

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *The Polar Journal* in Dec. 2019, available via <http://www.tandfonline.com/>

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Funding details: Elizabeth Leane's contribution to this work was supported by the Australian Research Council under FT120100402.

## **The ‘Alien’ Next Door: Antarctica in South American Fiction**

### **Abstract**

The representation of Antarctica in fiction has drawn the attention of an increasing number of scholars during recent years. However, analyses undertaken so far have foregrounded English-language texts produced by writers located in the Northern Hemisphere. In these texts, Antarctica is often seen as a remote, oppositional and alien space. This article challenges the Anglocentric view of Antarctic representation by examining the way the region is imagined in South American fiction. After surveying the small body of criticism that deals with Spanish-language texts set in Antarctica, we focus closely on three twentieth-century short works written in South America. Our analysis demonstrates that these three texts challenge the image of Antarctic as an underworld, opposed to and cut off from the rest of the world. Rather, in Antarctic literary imaginings of Argentina and Chile, the Drake Passage bridges the gap between Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica, acting not as a barrier between two opposed regions, but connecting landscapes with shared features. Aware of the evident geopolitical connotations to this construction of South American/Antarctic relations, we show that in Antarctic fiction from Argentina and Chile geographic proximity does not necessarily play in favour of nationalist rhetoric. Surprisingly, it can be at the core of texts that naturalise Anglophone hegemony. Moreover, while the three stories evoke a geographic imaginary very different from that produced by many Anglophone texts, they do not present a unified vision. Further research is needed to probe whether the geographic imaginaries constructed in these three short texts can be traced in a wider range of South American texts set in Antarctica.

**Keywords:** literature; Antarctica; Latin American Fiction; South America; representations of Antarctica; Drake Passage

**Geolocation information:** Antarctica; South America; Drake Passage

## Introduction

The representation of Antarctica in fictional works is a topic that has drawn increasing scholarly attention in the last few decades, with critics putting forward a range of arguments about the large-scale patterns that can be identified in these texts when taken as a group. One of the earliest of these studies is Stephen Pyne's *The Ice* (Pyne 1986), which figures the continent as a "wasteland for imaginative literature" (p.153). "The Ice," Pyne repeatedly insists, reduces any ideas applied to it, reflecting a culture's beliefs back on itself in simplified form. While Pyne's governing metaphors of the continent as both an "esthetic sink" (p. 150) and a mirror have remained influential, later critics have been more willing to trace the contours of literary traditions that, although inevitably imported from elsewhere, have taken distinctive shape when applied to Antarctica. Eric Wilson (Wilson 2003) argues that theories of classical geography produced "two dichotomies concerning the southern continent" evident up until James Cook's circumnavigation: a negative tradition in which "the unknown southern hemisphere was the dark other, the alien planet – the antihuman, the monstrous" (145); and a positive one in "fantasies of paradise or visions of the sublime" were projected onto the region (146). Critics focussing on more recent cultural texts have identified corresponding traditions of the "Antarctic Gothic" (Lenz 1995; Wijkmark 2009) and the "Antarctic utopia" (Leane 2013; Rosner 1999). While these binaries do not exhaust the thematic currents evident in Antarctic fiction,<sup>1</sup> they are significant in that they assume the Antarctic to be a remote, oppositional and alien space. These qualities are necessary both to Gothic representations of Antarctica, in which the continent harbours dark secrets that must be contained, and utopian ones, in which an ideal imagined society must necessarily be located remote from the existing inhabited world.

These critical analyses, however, are largely based on English-language texts produced by writers located in the Northern Hemisphere, most prominently Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper and H.P. Lovecraft. English-speaking colonies in the Southern Hemisphere inherited their legacies, although these were complicated by the very different geographical relations of these colonies with Antarctica. Although the Antarctic continent lies many days' journey in an icebreaker (or weeks in the age of sail) from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, these nations nonetheless are proximate to Antarctica on a global scale, and all act as widely recognized 'gateways' to the south in various ways. Their literary responses to the Antarctic might then be expected to be marked by this geographical and logistical connection, and analysis has to some degree borne this out. In Australian literature, for example, critics have pointed to Antarctica's function as a "surrogate land for Australia" onto which anxieties about the latter's alienness, from the perspective of a white settler tradition, could be projected (Pierce 1995, p. 114: see also Leane and Pfennigwerth 2002)). The two continents' ancient geological connectedness have also inspired literary responses (Leane 2007, 276-8). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, a long history of awareness of the far south in Maori narratives (see e.g. McNerngney 2011) is augmented by a

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, poet Bill Manhire, editor of the first anthology of Antarctic literature, notes that "ideas of purity, cleanness, and perfection" come up repeatedly in writing about the Antarctic (Manhire 2004).

strong contemporary literary engagement with the far south, although we are not aware of any scholarly attempts to identify national characteristics of this work. And although critics have begun to analyse South African relations with Antarctica with a focus on national ideologies (van der Watt and Swart 2016), little if anything has been written about specifically South African literary engagements with Antarctica. Analysis of these national literary responses to the far south is beyond the scope of this article, but their absence in scholarship points back to the dominance of Northern Hemisphere texts. Despite the heterogeneity of cultural responses produced by English-speaking writers living in (relative) proximity to the South Polar region, Anglophone representations of Antarctica are still strongly associated with the legacies of canonical Northern Hemisphere writers.

This article challenges this Northern Hemisphere and Anglocentric view of Antarctic representation by examining the way the region is imagined in South American fiction. After surveying the small body of criticism that deals with Spanish-language texts set in Antarctica, we focus closely on three twentieth-century short works written from a South American perspective: “La borrasca” (1932) by Argentinian Liborio Justo; *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* (1944) by Chilean Francisco Coloane; and “La carga de Membrillares” (1988), by Argentinian Roberto Fontanarrosa. Our analysis demonstrates that these three texts challenge the image of Antarctic as an underworld, opposed to and cut off from the rest of the world. Rather, in Antarctic literary imaginings of Argentina and Chile, the Drake Passage bridges the gap between Tierra del Fuego (often itself depicted as “the end of the world”) and Antarctica. The Drake acts not to separate regions that are opposed or alien to each other, but rather to connect landscapes that already have things in common.

While there are evident geopolitical connotations to this construction of South American/Antarctic relations,<sup>2</sup> this sense of extension or familiarity between South America and Antarctica cannot be straightforwardly equated with a nationalist assumption of a natural connection between Antarctica and South America. As we will show, in Antarctic fiction from Argentina and Chile geographic proximity does not necessarily play in favour of nationalist rhetoric. Surprisingly, it can be at the core of texts that naturalise Anglophone hegemony. While one of these three texts we examine could certainly be read as nationalist (Coloane 1945), the other two lesser-known works are more complicated in this regard. “La borrasca” (Justo 2001) was published before the idea of geographic continuity became political, and “La carga de Membrillares” (Fontanarrosa 1988) pokes fun at the assumption of proximity between Antarctica and Argentina by reducing the gap between these two continents to zero. While we do not claim that the three stories produce a unified vision, we argue that together they introduce the idea of the Drake Passage as a connector between South America and Antarctica, presenting a geographic imaginary very different from that produced by many Anglophone texts. In the last part of the article, we extend this argument beyond our detailed readings of these texts to indicate how the geographic imaginaries they evoke are characteristic of large number of South American texts set in Antarctica. Further research is needed to establish whether and how this geographic imaginary has evolved over the years.

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<sup>2</sup> Alongside effective occupation, inheritance from Spain and geological continuity, geographical proximity has been used by Argentina and Chile to support their sovereignty claims on the Antarctic Peninsula (Howkins, 2017).

## Recent Approaches to Analysing South American Fiction about Antarctica

A small number of scholars have worked on Antarctic fiction from a Spanish-language perspective. Spaniard Javier Guijarro Ceballos (2010) has identified and deconstructed assumptions in Anglophone Antarctic works, showing that imagined versions of Antarctica are also highly loaded from a cultural and geopolitical point of view. Confronted with Frank Debenham's idea of Antarctica's "simple legend" (Debenham 1959), Guijarro Ceballos contends that:

The complex and diverse inventions of Antarctica, and the images that they project, are "inhabited" in myriad and sometimes particular ways. In some cases, we inhabit them "naturally": Antarctica is sublime, ineffable, divine, untouchable... But the evidence that other discourses invent Antarctica as a place to be claimed, to be visited, to be exploited, as cruel, or just as absurd and alien, eradicates the impression of naturalness, reveals the foundations of the construct of the imagination and shows that we "inhabit" a cunning – and not always disinterested – invention of Antarctica. (our translation; op. cit. pp. 107-108)<sup>3</sup>

Drawing on Hobsbawm's concept of "invented traditions" (E. J. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), Guijarro Ceballos notes that in Antarctic historiography there is a select group of Anglophone names and events repeated over and over, "build[ing] on a hegemonical Antarctic legend," while others are usually brushed aside: "Some Antarctic discourses originating from countries like Spain, Chile and Argentina occasionally denounce the belittlement of their historic contributions" (p. 110). Among these non-fiction texts that challenge the hegemonical anglophone Antarctic legend, Guijarro Ceballos mentions *El continente de los hombres solos*, by Chilean Santiago Reyes (Reyes 1956). Guijarro Ceballos observes that Reyes, while narrating the rescue of Shackleton's colleagues marooned on Elephant island by Chilean Piloto Pardo on board the *Yelcho*, reverses the hegemonic legend: "Elephant island is worth visiting because that is where, in 1916, Chilean Captain Pardo rescued the crew of the *Endurance*, who cheered the arrival of the *Yelcho*, where also Shackleton happened to be" (our translation; op. cit. pp. 286-287).<sup>4</sup> Guijarro Ceballos also deconstructs the workings of some Spanish texts that,

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<sup>3</sup> "[L]as complejas y heteróclitas invenciones de la Antártida, así como las imágenes en que éstas se decantan, están 'habitadas', y lo están de modo diferente, cuando no excluyente. En ocasiones, las habitamos 'naturalmente': la Antártida es sublime, inefable, divina, intocable... Pero la mera constatación de que otros discursos la inventan como reivindicable, visitable, explotable, cruel, o simplemente absurda y ajena, erradica la impresión de naturalidad, revela los cimientos del constructo imaginario y demuestra que 'habitamos' una invención artificiosa de la Antártida, no siempre desinteresada."

<sup>4</sup> "[L]a isla Elefante es digna de visitarse porque en ella se produjo en 1916 el auxilio chileno del capitán Pardo a los tripulantes del *Endurance*, que vitorearon la llegada de la *Yelcho* en la que también viajaba Shackleton." Guijarro Ceballos highlights the contrast between

while bemoaning the naturalisation of hegemonic historiography by Anglophone discourse, turn a blind eye to the own workings of Spanish historiography.<sup>5</sup> As we will show below, it is possible for Spanish language texts both to reinforce this Anglophone hegemony even while constructing a geographic imaginary which is very different from that of the English-language imagination.

Working from an explicitly South American perspective, Pedro Luis Barcia (2013) took on the task of compiling an Argentine Antarctic anthology and arguing for an Argentine Antarctic literature – that is, considering the Antarctic sector claimed by Argentina as one of Argentina’s literary regions. Rooted in the imaginary of Antarctica as part of the national territory, Barcia’s study offers a look at Antarctic fiction as a contribution to national narratives, providing what he considers a missing piece in the puzzle of Argentine regional fiction:

My intention is to assimilate Antarctica as a thus-far unrecognized national literary region and to appreciate the works that it has inspired in our writers. The work has not yet been done. I understand that, with this task, I will make a small contribution to a consciousness of our integral sovereign territorial reality. (p. 38-39; original emphasis)<sup>6</sup>

Drawing on Pratt Fairchild’s definition of *cultural region* (Fairchild 1963), Barcia contends that regional literature entails an “objective or descriptive” (p. 68) perspective that, while based on regional materials, connects with universal themes. Moving on to the specifics of Argentine literary production, he notes that the number of Antarctic works is limited, but that there are several texts devoted to “the Homeland of Ice”,<sup>7</sup> later repeating this idea of “the Antarctic homeland”.<sup>8</sup> Framing Antarctic fiction according to an explicitly nationalist ideology is, however, a different task than gathering examples written by Argentine nationals. If Antarctic fiction is framed within Argentine regional literature in the terms chosen by Barcia, what happens to the works that do not respond to a “objective or descriptive” logic, but that nonetheless use as a setting the fraction of the continent claimed by Argentina; or works that are written by Argentines but set in parts of the continent distant from the claimed territory? Do literary works still deserve

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Reyes’s perspective and the canonical narrative of the events on Elephant island, as narrated by the character Ta Shu in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Antarctica* (Robinson 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Guijarro Ceballos’s analysis of Mazzeo in Guijarro Ceballos, 2010, pp. 288-294.

<sup>6</sup> “Mi intención es incorporar a la Antártida como una región literaria del país, hasta ahora desconsiderada como tal, y estimar las obras de creación que ella haya generado en nuestros escritores. La labor está virgen. Entiendo con este avance hacer un servicio, por pequeño que sea, para aportar a una conciencia de nuestra realidad territorial soberana *íntegra*.”

<sup>7</sup> “La producción literaria generada en motivos antárticos es incipiente, pero tiene algunos logros. La muestra que ofrezco, no obstante, es variada en géneros –poesía, memorias, teatro– y enfoques y actitudes –lírica, descriptiva, narrativa, dramática- frente a la Patria de Hielo”. (*op. cit.*, p. 115)

<sup>8</sup> “la patria antártica” (p.115)

to be considered Argentine Antarctic fiction even when they do not provide any service to the “sovereign territorial reality”? Barcia’s perspective places special emphasis on the Antarctic landscape as long as it reinforces the idea of national territory, leaving out some works of great value that do not fit into the national narratives of Antarctica.

Such a perspective, we argue, narrows the field. From graphic novels to thrillers, there are relevant Argentine and Chilean Antarctic fiction works that have very little to say about national heroes or territorial claims.<sup>9</sup> For one thing, Argentine and Chilean popular imaginations incorporated the Antarctic landscape well before these countries officially assimilated Antarctica as part of their domains. The incorporation of a section of Antarctica into Argentina’s “territorial regions” did not occur until the 1940s,<sup>10</sup> more than forty years after the publication of the first Latin American work of fiction set in Antarctica.<sup>11</sup>

A shorter study centred on Antarctic fiction is Ilaria Magnani’s “La Antártida en la literatura argentina. Entre el sueño edénico y la reafirmación soberanista” [“Antarctica in Argentine Literature. Between the Edenic Dream and the Reaffirmation of Sovereignty”] (Magnani 2017). This study undertakes a very interesting reading of the poem “La vida en el polo” [Life at the Pole] (Antares 1886), tracing links with a seminal text<sup>12</sup> in Argentine literature and with the question of immigration, the development of the country and the genocide of Patagonia’s indigenous population, all issues that were strongly present in Argentine cultural production at the turn of the twentieth century. Magnani also argues that the features of Argentine society at the time permeate its Antarctic literature, rendering it different from works written in Europe or the United States. She notes that Argentine representations of Antarctica are influenced by the fact that the country is “almost adjacent to the Antarctic continent” (p. 32). To the extent that it emphasizes links between Patagonia and Antarctica, Magnani’s argument supports our observations here, but her study is limited by the fact that she takes at face value Barcia’s assumption that Antarctic fiction is composed of works that contribute to discourse on sovereignty only (Barcia 2013).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One example of this is the novel *Bull Rocket: Peligro en la Antártida* [Bull Rocket: Danger in Antarctica] (Oesterheld, 1995). Works such as this are far more wedded to genre conventions (in this case the thriller) that operate transnationally than to representing specific regional concerns.

<sup>10</sup> For a thorough study in English about Chile and Argentina sovereignty claims in Antarctica, see Howkins, 2017. Sources in Spanish include Pinochet de la Barra, 1976 and Genest, 2001. For details on the appearance of Antarctica as one of Argentina’s geographical regions, see Quintero, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> *La vida en el polo* (Antares 1886).

<sup>12</sup> *La cautiva* [The captive], by Esteban Echeverría, first published in 1837.

<sup>13</sup> There is one exception: Magnani does mention two of the Antarctic works by Héctor Germán Oesterheld: *La Guerra de los Antartes* (Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Trigo 1998) and *Bull Rocket: Peligro en la Antártida* [Bull Rocket: Danger in Antarctica] (Héctor Germán Oesterheld 1995).

This article adds to this growing body of analyses of Spanish-language imaginative representations of the Antarctic by examining two previously neglected texts alongside a better-known one to make an argument about South American literary constructions of Antarctica. Not all of these texts fit into Barcia's criteria of works that contribute to the sense of an "integral sovereign territorial reality", but they do put forward a vision of Antarctica that contrasts markedly with the oppositional, alien other that so often characterizes Anglophone literature.

### **The 'Antarctic' seas: Liborio Justo's "La borrasca"**

"La borrasca" ["The Squall"] is a short story by Liborio Justo (Argentina, 1902-2003) published in 1932 as part of *La tierra maldita* [The Cursed Land], a compilation of twelve tales. In this and other works by Justo, most of the characters dwell on the fringes of society: they are gold diggers, exiles, convicts and lone adventurers. Justo himself had a keen interest in the problems of the lower classes. Being the black sheep of a well-off family, the young Justo was often sent away from Buenos Aires. In one of those journeys, in 1930 he embarked on the *Orduña*, visiting the Falkland Islands / Islas Malvinas, the Magellan Strait, Punta Arenas and the Beagle Channel. Two years later, he left Buenos Aires again, this time embarking on the whaler *Dias*, reaching South Georgia and the South Orkney islands.<sup>14</sup> Justo's writing grew out of these trips around Patagonia and the Southern Ocean. The stories in *La tierra maldita* take place in a vast region ranging from Patagonian lakes to the Falklands, South Georgia, Cape Town, Ushuaia, Cape Horn, the South Shetland Islands, and the Ross Sea.

The plot of "La borrasca" (Justo 2001) begins with a group of sailors on board the *Morsa*, a whaler sailing in the Southern Ocean. The ship is registered in Argentina, but all of her crew are Norwegian. In the crew mess a seasoned whaler tells his mates a story that sounds very similar to Ernest Shackleton's most famous adventure (1914-1917). Sailing under the command of a Dutchman named Dutra, the whaler's ship had sunk on South Georgia's west side. The men had waited to be rescued for a week when Dutra decided to hike across South Georgia to try to reach the whaling station at King Edward Cove and get help. The rest of the group stayed and survived on seals and penguins, and after two months were rescued by an English ship stopping at South Georgia on its return from the South Shetlands. They never heard from Dutra again. Ten years later, while hunting back in South Georgia, one of the former castaways came across the body of Dutra, who had never made it to King Edward Cove. After the whaler recalls this story, the *Morsa* arrives in Cumberland Bay, South Georgia, and docks at Grytviken's whaling station. The story then shifts to a description of life at the whaling station. The narrator depicts Grytviken's inhabitants as a heterogeneous group of "four hundred men from all corners of the world, brought together every year during the hunting season on a deserted island in the desolation of the Antarctic seas" (p. 181).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Justo's voyages are described in his autobiography *Prontuario* [Criminal Record] (Justo 2006).

<sup>15</sup> "Cuatrocientos hombres traídos de todas las latitudes, que las circunstancias reúnen en una isla solitaria, en la desolación de los mares antárticos, durante cada temporada de pesca."



In Justo's story, the environment is simultaneously majestic and violent. The sea can smash vessels against the shore, and the unbearable stench of bloated whale carcasses at Grytviken pervades everything and everyone. The Antarctic environment is certainly not welcoming. However, the narrator is taken by the grandiosity of the icebergs and the beauty of birds, and the rest of Justo's characters seem merely oblivious to the environment that shapes their lives and deaths. In the closing scene, the four hundred men gather at the whaling factory's cinema to watch a comedy:

...and while the actors' somersaults attracted the whalers' attention, their childish laughter damped down the roar of the furious Antarctic wind that whistled in the roof eaves while a continuous layer of snow accumulated, flake over flake, creating a thick white layer that extended in the dead of night over South Georgia like a sombre shroud.

The men, however, did not perceive it.<sup>16</sup>

For the purposes of our discussion of the geographic imagination, an important feature of "La borrasca" is that its characters – sealers and whalers – move around a single geographic entity encompassing Antarctica and the Sub-Antarctic and South American islands. The whaling factories on South Georgia are referred to as "the whaling stations of the southern seas,"<sup>17</sup> and the rocky coast of the island is mentioned as "the southern shores",<sup>18</sup> resonating with the South American southern shores that lie almost one thousand nautical miles to the east. The fact that the whaler is registered in Buenos Aires and bears a Spanish name ("Morsa")<sup>19</sup> reinforces the sense of proximity between South Georgia (that "deserted island in the desolation of the Antarctic seas" mentioned above) and mainland Argentina.

In contrast with this construction of the Southern Ocean almost as an appendage to South American geography, other elements of the text fit neatly into the Anglophone Antarctic canon: the embedded survival story in South Georgia mirrors Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition (1914-1917), one of Antarctica's key master narratives<sup>20</sup> and strongly linked to the exploration history of Britain.<sup>21</sup> Rather than denouncing the

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<sup>16</sup> "Y mientras las piruetas de los cómicos de la pantalla atraían su atención, sus risas de niños grandes apagaban el ruido del furioso viento del Antártico, que silbaba terriblemente en los aleros, mientras una continua nevada acumulaba, copo sobre copo, una gruesa capa de armiño que se extendía, en la oscuridad de la noche, como una mortaja sombría sobre la Georgia del Sur.

Ellos, sin embargo, no lo percibían." (p. 182)

<sup>17</sup> "...las estaciones balleneras de los mares australes." (p. 171)

<sup>18</sup> "...las costas del sur" (p. 171)

<sup>19</sup> Literally, "Walrus" (p. 165), an Arctic species that the Norwegian crew at South Georgia would have been familiar with.

<sup>20</sup> For a study of Antarctic master narratives see Senatore, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> At this stage, Britain had already claimed both South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula (Headland 2009; Howkins 2017), while Argentina had informed the Universal Postal

prevalence of English-language narratives, the nested story in “La borrasca” reinforces the canon, setting a tone that permeates the frame narrative: as the *Morsa* enters King Edward Cove, the narrator mentions “the buildings in the zone of the English government and the residence of the magistrate”<sup>22</sup> (p. 179). The next story, however, presents a different approach.

### **Extending the World’s End: Coloane’s *Los conquistadores de la Antártida***

Francisco Coloane (Chile, 1910-2002) first published *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* [The Conquistadors of Antarctica] in 1945, with many editions appearing thereafter (Coloane 1945). Coloane also penned other several works set in southern Patagonia and Antarctica, including *Cabo de Hornos* [Cape Horn] (1941), *El último grumete de la Baquedano* [Baquedano’s Last Cabin Boy] (1941), and *Tierra del Fuego* (1956).<sup>23</sup>

Set at the end of 1941, *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* is a novella featuring Sergeant Ulloa and his crewmates stationed at Walaia, a communications relay station close to Cape Horn that provides support to the *Antártico*, a Chilean Navy search and rescue steamboat. The first part of the text is located in the vicinity of Walaia. The station’s crew confront and decide to report to law enforcement authorities in Punta Arenas a local settler who has stolen cattle from a neighbour. Soon after, Sergeant Ulloa and three colleagues decide to head toward Antarctica across the Murray Channel on board the cutter *Agamaca*. The motives for the expedition are imbued with a sense of patriotic duty. Ulloa explains:

I want to see all of my country [...] I believe that Chile is an empire; perhaps a rather fantastic one, but to me it is an empire. Namely, to the north it reaches the subtropical region; to the south, it buries its feet in the snow of the Pole; to the east, it reaches out through the Magellan Strait and Lennox, Picton and Nueva islands up to the Atlantic; and to the west we have our

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Union that its jurisdiction also comprised South Georgia (*Memoria de Relaciones Exteriores* in Arnaud, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> “...los edificios de la zona del gobierno inglés y de la residencia del magistrado.” (p. 171)

<sup>23</sup> The 1940s and 1950s were a time when Antarctica became the subject of increasing political attention in Chile and Argentina. In Chile, on 6 November 1940 President Aguirre Cerda issued Decree 1747, establishing the limits of the Chilean Antarctic or Chilean Antarctic Territory. The original text of Aguirre Cerda’s Decree can be found in Pinochet de la Barra, 1976 (p. 98). After issuing a series of Antarctic maps that caused friction with Chile, the Argentine government established the limits of Argentine Antarctica on 12 March 1947 through a communiqué from the National Commission for Antarctica. The original in Spanish can be found in Genest, 2001 (pp. 102-103). Other sources on this matter are Comisión Nacional del Antártico, 1948; Fontana, 2014; Howkins, 2017. While this political interest in Antarctica permeates cultural production (Molíns, 1950; Cócaro, 1958a; Schweizer, 1958) some writers remained indifferent to the sovereignty dispute (Oesterheld, 1995).

Easter Island, that hand opened out in the middle of Oceania. (pp. 17-18)<sup>24</sup>

Shortly before leaving Walaia, Ulloa receives news about the passing of President Aguirre Cerda: “The best way to honour him is not through sadness, but through action. He enlarged the soul and the body of Chile. We owe him the Decree that extends the boundaries of our country up to Antarctica<sup>25</sup>. While I already had a goal for my trip, now there is a more important one: I will go and plant our flag in his memory”.

The second part of the novel describes their Antarctic journey. During the voyage, Ulloa and his companions have a number of adventures and catch a strange fish from the Antarctic waters.<sup>26</sup> At one point, the *Agamaca* gets caught in the ice and sinks. The castaways continue on foot, but two of the four men die. The survivors manage to reach a whaling station in East Antarctica and the whalers tend to the exhausted travellers. After the survivors make radio contact with Chilean authorities, a seaplane comes to the rescue and takes the men back to Walaia. A few days later, police officers enforce an arrest warrant issued by a court against the cattle thief reported by the Walaia crew before their trip, and the offender is forced by the authorities to compensate his victim.

For our purposes here, *Los conquistadores* is significant for the way in which its two settings – southern Chile and Antarctica – are rhetorically linked. The end of the world, be it north or south of the Drake Passage, is no free-for-all, but part of Chilean domains. The State is all over the map, making law and order eventually prevail around Walaia, and bringing the military and the flag down south. The characters in the first part and in the epilogue of the novel are the inhabitants of the Beagle Channel: civil servants (military, police, judges), native Yaghans and settlers. These people move with confidence along the channels and islands of southern Tierra del Fuego. The narrative

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<sup>24</sup> “Quiero conocer todo mi país [...] [C]reo que Chile es un imperio; aunque un poco fantástico, para mí lo es. A saber: por el Norte, llega a la zona subtropical; por el Sur, entierra los pies en las nieves del Polo; por el Este, sale con el estrecho de Magallanes y con las islas Lennox, Picton y Nueva hasta el Atlántico, y por el Oeste tenemos a nuestra isla de Pascua, esa mano extendida en plena Oceanía.”

<sup>25</sup> Decree 1747 states: “The following form part of the Chilean Antarctic or Chilean Antarctic Territory: all the lands, islands, reefs, glaciers (pack ice), and everything else, known or unknown, and the respective territorial seas, inside the limits of the sector between 53°W and 90°W.” This English translation is by Howkins, 2017 (p. 71).

<sup>26</sup> This episode is a nod to chapter 18 of Poe’s 1838 novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Poe 1975), where Pym picks up the carcass of a strange creature while sailing in unknown Antarctic waters. Poe’s dead monster also came to the attention of Spanish readers when Jorge Luis Borges included it in *The book of imaginary beings* (Borges and Guerrero 1978).

establishes clear rules about the landscape and the characters' relationship with it. Love for the land, or rather for homeland, is a must in Coloane's story: "This is Chilean land, animals have budded like grass, like oak trees, and should belong to those who do not repudiate it, but who love and populate it."<sup>27</sup> In the second part, Sergeant Ulloa and his colleagues leave their familiar environment at the world's end and come across unknown creatures and treacherous beaches. They experience unexpected dangers and wonder at Antarctica's birds, mammals and landscapes, even being brought to tears by the beauty of what lays before their eyes. However, rather than functioning as a water barrier or protective ring, the Drake Passage serves as a bridge that connects the familiar Beagle Channel region with the unknown Antarctica. Coloane's characters do not travel to the end of the world; they are already in it before leaving Walaia. Although the Drake Passage is described as "the most desolate there is," and the Diego Ramírez Islands lying within it as "nothing but a few inhospitable rocks raised in those abyssal waters,"<sup>28</sup> Walaia itself is described in very similar language. The station is located "in one of the most wild, deserted and austral places on earth: the mouth of the Murray Narrows, opposite Cape Horn [...] In this section of the world's end, nature is hostile and tempestuous".<sup>29</sup> The image here is not of a cosy home and an alien other, but rather of two equally wild environments. Walaia is merely a "section" of the world's end, and Antarctica another.

The geographic connection between Antarctica and Cape Horn embodied by the Drake Passage is compounded in Coloane's novel by a political coupling. The Antarctic icescape that takes centre stage in the second part of the story is not a politically neutral environment, but part of Chile's national territory. Adding a dramatic twist to Sergeant Ulloa patriotic endeavour, in the aftermath of the sinking of the *Agamaca* the man falls to his death just after planting the Chilean flag in Antarctic soil.

While Justo's characters constitute whalers and sealers from broad variety of nationalities driven by their personal desire for wealth and adventure, there is limited diversity in Coloane's novel. There are Germans and Swedes and Greeks, but they play a very minor role as people who are rescued by the Chilean Navy after running into trouble in the Southern Ocean. The most prominent roles are played by governmental institutions, whether they are the armed forces, the police or the judiciary. And while Coloane's characters are not indifferent to the prospect of exciting Antarctic adventures, there is a more relevant motivating force: patriotic duty. The men are driven to go to

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<sup>27</sup> "Esta tierra es chilena, los animales han brotado en ella como los pastos, como los robles, y deben pertenecer a los que no reniegan de su suelo, a los que la quieren y la pueblan." (p. 56)

<sup>28</sup> "Entre el Cabo de Hornos y las costas de la Antártida está el mar de Drake, el más desolado que existe. La lucha de los dos océanos es titánica y las islas Diego Ramírez no son más que unas cuantas rocas inhóspitas levantadas en mitad de ese abismo de agua." (p. 21)

<sup>29</sup> "La radioestación de Walaia, de la Marina de Chile, está situada en uno de los parajes más agrestes, solitarios y australes del mundo: en la desembocadura de la Angostura Murray, frente al Cabo de Hornos [...] La naturaleza en esa parte del fin del mundo es hostil y tempestuosa"

Antarctica not so by their personal interest, but to accomplish a higher mission on behalf of the state. This institutional mandate lends sublime meaning to their adventure. In line with Barcia's (2013) perspective, in Coloane's novel Antarctica has a value insofar as it is part of Chile's "territorial reality". In the next and last story we examine, the proximity between South America and Antarctica evident in *Los conquistadores* is taken to the extreme, but with quite different political implications.

### **Cavalcade to the Pole: Fontanarrosa's "La carga de Membrillares"**

"La carga de Membrillares" ["The Membrillares Attack"] is a story by Roberto Fontanarrosa (Argentina, 1944-2007), first published in 1988 in *El mundo ha vivido equivocado y otros cuentos*. Short and effective, this story combines evident absurdity with a nod to the epics of the gauchos, strongly present in works of classic Argentine writers such as Leopoldo Lugones and Domingo F. Sarmiento. The plot can be easily summarised: a group of 25 soldiers, led by Colonel Membrívez, gathers in La Rioja province, roughly 3500 km north of the southernmost tip of Argentina. They are malnourished, exhausted and nearly out of bullets. Attacked by a group of native Pampa warriors and chased by a rival faction of the army, Membrívez has a mission: to reach the Laguna del Tala, a salt lake in the Membrillares Plains in the south of the country, so that the men can make jerky from the meat of a rotting goat carcass that they have already been carrying for three years. Day in and day out, they push south on their horses in a desperate attempt to make it to "the sea of whiteness" until one day they find themselves at the gates of a vast, white expanse. Their excitement at having reached what they think is the salt lake quickly vanishes when they spot some dark human shapes approaching them from the south. However, all is not as it seems. In the final lines, Colonel Membrívez tells his men to prepare to confront the approaching human shapes that walk towards them in the sea of whiteness:

—No shooting until I say so!— shouts Membrívez. He doesn't know that there's no ammunition left. The last bullets were used two years ago to shoot a bottle of gin. But nobody wants to upset the boss, so they don't tell him. — Identify yourselves! — demands Captain Membrívez. —Captain Roald Amundsen!— a voice with a strange accent replies. — Amundsen...— Membrívez mutters as he feels, for the first time, the cold snow on his weather-bitten skin. (Fontanarrosa 1988)<sup>30</sup>

Having inadvertently ridden their horses far past the long-yearned-for salt lake into the Antarctic ice, the men are filled not with triumph but dismay.

In "La carga de Membrillares", Fontanarrosa's characters are not driven by the prospect of finding riches of any kind. Unlike Justo's characters, they lack greed for money; and unlike Coloane's, they are devoid of a sense of national duty. Their

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<sup>30</sup> "—¡No tirar hasta que yo lo ordene! —grita Membrívez. No sabe que no quedan municiones.

Hace dos años se dispararon los últimos cartuchos contra un porrón de ginebra. Pero nadie le dice nada. No quieren inquietarlo. Bastante tiene ya el capitán con su pertinaz caída del caballo. —¡Identifíquensen! —reclama el capitán Membrívez.—¡Capitán Roald Amundsen! —le contesta una voz de acento extraño.—Amundsen —musita Membrívez. Y siente, por vez primera, el frío de la nieve sobre su piel curtida."

progress responds to a necessity more mundane than patriotic: finding salt to stop the decay of their last piece of meat. Despite being deprived of almost everything, Membrívez's men pursue their goal relentlessly, remaining united to the point that the 25 men share the last gulp of water. The story is packed with satirical references to the resilience and suffering of Argentine soldiers in the nineteenth century civil war. But most relevant here is that Membrívez and his men do not reach Antarctica by being involuntarily blown by the Drake Passage's gales, nor do they arrive at the white continent as a result of a well-executed plan. They do it unintentionally, and their arrival is, one could say, a by-product of their relentless and desperate push in search for the salt lake – that “sea of whiteness”. In this way, Fontanarrosa pokes fun at the widely accepted assumption that Antarctica is a land reserved for heroes. But his irreverence does not stop there. He also laughs at the idea that Antarctica constitutes an extension of Argentina's mainland. In his satire, Antarctica is so Argentine and so close to the pampas that the soldiers reach the Ice riding their horses. The men do not even realise their feat until they have come across Amundsen and his crew, who are returning from their discovery of the Pole. Satire only functions when directed at a widely recognized target. Thus Fontanarrosa's story, even while it satirizes the notion of a direct connection between Argentina and Antarctica, also reinforces just how strong this concept is in the South American imagination.

### **A distinct relationship with the Antarctic landscape**

Each of the texts presented in this article contributes in distinctive ways to an evolving South American geographical imaginary. The spatiality of Justo's “La borrasca” suggests free movement in a broad area encompassing South Georgia, the Beagle Channel, Cape Horn, the Magellan Strait, the Drake Passage, the Falkland Islands, and the South Shetland and South Orkney Islands.<sup>31</sup> This vast region is indistinctly called “the southern seas”, “the southern shores”, “the Antarctic seas” and “the Patagonian Coast”. The characters come from around the world in search of fortune (or out of plain greed) and adventure. Rather than representatives of a national state, they are individual in nature, and so is their enterprise, be it a quest for financial gain or soul-searching or fulfilling their destinies. By contrast, in *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* (Coloane 1945) the connection between the south of South America and Antarctica is deeply influenced by a preoccupation with national sovereignty. There is no schism between the vast continent and the Chilean sector; Antarctica has a value insofar as it is part of the national territory, a view that naturalises a particular representation of the continent and deems irrelevant all the rest. National states' interests permeate almost every aspect of the interaction between the characters and Antarctica. The immense borderless continuum depicted by Justo in the first decades of the twentieth century knuckles under a perspective that puts Chile first. Although geographical continuity persists, the continuum is now much smaller, mostly encompassing mainland Argentina/Chile and their Antarctic claimed sectors only.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, in “La carga de Membrillares” [“The Membrillares Attack”] (Fontanarrosa 1988), the distance between Antarctica and South

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<sup>31</sup> In a handful of texts, East Antarctica and the Ross Sea Region are also included, as in another of Justo's short stories “Las brumas del Terror” [“The Mists of Terror”].

<sup>32</sup> Although in *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* there is a vague mention to “a whaling factory on the east side of the Antarctic lands”. [pg refs]

America becomes smaller than ever. Paradoxically, as the symbolic gap between South America and Antarctica fades from view, so does the interest in waving national flags.

Although space restrictions mean we can focus in detail on only a small number of works of fiction here, there are elements in other texts that show that this geographic imaginary of an Antarctica merged with the south of South America is widespread in Spanish fiction. These works include the novels *En el Mar Austral* [In the Southern Ocean, first published in 1898] (Mocho 1961), *Hielo azul* [Blue Ice] (Saga 1941), *El puñal de Orión* [Orion's Dagger] (Piñero 1925), *Antártida Argentina* (Schweizer 1958), *Donde la patria es un largo glaciar* [Where the Homeland is a Long Glacier], *Viaje a la Antártida* [Voyage to Antarctica] (Cócaro 1958a, 1958b), *Los Antártides, mare nostrum* (Molins 1950), *La vida en la Antártida* [Life in Antarctica] (Soria 1954), *Trece de suerte* [The Lucky Thirteen] (Burke 1959), *Antártica. Poemas de hielo* [Antarctica. Poems of Ice] (Moneta Testa 1964), *Fuego Antártico. Voluntad para vencer* [Antarctic Fire. Will to Vanquish] (Vaca 1973), *Pujato* (Cortiñas 2013), *Antártica. Sueños de ayer y del mañana* [Antarctica. Dreams of yesterday and of the Future] (Pinochet de la Barra 1988), *Bull Rocket: Peligro en la Antártida* [Bull Rocket: Danger in Antarctica] (Oosterheld, 1995), *Una temporada en Paraíso* [A Season in Paradise], (Erlwein 2007), *La Antártica empieza aquí* [Antarctica Begins Here] (Labatut 2012), *Cartas a Messi* [Letters to Messi] (Schillat 2013), *Antártida negra* [Black Antarctica] (Lestido 2017), some of the short stories included in *La Tierra Maldita* [The Cursed Land] (Justo 2001), the fantasy short stories "Time Wars Lluscuma" (Baradit, n.d.) and "Albedo" (Iparraguirre 2016), the recently published graphic novel *Terra Australis* (Nakamura 2018) and more. An ongoing study is probing whether clear patterns can be identified within this body of texts<sup>33</sup>.

### Looking south ... from the south

As our analysis has made clear, the three stories discussed in this article are by no means entirely unified in the way they represent the movement and motivations of human actors who travel from South American to Antarctic space. Liborio Justo presents a diverse group of men who voluntarily travel to Antarctica in search of adventure and wealth. In Coloane's tale, those who go to Antarctica also do so by their own will and experience a number of adventures, but they do it in pursuit of a higher goal and their relationship with the Antarctic landscape is shaped by national interests. Lastly, in Fontanarrosa's story, those who make it to Antarctica have neither personal ambition nor patriotism, but hunger and desperation. "La borrasca" and "La carga de Membrillares," like several other works of fiction from Argentina and Chile,<sup>34</sup> resonate

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<sup>33</sup> Wainschenker, P. (n.d.). *Notes from the Backyard. Representations of Antarctica in Literature from Argentina and Chile (1886-2015)* (in progress). Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury.

<sup>34</sup> HG Oosterheld, for example, combines the outskirts of Buenos Aires with John Campbell's (Campbell, 1938) frozen monster in "Sherlock Time: Tres ojos" ["Sherlock Time: Three eyes"] (Héctor Germán Oosterheld and Breccia 2012).

with well-known narratives from the English Antarctic corpus: those relating Shackleton's and Amundsen's expeditions respectively. In the latter story, European references are intertwined, with local images with the race to the South Pole juxtaposed with images stemming from Argentine pampas' folklore.

Nonetheless, the texts analysed here share a key feature that contrasts with the broad patterns identified in English fiction: Antarctica is not isolated from its surroundings, but rather connected to them by the Drake Passage (or, in Fontanarrosa's narrative, its absence). The south of South America, the Sub-Antarctic islands and the Antarctic Continent form a continuous geographical entity—the “end of the world”—in which the Drake Passage acts as a connector between different subsections and characters move in a relatively free-flowing fashion. The relationship between Antarctica and the south of South America in these texts is characterised not by opposition but by spatial continuity. The classic English imaginary of Antarctica as an oppositional, inverted underworld does not seem to fit these examples of South American imagination. Rather than an underworld, Antarctica operates as a place that, while hostile and remote, is simultaneously connected to the rest of the world. The sublime, the unnerving, and the other are right there, in the backyard.

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