Thinking back on her struggle for intellectual existence during the first half of this century, Victoria Ocampo has said that it often seemed a futile and exhausting enterprise, like sailing against the wind and the tide—contra viento y marea. The winds and tides she confronted were those of the southern latitudes where she was born, the daughter of a wealthy and aristocratic Argentine family whose forebears had settled and governed the region since the days of the Spanish conquistadors.

At the turn of the twentieth century, women of the upper classes in Latin America were, despite appearances to the contrary, an oppressed minority. They lived in large homes with servants, had wardrobes purchased in Europe, and spent all their time on domestic, social, and religious activities. However, the reality of their life, viewed from today's perspective, was far from appealing; they had virtually no freedom, not even in their own homes. Everything they did was subject to a strict code of conduct that required unquestioning submission.

The Catholic Church and proper society had dictated the way in which a woman of aristocratic position should be raised, educated, chaperoned, and married. An endless litany of moral precepts guided her movements from childhood to old age. At every stage of life, she was subject to a paternalistic rule that dominated Hispanic life long before news of the New World first reached King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. The honor of a caballero and his family depended upon the irreproachable virtue and obedience of his wife, mother, or daughter.

It was a rule Victoria Ocampo could not resign herself to accept. Drawn to literature and the arts as a child, she dreamed of a more stimulating, independent, and expressive existence. Risking the censure of those around her, she set out as an adult to find it, defying conventions and provoking scandals. Sailing against the wind and the tide, Victoria accomplished more in the area of culture than any other woman in her country's history—perhaps in the history of Latin America. Even today, however, the mention of her name raises eyebrows in Argentina because Victoria Ocampo, at the age of eighty-eight, is still a rebel.

Author of more than ten volumes of essays and a dozen shorter works, founder and director of a literary review (often called the finest in Latin America) which has endured more than four decades; publisher, translator, lecturer, benefactor of the arts, friend of famous men and women the world over—Victoria Ocampo is all of this and more. She has been compared to other twentieth-century women of letters—Adrienne Monnier, Harriet Munroe, Nancy Cunard, Ottoline Morrell, Vita Sackville-West—who were authors, patronesses, publishers, or a combination thereof. Yet her name is not as well known as theirs outside Latin America.

In her own country, she is a legend. Argentines know her not only as a woman of cultural accomplishment, but as a famous beauty, admired and sought after by men of distinction, a woman who broke many rules and paid for her opposition to dictatorship with imprisonment. Yet even in Argentina, her legend carries an aura of mystery; few people know the real Victoria Ocampo. Precisely because she led such an unorthodox life, apocryphal anecdotes and misconceptions about her have been as abundant as the criticisms she faced.

The struggle that once seemed futile and exhausting has become an inspiration to others, both in the Americas and abroad, who have recognized and honored her in recent years. Not only is she the first woman to be elected to the Argentine Academy of Letters, she is also, among other tributes, an Official of the French Legion of Honor, Commander of the French Order of Arts and Letters, a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, a recipient of the Italian Order of Merit, and an Honorary Doctor of Letters both at the University of Visva-Bharati in India and at Harvard University in the United States. The words that accompanied the degree conferred upon her by Harvard in June 1967 (the tenth woman so honored in the University's history) express the admiration shared by many who know her determination and integrity: "Dauntless lady; bright burning spirit; exemplar and defender of the unfettered mind."

In a long lifetime of devotion to literature and the arts, Victoria Ocampo's name has become synonymous with two objectives: the pursuit of creative excellence and the nurturing of cultural dialogues between nations of all continents. Through her review and publishing house, both of which are named Sur, she has led what began as a personal crusade to export the finest examples of Argentine culture and, at the same time, import the highest quality of literary and artistic expression from abroad. Seeking out authors and works that represent the best aspects of contemporary culture, whatever their country or political affiliation, has been both her business and her pleasure.

If there is one quality that characterizes Victoria Ocampo today just as it did in her youth, it is her intellectual generosity, her eagerness to share her enthusiasms with others. Those who have known her personally, as well as those who know her only by the publications that carry her name, can testify to the bountiful nature of the woman whom her friend André Malraux once called "la superbe Argentine." ¹

I am one of those who has been enriched by knowing Victoria Ocampo. In the autumn of her years and the spring of mine, she responded generously to the request of a college student who wanted to write an honors thesis about her. A fellowship from a Harvard-Radcliffe program for research abroad made possible a trip to Argentina, where I spent the summer of 1962 gathering information for my project. Victoria was in Europe during those months, but her sister Angélica, her colleagues at Sur, and her friends—among them the authors Eduardo Mallea and Jorge Luis Borges—welcomed me warmly and provided me with the information I sought. Fortunately, Victoria stopped in New York on her way home that fall, so my work culminated with our meeting there. Having heard and read so much about her. I felt rather apprehensive as I knocked on her door at the Waldorf Astoria. Then the door swept open and a tall, extremely handsome, silver-haired woman with a flower pinned on her jacket greeted me with a smile and queries about my stay in Buenos Aires, lamenting that she had not been there herself to show me around. We spoke for several hours, mostly in English (hers flawless and British-accented). I remember thinking then, and the next time that we met during her stay in New York, that Victoria Ocampo was, without question, the most vitally expressive person I had ever met.

Thirteen years later, in 1975, I knocked again on another door at the Waldorf and there was Victoria, still handsome, still energetic at eighty-five, and pleased to learn that I was now teaching Spanish at the same college where her close friend, Valborg Anderson, was a professor of English. (It was Val who told me that Victoria was in town and planned to stay for several months.) Victoria knew that I had come with another project in mind: what would she think about my writing a book that would introduce her to the English-speaking public, to readers in North America who knew little if anything about her and her accomplishments? I particularly wanted to tell the story of her experiences as a Latin American woman who refused to follow the conventions of her society and who became a feminist when the notion of equal rights for women was considered not just scandalous but immoral in her country. I also wanted to include a selection of her essays in translation, virtually inaccessible to non-Spanish readers. Would she be willing to cooperate with me, I

wondered, giving me permission to consult private documents and sharing her personal recollections? I was well aware, as I broached the subject, that Victoria was notoriously reluctant to discuss certain aspects of her private life.

The idea appealed to her. Not only was she interested in my project but she was enormously anxious to learn more about the women's movement in the United States (coincidentally that day had been proclaimed Equal Rights Amendment Day: November 4, 1975). She asked me as many questions as I asked her. Tired from a recent bout with the flu, she leaned back against some bed pillows. In her customary tailored slacks, simple blouse, cardigan sweater, and silk scarf, she looked elegantly casual, surprisingly at home in a nondescript hotel room filled with books and magazines. But her frame of mind was anything but complacent. Why were so many women in the States opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, she wanted to know, incredulous that such "sabotage," as she called it, could exist in such an advanced country. What were women's studies programs like in North American universities? What were the latest books by women writers in the U.S.? What progress had been made by women in government? And what did I think of Susan Brownmiller's book on rape? Many times, our exchange of ideas involved comparisons between her country and mine.

Thereafter, we met several times a week. Over tea and cinnamon toast in Oscar's, the hotel coffee shop, on our way to and from the movies on Third Avenue (did I realize how much Pasqualino in Wertmuller's Settebelleze was like an Argentine compadrito), with friends or alone, we continued our discussions. In deference to Victoria's dislike for the formality of tape recorders, I took to jotting down notes for the book after we parted each day. Before she left for Argentina in February 1976, three weeks prior to the military coup that brought Isabel Perón's regime to an end, we agreed that I would spend four weeks in Buenos Aires in July and August. Victoria offered me her home and I gratefully accepted. Would I mind the lack of central heating during a chilly Argentine winter, she asked? I assured her that I would not.

Not only did I spend that fascinating month with her, but I also returned in January 1977 to visit her for three weeks at her summer home in the seaside resort of Mar del Plata. Later, during a sabbatical leave, I went twice, in January and August of 1978, to spend five more weeks with her. I am more than qualified to testify to Victoria Ocampo's legendary generosity and hospitality. No words of thanks, however, could adequately express what her friendship has meant to me—far beyond the scope of writing this book.

Her two lovely homes were the principal settings in which I did most

of my research. (Both homes were deeded to UNESCO in 1973 with the stipulation that they be used as international centers for literary and cultural activities. In November 1977 the first UNESCO-organized activity was held in her home near Buenos Aires, a "Dialogue of Cultures" over which she presided as honorary president.) Immersed in the ambience and presence of Victoria Ocampo. I devoted several hours each morning and evening to reading her unpublished memoirs and collections of personal letters, her books and articles, and parts of her vast library which fills several rooms and spills over into corridors and hallways. Over meals and tea at five. she and I would discuss whatever I was reading at the time. Naturally, our conversations followed other tangents as well, especially when we were joined by friends or members of her family. I would also spend occasional afternoons researching at the Sur offices, or perhaps interviewing people who had known or worked with Victoria. Over the course of my visits. I met many delightful and generous people in Argentina. I truly came to feel that the country my mother had left as a child had welcomed me back in her place.

This book, then, reflects my personal knowledge of Victoria Ocampo. Future biographers may describe her more dispassionately or they may emphasize aspects of her life that I only touch upon. If the reader does not find herein as much depiction of her love life as of the loves of her life, it is because I have purposely focused my attention on the latter in my interpretation of her accomplishments. Hopefully, Victoria's memoirs will be published one day soon, for there the reader will find her intimate stories told with matchless grace and humor. (Albert Camus, who read portions of her memoirs as she was writing them in the 1950s, urged her to publish them and added that, in his opinion, she would have made an admirable novelist.²)

The following pages are meant to be an introduction to the life and work of an extraordinary woman of our time, not a complete biography. Nor, for that matter, is it "official" in any sense. I have pointed out Victoria's weaknesses as well as her strengths, insofar as I understand them; she never suggested that I do otherwise. For discretion's sake, however, I did agree not to mention one or two names or quote from certain highly personal documents.

At my request, Victoria has read the manuscript in two of its preparatory stages. She has also read the translations that accompany the text and has generously authorized the use of photographs and of quotations from her works as well as from other works published by Sur. Her observations and corrections (dates, names, places, and some slight modifications in the phraseology of the essays) have undoubtedly improved my work; but the final result and any flaws it may contain are my responsi-

bility alone. With the hope that it will be of interest to students and specialists as well as to general readers, I have appended chapter notes and a selected bibliography.

The fifteen essays which I have translated were chosen 1) for their representative qualities, 2) in order to illustrate incidents and themes discussed in the preceding text, and 3) because they appealed to the translator. They have been arranged in chronological order by subject—by the date of their impact on Victoria's life—not by the date of composition, indicated at the beginning of each essay. All foreign words and phrases have been left as in the original essays and are explained in notes following the translations. The essays are offered to the reader as an integral and essential part of Victoria Ocampo's self-expression. To omit them would be to deny the non-Spanish speaker a part of her which only she can convey and without which no introduction to her life would be complete.

To all those who helped me in ways large and small in the preparation of this book, I am very grateful.

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Many generous people on several continents provided me with indispensable information and advice. Some knew Victoria Ocampo well and others did not, but all gladly offered me the benefit of their knowledge and experience and thus immeasurably enhanced my work. In Argentina, I would like to express my special appreciation to Victoria's surviving sisters, Angélica and Silvina, who received me so warmly and reminisced on occasion about life with their older sibling. I also feel honored to have known two exceptional women, María Rosa Oliver and Fryda Schultz de Mantovani, who passed away while this book was being written; their kindness to me and their generous contributions to my efforts to portray their friend and colleague at Sur were more appreciated than they ever realized. Whenever I went to the offices of Sur, three hospitable and capable women, Yvonne Castresana, Lily Iriarte and Nélida Mariperisena de González, helped me find whatever I needed: to them and to others associated with Sur and with Victoria's households (especially José Luis Alvarez, Haydée Sirito, and Clara Aunchayna) I am very grateful. My thanks also go to two esteemed friends, Enrique

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This book might never have come into being had Juan Marichal and Raimundo Lida, two distinguished professors at Harvard, not told me about Victoria Ocampo many years ago, and had they and another eminent author and educator, Francisco Ayala, a former colleague at Brooklyn College, not encouraged and supported my plans to write it. I wish to thank them and the following friends in New York who know Victoria well and who have helped me in so many ways: María Luisa Bastos, who was very kind to me in 1962 when I first stopped in at *Sur* and who has continued to be equally generous here in New York; Ronald Christ, who graciously read an early draft of the manuscript and gave me the benefit of his knowledge and support; Mildred Adams, with whom I had so many pleasant conversations and who read the translations at my request; and Valborg Anderson, who has been unstinting in her encouragement, devoted in her critical reading of portions of the work in progress, and always eager to talk with me about our beloved mutual friend.

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