbolism of flowers in Reyes’s poetic vision of pre-Conquest Mexico, “Visión de Anáhuac.”<sup>2</sup> Using this nickname again and again, Victoria seemed to emphasize the most important bond they shared: their awareness of being *americanos*. To them, this condition, in its irreversible otherness, was to be pitied and yet also exploited. America, said Reyes, and he meant Spanish America, had historically been handicapped by being “el centro de varias fatalidades concéntricas” ‘the center of several concentric adverse destinies,’ imagined and defined by the Old World where, until recently, “sólo piden al hispanoamericano que sea pintoresco y exótico” ‘they only ask that the Spanish American be picturesque and exotic’ (“Un paso” 275-77). Writing this in the first piece he contributed to her new magazine, Reyes made note of Ocampo’s personal experience, as related in one of her early essays, “Quiromancia de la pampa” ‘Palmistry of the Pampa’; she wrote of feeling like “la propietaria de un alma sin pasaporte . . . invisible ante la mayoría de los ojos europeos, acostumbrados a otros espectáculos” ‘the owner of a soul without and passport . . . invisible to the majority of European eyes, accustomed to other spectacles’ (147-48). This complaint of the disquieted, displaced soul, which Ocampo saw in herself and her fellow Argentines as “nuestra angustia presente” ‘our current anguish’ (149), carries existentialist overtones that suggest the influence of her mentors, Ortega and Frank. Such anxiety can be debilitating or stimulating, in psychogeographical terms, depending on how the individual interacts with his or her sense of self and place.<sup>3</sup> For Ocampo and Reyes, being American involved an urgency to reach out and explain their otherness in a broad historical and cultural context. The birth of modernity in America, Reyes pointed out, was the result of disjunctions, separations, and discontinuities that inevitably produced a historical tempo different from that of Europe. In his celebrated essay, “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana” ‘Notes on American Intelligence,’ he says:

Llegada tarde al banquete de la civilización europea, América vive saltando etapas, apresurando el paso y corriendo de una forma en otra, sin haber dado tiempo a que madure del todo la forma precedente. . . . Pero falta todavía saber si el ritmo europeo . . . es el único *tempo* histórico posible; y nadie ha demostrado todavía que una cierta aceleración del proceso sea contra natura. Tal es el secreto de nuestra historia, de nuestra política, de nuestra vida, presididas por una consigna de improvisación.

Having arrived late at the banquet of European civilization, America lives skipping over eras, hurrying along and running from one stage to the next, without giving time for the preceding stage to fully mature. . . . But we still don't know if the European rhythm . . . is the only possible historical *tempo*; and no one has yet proved that a certain acceleration of the process goes against nature. This is the secret of our history, our politics, our life, characterized by improvisation. (297)

This distinctly American mode of being, according to Reyes, “[que] va operando sobre una serie de disyuntivas” ‘that continues to operate on the basis of a series of disjunctions,’ enables the possibility of defining an “American intelligence” which has a potential for synthesis and unity unknown in the Old World. In a 1921 essay, “Panorama de América” ‘American Panorama,’ he noted the tendency on the South American continent to speak of “nuestra América” ‘our America,’ which had no conceptual counterpart in Europe (125-26). One of the strengths of Latin America, Reyes said in “Notas,” echoing Waldo Frank’s message of spiritual renewal, was its potential for creating a new civilization out of the chaos of conquest and colonization, “porque nuestra mentalidad, a la vez que tan arraigada a nuestras tierras como ya lo he dicho, es naturalmente internacionalista” ‘because our mentality, while deeply rooted in our lands, as I have already said, is by nature internationalist’ (300).

Victoria Ocampo, in her typically subjective approach to theoretical issues, claimed that her own inclination to express herself first in French and then in Spanish was the result of a very American experience within her class and generation in Buenos Aires, where French was considered superior to Spanish. When she met Ortega, she began to realize how misguided this attitude was, but for her it was too late to undo years of cultural

hybridity, of writing her most intimate thoughts in French, yet in an American setting: "Quedaré siempre prisionera de otro idioma, quiéralo o no, porque ése es el lugar en que mi alma se ha aclimatado" 'I shall always be a prisoner of another language, whether I like it or not, because that's the place where my soul was acclimatized' ("Palabras francesas" 40). The *lugar* to which she refers is a linguistic not physical space, and it points to the critical juncture of language and cultural identity. For Argentines of her class, cultural identity was transnational and plurivocal, yet also geographically and emotionally American. The need to articulate this disjunction arose, for Ocampo, out of the realization that she was not the stereotypical Latin American that others expected her to be. Perhaps that feeling of insufficiency was a blessing in disguise, she wrote some years later, because it bred an openness to the world rather than the provincialism so common among Europeans who remained ignorant of Latin America: "Esto suele ocurrirles a las naciones que tienen un pasado suntuoso. No les queda tiempo, ni ganas, de mirar hacia afuera" 'This tends to happen to nations that have a sumptuous past. They don't have the time or the inclination to look outside themselves' ("Argentinidad" 244). In her case, Ocampo confessed, the drama of her life has been the need to explain her American difference, which she implied was a common experience among Latin Americans: ". . . henos aquí obligados a cerrar los ojos y a avanzar penosamente, a tientas, hacia nosotros mismos; a buscar en qué sentido pueden acomodarse las viejas explicaciones a nuevos problemas" '. . . we find ourselves obliged to close our eyes and go ahead with difficulty, groping along toward ourselves; to search for a way in which the old explanations can be accommodated to new problems' ("Palabras francesas" 40).

Generations of writers and artists, from the early twentieth-century arielistas<sup>4</sup> onward, have taken part in this modern discourse on Latin American identity in which Ocampo and Reyes were major interlocutors. Both of them developed their aesthetic and intellectual orientations in an atmosphere of modernistic internationalism that prevailed in Latin America early in the twentieth century. Several decades later, continuing to believe as humanists that culture should not be confined by political bound-



aries, they found themselves at odds with the ideological nationalists in their countries. Both were inveterate travelers, in the literal and armchair senses, and they both turned to literature as a way of building bridges between their native locales and other places that nourished their spirit. Despite differences in gender and nationality, their construction of self-identities followed a similar course that involved removing themselves from their family milieu early in life: Reyes left Mexico during the chaotic years of the Revolution to pursue a career and education abroad, while Ocampo distanced herself from an oppressive Argentine society by frequent trips to Europe and an unconventional lifestyle. In an autobiographical essay Reyes acknowledged, with words that could just as well been Ocampo's, a sense of self that resisted national boundaries: "Mi arraigo es arraigo en movimiento. El destino que me esperaba más tarde sería el destino de los viajeros. Mi casa es la tierra. Nunca me sentí profundamente extranjero en pueblo alguno, aunque siempre algo náufrago del planeta" 'My ground is ground in movement. The destiny that awaited me later on was that of all travelers. My home is the earth. I never felt deeply foreign in any land, although always somewhat shipwrecked on the planet' ("Parentalia" 83).

The concept that geographic and cultural displacement enhances the development of an identity that is historically conscious has been articulated in recent feminist theory by Teresa de Lauretis, building on the writings of Adrienne Rich, Monique Wittig, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa ("Eccentric Subjects" 138-39). The experience of being an eccentric subject in a postcolonial society, according to Lauretis, made possible "the understanding of the interrelatedness of discourses and social practices, and of the multiplicity of positionalities . . . not a single system of power dominating the powerless . . ." (131). Reyes and Ocampo expressed their sense of self-dislocation in various autobiographical essays, but they also left us two personally revealing, early works of dramatic literature that have been received and interpreted in quite different ways in Latin America. I am speaking of Reyes's 1924 "poema dramático," *Ifigenia cruel* 'Cruel Iphigenia,' written in 1923 and published in Madrid, and



ter-Lily Pond,<sup>5</sup> written in 1922 and also published in Madrid in 1926.<sup>5</sup> *Ifigenia cruel* is considered one of the masterpieces of Mexican literature and a symbolic representation of the post-Revolutionary commitment to a new national identity. *La laguna de los nenúfares*, on the other hand, is virtually unknown in Argentine literature, or even as part of Ocampo's oeuvre; conceived as a play for children and written by a woman, it has been given little critical attention, except, ironically, by the well-known gentlemen (Ortega and Benavente) who published it in Spain. Reyes and Ocampo had not yet met when they wrote these works; however, they shared a modernist approach to classical literature and chose to rework allegorical structures and humanistic themes that transcended any specific place or time. Inspired by well-known myths—one, that of Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and the other, the story of young Buddha—Reyes and Ocampo directed their messages at modern audiences in an era of post-war upheaval; as Reyes observed in a commentary at the end of his play, literature “se iba convirtiendo en un alimento del alma, y ayudaba a pasar la crisis” ‘was becoming food for the soul which helped to get through the crisis’ (83). These works emphasized the drama of choosing one's own path in life, of stepping out of an imposed destiny to embrace freedom and the moral responsibility for one's own actions. In this sense, both their plays show the influence of Ortega y Gasset, which is understandable given the working relationship Reyes had at the time with Ortega in Spain and Ocampo's friendship and correspondence with Ortega after his 1916 visit to Buenos Aires.<sup>6</sup> Ortega's philosophy of *perspectivismo*, as expressed in his major works from the era of the First World War, portrayed life as a risk-filled drama in which the individual has to interact with his or her circumstances in an effort to create an authentic vocation and the opportunity for self-renovation through the exercise of one's *razón vital* ‘vital reason.’

If we look at these two plays by Reyes and Ocampo, we see comparable protagonists. Ifigenia, as Reyes describes her, had been saved from death by the goddess Artemisa whom she serves as a slave, retaining no memory of the bloody destiny visited upon her family by the curse of Tántalo. Lacking a context for under-

standing her emotions, Ifigenia refers to herself as “un animal ajeno” ‘an alien animal,’ lamenting to the chorus of women who observe her strange behavior, “Es que reclama mi embriaguez, / mi patrimonio de alegría y dolor mortales. / ¡Me son extrañas tantas fiestas humanas que recorréis vosotras con el mirar del alma!” ‘My exalted state of mind demands my store of mortal happiness and pain. So many human joys that you all experience with the eyes of your souls are foreign to me!’ (21). Ifigenia craves the warmth of human companionship, realizing that she only knows the loneliness of mindless servitude. In Ocampo’s mythopoetic play, the young male protagonist, Copo de Nieve ‘Snowflake,’ has been saved from a shipwreck by his stepfather, the Magician, who intentionally keeps him ignorant of the realities of human life beyond the walls of his domain so as not to lose his love. Copo de Nieve grows up content but curious, learning about life only from the animals who are his companions in the Magician’s enchanted forest. One day he learns that there is a world of men and cities outside the castle walls and he confesses his confusion and doubts to his stepfather: “Siento como una tempestad en mi corazón . . . mis oídos zumban . . . mis ojos se nublan” ‘I feel as though a storm were in my heart . . . my ears buzz . . . my eyes cloud over’ (41). Driven by the need to know, Copo de Nieve leaves his safe haven of childhood ignorance and discovers the truths of Old Age, Illness, and Death; he finally returning to the Magician with the conviction that only love and hope can surmount the ills of an unjust society. In Reyes’s play, Ifigenia becomes aware of her ignorance, or lack of memory, by the arrival of her brother, Orestes, who tells her of Tántalo’s curse and asks her to return to their homeland to expiate the family sins. This Ifigenia, unlike her Greek model, rejects her brother’s suggestion, opting instead for autonomy and the freedom to choose her own life. Her parting words to Orestes are: “Llévate entre las manos, cogidas con tu ingenio, estas dos conchas huecas de palabras: no quiero” ‘Carry in hand, together with your cleverness, these two empty shells of words: I refuse’ (76). Both Copo de Nieve and Ifigenia make the conscious decision to risk danger and alienation in order to find their own truths. In this sense,

thors who also rejected the vicious cycle of an imposed destiny in the early stages of their lives: Ocampo in her decision to break out of the confines of Argentine gender stereotypes, and Reyes in his departure from the violence of the Mexican Revolution that had taken his father's life. Cintio Vitier has observed that the key message in Reyes's drama—which could also be said of Ocampo's—is the protagonist's rejection of fatalism, of the blind chain of causality that impedes free agency (271-72). As the chorus of women says admiringly to Ifigenia at the play's conclusion: "compénsate a ti misma, incomparable; / . . . escoge el nombre que te guste / y llámate a ti misma como quieras; / ya abriste pausa en los destinos, donde brinca la fuente de tu libertad" 'reward yourself, incomparable one; . . . choose the name you like and call yourself as you wish; you have now made destiny pause, and from thence arises the source of your freedom' (78). This is the renovating affirmation that denies the inertia of ignorance in favor of active intelligence, and opens the way to an authentic, historically grounded identity.

These two dramas thus help us understand how Victoria Ocampo and Alfonso Reyes envisioned Latin America's future at a critical juncture in history when the Old World no longer served as a compelling model for modernist American sensibilities. They both acknowledged a privileged role for creative individuals—open to a universe of ideas beyond national borders—who would constitute an elite minority and lead the way to a new synthesis of cultures in Latin America. This was the mission that Ocampo assumed when she began to publish *Sur* in 1931, with Reyes, Ortega y Gasset and Frank on the advisory board along with writers and artists from all over the Americas and Europe. As she wrote to Ortega in a letter just before *Sur* came out:

He aquí mi proyecto: publicar una revista que se ocupe principalmente de problemas americanos, bajo varios aspectos, y donde colaboren los americanos que tengan algo que decir y los europeos que se interesen en América. El *leitmotiv* de la revista será ése pero, naturalmente, tratará también otros temas.

This is my plan: to publish a magazine that will deal primarily with American problems in various ways, and in which Americans who have something to say, and Europeans who are interested in America, can take part. That will be the *leitmotiv* of the magazine, but naturally it will deal with other subjects too. (“Vida de la Revista” 6-7)

It was clear from the start that Ocampo would draw a wide circle of intellectuals around the core of American issues, and that she intended to include in the space of *Sur*’s cultural dialogues many voices from beyond American shores. To Alfonso Reyes, her magazine signified the realization of his own desire for a space in which to develop “la inteligencia americana”; as he wrote to Ocampo on January 15, 1931:

*Sur* va a ser como nuestra patria. Ya verá qué activo ciudadano resultado yo. Preparo colaboraciones en verso y prosa y me permitiré enviarle cuantas sugerencias se me ocurran. La vida tiene ahora más peso. A usted las gracias.

*Sur* is going to be like our homeland. You’ll soon see what an active citizen I’m going to be. I’m working on submissions in verse and prose, and I’ll go ahead and send you all the suggestions that occur to me. Life has more weight now. Thanks to you. (*Cartas echadas* 19)

A few months later, writing only partly in jest, Ocampo informed Ortega that she expected him to contribute actively to the constructive objectives of the new magazine:

te diré que tienes un deber moral hacia nosotros, en tu calidad de español. Muy bien estaba . . . eso de eviarnos Pizarros y Corteses que se entretenían matando indios de la noche a la mañana, interrumpiéndose sólo para hacer la señal de la cruz. Muy bien eso de que hayan mandado aquí cuanto bandido y aventurero les molestaba en España. Pero ha llegado la hora del karma. En parte son responsables ustedes de lo que por aquí ocurre. No son inocentes.

I will tell you that, as a Spaniard, you have a moral obligation towards us. You considered it all very well . . . to send us Pizarros and Corteses who amused themselves by killing Indians all the time, taking a break only to make the sign of the cross. All very well that you sent here all the bandits and adventurers that annoyed you in Spain. But the moment of karma has come. You

all are partially responsible for what happens here. You're not blameless. ("Vida de la Revista" 7)

In various later essays, Alfonso Reyes placed the relationship with Spain in another perspective by pointing out the unique benefits of a postcolonial mentality:

Para la herencia internacional estamos dichosamente preparados. El hecho mismo de haber sido convidados algo tarde al simposio de la cultura, de haber sido un orbe colonial y de haber nacido a la autonomía al tiempo mismo en que ya se ponía el sol en los dominios de la lengua ibérica, nos ha adiestrado en la operación de asomarnos a otras lenguas, a otras tradiciones, a otras ventanas. Para llegar a Roma tuvimos que ir por muchos caminos. No así el que vive en Roma.

We are fortunately prepared for an international heritage. The very fact of having been invited rather late to the symposium of culture, of having been a colonial sphere and having awakened to autonomy just as the sun was setting on Spanish-speaking dominions, has prepared us to appreciate other languages, other traditions, other views. To reach Rome we had to take many roads. Not so for the one who lives in Rome. ("América y los Cuadernos" 34) <sup>7</sup>

This openness to exploration and dialogue with the objective of building a new culture of synthesis in Latin America was part of a wider intellectual effort in the 1930s and 1940s to develop a transnational space that would foster unity in the Americas and claim an American place at what Reyes called "the banquet of civilization." What Reyes conceived of as civilization—and Ocampo too—certainly relied heavily on the classical and contemporary European notion of culture with a capital C. The expansive perspectives that subaltern and cultural studies have generated in recent decades were only beginning to impact the literary discourse of their time. Ocampo's interest in feminism and cinema studies show her openness to this critical refocusing; in Reyes's case, we see a more general conceptual emphasis on the unique hybridization of Latin America's cultural history and its potential for collective self-affirmation.<sup>8</sup>

Still, both Ocampo and Reyes believed that it would be the educated elite of each country who would gain access for America to the banquet—in itself, an image of exclusivity—because “de ellos nacen los movimientos culturales” ‘through them cultural movements are born’ (“Posición de América” 65).<sup>9</sup> This approach to cultural reconstruction, which appears to privilege those who are already privileged by virtue of education and socio-economic advantages, angered Latin American Marxists and nationalist ideologues who accused Ocampo and Reyes of being *elitistas* and *extranjerizantes* [foreignizers]. Both of them were forced to take defensive positions in numerous essays in which they claimed social class had nothing to do with their notion of a cultural elite. Their protests did not convince their detractors. More poignantly, both were compelled to reaffirm their devotion to Argentina and Mexico many times over, despite abundant evidence of their *americanismo* in words and deeds across the decades.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most personal testimony to this shared destiny was a poem that Reyes wrote to Ocampo in January of 1937, when he was a guest in her vacation home in Mar del Plata. A few stanzas from this *romance* in traditional ballad style hint at the dislocation they both felt as voyagers in the borderless world of culture. Reyes writes

Mar del Plata y mes de enero,  
 cuando las grandes calores.  
 Sale a paseo Victoria  
 con sus cuatro entrenadores.  
 El uno le habla de guerras  
 y el otro le habla de amores,  
 y el tercero, como niño,  
 le corta y le junta flores.  
 El cuarto nada decía,  
 que iba recordando, porque  
 en otras tierras dejaba  
 su alegría y sus dolores.  
 “¿Por qué callas y no escuchas,  
 ni te quejas, ni das voces,  
 ni dejas salir del pecho  
 ni tus penas ni tus goces?”  
 “Tú no sabes, Victoria;  
 Victoria, tú no conoces

peregrino entre los hombres.”

Victoria nada decía,  
viendo lo que le responden.  
De lejos, temblaba el mar,  
en la luz del horizonte.

‘Mar del Plata in the month of January,  
when the heat is very intense.  
Victoria goes out walking  
with her four instructors.

One talks to her about wars,  
and the other talks about love,  
and the third, like a child,  
cuts flowers to give her.

The fourth was saying nothing,  
because he was thinking how  
he left in other lands  
his joy and his sorrows.

“Why aren’t you talking or listening,  
you aren’t complaining or speaking out,  
why don’t you get off your chest  
either your pain or your pleasure?”

“You don’t know, Victoria;  
Victoria, you don’t understand  
what it is to go through the world,  
as a wanderer among men.”

Victoria said nothing,  
seeing what he responded.  
Far off, the sea was shimmering  
in the light on the horizon.  
 (“Aqui comienza” 255-57)

Ocampo understood all too well the feeling Reyes expressed in these brief stanzas; her wanderings had been different, but equally disquieting in terms of her relationship to her compatriots. After his death in 1957, Ocampo wrote an essay in tribute to him that spoke of their shared experience of being born *americanos* but nurtured by a wider cultural experience. Taking an image from Reyes’s earlier writings, Ocampo referred to this condition as “el mal de Ulises, de los viajeros que dejan, dispersos en el planeta, lugares que son como amigos, amigos que son como el lugar donde uno vive mejor” ‘Ulysses’s malady, that of travelers who leave, scattered across the planet, places that are like friends, friends that are like the place where one lives best.’ And



she quoted his words: “A veces, los que vuelven de un largo viaje conservan para toda la vida una melancolía secreta, como de querer juntar en un solo sitio los encantos de todas las tierras recorridas” ‘Sometimes, those who return from a long trip retain all their lives a secret melancholy, as if they wanted to gather in just one place all the delights of the lands they traveled’ (“Alfonso Reyes” 180-81).<sup>11</sup> This was, in Ocampo’s opinion, “el pan nuestro de cada día” ‘our daily bread,’ a very authentic way of being American.

Today, perhaps better than during their lifetimes, we can appreciate the validity of their ideas on the Latin American condition. For a variety of political, economic, and social reasons, it is now more commonplace than ever for Latin Americans to experience displacement and to find their identities shaped by a blending of cultures and languages.<sup>12</sup> Ulysses’s malady has become in our time the drama of the working classes as well as the privileged, whose cultural ground is also “ground in movement” between north and south. More importantly, in the contemporary literature of Hispanic America—and this includes the United States as well—we see a moral imperative to testify to this experience of cultural transnationality and hybridization. Our knowledge of the Latin American condition has been immeasurably enriched by writers of earlier generations and today who try to bring together the worlds of both body and spirit to show what it truly means to be *americano* or *americana* in all its painful and fascinating complexity.

## Notes

1. This was an term used by Alfonso Reyes in a letter to Victoria Ocampo (January 29, 1931) invoking a spiritual bond between those who devote themselves to intellectual understanding among peoples of the world (Perea, *Cartas echadas* 20).

2. In “Visión,” Reyes writes: “La escritura jeroglífica [de los aztecas] ofrece el material más variado y más abundante: Flor era uno de los veinte signos de los días; la flor es también signo de lo noble y lo precioso; y *asimismo*, representa los perfumes y las bebidas” “The hieroglyphic

writing (of the Aztecs) offers the most varied and abundant material: Flower was one of the twenty signs of the days; the flower is also a symbol of nobility and value; and also, it represents perfume and drink' (94). All translations in this paper are mine.

3. For a study of the concept of psychogeography, see Howard F. Stein, *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography*, especially Chapter 1.

4. This term refers to those who favored the cultural values expressed in José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900), a seminal Latin American essay. Rodó wrote of the need to counter the materialist culture of Caliban (the United States) with the best spiritual and intellectual traditions of the Greco-Roman heritage.

5. Ocampo explains in a 1927 letter to Count Keyserling that this work, inspired by a fairy tale she read as a child, was published without her knowledge or consent by Jacinto Benavente, who encouraged her to write it, and Ortega y Gasset, ostensibly to please her. However, she considered it amateurish and unpolished, and also unfortunately changed by its translation from the original French into Spanish. See the preliminary pages of the posthumous 1982 version of *La laguna*. This work was also published in English in Meyer & Fernandez Olmos, *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America: New Translations*, 77-106.

6. On this point see Aponte, *Alfonso Reyes and Spain* 91-121. Also, Meyer, *Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide* 50-63.

7. On this same topic, see also "Notas sobre la inteligencia americana" (1936) and "Posición de América" (1942).

8. Reyes was also sensitive, as *Ifigenia cruel* suggests, to the unique experience and perspective of women. His words in a letter to Ocampo of July 8, 1954, upon receiving her book *Virginia Woolf en su diario* are revealing: "Pineda me ha traído tu Virginia Woolf que he leído con el ánimo suspendido, y hasta sintiéndome solidario de un mundo que no es el mundo de los hombres. (Pues yo, en mi interior, suelo viajar como un sonámbulo más allá de las fronteras establecidas). Gracias, Victoria. Me has hecho sentirme cerca de ti" 'Pineda has brought me your Virginia Woolf which I've read with suspended breath, and even feeling myself in solidarity with a world that does not belong to men. (Privately, I often travel like a sleepwalker beyond fixed borders). Thanks, Victoria. You have made me feel close to you' (*Cartas echadas* 59-60).

9. On the subject of “the role of the intellectual as an agent in the transformation of culture” and the “almost mythic space belonging to elites” as portrayed by *Sur* and many avant-garde reviews in their generation, see Francine Masiello, “Argentine Literary Journalism: The Production of a Critical Discourse” 31-34.

10. Of the many essays in which Ocampo addressed this accusation, one might single out as one of her most forceful responses “Argentinidad de los extranjerizantes.” Of Reyes essays, the most detailed on the subject is “A vuelta de correo.” These words of Federico de Onís regarding Reyes’s *mexicanismo* might be applied equally to Ocampo and her homeland: “La verdad es que la raíz del cosmopolitismo de Reyes hay que buscarla en México, y que su *mexicanismo* esencial y puro le acompañó siempre y en todas partes y prestó a su persona y a su obra esa calidad superior que los extranjeros apreciaban” ‘The truth is that the roots of Reyes’s cosmopolitanism must be sought in Mexico; his essential, pure Mexicanness was always with him, and wherever he went, it gave his person and his work that special quality that foreigners appreciated’ (“Alfonso Reyes” 17).

11. See also a later Ocampo essay on the same subject entitled “Las noches de Itaca” (1973).

12. Beatriz Sarlo, in her study of Buenos Aires in the twenties and thirties, has referred to “el gran escenario latinoamericano de una *cultura de mezcla*” ‘the great Latin American scene of a *mixed culture*’ which she characterizes as “modernidad europea y diferencia rioplatense, aceleración y angustia, tradicionalismo y espíritu renovador; criollismo y vanguardia” ‘European modernity and River Plate difference, acceleration and anguish, traditionalism and a spirit of renovation; Creole customs and the *avant garde*’ (13). She points out the impact of massive immigration from Europe and of modernist attitudes in society and the arts in various works of Argentine literature. The Mexican author Néstor García Canclini has also written an interesting study of the cultural heterogeneity of more recent decades in Latin America.

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