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Los Angeles

Meridional Triangulations: Buenos Aires, Marseille, Paris, 1930-1947

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

by

Jason Araujo

2026

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2026

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Meridional Triangulations: Buenos Aires, Marseille, Paris, 1930-1947

by

Jason Araujo

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Stephanie Frances Bosch, Chair

“Meridional Triangulations and Peripheral Resistances” is a comparative study of three culturally significant magazines active before and during the Second World War: Jean Ballard’s *Les Cahiers du Sud* (1914–1966), Roger Caillois’s *Lettres françaises* (1941–1945, 1947), and Victoria Ocampo’s *Sur* (1931–1981.) Each sought to articulate, metabolize, preserve, and resist the social, historical, and cultural upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s in Europe and Latin America. The concept “meridional” points to currents of movement that cross borders of all kinds, countering the still-common assumption that Europe occupies a cultural center to which the rest of the world merely reacts.

“Meridional Triangulations” also serves as a method: reading the three magazines’ shared contributors and international ethos as a source of connection rather than division, a unity located not in territorial claims but in the

meteorological, oceanographic movement the “meridional” describes. The dissertation asks what this triangulated reading reveals about how these publications navigated the period from 1930 to 1947, an era defined by the rise of authoritarian regimes on both sides of the Atlantic, and how their aesthetic and political commitments were both reinforced and strained by an ambition to engage a world existing within, and potentially beyond, the nation-state.

While all three magazines published contributors considered dangerous by the authorities of their moment, the two “peripheral” publications, *Les Cahiers du Sud* and *Sur*, register an acute awareness of nationalism’s threat not only to culture but to physical mobility and the rights of self-determination inherited from eighteenth-century revolutionary thought. *Lettres françaises*, by contrast, presented itself as a voice in exile charged with preserving French literary culture under occupation. Though Caillois may have understood his magazine as uniquely positioned against European nationalism’s excesses, its perspective remained narrower than it claimed, reluctant to treat Paris as anything other than a metonym for a national framework that continues to complicate the promise of the international spirit.

This project thus addresses literal and literary boundaries alike, aiming to deepen our understanding of resistance, movement, and the generative potential of the liminal spaces between established categories of thought.

The dissertation of Jason Araujo is approved.

Edith Benkov

Kathleen L. Komar

Maarten H. van Delden

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2026

*Ces jours sans horizon, ces mers sans pli
ces continents sans noms...que d'amériques
pour les pêcheurs de perles de l'oubli*

from *Le mal des fantômes* by Benjamin Fondane



Xul Solar's *Drago* (1927.) Watercolor on paper.
Courtesy Museo Xul Solar-Fundación Pan Klub

Dedicated to the memory of my father Dean Araujo, the unconditional love of my mother Alexis Araujo, and the invaluable mentorship and guidance of the late Efraín Kristal.

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While at USD I also worked part-time at the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation in Downtown San Diego at a little house on the corner of 4th and Island. Thank you to Tracy Frick, Dan Haslam, and Keiliki Rodriguez for all that you

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After a rewarding few years working for the U.S. government in Washington D.C., I returned to academia in 2014 to pursue an MA in French and Francophone Studies at San Diego State University where I encountered a dynamic community of support. This group included Victor Clark Alfaro, Edith Benkov, Clarissa Clò, Joanne Cornwell, Anne Donadey, Mary Ann Lyman-Hager, Holly Ransom, Kristin Rebien, and Emily Schuckman Matthews. I also want to salute the memory of the Théâtre Français de San Diego.

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INTRODUCTION

It is manifest that the Second World War (1939-1945) remains a defining event debated within the context of various disciplines: history, economics, psychology, sociology, geography, and political science. There are also any number of important cultural features of this conflict that have been considered and studied, including artistic trends and various avant-garde movements such as Modernism. Marina Mackay's 2009 *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* reminds us that literature is a crucial discipline to be considered among others like history and political science during this transformational moment. Debarati Sanyal's contribution to the collection highlights the importance of the creative arts in thinking about the legacies of the conflict: "France's wartime experience is not a fixed monument to the past, but a dynamic process of critical revision and creative reimagination."¹ More recently, literary scholars have attempted to center literature more directly when it comes to this critical "world" historical event. In the English-language space James Heffernan's 2022 monograph *Politics and Literature at the Dawn of World War II* is a prime example.

Looking beyond English and considering the languages and regions that are central to this dissertation, we have a couple of noteworthy examples. Efraín Kristal published a book not long ago, *Querencias* (2022,) wherein he addresses the writer Jorge Luis Borges's relationship to translation, philosophy, and war, with careful

¹ Debarati Sanyal, "The French war," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. Marina Mackay (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 95.

attention paid to the First and the Second World Wars. There is also Vincent Berthelier's *Le style réactionnaire* (2022), an exploration of French literary production and its relationship to right-wing figures and movements over the course of the 20th century. His work reminds us that the conjunction of literature, style, and politics during this moment of conflict and war can help us to better understand the complexity of this historical moment and the writers who continue to draw inspiration and lessons from its continuing presence.

Though we have seen attempts over the last twenty-five years to engage critically with literary production during the Second World War (SWW), there remains a persistent gap in, even resistance to, an understanding how literatures on the supposed geographic margins interacted with and even shaped the outcome of major historical events in Europe, including some marginal locations within the continental perimeter. The study of the SWW stands to benefit from work that considers the cultural angle from a comparative posture. This study will allow for new perspectives to emerge and give another sense of the conflict's "worldness," not just from centers of power but from peripheries of prominence, peripheries whose contributions must be considered if we are to understand the conflict and its past and current afterlives.

While much work has been done to connect Latin American concerns with European ones and vice versa during these crucial years, my research contribution here seeks answers to the following questions: what can these transatlantic cultural publications from the supposed peripheries tell us about the much-debated

discursive promises and perils of both nationalism and resistance during this chaotic and violent time? To what extent did Buenos Aires and Marseille help sustain larger commitments to both literary and cultural developments in the face of rising despotic and fascist regimes? One answer, I propose, lies in an extended discussion of both the literary *and* the historical/political. As Vincent Berthelmer has recently written in of the right-wing reactionary author Charles Maurras, “[son] influence est conjointement politique et littéraire.”² To recount and think about the anti-reactionary magazines that are the main subject of this dissertation, one is invited to consider the conjoining forces of literature and politics. It is my contention that the influence of these magazines and their editors (Jean Ballard, Roger Caillois, and Victoria Ocampo) is also both literary and (sometimes begrudgingly) political. It is important to better understand how each of these magazines engaged with both discrete and locally specific socio-political concerns as well as shared inter/transnational matters often illustrated and debated in these magazines through the lenses of aesthetics, art, literature, and philosophy.

This dissertation’s comparative method also participates in a broader methodological shift within periodical studies over the last two decades, one that has increasingly treated the little magazine not as an inert container for otherwise-freestanding texts but as a proper form in its own right, with its own logics of circulation, translation, and world-making. Eric Bulson’s *Little Magazine, World*

² “[His] influence was jointly political and literary.” Vincent Berthelmer, *Le style réactionnaire* (Éditions Amsterdam, 2022), 23.

Form (2017) has been particularly influential in this regard, arguing that the little magazine should be understood as a genuinely global form whose meaning is best grasped not through isolated national case studies but through attention to how such publications moved, adapted, and reproduced themselves across radically different geographic and linguistic contexts. This turn builds on and extends earlier field-defining work, including the multi-volume *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* project led by Peter Brooker, Andrew Thacker, and others. Taken together, this body of scholarship has made it possible to ask not simply what a magazine published, but what a magazine *is*: an evolving material and social form whose editorial choices, networks of contributors, and patterns of circulation constitute their own kind of argument.

My own intervention extends this periodical-studies turn in a specific direction. Where Bulson and others have largely conceived of the little magazine as a form that circulates and mutates as it moves between sites, often tracing a single publication's transnational itinerary or a network's diffuse and uneven connections, my work here proposes that an equally productive approach, at least for the case at hand, is not the individual magazine or even the informal network connecting several, but rather the axis along which a small constellation of magazines can be shown to sit in active relation to one another. *Sur*, *Les Cahiers du Sud*, and *Lettres françaises* did not simply circulate independently with overlapping contributors and a shared set of political urgencies; read together, they triangulate what I call a meridional axis whose logic no one magazine, read in isolation, could fully reveal.

Why these three magazines? There are several reasons these magazines should be considered side-by-side in a single comparative study. The first is that they share a list of recognizable contributors among them, including Roger Caillois, Albert Camus, Paul Éluard, René Etiemble, Benjamin Fondane, Saint-John Perse, Jean Paul Sartre, Jules Supervielle, Paul Valéry, Marguerite Yourcenar, among others. It is also worth noting that they sometimes published the same exact piece, even within one or two issues of the other. One case in point is the publication of Saint-John Perse's poem "L'Exil," which first appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud* in May 1942 (at the height of Vichy's prominence) followed by *Lettres françaises* in July of that same year. In both magazines the poem appears front and center, signaling its editorial significance and hard-to-miss allusion to the events taking place during this global conflict.

One may have noticed that the above list of the various shared contributors is all in one way or another French/Francophone, a frequent criticism of Ocampo's *Sur*. This isn't to say that the sole connection between these three magazines is their passion for French culture and language, though there is no lack of that. There is another interesting and important point of connection: Ballard's and Ocampo's projects are linked by a shared sense of geographic and linguistic openness that attempted to call into question, perhaps even resist, parochial nationalist interests and prerogatives in the cultural and literary sphere. In the case of Ballard, his magazine sought to emphasize the importance of Marseille as a

cultural contender and embrace the larger concept of the “Mediterranean world” (from publishing local Provençal writers to the world of Arabic language found a sea apart) in an effort to claim relevance in the face of Paris as a self-proclaimed “national” center of culture. Similarly, Ocampo’s project aimed to both center and unite an unwieldy American continent, to the frequent dismay of Argentine nationalist sympathies of all types, irrespective of their political directionality. This geographic capaciousness points to another important aspect of all three magazines: the role of linguistic difference and of translation. Translation is a critical practice (though not equally so) in all three magazines.

Another key reason to juxtapose these publications has to do with understanding how each responded to the developing political and social situations within their respective geographic perimeters and to explain how these magazines not only responded but also helped ensure a spirit for survival. *Sur*, for example, was born at a particularly tense moment in Argentina’s history. Ocampo’s cosmopolitan project appeared concurrently with the takeover by a protectionist and nationalist military regime at the beginning of what historians now refer to as the “infamous decade.” Though these concurrent events—the military takeover and the founding of the magazine—were perhaps a vagary of history, it is clear that such a coincidence did in fact have tangible effects on the subsequent direction of the magazine and its socio-cultural postures, even before *las vísperas de la guerra*, the eve of war, in the late 1930s. We can see subtle hints of this political dimension in the first edition of *Sur*, a positionality that only became more obvious as the decade

of the 1930s progressed. In fact, by the 35th edition of the magazine (August 1937), readers encountered an article titled “Posición de SUR” placed right at the beginning and written in response to attacks by the magazine *Criterio* (at the time a staunchly conservative and nationalist publication committed to Catholic principles.) Ocampo’s editorial stance here attempted to convey a certain “neutrality” wherein we read that “[e]sta revista [*Sur*] no tiene color político, como no sea el color que impone a una inteligencia la defensa honrada de esos principios, de esos fundamentos,” “[t]his magazine [*Sur*] has no political affiliation—unless it be the color imposed upon an intellect by the honest defense of those principles, of those foundations.”³ Though perhaps initially more politically capacious in terms of its positionality, *Sur*’s stance became much more direct in 1937 and over time became even more “committed” in terms of its political engagement. This shift was in response to the growing despotism and anti-democratic postures of various right-wing intellectuals that had appeared in the magazine’s pages. This commitment, though, is rhetorically expressed through a language of “neutrality.” This notion of neutrality is worth unpacking, both as a concept and what it meant practically during this specific moment in the history of that country. As James Cane has observed with respect to the relationship between the press and the government, “...the proper role of journalism and the press was one of the more contentious issues of that [1930s] decade. This was due, in no small measure, to the way that

³ Victoria Ocampo, “Posición de *Sur*,” *Sur*, August 1937.

the conflict over the social role of journalism lent concrete expression to more fundamental issues regarding the distribution of power in Argentine society, the meanings of democracy, the shifting nature of citizenship, and the reworking of the boundaries between state and civil society and between public and private.”⁴

Though I do not wish to conflate the project of a daily newspaper with that of a monthly cultural and literary magazine, it is important to note that state power and its ability to censor would have applied to both types of publications.



The concept of triangulation that animates this work is premeditated. It is not merely the act of naming three discrete “sites” and using specific literary artifacts to juxtapose them, enumerating their similarities and differences to argue that they are more akin than not or *vice versa*. Triangulation, rather, allows for new ways of problematizing how information both moves and is rendered intelligible; how placing three spaces within a single study may connect to more solid truth claims. The U.S. philosopher Donald Davidson (1917-2003) developed a very sturdy if debated way of thinking and deploying the concept of triangulation. It was a feature of his work that appeared frequently across much of his later writing. For Davidson, triangulation most broadly “refer[s] to a process through which...people

⁴ James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy: Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930-1955* (Penn State University Press, 2011), 15.

have to go in order to be thinkers and speakers.”⁵ One of his former students, Claudine Verheggen, in her attempt to clarify his “triangulation argument,” explains at least two possible ways of understanding this often-misapprehended concept. One way is to understand that triangulation is “required to fix the meanings...of one’s thoughts and utterances,” while the second is “that triangulation is needed to have the concept of objectivity, which, for Davidson, is also needed to have language and thoughts (in addition, that is, to the obvious requirement that meanings be fixed).”⁶ Verheggen then goes on to explain that these two ways of understanding Davidson’s concept should be taken together and considered as part of the same operation.

How does using Davidson’s philosophical framework of triangulation serve the task at hand? By using these three magazines to represent a geographic troika of sorts (Ocampo representing Buenos Aires, Ballard representing Marseille, and Caillouis representing Paris “in exile”) we can begin to see more objectively and with greater clarity how these magazines used one another to ensure a robust defense of “French” literary and cultural tradition, itself a metaphor for the main tenants of Republican tradition in the face of murderous violence: liberty, equality, fraternity.⁷ It was, after all, the French Revolution that not only inspired this motto; it was also

⁵ Claudine Verheggen, “Triangulating with Davidson” in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 226, 2007, 96.

⁶ Claudine Verheggen and Robert H. Myers, *Donald Davidson’s Triangulation Argument: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Routledge, 2016), 11.

closely linked with the excesses of violence itself. Though one may encounter the claim that no internal publication in France was able to adequately resist the pressures of occupation and the censor, my detailed examination of the magazines as well as various archival materials has led me to the conclusion that all three, including Ballard's in Marseille, though operating under very different circumstances, were deeply committed to anti-fascist causes and all were able to exceed their given geographic constraints. Donaldson's notion of triangulation has helped me to better understand the value of constellating by way of a third term, allowing me to see that although Caillois's magazine was committed to the free French cause, his editorial approach did not seriously trouble the centralized discourse that existed prior to and then subsequently after the war was over and de Gaulle ascended to power, another figure who was quite suspicious of parliamentary standards.

My title also introduces what I believe is a new concept when applied to cultural and literary studies. The term meridional refers to the "south," as opposed to the septentrional which signifies the "north." Beyond its association with a cardinal direction, meridional can equally refer to the sun's position at noon or a wind "blowing along the line of a meridian." According to the OED, these two terms, meridional and septentrional, have seen a recent decline in usage, and their respective declines perhaps suggest a broader significance. So, why meridional and not simply "south" (as two of the magazines refer to in their titles)? The answer has to do with the tensions between land and sea. Meridional, to my understanding, is a

concept intimately associated with water, a crucial aspect of how the triangulation I am describing here can and does occur. “South,” though evocative as a concept for the two magazines who use it and their aesthetic and cultural commitments, doesn’t quite capture the entire vehicle by which such a triangulation is made possible.

In contemporary academic discourse in the United States, it is crucial that I address a profoundly influential field that has helped me better understand my own proposed term. Global South studies have largely moved beyond a locational reading of “south” despite what its name might suggest. In its most productive form, the field treats the Global South as a relational position rather than a topos, one produced by capitalist accumulation and legible within the borders of wealthy nations as readily as outside them, as the modifier “global” allows for the “south” to dislocate from a strict geolocatable position. The meridional is not a rival to that claim so much as a different kind of phenomenon. Where the Global South names a position within a structure of subordination, the meridional names a process of transmission, and the two are not mutually exclusive. The difference between the two lies in their methodological outcomes. Global South studies are powered by pushing the south’s geographic term, with the result that it becomes “both many and nowhere.” The meridional as I seek to articulate it moves in another direction. It doesn’t look to dislodge geography so much as consider geography’s layered fullness, exchanging the layer of a political map for one that is more meteorological/oceanographic in nature, where a meridian is a physical line and meridional circulation indicates the movement of water and air along it. The axis

traced here is certainly locatable, therefore. The consequence of such an understanding is that no one force can claim to have originated the effects of the phenomena that occur within its frame. It is also, unlike north-south relationality that still animate some Global South positions, symmetrical in principle: a meridional wind is defined by its alignment with the meridian rather than by any particular location along it. Finally, it is important to remember that a single axis can also join another to help form a triangle. As such, the forces of the meridional between Buenos Aires, Paris, and Marseille can give us fresh insights and new understandings.⁸

Finally, it is important to unpack the concept of “resistance.” This is a complex term, one that shifts meaning, as many terms do, across time and space depending on who is resisting what, how, and why. Resistance is also, it seems, very much in the eye of the beholder, and its meaning has proven especially unstable within French historiography. Robert Paxton’s seminal *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (1972) crucially reoriented that historiography by demonstrating, against the postwar consensus, that the Vichy regime pursued collaboration as a deliberate homegrown project rather than a reluctant concession extracted under duress, a finding that provocatively dismantled the assumption that occupied France could be neatly divided into collaborators and resisters. In the wake of Paxton’s field-reorienting work, Henry Rousso influentially diagnosed the

⁸ Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra and Anne Garland Mahler, “Introduction: New Critical Directions in Global South Studies”, *Comparative Literature Studies*, Volume 58, Number 3, 2021, 465-484

postwar period's own mythmaking as a "Vichy syndrome," a collective memory in which the nation's occupation-era conduct was retroactively reorganized around a narrative of robust, near-universal resistance. Later historians, building on both, showed how contested, marginal, and retrospectively applied the label of "resistance" actually was at the time. Few French men and women during the occupation itself would have described their own daily conduct using such a term; the designation arrived later, conferred by history rather than being claimed in the moment. My work here takes that instability seriously rather than attempting to resolve it. Editorial continuity—the simple, sustained act of keeping a magazine in print under conditions that make such continuity difficult—does not announce itself as resistance in the heroic register the word has since acquired. It more closely resembles what the political scientist James C. Scott termed "everyday resistance" or "infrapolitics": modes of refusal that are low visibility, sustained rather than dramatic, and easily mistaken for mere accommodation precisely because they decline the theatrical postures by which resistance is usually perceived and recognized. Reading Ballard's and Ocampo's editorial efforts through this lens does not inflate quiet persistence into clandestine heroism. It instead insists that the category of resistance has always been broader, and more contested *in situ*, than the term's later, tidier usage would suggest.

To understand the cultural-political urgency of resistance, one benefits from locating it within the broader mid-century critique of Enlightenment reason. In their seminal *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (drafted in exile and published in 1944),

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued that the very values of Western rationalism—the foundational concepts of the French Republican tradition—carried an internal, self-destructive violence that ultimately facilitated the rise of twentieth-century totalitarianism. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the “will to power” and the obsession with instrumental classification in the European center did not liberate humanity; instead, they paved the path to Nazism.

By analyzing the printed troika presented here, this study demonstrates that while the European center collapsed under the weight of its own rationalistic excesses, the “meridional” axes became the vital space where those very Republican values of liberty and fraternity were rescued and radically re-signified. In Marseille and Buenos Aires, Ocampo and Ballard did not simply “mimic” the classical French tradition; their attempt was to liberate it from its metropolitan chauvinism, showing that the defense of the free spirit required a geography that exceeded the borders of the nation-state and the power of its capital. To trace the development of this meridional and its custodial foil, this dissertation is structured into three highly focused, comparative chapters.

Chapter One: Southern Currents: Victoria Ocampo’s *Sur*. This chapter reconstructs the intellectual and material networks of *Sur* during the “infamous decade” in Argentina. It examines in detail Ocampo’s first issue, specifically two editorial pairings of international and local contributors as a deliberate, structural staging of cultural collision. By providing a detailed close reading of these four

articles that appear in the inaugural issue, this chapter demonstrates how Buenos Aires functioned as a generative node of cultural production that actively sought to push beyond European chauvinism.

Chapter Two: Meridional Waves: Jean Ballard’s *Les Cahiers du Sud*. This chapter turns to the southern shores of Marseille to examine how Ballard utilized his port city's liminal “threshold status” to establish an independent source of cultural and social authority. It analyzes Ballard’s editorial resistance to both Parisian centralization and Vichy’s collaborationist “National Revolution.” Through close readings of one of the journal’s crucial contributors, Benjamin Fondane, this chapter shows how *Les Cahiers du Sud* preserved a space for free thought by turning its gaze toward a fluid, multidirectional Mediterranean world that was Braudelian in the sense that its boundaries were drawn by circulation rather than by coastlines.⁹

Chapter Three: The *Normalien* of the Plains: Roger Caillois’s *Lettres Françaises*. This chapter serves as my study’s structural foil, examining Roger Caillois’s six-year Argentine exile. It traces his evolution from his 1939 arrival to his post-war return to Paris and the restoration of a “universal cultural clock” located, of course, in the Ile-de-France. Through detailed close readings of all of his

⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (University of California Press, 2023.)

contributions to his magazine in exile, this chapter demonstrates how Caillois systematically used his displacement not to discover the dynamism and richness of the supposed periphery, but rather to re-entrench metropolitan hegemony, enacting an extractive logic that was concretely dependent upon Argentina and its material and cultural significance.

CHAPTER ONE

Southern Currents: Victoria Ocampo's *Sur*

“No podemos crear nada fuera de nosotros sin antes haberlo creado en nosotros.”
“We cannot create anything outside of ourselves without first having created it within ourselves.”¹⁰

Victoria Ocampo

Introduction

The cover of *Sur*'s inaugural issue presents readers with a simple visual sign: an arrow pointing downward, its directional force both asserted and softened by the placement of the magazine's title in large, bold font. Such a design interferes with the arrowhead's thrust while making it unequivocal: we are southbound. This graphic choice, maintained practically unchanged across four decades of publication, operates as more than aesthetic posturing; it represents a critical expression about directionality (geography) and its relationship to cultural and intellectual authority. In other words: the image can be understood as a political statement. One may still too easily today cede the power of early 20th-century transatlantic artistic and cultural exchange to European centers, whose radiating cultural innovations, we are told, then flowed to peripheral recipients eager to either fight against them, adopt them whole cloth, or make some hybrid response of them.¹¹ Editor Victoria

¹⁰ Victoria Ocampo, “La Mujer, Sus Derechos y Sus Responsabilidades,” in *Lawrence de Arabia y Otros Ensayos* (Aguilar, S.A. de Ediciones, 1951), 445.

¹¹ For a discussion of these various responses please see Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Northwestern, 2014) and Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Seuil, 1999.)

Ocampo's southward-pointing arrow, however, subtly pushes back against such a centrifugal understanding both in her time and our own and proposes an alternative cultural flow that positions Buenos Aires (*Sur*) as an active node of cultural production and innovation rather than an uncultured climber, a mere copy, or some mix. Such a gesture then pushed the envelope of authority and reminds readers today that the development of cultural and literary artifacts and traditions is the product of flows and currents, neither strictly national nor wholly dependent on authorities from a given geographical location/orientation.

Leading up to and during the first decade of *Sur*, the magazine found itself participating within larger debates surrounding Modernism, a movement that is now historically self-assured, while also replete with contradictions, such as its definition, when and where it appears, and its socio-cultural afterlives.¹² With this cultural movement as a backdrop, where does Ocampo and her magazine fit into such larger debates? Scholars, including Gayle Rogers and Laura María Lojo Rodríguez, have proposed that in the face of the destruction wrought by the First World War, many Modernist European writers believed that Europe could be “revitalized from its moral and cultural degeneration in different corners of the

¹² Modernism doesn't materialize at one given moment within a particular geography; rather, it is a phenomenon that transpires in different places at different times, making it difficult to chart its movements or come to a satisfactory answer as to any official timing or provenance. When thinking about the magazine *Sur*, such a complex timeline (Modernism, according to various accounts and disciplines, can span from the late 19th century into the 1960s) yields no single satisfying definition.

world which had remained safe from the war's devastation."¹³ Though such a conclusion could be drawn in the minds of the Europeans who conceived of and actively participated in the making of their historical moment, looking back today we might question whether countries like Argentina remained "safe" from the effects of the Great War.

Victoria Ocampo's particular approach to Modernism may be staring right back at us from her magazine's cover. Its austere, unornamented design—a single arrow, the magazine's title set in bold, capital letters—embraces the visual idiom of interwar Modernism: clean, geometric, stripped of decoration, decipherable nearly instantly. At the level of graphic form, in other words, the cover adopts the appropriate and legible metropolitan aesthetic. But the minimalism on display here also subtly reorients such a visual idiom so that it calls into question European hegemony. The arrow and the single word "Sur" take a Modernist grammar associated with the cultural centers of Europe and aim it away from those centers, "southward." This is the point of the gesture: the cover neither rejects Modernist form, as a cultural nationalism, nor simply adopts it, as Ocampo's critics charged when they accused her of *européismo*.¹⁴ It accepts the metropolitan aesthetic and redirects it at the same time: a Modernist visual language to point past the very

¹³ L. M. Lojo Rodríguez, "Thought in American and for the Americans": Victoria Ocampo, *Sur*, and European Modernism," in *Philosophy in the Condition of Modernism*. ed. Ana Falcato and Antonio Cardiello (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 168.

¹⁴ In the third edition of *Sur*, Ocampo must contend with such criticisms. See Victoria Ocampo, "Palabras Francesas," *Sur*, Winter 1931, 7-25.

centers that national idiom is taken to represent. To push back, it turns out, helps by way of a preestablished forms.

Looking to describe such a phenomenon I term this process “meridional.” The choice of this new coinage is deliberate as the available vocabulary for describing cultural movement carries a directionality that quietly reinstates the very hierarchy I seek to interrogate. “Influence” runs from a source to a recipient; “reception” casts one party as passive; “center and periphery,” even when invoked critically, maintain the gulf between them; and “exchange,” which sounds balanced, presumes two fixed poles trading across a stable axis.¹⁵ None of these describes a flow in which the directionality itself is unpredictable, unstable, in which no pole is permanently source or recipient, in which a single site may be both at once, and by which currents curve, return, and collide rather than running infinitely in one predictable direction or obeying territorial integrity. Entire landmasses can and will be remade by climatometeorology. The concept “meridional” therefore serves to help describe a less binary, prescribed phenomenon. The word is drawn from meteorology, climatology, and oceanography, where meridional winds and oceanic currents describe movement as part of a circulating system that redistributes heat and

¹⁵ See René Wellek, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature” in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton University Press, 1971); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Academic Press, 1974); David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso, 2013.)

moisture in both directions and inevitably must return upon itself, repeatedly.

Translated into a cultural setting: metropolitan aesthetic and cultural forms become not origins to be discovered or received but elements within a larger circulation that flow multidirectionally, more like ocean currents and wind patterns, cyclical and repetitive, than like a beam radiating from a fixed source.

Such a term can extend beyond the visual design of the magazine and be found in the content of its pages as well. The inaugural issue brings together contributors who represent meridional flow, creating an intellectual dynamism that exceeds the specter of the center/periphery binary. The roster of contributors and their respective pieces bring together a mix of orientations, from long-established transatlantic friendships like the one I trace between Alfonso Reyes and Jules Supervielle, to more recent and contentious pairings like Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Benjamin Fondane. Rather than synthesizing these voices into a coherent editorial consensus, Ocampo's approach sought to maintain productive tensions that refused easy resolution or synthesis. This chapter argues that such strategic dissonance exemplifies Ocampo's distinctly port city, or *porteño*, modernism, one that engages European aesthetic innovations not through feverish imitation or anxious rejection but through an emphasis on allowing the various fissures and discrepancies to be placed side-by-side in a manner one might term, once more, as "meridional."

Palabras Francesas in Argentina

Victoria Ocampo was born in Buenos Aires in 1890 into one of Argentina's most prominent patrician families, a background that provided her with substantial financial resources and social access, while also generating cultural and social tensions that would come to define her identity as an intellectual, writer, and ultimately an editor and publisher. Her father famously lamented that his firstborn child was not a son, while her mother later confiscated books from an adolescent Victoria, books she deemed inappropriate for her daughter. These experiences quickly introduced Ocampo to the constraints of a patriarchal social order. In addition to her gender, she was also targeted for her polyglotism. From a young age she was educated primarily in French and English, with Spanish language use relegated to exchanges with household staff — a linguistic formation that left her vulnerable to criticism for displaying an “actitud extranjerizante,” or “foreignizing attitude,” and succumbing to “europeísmo,” “Europeanism.”¹⁶ This socio-cultural ostracization from an early age became, paradoxically, a later source of editorial strength and cultural significance: her fluency in multiple languages and perceived

¹⁶ Such accusations of Victoria Ocampo being a “foreignizer” appeared even before the journal's founding and would only continue to appear in subsequent decades. She felt compelled to address these criticisms within the first year of the magazine, in issue number three, in an article titled “Palabras Francesas.” During these early years of the magazine, she endured quite a deal of criticism from both the ideological left and right. On the right, in particular, there was Monsignor Gustavo Francenschi (1881-1957) whose journal *Criterio* often accused Ocampo and the larger group of neglecting traditional Hispanic-Catholic values in favor of secular European models that he deemed “inauthentic” and “foreign” to the true Argentine spirit. That “Hispanic-Catholic” values were somehow indigenous to Argentine ontology seems a stretch; it is also interesting to note that Francenschi was born in Paris. See Rosalie Sitman's 2003 monograph *Victoria Ocampo y Sur: Entre Europe y América*, especially chapters two and three.

outsider status within Argentine intellectual circles positioned her to challenge both European cultural hegemony and Argentine cultural nationalism simultaneously.

Ocampo's cosmopolitan outlook was formed through extensive travel abroad in Europe and the United States, perhaps most significantly a transformative 1908 trip where she attended courses at the Sorbonne on Dante, Saint Augustine, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, and heard lectures delivered by Henri Bergson, a figure who would go on to dominate French and European thought during the first half of the twentieth century. These experiences provided her direct contact with key European intellectual figures, a list that would only grow, beyond Europe, once she returned to Argentina. Such an experience would also confirm her staunch opposition to the way society forces women to conform to particular social roles at the exclusion of intellectual development. Upon her return to Argentina, she continued to struggle against herself and her role in society, but over the course of the 1910s and 20s she pushed herself to grow by meeting additional key international figures, including Rabindranath Tagore, Waldo Frank, Herman von Keyserling, and José Ortega y Gasset — two of whom proved indispensable in the ideation and subsequent creation of her magazine. Rather than simply adopting European cultural models, as some of her critics claimed, Ocampo's travel experiences and subsequent intellectual work enabled her to envision Buenos Aires not as a peripheral backwater nor a parochial capital of an inward-looking nation-state, but as an active site of cultural production, capable of moving beyond its

supposed isolation to become a dominant force within a rising internationalism spurred by profound technological shifts.

Sur emerged from Ocampo's particular biographical trajectory during a period of dynamic cultural and political transformation in Argentina. Though her magazine was founded in 1931 when she was 40 years old, her life experiences up until that point played a crucial role in her editorial approach over the following decades. Beyond her biography, the larger history of Argentina and its relationship to the rest of the world is also crucial to understanding Ocampo's life and work. For example, though her youth and early adulthood shaped many things about her magazine, her larger family lineage was linked quite closely with the development of the Argentine state.

The fin-de-siècle and the 20th century turn

The decade in which Victoria Ocampo was born saw the continuation of a number of dramatic social and economic transformations occurring both in Argentina and across the hemisphere. In Argentina, the period between 1880 and the Great War witnessed unprecedented economic growth driven by agricultural exports, foreign investments, and a massive influx of European immigration. Between 1870 and 1930, the country received over three million European immigrants, profoundly altering the cultural and demographic composition of the relatively new country. This massive influx created what prominent 20th century historian José Luis Romero termed the “alluvial period” – a geological concept

applied to a cultural formation that followed what he called the “colonial” and the “creole” periods.¹⁷ The scientific concept references a layer made of young, unconsolidated particles like mud, sand, and pebbles dropped by rivers and streams. The “alluvial” here refers to the successive layers of foreign influences that arrived during the late 19th and into the 20th century. My concept of the meridional is in conversation with Romero’s efforts to give structure to this period, except mine is less territorially, geologically situated.

Buenos Aires emerged during this period as a cosmopolitan metropolis that rivaled European capitals in its cultural ambitions and economic prowess. The city’s rapid expansion, from approximately 180,000 inhabitants in 1870 to over one million by 1910 was accompanied by ambitious urban planning projects that looked towards Europe, perhaps most conspicuously Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s mid-19th century transformation of Paris. During these decades of economic bounty, the “Paris of South America” saw the construction of grand avenues, an opera house (Teatro Colón), museums (including the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes), libraries, and numerous other municipal infrastructure projects. This cultural infrastructure would prove instrumental over the first decades of the 20th century as Buenos Aires’s status would grow in stature.¹⁸

¹⁷ For more on his periodization see José Luis Romero, *Las ideas políticas en Argentina* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946.)

¹⁸ James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (Oxford University Press, 1974.)

The *fin-de-siècle* period also witnessed the emergence of a particularly Argentine literary culture that sought to further debate and understand the promise and limits of both its outward-looking cosmopolitanism and its inward-looking national identity formation. Writers like Leopoldo Lugones and Rubén Dario (who lived in Buenos Aires from 1892-1898), two important figures who bridged the 19th and 20th centuries, exemplified this tension, producing works that engaged with French Symbolism and other European movements while also addressing specifically American and Argentine themes and concerns. The founding of influential cultural magazines such as *La Biblioteca* (founded in 1896 by French immigrant and head of Argentina's national library, Paul Groussac) and *Nosotros* (founded in 1907) established national precedents for the kind of international cultural mediation that would later characterize Ocampo's *Sur*.

Though wealthy and experiencing a cultural boom, Argentina was also not immune to the larger historical shifts taking place around the world. When the First World War broke out, Argentina's official response of neutrality created a complex cultural situation that would prove crucial for understanding the emergence of Modernist and other avant-garde movements in the 1920s. While geographically removed from the conflict's immediate devastation, Argentina was compelled to negotiate shifting European markets and trade patterns. Perhaps more importantly for my purposes here, the war's ideological implications would end up profoundly affecting Argentine intellectual culture, exacerbating

longstanding debates about civilization, progress, and national identity that dated from the previous century and would persist throughout the interwar period.

The sinking of three Argentine merchant vessels by German submarines in 1917 brought the conflict closer to the national consciousness, generating heated debates about Argentina's international position as well as a national conversation about its future. These discussions extended beyond immediate political concerns to fundamental questions about Argentina's cultural and social relationship to the various countries involved in the conflict. This shift was particularly salient as many of those who had been arriving during the "alluvial period" were in some way related to various national identities in mainland Europe then currently engaged in combat. The war not only confirmed a political crisis, but also emphasized Europe's cultural and moral crisis, prompting many Argentine intellectuals to reconsider assumptions about cultural hierarchies and progress that had gone unquestioned in the decades leading up to the conflict. So while some scholars have characterized European modernists as seeking sites far from the action of the war in the hopes of saving European culture and civilization, and while Argentina's involvement in the conflict was perhaps minimal compared to the extreme loss of life on the European continent, it would be inaccurate to think of Argentina as a neutral or untouched zone.¹⁹ Those recently arrived from Europe certainly had well-formed feelings and

¹⁹ L. M. Lojo Rodríguez, "Thought in American and for the Americans": Victoria Ocampo, *Sur*, and European Modernism" in Falcato, Ana, and Antonio Cardiello, eds., *Philosophy in the Condition of Modernism*. (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 168.

opinions about the conflict, while the loss of the merchant vessels, though minimal, sparked a larger socio-political reorientation that produced serious cultural reverberations.

The aftermath of the war ushered in a period that saw the emergence of a growing literary opposition between two groups: Boedo and Florida.²⁰ These movements, named respectively for a working-class neighborhood and an elite commercial street in Buenos Aires, represented competing visions of cultural modernization and national development. The quarrel between them was never exactly local; each side staked its claims of literary legitimacy, with one who sought a popular voice and the other who prized autonomy above all else.

The Florida group, most strongly associated with the magazine *Martín Fierro* (1924-1927,) advocated for cosmopolitan engagement with European avant-garde movements like dadaism, surrealism, and ultraism. Writers like Jorge Luis Borges, Oliverio Girondo, and Norah Lange promoted experimental poetics and formal innovation in the Spanish language while maintaining connections to international artistic networks. Their approach emphasized aesthetic autonomy and the renewal of literary, mostly poetic, language through contact with metropolitan Modernist movements in Europe.

²⁰ John King, *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of Culture, 1931-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

The Boedo group, centered around the magazine *Claridad* (1926-1941,) pursued a different tack when it came to the idea of modernization, seeing the importance of rooting the movement in social realism and what might be considered more overtly political engagement. Writers like Roberto Arlt, Elías Castelnuovo, and Leónidas Barlett advocated for literature that addressed working-class concerns and Argentine social realities, usually more attracted to the genres of the novel and sometimes theatre. One could say that Boedo's approach emphasized content over form, seeking to create a genuinely "national" literature (though it should be said that such a nationalism was still squarely situated within the Argentine capital) that could speak to popular audiences while addressing issues of social justice and economic inequality.

This cultural divide reflected broader tensions regarding the process of modernization, the construction of a "modern" national identity, and the deployment of cultural authority (likely more than one) that extended beyond these particular literary circles. The debates between members and proponents of these two groups served to explore fundamental questions about the role of culture in national development, the relationship between aesthetic innovation and social progress, and the possibility of creating authentic and/or unique cultural forms in the shadow of supposed European cultural dominance. These discussions provided the immediate cultural context within which Victoria Ocampo would conceive of and launch her magazine, a space that she ultimately hoped would move beyond the

polarizing effects that the cataclysm of the First World War produced and represented.

Just months before that first edition of *Sur*, Argentina witnessed increasing political and social instability, culminating in the military *coup d'état* of September 6, 1930; this event overthrew the democratically elected president, Hipólito Yrigoyen, bringing to a close Argentina's relatively recent foray into expanded universal male suffrage and governance under the 1912 Sáenz Peña Law. This political crisis occurred alongside broader cultural transformations driven by technological innovation, evolving social relations, and shifting international dynamics. In many ways *Sur* embraced these shifts, dedicating many articles to artistic disciplines that were undergoing radical transformation, specifically architecture and film among others.

The rise in Argentina of a new type of mass, technically reproducible culture, facilitated by the developing technologies of radio, film, and an ever more robust popular press, challenged traditional elite and state cultural authority and created new forms of cultural mediation. It was also during this period that there was an increasing cultural exchange with other Latin American countries as well as the United States, a situation that allowed for new constellations to emerge, including the development of a Pan-American cultural network for which many, including figures like Waldo Frank and Gabriela Mistral, advocated.

***Sur's* First Issue**

As mentioned earlier, the political landscape that would serve as the context for *Sur*'s emergence was dramatically altered on September 6, 1930, when General José Félix Uriburu led a military coup that overthrew the democratically elected president Hipólito Yrigoyen. The *coup* represented a collapse of the liberal democratic order that Argentina had struggled to achieve over the course of the second half of the 19th century, a project in which Ocampo's family was intimately involved.²¹ This event signaled a profound shift in the history of Argentina, definitively altering its path for the remainder of the century to devastating consequences. The 1930 *coup* ushered in an emerging authoritarian, nationalist shift that would go on to dominate the following decade, known as the “*década infame*,” the “infamous decade,” and far beyond.

Yrigoyen's armed fall reflected broader tensions that had been building at least since that fateful moment of the sinking of the merchant ships in 1917, just one year into his first mandate, though these tensions existed before this event, having their roots in the previous century. Yrigoyen and his Radical Civic Union party had failed to resolve fundamental economic and social contradictions, and the global “Crac del 29” or “Crash of ‘29” exacerbated irreversibly these tensions, creating a perfect storm for military intervention. This appealed to certain sectors of the conservative elite seeking to restore traditional hierarchies and national order,

²¹ This project was also rife with contradictions and tensions. The Ocampo family was particularly drawn to the life and legacy of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento who was president of Argentina from 1868-1874. For a more robust discussion see Doris Meyer, *Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide* (George Braziller, 1979.)

while appealing to some of Yrigoyen's RCU constituencies that saw in the *golpe*, coup, an opportunity to restore a working-class prerogative within larger national political debates.

Ocampo's January 1931 launch should be understood within the context and development of this political crisis, one that would eventually result in authoritarian consolidation, though not in entirely prescriptive ways. While the magazine initially avoided "politics" as such, particularly in its initial years, I will now examine some of the aspects of the magazine that demonstrate its political consciousness.²² At an historical moment marked by dramatic economic hardship, nationalist fervor and authoritarian retrenchment across Latin America and Europe, *Sur*'s commitment to international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange could be seen at the very least as an oblique form of political resistance.

One might consider that a refusal to be seen as political can function as a strategic position designed to create space for artistic and intellectual autonomy within an increasingly restrictive political environment. While Uriburu's movement drew support from conservative sectors of society that shared the Ocampo family's elite social standing, the General's nationalist tendencies directly contradicted Ocampo's democratic, internationalist aspirations. Her vision of cultural

²² In the magazine's early years, Ocampo and her circle adopted a position of "literatura pura," "pure literature," and professional independence, claiming to be above the "transitory maneuvers of politics" Such a posture drew upon three different legacies. The first was the wake of the Florida group and its magazine *Martin Fierro*, a publication that prized aesthetic autonomy over political adherence and social realism. The second was from Julien Benda's work *La Trahison des clercs* (Grasset, 1927.)

modernization through cosmopolitan engagement and exchange conflicted in profound ways with the new regime's emphasis on national conservative values, particularly their views on literature and women.

Explaining this historical trajectory helps to better understand how *Sur* could simultaneously embrace international Modernist and avant-garde networks and challenge assumptions about cultural hierarchy and geographic centers of cultural authority. The magazine's embrace of what I term the "meridional" emerged not simply from aesthetic and literary concerns, but from a specific political situation and broader cultural dynamic that demanded new strategies for maintaining intellectual autonomy and international networks under conditions of rising authoritarianism. The inaugural issue's particular blend of international contributors and experimental approaches thus represented both cultural innovation and a keen if subtle political awareness, pushing back against the idea of Buenos Aires's status as a peripheral site.

The most influential English-language account of *Sur* remains John King's *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931–1970*. King's study is crucial because the meridional reading this chapter proposes is in part an argument that engages with his legacy. King's study is indispensable as a history of the magazine, its founding, its evolution, its afterlives, its contributors, and its political entanglements across four decades. Any account of *Sur* in English, including this one, owes more than a debt of gratitude to the scholarly breadth and intellectual incisiveness of his work. That said, the title of

his study announces a comprehensive evaluation of the magazine as a whole, while this chapter seeks to center a single issue and tease out particular complexities given a certain set of authorial pairings. To study *Sur* in terms of “its role in the development of a culture” is to ask whether and how well the magazine served not just the formation of Argentine national culture. According to King, *Sur* represented a certain, perhaps cloying, brand of Ocampo liberalism, a resistance to populism and mass culture, and an attachment to elitist values that set it at odds with the more dominant currents of twentieth-century Argentine thought, from Peronism to the various nationalisms, socialisms, and authoritarianisms that animated the period. The magazine, in King’s reading, was too European, too elite, too detached from the social realities of the nation whose culture it claimed to cultivate.

There is nothing outright inaccurate in this assessment, and it would be a mistake to dismiss the careful work King painstakingly produced. He was, in fact it seems, a pioneer in periodical studies. *Sur*, according to his account, was an elite publication, financed by a patrician fortune, edited by a woman whose formation was more French and English than Spanish (another colonial language I should add), and largely uninterested in the working-class realities that animated other cultural formations like the Boedo writers and their successors. King’s critique is more than reasonable. That said, those terms are precisely the ones the populist/nationalist Boedo faction would have preferred: that a magazine is to be judged by its fidelity to national social realities, by its representativeness, by its contribution to the development of a singular and authentic Argentine culture. To

evaluate *Sur* this way is to accept in advance the centripetal premise that culture is national property, that it accumulates a center, a power, at the expense of what is not included, and that a culture's worth lies in how faithfully it serves such an accumulation. King's verdict that *Sur*'s relationship to Argentine identity was aloof, shares its deep grammar with the nationalist critics who accused Ocampo of *européismo*; both assume that the relevant question is whether the magazine adequately belonged to the nation, a nation that only needed to exorcise its European and North American pretensions.

The meridional framework here seeks to address a different question, and in doing so it does not so much refute King as critically engage his frame and terms. The question this chapter poses is not whether *Sur* served the development of an Argentine culture; rather, it looks to understand what kinds of cultural relationality the magazine made possible, what currents it captured in its pages, what crossings it staged, and what forms it shared and sustained that would not otherwise have existed. By such measures the very features King counts against the magazine can appear differently in the frame I am proposing. Its cosmopolitanism is not necessarily a failure of national rootedness but a refusal of the premise that culture must be nationally rooted at all. Its "elite internationalism," whatever its undeniable class limitations, was also the infrastructure through which a Mexican diplomat's meditation on an up-and-coming female Uruguayan poet, a French-Uruguayan's Brazilian travel diary during political upheaval in that country, and a Romanian-Jewish émigré's defense of silent cinema could share the pages of a

single Buenos Aires-based magazine in 1931 at the height of financial and political turmoil. To read these as symptoms of *Sur*'s detachment from Argentine socio-economic reality is to miss that the magazine was proposing a different account of where cultural value comes from: not from the deepening of a national "essence" but from the meeting and collision of currents that belong to no nation. King measures *Sur*'s promises and failures against the development of a national culture, which is more than fair; this chapter, however, reads Ocampo's project differently. While undoubtedly patrician in formation and impulse, the magazine frequently addresses the shortcomings of a singular, possessive, centripetal national cultural force.

This is not to claim that the class politics King identifies are irrelevant, or that *Sur*'s elitism should simply be explained away. Ocampo's magazine was certainly the product of a particular manifestation of the Argentine oligarchy, and its blind spots were real. But the recognition of those limits need not require anyone to accept the evaluative frame within which they are usually posed. One can grant everything King observed about *Sur*'s socio-cultural pretensions and still insist that the magazine's significance is not exhausted, or even principally captured, by the question of whether it served the nation or the critique of the nation and its oligarchic capture. The meridional reading allows both things to be true at once: that *Sur* was an elite publication with the exclusions its class orientation entailed, and that it was nonetheless the site of a genuinely radical demonstration of cultural flow, one whose political stakes, as the Drieu/Fondane pairing will make clear, were

considerable, and quite at odds with the nationalisms then gathering force on both sides of the Atlantic.

Two Triangles: Ocampo-Reyes-Supervielle; Drieu La Rochelle-Fondane-Ocampo

The first issue's contributors and their specific contributions are critical to understanding the magazine's particular approach to Modernism. While we can safely assume that each of the authors had some kind of direct relationship with Ocampo, what can we make of their respective interpersonal relations, if anything at all? Upon looking at the list of names, various overlaps emerge that are worth examining in detail; it is important to add that I suspect these crossings are editorially premeditated. Rather than simply publishing famous international writers to provide the magazine with an aura of authority, *Sur* and its director sought to create a platform whereby the relationships between contributors enacted the various valences of cultural exchanges she sought to explore and promote.

Two pairings from the inaugural issue reveal the promise of this approach: first, the established friendship between the Mexican diplomat and writer Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959) and the bilingual French-Uruguayan poet Jules Supervielle (1884-1960.) Their side-by-side inclusion, quite literally as their pieces appear sequentially in the magazine, demonstrates how *Sur* amplified preexisting networks of writers and intellectuals who were already crisscrossing all cardinal directions. Meanwhile, a second, more contentious dynamic was also brought to bear in this first issue. The relationship between Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and

Benjamin Fondane is an example of how Ocampo deployed ideological tension as an editorial strategy. Together, these two relational constellations underscore *Sur*'s Modernist approach.

The friendship between Alfonso Reyes and Jules Supervielle exemplifies how *Sur* drew upon existing intellectual networks that had developed independently from Ocampo. These two men met through Ernest Martinenche's Paris-based *Groupement des Universités et Grandes Écoles de France pour les rapports avec l'Amérique latine* in 1913, a year before the First World War and nearly two decades before *Sur*'s founding. Their relationship was forged when Reyes was serving as Deputy Secretary of State at the Mexican Embassy and Supervielle had recently completed his doctoral studies. Martinenche's organization, created at the request of the French government to strengthen ties between France and Latin America in a rapidly shifting geopolitical moment, provided a forum for precisely the kind of intellectual and cultural mediation that both men later pursued in their respective spheres of influence. For Supervielle, born and raised in Uruguay, this took shape in the world of poetry and letters, where his bilingual, transatlantic poetics negotiated the various tensions between European and South American forms. For Reyes it involved not only literature but also diplomacy and a growing urgency around international cooperation, as he sought to articulate a future cultural zone in which Latin America could embrace itself both with and without Europe. Their relationship, formed in their twenties, set the foundation for a lifelong exchange nourished by shared interests in poetry, identity, and the role of

literature in both bridging and maintaining the divide between Europe and the Americas. This long-established relationship is precisely the kind of cultural and intellectual exchange and flow that would later characterize *Sur*'s editorial approach

In the inaugural issue of *Sur*, their contributions are sequential, beginning first with Reyes's "Compás Poético" followed by Supervielle's "Notas de Viaje a Ouro Preto." Though these pieces are certainly distinct in content – the first being a critical meditation on poetry and the other somewhere between ethnography and travel diary – both pieces were composed in Brazil in the second half of 1930. Their epistolary correspondence confirms that the two men even crossed paths in Rio de Janeiro in July, as Reyes was preparing to take up his post as Ambassador to Brazil, while Supervielle was travelling and writing.²³

Before beginning an analysis of his first of many contributions to *Sur*, I should provide some key information about Alfonso Reyes. The Mexican-born critic and diplomat was simultaneously culturally and diplomatically engaged across the various geographic spaces discussed in this dissertation during the inter-war period in ways that are significant. He served as Ambassador to Argentina twice, first from 1927-1930 and again between 1936-37. In between, he served as Ambassador to

²³ See Paulette Patout, "L'amitié de Jules Supervielle pour Don Alfonso Reyes" in *Littératures* 3, Spring 1981, 86-88.

Brazil from 1930-1935 and then again from 1938-1939. This decade-long series of assignments in the region fundamentally shaped his literary output.

Reyes's first contribution to *Sur* was pitched somewhere between a critical assessment of contemporary poets writing in the Spanish language and a theory of contemporary poetry.²⁴ The first four sections are each dedicated mostly to an individual poet: Juana de Ibarbourou, Enrique González Martínez, Ángel Aller, and Eugenio Florit. These poets are judiciously chosen, as Reyes set out to better understand Spanish language poetry in its various geographic formations: Ibarbourou from Montevideo; González Martínez from Mexico; Aller born in Galicia but living in Uruguay; and Florit, who was Cuban but spent his childhood in Catalonia. Such a selection was certainly in keeping with Ocampo's larger impulse to make her magazine one for both the Americas and Europe. Another critical aspect of the article that is in keeping with Ocampo's editorial thrust: the celebration of women and the crucial and underappreciated role they play in culture and society. By beginning his first contribution with a critical consideration of Juana de Ibarbourou, Reyes signals his alignment with Ocampo when it comes to this commitment, which may be considered one of the most conspicuously political for Ocampo.

²⁴ It is worth noting that by and large *Sur* has a complicated relationship to poetry, though much less so than Caillois's *Lettres francaise*, as we will see. Though perhaps ambivalent, it is worth noting that from the second issue *Sur* published poetry, specifically the poetry of Langston Hughes translated by Jorge Luis Borges.

Although today she is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world – perhaps due to the fact that none of her poetry collections has ever been translated in its entirety – Juana de Ibarbourou, later celebrated as Juana de América, was one of the most renowned Latin American poets of her generation, nominated on three occasions for the Nobel Prize in literature. Alfonso Reyes opened his first contribution to *Sur*, “Compás Poético,” with a meditation on Ibarbourou’s then most recent collection, *La rosa de los vientos* (1930). The very title of his essay may be read as an homage to her work in ways that are both precise and suggestive. The term *compás* resonates with a rich double meaning: it signifies not only a navigational compass but also rhythmic measure, a term that thereby invites readers to consider the interplay between cartography and rhythmic cadence, between the idea of charting a direction and the musicality of verse.

Ibarbourou’s own title is likewise playing with similar layers of meaning. *La rosa de los vientos* can be translated literally, word for word, as *The Rose of the Winds*, a striking image that fuses the delicacy of a flower and the elemental force of motion and movement that might blow its petals and scent about. Yet such a literal translation risks obscuring another, perhaps more immediate connotation, especially for Spanish speakers: the “compass rose,” or “wind rose,” the circular diagram that maps cardinal and intermediate directions. The interplay between the titles of each of these texts, Ibarbourou’s collection and Reyes’s essay, demonstrates a shared preoccupation with poetry not simply as an art of linguistic meter but also as a tool that helps chart both the poet’s and the reader’s paths, situating all

concerned between interpretative possibilities of the imagination and geographic as well as phenomenological, sonorous orientations.

Reyes's decision to review Juana de Ibarbourou's recent work at the time cannot be explained solely by Victoria Ocampo's editorial eye or influence. In fact, the connection between Reyes and Ibarbourou had already been established at a highly symbolic public event the previous year. In 1929, a ceremony was held in the *Salón de los Pasos Perdidos* inside the Legislative Palace in Montevideo, an event where Ibarbourou was formally named "Juana de América."²⁵ The event was attended by leading political and cultural figures of the time, including Juan Zorilla de San Martín and Alfonso Reyes himself. Reyes's presence at this ceremony was not merely out of diplomatic duty; it signaled his endorsement of a poet whose growing prestige had then extended beyond Uruguay. By associating himself with Ibarbourou at such a moment, Reyes lent legitimacy to her elevation as a continental rather than a merely national figure, a symbol of a poetic voice that sought to cross borders and embody a broader, Pan-American cultural identity.

Reyes's subsequent review of *La rosa de los vientos* can be understood as an extension of the critical and symbolic support he had already demonstrated by way of his participation in Montevideo. In his brief critical appraisal of the first collection published in the wake of her public dedication in the halls of Uruguay's

²⁵ Lauren Applegate, "The Rebel and the Icon: Juana de Ibarbourou and the Emblem of Juana de América", in *Pacific Coast Philology*, Volume 49, Issue 1, 2014.

legislative palace, Reyes suggested what he called a “divino desorden,” “divine disorder,” noting that Ibarbourou had deliberately “rompió el timón y la hélice de su navío,” “broken the rudder and propeller of her ship.”²⁶ For Reyes, this calculated act of metaphoric self-sabotage signals not a failure of control, but rather the poet’s willingness to risk, to abandon conventional forms and submit herself to forces that confront her own limitations. He describes this gesture as unleashing a “misterio destrozón,” “destructive mystery,” in which Juana, “...sola en [s]u barca ebria, y despeinada en el viento, eres, terriblemente pura, un testimonio fehaciente de la catástrofe: la catástrofe que la presencia del Dios desata en las cosas, cada vez que se acerca a ellas,” “...alone in [her] drunken boat, wind whipped, [is] terribly pure, a reliable witness to the catastrophe: the catastrophe that the presence of God unleashes on things each time he gets close to them.”²⁷ Reyes’s language underscores the seriousness with which he took her work (referencing, perhaps, another drunken boat, that of Rimbaud), reading her embrace of disorder not as a sign of collapse but as evidence of poetic vitality, survivability. His comments here thus affirm both his confidence in Ibarbourou’s ability to continue producing exceptional poetry and his broader vision of her as a writer whose art transcended strictly regional or national concerns by engaging directly with themes that suggest both the elemental and the divine.

²⁶ Alfonso Reyes, “Compas Poético,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 64.

²⁷ Alfonso Reyes, “Compas Poético,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 65.

Reyes's interpretation of Ibarbourou's embrace of disorder might have also resonated with the editorial approach of *Sur*, where tension and contradiction were pursued rather than paved over. By emphasizing the poet's decision to relinquish control and confront the forces of mystery, catastrophe, and the divine, Reyes, through his critique, framed her work as emblematic of a poetics that refused easy reconciliation. This critical stance echoed Ocampo's editorial approach, which sought to position *Sur* as a forum that allowed for competing ideas, divergent aesthetics, and dynamic ideological positions. In this sense, Ibarbourou's willingness to "break [her] rudder" offered a poetic analogue to *Sur*'s own project: both refused to steer by way of a single, predetermined course, preferring instead to expose themselves to the unpredictable winds of cultural and social debate. Reyes's review thus not only underscored Ibarbourou's stature as a poet of international significance but also validated Ocampo's editorial gambit. Her magazine from Buenos Aires could serve freely as an arbiter of literary value, amplifying voices that sought to go beyond the national while also challenging the very notion of a stable cultural center within the cosmopolis.

Reyes's article culminates with an "offering," two in fact. Here he provides the reader with sibling "premáticas," a word that translates as "decree." The first "decree" is that no one should confuse poetry with poetic states of the mind. Poetry is a creation, which means it exists independently of its author/creator. To flesh out his point, Reyes recalls a 19th-century anecdote involving two well-known artists, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the painter Edgar Degas. Degas was known to

dabble in verse, specifically sonnets, but once confessed to the great Symbolist poet that he struggled to turn his ideas into poetic form. Mallarmé is reported to have replied, “poems are not made with ideas, but with words.” This story aims to support Reyes’s larger claim that poetry is not necessarily born of feelings, ideas, or other states of mind, but rather is a matter of words, their careful measurement and deployment. His second “decree” insists that no one should confuse poetry with “las cuentas de la lavandera” – literally “the washerwoman’s accounts,” a classist and misogynistic turn of phrase that means “fairy tales” or “fables.”²⁸ By invoking this image, however, Reyes draws a distinction between poetry and the realm of popular anecdotes and tales. If the first decree warns against reducing poetry to a projection of the poet’s inner moods, the second decree cautions against poetry that is made for mere tale-telling, the kind of narrative story that is the stuff of folklore. For Reyes, poetry demands a higher level of formal construction and imaginative reach. It should not be reduced to either psychological prompts or anecdotal chitchat.

Turning our attention to women’s cultural authority in this geo-historical moment, the nature of Reyes’s fairly obvious, but likely unmeditated, misogynistic jab should not go unquestioned. While he is clearly ceding the place to a great woman poet and promoting Ocampo’s editorial vision, here we are also reminded that misogyny, like other forms of bigotry, just as often does not operate coherently,

²⁸ Alfonso Reyes, “Compas Poético,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 71-72.

reasonably. Ocampo was not unaware of the vagaries of such colloquial language. As early as 1928, three years before the magazine's founding, she had published a sharp rejoinder to José Ortega y Gasset where she took public exception to his chauvinism and to his portrayal of a woman as men's passive muse. Her push here was striking precisely because Ortega was one of the two figures, with Waldo Frank, whom this chapter has identified as indispensable to *Sur's* development. Ocampo's commitment to women's intellectual standing, in other words, set her at odds with the very men whose support she enlisted in founding her magazine. Her notion of feminism was not borrowed from her international interlocutors but often asserted against them. Francine Masiello has documented how insistently Ocampo claimed, from the opening of her *Testimonios*, the right to be received specifically as a woman writer, to write, in Ocampo's own formulation, "as a woman," whatever the quality of the result.²⁹ For a woman whose father had lamented that his firstborn was not a son and whose mother had confiscated her books, the assertion of female authorship was a central struggle of her formation.

This commitment is legible in the organization of the inaugural issue, and it underlines the meridional argument in a specific way. When Reyes opens "Compás Poético" with an extended meditation on Juana de Ibarbourou, placing an Uruguayan woman poet at the head of his survey of Spanish-language verse, treating her not as a regional curiosity but as a figure of continental and elemental

²⁹ Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (University of Nebraska Press, 1992.)

significance, he is aligning himself with an editorial priority that was also unmistakably Ocampo's. The gesture matters because it locates a woman at the origin of the magazine's first critical statement about poetry, and because it does so without overt pleading: Ibarbourou is read as a major poet, her embrace of "divine disorder" treated with the same seriousness Reyes would extend to any canonical figure. In a cultural field that routinely consigned women's writing to the minor, the domestic, or the sentimental (ironically the very register Reyes dismisses when he warns against confusing poetry with "las cuentas de la lavandera," the washerwoman's accounts), the placement of Ibarbourou is itself a small but consequential act of editorial insistence.

Jules Supervielle's contribution that follows Reyes's is not in the genre for which the French-Uruguayan writer is most known and celebrated: poetry. Instead, the piece takes the form of five, mostly rather brief, journal entries dated from Saturday, 12 July to Wednesday, 16 July, 1930. These entries chart his journey from the country's then-coastal capital, Rio de Janeiro, into the "interior," specifically through some cities in the state of Minas Gerais. Supervielle tells the reader in the second paragraph that such a journey is perhaps counterintuitive. "¿Por qué este viaje al interior? ¿No es acaso lo peculiar del Brasil el entregarse empezando por sus costas? Las montañas y su vegetación, todo lo que hace habitualmente el interior de un país, vienen aquí al encuentro del viajero, en plena mar..." "Why this trip to the interior? Isn't it Brazil's unique feature that it embraces its coastline first? The mountains and vegetation, everything that

typically makes up the interior of a country, meet the traveler here, right at the coastline...”³⁰ Of course, it is seductive to believe that a single site can provide the fullness of the larger country’s diversity. Pushing beyond this, and without providing the reader with much of an answer to his question, Supervielle departed via train the next day.

The timing of Supervielle’s journey, July 1930, deserves particular attention. His travels occur at a moment of profound political shifts, positioned between Brazil’s contested March election and the October Revolution of 1930 that would overthrow the First Brazilian Republic, roughly coinciding with Argentina’s September coup. While Supervielle makes no explicit reference to these brewing political and social crises, his observations of social and temporal alienation acquire additional resonance when read within this fraught historical context. His observation that the inhabitants of Ouro Preto and Mariana appear as “extranjeros,” “foreigners,” in their own cities, governed not by themselves but by “bellas y poderosas abstracciones, por personajes muertos en siglos pasados,” “beautiful and powerful abstractions, by dead characters from centuries past,” might be read as inadvertently capturing the political alienation that would soon ignite only a few months later.³¹

³⁰ Jules Supervielle, “Notas de Viaje a Ouro Preto,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 74.

³¹ Jules Supervielle, “Notas de Viaje a Ouro Preto,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 83.

The genre of his contribution might best be described as hybrid, oscillating somewhere between the immediacy of a travelogue and the more reflective registers of an ethnographic, historical, or sociological meditation. As the reader accompanies Supervielle on this excursion, the movement itself becomes significant: a French-Uruguayan poet tracing a path into the Brazilian “interior” (many today would not necessarily describe it as such) at once makes literal *Sur*’s hemispheric scope and stages the act of cultural translation across national and linguistic boundaries. Especially important is the status of Brazil, an outlier on the continent in a number of ways, including its language and its particular historical dynamic with Europe. Supervielle’s meditation on Brazilian identity – prompted by a fellow traveler’s questions about “el país latino más poblado,” “the most populated Latin country” – touches on fundamental debates about racial and national belonging that the impending Vargas regime would attempt to resolve through its vision of racial democracy and national integration.

Along the way, Supervielle intersperses descriptions of country landscapes and urban environments that examine Brazil’s colonial past, its shifting cultural and racial identities, and the social realities of the first half of the 20th century. Perhaps most telling is his citation of a Brazilian proverb: “El Brasil progresa de noche, mientras duermen los brasileños,” “Brazil progresses at night while Brazilians sleep.”³² Though Supervielle dismisses this sentiment as “perfectamente

³² Jules Supervielle, “Notas de Viaje a Ouro Preto,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 79.

injusto,” “perfectly unjust,” defending Brazilian achievement in urban development, the saying encapsulates precisely the critique of the “Old Republic” that would be mobilized in the coming revolution's rhetoric, that ordinary Brazilians remained excluded from their own country's governance and modernization.³³

Supervielle's writing is fragmentary rather than systematic, shaped as much by a poetic sensibility as by his impulse to document and provide a recollection that approximates various techniques being developed in the burgeoning sphere of the social sciences. The result is not a comprehensive travel account nor a rigorous ethnography; rather, Supervielle provides the reader with a series of day-by-day chronological vignettes, attuned to both aesthetic detail and a broader historical current that do not easily find obvious cohesion by way of a single argument. This fragmentary quality, the sense of suspension and waiting that resonates throughout his account, from languid train journeys to the eternal Sunday atmosphere he perceives in Mariana, might itself reflect the political interregnum of mid-1930, a threshold moment before an authoritarian transformation would seize not just Brazil but the larger region. In this sense, Supervielle writes as a poet who has wandered into the land of ethnography and sociology, two disciplines that are relatively new, ascendant. Despite his dabbling, he also has no intention of surrendering the subjective immediacy of his lived experience. His contribution here

³³ Boris Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Cambridge University Press, 1999.)

reflects a desire to move across genres in order to engage with the cultural, political, and social questions of modern life.



Benjamin Wechsler, who would later become known as Benjamin Fondane, was born on November 14, 1898, in the Moldavian city of Iași, in what was then the Kingdom of Romania. He was a poet, essayist, philosopher, and later filmmaker, Jewish and Romanian, who at roughly twenty left for Paris, eventually adopting French citizenship in the late 1930s, and after his arrest and deportation died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz. His early formation in Iași, a vibrant Jewish intellectual community that saw a steep rise in antisemitism that accompanied Romanian nationalism, shaped a sensibility that was skeptical of fixed identities and national orthodoxies. By the time he arrived in Paris in December 1923, he had already published poetry and criticism in Romanian, and he carried with him a polyglot intellectual formation that would define his subsequent trajectory as a French-language writer and thinker.

In Paris, Fondane navigated a dramatically shifting cultural landscape. He was already a published poet but was also known for his writings in philosophy and film criticism. A few years after he arrived, he obtained a position at Paramount Pictures as a scriptwriter and assistant director. His relationship to surrealism, the ascendant aesthetic movement of the Paris he arrived in, was initially one of critical sympathy, as he was drawn to its anti-rationalism and suspicion of bourgeois

orthodoxy. He was ultimately closer, however, to Yvan Goll's internationalist vision of the movement than to André Breton's psychoanalytic framework and grew increasingly skeptical of surrealism's growing dominance during the interwar period. More consequential for his intellectual development was his 1924 encounter with the Russian philosopher Lev Shestov, whose existentialist skepticism of reason and systematic thought would become a defining philosophical relationship that punctuated his regrettably short life. Fondane became a devoted disciple and, eventually, his primary French-language interlocutor and advocate.³⁴

It was by way of Shestov that Fondane crossed paths with Victoria Ocampo. In 1929, Ocampo traveled to Paris and visited Shestov, and in the philosopher's home she was introduced to Fondane, then serving as Shestov's assistant. Shestov encouraged her to introduce Fondane to the cultural life of Buenos Aires, and Ocampo, impressed by his intellectual prowess and vast cultural fluency, followed the suggestion. She invited him to deliver a series of lectures at the University of Buenos Aires on avant-garde cinema and to lecture on Shestov at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Fondane made the trip later that same year. His lectures were transcribed and published in the Argentine magazine *Síntesis*, and through the essayist Eduardo Mallea, he was invited to contribute to the literary supplement of *La Nación*. His prestige in Argentina as a perceptive connoisseur of cinema was amplified by the notes that would appear in *Sur*. A second visit followed

³⁴ Benjamin Fondane, *Rencontres avec Léon Chestov*, ed. Monique Jutrin and Michel Carassou, (Non Lieu, 2016.)

in 1936, when Ocampo invited him back to shoot his own film, *Tararira*, an avant-garde musical, today lost, produced by the Falma-Film company.³⁵

Their 1929 encounter thus precedes *Sur*'s founding by two years, and the relationship it established, between Fondane, Ocampo, and the intellectual network she was assembling, is the biographical foundation for his appearance in the magazine's inaugural issue. In other words, he was not simply a contributor selected from the Parisian literary world.

The second figure in this pairing arrived at *Sur* by different means and represented a distinct relationship to the magazine's editorial identity. Pierre Eugène Drieu La Rochelle (1893–1945) was a French writer of novels, short stories, and political essays, who was born, lived, and died by suicide in Paris. A contradictory figure, his career moved from avant-gardist poet and writer after the First World War toward a concerted more fascist and collaborationist posture displayed during the 1930s and 1940s. Wounded in the First World War, his experience as a soldier marked him permanently, and he emerged from it disillusioned, beginning his search for a solid moral and philosophical underpinning. Through the 1920s he passed through successive and often contradictory commitments: he was sympathetic to Dada and the Surrealists and to communism; a close friend of Louis Aragon, while also drawn to the royalist Action Française; yet refused to align himself to any one of these currents. He was a

³⁵ Monique Jutrin, "Tararira, une mise au point," *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, Number 5, 2001-2002.

stubborn anti-conformist. He established and then quarreled with friends across the Parisian literary elite. By the time of *Sur's* inaugural issue in January 1931, he was a recognized if complicated figure in French letters. His most celebrated novel, *Le Feu Follet* published that same year, is a bleak portrait of a heroin addict's degradation and suicide, drawn from the death of his friend, the Dadaist poet Jacques Rigaut.

In his political writings of the late 1920s, Drieu was already advocating for a more martial Europe and denouncing the "decadent materialism" of democracy, arguing that the parliamentary system of the French Third Republic was responsible for what he saw as France's cultural and social decay.³⁶ These views had not yet hardened into the explicit fascism they would become by the mid-1930s, when his *Socialisme Fasciste* would appear and he would join Jacques Doriot's *Parti Populaire Français* in 1936, but the direction of such thinking was already visible at the moment of the inaugural issue. Ocampo was already all too aware of this. She had met Drieu in April 1929, and the meetings she hosted in Paris, where both Drieu and Fondane were sometimes present, had given her a direct view of the friction between them. As Odile Felgine documents in her French language biography, Ocampo later reflected that from the very beginning the two men had regarded each other "comme chien et chat."³⁷ Biographers have attributed this to masculine rivalry, a reading that conveniently diverts attention from the ideological

³⁶ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, "Carta a unos desconocidos," *Sur*, Winter 1931.

³⁷ Odile Felgine, *Victoria Ocampo*, (Criterion, 1991), 109

gulf between them: Fondane, a Romanian-Jewish existentialist poet whose experience of European antisemitism was not abstract, and Drieu, a Parisian writer whose political trajectory was moving toward precisely the nationalism and racial politics that would eventually kill Fondane.³⁸ To place these two men within the same issue, knowing what she knew of their mutual antipathy, was not an editorial oversight. It was a deliberate act, and understanding what Ocampo was doing with such a pair is important to work through.

If the Reyes/Supervielle pairing demonstrates how *Sur* amplified an already existing meridional network of contributors, two friends whose decades-long exchange Ocampo made visible by placing their pieces side-by-side, the Drieu/Fondane pairing demonstrates something more unorthodox and difficult to unpack. First, these two are paired here not because their contributions appear side-by-side; in fact, dozens of pages lie between the two pieces. That said, Ocampo's editorial choice to include these two in a single, inaugural, issue provides an important contrast that is relevant to the network Ocampo is constructing. With a pair like this she finds herself directly constructing one, one that demonstrates another feature of the magazine: bringing together antagonistic and dissonant voices. The two men did not arrive at *Sur* through a shared history of mutual regard as Reyes and Supervielle had. Though their temperaments were distinct and in tension, their contributions embody two very distinct visions of culture, its

³⁸ Odile Felgine, *Victoria Ocampo*, (Criterion, 1991), 109

evolution, and how its authority is powered. Although these two men held profoundly different views on art and politics, it is important to also highlight some common ground, specifically their suspicion of the more decadent aspects of modernity, including its materialism, scientism, and political malaise.

Drieu's contribution takes the form of a "carta," a "letter," to a people he doesn't know, the "desconocidos," "the unknown ones," of Argentina. The title is candid: Drieu had not yet been to Argentina at this point and did not personally know the founding editorial team apart from Ocampo. He writes unequivocally: "Yo no conozco América. Yo no he viajado nunca," "I do not know America. I have never travelled."³⁹ What is striking is not the admission itself, but what Drieu subsequently feels entitled to offer from within his own ignorance. Knowing nothing of the place firsthand, he nonetheless proceeds to deliver counsel.

The letter unfolds across eight brief sections, each divided from the next by asterisms. Drieu issues a sequence of observations, reflections, and pronouncements, each delivered and then set aside for the next. In the first two sections, Drieu frames the appearance of the magazine as "una acción," "an action," and insists that to found such a publication is "ser humano," "to be human."⁴⁰ And while he welcomes the power of the verb "fundar," "to found," he is skeptical that such a collective enterprise can or should continue in perpetuity. One of his

³⁹ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, "Carta a unos desconocidos," *Sur*, Winter 1931, 55.

⁴⁰ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, "Carta a unos desconocidos," *Sur*, Winter 1931, 55.

prescriptions to the group after a decade together: “romped vuestras máquinas de escribir, quemad vuestros archivos, y cumplid cada uno por vuestro lado el trabajo comenzado en común,” or “smash your typewriters, burn your archives, and each one of you complete the work individually that you started together.”⁴¹ Drieu’s antipathy toward sustained collective creation is palpable. His is a vision suspicious of the social and the institutional more broadly, one that locates value in the seismic collective collision (clash of civilizations?) that should then ultimately return to a naturally occurring atomized individuality and the elevation of the winner’s prerogative. Group work is purely in the service of a winner who must distinguish himself as quickly as possible.

The third and fourth sections establish the peculiar authority from which Drieu speaks. He does not travel, we are told; rather, the world comes to him. From his small Île Saint-Louis, “enganchada como una barca podrida detrás de Notre Dame,” “hooked like a decaying boat behind Notre Dame,” he has watched the men of all nations pass through Paris.⁴² His description of the center of Paris here should be read within the context of his larger critique and distaste of the Third Republic’s embrace of democratic ambitions. For Drieu, it can be argued that the decaying “boat” at the heart of the city, the original center, following the liberalizing forces of the Catholic church (Notre Dame) as represented by thinkers like Jacques Maritain (another friend of Ocampo’s), continue to leave his country in a moribund state of

⁴¹ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 54.

⁴² Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 57.

blight. Beyond the image, we find the cosmopolitanism of a dreamer who claims the whole planet as “un fruto todo delicado y vivo en mi mano sensible,” “a fruit so delicate and alive in my sensitive hand,” precisely because the planet has come to be surveyed by him at the center.⁴³ Though Paris is decadent and decrepit, it remains the point through which all the world passes and from which all the world may be known without the dreamer ever leaving its banks. The structural logic here is plainly centripetal: the periphery travels to the center, despite the decay, to be seen; and the center, having seen it pass, may then pronounce it and give it life, meaning.

The fifth section conceives of Argentina as a latitudinal line. Here he begins by describing Argentina as “un país que está a la altura del África del Sur y de Australia. Los blancos del mundo austral,” or “a country at the same height as South Africa and Australia. The whites of the austral world.”⁴⁴ This passage is perhaps one of the more confusing as it simultaneously reinforces a social and racial hierarchy undergirded by colonialism while also leaving space for unexpected models for what Argentina might be or soon become. Though more likely than not completely unaware of this, Drieu is tapping into an old 19th century debate that goes back to at least José Gervasio Artigas (1764-1850.) Nicolas Shumway has described Artigas’s view that there is a “preexisting Argentine character, invisible to the Europeanized porteño and extant only in the pampas and their inhabitants

⁴³ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 57.

⁴⁴ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 57-58.

who were somehow the ‘real’ *pueblo*.”⁴⁵ The sixth turns to writing, which Drieu casts as a necessity and a discipline of the passions: write little, and only on capital subjects, lest Argentina “vivirá menos, sufrirá menos, gozará menos,” “[will] live less, suffer less, enjoy less.”⁴⁶

It is the seventh section that exposes the framework beneath the letter’s particular cosmopolitan surface. Here Drieu insists that there is only one thing in man: his passions. *Sur*’s writers on the River Plate should not yet sing “el amor argentino,” or “Argentine love,” but “el amor,” simply “love.”⁴⁷ The logic goes that only later will such a song happen to sound with a tone heard nowhere else but in Argentina. For Drieu, the mystery of cultural identity lies in “los casamientos de sangre del lugar,” “the marriage of blood and place.”⁴⁸ He then goes on to list a number of writers that serve to demonstrate the gulf between the idiomatic and the genetic-territorial. He first invokes Conrad’s writing of ‘the tropics’ in English, Barrès breathing more freely across the Spanish frontier, Montherlant in Morocco, Malraux dreaming of Asia. Those in Argentina, he suggests, should not label their work Argentine too soon: “[n]o digáis demasiado pronto: esto es argentino, esto no lo es,” “[d]on’t be too quick to say: this is Argentine and this isn’t.”⁴⁹ He warns against this because the authority to name belongs elsewhere: “Somos los extranjeros los

⁴⁵ Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (University of California Press, 1991), 258.

⁴⁶ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 60.

⁴⁷ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 61.

⁴⁸ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 62.

⁴⁹ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 62.

que diremos: esto es argentino, esto viene de ese Sur,” “We are the foreigners who will say: this is Argentine, this comes from the south.”⁵⁰ But this formulation is tricky to unpack given Drieu’s understanding of what constitutes a “European.” At what point is a European no longer a stable category in the wake of the many historical defining moments that brought together and then severed an historically constitutive hemispherical past? Does Drieu conceive of people like Ocampo as “foreigners”? The answer is likely yes, and as such his counsel presupposes that what counts as Argentine must be protected from Europeans who are simply confused by their identity.

In the eighth and final section, Drieu asks whether his readers have visited South Africa or Australia, whether they actually know their “brothers” of the austral world, and reminds them that a man today has multiple homelands: his own, then his continent, then the planet. He signs off as “el soñador de los bordes del Sena,” “the dreamer on the banks of the Seine.”⁵¹ What Drieu has pronounced about Argentina, its blood, its passions, and its name, has issued from a dreamer who, by his own account, has never left the center, who at this point knows the “south” only as one of the many regions of the world that have passed beneath his gaze, and who reserves for himself and his fellow Europeans, be they in Europe or *in situ* elsewhere across the globe, the final authority to say what the “south” is. Beneath his planetary pretensions, the letter is a sustained enactment of the

⁵⁰ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 62.

⁵¹ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Carta a unos desconocidos,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 63.

center's prerogative to cut up the world, define the margin; a cosmopolitanism that never doubts where the naming is done. It is also a powerful statement about the limits of identity formation on the periphery: Europeans like those founding and running a magazine in Argentina have, according to Drieu's perspective, forgotten their true origins and must not speak too soon about a given identity that will likely never be theirs.

Fondane's contribution could not differ more in form, register, or implicit politics. Where Drieu muses, Fondane analyzes. "El cinema en el atolladero," "Cinema at an impasse," is a sustained and technically precise argument about the crisis the medium of film faced with the arrival of synchronized sound. Fondane opens not with a verdict but with a caution against rushing to one: has cinema truly gained a new dimension through the synchronization of word and image? He concedes that it has but argues that the gain is rendered more or less null because to make room for this technological shift cinema hastily abandoned every other dimension it had so painstakingly developed over the course of its early years. The source of the sickness, he insists, lies not in the technical discovery itself but in the base and childish use made of it. The talking film, by subordinating everything to dialogue, has reduced cinema to a belated copy of theater, and theater, in Fondane's

stringent judgment, is a “no-arte,” a “non-art,” long since fallen out of the lyric register that cinema had inhabited from its first moment.⁵²

Before mourning what has been lost, Fondane first reconstructs why silent cinema was so important and revolutionary in the first place. He offers a brief summary of how he understands the steps: first was theater’s collapse, supplanted initially by Russian ballet, then subsequently by the music hall, the circus, the radio, and finally by silent film, its “adversario irreductible,” “irreducible adversary.”⁵³ Silent film had become, in his curious phrasing, the “máximo estupefaciente” of modern times, the “maximum narcotic.”⁵⁴ It must be said here that narcotic should not be read as a pejorative jab. Fondane, it seems to me, in fact wants art to chemically alter the spectator and help them discover the layers that are possible. The talking film squanders precisely this power, dragging cinema back toward something passive, predictable, programmatic, the limited mimetic theater it had escaped if only momentarily.

The heart of the essay is Fondane’s inventory of the language silent cinema had built, and such an inventory is conducted, tellingly, through an extended grammatical metaphor. Cinema, he insists, was “un lenguaje,” “a language,” with its own morphology and syntax. The camera angle had become “una ciencia

⁵² Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 159. Fondane is not against theatre: quite to the contrary: he wrote and produced a number of plays, especially early on in his career in Bucarest.

⁵³ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 159.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 159.

mágica,” “a magical science,” evolving from Méliès to Eisenstein; the close-up was cinema’s answer to the microscope; the travelling shot was “el verbo regular de ese lenguaje,” “the regular verb of the language,” and the panoramic its irregular verb; the fade conveyed whiteness and emptiness, while the dissolve braided together great blocks of dispersed time, superimposition suppressed time “con un solo golpe de batuta,” “with a single stroke of the baton;” slow and accelerated motion were “grandes ventanas abiertas al movimiento,” “great windows opened onto movement.”⁵⁵ Montage was the syntax binding it all. The metaphor is not an ornament. To call cinema a language with its own grammar is to propose that it is a language requiring no translation: a universal idiom legible across every national and linguistic frontier, owned by no center and accessible to all.

This is why the essay’s political stakes are inseparable from its aesthetic ones, and why its account of a burgeoning United States industry (re: *not* art) cuts so deeply. Confronting the problem of national-language markets, Hollywood had started mass-producing multiple-language versions, “copias con arreglo al original norteamericano,” “copies modeled on the North American original,” churned out in 10 days: “una mercancía perfectamente buena para el Oriente,” “a commodity merely good enough for export.”⁵⁶ The result, Fondane laments, is that a masterpiece made in one language may now never be seen in another: “pesa una

⁵⁵ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 161.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 164. “Oriente” here can sound pejorative. My reading is that this is how US producers and studios understood their operations.

prohibición implacable sobre las obras maestras del cinema,” “a relentless prohibition hangs over cinematic masterpieces.”⁵⁷ The spoken word has, once again, partitioned a developing, universal art into as many markets as there are now burgeoning nation-states. Yet Fondane refuses cynicism and despair. His observations, he insists, “no son pesimistas,” “are not pessimistic.” Citing Chaplin, he predicts that cinema cannot continue on this path, that it will stabilize, like a postwar currency, once words, no longer squandered, regain their heft, and that the public, against “demasiada prensa pagada,” “too much paid press,” will make its pressure felt despite industrial strong arming.⁵⁸

He closes wishing for cinema’s return to what it had been: “el consuelo metafísico de las multitudes,” “the metaphysical consolation of the multitudes,” an image that binds his film criticism to the concern of human dignity that animates so much of his work.⁵⁹ Fondane mourns, in other words, the fragmentation of precisely the kind of borderless expression I term meridional, a cultural form that flowed everywhere because it belonged to no single linguistic or territorial center.

Conclusion

Taken together, the two pairings selected from the inaugural issue reveal the dynamic range of what Ocampo was attempting to capture, and the range is wider than either pairing alone might suggest. With Reyes and Supervielle, she amplified

⁵⁷ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 164.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 165.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Fondane, “El cinema en el atolladero,” *Sur*, Winter 1931, 165.

a preëxisting dialogue, placing in successive sequence two friends whose transatlantic exchange had been blossoming since before the First World War and letting their proximity on the page make visible a current that had been flowing all along. With Drieu and Fondane, there was a different, more unsettling move: she orchestrated a relative proximity between two men who regarded each other with deep, and ultimately quite valid, suspicion. She staged on her pages the collision of two irreconcilable cultural positions: Drieu's centripetal conviction that the European center, including those colonizers out there still among the ranks, retains the authority to drive culture and name the south, against Fondane's meridional defense of an art that should belong to no center and should require no translation. Such internal pairings are not two examples of divergent gestures. They are two manifestations of a single editorial approach being born in this first issue of over 300: one that amplifies when such an action serves and confronts when confrontation conveys something worthwhile. What unites these two pairings is not a consistent aesthetic or intellectual coherence but a refusal to resolve the tensions of transatlantic cultural exchange into a single, settled editorial line of thinking.

This may be the deeper logic of *Sur's* first issue, and indeed of the magazine that would subsequently develop over decades. Ocampo did not assemble her contributors to manufacture consensus or discord, nor to demonstrate that Buenos Aires could publish the respected names of Europe. She assembled them so that the relationships between them, those concordant and discordant alike, might convey the very dynamics of cultural circulation the magazine was established to make

visible and explore, here what I suggest is a meridionalism. The inaugural issue is not intended to be an anthology of distinguished voices but a deliberately arranged field of diverse cultural forces where harmony and friction are both—must be—present. To read this issue as a bid for European praise and relevance, as some of Ocampo's critics then and since have done, is to miss the structural argument embedded in the arrangement proposed by the first issue, one where cultural value is produced not at a center and transmitted outward, nor as a resistant periphery that forces a new gravitational center, but in the meeting, crossing, and collision of currents that obey no single cardinal direction and are subject to forces that exceed human control though may, regrettably, be subject to its anthropocentric dominance.

That structural argument was also, in 1931, a political one, however little it overtly represented itself as such. *Sur* appeared four months after the military coup that overthrew Yrigoyen and inaugurated the *década infame*, at a moment when nationalist and authoritarian retrenchment was hardening across both Latin America and Europe. To insist, in such a moment, that culture flows multidirectionally, meridionally, and belongs to no nation was to set the magazine quietly but firmly against the cultural logic of the regimes then consolidating power, regimes that grounded their authority precisely in claims of national essence, blood, and soil. The Drieu/Fondane pairing makes the stakes unmistakable. Drieu's vitalism of "los casamientos de sangre del lugar," published just before his own turn toward fascism, was not an aberration within the issue but the position against

which the issue defined itself; and Fondane, the Jewish émigré who would die at Auschwitz, embodied in his very person and his borderless art everything that such a politics would seek to extinguish. Ocampo's refusal to resolve their dissonance was neither political neutrality nor what we might today term as "bothsidesism." It was the preservation, on the page, of precisely the impartiality and plurality that the authoritarian nationalisms of the 1930s could not, would not ultimately tolerate.

Seen this way, *Sur's* first issue advances the larger argument this dissertation engages about the relationship between two continental forces connected by way of meridional forces. A conventional account would quickly cast Buenos Aires as a peripheral recipient, importing European prestige and adapting metropolitan forms to local conditions. But the inaugural issue isn't so transparent and does not clearly advocate for such a transactional reading. It is Buenos Aires that convenes the conversation; it is Ocampo who establishes the mix of European and American voices; it is from the south that the centripetal claim of someone like Drieu is given his hearing and, by the issue's own arrangement, answered. The magazine does not position itself as a destination for cultural exchanges that originate elsewhere. It positions itself as a kind of meteorological space through which those flows pass and are reorganized, a place where the European center can be received, juxtaposed, and challenged or displaced from its assumed authority even while giving it space to make its claims. This is the meridional in practice: not the inversion of the center/periphery binary, which would merely seek to install Buenos Aires as a new center; but rather its dissolution into a field of currents in

which the question of who holds the authority to name and speak is constantly challenged and reopened.

Focusing on a single issue of a magazine with over three hundred is without doubt insufficient, perhaps reckless. Many scholars over the last half century have published articles and book-length studies on *Sur* in English, French, and Spanish. Few, if any, however, provide close readings of selected articles that appear in its pages. One of the goals of this chapter is to fill in this gap and provide readers with a selection of close readings from the first issue to better understand the magazine's initial appearance and to engage the historical archive in new ways. Such an approach is a magnified snapshot into the interconnecting networks that Victoria Ocampo brought to life.

Returning now to *Sur*'s cover, and to the visually defining arrow pointing south: it is tempting to read its dulled tip as a simple, futile attempt at reorientation, a mere redirection of cultural authority from north to south, a counter-assertion against supposed European dominance. But the inaugural issue also suggests something less obvious. The arrow does not merely point away from Europe and toward the south; it points downward, also toward the reader who holds the magazine in their hands, implicating that reader, us, in the dynamics that the issue sets in motion. To open *Sur* was and is to be drawn into a field where Reyes and Supervielle's friendship and Drieu and Fondane's antagonism were equally at work, where harmony and collision might reflect a meridional expression, and where the reader was asked not to receive a settled cultural authority but to take

up a position within an unsettled and multidirectional exchange. The arrow points south, but it also points inward and outward at once, a reminder that the meridional is not a destination but a process, and that the reader stands both within it and outside it. That is what Ocampo's cover expressed from the first issue, and what the four decades of *Sur* that followed would continue to enact: that the direction of culture is never absolute, and that to publish from the south was to insist, against the gathering nationalisms of the last century, that no single definition or direction could ever have the last word. In fact, such a last word would risk the actual end.

CHAPTER TWO

Meridional Waves: Jean Ballard's *Les Cahiers du Sud*

“Vous verrez quel souffle atlantique passe sur ces grandes phrases...”
“You will see what Atlantic breath travels through these mighty sentences...”⁶⁰
Jean Ballard, 1942

Introduction

“À bord du Mendoza, le 30/VII/29.” Benjamin Fondane, the Romanian-born French language writer and thinker we encountered in the previous chapter, placed this summertime date at the top of one of his poems, crossing the Atlantic where he would go on to find himself on the other side of the globe where it was winter. “30 July 1929. Aboard the Mendoza,” a brief orientation for a small poem that makes up his long-form poetic work *Ulysse*. It opens not with an image but with a log-style entry, formally suggesting that the poem needed to anchor itself to a specific time and place, a concrete crossing, before it could afford to dissolve into the ocean. Seven years later, in 1936, making the same crossing again, Fondane was no longer sure it mattered which vessel he was on. “Pendant que l’on danse / sur le pont des premières de ce bateau déjà vieux, / Florida? Mendoza?” or “While we dance / on the bridge of the firsts of this already old boat, / Florida? Mendoza?”⁶¹ The question is not rhetorical as it may be a genuine expression of artistic blurring, of liquefaction of thought inspired by the inevitable sea before him. By the mid-1930s all vessels’

⁶⁰ Jean Ballard, “Mission de l’Esprit,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, December 1942, 137.

⁶¹ From an unpublished poem “Pendant que l’on danse,” which appears quoted in Evelyne Namenwirth, “Marseille-Buenos Aires. Reportage d’Ernest Claes,” *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, No. 11, 2008.

names had become almost interchangeable, one ship standing in for any ship, one crossing folding into the others he had already made and hoped to go on making. “En souvenir d’un autre navire,” “Remembering another boat,” he will write in a dedication, “mais ne portent-ils pas tous le même nom?” or “but don’t they all carry the same name?”⁶²

Much like his philosophical approach, Fondane was a writer for whom the aesthetic particularities of departure mattered less than the need for departure itself. And yet the changes that took place between 1929 and 1936 were quite concrete, something Fondane’s own deliberate poetic license about ports and ships should not obscure. In 1929 he was making his first crossing at Victoria Ocampo’s invitation, traveling toward a new intellectual horizon and ready to spend more time with an editor who was at this stage in her journey in search of a magazine all her own. By 1936 he was writing to another editor, Jean Ballard, from the dock: “je pars, ce lundi, par le bateau Florida, de Marseille pour Buenos Aires,” “I’m leaving this Monday on the Florida from Marseille for Buenos Aires.”⁶³ Already a contributor of four years’ standing to a magazine whose offices on the Cours du Vieux-Port he will pass on his way to board. The previously crossed path has not

⁶² This is from a dedication to the poem “Titanic” dedicated to Georgette Gaucher as cited in Evelyne Namenwirth, “Marseille-Buenos Aires. Reportage d’Ernest Claes,” *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, No. 11, 2008.

⁶³ Benjamin Fondane to Jean Ballard, Friday, 1936, Fonds littéraires méditerranéens, Bibliothèques de Marseille, Marseille, France.

changed. What has changed is what waits for him, in both directions, on either shore.

The southern port city Fondane passed through in 1929, en route to visit Ocampo and her vast Argentine and international intellectual milieu, is not yet a site of artistic or intellectual consequence for him or, at this point, anyone else. At this moment he has yet to meet Ballard. He has not yet written a word for *Les Cahiers du Sud*, a magazine that will eventually publish over 40 of his articles. Marseille is, at this moment, simply a space of transition: the last solid ground before the wide expanse of the Atlantic. This Mediterranean municipality, though, will eventually become key to his intellectual development and produce a set of relationships, particularly with Ballard, that will leave a lasting mark on both.

Such a transformation is not incidental to the current of this chapter's argument. *Les Cahiers du Sud* did not mature because of Benjamin Fondane, or because of any single contributor (or genre for that matter). It became a robust force because Jean Ballard, its editor-in-chief from 1925 until its final issue in 1966, made a set of crucial and intentional decisions that transformed a dynamic but modest regional review into one of the most significant literary magazines in interwar and wartime France. Fondane's two Atlantic crossings to Buenos Aires, departing from and returning to a city he would simultaneously come to know, give this chapter two important temporal markers: 1929, when Marseille was for him still only a point of departure, and 1936, when it had solidified into a real

destination. Between those two dates, Ballard continued to build the publication that would define the city's cultural identity for the next three decades.

This chapter introduces readers to *Les Cahiers du Sud*, its founding and evolution, and its editor, before turning to some of Fondane's particular contributions to the magazine that will help serve as key texts within the larger historical thrust of the magazine. Like *Sur*, *Les Cahiers du Sud* is one of the major literary artifacts of its time, having published many now well-known writers across several decades, from the First World War through the first years of the postwar "Trente Glorieuses." I pay careful attention to one piece in particular: "L'homme devant l'histoire, ou du bruit et de la fureur," "Man Before History, Or, the Sound and the Fury," published in 1939, a text written just months before France's formal declaration of war against Nazi Germany and one year before the German invasion of France. Though Fondane had hoped to appear in the magazine's pages as a poet, he would have to wait until his death for Ballard to finally publish his poem "Le Mal des Fantômes," "The Sorrow of Ghosts," a posthumous appearance whose circumstances the chapter's final sections will address.

Before turning to the particulars of the magazine itself, I will situate this chapter's arguments within the larger claims I seek to make. The previous chapter pushed to better understand *Sur*'s various relationships to Modernism and how conceiving the magazine as a meridional project might help us better understand the various debates that have animated its legacy. It was a magazine that

addressed the centripetal logic of European cultural authority by proposing Buenos Aires not as a cultural periphery seeking recognition by the center nor as a nationalist project to promote but as a vantage point from which the meridional flow in between could be articulated, contested, and reframed. The question the following chapter poses is whether meridionality, as a structural logic rather than a geographic metaphor, holds theoretical relevance and promise in a case that seems at first to resist such a characterization. Marseille is certainly not Buenos Aires. It is not separated from Paris by an ocean but rather by 400 miles of land and several centuries of provincial resentments. Its peripherality is territorial rather than transatlantic, produced by the centripetal logic of French cultural nationalism rather than by larger European imperial processes. And yet, Ballard's editorial approach and engagement produced a magazine that arrived, independently and by a number of diverse routes, at something remarkably close to what Ocampo was developing in Buenos Aires: a refusal to treat the magazine's location as a deficiency to be overcome, and an insistence that what passed through a coastal city—people, texts, ideas, and languages—was itself a unique and valuable form of cultural authority. This chapter argues that such a comparison helps connect two publications by way of shared contributors and editorial semblance. Though their geographies and particular histories may make a comparison difficult, meridionality is the concept that will help guide the comparison.

Cardinal Directions: From *Fortunio* to *Les Cahiers du Sud*

Les Cahiers du Sud were not always known as such. The magazine began in 1913 as *Fortunio*, a title borrowed from the amiable, naive hero of Alfred de Musset's 1835 comedy *Le Chandelier*. The initial notion of the magazine, therefore, was conceived by way of literary citation prior to transforming into something that took geography as central to its editorial premise. The choice of Musset's character is worth contemplating because such a reference is precise. In Musset's play, Fortunio is the young, guileless clerk who loves without calculation and is loved in return precisely because of his transparency, a figure defined less by what he does than by what he refuses to do, which is to hide his true intentions. A magazine that names itself after such a figure is perhaps suggesting something about its editorial vision: a preference for sincerity over strategy, for the direct gesture over a calculated one. Whether or not the founding circle of high schoolers at the Lycée de Marseille, now the Lycée Thiers, consciously intended this reading, it is not an inappropriate description of what Jean Ballard would eventually make of the magazine over four decades as director and editor. Sincerity and intellectual candor remained crucial, even when the name changed.

Fortunio's founding members were a circle of particularly precocious young men whose shared educational formation gave them both the intellectual ambition and the social network to attempt something that most students their age would likely not have considered otherwise. Marcel Pagnol was the group's original artistic and intellectual force. An indefatigable advocate, he was the organizational engine, the one who pushed for its creation through force of personality as much as his

cultural, editorial vision. Pagnol was already, at this early stage, what he would remain beyond his youth and early adulthood in Marseille: a man of prodigious energy and abundant ambition, committed to Marseille in sentiment while also casting an eye toward a wider, more national stage. The tension between local attachment and centripetal ambition that would eventually come to break his partnership with Ballard was already visible, nascent. Though Pagnol certainly embraced Marseille's rich cultural profile, he was also eager to circulate among the larger national cultural system, which it would do so by electing him to the Academie Française after the Second World War in 1946.⁶⁴

The first issue of *Fortunio* appeared on 10 February 1914. Jean Ballard joined the masthead by the third issue that same year. He was introduced to Pagnol's circle by Gaston Mouren, a connection that would prove consequential in ways no one involved could anticipate. Ballard's first contribution was a verse essay called "Une agonie," "An agony," published on 29 March 1914.⁶⁵ The title carries an irony that can only retrospectively be fully appreciated. Four months after its publication, on July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and the subsequent breaking of the chain of alliances dragged most of Europe into the conflict. The agony Ballard had written about in verse was shortly to be replaced by an agony of a different and incomparably larger order. What was for too short a

⁶⁴ Raymond Castans, *Marcel Pagnol: Biographie* (J.-C. Lattès, 1987).

⁶⁵ Jean Ballard, "Une agonie," *Fortunio*, March 29, 1914, 4-5.

time after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles called “la der des ders,” the last of the last, the war to end all wars, would prove to be neither.

The war’s effects on *Fortunio* were immediate and decisive. The magazine was suspended for the duration of the war while its founding members fulfilled their obligations to the French nation. Most were conscripted; some saw combat; all had their lives altered in ways that no peacetime literary ambition could have prepared them for. Jean Ballard and Marcel Pagnol were among the more fortunate: neither saw combat, and both were assigned to auxiliary duties close to home. Pagnol’s assignment, in particular, has an ironic quality to contrast with his literary ambitions that were interrupted. He was tasked with preserving and polishing the copper fittings of several hundred military lamps: painstaking, unglamorous work that eventually sent him to the hospital with health complications and resulted in his discharge from service. The man who would become one of France’s most celebrated writers and the first filmmaker elected to the Académie Française spent the First World War polishing military hardware in a southern French depot.⁶⁶

Despite Pagnol’s rather curious military assignment, what the war did to the founding circle of *Fortunio* was far from light or insignificant. It reordered the entire field of possibility within which the magazine had been imagined. The prewar

⁶⁶ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993).

literary landscape of France, the landscape in which a group of ambitious lycée students could establish a review, was fundamentally altered. By November 1918, confidence had been destroyed, not just rhetorically but materially: in the bodies of a generation of young men, in the economies of every nation involved, in the political structures that had made the war both possible and catastrophic. The magazines that would matter in the 1920s and 1930s, *La nouvelle revue française*, *Les Cahiers du Sud*, and others were all, in different ways, responding to this destruction. They were attempts to rebuild cultural authority on grounds that the war had made uncertain. *Fortunio's* suspension was not only a logistical interruption. It was a powerful lesson for the founding members in what happens when history takes the reins.

The magazine's postwar reassembly was a concerted effort that, eventually, turned fractious. Pagnol reconvened the prewar team in February 1920, a year after the Treaty of Versailles had formally ended the conflict that had brought an end to their earlier efforts. This reassembly, though, was not a restoration of what had existed before. The changes as a result of the Great War were too destructive, and an attempt to reanimate a shared project in a world that had been fundamentally altered was not at all obvious. By October 1920, the magazine had settled into a reliable rhythm, with Pagnol as editor-in-chief and Ballard managing advertising. The division of labor was practical and, for that moment, sustainable. Pagnol supplied the editorial vision and organizational drive while Ballard supplied the administrative competence and the local knowledge that kept the magazine

financially viable and locally relevant. Within a year the magazine had added new contributors; within two it had started a publishing house and grown its subscription base to roughly a thousand readers spread across Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, and, notably, Paris.⁶⁷ The Paris subscriptions were a sign of national relevance but also, in retrospect, a sign of the tension that would eventually cause the editorial partnership to fracture: to have readers in Paris was to remember that Paris was where cultural legitimacy ultimately resided, even for a magazine that was oriented differently.

The proximate cause of that tension was Pagnol's appointment, in 1922, to teach at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, one of the most prestigious lycées in France, located in the ninth arrondissement and associated with some of the most distinguished names in French cultural and intellectual history. The appointment was a mark of distinction, a confirmation that Pagnol's abilities and talents had been noticed by institutions beyond his southern milieu, and it required his physical relocation to the capital. For several years afterward, the magazine's team tried to manage the awkward geography of a magazine whose editor-in-chief now lived 400 miles from its offices on the Vieux Port. The arrangement, though perhaps normal to contemporary observers, was not for the time. An editor who works from Paris on a magazine based in Marseille is, whatever the intentions, at the very least impractical. The other lingering tension was that such a foothold in the capital

⁶⁷ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993).

risked enacting precisely the centripetal logic that the magazine's location and orientation might largely push against.

In 1925, Pagnol resigned, and Ballard assumed full editorial control of the magazine. The significance of this moment is easy to understate if one reads it only as a change in titular leadership. It was also a fundamental identity shift: a choice about where the magazine would be anchored (not centered) and what that anchoring would mean. Ballard could have agreed and encouraged that the magazine be more closely linked to Paris. Pagnol's trajectory seemed to suggest it was the natural next step. Neither Ballard nor Pagnol seemed willing to arrive at a synthesis, however. Ballard stayed in Marseille, in the offices near the Vieux-Port that the magazine had occupied since its relaunch, and began the process of making explicit what the magazine's location had implied but never fully articulated.

That process of redefinition began with the magazine's name. In 1925, the same year as Pagnol's resignation, Ballard began appending a new name beneath the old one: *Les Cahiers du Sud*, printed under the official title as a kind of subtitle, a second identity testing itself against the first. The change was not declared so much as it just gradually started to happen, issue by issue, until October 1925, when the two names finally switched positions on the page. *Les Cahiers du Sud* rose to the top. *Fortunio* was buried beneath it, and would not return, eventually disappearing entirely. The gradualism of the transition is not without significance. Ballard did not issue a manifesto or make a polemical declaration. He was letting the new name accumulate weight through its continual presence, allowing it to

become familiar before it became official, trusting that the logic of the change would make itself legible over time. This is characteristic of his editorial method more broadly: a preference for demonstration over decisive declaration.

A View from the Threshold

Pagnol's departure to Paris was in many ways simply the ordinary trajectory of literary ambition in interwar France, where Paris remained the obligatory destination for anyone seeking a national readership and status. He was, by any measure, doing what talented people from the provinces were supposed to do: moving toward the center, seeking the recognition that only the capital could confer. His subsequent career, the plays that would make him famous, the films that would make him a national figure, his election to the Académie Française that would confirm his cultural status, suggests that the move was entirely reasonable and expected. But it is also a cultural custom and reality this dissertation has been tracing and asking to interrogate. The assumption that culture derives legitimacy by migrating toward the center, that a provincial review is a waiting room rather than a destination, that talent from the south must eventually be minted by the Parisian establishment before it can be said to have fully come into its own. Pagnol's career is, from one angle, a perfect illustration of how such cultural assumptions shape individual lives and artistic communities. Ballard's career is equally illustrative of what happens when someone challenges such an orthodoxy.

His refusal was not merely a biographical fact about where one man chose to live. It can also be read as a theoretical position, an argument that the south could generate its own cultural authority rather than rely on larger national projects and prerogatives. This is the articulated argument that is at the heart of renaming the magazine. Where *Fortunio* had been a name without geography, a proper noun borrowed from a fictional character, carrying no spatial claims, *Les Cahiers du Sud* were insistently locatable. They named a direction rather than a person, a compass bearing rather than a character from literature. And it named that direction not as a deficiency to be overcome but as a vantage point: not “we are in the south and therefore provincial” but rather “we are of the south and therefore oriented differently, seeing things from here that others may not see.”

Ballard’s own account of the new title’s purpose appears in the magazine’s pages. Writing in the January 1926 issue, he described the name as designed to “accueille par son vague sens géographique toutes les tendances, les conceptions esthétiques et autres des esprits de vastes contrées qui entourent et prolongent Marseille,” “to welcome, by its vague geographic sense, all trends, aesthetic conceptions, and other spirits from the vast countries that surround and extend beyond Marseille.”⁶⁸ The phrase “vague sens géographique” reveals that while geography is conceptually crucial and present, it is also fluid. Ballard is not claiming a precise regional identity or a programmatic Mediterranean nationalism

⁶⁸ Jean Ballard, “À nos Lecteurs,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, January 1926, 53.

to battle Parisian hegemony. He is claiming something more capacious: that a magazine anchored in Marseille is anchored in a city that looks in multiple directions at once, toward the North African coast as readily as toward the French interior, toward the Levant as readily as toward Athens, toward the Atlantic as readily as toward Rome. The geographic possibility, its “vagueness,” is the point. A magazine title tied to a fictional 19th century character centers a concept of a national literature; a name tied to a cardinal direction made another sort of claim, but a deliberately imprecise one, gesturing toward a Mediterranean beyond rather than fencing off by delimiting regional coordinates.

Marseille, in this reorientation, stopped functioning as a provincial capital under the sway and direction from Paris and instead insisted on the value of cultural and linguistic liminality: a threshold city whose value lay precisely in the diversity of what passed through it rather than in what it attempted to smooth over. Marseille’s identity as a port city, a city of arrivals and departures, was of course already centuries old by the time Ballard began to engage its possibilities within an editorial frame. What was novel was the claim that this threshold identity could be a source of larger cultural authority and promise rather than a symptom of cultural inadequacy or backwards regionalism. The port city, in the dominant French cultural imaginary, was a place of transience rather than permanence, of commerce rather than culture, of the heterogeneous rather than the refined. Ballard’s *Les Cahiers du Sud* proposed that transience, heterogeneity, and the mixing of peoples and ideas that a port city naturally produces were not

obstacles to cultural production but conditions of such a process: that the magazine's location was not an accident to be apologized for but an advantage to be analyzed and embraced.

The resemblance to Victoria Ocampo's *Sur*, founded only six years after the renaming of Ballard's magazine and three thousand miles southwest, is worth considering. Both editors arrived, by different routes, at a compelling insight: that a magazine's authority need not derive from proximity to an elite cultural center, and that geographic distance from such a source could be reconceived as a relevant vantage point rather than a deficiency. The parallel will be developed more fully in the pages that follow. For now, it is enough to note that Ballard's 1925 decision to stay in Marseille, to rename the magazine with the south as its anchor, to articulate its location as a feature rather than a flaw, is a (re)founding gesture of what I am terming meridionalism. Everything that *Les Cahiers du Sud* would go on to become in the 1930s and 40s (as well as during the post war years), the international roster, the philosophical columns, the wartime continuity, the unacknowledged transatlantic connection to *Sur*, was derived from the tension between the center and the periphery that the magazine embraced and troubled.

This reorientation under Ballard's leadership was gradual while also impactful. The years between the renaming in 1925 and the end of the decade were years of growth: the magazine finding its voice, its contributors, its readership, and its institutional identity. While *Fortunio* had often centered local, Provençal-inspired works, though not exclusively, *Les Cahiers* were motivated to expand their

literary scope and move beyond the immediate local, asking how the local and the larger scope of the Mediterranean related to and informed one another. The question was not merely aesthetic and geographic. It was, in a deeper sense, philosophical: what did it mean to think from Marseille, to write from Marseille, to publish from Marseille, at a moment when the entire infrastructure of French cultural life was organized around the assumption that serious contributions happened elsewhere further north in the Île de France? Ballard's answer, worked out issue by issue across the late 1920s and into the 1930s, was that it meant something specific and irreplaceable: that the view from a threshold was a view unavailable from the center, and that the magazine's task was to make that view legible to readers who might not have thought to look for it or even thought that such a view existed.

A crucial figure in the magazine's late 1920s development was the poet André Gaillard, whose influence between 1926 and 1929 was decisive in opening *Les Cahiers du Sud* to surrealism. By way of Gaillard's creative interests and network, the magazine published Paul Éluard, Robert Desnos, Henri Michaux, Antonin Artaud, René Crevel, Benjamin Péret, and Jules Supervielle, as well as ex-Surrealists whose trajectories had already diverged from Breton's gravitational orbit. The significance of this surrealist moment for the magazine's identity is of two-fold concern. On one hand it represents the moment when *Les Cahiers du Sud* first established genuine contact with the Parisian avant-garde on something like equal terms: not as a provincial admirer but as a publishing venue where major

figures appeared. On the other hand, and more importantly for this chapter's argument, the Surrealist connection also established the magazine's characteristic mode of engaging with literary movements: adjacently rather than forcefully or programmatically, welcoming their energies without submitting entirely to their cultural program or vision. Ballard was sympathetic to surrealism's ambitions in ways that some in the broader French literary establishment were not, but he was certainly not a Surrealist editor in the way that a magazine like *La Révolution surréaliste* was a Surrealist publication. He featured Surrealists alongside local poets, philosophical essayists, and writers who had nothing to do with what ended up becoming André Breton's movement. The result was a magazine where surrealism was one voice among many rather than the governing aesthetic, which is, in retrospect, exactly the kind of editorial stance that allowed *Les Cahiers du Sud* to outlast every explicitly programmatic magazine of its generation.

Gaillard's death in 1929 closed the most intense phase of the magazine's Surrealist engagement, but it did not close the connection entirely. Contact was also established during these years with Joë Bousquet and the Carcassonne group, a network of poets centered in the Languedoc town whose literary magazine, *Chantiers*, was engaged in a parallel effort to articulate a southern French literary identity distinct from Parisian tendencies. The connection to Bousquet is worth noting not merely as a passing detail but as evidence of a broader network of southern French literary activity that *Les Cahiers du Sud* were part of and, in some sense, organizing. Ballard's magazine was not an isolated experiment but the most

visible node in a constellation of publications and writers who were, each in their own way, working through what it meant to do serious literary work from the south of France in the interwar period.

By the 1930s, the editorial approach Ballard had been developing since 1925 had come into its own. It had achieved a recognizable identity, one that other writers and readers could distinguish. As Alain Paire has argued, the magazine matured across this decade into a metaphoric *lieu de rencontre* for intellectuals and writers from across the world who often resisted easy ideological or literary categorization. The idea of a “meeting place” is crucial. A meeting place is, by definition, a threshold: a site whose value consists not in what it produces internally but in what it enables between people who come to it from elsewhere. Ballard’s Marseille was precisely this: a city that was already a meeting place by geographic design and necessity. The magazine made explicit and deliberate what the city had always been doing organically.⁶⁹

The roster of contributors who appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud*’s pages during the 1930s provides a flavor of its editorial diversity: Rafael Alberti, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Walter Benjamin, Alejo Carpentier, Ribeiro Couto, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, Federico García Lorca, Franz Kafka, D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Yone Noguchi, Léopold Sédar Senghor. What these writers share is obviously not a literary movement or a national allegiance. What they share is a

⁶⁹ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993).

connection to Ballard and his vision and that they agreed to publish their work in the pages of the magazine. The set of contributors over its decades-long life is itself an argument: an argument that the south of France was a place where Walter Benjamin and Dai Wangshu could appear in the same publication, that Marseille was a city whose cultural gravity was sufficient to pull contributors from four continents, and that a magazine based near the Vieux-Port could make a credible claim to internationalism that was all its own with little to do with Paris.⁷⁰

What held such an enterprise together? What was the editorial principle that made it coherent to publish Faulkner alongside Senghor, Benjamin alongside Noguchi, García Lorca alongside Carpentier? The answer is certainly not a shared aesthetic program. These writers do not belong to the same literary movements or traditions, do not share a politics let alone a language; their contributions to *Les Cahiers du Sud* were originally written in French and in other languages and translated (as was the case with *Sur*). What they share, at the level of editorial selection, is something closer to what Ballard had articulated in 1926 as the magazine's guiding principle: they are spirits from "vast countries that surround and extend beyond Marseille," writers whose work resisted the national and ideological categorization that the dominant literary institutions of the period were increasingly demanding. Such a meeting place drew people who either needed or desired it: writers who were too cosmopolitan for nationalist literary

⁷⁰ Dai Wangshu (1905-1950) was a Chinese poet and translator, close to René Étiemble

establishments, too heterodox for programmatic avant-gardes, too interested in the world beyond their own borders to be satisfied with a purely local readership.

Ballard's magazine did not merely reflect a cosmopolitan literary culture. It helped create and sustain one.

This is also the decade in which Ballard's editorial philosophy found its most explicit articulation in relation to the Mediterranean as a distinct cultural geography. His manifesto-like editorials from these years consistently return to the Mediterranean not as a scenic backdrop or a purely regional marker but as a conceptual framework: a set of relations between peoples, languages, and traditions that had been producing cultural exchange for millennia before the contemporary nation-state had reified those exchanges into categories. Writing about the power of *Les Cahiers du Sud*, Gabriel Audisio proposed that the magazine represented a "carnal negation of all racisms," a characterization that is both a cultural claim and, in the context of the 1930s, a political one.⁷¹ To say that the Mediterranean negates racism, carnally and materially rather than merely ideologically, is to say that the lived reality of the Mediterranean world, its centuries of mixture, its overlapping populations and intertwined histories, its refusal to stay within the clean boundaries that nationalism was insisting on, constitutes a standing rebuke to the racial ideologies gathering force across Europe in these years. Gabriel Audisio, one of the magazine's most characteristic voices and a writer whose work moved fluidly

⁷¹ Gabriel Audisio, "Vers une synthèse méditerranéenne," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, March 1936.

between Algeria and metropolitan France, gave this ethos its most concise formulation. According to him, “[t]he great secret of the Mediterranean is the conciliation of the East and the West.”⁷² While such a formulation may seem trite today, in 1935 it could better be read as a provocation: a claim that the most significant cultural fact about the Mediterranean is not its internal divisions, Christian and Muslim, European and African, colonizer and colonized, but its capacity for coexistence, for the production of forms and ideas that neither side of any given binary could have produced alone.

This Mediterranean framework shaped not only the magazine’s literary preferences but its geographic imagination in ways that exceed the Atlantic axis that connects it to *Sur*. The landmark 1935 special issue “L’Islam et l’Occident” (“Islam and the West”) is a clear example: a Marseille-based magazine producing a sustained, serious engagement with Islamic thought and culture at a moment when French public discourse about North Africa was organized almost entirely around the logic of colonial administration. The issue drew on contributors from Lebanon, Egypt, and Algeria alongside metropolitan French writers, and framed the relationship between Islam and the European “West” as a question of intellectual exchange rather than civilizational confrontation. This is not the posture of a magazine that understands itself as purely “French,” or that locates the Mediterranean’s significance primarily in its connections to the “Latin” cultural

⁷² Gabriel Audisio, “Vers une synthèse méditerranéenne,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, March 1936.

tradition. It is the posture of a magazine that understands Marseille as a city facing south and east as much as north and west: a city whose port received ships from Tunis and Alexandria as readily as from Barcelona and Genoa, and whose literary magazine ought, Ballard believed, to reflect that orientation.

The magazine's relationship to Modernism's larger currents was, in this sense, adjacent. *Les Cahiers du Sud* participated in Modernism's major debates (surrealism, existentialism, the question of committed literature, the relationship between aesthetic autonomy and political engagement) while insisting, through its Mediterranean ethos and its geographic orientations, on a set of values that stood in implicit tension with the dominant modes of both Parisian avant-gardism and Anglo-American Modernism. Where the latter tended toward formal experimentation, aesthetic autonomy, and a cosmopolitanism defined by the movement between metropolitan centers, Ballard's magazine proposed a different kind of cosmopolitanism: one rooted in place, in the specific sensory and historical reality of this Mediterranean port city. Such is the distinction that Gayle Rogers's work on transnational modernism helps to clarify. Rogers has argued, in his analysis of the relationship between British modernism and Spanish literary culture, that the "Spanish problem," Spain's troubled, ambivalent relationship with the European cultural mainstream, provided an animating impulse for interwar Modernism precisely because it introduced a set of values and orientations that the

dominant Anglo-French tradition could not generate from within itself.⁷³ An analogous argument can be made for Ballard's magazine: *Les Cahiers du Sud's* Mediterranean peripherality was not a deficiency relative to Parisian Modernism but a resource, a source of energy and connections that the center could not produce on its own terms.

By the decade's end, *Les Cahiers du Sud* were publishing many of the same names that filled the pages of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Malraux and Sartre among them, both of whom would also appear in the pages of *Sur* and later *Lettres françaises*, the subject of the next chapter. Such a convergence is worth beginning to unpack. Three magazines, on two continents, with one working wholly independently of the other two, were drawing from a shared and overlapping pool of contributors, as though the literary world of the 1930s had its own meridional logic that each individual editor was each discovering in due course. *Les Cahiers du Sud's* status vis-à-vis the *Nouvelle Revue Française* was one that could compete. There is proof that the magazine reached *NRF*-level prestige and international reach while remaining structurally committed to the gateway logic Ballard had articulated from the outset, addressing the world without seeking Paris's cultural clout.⁷⁴ That, in the end, is what Ballard's magazine demonstrated: not that Marseille could become Paris, but that it did not need to pursue such a goal.

⁷³ See Gayle Rogers, *Modernism and the new Spain: Britain, cosmopolitan Europe, and Literary History*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), especially the introduction "The Problem of Spain and the Cultural Map of Interwar Europe."

⁷⁴ Christel Brun-Franc, "Émergence et développement des Cahiers du Sud. : Histoire d'un succès (octobre 1925 - septembre 1939)" (PhD diss., Aix-Marseille, 2015).

Weights and Measures: Ballard as Editor

The history and legacy of *Les Cahiers du Sud* have been well documented by Alain Paire whom I referenced earlier. Paire, an art critic, former gallery owner, and current columnist for the daily newspaper *La Marseillaise*, meticulously researched *Les Cahiers du Sud* using the archives at the Bibliothèque municipale de Marseille. His 1993 monograph was uniquely devoted to the complete history of the by and large monthly publication originating from the “grenier [attic] du Vieux-Port.” His exhaustive study remains unparalleled. What follows here is an attempt to open our way of reading Jean Ballard’s crucial and understudied “notebooks” in the 21st century. While Paire provides an impressive overview, this chapter seeks to tease out critical moments during the 1930s and 40s to give a better sense of how this magazine connected not only to the larger European concerns of its time but also how it interacted in important, if editorially unacknowledged, ways with *Sur*, Victoria Ocampo’s Buenos Aires-based magazine and publishing house. I will do this by focusing on key contributions of Benjamin Fondane, the Romanian-born French language poet and philosopher.

Before that, however, it is important to understand Ballard’s editorial philosophy and, as such, first consider his background. Though not born wealthy, his modest salary as a *peseur-juré*, a certified public customs official working at the port, allowed him to sustain *Les Cahiers du Sud* for over three decades. The *peseur-juré* was a specific and regulated institutional role in the commercial life of the port:

an independent, state-certified intermediary whose function was to weigh goods arriving and departing in the name of commercial fairness, guaranteeing to both buyer and seller that the measurement was accurate and impartial. There is something poetically apt in this profession that goes beyond biographical color. The *peseur-juré* served as intermediary between buyers and sellers where goods arrived from elsewhere and were weighed, assessed, and redistributed into new circuits of exchange. Ballard's editorial work operated by way of a structurally analogous logic: a man stationed at Marseille's cultural threshold, receiving intellectual cargo from across the Mediterranean and beyond, assessing its weight, and sending it back out into the world through the magazine's pages. The analogy is imperfect, but it captures something real about Ballard's self-understanding as an editor. He did not view himself as a philosopher or a theorist. He left the creating and theorizing, by and large, to his contributors. Rather he was a facilitator, a guarantor of fair exchange between ideas and readers that would otherwise not find each other. The *peseur-juré* at the commercial port and the editor at the cultural meeting point were, in Ballard's life, the same person performing the same essential function in two different registers: making sure that what arrived from elsewhere was honestly weighed and fairly distributed.

This self-understanding as facilitator rather than originator has direct implications for how we read Ballard's editorial approach. Unlike Ocampo, who wrote substantial personal essays and editorial statements that make her cultural and intellectual commitments legible in her own voice, or Caillois, who, we will see,

brought to *Lettres françaises* a fully developed theoretical apparatus drawn from his anthropological and sociological work, Ballard left less in terms of such “meaningful” contributions. What he left instead was the magazine itself: forty years of editorial decisions, accumulated issue by issue, that constitute a practice of cultural facilitation more coherent and more principled than any manifesto he might have written. Reading Ballard’s editorial philosophy therefore requires reading *Les Cahiers du Sud* the way one reads poetry rather than prose: attending to pattern, to recurrence, to the significance of juxtaposition, to what is included and what is omitted, rather than to any single explicit statement of intent.

That said, there are of course moments where Ballard does contribute his own work to the magazine. In January 1938, to mark the magazine’s twenty-fifth anniversary, he penned a “chronique” titled “Propos de nos vingt-cinq ans,” “On the subject of our twenty-five years.”⁷⁵ The piece was not merely an occasion to celebrate the achievements of a magazine based in Marseille that had demonstrated it could stand alongside Parisian institutions like the *NRF*. It was also a retrospective accounting: an attempt to name, after twenty-five years of publication, what the editorial project had always been and what it had consistently refused to be. Just one year later, in a piece titled “17 Décembre 1939,” Ballard would write a more somber reflection: a memorial to André Gaillard and a reckoning with the political and cultural earthquakes that had been building since the early 1930s and

⁷⁵ Jean Balard, “Propos de nos vingt-cinq ans,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, January 1938, 61-64.

that too few had wanted to measure. Taken together, these two pieces frame the magazine's mature identity: a publication that had grown into genuine cultural authority while remaining, as Paire has characterized it, fundamentally "centrist" in its orientation, a liberal "qui tente aussi souvent que possible de soustraire sa revue à toutes les pressions, d'où qu'elles viennent," "who tries as often as possible to remove all pressures from the magazine, no matter where they come from."⁷⁶

This characterization of Ballard as a centrist liberal allergic to pressure requires some unpacking because it risks being misread as editorial timidity, a refusal to take sides supposedly on the grounds of principle. In his assessment, Paire offers something more precise and nuanced. What he identifies is not indifference to politics but a specific and considered editorial conviction: that the magazine's survival and its cultural value depended on its remaining a space where diverse, even incompatible, voices could coexist without being conscripted into a single ideological program. The distinction matters especially in the context of the 1930s, when the demand that intellectuals and editors declare their allegiances, fascist or antifascist, communist or liberal, nationalist or cosmopolitan, was becoming increasingly the trend. Ballard did resist such pressure consistently and, one might say, on principle. As Paire notes, "En ce qui concerne sa revue, Jean Ballard ne voudrait pas devoir se situer à droite ou à gauche...il est une fois de plus patent qu'une finalité unique anime et régent les options de Jean Ballard: le sort

⁷⁶ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993) 245.

des Cahiers du Sud, leur perpétuation et leur développement,” “When it came to his magazine, Jean Ballard didn’t want to have to situate himself to the right or left...it is once again evident that a single aim drives and governs Jean Ballard’s choices: the fate of *Les Cahiers du Sud*, its survival and development.”⁷⁷

Let us press on this idea because it can be both true and potentially misleading. True, because in the specific historical context of occupied France, the decision to keep a literary magazine circulating, to maintain a space where diverse intellectual voices could appear alongside one another, was not a politically neutral act. The German occupation had a direct and immediate interest in controlling French cultural production, and the existence of a magazine that continued to publish philosophical and literary work outside the official channels of Vichy’s cultural policy represented a form of resistance, however muted. Potentially misleading, because “continuation” could also describe a purely passive response to political pressure: the path of least resistance rather than the path of principled refusal. What distinguishes Ballard’s continuation from simple accommodation is precisely the content of what he continued to publish: figures on the Liste Otto, philosophical work that challenged the ideological premises of the occupation, poetry by writers whose lives were directly endangered by the regime.⁷⁸ The magazine’s survival was not paved by compromising its contents. It was sustained,

⁷⁷ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993) 245.

⁷⁸ H.R. Kedward, *Resistance in Vichy France* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 188-189.

at genuine risk, by a man who understood that what he was preserving was worth the risk.

Before turning to the specific question of Ballard's political engagements and editorial choices during the Occupation, I will first develop more fully the argument about Marseille as a cultural-geographic site that has been suggested in the previous pages. This is the argument that most directly engages my broader theoretical scope, because it is here that a comparison between *Les Cahiers du Sud* and *Sur* becomes something more than an observation about two editors who independently arrived at similar approaches. It is here that the concept of the meridional can help us theorize a cultural criss crossing. It is also an opportunity to discuss the shared, if particular, circumstances of cultural resistance present in both magazines.

The resistance comes from a simple geographic fact: Marseille is inside France. Unlike Buenos Aires, which was separated from the European cultural center by an ocean, a colonial history, and several centuries of enforced cultural dependency, Marseille was four hundred miles from Paris: a train journey, not an Atlantic crossing. Its relationship to the French cultural center was not the relationship of the colonial periphery to the imperial metropole but the relationship of the provincial city to the national capital, a different dynamic with fundamentally different stakes. One might reasonably argue that this difference makes the comparison between Marseille and Buenos Aires difficult to sustain.

Such an “internal peripherality” is a different enough phenomenon from “transatlantic peripherality.

This objection is worth taking seriously rather than dismissing. The centripetal logic that organized French cultural life in the interwar period was not identical to the colonial logic that organized European cultural relations with Latin America. France’s relationship with Marseille was not a relationship of obvious extraction and dependency in the strict colonial sense. Marseille was not being systematically stripped of its cultural resources and sent to Paris, in the way that colonial territories were stripped of their material resources and sent to European capitals. The relationship was subtler and, in some ways, more insidious: not extraction but cultural condescension, not dependency but rather dismissal. Marseille was not exploited by Paris so much as it was more frequently belittled by it: treated as a city of commerce and transience rather than culture and permanence, acknowledged as a necessary node in the national economic network while being held at a distance from the national cultural conversation. The dismissal was, in its own way, as effective as extraction in producing the condition of peripherality: a city that had been generating cultural work of genuine significance for decades (admittedly longer) without receiving the recognition that would have allowed it to accumulate cultural authority in the broader national imaginary.

Within this given context, what Ballard’s *Les Cahiers du Sud* did was refuse the terms of the dismissal without giving into the temptation to whine. This is the

gesture that makes it structurally comparable to *Sur*, despite geographic differences and particularities. Ocampo's magazine refused the assumption that Buenos Aires was a cultural periphery that needed European validation to register. Ballard's magazine refused the assumption that Marseille was a provincial backwater that needed Parisian validation to matter. The content of the refusal is different in each case; the historical, political, and cultural specifics of Buenos Aires's relationship to Europe are not the same as the specifics of Marseille's relationship to Paris, but the structure of the refusal is analogous. Both editors proposed, through the practice of their magazines rather than through any theoretical declaration, that the view from where they were was a view worth having, and that the authority to make that claim did not need to be borrowed from elsewhere.

Pascal Ory's work on French cultural history during the Occupation provides a useful framework for understanding what was at stake in Ballard's specific version of this refusal. Ory has argued that the Occupation created a situation in which French cultural production was organized around two poles, collaboration and resistance, with a large and unstable middle ground occupied by editors, writers, and cultural institutions that were trying to continue working without fully committing to either pole. The Vichy government had its own cultural program, a program organized around the values of work, family, and fatherland, and deeply hostile to the cosmopolitan, internationalist cultural values that had characterized the French intellectual left in the 1930s. Within this context, to continue publishing a magazine that was openly cosmopolitan, philosophically heterodox, and

committed to intellectual exchange across national boundaries was to occupy a specific and legible position in the cultural field of occupied France, even if Ballard himself would never have described it in those terms. His refusal to situate himself as right or left, his insistence on the magazine's continuity as the primary value, was not a retreat from the political situation but a specific response to such: a claim that cultural plurality itself was the value worth defending, and that defending it required neither collaboration nor the heroics of explicit resistance but the quieter, more sustained courage of simply keeping the project going.⁷⁹

This is also the context in which H.R. Kedward's observation about wartime censorship becomes most significant. Kedward has noted that censorship in the Occupation's southern zone was "less predictable for literary, philosophical, and critical writing, and usually confined itself to prohibiting certain passages rather than enforcing publication of others."⁸⁰ The relative latitude afforded to erudite literary publications was not, in other words, a product of the occupying regime's indifference to culture. The regime was deeply interested in culture and clearly committed to using cultural institutions for its own ends. It was, rather, a product of the regime's uncertainty about how to handle publications that operated at a level of abstraction and cultural specificity that made their political implications difficult to read. A magazine that published philosophical essays and literary translations was harder to censor than a newspaper that published political

⁷⁹ Pascal Ory, *Les Collaborateurs, 1940–1945*, (Seuil, 1976).

⁸⁰ H.R. Kedward, *Resistance in Vichy France* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 188.

commentary, not because it was less political but because its politics were less legible to administrators whose primary training was not in literary criticism. Ballard exploited this legibility gap, whether consciously or not, by maintaining the magazine's commitment to the erudite and the literary even under conditions that might have pushed a different editor toward more explicitly political content.

If Ballard's political convictions resist easy identification, within the question of poetry we find something closer to commitment. In 1940, amid the Occupation's first year, Ballard gave a robust defense of poetry that is worth reading as precisely the kind of political statement his editorial stance otherwise avoided making directly. He wrote: "Pour nous, la poésie n'est pas un genre littéraire," "for us, poetry is not a literary genre." To say that poetry is not a genre is to say that it cannot be subordinated to the categorical imperatives that govern other forms of writing, including politically committed prose. It is to claim for poetry a kind of exemption from the instrumentalization that wartime, and the intellectual debates of the 1930s more broadly, was demanding of literature more broadly.

The stakes of this claim sharpen considerably when set against the dominant intellectual currents of the period. By 1940, the debate about the proper relationship between literature and political commitment had been burning for at least a decade, and it had produced a set of positions whose terms were becoming increasingly dry, rigid. On one side stood those who argued, with varying degrees of sophistication, that literature's value was exhausted by its capacity to serve political ends: the writer's first obligation was to the cause, whatever the cause

happened to be, and aesthetic autonomy was a luxury the historical moment could not afford. On the other side stood those who defended aesthetic autonomy against all political claims, arguing that literature's value lay precisely in its resistance to instrumentalization: that the moment a poem became useful to a cause it likely ceased to be a poem. Ballard's position, characteristically, did not fit neatly into either camp. He was not indifferent to political engagement; the magazine's record of publishing antifascist writers and maintaining intellectual plurality under censorship pressure makes that clear. But he refused the reduction of poetry to a political instrument, and his refusal was not the refusal of someone who had failed to understand the political stakes but of someone who understood them well enough to see that poetry's contribution to those stakes was something other than what the advocates of committed literature were claiming.

This defense of poetry as something categorically irreducible is worth reading alongside Jean-Paul Sartre's near-contemporary, though postwar, account of committed literature in his 1948 *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Sartre, who was himself a contributor to all three magazines examined in this dissertation, was notably suspicious of poetry in that text, in a gesture that echoes Caillois and reaches back, as Ballard might have recognized, all the way to Plato. For Sartre, prose alone could bear the full weight of political commitment because prose alone was fundamentally communicative, oriented toward the reader and toward the world. Poetry, by contrast, treated words as things rather than signs, resistant to the transparent mediation that engagement required. Ballard's 1940 defense of

poetry against exactly this subordinating logic is therefore not a retreat from politics but a counterargument about what literature is for: not an instrument of liberation whose value is exhausted by its political utility, but a mode of human attention whose irreducibility is itself a form of resistance.

The comparison between Ballard and Sartre is instructive not only as a theoretical counterpoint but as a biographical and institutional one. Sartre published in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, which means that Ballard was simultaneously defending the categorical irreducibility of poetry and publishing one of the writers who would most forcefully argue against that position. This is not a contradiction. It is, precisely, the kind of productive tension that Ballard's "centriste" editorial philosophy was designed to sustain. The magazine did not exist to enforce a single position on the relationship between literature and politics. It existed to maintain an open space in which incompatible positions and patterns could encounter one another, challenge one another, and remain in productive tension rather than resolving into a single orthodoxy or outright hostility. Sartre's presence in the pages of a magazine whose editor disagreed with his account of poetry is not a symptom of editorial inconsistency but evidence of editorial confidence: the confidence of an editor who understood that the value of a literary magazine was not to settle debates but to keep them alive and open.

Sartre's own formulation of liberty, written after the war but resonant with the decade that preceded it, is instructive here. "La liberté même, si on la considère *sub specie æternitatis*, paraît un rameau desséché," "liberty itself, considered under

the aspect of eternity, appears a withered branch,” he wrote. “Il n’y a pas de liberté donnée; il faut se conquérir sur les passions, sur la race, sur la classe, sur la nation et conquérir avec soi les autres hommes,” “There is no given freedom; one must conquer oneself, one’s passions, race, class, nation, and in doing so conquer freedom alongside others.”⁸¹ Sartre’s understanding of liberty as a never-ending process of self-overcoming is not far from what Ballard’s editorial project implies, even if Ballard would never have expressed it in those terms. Both positions resist the comfortable assumption that freedom is a stable possession rather than a perpetual struggle. The difference is that Ballard seeks to locate this struggle in the space of the magazine itself, in the ongoing act of keeping open a publication whose diversity of voices refuses the closure that ideology demands.

If Ballard’s editorial philosophy has a transatlantic counterpart, it is Ocampo’s, and the evidence that each was aware, at least obliquely, of the other’s existence begins earlier than one might expect. In a letter dated April 1, 1933, Benjamin Fondane wrote to Jean Ballard asking him to send copies of the January and March editions of the magazine to various associates. Among the names on the list was Victoria Ocampo. Just next to her name and Buenos Aires address, Fondane had penned a note in the margin: “je crois que vous n’avez pas encore vu cette très belle revue argentine,” “I don’t believe you have yet seen this very

⁸¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio Essais, 1985).

beautiful Argentine magazine.”⁸² It is possible that this was the very first time Ocampo’s name was mentioned to Ballard. Though it may have been the first, it would certainly not be the last. There are many subsequent instances in the epistolary archive where Ocampo’s name appears, either directly or indirectly: some correspondents wrote to Ballard on *Sur* letterhead, carrying the Buenos Aires magazine’s identity into the Marseille office as a kind of ambient presence.

Living Philosophy in the face of Death

Benjamin Fondane’s first contribution to *Les Cahiers du Sud*, “Martin Heidegger sur les Routes de Dostoïevski,” appeared in 1932 just one year after his first publication in *Sur*, and three years after his first Atlantic crossing aboard the *Mendoza*. Its appearance in the magazine marked the beginning of what would become one of the most sustained and, ultimately, most complicated editorial relationships of Fondane’s career: over 45 texts published in *Les Cahiers du Sud* between 1932 and 1944 with others published posthumously, a figure that places Ballard’s magazine among the primary sites of Fondane’s published intellectual life. The 1932 piece also established the philosophical register in which Fondane would work throughout his contributions: not literary criticism in any conventional sense, but a mode of essayistic thinking that moved fluidly between philosophy, literature, and existential provocation. Ballard himself would describe this quality, admiringly,

⁸² Benajmin Fondane to Jean Ballard, April 1, 1933, Fonds littéraires méditerranéens, Bibliothèques de Marseille, Marseille, France.

as Fondane's "primesaut," a quality of spontaneous, first-leap intellectual movement that animated his prose, all the while keeping his poetry, in Ballard's estimation, at arm's length.⁸³

The title of the 1932 piece provides its method before the reader has encountered a single argument: Heidegger on the path of Dostoevsky, the philosopher of "Being" routed through the novelist of suffering and underground consciousness. Fondane is already indicating that this is not going to be a conventional reception of an up-and-coming German philosopher in a French literary magazine. The routes in question are not those of academic philosophy, not the paths from Kant to Husserl to Heidegger that the history of philosophy would conventionally trace, but rather the routes that run through novels, the underground men and epileptics and murderers and saints of nineteenth-century Russian fiction. Fondane's argument, detailed across twenty pages of energetic, if dense, prose is that the Heidegger of the 1929 lecture "Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?" proceeds not from Kant but from Dostoevsky: that beneath the systematic philosophical apparatus of *Sein und Zeit* and its surrounding texts there is a Dostoevskian inheritance that Heidegger himself would not acknowledge: an understanding of human existence as constituted by anguish, by the encounter with nothingness, and by the impossibility of standing comfortably inside reason's house. Where Kant had built a philosophy on the secure foundation of the transcendental

⁸³ Benjamin Fondane, "Sur la route de Dostoïevski: Martin Heidegger," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, July 1932.

subject, Dostoevsky had sent his characters into the basement of that subject. Heidegger, in Fondane's reading, goes into the basement too, but then, at the crucial moment, recoils before the abyss that Dostoevsky had opened.

To "recoil before the abyss" is the piece's primary claim. But how are we to understand such a posture? For Fondane, whose philosophical orientation had been decisively shaped by his friendship with Lev Shestov, the Russian-language Jewish philosopher who had introduced him to Ocampo in 1928 and whose work constituted the most sustained philosophical influence on his thinking, the fundamental question of philosophy was not "what can we know?" but "what happens to the human being when knowledge fails?" Shestov's existentialism, drawing on Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and the biblical tradition, held that the great rationalizing systems of Western philosophy, from Plato through Kant and beyond, were elaborate mechanisms for avoiding precisely the question that genuine human existence posed most insistently: the question of suffering, of injustice, of the particular, unrepeatable human life that no universal law could adequately address. Philosophy, in this view, was consolation masquerading as truth: a way of making the unbearable bearable by assimilating it to a system and thereby avoiding the confrontation with the abyss that genuine thinking requires.

Fondane's claim about Heidegger is that he comes closer to the abyss than any previous systematic philosopher; that angst, "Sein-zum-Tode," the confrontation with nothingness that structures the existential analytic of Dasein in *Sein und Zeit* are genuine philosophical recognitions of the ground that Dostoevsky had been

exploring in fiction in the prior century, but that he ultimately retreats from it by continuing to seek, even within the recognition of existential anguish, a philosophical foundation that would make that anguish legible as a structural scar rather than an open, bleeding wound. Heidegger makes a being of the abyss, in Fondane's formulation: he turns the irreducible particularity of human suffering into a general structure of "Being" and in doing so performs exactly the philosophical move that Shestov had identified as the evasion of genuine thought. The existential analytic of *Dasein*, however far it has traveled from Kant, is still, for Fondane, a system, and systems, however sophisticated, remain in the domain of solace. Philosophy, as Fondane would articulate it explicitly in his later work, "begins where the 'I know' has come to a stop; where one must fight against the 'I know' and that, be the price what it may, and even if the price be the martyrdom of reason."⁸⁴

The argument Fondane is making in 1932 is an argument about the relationship between systematic philosophy and the kinds of human experience that systematic philosophy consistently fails to address: suffering, injustice, and the particular life that cannot be subsumed into the universal. This is, implicitly, an argument that the margins of philosophy—the underground, the abyss, the basement where some of Dostoevsky's characters live—are as philosophically serious as the edifice that tries to ignore them. And *Les Cahiers du Sud*, a literary

⁸⁴ Benjamin Fondane, "Sur la route de Dostoïevski: Martin Heidegger," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, July 1932.

magazine published in a gateway city that the national French cultural establishment had long overlooked, was precisely the kind of institutional space in which such an argument could find a home. The magazine's location at the margin of the French cultural field was not incidental to its hospitality toward a philosophical argument about the significance of what systematic thinking excludes.

Between 1932 and 1939, the year he inaugurated "La Philosophie vivante" column, Fondane's contributions to *Les Cahiers du Sud* developed the existential and philosophical line established in the Heidegger piece across a sustained engagement with the major figures of this intellectual constellation: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky again but this time on his own terms rather than through Heidegger, Nietzsche, Bachelard, Jankélévitch, and Queneau. The sequence of contributions should read as the working thought of a philosopher building toward the two major published works that would define his mature œuvre: *La Conscience malheureuse* (1936), a collection of articles developing his existential thinking back to 1929, and *Faux traité d'esthétique* (1938), in part—and this is directly relevant to Ballard's own 1940 defense of poetry—a reclamation of the independence of poetry from ethical, aesthetic, and political impositions. Fondane's philosophical arguments resonated with the argument Ballard was making through his editorial choices: both sought to refuse the reduction of the literary or philosophical work to a function it did not intend to serve, both insisting on the irreducibility of certain kinds of attention and experience to the demands of system, program, or ideology.

In May 1939, *Les Cahiers du Sud* published an editorial roundtable that sought to address the European political crisis accelerating at a rapid clip. The participants were asked to respond to a piece written by Jacques Bénét titled “Avec des Cartes truquées,” “With Rigged Cards.” Bénét’s article, which opens with the line “Les Démocraties? Des idées chrétiennes devenues folles!”, “Democracies? Christian ideas gone mad!”, is an attempt to recenter religion, specifically Christian religion, as the conceptual framework most adequate to understanding the catastrophe at hand.⁸⁵ His argument, rooted in a reading of the French Revolution as a socio-cultural shipwreck, holds that the diminished role of religion in modern European life is the primary cause of the political disorder threatening to engulf the continent. Six respondents were invited to reply: Gaëtan Picon, André Chastel, Jean Grenier, Pierre Missac, Roger Secrétain, and Benjamin Fondane. Their responses ranged across political, aesthetic, and philosophical registers, but none was quite like Fondane’s.

The roundtable format itself is worth better understanding before considering in detail Fondane’s contribution. It is, structurally, one of *Les Cahiers du Sud*’s more ambitious ways of addressing the major and quite devastating socio-cultural shifts taking place. This form enacts, rather than merely advocates for, the kind of maintained tension over easy resolution that Ballard’s “centriste” philosophy encouraged. By inviting a debate rather than penning an editorial, the magazine

⁸⁵ Jacques Bénét, “Avec des cartes truquées,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, May 1939, 400.

refused the demand for ideological cohesion that the political atmosphere of 1939 was pressing with increasing urgency. The six respondents were not expected to deliver or reflect a given posture. Their competing claims and disagreement, it appears, were the point. The roundtable holds open a space of multiple, incompatible orientations in the face of a crisis that was demanding everyone participate and engage. It also, notably, includes Fondane in a conversation that is explicitly about Christianity and democratic politics: a conversation in which Fondane, as a Romanian-born Jewish philosopher living in Paris under increasing threat from the racial politics, has a stake that none of the other participants share in quite the same way. The editorial decision to include him is itself significant. Ballard was not organizing a conversation among people who all occupied the same relationship to the crisis. He was insisting on the presence of someone for whom the crisis was not only intellectual but also existential.

Fondane's response, titled "L'homme devant l'histoire ou du bruit et de la fureur," was a unique blend of philosophy, literary analysis, and contemporary commentary whose title is worth unpacking. "Man Before History, Or, the Sound and the Fury," places man before history, or man in front of history, or man confronting history. This title conveys a posture that is neither that of the historian who masters and narrates the past nor that of the political actor who claims to shape the future, but of the human being who stands in front of something that exceeds them, that they cannot fully comprehend or control, that arrives with the force of the incomprehensible. The subtitle, "du bruit et de la fureur," the sound and

the fury, insists on a literary reference drawn from Macbeth's speech on the meaninglessness of life, and deploys it as a description of the political crisis itself: not a moment of historical clarity in which forces and causes can be cleanly identified, but a moment of noise and rage in which the very categories of historical understanding fail.

He begins with a meditation on the difficulty of the task at hand, the challenge of "concluding" a debate whose stakes exceed the available vocabulary, before pivoting to the epigraph that opens Bénét's article, a line attributed to André Gide: "Ce n'est pas drôle de jouer dans un monde où tout le monde triche," "It's no laughing matter to play in a world where everyone cheats..." Where Bénét wants to explain the crisis through the decline of religious authority, a diagnosis that implies a cure, namely the restoration of religion's social function, the Gide epigraph names something more elemental and less easily remedied: a collapse of the conditions of legitimate play itself, a world in which the rules have not merely been broken but have been rendered fictitious. If the crisis were merely a matter of having abandoned Christianity, then returning to Christianity, or at least to the social order Christianity had previously underwritten, would be a coherent response. But if the crisis is a matter of the rules of the game having been transformed and rigged, then no restoration of any particular set of rules can address it because the problem is not which rules one plays by but the fact that all of involved are now aware that rules are selectively applied rather than rigorously adhered to, that the game could have been different, and that the claim of any particular set of rules to natural

authority has been permanently undermined. Fondane also alters Gide's quote ever so slightly, adding to the sentence "en commençant par moi-même," "beginning with me."⁸⁶ This adjustment is crucial for Fondane as he understands that "tout homme triche qui, énonçant une proposition à caractère général et universel, trouve le moyen de s'en excepter...", "...every man cheats when he states a proposition of a general and universal character and finds a way to exempt himself from it...."⁸⁷

This is the argument that Fondane develops across his contribution to the roundtable, and it is an argument whose roots run deep into the philosophical work he had been producing and publishing in *Les Cahiers du Sud* since 1932. The encounter with Heidegger's "abyss," the engagement with Kierkegaard's "martyrdom of reason," the Shestovian insistence that genuine philosophy begins where the "I know" has come to a stop: all of this is mobilized, in the 1939 piece, as a framework for understanding a political crisis that a conventional vocabulary of politics and religion cannot adequately address. Bénet's Christian diagnosis fails, in Fondane's reading, for the same reason that Heidegger's existential analytic fails: it proposes a framework that can contain the crisis, give it a legible shape, and point toward a resolution. What Fondane saw in the gathering catastrophe of 1939 was something that resisted containment: an historical moment in which the human being was genuinely "devant l'histoire," confronting something that exceeded every

⁸⁶ Benjamin Fondane, "L'homme devant l'histoire ou le Bruit et la Fureur," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, May 1939, 441.

⁸⁷ Benjamin Fondane, "L'homme devant l'histoire ou le Bruit et la Fureur," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, May 1939, 441.

available framework for comprehension, including the frameworks of reason, religion, and political ideology that the roundtable's other participants were variously deploying.

Fondane had been meditating on this situation for some time before the roundtable provided him the venue to address it directly. His 1935 undelivered speech, "L'écrivain devant la révolution," written for the *Congrès international des écrivains pour la défense de la culture*, the great Popular Front intellectual mobilization that took place in Paris from 21 to 25 June 1935, had already established the basic coordinates. The *Congrès* had attempted to mobilize writers across national and ideological lines in defense of culture against fascism, but Fondane's undelivered speech called into question the key terms of that mobilization. He was quite obviously not opposed to the antifascist cause; his biography made his opposition to fascism a matter of survival rather than simply political affiliation. But he was suspicious of the writer who subordinates his work to the collective program, wary of the humanist rhetoric that many members of the *Congrès* deployed, and dubious of André Gide specifically: he was skeptical of the humanism Gide espoused and of the merits of playing to a crowd, twin aspects of the *Congrès* that he explicitly attacked in his text. The 1939 roundtable, with its Gide epigraph and its demand for a concluding response, returns him to exactly this terrain: a public intellectual debate in which he is asked to contribute to a collective argument, and in which his response is, characteristically, to question the foundational premises of the argument rather than to simply advance within its

given terms. As we shall see, the undelivered 1935 speech contains in embryonic form many of the central ideas that would be developed more fully in his two major philosophical publications, *La conscience malheureuse* (1936) and *Faux traité d'esthétique* (1938).⁸⁸

By 1939, the political situation that had been simmering since the events of February 6, 1934, where there was an attempted right-wing coup, had reached a point of crisis that could no longer be managed through careful positioning. The February 1934 events, the “Veterans’ Riot,” triggered in part by the Stavisky affair, in which an embezzler and confidence man with extensive ties to the French government became the focal point of violent right-wing unrest, had crystallized the deep fractures within the Third Republic, bringing to the surface the intersection of economic insecurity, corruption, and political polarization that would define the decade’s trajectory. For someone like Fondane, who had been experiencing severe aggression in the face of unabashed nationalism since his childhood in Iași, these events in France carried a particular and uncomfortable resonance. The experience here was not abstract. It was, for him, the same crisis in a different language, playing out on a different stage, which is precisely what gives his 1939 roundtable contribution its peculiar combination of analytical distance and existential urgency. The “man before history” of the title is not a generic philosophical subject. He is, among other people, Benjamin Fondane himself, a recently French-naturalized

⁸⁸ Benjamin Fondane, *La conscience malheureuse* (Verdier, 2013); *Faux Traité d'esthétique: Essai sur la crise de réalité* (Non lieu, 2023).

Jewish intellectual living in Paris in the spring of 1939, watching the sound and the fury approach.

Fondane's relationship with *Les Cahiers du Sud* deepened considerably in 1939, the same year, not coincidentally, that the European political crisis reached its most acute point before the war's formal outbreak. That year, he contributed a regular column for the magazine titled "La Philosophie vivante," "Living philosophy," a title that was itself a philosophical proposition: not philosophy as a discipline conducted in the ivory tower, but philosophy as a practice of thinking conducted in proximity to literature, to politics, and to the irreducible pressures of historical life. The column was Fondane's own invention, not an assignment Ballard issued but a conceptual contribution Fondane brought to the magazine: an expansion of the editorial project's scope from within, by one of its most committed contributors.

"La Philosophie vivante" was a space of both deep analytic work and social relevance. It served as a claim against the dominant institutional understanding of philosophy as a discipline: against the university and against the "perennis philosophia" that Fondane had explicitly rejected in his formulation of what genuine thinking required. Living philosophy as opposed to what? To dead philosophy, to philosophy that had become a museum of solved problems and established positions; philosophy that proceeded by the orderly application of established methods to new materials rather than by the confrontation with what genuinely resists comprehension. The column's title announces what the 1932

Heidegger piece had sought to engage: a commitment to philosophy as a form of encounter with the genuinely difficult rather than a technology for domesticating difficulty into a system. That this commitment found its home in a literary magazine in Marseille rather than in a Parisian one is not without surprise. Living philosophy, in Fondane's understanding, could not afford the institutional distance that the university and its journals maintained from the pressures of historical life. It needed to be where the pressure was: in a magazine that was publishing Faulkner and Senghor and Simone Weil, that was maintaining its editorial plurality under censorship, and that was refusing to become an instrument of any single program even as such programmatic forces were multiplying around it.

What makes the column's existence particularly salient is what Fondane chose not to do. Despite receiving offers from the rival review *Fontaine*, an Algiers-based literary magazine that would become one of the most important French language literary publications during the Occupation years, publishing writers who could not appear elsewhere under the censorship regime, Fondane maintained his column at *Les Cahiers du Sud* through the war. This was not a trivial loyalty. The wartime context made editorial choices consequential in ways that peacetime publishing did not: a writer's continued association with a given magazine was legible as a statement, however indirect, about where one's intellectual solidarities lay. Fondane's fidelity to *Les Cahiers du Sud* during these years is evidence that the relationship with Ballard was not merely professional but something more profound

and intellectually intimate. That said, despite his commitment, Ballard was unimpressed with Fondane's poetry.

Le Mal des Fantômes was not a minor or marginal project. It was Fondane's major poetic undertaking, the work he had been composing and revising since at least the initial 1929 Atlantic crossing to Buenos Aires, when the first sequences were written aboard the *Mendoza*. The poem's title, alternatively the "sickness," "sorrow," or "evil of ghosts," refers to a condition of suspended existence: not quite alive, not quite dead, belonging to a world that is no longer fully present while also unable to fully leave it. By 1943, when Fondane was pressing Ballard most insistently for some form of its publication, the poem's existential metaphor had acquired a literal dimension that gave it an urgency no editorial preference could have anticipated. As a Jewish intellectual living in occupied Paris, Fondane was himself existing in a condition not entirely unlike the poem's title: legally stripped of rights and protections, dependent on French colleagues and connections for a precarious continuation of his intellectual life, and suspended in a situation whose outcome he could not predict. To have such poetry refused by Ballard in these circumstances was not merely a literary disappointment. It was a refusal of the most serious work of a man who was, whether he knew it or not, running out of time.

What the correspondence reveals is the power dynamic latent within even the most friendship-oriented editorial relationships. Fondane needed Ballard in a way Ballard did not need Fondane: not personally, but institutionally. *Les Cahiers du*

Sud were one of the primary platforms through which Fondane's intellectual work reached a French-language public, and the column he had invented there gave him a form of regular presence in the literary world that his precarious wartime situation might otherwise have denied him. To have that same platform refuse his poetry, the work he considered his most meaningful contribution, was not merely a professional disappointment. It was a form of partial erasure, administered by someone who simultaneously valued his prose. The meridional network, this episode reminds us, was not a space of uncomplicated solidarity. It sustained contradictory relationships simultaneously, including ones in which the same editor could champion a contributor's work in one register while denying it in another. The network's generosity had aesthetic, intellectual, and interpersonal edges.

Benjamin Fondane was arrested by the Gestapo on March 7, 1944. He was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was murdered in October of that year. He was fifty years old. The poem "Le Mal des Fantômes," whose publication Ballard had resisted during Fondane's lifetime, appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud* posthumously in issue 268, October-December 1944: the poetry finally arriving in the magazine's pages after the poet himself could no longer see it there.⁸⁹

The decision to posthumously publish this work must be read carefully, because it is not one thing. It is, first, an act of editorial mourning: a belated recognition that what had been withheld in life could be offered, at least, as an

⁸⁹ Benjamin Fondane, "Le Mal des Fantômes," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, October 1944, 121-131.

elegy. It is also, unavoidably, an act that cannot be separated from its own belatedness: the poem appears because Fondane can no longer contest its terms; can no longer insist on the full collection rather than the editorial selection; can no longer arrive at the Vieux-Port office to press his case in person or by way of letters. The generosity of posthumous publication is real, but it is a generosity that costs nothing to the one who extends it and everything to the one who might have received it.

The poem itself, now that it can be read in the pages of *Les Cahiers du Sud*, demands the attention that Ballard's resistance had long withheld. "Le Mal des Fantômes" is a poem about suspended existence: about the condition of being not quite present in a world that is no longer quite one's own, of belonging to a reality that has become spectral, not through death but through the preliminary stages of erasure that precede it. The ghosts of the title are not the dead but the not-yet-dead who have already been stripped of the marks of the living: rights, recognition, and the simple ability to move through the world without threat. Reading the poem in its posthumous publication context, October 1944, when the liberation of France was underway and the full scale of the deportations was beginning to become legible, is to read it in the light of its own terrible completion. If the translation is "sickness of ghosts," it was not a metaphor.⁹⁰ It was a description of what had been done to the

⁹⁰ The poem's title has never officially been translated as such, though "sickness" could certainly be a possibility given the content of the poem.

poem's author, and to the hundreds of thousands of others who had shared his condition.

And yet to read the posthumous publication only as tragedy would be to miss something that I argue we need to maintain despite the pain. *Les Cahiers du Sud* were not only a site of mourning but also a site of resistance, and in 1944, publishing the work of a murdered Jewish poet was itself a statement of considerable significance. Ballard's magazine had survived the Occupation by navigating the "Liste Otto," the major list of banned authors and texts in by the Vichy authorities, and the larger censorship apparatus. Within that latitude, Ballard had continued to publish figures who appeared on the banned list, maintaining the magazine's commitment to intellectual plurality under conditions that made such plurality genuinely dangerous. The posthumous publication of Fondane's poem belongs to this longer record: a magazine that had refused the poetry in peacetime finding, in the ruins of the war, a reason to publish it at last.⁹¹

There is one further dimension worth naming. The poem that finally appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud* had been gestating since at least the 1929 Atlantic crossing, when Fondane first traversed the Atlantic aboard the *Mendoza*. The dateline "à bord du *Mendoza*, le 30/VII/29" with which this chapter opened finds its terminus here: a poem that began at sea, between continents, in the first of many of the meridional encounters Ocampo had made possible, arriving in print in Marseille

⁹¹ Benjamin Fondane, "Le Mal des Fantômes," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, October 1944, 121-131.

in the aftermath of the poet's death. The meridional network sustained this poem across fifteen years of crossings, correspondences, columns, disputes, and finally murderous silence. That it survived at all, that it reached the page, even posthumously, even imperfectly, is something substantial.

Before leaving Marseille, what did *Les Cahiers du Sud's* wartime continuity represent? Ballard's magazine published without interruption from its offices on the Cours du Vieux-Port throughout the Occupation, navigating censorship, and the progressive tightening of the cultural atmosphere in the southern zone, while remaining, as the foregoing pages have shown, a genuine site of intellectual plurality and resistance. This historical reality is not a minor fact and, in fact, becomes a significant one when set against the claim, advanced most forcefully by Roger Caillois in his editorial framing of *Lettres françaises*, that French culture required external rescue during these years: that the "rayonnement" of French thought could only shine from without. Caillois's claim is not without merit, and Chapter Three takes this self-description seriously. But it is also, at least in part, a claim that erases what was happening simultaneously in Marseille: a quite modest man working as a customs official by day, editing a literary magazine of significant cultural significance by night, refusing to stop publishing, refusing to choose a side, refusing to simply stop. The "rayonnement" Caillois identified from the outside was already underway, quietly, from within.

Conclusion

The relationship between *Les Cahiers du Sud* and *Sur* was never formalized. And yet the archive is full of suggestive possibilities: overlapping networks, shared contributors, mutual awareness, and at least one documented case of a text migrating between the two magazines across the Atlantic, carrying the meridional axis in textual form even in the absence of any institutional structure to support it.

The earliest documented evidence of contact between the two magazines is the letter Fondane wrote to Ballard on April 1, 1933, asking him to send copies of recent issues to various associates and friends. Among the names on the list was Victoria Ocampo, her Buenos Aires address written out carefully beside her name, with a marginal note in Fondane's hand: "je crois que vous n'avez pas encore vu cette très belle revue argentine," "I don't believe you have yet seen this very beautiful Argentine magazine."⁹² Fondane is not proposing a formal editorial relationship: he is simply, in the manner of someone who moves easily between worlds, introducing two people he thinks should know about each other. But the introduction, however offhand, is itself a meridional act: a Romanian French-language Jewish poet writing from Paris to an editor in Marseille about a magazine in Buenos Aires, drawing a triangle across three continents with a small message.

Whether Ballard acted on his advice, whether he sought out *Sur*, subscribed, corresponded with Ocampo, the archive cannot conclusively establish at present. What it does establish is that Ocampo's name continued to appear in the *Les*

⁹² Benajmin Fondane to Jean Ballard, April 1, 1933, Fonds littéraires méditerranéens, Bibliothèques de Marseille, Marseille, France.

Cahiers du Sud correspondence in subsequent years, directly and indirectly. Contributors like Fondane wrote to Ballard stating explicitly her name and the name of the review, carrying the Buenos Aires magazine's identity into the Marseille office as an ambient presence. The two editorial projects remained in each other's peripheral vision, connected by the network of contributors who moved between them, without ever meeting directly.

The most significant documentary evidence of the *Sur-Les Cahiers du Sud* connection, however, is not a letter or a voyage but a text. A preface Fondane wrote to his "conversations with Chestov," the Russian existentialist philosopher Lev Shestov, whose introduction to Ocampo had precipitated Fondane's first Buenos Aires invitation in 1929, was published by Victoria Ocampo in Spanish translation in *Sur* in July 1940, appearing in issue 70 under the title "Sur las orillas del Iliso." Seven years later, in the first half of 1947, the same text appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, titled "Sur les rives de l'Ilissus. Fragments," published at this point posthumously. The same Fondane text, in two languages, in two magazines, on two continents, separated by seven years and by the entirety of the Second World War, including Fondane's own murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1944.

The Shestov preface is worth dwelling on as the argumentative keystone of this connection. It demonstrates, in concrete archival terms, that the *Sur-Les Cahiers du Sud* relationship was not merely a matter of shared contributors but also of shared texts: specific pieces of writing that existed, across time, in both magazines' pages. The meridional network was not only a network of people and

correspondence. It was a network through which texts themselves traveled, accruing new contexts and new readers as they moved. That this particular text was a preface to conversations with Shestov, the philosopher who had introduced Fondane to Ocampo and set the entire meridional chain in motion, gives the migration an almost novelistic quality of circularity. The text that arrived posthumously in Marseille in 1947 carried within it the trace of the encounter that had made both magazines part of Fondane's world in the first place.

One question the archival materials raise but cannot fully answer is why this connection has remained unacknowledged in any substantial way. Why did Ballard and Ocampo, made aware of each other's existence by at least one shared contributor as early as 1933, never formally recognize the relationship that their overlapping networks seemed to be building toward? The unsatisfying answer at this point is that we do not know. Several explanations are possible: logistical difficulty, the interruption of the war, the administrative burden of running two independent publications on two continents. Another, less charitable, is social prejudice. Ballard's failure to reach out to Ocampo directly may reflect, at least in part, the casual misogyny of the milieu on both sides of the Atlantic. Ocampo, for her part, may well have had prejudices of her own, including a well-documented penchant for cultural supremacy that was likely dubious of cultural forces that lacked certifiable prestige. What the archive does allow us to say, with some confidence, is that the absence of formal acknowledgment did not prevent the

connection from being a documented one. The evidence assembled here builds the case that *Sur* and *Les Cahiers du Sud* were part of the same meridional world, whether or not their editors ever exchanged a single word.

CHAPTER THREE

The *Normalien* of the Plains: Roger Caillois's *Lettres Françaises*

“People said that one well-known French writer fell on his knees before her [Victoria Ocampo], crying out that he would not get up until he received the twenty or thirty thousand to start a literary review...As for me, that French writer's approach to Mrs. Ocampo seemed to me to be the healthiest and most sincere of the lot, but I knew from the beginning that, not being known in Paris, I couldn't extract a thing from here, even if I were to kneel there for months.”

Witold Gombrowicz⁹³

Introduction

In 1935 a twenty-two-year-old French writer and thinker born in Reims, Roger Caillois, published his first book, *Procès intellectuel de l'art: Exposé des motifs* (*Art on Trial by Intellect: An Explanatory Statement*). The publisher was the same Marseillais *peseur-juré* and editor Jean Ballard who was a central figure in the previous chapter. At forty-one pages, this document served as both a letter of formal farewell to his participation with André Breton and the surrealists as well as an introduction to his geographically vast and intellectually prolific career. Caillois's publication begins with a preface, an open letter to Breton, describing the reasons for his desired departure.⁹⁴ Jean Ballard printed forty copies on Holland

⁹³ The Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz is likely referring to Roger Caillois, though it is impossible to confirm with exact certainty since he intentionally omits the name. As a writer of great talent, Gombrowicz was invited to the inaugural voyage of a then new maritime route established between Poland and Argentina. Gombrowicz, like Caillois, found himself unable to return to Europe choosing to stay in Buenos Aires throughout the war. *Witold Gombrowicz Diary*, p. 165. Odile Felgine, Caillois's French language biographer, also suspects Gombrowicz is referring to him, though she flatly denies Gombrowicz's characterization of events. *Roger Caillois*, p. 211.

⁹⁴ Here Caillois writes to Breton: “Until now, my sense of solidarity has been strong enough grudgingly to defend all of this [surrealism] against outside attacks, however well-founded. That is why I had unhesitatingly accepted the clannish ethos of surrealism. But I can no longer do so, as I disagree all too openly about the very basis of our accord.” The story, so often referenced it has

paper; Caillois funded the print run on his own account. The text's subtitle leverages procedural language, while the title itself only confirms the legal stakes. The young man's rhetorical impulse is to lay out his case, as a lawyer might. According to Jean Baubérot in his preface to Lionel Moutot's *Biographie de la revue Diogène: Les "sciences diagonales" de Roger Caillois*, the outcome of the quarrel that led Caillois to leave Breton's movement was heated without, in the end, being acrimonious. The reason, he suggests, was about age: "Caillois est un tout jeune normalien d'à peine plus de vingt ans quand Breton, qui approche la quarantaine, le reconnaît comme un pair et mène avec lui cette *disputatio*," or "Caillois is just a young *normalien* who is barely over twenty years old when Breton, who is approaching forty, recognizes him as an equal and leads with him this *disputatio*."⁹⁵ Caillois's departure from surrealism was also more gradual than one might expect given the directness of the prose in his first published work; he would subsequently continue to contribute articles to *Minotaure*, surrealism's premier magazine, at least through 1935.

There are two noteworthy items for my purposes here when it comes to Caillois's debut text. The first is that he chose to publish his dissent with a publisher far from the banks of the river Seine. His motivations could have been inspired by any number of impulses, including a youthful distrust and general

become mythological, is that Breton and Caillois possessed fundamentally different approaches to the Mexican jumping bean. Caillois sought to dissect it, an impulse that Breton found censurable.

⁹⁵Lionel Moutot, *Biographie de la revue Diogène: Les sciences diagonales selon Roger Caillois*. L'Harmattan, 2006, 8. A *normalien* is a student or alumni of the highly prestigious French École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris.

unease with cultural authority headquartered in Paris, especially in the circles of the avant-garde where his status was both being shaped and questioned. This also could have simply been the result of a certain expedience: Ballard was frequently happy to engage new and upcoming promise, and Caillois, as a young and not-yet established intellectual, might have simply needed someone like Ballard to publish this initial text whereas others in the French capital would not. Whatever the reason, Ballard's literary enterprise on the Vieux Port of Marseille was instrumental for this precocious young talent. The second, perhaps more important, element worth thinking about is that Ballard's decision to enter into a publishing contract for this work was the beginning of a multi-decade long relationship between him and the soon to be co-founder of the Collège de Sociologie who would contribute many articles to *Les Cahiers du Sud* over his lifetime. It was a key meridional moment operating within a single national frame. To recall, the meridional as I've been theorizing it and using it here is a mode of cultural circulation that runs along a north-south axis rather than radiating outward from a fixed metropolitan center. *Les Cahiers du Sud*, though published far from the center of cultural authority, will play a crucial role in the development of a major centripetal figure in the larger 20th century evolution of French thought and letters. It would prove to be meridional in another crucial way, as well: this relationship will eventually connect both Buenos Aires and Marseille, not via Paris directly, but by way of Ballard's editorial openness to a young, up-and-coming mind

who would eventually find himself exiled on the banks of another river, those of the River Plate.

Caillois's increasing misgivings regarding the surrealists likely resonated with Ballard. Though he, too, initially engaged with the movement, especially by way of André Gaillard (discussed in the previous chapter), the Surrealists became more and more ideologically oriented under the influence of their "pope," André Breton. Though Ballard's and Caillois's sympathies shifted course, such an affinity between the two should not be overstated since each of the two objected to different aspects of the movement's evolution. Ballard's distance was by this point both aesthetic and political. Alain Paire notes that while remaining faithful to Joë Bousquet and several other of Gaillard's friends, *Les Cahiers du Sud* drew further and further away from surrealism over the course of the 1930s.⁹⁶ Ballard was sensitive to the movement's lack of equilibrium and penchant for posturing. Such volatility was contrary to his demeanor. All the while his ultimate aim was simple: the continuation and development of his literary review irrespective of both popular and avant garde trends as well as a healthy dose of skepticism regarding political binarism. Refusing to situate the magazine on the right or the left of the political spectrum, for example, was, for him, a condition of survival as much as a matter of principle. Caillois's objection, on the other hand, was born of a methodological discrepancy that ended up being insurmountable. What he could not accept was a

⁹⁶ Alain Paire, *Chronique des Cahiers du Sud*, (IMEC, 1993).

movement that treated certain phenomena as protected from explanation, and his open letter articulates this point plainly: knowing what makes the bean jump doesn't threaten its mystery; access to such knowledge will only reinforce the mystery. Ballard declined political alignment while Caillois declined an epistemological exigency. While these two postures are distinct, they do share a consequential commonality: both outlooks regard orthodoxy with suspicion.

Caillois's break with surrealism will, for Breton and his larger movement, become more critically consequential as his intellectual and cultural stature grow while his academic promise will only continue to blossom. In 1936 he sat for and passed the *agrégation de grammaire*, a national and highly competitive examination with a fixed number of places. While Caillois was not uncritical of orthodoxy at this stage, he also continued to pursue its markers of status. Ballard's distancing himself from the movement was also consequential, but for other reasons. Though he had no high-level academic credentials and lived far from the cultural center, his talent and intellectual dynamism allowed him to engage with both up-and-coming talent as well as already established writers.

I start with this biographical background detail and bit of publishing history to help set the stage for Caillois's eventual wartime editorial project of his own:

Lettres françaises, or *French Letters*.⁹⁷ Caillois's participation in publishing as a

⁹⁷ It is important to distinguish Caillois's Buenos Aires-based magazine from a magazine of the same name being published in occupied Paris. Jacques Decour, the magazine's co-founder, will not live to see the first issue as he is killed by firing squad by the Nazi occupiers on May 30, 1942. His co-founder Jean Paulhan, former head of the *Nouvelle revue française*, will escape the same fate thanks to the intervention of a founding member of Ocampo's magazine *Sur*: Pierre Drieu la Rochelle.

contributor with inter-war magazines, including *Les Cahiers du Sud*, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, *Acéphale*, and *Minotaure*, gave him a broad sense of the function and potency of these magazines to push critical and cultural discourse. The power of these platforms became all the more important during the Second World War where they served as a crucial place of intellectual resistance and cultural survival. Of the three magazines examined in this dissertation, *Lettres françaises* does not yet have a single scholarly study dedicated to its history and legacy in any language.⁹⁸

Lettres françaises were, in many editorial respects, like the other two magazines I have examined during these crucial moments leading up to and during the Second World War. Once the war officially begins, each of these magazines was committed to the liberation of France as well as desirous of a space for French culture and letters to be expressed without fear of censorship. Conceived and edited from Buenos Aires with major financial and editorial assistance from Victoria Ocampo, plural in its contributors, working across idiomatic and cultural divisions, and sharing a network of writers, it is hard to distinguish his magazine from the other two we have already examined.

Despite these similarities, *Lettres françaises* did have several distinguishing traits. Where the other two publications have a more capacious (even sometimes playful) sense of critique, *Lettres françaises* registered as a bit more self-conscious,

⁹⁸ The scholar who comes closest is Annick Louis, an Argentine-born France-based university scholar. She has published several articles on *Lettres françaises*. See bibliography.

even rigid. As Ocampo later related to Caillois via letter in 1943, Jacques Maritain and his wife found that his magazine “...est très bien mais un peu sèche et un peu dure, parfois, dans ses critiques...[ils] trouvent que l’esprit des *Lettres françaises* est trop genre Paulhan et NRF [*Nouvelle revue française*,]” “...is very good but a bit dry and sometime harsh in its critiques...[they] find that the spirit of *Lettres françaises* is too much like Paulhan and the NRF [*Nouvelle revue française*.]”⁹⁹ This reference to *Lettres françaises* being more like the prestigious Paris-based literary magazine is curious since it also reveals Maritain’s own subtle critique of the reputable magazine. Maritain seems to also suggest here that Paulhan’s magazine may be similarly self-aggrandizing. It is also worth noting that *Sur*’s reputation among critics has historically been compared with the same publication. This all the while *Les Cahiers du Sud* remained for the most part critically marginal, though perhaps less so then than now. This rather frequent impulse to use the French national capital as the cardinal point of reference is an interesting gesture that seems to miss a great deal of Ocampo’s larger project with *Sur*, however. Certainly, Ocampo is fascinated by France and Paris in particular. This fascination, though, does not dominate her entire publishing enterprise despite how some of her critics have characterized her approach. While she certainly published leading European figures during the first two decades of the magazine’s existence, she also published

⁹⁹ Odile Felgine, *Correspondance: Roger Caillois, Victoria Ocampo* (Stock, 2022), 186.

work from both North and South America as well as work within Argentina that was intellectually unorthodox.

To get a sense of Caillois's project, how it resonated with and differed from the other two publications, I will provide a series of seven close readings of all the pieces he published in the magazine's pages. This will allow us to get a sense of Caillois as a thinker and writer and will also allow us to compare his editorial positions and evolution within the context of what we have already seen in the cases of Ballard and Ocampo. We will discover that some of these same essays that appeared in *Lettres françaises* sometimes also appeared in the other magazines as well, adding to the rich meridional tapestry I've been weaving. Such an approach, of course, is by no means an exhaustive study of the magazine's ultimately modest life span when compared to the other two, technically twenty issues from 1941 until 1945, with one additional issue published in 1947. Such a comprehensive study of Caillois's magazine still has yet to be done in any language. For the time being, however, what follows will add to the scholarship currently being produced, above all in French and Spanish.

"Pour une esthétique sévère," No. 1, July 1941¹⁰⁰

In the first issue of *Lettres françaises*, Roger Caillois contributed a text titled "Pour une esthétique sévère," "For a severe aesthetic," one of what I would identify

¹⁰⁰ Roger Caillois, "Pour une esthétique sévère," *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1941, 33-39.

as two guiding editorial manifestos for the journal. Though its prose is heady and abstract, the overarching message is clear: the artist must recognize that while there exist unexpected and troubling works that command respect through their seemingly spontaneous charm, one must not be seduced by these “facile” treasures that on the surface appear to require no effort. Caillois argues that if a writer is to produce work that achieves truly dazzling effects, this same writer must find a stoic balance that is both receptive to the call of beauty while disciplined enough to choose “not to respond” to such a work’s easier, more intoxicating lures.

This aesthetic demand is rooted in Caillois’s vivid and rather visceral biological metaphors for the imagination that underscore a seductive yet ultimately ephemeral nature. He describes spontaneous or “automatic” art as “calices rutilants,” “rutilant calyxes,” that bloom magnificently above a “marsh of fermentation.” To Caillois, these wonders are deceptive and temporary; they exhale a “cadaverous odor” because they are eventually detached from the “root” of the subconscious and, having little substance, quickly return to the mud from which they sprang. He contrasts this with a “rigorous alchemy” and a “firm will,” asserting that true intellectual success is brought about only through the process and patience that turn raw “minerals” into refined “jewels.”¹⁰¹

Philosophically, this “severe aesthetic” represents yet another rebuke that is likely aimed at surrealism. This piece echoes his 1934 break with André Breton,

¹⁰¹ Roger Caillois, “Pour une esthétique sévère,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1941, 36.

where Caillois rejected the “marvelous” in favor of rigorous analysis and observation. For Caillois, the Surrealists sought to celebrate the “easy treasures” found in dreams and the subconscious. Here, halfway across the world where surrealism did not hold the same socio-cultural power, he used the pages of *Lettres françaises* to champion an intelligence “deeply in love with truth” and the precision of form. He viewed the abdication of intelligence to that of the senses as an “inexpiable betrayal” of the spirit. In other words, he restaged the 1930s *disputatio* with Breton, who only continued to grow in cultural significance throughout the war years and beyond.

Such an insistence on rigor was not merely an artistic preference but was deeply tied to Caillois’s identity as a sociologist and his reaction to the wartime confusion that was all around him. As the only “*normalien*” on the subcontinent who had passed the *agrégation de grammaire*, Caillois brought a sense of duty, yes, but also a bourgeois disposition and academic authority to his exile in Argentina. His call for a “severe aesthetic” mirrored his political notions regarding a “spiritual elite” or “clerisy.” He believed that just as art required a “singular law” to organize chaos into “vast edifices of knowledge,” the recovery of Europe from Hitler’s systemic presence required a disciplined, aristocratic defense of culture against the “anarchy” of many modern social and cultural movements that were thriving on weak and underdeveloped premises.

However, this intellectual severity came at a cost, as some viewed its presentation and rigor as contributing to the journal’s reputation for being rigid and

alienating. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, some of Caillois's contemporaries, including Jacques Maritain, found the publication to be "a bit dry and a bit hard," noting that it sought to occupy the vacuum of prestige left in the wake of collaborationist takeover of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. By emphasizing the negative side of criticism and maintaining a cold, analytical tone, Caillois asserted an authority that could easily be perceived as national exceptionalism and pretension, contrasting with the more capacious and geographically flexible cultural vision held by his patron, Victoria Ocampo, not to mention the *peseur-juré* Ballard who published the young man's initial piece of writing.

Ultimately, this inaugural meditation captures the erudite Caillois at a crossroads at the start of his American journey and subsequent metamorphosis. The piece frames artistic life and the pursuit of knowledge as an "endless combat" between the seductive, spontaneous calls of nature and the demanding structure of the human spirit that is more akin to geology than the beautiful though ultimately ephemeral flora. While he would later be "shaken" by the vast, naked landscapes of Patagonia—leading him to become a "writer despite himself" who valued lived experience—this first articulation in his magazine remains a testament to his belief that the honor of the spirit and its fruits is found in the triumph of discipline over chance.

This piece also appeared in *Les Cahiers du Sud* two months earlier in May 1941 and took the Seneca quote that appeared as an epigraph as its title: "Vigilantis Narrare Somnia" or "To Tell the Dreams of a Waking Man." In a letter to Caillois,

Ballard confirms that this piece was well received by his colleagues at the Vieux Port and hence his desire to publish it “en belle place,” “in a good location.” He writes that “ce qui est bien c’est cette orientation [dans le texte de Caillois] soit conforme à ce qu’exige une probe conscience d’écrivain qui dans la confusion de ce temps ne veut plus qu’une chose : être sincère avec soi-même, voir clair dans ses pensées,” “what is admirable is that this orientation [in Caillois’s text] aligns with the demands of an honest writer’s conscience, one that, amidst the confusion of the times, desires only one thing: to be sincere with oneself, and indeed clear in one’s thinking.”¹⁰² This praise for Caillois’s severe aesthetic resonates with Ballard likely due to the confusion and harsh realities in Marseille at this moment. Ballard reads Caillois’s message not through the lens of bourgeois exceptionalism, but rather as a text that calls for a return to honesty and hard work. Like Caillois, Ballard was also not entirely convinced of surrealism, though he and Caillois would certainly disagree on the status of poetry, a genre that was of particular interest to Ballard and the entire editorial team at *Les Cahiers du Sud*.

“Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger” No. 2, October 1941¹⁰³

Caillois’s article “Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger,” “Duties and Privileges of French Writers Abroad,” appeared, oddly, in the second

¹⁰² Jean Ballard to Roger Caillois, July 15, 1941, Fonds littéraires méditerranéens, Bibliothèques de Marseille, Marseille, France. In this letter Ballard also indicates another hemispheric node of connection, with the poet and translator Edouard Roditi who was then in Kansas City.

¹⁰³ Roger Caillois, “Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1941, 1-4.

issue of *Lettres françaises*. I describe it as odd since the piece reads as a sort of straightforward manifesto for the editorial project of the magazine, a summary of its larger aims and intentions, the kind of writing that usually accompanies an inaugural issue of a magazine to help set the stage for the reading public. Of his editorial project, he writes: “Elle [la revue] veut servir, indépendamment de toute préférence ou sympathie personnelle pour les hommes et pour les écoles, les écrivains restés en France. Elle fera son possible pour qu’aucun fossé ne se creuse. Elle entend manifester non seulement du respect et de la compréhension, mais encore un esprit d’obéissance envers ceux qui en France font preuve de vigilance et de courage,” “It [the magazine] seeks to serve those who have remained in France, and to do so irrespective of any preference or personal liking for specific writers or movements. It will do whatever it can to prevent the emergence of any divide. It aims to express not only respect and understanding but also a spirit of obedience toward those who are proving their vigilance and courage in France.”¹⁰⁴ Such an ecumenical disposition is, according to Caillois, a calling of paramount significance given the historical moment. The extremity of the conflict unfolding in Europe and elsewhere across the world does not allow for equivocation: “La fidélité à leur égard [écrivains français en France] oblige au contraire chacun à s’engager et à prendre parti,” “On the contrary: our loyalty toward them [French writers in France] obliges

¹⁰⁴ Roger Caillois, “Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1941, 3.

each of us to be committed and to take sides.”¹⁰⁵ This position, which resonates directly with *Sur*’s position, is certainly one of anti-fascism, anti-occupation. But what are we to make of Caillois’s relationship to a certain French exceptionalism, a sort of nationalism that one can already sense in this message of solidarity? This question, whose answer is not entirely clear cut, will be discussed in more detail later.

Though Caillois’s position as described here is a laudable one, such a practice proved more arduous and inconsistent, especially given the circumstances of the war and the nature of communications at this historical juncture. Jean Ballard’s *Les Cahiers du Sud*, which was published consistently throughout the war as we know, was reviewed by Caillois’s magazine only in four issues, definitively stopping in April 1942 (the last issue reviewed was that of September 1941). Given that his magazine would serve as a champion for those writers and editors still in France during this horrific moment, what could be the cause of such a sudden break in critical attention to one of the leading journals of the southern “free” zone? One possible explanation is that Caillois and the editorial team behind *Lettres françaises* simply did not find much value in the pages of Ballard’s magazine. It should be noted that many of the remarks made in these reviews could be rather harsh (“analyse trop subjective,” “conte de mince substance,” “poème plus remarquable par ses promesses que par ses apports présents”) indicating that

¹⁰⁵ Roger Caillois, “Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1941, 3.

solidarity would not preclude strict intellectual judgements.¹⁰⁶ Not all of the commentaries that appeared in his magazine were resoundingly negative, of course, and a number were critically encouraging. Though we cannot rule out an outright dismissal of the magazine from Marseille by the international group on the River Plate, it seems unlikely given the long-established relationship between Ballard and Caillois, a relationship that will continue after the war. After the Spanish language version that appeared in *Sur* in 1939, Ballard was the first to publish Caillois's French language version of the essay "La Plaine" (March 1942), even before it appeared in *Lettres françaises* (April 1942). Such proximity during these initial years of the war makes it even more curious as to why, during this moment of upheaval, Caillois would suddenly cut his critical consideration of the magazine.

Returning to the question of exceptionalism and nationalism, Claudine Frank, in her introduction to Caillois's editorial pronouncement in *The Edge of Surrealism*, her edited volume of his writings, notes that "*Lettres françaises* was fundamentally hostile to any celebration of French nationalism." She cites the magazine's review of Henri Focillon's article "Fonction universelle de la France," where the editors wondered "s'il ne convient pas de laisser faire par les autres de tels éloges [de la mission civilisatrice de la France]," "whether it would not be more appropriate to let such praise [of the civilizing mission of France] be voiced by others," and offers this appraisal as proof of the magazine's anti-nationalist

¹⁰⁶ Roger Caillois, *Lettres françaises*, July and October 1, 1941. "Analysis too subjective," "a story of little substance," "poem more remarkable for its promises than its outcome."

commitments.¹⁰⁷ While it is true that such assessments may point to an editorial aversion to nationalism, there are also editorial indications that not everything stemming from the French nation was rebuked. Though Caillois's initial distrust of French nationalism is not a secret given the nature of the conflict, I contend that Caillois harbored a particular strain of French nationalism by way of its unique "universalist" self-image, perhaps not so dissimilar from Focillon's in fact, despite the terse assessment of his discourse presented to the larger New York City public in 1940 at Carnegie Hall.¹⁰⁸ This version of a more benevolent and reason-based nationalism is present throughout his "Devoirs et privilèges" in various ways, including the very title where one's duty is not to some abstract notion of French language and culture. While a surface reading of the magazine's editorial positionality can appear anti-nationalist given its location in exile, it might be more prudent to read Caillois's aversion to nationalism not as an outright rejection of French nationalism writ large but rather of a particular brand of nationalism promoted by Vichy and those who would tarnish the reputation and grandeur of the true heritage of the French Republic.

¹⁰⁷ Henri Focillon (1881-1943) was a French art historian and Director of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon. Like Caillois, he found himself in exile in America at the outbreak of the war, though he was in the United States. He was, from the record, far from a nationalist. In fact, he advocated for many of the same things as Caillois and Ocampo during this moment.

¹⁰⁸ [See here](#) for a link to the program that took place on December 20, 1940.

Two images in this piece deserve more consideration. The first is the “fossé,” the “ditch” or “trench,” that the magazine will do everything possible to prevent from opening. It is a defensive and territorial image, and an odd one for a publication whose stated concern is culture not warfare. What it describes is not a difference of opinion but a more profound territorial cleavage, a gap that might widen between two bodies of writers who ought to constitute a single front. The second, and perhaps more revealing for my purposes here, is *obéissance*. Caillois does not write that his magazine will show solidarity with those who remained in France, nor that it will collaborate with them, nor even that it will defer to them on particular projects or questions. He writes that it will manifest a spirit of obedience. Respect and understanding are listed separately and precede it, which indicates that obedience is meant to be understood perhaps as something stronger. It is a significant word for an editor to apply to his own enterprise, and it establishes, in the second issue of a magazine barely three months old, a hierarchy in which Buenos Aires occupies the subordinate position and Paris, though occupied, standing in as a metonym for France, retains the authority to which obedience is owed. The magazine does not propose itself as a place where French letters might be further developed. It proposes itself as a place where they might be safeguarded on someone else’s behalf.

The same logic governs the essay’s most memorable image. Those French writers living abroad who are, in Caillois’s terms, “free” must feel themselves bound

by an invisible chain and must prevent it from going slack. The metaphor is, to say the least, complicated. A chain connects, of course, and the emphasis on keeping it taut insists that the connection remains a felt constraint. But a chain is also an instrument of confinement, and the writer abroad is figured as tethered to something both literal and abstract. Liberty, according to this account, is not the condition that makes the exiled writer useful. It is the condition that makes his obligation possible.

Archival materials from the Fonds des Cahiers du Sud, the major repository at the Bibliothèque Alcazar of all materials related to the Marseille-based magazine, confirm that these commitments were formulated with care, while they also indicate that the essay had a target more specific than its title suggests. Writing to Jean Ballard from Buenos Aires on 14 September 1941, on *Sur* letterhead, Caillois described this piece then in preparation for the forthcoming issue. He gives its title in an order the reverse of the published one, as “Privilèges et devoirs des écrivains français à l’étranger,” and summarizes its argument as an insistence that such writers are under “l’obligation d’être attentif à tout ce qui vient de leurs amis en France et de le relayer,” “the obligation to be attentive to everything coming from their friends in France and to relay it.”¹⁰⁹ He then supplies a motive. He has written the piece, he tells Ballard, “[p]arce que je n’apprécie pas trop l’attitude de certains, en Amérique du Nord, vraiment trop dégagée, pas assez

¹⁰⁹ For all its independence, Caillois’s magazine was, in the end, a subsidiary of *Sur*. It did not possess its own letterhead and relied heavily on the administrative resources furnished by Ocampo.

fidèle,” “[b]ecause I do not much care for the attitude of certain people in North America, really too detached, not loyal enough.”¹¹⁰ There are two details to unpack here. The first is the inversion of the title between September and October, which places duties before privileges. Certainly, a small editorial decision, but one that ultimately redistributes the larger argument toward obligation. And the essay, which reads as a general meditation on the situation of the writer in exile and what *Lettres françaises*’ editorial aims and objectives were, was also perhaps a polemic directed at the French literary establishment located in New York. What appears in print as a statement of principle also harbors a rebuke and opens the possibility that these tensions he is describing in the piece were not exactly abstract.

It is precisely at this level, of principle stated and practice diverging from it, that the essay becomes difficult to read in a coherent manner. Caillois acknowledges that a great many writers remain at work in France, but characterizes their production as reduced to whispers. In the paragraph immediately following, he describes writers who can neither speak nor act, delegating others to do so in their place and according to their intent. The two propositions are not strictly incompatible, since some may be silenced while others push to publish, and I have no wish to force him to choose between them. But the order is telling, because the second version supplies precisely the warrant the first would reject. Writers abroad can be delegates only if there are principles capable of delegating, and these

¹¹⁰ Roger Caillois, “Devoirs et privilèges des écrivains français à l’étranger,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1941, 3.

principles must reach them somehow. What Caillois cannot easily identify is the middle case, where writers in France are neither silenced nor speaking through intermediaries but publishing on their own account, in their own country, in reviews that appeared without interruption throughout the war. His own formulation elsewhere in the essay, that the book and journal notices in *Lettres françaises* do not differ from those currently appearing in France but are “merely clearer, as their role demands,” concedes the existence of such publications while relegating them to a lower rank. The claim is not that France is silent; it is that Buenos Aires, specifically Caillois’s magazine, is engaged in the same work, only better.

This is where the question of nationalism, which I alluded to above, appears, and it is also where the difficulty of situating and explaining such an impulse is located. French republican nationalism, since the Revolution in 1789, has been able to characterize itself as something other than the “nationalism” we understand in a more contemporary sense, because it claims for the nation not a particular inheritance of blood or soil but the custody of something universal, some might argue revolutionary even. On such an account the diffusion of French culture is not the advancement of a “national” (re: ethno-religious) interest but the extension of reason and right, and the vocabulary of “rayonnement” follows naturally. Such an inheritance should be projected and considered for its promise. Read in this light, the review’s objection to Focillon is narrower than Frank allows. The editors do not

deny that France has a universal function. They wonder whether it would not be more fitting to let others say so, namely perhaps Caillois and his magazine.

“La Pampa” No. 4, April 1942¹¹¹

Roger Caillois’s brief essay “La Pampa” was originally published in Spanish by Victoria Ocampo’s *Sur* in September 1939. A few years later in April 1942, Caillois decided to revisit the text and publish it in French in his magazine *Lettres françaises*. The French language translation also appeared inside the free French zone one month prior in *Les Cahiers du Sud*. This text, therefore, appeared in all three magazines and sits at a fascinating crossroads of pre- and subsequently early-war intellectual exile. The text presents itself as a highly personal, heroic meditation on stoic self-discipline, where a displaced soul finds a metaphysical purity in the infinite monotony of a landscape we assume to be the titular “La Pampa.” Yet, when read from the outside, through the deconstructive lens of a critical cultural history, the essay reveals something more ideological. It acts as a sophisticated rhetorical mechanism that strips, dislocates, and ultimately appropriates the South American geographical space known as “the plain,” converting a concrete territory (likely unfamiliar to most European readers) into a silent, non-reciprocal *tabula rasa* designed to host the exiled European intellect. By juxtaposing these two readings, one being Caillois’s metaphysical reflections against

¹¹¹ Roger Caillois, “La Pampa,” *Lettres françaises*, April 1, 1942, 1-3.

a deconstructive critique, we can trace how such vocabulary of heroic asceticism serves as the necessary aesthetic mask for a complex geopolitical displacement. In his exiled need, Caillois's response is one of self-discipline and control at the expense of a more supple, intellectually curious possibility.

As a philosophical text, the essay begins with a spatial awakening: the infinite, empty repetition of the flat "plain" communicates an "ivresse lucide," "lucid intoxication," that prompts the human soul to seek a "destin dépouillé," "stripped-down destiny." To help contend with this geographical void, Caillois invokes the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides, characterizing the ground as "...indivisible, homogène et, comme l'Être qu'imaginait Parménide, sans licence d'exister nulle part différent ou inégal," "...indivisible, homogeneous and, like the Being imagined by Parmenides, without license to exist anywhere different or unequal."¹¹² In an existential reading, Parmenides serves as a poetic amplifier, transforming the physical horizon into a direct, unmediated confrontation with the absolute.

However, beyond the essay's dominant philosophical register, another framing reveals that Caillois's metaphysical abstraction dissolves a real, inhabited place, rendering it into a space of pure categorical thinking devoid of specificity. One can arrive at such a reading simply by interrogating the title of the piece itself. In Spanish, "La Pampa" is immediately geographically locatable, especially for readers in South America. Shifting readership from a Spanish language audience to a

¹¹² Roger Caillois, "La Pampa," *Lettres françaises*, April 1, 1942, 1.

French/international one, the title's meaning risks losing the physically locatable site familiar to the Spanish-language audience. Caillois's decision to keep the Spanish title seems to suggest he understands the importance of the actual physical location to which the noun refers. This dislocation, though, is further exacerbated in the French language version published in *Les Cahiers du Sud* when Ballard chooses to translate the title to French, "La Plaine." Though the definite article "la" should help readers understand there is something specific about this plain, without the linguistic cultural context, one could easily read that such grammatical specificity is in the service of a metaphysical reading. Though such a stripping of place is likely in keeping with Caillois's larger rhetorical construct and goals, denuding La Pampa of its physical place might also be reinforcing certain hierarchies. In fact, beyond the title, the body of the essay contains no landmarks or geographic points of reference, leaving the French reader with a landscape in retreat if not entirely abstracted. By asserting that the land is "sans licence d'exister nulle part différent ou inégal," "without license to exist differently or unequally elsewhere," Caillois uses Parmenides to erase the concrete territory entirely, ensuring that the land cannot belong to any one individual in particular and where there is "...nul site en ce parfait espace," "no site in this perfect space."¹¹³

In Caillois's metaphysical rendering, the plain's physical austerity is a moral virtue. He praises an ascetic soil that is "sans visage ni parure," "without face or

¹¹³ Roger Caillois, "La Pampa," *Lettres françaises*, April 1, 1942, 2.

adornment,” “pauvre de séductions,” “poor in seductions” and entirely cleared of “tous les pièges de la douceur,” “all the traps of sweetness,” such as the shade of woods or “delicious” river currents. Any physical irregularity, such as a sharp ridge, is perceived as a “rebellion” that the distances quickly subdue, forcing the land back into “rank and discipline.” The harsh, vast landscape demands a tough style, matching “le masque de bronze des héros,” or “the bronze mask of heroes” that conceals and oppresses the secret, internal fire of the soul.¹¹⁴

Yet, looking closely at this descriptive language reveals that Caillois’s vocabulary—“parure,” adornment, “séduction,” seductions, “charme,” charm, and “fatuité,” vanities—is drawn directly from the lexicon of a literary critic assessing style rather than a traveler observing a terrain. The plain’s refusal of natural “vanities” is not a geographical description at all, but rather a veiled manifesto for prose without ornament. The landscape is valued precisely because it withholds itself, serving as a clean, rhetorical blueprint for Caillois’s severe style and directly anticipating his militant prewar campaigns against poetry and “facility,” though such barbed critiques of poetry will evolve if ever so slightly.

At the essay’s ethical center, Caillois demands a severe psychological match for such ascetic terrain: “Il faut à ce sol ascétique un homme au cœur dur et sans attente: rien à recevoir et tant à donner, combien à imposer s’il est besoin, à faire partager de force,” “This ascetic ground requires a man with a hard heart and no

¹¹⁴ Roger Caillois, “La Pampa,” *Lettres françaises*, April 1, 1942, 2.

expectation: nothing to receive and so much to give, so much to impose if need be, to make others share by force.”¹¹⁵ Facing this infinity, the rider who surrenders to the vast pedestal seeks no external comfort. He leaves the encounter as a “monarch without subjects of an imperishable empire... founded only within oneself.” Literally, this represents a lonely, heroic victory of self-governance and responsibility over anarchy and internal chaos.

A more culturally critical examination, however, reframes this “ascetic ground” as an act of non-reciprocal appropriation. Historically, European and North American intellectuals (such as Hermann Keyserling and Waldo Frank) visited South America where they explored a discourse of “regeneration,” casting Europe as spiritually depleted and the “New World” as a telluric, primordial reservoir of vital energy. According to this previous critical dynamic, the European is the passive debtor of the land’s replenishing force. Caillois explicitly rejects this telluric transaction, dismissing the “humid imagery of the tropics” and its offer of natural “convoitise,” or “greed.” While this refusal is perhaps less immediately condescending than traditional European discourses of primitivism and primal energies, Caillois’s vision of “La Pampa” doesn’t necessarily achieve a more culturally sensitive outcome. By demanding an “infecund” plain with “nothing to receive,” Caillois also eliminates the possibility of a mutually respectful exchange. The land is reduced to a “whetstone rather than a spring,” serving as a mere

¹¹⁵ Roger Caillois, “La Pampa,” *Lettres françaises*, April 1, 1942, 2.

instrument or “pure occasion” for a European recovery that is entirely one-sided, leaving the metropolitan-periphery hierarchy untouched.

The text reaches an apex of poetic humility in its final line: “Je rends grâce à cette terre qui exagère tant la part du ciel,” “I give thanks to this earth that so exaggerates the share of heaven.” To read it literally, we understand this as a sincere gesture of gratitude from a traveler humbled by a landscape that shrinks itself to prioritize the spiritual sky above. But a critical reading reveals this sentence as the ultimate structural skeleton of the entire essay. Caillois does not thank the plain for what it actually is, but rather for its capacity for self-effacement, silence, and emptiness. By shrinking its own physical presence, the ground “exaggerates” the sky—symbolically clearing an empty frame to be occupied, dominated, and written upon by the displaced European intellectual.

It is precisely this that Hellen Ferro will remind us of in 1953 in the pages of *Les Cahiers du Sud*. His understanding of this dynamic would identify it as an accusation rather than a compliment. What France established in Argentina, on his account, was “le seul impérialisme qui n’a pas été repoussé mais au contraire a été accueilli avec égard et reconnaissance,” “the only imperialism that was not repelled but on the contrary was received with deference and gratitude.” France exports its culture, he writes, and takes little interest in who receives it: “Elle donne, mais ne reçoit point,” “[France] gives, but does not receive.”¹¹⁶ Spiritual imperialism,

¹¹⁶ Hellen Ferro, “Le Sentiment Français et le Nationalisme Argentin,” *Les Cahiers du Sud*, January 1954, 187.

whatever that might mean in Ferro's formulation, is the regeneration topos described from the receiving end. That Caillois would answer such a critique fourteen years later with a catalogue of French translations, French anthologies, and a French series, *La Croix du Sud*, he himself directed is a matter I take up in the conclusion of this chapter.

As I close this section, one question worth addressing that we are likely unable to answer in any satisfactory way: why did Caillois decide to resurrect this piece from his first months in Argentina years prior and place it before French language readers in the spring of 1942? One possible answer is circumstantial: he was editing a quarterly magazine mostly single-handedly, as he complained to Ballard in September 1941, and an existing piece from that time might provide readers with the larger context for his absence from hexagon. Another possible answer lies in what such an unearthing likely required. A meditation on the pampa, composed by a recent arrival and subsequent exile, published in Buenos Aires for readers who knew the referent, becomes in French a meditation on emptiness as such, addressed to readers who are likely unable to locate it. The placename is present in the hemisphere that contains the place and absent in the hemisphere that does not. Whether that decision was Caillois's or Ballard's I have yet to establish, and further detailed research of the correspondence may help yield an answer. What can be said is that the essay's central proposition, that an emptied ground is valuable because something arrives in it, is legible in 1942 as more than an aesthetic claim.

“Situation de la poésie,” Nos. 7-8, February 1943¹¹⁷

Caillois published “Situation de la poésie” as the introductory essay for an issue of *Lettres françaises* dedicated entirely to contemporary French poetry. His relationship to poetry was always fraught, ambiguous at best. In the 1930s, in fact, much of his critical approach to poetry could easily be described as outright hostile. Fundamentally suspicious of what he considered poetry’s rhetorical charms and unearned power, he conceives of the genre as intellectually lascivious, specious, to such a degree that action has to be taken: “...one of the most important [tasks of our time] is to restore poetry to its proper and mediocre function, to confine to its small domain this activity which is so presumptuously invading the great ones.”¹¹⁸ Yet, while “Situation of Poetry” maintains his fundamental distrust of poetry as it is popularly practiced and received, this text marks a moment of evolution. By dissecting the failure of both romantic lyricism and the modernist quest for “pure poetry,” Caillois proposes a more severe, prose-centric alternative, an aesthetic pivot that ultimately allows him to find a profound, unexpected admiration for the poetic work of Victor Hugo and the vast, soul-inspiring work he encounters in Saint-John Perse to whom he will dedicate an entire book after the war in 1953.

¹¹⁷ Roger Caillois, “Situation de la poésie,” *Lettres françaises*, February 1, 1943, 1-6.

¹¹⁸ Roger Caillois response to an “Enquête sur la poésie indispensable,” *Cahiers G.L.M.*, October 1938, 56. The magazine’s initials stand for Guy Lévis Mano, a Greek-born editor, translator, and poet.

Caillois opens the essay by contemplating what he sees as a curious sociological phenomenon: in the wake of the 1940 defeat and the misery of German occupation, French readers and writers were turning to poetry in unprecedented numbers. Citing André Gide, he notes that, “...tant de jeunes gens comme d’autres ‘entrent en religion’ sont, eux, entrés en poésie, si tant de leurs aînés les ont précédés ou rejoints dans cette ‘cléricature,’” “...just as other young people ‘enter the religious life,’ they have entered into poetry—and so many of their elders have preceded or joined them in this ‘clerical calling.” For Gide, this poetic “clericalism” or monastic retreat was a natural psychological reaction. Observers in the hexagon reported a “foisonnement poétique,” an “incessant poetic blossoming,” since the “étrange défaite,” as Marc Bloch had characterized the events of 1940 in real time. Poetry was being devoured by a desperate public with the same avid hunger once reserved for popular biography.

From his exile in Buenos Aires, however, Roger Caillois viewed this collective retreat with a characteristically clinical, cold skepticism. His assessment reads as anxious for what such a preference “presages for letters,” harboring a deep suspicion that this sudden religious devotion to poetry is not a heroic act of resistance, but an escapist retreat, a way to seek comfort in the “refuge of hope” in the beautiful escape of words since reality itself had become too brutal to face.

Rather than pretend that he was seeking such an editorial position, Caillois states unequivocally, “...pour ma part, si c’est ici l’occasion d’une confidence, je n’entends pas grand-chose à la poésie et me suis toujours senti plus disposé à la

combattre qu'à m'y abandonner," "...for my part—if this is the moment to confess—I do not understand much about poetry, and I have always felt more inclined to fight against it than to surrender to it."¹¹⁹ This self-admitted lack of understanding is not an acknowledgment of intellectual inadequacy, but a strategic refusal of what Caillois seems to suggest is a phenomenon of poetry's complicity. Caillois's hostility is directed at what he terms "lyricism," shorthand for dishonesty and treachery. He laments that the contemporary reader is drawn to "naive confessions, forced images, and pretentious expressions." In a scathing critique of romantic spontaneity, he argues that modern poets operate under the delusion that "sincerity stands in for effort and merit," a lazy assumption that yields nothing but some "vent et de l'écume," "wind and foam." His combativeness intensifies as he assesses the formal decay of the genre. Because modern poets have abandoned classical structures such as "meter, prosody, rhyme, and caesura," structures he has already admitted he doesn't fully understand, their contributions have become virtually indistinguishable from prose. The contemporary poem, he mocks, is merely "bad prose" that maintains the illusion of poetry through an arbitrary typographical layout and a "monotone, relaxed syntax." For Caillois, this formal hollowness results in a moral failing: the writer of such work masquerades as a poet, simply deploying "the necessary disciplines of thought and style."

¹¹⁹ Roger Caillois, "Situation de la poésie," *Lettres françaises*, February 1, 1943, 2.

Caillois identifies two false paths that have for him led contemporary poetry into its state of disrepair: the romantic delusion of the prophet, and the modernist illusion of the chemist (a discipline to which he is more sympathetic, it should be noted). Let me begin with the first diagnosis, that of the poet as prophet. As poets demand less labor from themselves and surrender completely to vacant notions of “inspiration,” they inflate their social status, claiming to be mages, seers, or even minor deities. They operate under the (fraudulent) assumption that if their verses are unintelligible, they likely still contain some sort of mysterious revelation that exceeds human reason and is therefore of vital value. Conversely, Caillois attempts a critique at the more intellectual modality, most notably associated with Paul Valéry, that attempts to isolate poetry in its pure state, much like a chemist extracting a pure substance from raw, recurring matter.

Caillois argues that this attempt to engineer “la poésie désincarnée,” “disembodied poetry,” was a disaster. By stripping poetry of the narrative, moral, and intellectual weight that is conventionally shared with prose, the purists reduced the genre to its anemic, skeletal frame. The magic of a beautiful line of poetry, which for Caillois once shone so brilliantly when set against a neutral, prose-driven background, was completely extinguished when every single line was forced to be a paroxysm of pure sound and image rather than anchored in a structure. Modern, “pure,” poetry was thus judged to be an artificial, unsavory enterprise, entirely divorced from human emotion and “emptied of all substance.”

To avert such transgressions, Caillois proposes a flatly anti-romantic, “humble and trivial” reorientation of the genre. He demands that poetry be treated not as a divine oracle, but as a highly specialized, rigorous form of prose that must obey all of its laws and then some: “Je demande ainsi que la poésie possède toutes les qualités qu’on réclame de la prose, qui comprennent en premier lieu nudité, précision, clarté, et qui tendent toutes à faire qu’il n’existe pas d’écart entre la pensée et le langage,” “I therefore require poetry to possess all the qualities demanded of prose—primarily nakedness, precision, and clarity—all of which tend to ensure there is no gap between thought and language.”¹²⁰ Under Caillois’s watchful and well-meaning gaze, there is no room for the ineffable, the suggestive, or the mysterious. The poet, it turns out, must be in absolute control. Such a demand leads to a direct and unavoidable clash not just with the surrealists like Breton but also with poets like Paul Valéry, another writer who appears in all three magazines. Caillois expresses astonishment that the poet from Sète could construct a literary theory that celebrates the “ambiguity” of verse, where meaning is determined not by the author but by the whim and will of the reader.¹²¹ To Caillois, this surrender of authorial intent is nothing less than an “étrange démission,” “strange resignation” of the intellect (a formulation that makes one think of Marc Bloch’s *Une étrange défaite*, though this work would not be published until after the

¹²⁰ Roger Caillois, “Situation de la poésie,” *Lettres françaises*, February 1, 1943, 3.

¹²¹ This wartime debate prefigures the later, post-war debate about the function and role of the “author.”

war). True poetry, if such a form and genre can exist, must be a “voluntary servitude.” It must be a discourse that is entirely legible, like prose, in its intellectual precision, yet also possess “by addition” the aesthetic efficiency of formal metrics (but not music) – an absolute gain in power purchased without any sacrifice to its intellectual rigor.

How, then, does Caillois reconcile his poetic hostility with an appreciation of poets and their craft? He does so by identifying a rare class of poetry that respects the “woke spirit” and functions as an instrument of moral construction. He finds such a prime model first in the narrative poetry of Victor Hugo. Caillois points to Hugo’s untitled poem that begins “Autrefois j’ai connu Ferdousi dans Mysore” as a masterpiece of the enigmatic poetic parable. Poems like this one present vast, legendary fables that the reader intuitively knows to be true and “edifying” (a word that will return in another text we will look at a little later) even if their precise lesson cannot be entirely logically pinned down. As justification for these enigmatic signs, Caillois invokes Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic definition of beauty as “finalité sans fin,” “finality without end.” Hugo’s verses command respect because their mystery is not the result of unexamined, automatic unintelligibility but a deliberate highly structured design, a formal architecture that protects truth in the face of the unknowable.

If Hugo represents a way for Caillois to find value in poetry, his encounter with Saint-John Perse (Alexis Leger), whose poem *Exil* appeared in *Lettres françaises*, provided him a contemporary example of excellence. Caillois analyzes

Perse's poetry as a grand, sweepingly exotic cartography: "Il se plaît à peindre des coutumes étranges, des gestes singuliers, des sentiments difficilement concevables. Il en compose de vastes fresques qu'on dirait tout imaginaires et gratuites..." "He delights in depicting strange customs, peculiar gestures, and emotions that are difficult to conceive. He composes vast frescoes of them, scenes that seem entirely imaginary and arbitrary."¹²² Critically, Caillois conceives of Perse's magnificent, far-off landscapes, with their lost dynasties, religious institutions, and curious customs, not as literal, picturesque observations; rather, he reads them as interior landscapes. The "savant dépaysement" and historical distance are used as a rigorous, aesthetic solvent to dissolve everything that is merely local, historical, or temporary about the human condition.

Such geographic deconstruction to reach "l'être ductile," the "ductile being," is the exact poetic equivalent of what Caillois had performed in his essay "La Pampa." Just as he stripped the Argentine plain of its specific local markers to convert it into a Parmenidean stage for the exile's sovereign intellect, Saint-John Perse strips the world around him to construct "un pur langage sans office," "a pure language without utility." Through this severe, highly disciplined architecture of language, Perse achieves the ultimate stoic victory of exile, declaring, "Il n'est d'histoire que l'âme, il n'est d'aisance que l'âme," "There is no history but of the soul, there is no ease but that from the soul."¹²³

¹²² Roger Caillois, "Situation de la poésie," *Lettres françaises*, February 1, 1943, 5.

¹²³ Roger Caillois, "Situation de la poésie," *Lettres françaises*, February 1, 1943, 5-6.

“Situation de la poésie” is a crucial step in the evolution of Caillois’s critical and intellectual development as he makes space for a new vision that will only crystalize post-war: Caillois as literary critic. It begins with an echo of his aggressive 1930s distrust of poetry and its unearned social position but ends with an articulation of a poetry that is worthy of a reader, one that centers “voluntary servitude” like we see in Hugo and Perse. By submitting poetry to the clarity and precision of prose, Caillois does not outright assassinate the genre; instead, he saves it from what he considered to be the “delirium” of the subconscious turn. This small shift while an exile in Argentina laid the groundwork for his literary turn.

“L’héritage de la Pythie,” No. 10, October 1943¹²⁴

In October 1943, Caillois published “L’héritage de la Pythie,” “Heritage of Pythia,” in the tenth issue of his magazine *Lettres françaises*. Ostensibly a treatise on the psychological and mechanical nature of artistic inspiration, the essay is much more than a routine defense of what we might term a “classical” understanding of inspiration. Caillois seeks to explore both the role and the value of inspiration, two functions that are related but hold culturally distinct spaces. Read closely, and situated alongside his earliest contribution that we’ve already addressed, “Pour une esthétique sévère,” and anticipating his final contribution to his magazine that I will discuss later, “Actualité des Sectes,” this article seeks to

¹²⁴ Roger Caillois, “L’héritage de la Pythie,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 33-41.

demystify the role that the subconscious plays in defining and understanding inspiration. It is a rhetorical essay that argues for stripping the creative act of its romantic, supernatural aura, and bringing it under the strict sovereignty of the conscious intellect. By analyzing the essay's textual mechanics, its metaphors and its geopolitical stakes, I will demonstrate how Caillois's aesthetic policing of "inspiration" mirrors his geographic denuding of the Argentine Pampa we saw in the previous section, converting raw, wild materials into disciplined instruments of intellectual authority.

Reading Caillois's essay one encounters a customary rigorous, clinical analysis of his subject, this time dedicated to the examination of the creative breakthrough known as "inspiration." He directly attacks the myth of the "genius" whose popular definition has it that such a person's creations arrive by way of divine forces. Towards the middle of the essay he writes, "Aussi dès qu'on interroge la nature de l'inspiration, on aperçoit qu'elle ne fait jamais que restituer," "As soon as one interrogates the nature of inspiration, one notices that such inspiration only ever results from a return."¹²⁵ To insist that inspiration is only ever the reflection of labor is to push against the romanticized "miracle" of art. Caillois argues that when a poet or artist is suddenly the beneficiary of a perfect image or a musician composes a sonata while asleep, they are not receiving a gift from some supernatural muse or divine source; rather, they are receiving the delayed dividend

¹²⁵ Roger Caillois, "L'héritage de la Pythie," *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 36.

of their own prior, sometimes agonizingly conscious effort. He writes, “C’est à ses veilles qu’il doit une facilité soudaine,” “It is to his late-night efforts that he owes such sudden ease.” The “miracle of today” is merely the unconscious digestion of yesterday’s applied efforts.¹²⁶

To illustrate this biological, psychological processing, Caillois leverages a captivating and revealing physical metaphor: “Dans les eaux calmes, chaque matière suspendue descend et se dépose selon sa pesanteur. Ainsi, quand la conscience a longtemps agité ses penses [sic] en vain, il vaut mieux qu’elle les laisse aller librement et les oublie même...” “In calm waters, each piece of suspended material descends and settles according to its weight. As such, when the conscience has for a long time been hard at work and in vain, it is better to let everything go freely and even forget...”¹²⁷ This image of suspended particles subsequently organizing themselves according to the earth’s gravitational pull is quite strategic. It transforms “inspiration” from a vertical, transcendent spiritualism into something that is ultimately a horizontal: a work that settles like sediment not because of divine intervention but because of naturally occurring physical forces, a capacity to let things take their natural course. By explaining the subconscious as a quiet settling basin for conscious study and “ancient ambitions,” Caillois denies the mind’s hidden depths of their divine allure. Creative

¹²⁶ Roger Caillois, “L’héritage de la Pythie,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 35.

¹²⁷ Roger Caillois, “L’héritage de la Pythie,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 36.

breakthroughs have little to do with magic: they are simply the result of delayed intellectual promise.

The primary rhetorical target of the piece is the modern artist's surrender to the "irrational," a legacy Caillois traces back even before his break with the surrealists and into classical antiquity. He characterizes the then contemporary fascination with automatic writing and surrealist surrender as a dangerous longing to inherit the trance of Pythia, the highest priestess who, according to myth, delivered prophecy in the Temple of Apollo. Caillois writes, "C'est l'antique héritage de la pythie qu'on prétend recueillir. C'est la même voix qui montait des entrailles d'une vierge bouleversée...dont on espère aujourd'hui qu'elle fasse surgir à la lumière les remous du fleuve tout animal de sang et de désirs qui roule au fond de chacun une lave ardente et sombre," "It's the historical legacy of Pythia that we claim to collect. It is the same voice that rose from the depths of a deeply shaken virgin... whom we hope today will bring to light the turbulent currents of that river, a creature of blood and desire, rolling a dark, burning lava within the depths of every soul."¹²⁸ Here Caillois's diction becomes deliberately visceral and sickly. The voice of Pythia does not descend from Apollo; it rises from the "depths of a deeply shaken virgin," unearthing a dark, animalistic lava of repressed desires. He dismisses this surrender to raw inspiration as an "invitation to delirium" warning that those who refuse the rigorous, conscious work required to "fix and describe"

¹²⁸ Roger Caillois, "L'héritage de la Pythie," *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 34.

these forces will produce nothing but “pur désordre,” “pure disorder” and “inconsistante écume,” “inconsistent foam.”

Such diagnostic disgust for the unchecked subconscious directly echoes his biological metaphors in “Pour une esthétique sévère.” In that inaugural essay Caillois compared spontaneous, automatic art to the “rutilant calyxes” blooming over a “marsh of fermentation and mud.” These wild, uncultivated flowers are deceptive as they exhale a “cadaverous odor” because they poorly detach from their roots in the putrid rot of the raw imagination. By framing the romantic subconscious as a swamp of “decay” and “delirium,” Caillois establishes a strict hierarchy: the raw, spontaneous movement of the mind are coded as low, impulsive, and unstable, while the conscious, organizing intellect is coded as noble, masculine, enduring.

Having “demystified” the subconscious, Caillois elevates conscious resistance (reason) to a moral and aesthetic statute. He writes, “En art comme en morale, l’essentiel est de fuir la nature et de substituer à ses lois des principes empreints d’une rigueur différente. La nature est également l’ennemie de la justice du style,” “In art as in morality, it is essential to shun nature and to substitute for its laws principles imbued with a different kind of rigor. Nature is likewise the enemy of stylistic justice.”¹²⁹ For Caillois, it seems, “nature” is the ultimate enemy because left to itself it knows only “le cri et le soupir,” “the cry and sigh,” of instinct. True

¹²⁹ Roger Caillois, “L’héritage de la Pythie,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 38.

human dignity is forged in “servitude volontaire,” “voluntary servitude,” meaning the deliberate submission to rigid rules, syntax, and formal constraints that comply with the gravity of the world.

Artistic creation is depicted as an exhausting, perpetual struggle against a turbulent medium. The materials of art, whether the hardness of marble or the rigid structures of language, offer a resistance that must be tricked rather than conquered. In this struggle, Caillois admits that “accidental beauties” and “gifts of chance” will inevitably appear and surprise the artist. However, rather than celebrating these spontaneous gifts as signs of the divine, Caillois insists that they be subjected to cold surveillance. He comments, “C’est assez d’ailleurs pour que les facultés sévères qui n’ont pas eu part à leur naissance doivent les examiner avec soin avant de consentir à les adopter,” “Moreover, this is reason enough for the rigorous faculties that played no part in their birth to examine them carefully before consenting to adopt them.”¹³⁰ The surge of natural creative energy is too muddy and chaotic; it is described, in fact, as a “fleuve trop ému,” a “river too turbulent,” that must be constrained by dams, dikes, and canals. The role of the sovereign artist is not to flow with the river, but to engineer its containment.

To fully understand the urgency of Caillois’s hostility toward “delirium” in 1943, one might look back to his biography and intellectual formation.

Philosophically, his article is yet another set of arguments that demonstrate his

¹³⁰ Roger Caillois, “L’héritage de la Pythie,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1943, 39-40.

anti-Surrealist position. The defining anecdote of this break occurred in 1934 when Caillois proposed his particular view and approach to the question of “Mexican jumping beans” in the company of André Breton. While Breton enthusiastically celebrated the beans as a magical, poetic phenomenon that should simply defy explanation, the twenty-one-year-old Caillois remained incredulous. He insisted that one must physically dissect the beans to further understand what made them tick (which was, it turns out, the larva of a small moth.) This incident crystallized their irreconcilable approaches and ultimately asserted their particular worldviews: Breton sided with the “marvelous,” the intoxication of mystery, while Caillois pursued a method of rigorous analysis, observation, and dissection. Writing this article in exile, finally hemispherically closer to the Mexican jumping beans (while still quite geographically removed), reset the stage for their dispute where Caillois was re/performing a literary dissection of this debate within a different milieu: slicing open the beans of “inspiration” only to expose the mundane, labor-oriented mechanism operating within.

“Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” No. 13, July 1944¹³¹

Caillois’s “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante” appeared in the 13th issue of *Lettres françaises*. The text serves as the culmination of Caillois’s literary criticism that had been appearing and developing since his first piece in the first

¹³¹ Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 1-5.

issue: “Pour une esthétique sévère.” Entering its fourth year of publication, with the war raging, Caillois abandoned any pretense of editorial neutrality regarding aesthetics and literature: he possessed no patience except for “edifying literature.” Rather than advocating for narrow, preachy moralism, Caillois uses the essay to formulate an original, rigorous definition of “edification” that seeks to reroot the concept in disciplines like architecture, formal literary style, and active moral choice. As we have seen before, he seeks to make his argument using both philosophical and stylistic considerations.

Caillois seems to be fully aware of the immediate allergic reaction some contemporary readers could have had to the adjective “edifying,” which conventionally is understood as being associated with dull, conformist, or preachy writing. His attempt to reclaim such a term by anchoring it in formal design can be found when he writes, “...l’édification propre aux Lettres réside dans le style...” “...true edification of literature resides in its style...”¹³² For Caillois, a “great art” must be above all well written. Though he believes in “great art,” he rejects absolute insulation as embodied in the notion of what is known as “l’art pour l’art,” or “art for art’s sake.” Since words possess inherent meanings, their arrangements inevitably engage human intelligence and morality. To argue that an artist should only concern themselves with the technical execution of their craft is, for Caillois, a failure of human ambition and likely just as dangerous as those poets who would

¹³² Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 2.

fancy themselves mages. He compares this to a carpenter who builds tables solely to impress his fellow guild members rather than satisfying the actual users who need it for both its beauty and its function. True literature must engage the whole human experience, uniting aesthetic beauty with intellectual and moral responsibility.

Caillois draws a sharp line between cheap conformism and genuine morality. He acknowledges that modern critics often warn writers against “good sentiments” under the assumption that they produce bad literature. However, Caillois argues that this view confuses moral choice with passive obedience: “La morale n’est pas la docilité. Elle ne commence même qu’au-delà, dans le débat délibéré du bien et du mal, où il faut de la fermeté et de l’invention,” “Morality is not docility. It begins only beyond that point, in the deliberate weighing of good and evil, a process requiring both firmness and inventiveness.”¹³³ For Caillois, conformism is lazy whereas true morality is active, requiring intellectual solidity, courage, and invention. Just as Pindar’s odes or La Fontaine’s fables are not weakened by their underlying moral purpose, which indeed gives them their core meaning, great art does not suffer from moral weight. The aesthetic pleasure of style acts as a “sweetened pill” that allows the reader to absorb the underlying truth, which then acts insensibly upon their character.

¹³³ Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 4.

The most politically charged segments of the manifesto are the sections where Caillois's attacks the avant-garde, specifically Surrealism, and its obsession with provocation, scandal, and "bad sentiment." Writing in the summer of 1944 as Europe stands physically and morally devastated by the war, Caillois argues for the historical irrelevance of artistic transgression, "Considérez l'époque...vous désirez provoquer de salutaires scandales. Mais tout est scandaleux. Les bâtisses vermoulues sont écroulées. Moralement nous vivons au milieu de décombres. Va-t-on faire croire qu'il y a encore du mérite, de la vaillance dans l'immoralité?" "Consider the times... you wish to provoke salutary scandals. But everything is scandalous. The rotting structures have collapsed. Morally, we are living amidst the rubble. Are we to be made to believe that there is still merit or valor in immorality?"¹³⁴ In an era of brute force and cultural collapse, when the old social structures have already crumbled into rubble, celebrating destruction or engaging in "immoralism" is no longer a brave or radical act (if it ever was one). To posture as an immoral transgressive rebel when the world itself is already a literal scandal is, to Caillois, a naive, hollow conformism. The artist has no choice but to face the realities of their century: when the structures are collapsing, there is no honor in being an iconoclast of ruins.

Consequently, Caillois declares that there should be no "style of destruction." Iconoclasm may be a pious, even sometimes needed, posture, but it cannot produce

¹³⁴ Roger Caillois, "Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante," *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 4.

great art. To achieve greatness, the writer must build: “Pour y parvenir, il est indispensable d’édifier, dans les Lettres, dans la vie, comme dans l’architecture. On n’atteint le style qu’en construisant,” “To achieve this, it is essential to build, in literature and in life, just as in architecture. One attains style only by way of building.”¹³⁵ Caillois compares literary creation to architecture. Demolishing a building is relatively easy because the natural laws of gravity work to such ends. Building, however, requires discipline and technical knowledge of the highest degree. To build and keep a temple upright, he explains, requires an architect who must calculate, show patience, and demonstrate perseverance in the face of natural forces like gravity. For Caillois, such a struggle is the source of style. Style is not a product of spontaneous fantasy or instinct, but rather the hard-won victory of the human “will to build,” “la volonté d’édifier,” colliding with the stubborn resistance of materials, including language.¹³⁶

Caillois concludes his manifesto with an urgent if ever measured call to action that seeks to neutralize the overwhelming anxieties of the immediate political situation. Even if the future remains completely uncertain, both the artist and the intellectual must operate under the assumption that their efforts to build, to edify, a new moral, cultural, and social architecture will eventually materialize. He ends the piece by writing, “Il faut agir comme si elle [la conjoncture] était favorable; et il n’est jamais trop tôt pour bien faire,” “One must act as if the

¹³⁵ Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 5.

¹³⁶ Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 5.

situation were favorable; and it is never too early to do things right.”¹³⁷ Caillois’s magazine, *Lettres françaises*, is for him the embodiment of that “action” and “edification.”

“Actualité des Sectes,” No. 14, October 1944¹³⁸

Caillois’s final contribution to *Lettres françaises* appeared in the fourteenth issue in October 1944, just two months after the liberation of Paris in August. This text is a sort of return for Caillois, an opportunity to revisit the sociological themes of his prior work. It is also far more than that: a difficult, confessional reflection in which he looks back at his own pre-war intellectual circle—most notably his work with Georges Bataille in the Collège de Sociologie and his proximity to Acéphale, the secret group—to deliver a warning about the psychological mechanics of totalitarian submission.

Caillois begins by noting that many of the period’s finest minds and brilliant writers are deeply seduced by the idea of “sectes,” or secret societies. He dismisses the caricatures and outright childish, romantic fantasies of blood cults in national capital cities, focusing instead on serious literary works that reflect this deep-seated preoccupation. Caillois first cites Jules Romain (1885-1972) and his 1934 *Recherche d’une église*. Part of the larger epic series, the roman-fleuve called *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* that seeks to write the larger story of his inter-war generation, this

¹³⁷ Roger Caillois, “Manifeste pour une littérature édifiante,” *Lettres françaises*, July 1, 1944, 5.

¹³⁸ Roger Caillois, “Actualité des Sectes,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1944, 41-46.

particular volume explores the spiritual and moral quest of the characters Jerphanion and Clanricard and their search for meaning after the horrors of the First World War. For Caillois, Romain's characters interpret the vast sweep of human history through the hidden, decisive influence of disciplined, elite sects (Jesuits, Freemasons, and other military orders) acting discreetly at key historical moments. Caillois finds this preoccupation "étonnante," "surprising." Caillois also references another even more substantial literary figure: Thomas Mann. In Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Caillois draws attention to the figure of Leo Naphta, the Jesuit-trained Jewish intellectual who rejects liberal egalitarianism in favor of a theocratic, community society governed by a "sainte Terreur," or "holy terror," and led by an implacable hierarchy of ascetics. Supporting Caillois's larger claim, these literary representations expose a real-world fascination with escaping a mediocre, undisciplined environment by finding inspirations in these sects. Such organizations are defined by a pact of absolute solidarity and a rigorous internal discipline that demands far more of its members than ordinary society would ever ask. The ultimate goal of such a chosen minority is to establish a subtle, unseen empire over the "multitude vaine, prétentieuse et bornée qui subirait pour son bonheur esclave ce joug le plus subtil," "vain, pretentious, and narrow-minded multitude that would submit, for the sake of its servile happiness, to this most subtle yoke."¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Roger Caillois, "Actualité des Sectes," *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1944, 43.

To demonstrate how easily these elitist fantasies cross the line from bookish speculation into historical horror, Caillois traces the lineage of German National Socialism (Nazism). He begins in 1914 when German youth groups enacted a literal secession from society, wandering the roads in search of an undefined “ardor and purity.” Known as the Wandervögel Secession, this split was driven by conflicts over adult authority, the inclusion of women, and homoeroticism. As such, these secessions shattered the original apolitical hiking club into fragmented, highly competitive factions. At the conclusion of the war Caillois cites two additional phenomena, the Freikorps and the Sainte-Vehme, that sought to punish “traitors” and overthrow the fragile Weimar Republic. Caillois argues that Adolf Hitler’s movement drew its early, most potent strength directly from these fanatical groups. The “sombre mysticism,” “somber mysticism,” of these secret organizations presided over the establishment of the Nazi system. Although Hitler eventually purged these turbulent, quasi-religious elements once he secured power, recognizing that chaotic virtues useful for consolidating power are highly dangerous for maintaining it, the psychological template had already been established.

The intellectual pivot of the essay is Caillois’s striking, first-hand confession regarding the Collège de Sociologie (which he co-founded in 1937 with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris among others). Dedicated to the “sacred sociology” of closed groups—including tribal initiations, heretical sects, and monastic orders—the Collège was driven by a deep fascination with those who sought to impose “firm laws” on a chaotic world. However, Caillois reveals that several members of their

circle were not content with mere academic interpretation; they were impatient to act. Convinced that absolute will power and an unbreakable alliance could conquer any obstacle, they resolved to seal their secret pact through the ultimate, archaic rite of bonding: a human sacrifice. Caillois relates, “Dans l’exaltation du moment, rien moins qu’un sacrifice humain ne sembla capable de lier les énergies aussi profondément qu’il était nécessaire pour mener à bien une tâche immense...” “In the exhilaration of the moment, nothing less than a human sacrifice seemed capable of binding energies as deeply as was necessary to carry out an immense task.” In a surreal turn of events, Caillois recounts that it was actually far easier to find a willing, voluntary victim than an executioner.¹⁴⁰ The conspiracy ultimately fell apart due to “elementary cowardice,” a lingering doubt about the efficacy of “such a rain of blood,” and Caillois's own fierce, vocal resistance. In his detailed footnote, Caillois explicitly names this inner circle as Acéphale, the secret, headless society led by Georges Bataille, which Caillois consistently refused to join while continuing to collaborate on their public journal of the same name.

Caillois’s critique of the planned sacrifice serves as an astute psychological demystification of violence. He rejects the idea that a shared, horrific crime can magically transform the human soul or bestow an “invincible will”: “Tant il me paraissait vain de songer que l’horreur d’un forfait partagé pût opérer dans l’âme de miraculeuses transformations...” “It seemed futile to me to imagine that the horror

¹⁴⁰ The topic of “executioner” is a topic that fascinated Caillois, and this topic would serve as the main premise of one of his initial articles with *Sur*, “Sociología del verdugo.” May 1939.

of a shared crime could work miraculous transformations in the soul...”¹⁴¹ He argues that the sacrifice would have left them “hésitants et timides, plus désemparés encore criminels qu'innocents,” “hesitant, timid, and more helpless as criminals than as innocents.”¹⁴² True existential and moral strength, Caillois insists, cannot be purchased through a monstrous external ritual. It must be drawn from within the individual. To believe that a crime or a sacred anointing can magically provide courage is, for Caillois, a form of spiritual laziness, a primitive delusion that mirrors Samson believing his strength resided in his hair.

By publishing this essay in Buenos Aires in late 1944, Caillois was engaging in a vital, retrospective self-critique. He had come to realize that the “somber mysticism,” the surrender to a collective delirium, and the fascination with violent rites that defined he and his Parisian avant-garde cohort were not radical, anti-bourgeois gestures. They were, in fact, the seeds, the psychological precursors to totalitarianism. The desire of the intellectual to escape the complexities of modern society by retreating into an “order” or elites who rule over a “happy, enslaved multitude” is a dangerous temptation of the human mind. When intellectuals abandon crucial, fully aware consciousness in pursuit of “magical” shortcuts or pleasing truths or even violence, they do not achieve freedom. Instead, they pave the way for the avalanche of the totalitarian state to crush and grind entire nations and societies. His “severe aesthetic” and insistence on “edifying literature” were

¹⁴¹ Roger Caillois, “Actualité des Sectes,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1944, 46.

¹⁴² Roger Caillois, “Actualité des Sectes,” *Lettres françaises*, October 1, 1944, 46.

therefore Caillois's moral and philosophical response to the excesses that he himself also participated in. Having stood at the edge of the sacrificial abyss with Bataille, Caillois understood that the critical, vigilant mind must build "vast edifices of knowledge" to chain the monstrous, chaotic beasts of the subconscious before they escape the pages of a study and write themselves across real-world history.

CONCLUSION

On the first of March 1953, Roger Caillois wrote a rather brief, defensive letter to Jean Ballard from Paris. *Les Cahiers du Sud* was about to dedicate an issue of the magazine to an anthology of Argentine poets with an introduction by the critic Hellen Ferro under an admittedly provocative title "Le sentiment français et le nationalisme argentin." Ferro's argument was structural, cutting to the core of the transatlantic relationship. He wrote, "Sans l'avoir voulu, la France constitua en Argentine un impérialisme d'un caractère très particulier, le seul impérialisme qui n'a pas été repoussé mais au contraire a été accueilli avec égard et reconnaissance: l'impérialisme spirituel," "Without having wanted it, French imperialism has constituted a particular character, the only imperialism that has not been rejected, in fact on the contrary has been welcomed with respect and gratitude: a spiritual imperialism."¹⁴³ France, according to Ferro, gladly exports its culture but remains fundamentally indifferent to who receives it.

¹⁴³ Hellen Ferro, "Le sentiment français et le nationalisme argentin," *Les Cahiers du Sud*, January 1954, 187.

Caillois must have heard word about this issue in the works and Ferro's broader critique. Responding to Ballard before the issue was even published, Caillois's letter was defensive, pointed. He responded clinically (publishing the letter publicly in the pages of *Sur* almost nine months before Ballard's issue was published) using the growing catalog of his own translations, anthologies and magazines he had overseen, and the landmark "La Croix du Sud" series he was directing with Gallimard, as proof that Ferro's critique was unwarranted. One of his more cutting rejoinders was when he asserted that Jorge Luis Borges was better known and more rigorously studied on the banks of the Seine in Paris than on those of the Rio de la Plata in Buenos Aires, adding haughtily that he feared no contradiction on the point. Twice in the letter, Caillois told Ferro and, by extension Ballard, that they were simply "behind the times."¹⁴⁴

Read against the trajectory of his exile, this letter is not at all a departure from his wartime experience and positions; such a quarrel is, in fact, a logical evolution. The catalog of unilateral French "giving" that he offers Ferro is the exact rhetorical architecture that "La Pampa" enacted on an abstracted Argentine landscape: a soil valued precisely because it has nothing to receive and everything to give, offering a tabula rasa for a displaced monarch to found an empire. What had started in 1941 as an aesthetic argument about the suppression of poetic ornament and the dangers of Pythian inspiration, not to mention a demand for

¹⁴⁴ Roger Caillois, "Correspondencia: Francia y Nuestra Literatura," *Sur*, March 1, 1953, 125.

editorial obedience in *Lettres françaises*, arrived in 1953 as a geopolitical claim about who possesses the authority to say who was early and who is now late. For Caillois, “lateness” is not simply a description of geographic distance. It presumes a universal cultural clock, and it presumes that clock ticks from the banks of the Seine.

A deep structural irony that the letter refuses to see is that Caillois spent six years in Buenos Aires living as an exception to his own rule. *Lettres françaises* ran on Victoria Ocampo’s money, was published under her prestigious *Sur* imprint, and was largely sustained by her personal networks of writers and intellectual resources. For the entirety of the war, this “independent” French-language magazine existed in large part because an Argentine woman of letters gave lavishly to it. Caillois was, for those six years, a living disproof of the very argument he was making in his 1953 letter to Ballard. Yet, upon his return to the metropole, he quickly reoccupied the seat of cultural authority as though his South American exile had been a mere temporary interruption rather than a profound counter-argument to Paris’s claims to socio-cultural hegemony.

This is one way of reading *Lettres françaises*, particularly Caillois’s specific contributions he penned throughout the war. While *Sur* and *Les Cahiers du Sud* generated intellectual authority from their base, insisting on the periphery as a vital site of cultural production rather than a passive site of reception, Caillois’s magazine operated on a custodial model. It treated the southern hemisphere as a

temporary registry, a safe deposit box meant to keep, relay, and protect the French national inheritance until the metropole was safe to return to.

CONCLUSION

“Today Sweden turns toward a distant Latin American country to honour it in the person of one of the many exponents of its culture. It would have pleased the cosmopolitan spirit of Alfred Nobel to extend the scope of his protectorate of civilization by including within its radius the southern hemisphere of the American continent.”¹⁴⁵

Gabriela Mistral, 1945

On December 10, 1945, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, better known as Gabriela Mistral, stood before the Swedish Academy as the first Latin American laureate to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. This institutional accolade did not, however, represent a reaffirmation of the power of the cultural metropolitan center. Instead, I contend, as this dissertation has argued in relation to various other adjacent contexts, that Mistral’s rise to international prominence was the product of a similar and overlapping decentralized, meridional network. By bypassing what would have been conventional capitals of cultural consecration, Mistral’s trajectory, from a self-taught teacher’s aide in Montegrande in the Andean foothills to an internationally celebrated pedagogue and poet, serves as proof that culture doesn’t always operate centripetally. Her international achievement was not negotiated and confirmed through a singular center, but across parallel, decentered nodes of cultural and linguistic exchange.

¹⁴⁵ Gabriela Mistral, “Nobel Banquet Speech” (speech, Stockholm, December 10, 1945.)

This decentered dynamic was visible from the initial publication that marked the beginning of her public writerly life. Her first collection of poems, *Desolación* (1922,) was published neither in Santiago, in her native Chile, nor in any official Hispanophone country; rather, this Spanish-language work appeared by way of the Instituto de las Españas at Columbia University in New York City. Shepherded by the Spanish philologist Federico de Onis (1885-1966), the publication of *Desolación* demonstrated that Mistral's international legibility was possible by way of a series of dispersed intermediaries who operated outside traditional nationally oriented systems. Such networks established a pattern of lateral, meridional, circulation that would define and sustain her career over the next two decades.

One of Mistral's primary interlocutors throughout her life was Victoria Ocampo, a relationship that was fundamentally constitutive of, rather than incidental to, Mistral's literary evolution. Spanning more than thirty years of correspondence starting in January 1926, their friendship shared a similar itinerant back-and-forth across the Americas and Europe. The publication of *Tala* (1938) by Ocampo's publishing arm of *Sur*, with its proceeds famously dedicated to children orphaned due to the Spanish Civil War, cemented Mistral's global stature in the years leading to her Nobel. Their collaboration exemplified the generative capacity of an underlying current, functioning as a cultural intersection built between two peers, born on the same day one year apart, from distinct but intellectually and spiritually common waters rather than a predictable hierarchical pipeline flowing from a metropolitan center.

If Mistral's trajectory is emblematic of the heights of what the meridional network could accomplish, the life and work of Benjamin Fondane mark its limit. He was, of all the figures this dissertation has considered, the one who moved most completely through its waters: the polyglotism of his upbringing; someone invited to Buenos Aires by Ocampo in 1929 and again in 1936; a writer who published in *Les Cahiers du Sud* from 1932 onward; and one piece of his work appearing in Caillois's *Lettres françaises* during the war. No figure better embodied the lateral circulation my study has traced. And yet, the same network that bravely published his texts across three continents could not carry him out of occupied Paris. He was arrested in March 1944 with his sister Line. Both were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau later that year in October, the same month Ballard would finally publish his "Le Mal des Fantômes." The poem that Ballard had declined to publish while Fondane was alive appeared at this liminal moment between his life and death, an editorial decision Fondane would ultimately never know.

In stark contrast to these meridional flows, the metropolitan "discovery" of Mistral could only occupy a highly equivocal and retrospective position. Roger Caillois's translation of her poetry for *Lettres françaises* (1944) occurred late during his wartime exile in Buenos Aires, and he did not compile and publish a French-language volume of her work until he returned to Paris, *after* the Swedish Academy had already conferred upon her this high honor. Caillois's late intervention functioned not as an act of discovery, in this case, but as a belated metropolitan

certification of a reputation already secured elsewhere by other means. This is, in the end, the shape of Caillois's entire six-year exile in the southern hemisphere: a man who spent the war in Buenos Aires, published Fondane, translated Mistral there, and returned to Paris in 1946 not transformed by what the south had produced but positioned to bestow his authority, which was never required. Nor was this meridional network uniform or omnidirectional, as Mistral's conspicuous absence from Ballard's *Les Cahiers du Sur* attests. Such a network did not flow by way of ideological cohesion, by way of a rigorous attention to a platform; it was made possible instead by specific and interpersonal channels, affinities, correspondence, and translation.

The Nobel ceremony of 1945 was not, then, the occasion of a "New World" discovery, whatever some in that room may have believed or understood. It was an affirmation of the meridional network and decades of labor conducted up and down rivers and across oceans. When Mistral accepted the prize, her banquet speech explicitly echoed the decentralized and collective identity that had carried her to Scandinavia. Rejecting the posture of the singular, isolated artistic genius (neither Breton's nor Caillois's version), she spoke as a daughter of Chilean democracy (not "Chile"), thanked the Swedes who had aided her, and framed her presence there as the direct voice of the poets of her communities and the indirect voice of the Spanish and Portuguese tongues. In recognizing these crossings, the Swedish Academy did not invent or confirm Mistral's global relevance. It affirmed a status already forged by a vital current flowing in all directions.

The meridional, as my dissertation has employed the term, designates a mode of cultural circulation that the available critical vocabularies have not yet described as such. To reprise: influence presupposes a source and a recipient; reception renders one party passive; the language of “center” and “periphery” preserves the hierarchy it purports to analyze and call out; and exchange, however balanced it appears, still assumes two fixed poles trading across a stable axis where one projects and the other receives. What *Sur* and *Les Cahiers du Sud* demonstrate in this context, independently and by different routes, is that cultural authority is just as likely to be generated at the site of its own production rather than borrowed from a metropolitan center, and that the currents connecting such sites often run laterally rather than radially. What *Lettres françaises* demonstrated, equally instructively, is that this possibility was never a structural given. Caillois wrote and edited from Buenos Aires for six years and did not, in the end, embrace the meridional spirit that Ocampos’s project sought to, at least initially, undertake. The distinction between the two positions was a matter of editorial disposition rather than geography, and it is precisely this cleavage my dissertation has sought to bring into view.

The implications of this concept extend beyond the three magazines examined here. If cultural authority can be produced at any moment along an axis like one described here rather than originating from a particular point, then the historiography of interwar and wartime literary production should develop

adequate methods to describe circulation rather than the monarchic detritus known as succession. Paying attention to the routes texts travel, the intermediaries (sometimes the editors, sometimes the writers themselves) who carry them, and the relationships that sustain such a passage, are just as important as the metropolitan centers that blush at what they don't (yet) know. This approach seeks to disorient and read anew not only the magazines my study has analyzed and situated, but also to engage the broader field of periodicals and correspondences whose significance has often been obscured by an evaluative frame that measures (always measures) peripheral cultural production against its eventual reception at an ultimately chimeric center. The meridional described here gives language to one such axis among many that remain to be traveled.

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