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## The Construction of the Memory of Italy in Argentina through a Choice of Translated Essays

*La operación básica de la cultura argentina es la traducción.*<sup>1</sup>  
J. Panesi

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### *Abstract*

As a country of immigrants, Argentina assimilated several languages in its idiolect. The languages spoken by the majority of newcomers were amalgamated with Spanish. In this respect, the birth of Argentina as an independent nation is connected to migration and translation. In fact, in Argentina, exiled or immigrant Spanish and Italian writers earned their living primarily as translators for publishers and journals, and in many cases their work was of outstanding quality. As part of an ongoing research project entitled "Essay, cultural memory and translation in *Sur* (1931-1970)", this paper reveals a particular interpretation of Italian culture through the translations in "Sur", Argentina's most famous literary journal and an important disseminator of international aesthetic trends for much of the last century. Construction of Italian identity since the thirties in Spanish America can be observed through the careful reconstruction of the roster of writers chosen, the genres preferred, the thematic of the adaptations in the host culture and the success of the translations. *Therefore, studies on translation, especially in peripheral host regions, are an essential branch of migration studies, as they establish the link between cultural memory and the construction of the new identity.*

*Key words:* migration; Italy and Argentina; translation of essays; Italian language and literature; construction of memory

### 1. Introduction

The concept of cultural memory which supports this view of translation studies sees culture not as a stable unit, but as a dynamic process that involves differences and shortages, and requires at the end an "interested selection" carried in the translation. In this context, the critical study of translations of Italian non-fiction texts published in *Sur* in the twentieth century is still one of the least researched topics in comparative studies, but crucial to articulating the inter-cultural tradition instituted in the twentieth century between Europe and America.

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<sup>1</sup> The basic operation of the culture of Argentina is translation. Jorge Panesi. *La traducción en Argentina*. In: *Voces* 3 (August 1994), p. 2-7, p.7.

The Argentinean journal *Sur* is one of the renowned and influential journals for Hispanic literature due to its great impact in the Americas as well as in Spain and other European countries. Proof of its resilience is the publication of 305 issues between 1931 and 1966, and of another 67 issues in the following 26 years. The first issue of *Sur* appeared in the summer of 1931, and the last of its total 371 issues was published in 1992. It is therefore an almost century-long journey which reflects the most important debates from all areas of modern culture from a peripheral or Hispanic perspective.

The journal's origins go back to 1931. It is well known that the name of the new publication was suggested by Ortega y Gasset in a telephone conversation. As head of *Revista de Occidente* in Madrid, he stressed the need to build a bridge between Spain and America and to promote the systematic translation of the major European literary and philosophy works which were still unpublished in Spanish.

I will organise my argument around four sections:

- 1) *Sur*'s devotion to foreign literature.
- 2) Immigration and translation.
- 3) Brief overview of the Italian intellectual scene between the 20s and the 40s.
- 4) Cognition of Italy through translations.

As this paper forms part of an ongoing project, my approach to the issue will inevitably be partial and it will not be possible to reflect fully here the findings relating to the early period of the journal, between 1931 and 1945.

## 2. *Sur*'s devotion to foreign literature

In the introduction to the first issue of *Sur*, in an open letter of thanks to the American writer Waldo Frank, Victoria Ocampo explains that the journal's main purpose is to study the crucial problems faced by Americans, but without ignoring Europe (*Sur*, 1, 1931, p.11). In other words, Ocampo proposes a journey of discovery to America with European writers, with the journal as their meeting ground. She declares admiration for the hidden treasure in America, although only the presence, interest and friendship of the Europeans may set its course accurately.

"Letter to strangers" by Drieu la Rochelle is another letter acting as a foundational introduction in this first issue. In this essay, the French writer says:

Escritor, yo me creía atado a los que tienen ojos para leerme directamente. Pero hoy no creo ya en la necesidad. Un inmenso trabajo de traducción que apenas se inicia, muele todos los idiomas

unos con otros. Un idioma planetario se forma joven, inhábil y feo. Adiós a los bellos idiomas viejos, de fuertes raíces locales. Siento deseos de inglés, de alemán, de ruso, de español.<sup>2</sup>

Several decades later, Ocampo explains again the origins of *Sur*, in volume 303-304-305 of November 1966 to April 1967, a volume which comprised three journals:

La llegada del norteamericano Waldo Frank (el autor de *España Virgen*) a Buenos Aires, en gira de conferencias, y mi encuentro con él y con quien traducía las conferencias del nuevo amigo. El traductor, argentino de 25 años, era autor de un libro de cuentos y redactor de *La Nación*: Eduardo Mallea. Tanto Frank como su traductor decretaron que una revista tenía que nacer de nuestro encuentro. Se necesitaba.<sup>3</sup>

Not without difficulty, the idea materialized surrounded by an aristocratic air: 100 copies of the first issue were printed on bond paper, numbered and reserved for subscribers of the deluxe edition. In this issue it was named *Sur Revista Trimestral*, directed by Victoria Ocampo, with Management and Administration offices at Rufino de Elizalde 2847 in Buenos Aires, on its Foreign Board (sic) were Ernest Ansermet, Drieu La Rochelle, Leo Ferrero, Waldo Frank, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, Jules Supervielle and José Ortega y Gasset; on its Editorial Board were Jorge Luis Borges, Eduardo J. Bullrich, Oliverio Girondo, Alfredo González Garaño, Eduardo Mallea, María Rosa Oliver and Guillermo de Torre, in that order.

Thus, interest in foreign literature was linked to the existence of a Foreign Board which suggested outstanding works from the European scene. But it was also supported by an Argentinean Editorial Board educated in French, as was the case of Ocampo, and in English, as was the case of Borges, not to mention other members of *Sur*, as revealed by King.<sup>4</sup> In the 3rd issue of the journal, Victoria Ocampo writes an article ("French Words", *Sur* 3, 1931, p.7-25) in defence of Argentine readers of French literature, explaining that French was the first language of the educated elites of her generation, and especially of the educated women in her environment, as well as the language of governesses and schools, and of culture, in opposition to Spanish, against which it expresses a desire to cancel the colonial past.

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<sup>2</sup> As a writer, I felt bound to those with eyes to read me directly. But today I no longer believe in the need. A huge translation work is just beginning, grinding all languages together. A global language is starting out, young, clumsy and ugly. Goodbye beautiful old languages, with strong local roots. I desire English, German, Russian, Spanish. Drieu la Rochelle: Carta. In: *Sur* 1 (1931), p. 53-63, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> [It came with] The arrival of American Waldo Frank (author of *Virgin Spain*) in Buenos Aires, on a lecture tour, and my meeting with him and the translator of the lectures of my new friend. Eduardo Mallea, the Argentinean translator of 25 years old, was the author of a book of short stories and editor of literary magazine *La Nación* [*The Nation*]. Both Frank and his translator decreed that a magazine must be born of our meeting. It was required. Victoria Ocampo: Vida de la revista *Sur*. Treinta y cinco años de una labor. In: *Sur* 303-305 (November/April 1966-1967), p. 1-22, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> John King: *Sur. Estudio de la revista literaria argentina y de su papel en el desarrollo de una cultura, 1931-1970*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989.

For these intellectuals, it could be said that writing in America meant importing and re-evaluating Spanish as a language of culture, and discovering through new translations of foreign works that it was possible to express the new world with new linguistic tools – this is why in the first period of *Sur*, translation is continuously compared with the discovery of a hidden treasure, a new American reality.

### 3. Immigration and translation

The birth of Argentina as an independent nation is connected to translation, as Jorge Panesi recalls in his work *La traducción en la Argentina*. As a country of immigrants, Argentina assimilated several languages in its idiolect: Italian and Yiddish, the languages spoken by the majority of newcomers, were amalgamated with Spanish; but also the native languages which withstood destruction and continue evolving with vitality, Guaraní and Quechua, have also mixed, lending the language a unique tone.

In Argentina, exiled or immigrant Spanish and Italian writers worked mainly as translators for publishers and journals, and in many cases their work was of outstanding quality, among them, Roberto Giusti, Mario A. Lancelotti, Enrique Pezzoni, José Bianco and Attilio Dabaini. The presence of translators in the management of publishing houses and other cultural initiatives in Argentina was instrumental in the development and expansion of publishing companies in the interwar period and their subsequent consolidation against the Hispanic market. We will focus on three of these in particular because of their close relationship to *Sur*'s group of translators.

The first of these companies is Editorial Losada. In August 1938, Gonzalo Losada, one of the directors of Espasa-Calpe Argentina, resident in Buenos Aires since 1928, together with Guillermo de Torre and Attilio Rossi, separated from his former company and founded Editorial Losada, accompanied from the very beginning by Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Francisco Romero and Amado Alonso. Between 1938 and 1950 the production of Losada was immense, ranging from university textbooks to novels, poetry and essays. It undertook the first translations into Spanish of Sartre, Kafka, Caillois and many other authors who contributed to turning a provincial country into a cosmopolitan and polyglot one from the 1940s.

The second big publishing house founded at the time was Sudamericana, with the support of Julián Ungoiti and Antonio López Llausás. In late 1938, it was already headed by a group of Argentineans: Oliverio Lirondo, Victoria Ocampo, Carlos Mayer, Antonio Santamarina and Alejandro Shaw, among others. In their catalogues were prestigious scientific papers and books and, dating back to its beginnings, translated books. It was with this company that Enrique

Pezzoni published *El texto y sus voces* (posthumous, 1986),<sup>5</sup> a kind of literary "biography" of authors and translators linked to the group: Borges, Roberto Arlt, Alberto Girri, Julio Cortázar, Felisberto Hernández, Silvina Ocampo, Leopoldo Marechal and Adolfo Bioy Casares. In the first pages, Pezzoni writes about his work as a critic as being similar to his *modus operandi* as a translator: "*El crítico oye las voces del texto, elige unas a expensas de otras, las une por simpatías y diferencias a las que oye surgir de otros textos. Ese concierto que organiza es una literatura (de un momento, de un espacio) y también es la literatura.*"<sup>6</sup>

Two years after publishing the journal, Victoria Ocampo founded the third publishing house, Editorial Sur, an extension of the journal that helped to make contributions profitable through the publication of contemporary literature. Sur also played a leading role in the genre of essays with the translation of outstanding works of the twentieth century. The following is a brief and necessarily partial<sup>7</sup> summary of the translations published by Sur between 1933 and 1971: The German philosophers Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Max Scheler, Herbert Marcuse and Karl Jaspers; among the French, Jean Paul Sartre, Roger Caillois and Jacques Maritain. Mahatma Gandhi, Lanza del Vasto, Henry Miller, Carl G. Jung, Elemire Zolla and Denis de Rougemont were translated as well. As for translations of literature, the commitment to contemporary English literature is remarkable: Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene, Lawrence Durrell, Edward Morgan Forster, Aldous Huxley and the Irish Samuel Beckett; the French writers translated include Albert Camus, André Malraux and Jean Giono. Translations of foreign literary criticism were also contributing greatly to the development of the national aesthetic; among them, we find the controversial *Oscar Wilde: ou, La "destinée" de l'homosexuel* by Robert Merle.<sup>8</sup>

Although the financial incentive to carry out translations was significant, the degree of involvement and active participation by Italian or Italo-Argentine immigrants and exiles both in journals and publishing houses shows that translating was a way to adapt to the new American reality, especially in regard to the review of the recent past and the critique of aesthetic and political thought, as it is reflected in the themes and names of the Italian authors chosen to be disseminated through Sur. It is important to note that Italian writers who immigrated to Argentina often sought another spiritual motherland in which to seek refuge

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<sup>5</sup> Enrique Pezzoni: *El texto y sus voces*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Sudamericana, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> "The critic hears the voices of the text, he chooses some at the expense of others, and brings them together according to affinities with and differences from those he hears coming from other texts. That concert organised by him is a literature (of a time, of a space) and also literature". Enrique Pezzoni: *El texto*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete list of the titles published by Editorial Sur see: <http://bibliotraducciones.com/editoriales/sur-editorial.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Merle: *Oscar Wilde: ou, la "destinée" de l'homosexuel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955

from their own country of origin's disasters. Their mass transfer to Argentina caused the progressive Italianisation of Buenos Aires. From the process described by Borges in *El Aleph*, Jorge Panesi recalls that a new Italo-Argentine culture will emerge, at first represented by Roberto Giusti.<sup>9</sup>

Alejandro Patat stresses that the dissemination, translation and criticism of Italian literature in Argentina, as well as the constitution of the country's literary identity, cannot be understood without the migratory phenomenon by which millions of Italians settled in America. Clearly, two visions of Italy existed in this acculturation process: one of a country of high culture, birthplace of a cultural and artistic heritage; and another, of a humble and impoverished country, consisting of a shapeless mass of often poor and illiterate men and women who went seeking their fortune in Argentina. In relation to the former image of Italy, Patat states that through the magazine *Nosotros*, between 1907 and 1928, Giusti proposed in Argentina the undisputed canon of Italian poetry at the turn of the century: Carducci, D'Annunzio and Pascoli. In this way, from the earliest years of the century, Argentinean criticism made one intellectual conviction hard to erase: the idea of Italian culture as culture classicised.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the influence of Italian literature was not directly related to the great migration, but wanted to get away from it. According to Patat, criticism became primarily an operation of selection and disposal, and the critic was a humble chronicler of the past. *Sur* journal was the first to introduce an interpretation of contemporary Italian culture.

In the early days of the journal, the unique Leo Ferrero excels, of whom more later. After the war, especially after 1953, two translators stand out: Enrique Pezzoni and Attilio Dabaini. The former will lead the journal in its last period, when Ocampo was an octogenarian. He updates the vision of Italy and other countries. "We are all translators," said Pezzoni on Malraux.<sup>11</sup> He translated many books from English (Graham Greene, Nabokov, Melville), Italian (Pasolini) and French (Saint-John Perse, Lanza del Vasto) and practised literary criticism not as a compiler, but in its most immediate and strong dimension: communication, fervour and translation of meaning.

As for the dominant translation theories in the years of publication of *Sur*, Patricia Willson examines several strategies that helped to shape the image of the foreign in Argentine

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<sup>9</sup> Jorge Panesi: Borges y la cultura italiana. In: *Críticas*. Buenos Aires: Norma, 2000, pp. 153-167, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> Alejandro Patat: *Un destino sudamericano: la literatura italiana in Argentina (1910-1970)*. Perugia: Guerra, 2005, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Pezzoni, *El texto*, p.12.

literature and made translation a democratic as well as an elitist practice.<sup>12</sup> Willson focuses on three figures of the group at *Sur*: Victoria Ocampo, José Bianco and Borges, each representing different positions as translators and writers. Ocampo is seen as a romantic translator, focused on the author as a genius and a creator, so that her translations are literal, and foreign. According to Willson, Jose Bianco is almost the antithesis. For him, what matters is the work, above the author, and he produced rewritings and reformulations which tend to produce a smooth, readable prose. This would also be the view of Dabaini and Pezzoni on translation; in my opinion, the selection of works and their acclimation to Argentine tastes was the most important aim for them.

Finally, in the case of Borges, Willson describes a process of decontextualisation and re-elaboration of fragments. Borges forces himself to approach authors for whom he felt no affinity thus: "*Encarna al traductor vanguardista que interviene con ese sesgo criollista que él tenía en su juventud y que deja rastros en sus traducciones. Borges despedaza la cultura occidental y traduce sus fragmentos, logrando ser contemporáneo sin renunciar a la tradición clásica.*"<sup>13</sup>

The relation between translation and writing is essential in *Sur*. In her renowned essay *Post-colonial writing and literary translation*, Maria Tymoczko has said that translation is often a source of formal experimentation in host cultures, because translators are always adapting or importing genres and formal strategies of the source text to the receiving system.<sup>14</sup> However, in Argentina the phenomenon may be more complex because, as noted by Willson in the work mentioned above, the opposite may also occur: the translation practice may serve to strengthen current national values.

In my opinion, the choice of Italian reality made through the selection of essays to be translated may form part of this phenomenon of shaped Argentine culture of Italian origin. In effect, the values of those works imported are in striking contrast to the original Italian cultural values at the time.

#### 4. Brief overview of the Italian intellectual scene between the 20s and the 40s

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<sup>12</sup> Patricia Willson. *La Constelación del Sur. Traductores y traducciones en la literatura argentina del siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> "(Borges) embodies the vanguard translator who approaches the text with that *criollo* bias that he had in his youth and which has left its traces on his translations. Borges shatters Western culture and translates its fragments, managing to be modern without sacrificing the classical tradition." Willson, *La constelacion del Sur*, p. 154.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Tymoczko: 'Post-colonial writing and literary translation'. In: Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds.): *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Manchester: St Jerome, 1999, p. 32.



From the early twentieth century until the interwar period, the role of intellectuals in Italy undergoes a complex transformation, corresponding to the economic and social difficulties of the moment and the problems that had dogged the country since unification, which increased the differences between the industrialised North, and the South, still immersed in an agricultural landowner system of subsistence.

World War I emphasizes social instability and opens a confrontation between supporters of interventionism and the Italy referred to as *passatisti*. This confrontation contributes to the crisis of Italian institutions in the post-war period. Intellectuals then oscillate between the irrational tendencies that glorify violence and vitalism, which had fuelled military nationalism, and continued protests against what they called "mutilated victory" (as it is the case of D'Annunzio and futurism), and more traditional positions that point to the decadence of bourgeois society. It is then that Benito Mussolini comes to power with the support of many dissatisfied young people. He creates the so called *fasci di combattimento* (fascist fighter patrols), formed by reactionaries who were against trade unions and the disarray of the left-leaning parties, particularly the Bolshevik-inspired Communist Party founded in 1921.

In 1923, Giuseppe Prezzolini published a volume of letters entitled *La coltura italiana*, in which he pretends to be a foreigner residing in and well acquainted with the reality of Italy.<sup>15</sup> His letters describe the Italian cultural situation to a fellow countryman. Prezzolini identifies as characteristic of Italian culture the fact of having a rich literary tradition, but one that is only known to a few cultivated men, and understands the need to educate the middle class, so that the number of participants in the cultural transformations of the time would be increased. Something that features heavily in this book is the role of newspapers and journals, the development of the publishing industry and the rise of cinema, for the author a real revolution.

Like Prezzolini, most Italian writers reveal the tension between fascism and the frustration of a middle class in search of a path between nationalism and social radicalism. The resulting social imbalance and disenchantment cause massive waves of emigration to America. At the same time, many intellectuals' references are the Catholic and liberal culture propagated during the unification process. This causes a relative and elitist distance from politics, characteristic of figures as influential as Benedetto Croce, and most academics.

While the political situation allowed, intellectuals sided with two opposing groups: the first and bigger group around Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), who in April 1925 publishes *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti*,<sup>16</sup> and the second group led by Croce, who signs *Una risposta di*

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini: *La coltura italiana*. Firenze: Soc. An. Editrice La Voce, 1923.

<sup>16</sup> Giovanni Gentile: *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti*. In: *Il Mondo*. 21 April, 1925.

*scrittori, professori e pubblicisti italiani, al manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti* (A response of writers, professors and publicists Italians, to the manifesto of Fascist intellectuals) in May 1925.<sup>17</sup> The rest choose silence, opting for the shelter of marginalisation.

In this socially and politically turbulent context, journals channel both positions in a particularly dramatic manner. Among the pro-fascist journals are U. Ojetti's *Pegaso y Pan; Il barghello* based in Florence, which provided a platform for debate, and the more orthodox *Gerarchia and Critica fascista*, the former led by Mussolini and the latter by minister Bottai. Among those resistant to the political regime, with varying degrees of opposition or political marginality, are: *Leonardo, Nuova Italia* and *Solaria* (1926-1936), for which Alberto Carocci, Eugenio Montale, Elio Vittorini and Carlo Emilio Gadda write; and the Catholic *Il Frontespizio*, with the young hermetics Carlo Bo, Mario Luzi and Piero Bigongiari, who are preoccupied with personal and existential issues. For Massimo Bontempelli's Novecento, Moravia writes *Gli indifferenti* (1929).<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Cognition of Italy through translations

In this research project analysis is structured around three periods corresponding to the three different periods of Sur: the first between 1931 and 1945, the second between 1946 and 1960, and the third between 1961 and 1970. I will not list here all the Italian essays published in these four decades, but I will provide an outline of their main straits:

In terms of themes, from 1931 to 1945 the predominant focus is on the question of aesthetics both in literature and in art, with essays such as:<sup>19</sup>

- Attilio Rossi. 'Para iniciar una sección de crítica de arte'; 'Dar precisión a una disciplina necesaria'; 'Situaciones de ambiente desfavorables al arte. Otros factores negativos'.<sup>20</sup>
- Leo Ferrero. 'El malestar de la literatura italiana'.<sup>21</sup>
- Leo Ferrero. 'Sobre D'Annunzio'.<sup>22</sup>
- Giorgio De Chirico. 'Sensibilidad. Sinceridad'.<sup>23</sup>
- Benedetto Croce. El problema moral de nuestro tiempo.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Benedetto Croce: Una risposta di scrittori, professori e pubblicisti italiani al manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti. *Il Mondo*. 1 May, 1925.

<sup>18</sup> Alberto Moravia: *Gli indifferenti*. Milano: Edizioni Alpes, 1929

<sup>19</sup>The complete list is not provided, only the most significant titles. The numerical identifier of each essay corresponds to the volume, issue and year of the journal *Sur* in which it was translated.

<sup>20</sup> In: *Sur* 18 (1936), p. 82-85.

<sup>21</sup> In: *Sur* 4 (1931), p. 118-124.

<sup>22</sup> In: *Sur* 43 (1938), p. 78-79.

<sup>23</sup> In: *Sur* 122 (1944), p. 32-35.

The question of aesthetics is also prominent in the reviews and news about Italy, as well as in film and literature reviews:

- Attilio Rossi: 'Enseñanzas de un film'.<sup>25</sup>
- Carlo Belli: 'L'Angelo in Borghese'. (Attilio Rossi, ed.). Roma: Edizione Augustea, 1938.<sup>26</sup>
- Ignacio Silone: *Pan y vino*. Buenos Aires: Avance, 1938. (Eduardo González Lanuza, ed.).<sup>27</sup>

As regards political issues, it is significant how very few writings on the Italian situation of the time there are. The two essays that refer to Italy are very different in nature:

- Augusto José Durelli: 'Noventa días después del "Manifiesto comunista"'.<sup>28</sup>
- Julio Irazusta: 'Influencia del espíritu renacentista en el descubrimiento de América'.<sup>29</sup>

The former focuses on the pre-war turmoil, and the latter on the recuperation of the spirit of the Renaissance in Italy, but in 1938 Italian communism becomes a new danger. The names of the translators are not included in most Italian essays translated in the first period.

In the second period, from 1946 to 1969, there is an explosion of Italian texts in the journal, predominantly translations of novels through Editorial Sur. The journal is filled with reviews and excerpts from novels by contemporary writers, such as: Prezzolini, Vittorini, Moravia, Pratolini, Pavese, Papini, Buzzati and Curzio Malaparte. Many writers were first published in Argentina and only much later in Spain, to the point that most of the translations still in use today are by Argentine translators from *Sur* journal or its related publishing houses.

However, despite this preference for narrative, there are also many translations of essays, already signed by their translators, some as striking as:

- Giulio Piovene: 'La guerra fría'. Trans. Enrique Pezzoni.<sup>30</sup>
- Antonio Gramsci: *Cartas desde la cárcel*. Trans. Mario Cueva.<sup>31</sup>
- Cesare Pavese: 'Poesía y libertad'. Trans. de Mario Cueva.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In: *Sur* 130 (1945), p.7-27.

<sup>25</sup> In: *Sur* 16 (1936), p. 78-82.

<sup>26</sup> In: *Sur* 44 (1938), p. 93-94.

<sup>27</sup> In: *Sur* 48 (1938), p. 56-63.

<sup>28</sup> In: *Sur* 49 (1938), p. 47-54.

<sup>29</sup> In: *Sur* 31 (1937), p. 50-59.

<sup>30</sup> In: *Sur* 225 (1953), p. 9-4.

<sup>31</sup> In: *Sur* 225 (1953), p. 25-33.

<sup>32</sup> In: *Sur* 225 (1953), p. 136-141.

- Massimo Bontempelli: 'La poesía contra la historia'. Trans. Héctor Miguel Angeli.<sup>33</sup>
- Emilio Cecchi: 'La Gruta de la Sibila de Cumas'. Trans. Mario Cueva.<sup>34</sup>
- Alcide De Gasperi: *Cartas de la prisión*. Buenos Aires: Criterio, 1957. (Humberto Rodríguez Tomeu ed.).<sup>35</sup>

Authors and works focusing on the relation between intellectuals and politics reach the Argentinian and Hispanic public thanks to the bilateral relations and immigration policies established after the Second World War. Besides that, the importance of neorealist literature overcomes the impasse of Italian literature in the inter-war period. Reviews on current issues include:

- Eduardo González Lanuza. 'Marinetti'.<sup>36</sup>
- Gian Gaspare Napolitano. 'La narrativa italiana actual'.<sup>37</sup>
- Attilio Dabini. 'Superación del regionalismo en la literatura italiana'.<sup>38</sup>

From 1946, after its final condemnation of fascism, *Sur* began to spread the new names of Italian literature in Argentina, exceeding the phase imposed by Leo Ferrero in the first period. A new employee joins the journal: Attilio Dabini, the true architect of the renovation of Italian literature in Argentina. Through his works of criticism for *La Nación*, translations for Losada and collaborations in *Sur*, Dabini disseminated the works of Piovene, Silone, Brancati, Alvaro, Flaiano and others young Italian writers in Argentina.

In December 1953, *Sur* publishes its issue Number 225, devoted entirely to the literature and the arts of Italy. Thereafter, Attilio Dabini and Enrique Pezzoni, as critics and translators, will exert a hegemonic role in the dissemination of Italian culture in *Sur*.

In the last period, from 1961 to 1970, the dominance of narrative works continues, but considerably less than in the previous decade, because the journal's frequency of publication is also reduced. Other works of authors already mentioned are translated, such as Moravia, Palazeschi and Pratolini. A number of poets are added, such as Quasimodo, Mario Luzi, Landolfi and Sereni, along with classical writers such as Svevo and Pirandello. As for essays, the works of Ricardo Bacchelli and Massimo Bontempelli are the most significant.

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<sup>33</sup> In: *Sur* 225 (1953), p. 131-136.

<sup>34</sup> In: *Sur* 225 (1953), p. 113-117.

<sup>35</sup> In: *Sur* 252 (1958), p. 86-87.

<sup>36</sup> In: *Sur* 123 (1945), p. 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> In: *Sur* 177 (1949), p. 56-57.

<sup>38</sup> In: *Sur* 192-194 (1950), p. 271-276.

### 5.1. Leo Ferrero

I will not limit this work to an extensive list showing the intensity of the translation work in *Sur*. The criteria for selection of the works must also be considered. For this purpose, I have chosen an essay from the first period of the journal as a paradigm of the cognition of Italy through translations.

This is Leo Ferrero's *El malestar de la literatura italiana* (The discontent of Italian literature), published in 1931, issue No. 4. As has been said, Ferrero was a member of the Foreign Board at *Sur* and a personal friend of Victoria Ocampo, to whom he turned to ask for an introduction to Ortega. Ferrero was by then a young writer, known for his essays on the aesthetics of Leonardo, a work prefaced by Paul Valery. Unfortunately, Ferrero died in a traffic accident in Mexico two years later, in 1933, a few days after sending his second essay to the journal. Ocampo published this second work, entitled 'Carta de Norteamérica, crisis de elites' in issue No. 8, together with a brief obituary, which later led to a homage in issue No. 10, in which excerpts from his unfinished French novel *Espoirs* (Hopes) were published. Five years later, in issue No. 43, of 1935, another work by Ferrero appears, the essay *Sobre D'Annunzio*, also related to the search for intellectual models to address the crisis.<sup>39</sup>

In the essay I wish to comment on, *El malestar de la Literatura italiana*, Ferrero mentions literary journals (*Fronte, L'Italiano, Il Convegno, Solaria*) and some prominent names in the Italian culture of the moment: Carocci, the two Gadda, Tecchio, Comisso, Montale, Ungaretti, Croce, Pirandello, Papini, Zavattini, Debenedetti and Solmi. He describes a shared feeling: "Los escritores italianos son, por lo general, pobres y tristes. Inseguros de sus amigos, en pugna con muchos enemigos conocidos y muchísimos desconocidos, viven en medio de los hombres como solitarios."<sup>40</sup>

According to Ferrero, the isolation of Italian intellectuals was due to the lack of a public set of values, forcing writers to become journalists or to promote scandals in order to awake the public's curiosity. Then the author discusses the causes of this Italian peculiarity, with respect to other countries: "En Italia, por lo pronto, (se) ha destruido en los intelectuales y luego, por reflejo, en el público, aquello que siempre me pareció el fermento de una cultura, la voluntad

<sup>39</sup> Leo Ferrero's collaborations in *Sur* were: *El malestar de la literatura italiana*. In: *Sur* 4 (1931), p. 118-124; *Carta de norteamérica, crisis de élites*. In: *Sur* 8 (1933), p. 107-116. In Notes of the same issue: Victoria Ocampo: *Obituary, Leo Ferrero*. p. 155-157; *Homenaje a Leo Ferrero*. In: *Sur* 10 (1935), p. 71-83, with two texts; Victoria Ocampo: *Esploirs*. p. 71-75; José Bianco: *La novela de Leo Ferrero*, p.76-83; Leo Ferrero: *Sobre D'Annunzio*. In: *Sur* 43 (1938), p. 78-79. Leo Ferrero's parents published some texts about their deceased son also. Thus, regarding Italian culture, the presence of Ferrero was key in the first period of the journal.

<sup>40</sup> "Italian writers are, in general, poor and sad, unsure of their friends, at odds with many known enemies and many more unknown, they live among men in solitude." Ferrero, *El malestar*, p.118.

de admirar.”<sup>41</sup> The young writer, on the contrary, looks for a teacher and a group in order to be linked to a tradition. In his view, the spirit of fellowship raises tolerance and benevolence in judgments, facilitating the relationship between culture and the public. It should be noted that Ferrero was living in France when he wrote the text. He wrote it in French, and Ocampo presumably translated it into Spanish, since there is no reference to a translator. Therefore, it is an invisible translation, like many made by the contributors to the journal in its first period. Regarding Italian, “El público a quien nadie ha educado, se ha convencido de que las grandes obras sólo pertenecen al pasado. Nada lo azora ni maravilla tanto como tener que reconocer que un libro moderno no es menos moderno, no es menos bello que uno venerable del pasado”. Ferrero concludes the essay with these words: “Culpables y víctimas a la vez confesemos la culpa de nuestro orgullo y procuremos ser más humanos, pues de lo contrario el lema, a un tiempo heroico e insensato que hemos escogido para vivir: ‘cada uno en lucha contra todos’, acabará por ser nuestro epitafio”.<sup>42</sup>

This text should be understood within the elitist conception of culture prevailing in America and Europe at the time, as in Prezzolini or in Ortega y Gasset's educational philosophy. A significant example is found in issue No. 12 of *Sur*, in 1935: Eduardo Mallea writes another essay on this subject entitled “El escritor de hoy frente a su tiempo” (The writer of today versus his time), stating: “Incumbe al intelectual la intuición y expresión de una época... Este instante climático (de crisis o caos) es necesario asirlo, separarlo, clarificarlo, tarea propia del espíritu”.<sup>43</sup> And it provides several examples of foreign authors who expressed angst in that time of crisis. Ferrero agreed with the clarifying role of the intellectual elites, but for him elites can transcend their time and impose order on the chaos only if they are able to influence or educate the society they live in. In this regard, he also writes about the crisis of the U.S. elites, claiming that this crisis is due to their inability to communicate with society, because they are isolated from political commitment.

With the manifesto of the Italian journal *Solaria*, *El malestar de la literatura italiana*, Ferrero spread the same ideas which started the Italian debate of the thirties: the need for an intellectual elite opposed to irrationalism and to the experimentalism of the vanguards, for a

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<sup>41</sup> "In Italy, meanwhile, something has been destroyed in the intellectual and then, by extension, in the public, something which I have always felt to be the ferment of a culture - the wish to admire." Ferrero, *El malestar*, p. 121.

<sup>42</sup> "We are both perpetrators and victims, and we must confess our sin of pride and seek to be more human, otherwise the motto, at once heroic and foolish that we have chosen to live by, "each struggling against all", will in the end be our epitaph." Ferrero, *El malestar*, p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> "It is incumbent upon the intellectual to grasp and express [the essence of] an era... the task of the spirit must be to grasp, to separate, to clarify this climactic moment (of crisis or chaos)." Eduardo Mallea. *El escritor de hoy frente a su tiempo*. In: *Sur* 12 (1935), p. 7-29, p. 17.

Europeanism opposed to all forms of nationalism, the pursuit of the deprovincialisation of culture, and the rejection of positivism. The discomfort of Italian writers conforms to the view that an Argentine artist could make his own reality. I would like to draw particular attention to a passage from Leo Ferrero's essay that leaves open a key question for the memory of Italian culture abroad: "No se ha indicado bastante, a mi juicio, que el intelectual italiano tiene su manera propia de ver la vida, manera que en nada se asemeja a la de cualquier otro intelectual europeo".<sup>44</sup> At this time Leo Ferrero was writing notes to explain the intellectuals' peculiar vision of the country; it would form the posthumous *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo* (Diary of a privileged man under Fascism), now in the Conti Foundation.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, if we compare the Italian cultural environment between the twenties and thirties, it has little to do with the news of it filtered abroad. Apart from the great names of nineteenth-century Italian culture, from Croce to Papini and Pirandello, from De Chirico to Barilli and Bontempelli, the predominant intellectual posture is committed to the crisis of positivism, but far from the breakthrough of the vanguards or existentialist dissolution, due to their ambiguous relation with the politics of fascism, a strain completely sidelined in the selection of translations.

### Conclusion

We question what was the preferred image of Italy for the *Sur* group? What Italian cultural values do they seek to transfer to the new American and Hispanic cultural space? In this tentative approach to the subject, I believe Italy is unanimously seen as the birthplace of art, with a Renaissance culture, theatre and music of unavoidable reference, but with a problematic present that is consciously left off the map of translations.

The discontent mentioned by Leo Ferrero was not explored further. Had he not died prematurely, he might have conducted a thorough review of the values of Italian culture that could be taken as paradigmatic, in the manner of Vasari. The truncation of this project meant that in the first period of the journal, despite the abundance of Italian and Italo-Argentines among the translators in *Sur*, intellectual and political commitment was absent. Even during wartime, an image of classic Italy was prevalent, oblivious to the tension, violence and social transformation.

<sup>44</sup> "It has not, in my opinion, been sufficiently stressed that the Italian intellectual has his own way of looking at life, which in no way resembles that of any other European intellectual." Ferrero, *El malestar*, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Leo Ferrero. *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo* (with inedit letter, introduction Angelo d'Orsi; L. Ciferri- M. Scotti eds.). Milan: Lombardi, 1993.

It is my opinion that the panorama of translated works clearly represents Italian identity in Latin America since the thirties. It was forged, among other means, through translations and can be followed through the detailed reconstruction of the list of writers chosen, the recurring themes, behind their adaptations in the host culture and the success of the published translations. Through the criticism of the translations, the information obtained on the identity of that time and place contributes to a much more accurate interpretation of artistic production itself. Translations also teach us to recognize those values which have subsequently remained in Italian culture to the present day.