Gabriela Mistral: How Society and Politics Influenced Her Moral Character and Her Professional Persona

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The author wishes to dedicate this work to Agustín, Aníbal and Ester

For all their love and patience.
Abstract

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Gabriela Mistral lived in a very chauvinist society in Chile, where competition among male writers was hard. Some of them did recognize her strong work, while others rejected it because of her socialist ideals, her lack of academic background and the fact that she was a woman and not from the high society. While representing Chile by invitation of politicians and governors, she visited many American and European countries where she was also published.

This paper recaptures the importance of her work and explains why she was so controversial in her time. This research explores how the society of her times was a destructive influence that kept her in the “shadows”, while in the rest of the world she was considered one of the most influential writers in all Latin America. Ironically, today, she has been forgotten outside our country, and is well recognized in Chile.
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PIECECITOS

“Piecitos de niño, azulosos de frío, ¡Cómo os ven y no os cubren, Dios mío!

¡Piecitos heridos por los guijarros todos, ultrajados de nieves y lodos!

El hombre ciego ignora Que por donde pasáis, Una flor de luz viva dejáis.”

LITTLE FEET

“Little feet of children blue with cold, how can they see you and not cover you – dear God!

Little wounded feet cut by every stone, hurt by snow and mire.

Man, blind, does not know That where you pass, You leave a flower Of living light.”

Gabriela Mistral
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Piececitos”/“Little Feet” is a poem that every child in Chile learns at school, every year, from North to South, like a typical song. The author, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga – who was born in a small town in the North – started writing poems and prose when she was 14 years old. At the same time she became a teacher’s assistant at rural schools, and when older, became a teacher as well. This woman who later called herself Gabriela Mistral, not only wrote literary pieces but many essays and letters to important people in the first half of the 20th century. These people would include politicians, artist, writers, journalist, and academics from all over America. However, she was constantly criticized by some teachers in the schools where she worked and by some conservative politicians under the influence of the Catholic Church. With the spread of her works internationally by other authors, Lucila had the chance to make connections and travel around Europe and America. Gabriela Mistral became –and still is– an inspiring woman. She was the first Hispanic woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and along with Pablo Neruda, is by far the most important Chilean poet of all time.


2. First woman was the Swiss Selma Lagerlof (1901); the second was the Italian Grazia Deledda (1926) and the third was the North American Pearl S. Buck (1938). Mistral was the fourth and the first in Spanish Language. Scarpa, Roque Esteban. Una mujer nada de tonta. (Santiago, Chile: Fondo Andrés Bello. 1976), P41.
Margaret Bates defines the style in Mistral’s work: “She differs from other women poets of her time, often painfully self-centered and extremely conscious of their “femininity,” in that she seldom mentions herself unless it is to tell us of her plainness. In her poems as in her life she is the arch enemy of vanitas.” This was something that attracted curiosity and speculations about her persona. It would also bring her enemies and the envy of some women as well, especially those involved in education.

How come a self-taught provincial lower middle-class woman, who became a rural schoolteacher and poet in her spare time, who suffered several personal tragedies, became a celebrity in Chile and internationally in her time? How was this woman able to receive the most important recognition in the literary world, with almost no translations from Spanish? Despite being now a celebrated and meaningful figure in Chile, Gabriela Mistral’s international recognition has decreased. The poet who once inspired the manifestos that became the precursors to the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations Children's Fund

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4. (See Appendices p.43) “Two months after her death, Américas (formerly) the Bulletin of the Pan American Union) reprinted her Pan-American pledge under the title “Pan American Manifesto,” a piece that remains a full expression of her Pan-Americanism. Moreover, it stands as an enduring, hopeful vision of multicultural harmony and unity for America- in the sense of that word so much a vibrant part of her.” Jonathan Cohen, *Chapter 1,* in *Gabriela Mistral: The Audacious Traveler,* edited by Marjorie Agosin (Athens: Ohio University Press. 2003), p.14
(UNICEF), and who wrote the famous verses of “His name is today,”\textsuperscript{5} is now peripheral to mainstream North Americans.

The purpose of this paper is to spread Mistral’s work to mainstream North America once again. But instead of focusing on her poems and what might be interpreted as standalone pieces, this paper will explore the connection of the poet to her work.

Mistral’s work becomes even more impressive once situated in personal context. In addition to her low socio-economic status, she suffered several human tragedies: from the early abandonment by her father, to the suicide of one of her young lovers and her adopted son. Moreover, she constantly struggled to overcome a conservative and politically polarized society that kept her in the “shadows” even after she had obtained international recognition.\textsuperscript{6}

This paper will begin with her general biography. Additional sections will provide the political history of Chile and an analysis of some of the places she lived. One of the most important of these locations was Mexico, the first country that was the gateway to the beginning of her international career. Another place where she had strong relations at different stages of her life was the United States, were she lived for many years and spent her last one. In conclusion, this paper will address


\textsuperscript{6} She received the Chilean National Prize of Literature in 1951, 6 years after the Nobel Prize.
how she is known in Chile and internationally now, and why it should be important to recover her work and keep it alive.
Chapter 2: Biography

Lucila Godoy Alcayaga (1889-1957), better known as Gabriela Mistral, was born in Vicuña, a rural town close to the mountains in the arid north of Chile. Her father abandoned the family when she was three years old. She was brought up by her mother who worked as a seamstress, and her older half-sister Emelina, who was a primary school teacher. Emelina taught Lucila rudimentary arithmetic, reading and writing. However, for most of her youth, Lucila was largely self-taught. Her sister nevertheless, influenced her career in education. At the age of 14, Mistral became an assistant teacher.

From this young age, Lucila started sending written work to newspapers under the name of “Someone”, “Solitude” and “Soul”; her readers were alarmed by her honesty as well as the socialist and pagan undertones in her writing. For this reason, in 1908, she adopted the pseudonym of Gabriela Mistral, for collaboration on the newspaper “La Constitución”. The name she chose came from two male authors she admired, and from whom she read their translations: the Italian Gabriele D’Annunzio and the French Fréderic Mistral.

8. The first time Lucila used the pseudonym was for the newspaper “La Constitución”, in Ovalle, Limari, in the north of Chile, on October 27th, 1908. Various biographies would say, by mistake, that it was for the Floral Games Prize, but that was years later. Zegers, Pedro Pablo, Conservador Archivo del Escritor y Jefe de Colecciones Especiales, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. El Legado Literario De Gabriela Mistral En El Archivo Del Escritor De La Biblioteca Nacional De Chile, Conferencia realizada durante el Seminario sobre Archivos Personales, organizado por la Biblioteca Nacional de España y efectuado en Madrid entre el 26 y 28 de mayo de 2004.
In 1905, she met one of the most important and influential people in her work and life—her first known lover Romelio Ureta, a man who was an employee in the railroads. The relationship with Romelio only lasted a couple years, but that was enough to leave a strong mark. In the year 1909, on November 25th Romelio killed himself. It was a huge loss for Mistral that would inspire her to write the “Sonetos de la Muerte” (“Death Sonnets”), a collection of poems that won the first prize in “Floral Games of the Artist and Writers Society” (“Los Juegos Florales de la Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores.”) five years later. This first recognition is tied to an anecdote that showed how Mistral decided to build her public persona. She didn’t attend the award ceremony. Some people would say that she didn’t have the proper attire for it and so was confined to watch in the audience incognito; others would say that she didn’t come at all. She never confirmed or denied either allegation, but preferred to maintain her image as the humble rural teacher who was too modest to receive prizes and recognition. This award provided her with some recognition amongst her peers but not entirely. She was already well known from her political writings, and she had already won over her ‘enemies’ especially in the high society. Her sonnets became the foundation that created her legend in the world of poets; the myth that would follow her always, the tragic verses dedicated to her lover, Romelio Ureta.9

9. (See Appendices page 38 )People would say that the Sonnets is the story of the lover who died because of love. It might be that way, but we could think it is more of a feeling that Gabriela had with the real event, a kind of reconciliation with the real story and plea for him. She would explain years later, in an interview, that he didn’t kill himself for her or for love, as most of the people believe so, he did it because he was ashamed for not being able to return money he took on his work. “Esos versos- ha dicho- fueron escritos sobre una historia real. Pero Romelio Ureta no se suicidó por mí. Todo aquello ha sido novelería.” /“These verses -she has said -were written, about a real story. But Romelio Ureta did not commit suicide for me. Everything was novelty [gossip]”. Alegria, Fernando. Genio y Figura de Gabriela Mistral. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1966), P.25
With only writings in magazines and some newspapers, with no serious publications and with only this prize to start, people already began reading her internationally and she gained admiration. Since very young, Mistral fought against chauvinism and traditional politics. Her principal concern was for women and children’s education in a time when they would not be considered for education by the State. She was offered collaborations in newspapers in México, Spain, Perú, and Argentina. Moreover, in Chile, the government moved her from town to town to teaching positions and as Director for various Institutions. Some of these ‘moves’—depending on the local government, or politics—were to keep her outside the social circles of the capital. Other moves were to promote her ideas in different parts of the country.

A man of important stature that started to follow this unknown woman was José Vasconcelos, Minister of Education in Mexico. He invited Mistral, who was 32 years old, to join the Mexican government’s educational reform program in 1921, and she accepted. This was the first international step in her career that would take her away from Chile forever; she traveled with her friend Laura Rodig, a Chilean artist. They would return a few times, but never lived in Chile again.

Gabriela worked together with three different women in her life whom she called her secretaries (to give them a title): the first was Laura Rodig who stayed with her about ten years, the second was Mexican-born Palma Guillén, and the last an American, Doris Dana, who was with her in the end and was Mistral’s executor named by the poet. Women of all types admired Mistral. She had friends from all socioeconomic levels, but she always depended on her secretary, who was considered her friend and family. She had very deep friendships with each of them.

Mistral’s first book, “Desolación” (Desolation), was published in 1922, by Columbia University in New York. Gabriela traveled throughout the United States
and Europe. In 1923, the University of Chile decided to give her the honorary degree of a Spanish Teacher (title only given by this institution at that time). At the same time, she published “Lectura para mujeres” (Lectures for women) by commission of the Mexican Government. This publication opened debates about women’s rights to the rest of the world.

In 1924, she published “Ternura” (“Tenderness”) in Madrid, Spain. At the same time, she traveled as a visiting professor in the United States. Years later, the Chilean Government named her Representative at the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of Nations in Geneva, and then a Delegate at the Education Congress in Lozano, and the Children Protection in Geneva. This started her diplomatic career, leaving aside but not completely her teaching profession.

Around 1928, with no certain dates provided by biographers, she found herself adopting a nephew, the son of her half brother that was living in Spain. She continued living from one country to another with him. In 1930, she worked as a visiting professor in different colleges in the USA, and was invited to talk for conferences in Central and South America. Also, she gave Hispanic literature lectures at the Puerto Rico University, in Havana and Panamá. In 1933, after being named consul for Madrid, Spain, she began to develop her diplomatic career in different parts of the world. In Lisboa, a couple of years later, she was designated Consul as a permanent profession for life by the Chilean Government.

“Tala” was published in 1938 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, while she was consul in Nice, and she donated the copyrights to the Basque Children victims of the Spanish civil war. Soon, she and her son fled from World War II to South America to become Consul in Petropolis, Brazil. In 1941, she published her first anthology with a prologue by Ismael Edwards Matte. Two years later, the biggest tragedy of her life
took place; her adopted son, Juan Miguel Godoy (called Yin Yin) killed himself when he was seventeen.

In 1945, still living in Brazil, she heard the news of her Nobel Prize; later, she would receive the letter. She was 56 years old. After receiving the award, she moved to Santa Barbara in the United States. By this time, her health was very delicate. Recognitions continued, she was named Doctor Honoris Causa at Mills College, Oakland, California in 1947.

The next year, Mistral was consul in Veracruz, Mexico, and then she was transferred to Naples, Italy, where in 1951, she won the National Literature Award in Chile – the most important prize in her native country. Her last publication was “Lagar”, 1954, in Santiago, Chile. That was her last visit to the country of her birth. Afterwards, she was appointed by the Chilean Government as a consul to the General Assembly of the United Nations, and so she moved to New York. In 1957, on January 10th after some cancer complications, she died in the Hempstead Hospital, on Long Island. Ten years later Doris Dana, the poet’s last secretary and executor published “Poema de Chile” (“Poems of Chile”), an unfinished work of Mistral’s.

About her work

It is, without a doubt, hard to explain in a simple phrase or description what Gabriela Mistral’s work is about. Saying that it was about the ‘world’ seems small in describing all her vast topics. It is necessary to separate her work into two areas of writing; the first one being essays and letters, and the second being her literary work. Although they have different themes explored between them, they are connected to her deepest thoughts, experiences, feelings, and particularly by her style of writing.
In general, she is most recognized by her literary work, but she didn’t write only poems and prose. As a diplomatic woman she wrote essays and columns in several magazines and newspapers all over the world. These writings earned her friends and critics. She had a sharp pen and shared her opinions about politics, wars, human rights (especially for children and women), education and Latin culture without fear of retaliation. She was, unquestionably, a visionary woman; many of her writings, even when she shared thoughts in her private writings, showed a woman with strong convictions and ideals of a new and better world. Though she was not part of any political movement, she was an independent artist who shared the ideas of countries united by their history, art and culture. She had a passionate voice that spoke of freedom and justice.

Mistral’s primary literary works, on the other hand, are about visions and experience in love, life, travels, motherhood, childhood, and simple common things of daily life, folklore and nature. However, children were her biggest concern and her dearest topic. She always felt like a mother, even when she wasn’t a biological one.

[In her work] There are also an abundance of poems fashioned after children’s folklore. The stories, rounds, and lullabies, the poems intended for the spiritual and moral formation of the students, achieve the intense simplicity of true songs of the people; there throbs, within them the sharp longing for motherhood, the inverted tenderness of a very feminine soul whose innermost “reason for being” is unfulfilled.10

Mistral was raised Catholic like most people in Chile, and her work often referred to the Bible and God, and to nature and its creation. However, around 1912 she discovered the prose of Rabindranath Tagore and the mysticism of the Hindu religion. She became more interested in them, but without leaving Catholicism

completely aside. Also, she was strongly influenced by Judaism. The Old Testament was represented constantly in her work. “Both aspects ultimately reveal much about Mistral’s character, her position on cultural plurality within the hermetic Catholicism of Chile, her deep understanding and embracing of Christianity’s Judaic roots, and her humanitarianism.”

Lockhart mentions a debate built around the image of Gabriela, her speculated identity(ies), her ambiguity, the need to answer the question: “Was she or wasn’t she?” not only in religion, but also sexually, as a mother, in politics and professionally.

Between 1912 and 1917 the majority of her works were published in magazines in Chile’s capital, Santiago, and other regions of the country from North to South. Internationally Gabriela published in Paris, several works were sent to Buenos Aires and Lima. Selections of these poems and prose where included later in “Desolación”. She wrote for every magazine she could find, so her word spread to many listeners and readers. Her work was published in places that she never knew. She had opinions and critiqued politics and the literature of the time, especially the work of women writers in Chile. She would say that it was nothing but melodramatic and lacked a real voice. While some poets of her time, in Chile, would criticize her literature, many respected and protected her. The Nicaraguan writer, Rubén Darío,

12. The following quote names some of the journals and magazines and places where her work was published, and that later created her first publication, Desolation. “Cabe mencionar que la mayoría de los trabajos de Lucila Godoy, ahora convertida en Gabriela Mistral, entre 1912 y 1917, se publican en revistas de Santiago y provincias como Sucesos, Zig-Zag, Pacifico Magazine, Revista de Educación Nacional, Primerose, Nueva Luz, Ideales, Figulinas, Familia, Luz y Sombra, Norte y Sur, Los Diez, La Silueta y Yo Sé Todo, entre otras. En el extranjero, Gabriela publica, como ya lo hemos dicho, en Elegancias, en 1913, en París; Nosotros, en 1918, en Buenos Aires, y Atlántida, también en Buenos Aires, en fechas posteriores, colaboraciones que envía desde Punta Arenas y Temuco. Todo el proceso anterior, es el inicio de lo que podríamos denominar la “obra gruesa” de los poemas y prosas, que años más tarde, en 1922, se incluyen en su primer libro: Desolación.” Zegers, El Legado Literario De Gabriela Mistral, p 11.
read some of her work while he lived in Paris and he published her writings in a magazine there, in France. (He is considered one of the most important writers in Latin America, and Mistral admired him as well). Pablo Neruda, the second Nobel laureate of Chile, owes her a lot of credit to his education. She believed he was the greatest poet of their time. Yet she believed he didn’t like her. The truth was, he admired her work and felt grateful to Mistral for her educational support when he was a child in his hometown, while she was director of the Girl’s School in Temuco. But he also did not defend her much from the critics.

What caught the attention of the readers in Mistral’s works? Her writing style was so different for that time, and many authors and biographers agree that it was something very new. Margot Arce de Vázquez would compare her to the poets of the time:

Gabriela Mistral’s poetry stands as a reaction to the Modernism of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (rubendarismo): a poetry without ornate form, without linguistic virtuosity, without evocations of gallant or aristocratic eras; it is the poetry of a rustic soul, as primitive and strong as the earth, of pure accents without the elegantly correct echoes of France. By comparison with Hispanic-American literature generally, which in so many occasions has been an imitator of European models, Gabriela’s poetry possesses the merit of consummate originality, of a voice of its own, authentic and consciously realized. The affirmation within this poetry of the intimate “I”, removed from everything foreign to it, makes it profoundly human, and it is this human quality that gives it its universal value.\(^{13}\)

She was not governed by known poets of her time, their verses and prose. She wrote from her own convictions, but she was also extremely critical of her own work. Most of the time she was doing corrections. Several manuscripts have been found of the same poems with variations. She always tried to find the correct words for her writing, which is why she is also very hard to translate, not only for Anglo languages.

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\(^{13}\) Arce de Vázquez. *Gabriela Mistral: The Poet and Her Work*. Pp. 21-22
but also for languages with Latin origins. The problem that translators find, in general, is that there are many ways to translate poetry. In the case of Mistral, some translators would work with the exact meaning of the word, not getting the sense of the metrics in the piece, or the logic of the meaning of the phrase; others would privilege the metric, changing words and varying the meaning of the phrase as well. She worked with metaphors that used exact words to make sense. For Mistral’s work, finding the balance between forms of translations proves to be the most difficult. Also, Mistral used words to describe places, objects, people, animals or flora that are only understood in Chile. For those words, it is very hard to find translations or a similar word to substitute in other languages.
Chapter 3: Chile and her beginnings

Political and social context

Around the 1880’s, Chile discovered saltpeter (nitrate) deposits that became the source of the country’s wealth for many decades. These resources where controlled by a small group from high society and foreigners. Because of this wealth and because the access to education was very difficult for the lower and middle classes, only the wealthy were involved in politics during this time. There were problems with money interest and corruption, and there was lack of education for the lower economic classes—especially in regions, monopolies, etc,–farther from the capital’s country. In politics, the only areas that differentiated the parties were the moral interests. Synthesized by educational and the religious ideas, there were only two parties that had defined doctrines: the conservative and radical. The conservatives were attached to religion and were less supportive of the ideals of education provided by the State, but instead favored private institutions. The radicals defended the idea of the State being in charge of education with no religion or monetary gain, without prejudice to private education as well, but under the supervision of the State. This group wanted to maintain the most absolute freedom of religion, to reach the final separation of church and state.14

There were no rights for workers who were exploited by their bosses. Up north in the copper and nitrate mines, workers were killed if they demonstrated for social reforms, better working conditions, or against the monopoly of foreign

businessmen. Initially, it was the English who were in charge of the mines. Later they were transferred to the American business sector, which made changes due to pressure from the middle class that was manifesting their concerns. The first protest in the country was in 1903 in the port of Valparaiso by the Steamship Company. Protests then spread over the years to other regions: north with the miners, central and south in agronomy and livestock. Also, at the same time, some National Presidents—who were concerned about education—would start to develop more schools especially in regions with free education, where it was really needed, as Mistral always spoke about. This gave the middle class some tools for a better future, and here some political freedom appeared for the people.

In this Chile, with the birth of a strong middle class, Gabriela Mistral spent her youth. She could see all these movements and inequality right in front of her. Mistral was motivated to effect change with the only thing she could do – teaching – when she was only 14 years old. That passion to confront class adversity was something visionary for a woman of those days, and for that bravery the new ‘politicians of the people’ (mostly liberals and radicals) were captivated by her and protected her, but it was a strong fight. Powerful traditional politicians did not like meritocracy, and less if demanded by women. Though she never showed resentments to the higher class, she was in the sights of several important people who wanted her to go away and curb her influence with the lower and middle classes.

One of the most important friends of Gabriela Mistral was Pedro Aguirre Cerda. He was a teacher and a lawyer, and he was in agreement with the poet’s ideas about education. When he became President of Chile from 1938-1952, his slogan was “To govern is to educate.” He founded numerous technical schools in industry and mining regions, and thousands of primary schools throughout the country. Also, he

was one of the first to recommend Mistral for the Nobel Prize. Mistral’s thoughts and ideas about education were considered very political for the right-wing Conservatives. But to her, education was never political it was something basic and extremely important that everyone should have the opportunity to access. “Lucila Godoy was one of the first voices in Latin America to propose democratic education for all, with no differentiation for student’s gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Contemporary educational thinkers, especially those working from the perspective of critical theory, would echo many of Lucila’s pedagogical ideas.”

Woman of her time

The Chilean society at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century was traditionalist, conservative, entrenched in Catholicism, and chauvinistic in many aspects. There were no institutions or associations with female members; politically active women of the day would have casual meetings in someone’s house, but publicly they were not allowed to have many opinions on political matters. Even women of the high society were most likely to concentrate on the raising of a family instead of being part of an association. Traditional women frowned upon those who remained unmarried, like Gabriela. Women had many limitations in their education, even when they did receive it. Many of them who enjoyed reading were denied or restricted to do so by their own families—for example, they were not allowed to read philosophy or about politics. Well known during this time period in Chile was the writer and poet Teresa Wilms Montt, a contemporary of Mistral, who was considered a rebel because she did not like the aristocracy and high society

16. Verónica Darer, Chapter 3 in Gabriela Mistral: The Audacious Traveler. p.47
itself, even though she was part of their world. Like her, there were others, but none of them with the ideals of Gabriela, or with her background.

Mistral had nothing to lose, unlike women like Wilms who lost all the privileges, and were a source of rumors and disqualifying adjectives, not to mention shame for their families for having a black sheep. They were usually exiled to nunneries to straighten their thoughts and avoid social shame. However, this rural teacher that was Mistral, seemed not to offend anybody, probably because of her humble background. Yet through a deeper inspection, she was introducing social themes that made people talk and think.

Feminists of the time were usually in the wealthier class, and they found in Mistral another voice—the voice of a teacher of the provinces and the voice of someone honest. That is why they liked Gabriela and welcomed her to their meetings, but they didn’t think exactly the same way as the poet. She believed in women’s education, but she was not a feminist in the vocal way as those who fought for the women's right to vote. She did not care about that. Gabriela never wanted to be identified with any movement or political party; she always introduced herself as an independent figure even criticizing women writers.

There is a mountain of disrepute and ridicule in Chile thrown on women who write. There is a reason for that. Not excepting even doña Mercedes Marin del Solar, women in Chile have spread like vines, endless ugly fools guides, smarmy and watery poems. Pure Galician, unfortunate blandness, insufferable hysterical whining.¹⁷

Mistral appreciated those meetings but she wasn’t really part of where they came from. She was independent and she liked to be the voice of the working class. Those women were not part of that group. Fernando Alegría says: “[…] “The Sonnets of death” are not really what give force to the message of Gabriela Mistral in Chile Centennial: her strong feminist discussions in the Ladies’ Club, her lectures on Montessori, its agrarianism, her passionate Christianity loaded with social projections. All this becomes her a character of Chilean culture.”

Joshep R. Slaughter includes a quote of her writing refusing to become a member of the Organization of Women:

In her 1925 article on the women’s movement in Chile, “Organización de las mujeres” (Organization of Women), Mistral recalls a provocative response she gave to an invitation to join the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres (Women’s National Council): ‘[I will accept] with pleasure, when groups of working women take part in the council, and it truly is national; that is, when it shows in relief all three of Chile’s social classes’. In her assessment, the rhetorical cloak of collectivity masks the limited and narrowly self-interested nature of this women’s movement, threatening to foreclose the possibility of true collectivity.

Chile was and still is a segregated country in terms of socio-political facts. Mistral was not only in support of women, but also in support of all people—she had a larger egalitarian vision of society. So she was reluctant to engage in these women’s

18. […] no son realmente los Sonetos de la muerte que dan súbita vigencia al mensaje de Gabriela Mistral en el Chile del Centenario: son sus recias pláticas feministas en el Club de Señoras, sus conferencias sobre la Montessori, su agrarismo, su cristianismo apasionado cargado de proyecciones sociales. Todo esto la convierte en un personaje de la cultura chilena/ […] the Sonnets of death are not really what give effect to Gabriela Mistral’s message in Chile Centennial; her strong feminist talks in the Ladies' Club, her lectures on Montessori, her agrarism and her passionate Christianity laden social projections. All this becomes a character of the Chilean culture. Alegría, Fernando. Universidad Veracruzana (Veracruz, México. 1980), p. 71

groups because the groups were segregated from the rest of the society and had no intention of addressing those inequities.

Because of her sharp tongue, she was constantly moved to several places and cities in different schools throughout the country. Some of these places were far from the capital. Some politicians that were uncomfortable with her presence forced moves to various remote regions. They were bothered by her thoughts and socialist ideas and some of them even by her ‘masculine’ appearance. She never wore fashionable clothes, but despite this, her short hair always combed, and her 6.2foot frame (1,90 mt.) made her stand out. However, most of the people who met her would described Mistral as a ‘saint’ in the way she talked and smiled and her kind manners [...] “She conquered friendships and enmities, hatreds and sympathies. She is read, but much more she is heard.”

She made converts to her political and educational beliefs by all types of people, just by talking with them in meetings and conferences and what was said about her and her work from others.

With the documents and writings found on Mistral’s work and reviewed by Pedro Pablo Zegers, we can realize that most biographers—and Mistral herself—describe tensions between other writers and herself. She always felt unloved and misunderstood in Chile, but the truth is that most of the people admired her. This was true especially of lower class people because they related to her social status, but also, those who were more educated such as wealthy women, writers and academics. Zegers’s reflects on the popularity of Mistral [...] just considering the vast amount of magazines, books and newspapers welcomed selflessly her creative works, and those texts dedicated as supplementary material for education. His comments are

20. [...] Le conquista amistades y enemistades, odios y simpatías. Se la lee, pero mucho más se la escucha”. Alegria. Universidad Veracruzana p. 71
21. “Por último, sólo algunas reflexiones. A la de luz los materiales que se observan en el Archivo, y que corresponden al período en que Gabriela trabaja en Chile, se puede aseverar que
accurate. Mistral was well-loved, and proof of that is visible by all the tributes that schools offer her, with the most important being that thousands of children play and dance to her poems even today. “Her poetry and academic prose, which, by her own account, was written just to be a complement to the classroom, they become material anthology, when Manuel Guzman Maturana, includes them in their reading books that were required teaching materials for many generations.”22 She had supporters even when she didn’t know who they were. It was mostly in political circles that she found herself with more critics.

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22. “Su poesía y prosa escolar, que, según ella misma cuenta, fue escrita sólo para ser un complemento del aula, se convierten en material de antología, cuando Manuel Guzmán Maturana, las incluye en sus libros de lectura, que fueron material docente obligado de tantas generaciones”. Idem, P10.

*Manuel Guzmán was a well-known poet, writer and academic in Chile and he also was a congressman between 1926-1930, creating and promoting educational reforms.
Chapter 4: The exile

In 1918, Pedro Aguirre Cerda, the Minister of Education of Chile and an important friend and supporter of Mistral, tried to secure a good position for her:

It has been an Andean Minister, Don Pedro Aguirre Cerda, who offers and brought a promotion to my corner mountain. This is a high teacher and a politician who is all beautiful moral figure. I accepted the honor, which means an appointment bearing his signature. With that honor now I’m going to the Magellan homeland.23

She refers to her move to Punta Arenas as the last city in the south of the continental territory. Mistral wanted to leave Santiago because she constantly felt personally attacked by her peers; she did not like big cities. This is considered her first ‘personal exile’ in terms of moving away from the capital, and eventually going into isolation within the country. She performed many jobs there, including teaching all kinds of people, even old workers. She also organized Punta Arena’s school administration. Two years later, she was assigned School Director in Temuco in the central territory of the country. While she was working as Director of the School for Girls, she would meet a very young Neruda, the future promise of Chilean poetry. She would help him by giving him books and readings; he would learn about poetry and Russian and Hispanic literature from her.

In 1921, Aguirre decided to move her to Santiago, to be the Director of the Liceo n.1 de niñas de Santiago (School for Girls), a very influential position in an acclaimed school. She had many troubles and she was forced to resign her position because she did not have her education degree. “She resigned [...] to protest a new

law that excluded anyone without a college degree from becoming a certified teacher.”

Nevertheless, Mistral’s influence in Chile was strong in the educational field in terms of teaching methods and child development. “Part of the moral accompaniment that she seeks for the psychological development of children is found in the substance of culture, education, and motherhood. For Mistral, one such basic element is the folktale, which she identifies as particularly appropriate for children.”

In her diaries, she gave a description of all her personal fights with the educational system, from the injustice of social position, to that of educational and socio-political equality. The writers who defended her were minorities in some cases, but she could always trust many of them such as Manuel Magallanes Moure—with whom she had an epistolary affair—and Armando Donoso among others. But they couldn’t do anything to stop her call to México, after Minister Vasconcelos’s invitation. She would never return to live in Chile.

Mission in Mexico and the political context

José Vasconcelos was the minister of Education in México under Alvaro Obregón’s government (1920-1924). He was one of the biggest admires of Gabriela’s work, so he decided to invite her to create and execute a new educational reform for his country. This was the first time she would leave Chile, and it would be forever. However, she never forgot her nation. Some people would say that she hated Chile,

that she wanted to leave because she didn’t feel loved or understood in Chile—and, at some point she must have felt that. But the truth is that she always loved her country and the people, the landscapes and the folklore. It was something present all the time in every word she wrote, even when she talked about other countries and places she visited, she was usually reminded of her roots. She didn’t like the bureaucratic people who criticized her because of her background or lack of education and that were not ready for her work.

Vasconcelos himself with Palma Guillén received her when she arrived to her new errant life outside Chile. Palma was also a teacher and was in charge of guiding Mistral through the whole country, showing her the good and the bad things. She was to become her closest friend and personal secretary for several years.

Mistral’s personal impression of México was focused on the landscapes, but most importantly on the social aspects as well, such as the poverty of the indigenous and the contrasts of social economic status. But also she described her admiration of the Mexican women who reminded her of the lower class women of Chile, the same upright women with the same integrity. Her admiration went out to the historical background of the natives as well, their art and culture, the powerful empire that fell at the colonists’ hands, the blood of innocents wasted. It also reminded her of the natives and the miscegenation in Chile. This was not only a women’s right issue, but it opened another view and another fight for human rights: the rights of the minorities in Latin American countries, the respect for different cultures, thus her thoughts against tyranny and dictators.

Within days of her arrival to Mexico, she inaugurated La Escuela Hogar para Señoritas Gabriela Mistral (The Gabriela Mistral Boarding School for Young Ladies)
in México City. Later other schools and libraries were named in her honor throughout the country. “One would suppose she would became [...] an object of veneration, but such was not the case. According to Vasconcelos, ‘An old evil of ours is xenophobia. [...] her [Mistral] presence provoked resentment. Envious little teachers attacked her because she was a foreigner’ (Iglesias and Garrido, 44)” They would believe that she was making money and just traveling around, but the truth was she lived modestly and didn’t make much of an income. They would ask: Why bring a foreigner to solve problems instead of local teachers? Gabriela was aware of these comments and critics and would begin the introduction of ‘Lecturas para mujeres’ with the title: “Words by a Foreigner”.

Like in the rest of Latin America, women’s education in Mexico was limited to religion and how to be a good wife and mother. Also it was limited to a certain type of women who had more access, but most women did not have access at all. The principal goal and mission of Vasconcelos was to give all of them access, facilities and something more. The purpose was to reduce illiteracy and to bring worker and indigenous women real education. Most of the schools had morning and evening shift schedules and they were Technical Institutions so students could learn crafts and other skills for life and social development—to provide them something more than just writing.

In November of 1924, Vasconcelos had resigned from his position and the new president who replaced Obregón was less interested in educational reforms. Mistral was disappointed. It was time for her to leave Mexico and she found herself with mixed feelings about this country. After her stay in Mexico, she was conflicted.

She was hurt by the critics and “stereotypes for the young female poet, sensitive and vulnerable, disillusioned in love, fraught by tragedy, and alone with her memories, when, in fact she was competent and pragmatic, a true humanist driven by a mission.” On the other hand, she was grateful for the chance to meet the indigenous people and learn of their culture and landscapes; she thought of Mexico as her own country as well.

Chapter 5: In between Mexico and the United States

Beginning her Consul Career

In 1923, the Council of Primary Education in Chile gave her the Spanish Teacher’s degree. She thought it was too late and she did not care much about this title. Somehow she was still hurt for all the negativity she had encountered in Chile while she was teaching without this certification; now, she did not need it anymore.

In 1925, she retired from academics at the age of 36 and was given a state pension from the Chilean government. In 1926, she was named secretary of one of the American Sections of the League of Nations. Then she was appointed to the position of Secretary of the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation of the Society of Nations in Geneva. Here she formed friendships with important intellectuals of the time: Henri Bergson, Madame Curie, Paul Valéry, Georges Duhamel, François Mauriac and George Bernanos, among others. She also became involved in the Conference for the Protection of Children held in Geneva, Switzerland. 29

She moved to Provence, France in 1928. From there she would travel to Rome, Paris and Geneva. In that year, Gabriela also attended the International University Federation in Madrid, Spain, as a delegate from Chile and Ecuador. It is around this time as well, that she received the visit of a family member. Her half-brother Carlos Miguel Godoy Vallejos had a son with Marta Mendoza. She died all of a sudden and left him with the child. He could not take care of the baby by himself and decided to give him up for adoption to Gabriela, with the promise that he would

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29. Agosin; Garafulich. *From Chile to the World*. p39
never reclaim him. Her dreams of becoming a mother became true with this boy, Juan Miguel Godoy, who later considered Mistral as his mother. She would call him Yin Yin. The next year, 1929, her mother, Petronila Alcayaga de Godoy died. This event would later become another source of inspiration for her work.

From then forward, she traveled around the world attending conferences and providing lectures about Chilean and Latin American authors. She began her consular career formally in 1932 in Geneva, but could not work after she declared herself an antifascist. She was transferred then to Spain. Although she was moving from one place to another with her consular work, she also participated in literature colloquiums and lectures all over North and South America and Europe.

In 1940, she fled with her son from Europe at the beginning of World War II, to South America. During her time as consul in Petrópolis, Brazil, she met and became friends with a Jewish couple, Stefan Zweig and his wife. Stefan was a writer as well, and the couple always suffered mentally after leaving their native country of Germany. The couple tragically decided to commit suicide together. This loss was a great source of pain for the poet, and to Juan Miguel, who felt very closed to them. Mistral could see this event coming, but there was nothing she could do except accepts the pain as she did before in the past.

In 1941 she published her first anthology with a prologue by Ismael Edwards Matte. Two years later, another tragedy broke her life into pieces; her son Yin Yin killed himself when he was seventeen, on August 14th. Fernando Alegria describes these two events in the poet’s life,

Gabriela was close with Stefan Zweig and his wife and sensed—as only she could do so—the awful climax awaiting the helpless Jewish

30. Juan Miguel was born in Barcelona, on April 1st in 1925. [review december, 2015]

31. [review december, 2015]
couple. She put this event on her shoulders and carried it all her life. However, she do not sensed the suicide of her child, Juan, and the surprise was like a stab. She never recovered from that death; somehow, he announced her death. Furthermore, I have no doubt about it; it altered her mental faculties.\(^{32}\)

She would confirm this last phrase in a letter written to her sister. “Nobody would ever understand my horror of finding my Yin Yin agonizing with the arsenic. Nothing, nothing would have prepared me for this. And nothing could”.\(^{33}\) Also, a time later, she would send one very long letter to some of her friends were she would bring details of the event, the hypothesis that she had about it, and many reflections.

[...] My Yin ... my "little boy" now even more "child" than ever, by the madness that took him away, it was not by illness, Emita, He killed himself. And writing these three words still feels like a dream. And I'll be foolish and will not touch stability myself while not understanding the absurd. It will relieve me if I could only understand, and although the understanding has nothing to do with the recovering or acceptance. [...] Oh, but I must return to my old heresy and believe in the karma of past lives to understand how great, phenomenal crime did I commit that I have been punish with my agonizing night with Juan Miguel in a hospital, so dreadful, despite his incredible stoicism with which withstood the embers of arsenic in his body poor dear!

[...] Moreover, it is no consolation that I seek, it is “seeing him” and in the dreamland I have him, and in the feelings of a presence in the vigil too, and what remains of both receipt is what I am living, and nothing more than that.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{32}\) “Gabriela intimó con Stefan Zweig y su mujer y presintió – como solo ella podía hacerlo- el desenlace espantoso que aguardaban a la indefensa pareja judía. Cuando se produjo se echo esa muerte al hombro y la cargo por el resto de su vida. En cambio no presintió el suicidio de su niño, Juan, y la sorpresa fue como una puñalada. De eso no se repuso nunca; en cierto modo, adelantó su muerte. Además, y sobre esto no tengo dudas, alteró sus facultades mentales.” Alegria. *Gabriela Mistral: Genio y Figura*. p.70


This was the most tragic and black episode in her life. She would never be the same, physically—by that time she was struggling with diabetes—and psychologically, he was everything to her. This event was included in literary format in her last publication, *Lagar*. She writes to Juan Miguel in many verses. In “Aniversario”/*Anniversary* and “Los Dos”/*Two of us* she would directly name him Miguel.

She was still consul in Brazil in 1945, when she received the news on the radio announcing that she won the Nobel Prize. After receiving the award in December, she moved to Santa Barbara, California in the United States. The whole world was curious about this almost unknown woman that received such enormous recognition. With the lack of translation of her work, most people didn’t know her, and didn’t understand why she was winning this prize. Although in Hispanic countries where she was already well-known, her nomination was a matter to celebrate, especially because of two important facts: she was the first Latin American to win the prize for Literature, but she was also the first Latin woman to do so. She pointed this out when she said: “El Nuevo mundo ha sido honrado en mi persona. Por lo tanto mi Victoria no es mía, sino de América”/*The new world has been honored through me. Therefore, my victory is not mine, it is America’s. */35

As Europe was ending their War with devastated countries; the Nobel Prize decided this time to look at the 'new continent' and open their eyes to the Americas, to these forgotten countries—For Mistral represented not only Chile, but also all of the Americas. She did not consider herself nationalist but "Americanist".

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Chapter: 6 Relation with the United States

To talk about Mistral’s relationship with the United States it is necessary to go back in time. It is almost unbelievable how attached Mistral was with this country, since very early in her life, and without even speaking English. She traveled to many states, and lived in the USA for many years. She spent time on both coasts. She always felt admiration for the people of the United States. Mistral was fascinated by the spirit of the young Americans. She described her image of them as strong, independent, curious and with intrinsic motivation to learn. However, she criticized the USA for being involved in invasions into Latin America. She made several calls to protect the minorities and the most vulnerable countries. She knew that the United States was a developed country and that it was growing fast, but she also knew that they were taking advantage of the work of poorer countries, and they were not giving much back. She spoke especially for Mexico and Nicaragua, asking the U.S. to respect the different cultures in the South.

First Publication

It was 1922 when a professor at Columbia University in New York, Federico de Onís, gave a lecture about Mistral. She was by then moving to Mexico. Students and faculty were so impressed with her work but knew that there was no existing publication in a book format. They decided, by their own convictions, to make a compilation of her material, making her first book publication under the support of the Hispanic Institute. She accepted gratefully without even knowing the people who worked behind the scenes to make it happen. This was the origin of “Desolación.”
(Desolation). There was no English translation at this time, so it was published only in Spanish. This recompilation of her work from different parts of the world created one of the most important books of poetry and prose in the Spanish language. This publication was the basis for her fame from readers from different parts of the world. The first bilingual translation was published the next year; the authors were by Michael P. Predmore and Liliana Baltra.\textsuperscript{36} This translation exposed her work for the first time for English readers to appreciate.

The importance of the USA in her life

The first and second visits to the US were in 1930 and 1931. She came to work as a visiting professor at Mills College in Oakland, California, Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, and Barnard College in New York City. Also, she would attend conferences in Central America, and provide Hispanic literary lectures in universities in Puerto Rico, Cuba and Panamá.

Her third visit to North America was in 1938. After visiting Chile, Argentina, Peru and Cuba she lived in Florida for a short time. From there she visited Jacksonville and Tallahassee; Mobile, Alabama, New Orleans in Louisiana, and then New York and Washington DC as a guest of the Pan American Union.

After winning the Nobel Prize in 1945, she was appointed Consul of Chile in Los Angeles, California. Recognitions all over the world continued, and in the USA she was named Doctor Honoris Causa at Mills College, Oakland, California in 1947. Three years later, she returned to the city of New Orleans where the Mayor, presented her with the key to the city.

In 1951 she won the National Literature Award in Chile, the most important prize in her country, ironically received years after first acquiring the world’s most famous award for literature. She was in Italy by then, and in 1953 she was named Consul of Chile in New York. This time Mistral participated in the Assembly of the United Nations representing Chile in the Legal and Social Condition of Women’s Commission (Third Session, March 16th–April 3rd). The next year (1954) when she was 65, she was present at the Eight Session of the same Assembly (March 22–April 9th). That year would also prove to be her last visit to Chile, invited formally by the Government, “where she was given an official tribute and was given the corresponding honors as the people of Chile enthusiastically acclaimed her.”

She published Lagar in Santiago and then returned to the United States. She was very ill.

On December 10th, 1955, in New York, Mistral attended the reading of her “Message about Human Rights”, at the great hall of the United Nations. In the next year she wrote her will, in which she bequeaths all of the rights of her works published in South America to the children of Montegrande.

As if she had known from the beginning that she would die in another country, she wrote “País de la Ausencia”/”Land of Absence”, a poem that was included in her book Tala (1938) and where she predicts her death in a land without name: “[…] Its name, a name/ that has never been heard, /and in a land without

37. Agosin and Garafulich: From Chile to the World p.50
38. Idem p 52.
In 1957, after fighting with severe cancer, she died on Long Island. The funeral mass was held at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. On January 19th her remains arrived in Chile. The government declared three days of national mourning, and a multitude of people came to see her at the University of Chile. She was buried in the General Cemetery of Santiago. In 1960 by the intervention of Doris Dana the poet’s executor, her remains were moved to Montegrande, as Gabriela expressed in her last will. In 2005 by the involvement of the Government of Chile and Doris Dana, Yin Yin’s remains were moved from Petropolis, Brazil, to accompany Gabriela in her place in Montegrande.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Chilean society is considered—even today—very traditional and conservative. In this chauvinist society, competition among males, especially writers and artists, has always been hard. It was even more difficult for a woman to compete and defend her background at the beginning of the 20th century, as it was for Gabriela Mistral.

By understanding Mistral more as a unique individual, her work, and the social context that helped to shape her character, one can understand the beliefs, myths and her outright rejection by some political groups. She had several achievements that many other poets and writers of the time could only dream of obtaining. Most of those awards came from other countries; in Chile, her recognition was later but not complete. She was very well loved and respected among students and many academics. The name Gabriela Mistral these days still evokes emotional feelings, when knowing her and her story. She is mostly recognized for her poems and all the myths that surrounded her tragic life events, but she was more than that. In the academic world, she was a pioneer in the methods of teaching; she wrote the beautiful prose, “The Teacher’s Prayer” and several other essays about teaching, not only for Chile but also, as an example for the rest of the Americas where she witnessed the poverty of numerous cities and the lack of education in those places. “[...] Mistral’s educational philosophy regarding teachers, teaching, and schools still offers an inspirational call to actively reform social and educational inequities that plague many nations, including those in Latin America.”40 She wanted to give opportunities to all kinds of people—men, women and children—regardless of their

40. Darer. Chapter 3 in Gabriela Mistral The Audacious Traveler. P.47
ethnicity, social status, color or language. She believed education was the way to defeat this inequity. Schools everywhere in the continent are named after her. She was considered the mother of the Americas; she adopted all the children that were suffering from wars and poverty in her heart, through her social policies and in her writing.

Gabriela Mistral is still well known in Latin America and people feel close to this poet, mostly because of her language, language that is not only Spanish, but also a true reflection of feelings and descriptions of the culture that all Latin Americans have in common and that she knew how to channel. Because of Hispanic history, Spain is the country in Europe that is most similar to Chile. The Spanish people still refer to Mistral as one of the most important poets for Spanish speakers, and they consistently recognize other Latin writers as well. For the rest of Europe and the United States, it is still hard to understand her work. There are few translations, and the scholars of Hispanic literature are not only aware of Mistral’s writings but also recognize her work as a humanitarian and a civil right defender.

Gabriel Mistral saw her American people in the trance of a creative agony; she instinctively identified with the people and the working classes; Her message was from pure Christian roots, a humanistic practice that sought the unity of men, solidarity through knowledge in beauty, and in the search for justice beyond prejudices and sectarian hatreds.

It is therefore necessary to seek her word, identify it in the verse and prose, but above all, by the example of her life, lesson of creative authenticity, moral courage and strong ideological consistency.41

The humble rural teacher was rich in the most spiritual way, which is what took her so far in life. The job now, is to keep her work alive by trying to inspire more translations and by making her work more accessible today in all languages. We need to bring her essays and writings back into the literary spotlight that

41. Alegría. Universidad Veracruzana. P.79
addressed the social ills of her day and that are still applicable today. Clearly there are still problems that Mistral addressed that plague us, but there exist today stronger social movements and more tools to create change. She can still inspire more people to do good in the world.
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La Orden Franciscana de Chile autoriza el uso de la obra de Gabriela Mistral. Lo equivalente a los derechos de autoría es entregado a la Orden Franciscana de Chile, para los niños de Montegrande y de Chile, de conformidad a la voluntad testamentaria de Gabriela Mistral.
Appendices

_Death Sonnets_

I
From the icy niche where men placed you,
I will lower you to the humble and warm earth.
The men did not know that I am to lay in it,
And that upon the same pillow we are to dream.

I will gently lay you down onto the warm earth
With the sweet caress of a mother for her sleeping child
And the soil will become a soft cradle
Upon receiving your body, of a hurt child.

I will then scatter bits of earth and rose dust,
And in the delicate sapphire of the moon dust
The light remains will be captured.

II
This weary tiredness, will one day be greater,
and the soul will tell the body it does not want to continue
dragging its mass along the rose color path,
where men go by, happy to live...

You will feel resolute digging beside you,
as another sleeping woman arrives to the quiet town.
I will wait until they have covered me completely...
and we will then speak for an eternity!

Only then you will know, why your flesh
is not yet ripened for those profound bones,
without fatigue, you had to come down to sleep.
Light will arise in the dark zone of destiny;
you will know that in our alliance
there was a sign from the stars
and, our enormous pact broken, you had to die...

III
Wicked hands took hold of your life from the day when,
under a sign of the stars, you left the field
of snow covered lilies. With joy it had bloomed.
Wicked hands tragically entered him...

And I said to the Lord: —“Along mortal paths
they take him. Beloved shadow that knows not how to guide!
Tear him away, Lord, from those fatal hands
or plunge him in the long sleep that you alone can give!

I cannot call out to him, I cannot follow him!
His vessel is pushed by a dark stormy wind.
Return him to my arms or harvest him in bloom.”

The rose colored vessel of his life came to a halt...
What did I not know of love’s ways, that I had no pity?
You, who will judge me, understand, Oh, Lord!

Translation by Doris Dana.42

42 Agosin; Garafulich 178
Land of Absence

Land of absence,
strange land,
lighter than angel
or subtle sign,
color of dead algae,
color of falcon
with the age of all time,
with no age content.

It bears no pomegranate
not grows jasmine,
and has no skies
not indigo seas.
Its name, a name
that has never been heard,
and in a land without name
I shall die.

Neither bridge nor boat
brought me here.
no one told me
it was island or shore.
A land I did not search for
and did not discover.

Like a fable
that I learned,
a dream of taking
and letting go.
And it is my land
where I live and die.
It was born to me of things
that are not of land,
of kingdoms and kingdoms
that I had and I lost,
of all things living
that I have seen die,
of all that was mine
and went from me.

I lost ranges mountains
Where in I could sleep.
I lost orchards of gold
that were sweet to live.
I lost islands of indigo
and sugar cane,
and the shadows of these
I saw circling me
and together and loving
become a land.

I saw manes of fog
without back or nape,
saw sleeping breaths
pursue me,
and in years of wandering
become a land,
and in a land without name
I shall die.

Translation by Doris Dana.\(^{43}\)

\(^{43}\) Idem 216-218
**Appeal for a Child**

This is a day of unity and also a day of reconciliation for all of us in the Child.

Today, our party discussions come to a halt: they rest, abound. Because there are many things we can discuss, but not this embarrassment called the naked and hungry Child. He did not ask to be born and he, without much claim besides his poor body that is a proof of his poor sustenance, an unhealthy room, a life scraping by.

For the first time we will give for child without mention of race or country, any child from any place in the world: South America, Chinese, Italian, Polish, Jewish, etc. And we will learn, and be surprised to know that in spite of angry chauvinisms, the concept of humanity, as the indivisible body of Christ, is concealed in the midst of our spirit, and that this “appeal” will make it rise to our hearts.

Many of the things we need, can wait: the Child cannot. Right now is when his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being rehearsed. To him we cannot reply: “Tomorrow.” His name is “Today”. After the age of seven, whatever we do will be to half-fix and correct without curing.

We are ill from many errors and many other faults; but the name of our worst crime is the abandonment of the children. Neglecting the fountain of life. It happens in some trades –a broken piece at the start cannot be remade. The same in the case of the Child: a late fixing does not bring a cure. In this way, we damage the divine design that the child had in him.

Today is the day to give for a crowd, but at the same time to each one, to give reaching everyone, without taking away from our own: the integrity of the United Nations in its distribution, will be without reproach.

Today’s collection is the start of a bold approach that was never done before: the one to give to another, to the one from faraway, to our compatriot and to the stranger. This essay is not absurd at all: it is the first and the last letter of the Christian alphabet. We never tested this, and one day we would have needed to be guided to a spiritual activity that was postponed but inevitable, difficult but possible.
We want to save ourselves by saving the Child; we always believed that salvation could come from helping a relative, the one whose face we knew. But, He who we call the Savior, did not come just for the Jew; He came for the planet and scandalized by adopting the World, centurions and rabbis.

It could be that the weakness of Christianity comes from our homely, and regional charity and the indifference with which we look at hunger in the Orient, in Africa and others.

The stretched-out hand of today, the traveling collection box that goes through the streets is not meant to ask, but to charge. We are all indebted to the little bundle that hides in our mountains, that lives in the valleys only receiving his share of air and light, and that wonders in cities that are both lavish and frayed by misery.

Today the collectors charge us what it is owed to the child, which is much. Let us give without a frown; let us give by either collective or individual decorum, Christian or Pagan, but let us all give. When we let go our coins, let’s try to see the invisible person who asks, so that from that image, the consciousness of a united World can be born within us, something that was tried-out in vain by the Society of Nations and that now, the United Nations Organization tries again, as one that tries for a second time, to plant a seed in the frozen and hard soil.

The United Nations are more than an assembly, politically tailored: they are the center of a universal consciousness. And the best of its initiatives and inspiration will perhaps be this “Appeal for a Child,” that is also a reparation of the mother’s shortcomings.

We were all children and to give today will be to look at your own childhood again. To give the daily allowance will be to recover a child’s hand, one in which nothing is wasted because nothing lasts as he keeps it open because the Child is a spend thrift of the divine...

May 1948 –an appeal for help that was the basis for the creation of UNICEF.44

Students’ Pledge on Pan American Day ("Pan American Manifesto")

We Americans of North and South America have accepted with our heritage of geographic unity a certain common destiny that should find a threefold fulfillment on our continent in an adequate standard of living, perfect democracy, and ample liberty.

We whom Providence has favored by giving us an immense territory for our home had first to take possession of this mighty land. Our second task was to secure from the wilderness that we had tamed that social well-being promised by democracies to their citizens. Our present duty is to create a culture worthy of our racial [ethnic] inheritances and our geographic endowment.

We have enough land so that no one need be envious of his neighbor, a republican sobriety to which vicious luxury is repugnant, a unanimous religious and lay sentiment that considers fair dealing the only lasting basis for world relations, and scenic beauty such that peace appears the natural state for the Americas.

Throughout our 105 degrees of latitude, the earth seems to be more ready, more eager, and quicker than elsewhere to fulfill its mission of bestowing happiness on mankind. Perhaps because America earth has been less exhausted by a long succession of generations, or because it is more richly blessed with the generative elements of heat and moisture and less burdened with population, it lends itself more readily than other lands to the men who, moved by the ideal of justice, strive for the equitable distribution of wealth and for a civilization woven in a shining pattern of good will on the warp and weft of the social virtues.

Heirs of the Old World and of at least two native cultures, we are endeavoring to outstrip both Europe and our indigenous empires in the perfection of a democracy that shall express the broadest possible concept of human liberty. Our own situation, between Europe and Asia, obliges us to comprehend conflicting viewpoints; even our coastline, looking both to the east and to the west like that of Greece, gives us the mission of welcoming different races with understanding.
We must realize that the fact that two cultures differ outwardly does not imply that one is necessarily inferior to the other, and that expression which human groups give to the same idea is the sometimes simple and touching, sometimes nobly beautiful. We should begin on this very continent, with a loyal interpretation of North by South America, or South by North America; our first duty is to our nearest neighbor. A better understanding of the rest of the world will come later and be as natural for us following a well-known path down which habit leads us.

Latin culture has found in the nations of South America, a realm vaster than the classic Mediterranean Basin for the government of men according to its own high standard, while all cultures are trying to achieve in Anglo-Saxon America, so far without misadventure, the ideal of universal brotherhood in a single land. And until today no attempt to realize this goal had met with success anywhere in the world.

Our heroes of North and South America, Washington and Bolivar, Lincoln and San Martin, might all have been fashioned in a single hour, in the same mold; they were laborers in a common task. Our constitutions, the fruit of their insight, were inspired by equal vision and have the family resemblance of plants nurtured in the same soil.

Anglo-Saxon American, sprung wholly from Europe, has succeeded, more or less easily, in its task of amalgamating in new surroundings the great cultures of Europe. Latin America has effected, and is still effecting, with greater difficulty and therefore with more suffering, the fusion of European and Indian, two races of distinct physical endowments and even more distinct emotional temperaments; the triumph over such obstacles is more significant than anything hitherto accomplished by man.

North Americans and South Americans, together we shall give a new key, a new rhythm, a new democratic interpretation to European culture, European institutions, and European customs, art, education and science, blending them all into a harmony of greater beauty and greater sweetness.

We have summoned people from the four corners of the earth with an utter lack of prejudice and with the hospitality of our far-flung shores, creating on our continent races in whose features may be traced their heritage from all the world—races
capable of enlarging the older, classic view of life, and capable, too, of living the epic of the future.

In American stock and American ideals, both formed in an environment of vast spaces and little hampered by tradition, unprejudiced observers have noted a splendid assurance in the face of our high enterprise, and a happy confidence in the future. We believe that war will seem to the next generations of America like an illustration in a musty tome, an ancient order belonging to times forever gone, thanks to the wisdom of our lawgivers and our educators. The effect of war in America would be to devastate our entire continent, despoiling its natural beauty and depraving the collective conscience so that we should once more have to lay the foundation and laboriously reconstruct the edifice of society. The memory of the building of America is too recent for us to be willing thus to jeopardize the work of our forebears.

We Americans of North and South America have been nurtured on twenty-one constitutions, all of which proclaim respect for the independence of others as a basic principle of self-respect. Our Republics were brought to life by Washington and Bolívar, under the auspicious star of the rights nations. From kindergarten through college we have been indoctrinated with a firm belief in the gospel of our national laws. Americans all, we affirm to the heroes from whom we are sprung our determination to hold the independence of all our homelands as sacred as our own. We renew our pledge that, in the intercourse between these twenty-one nations, we shall repudiate violence as treachery to the principles of eternal right and challenge injustice as a blot on that glorious honor by which we now and shall forever live.45

45 This anonymous translation was originally published in April 1931 in the Bulletin of the Pan American Union and subsequently revised by Jonathan Cohen. Agosin, Marjorie. “Gabriela Mistral: The audacious traveler”. P 14-17.
Gabriela Mistral
Gabriela Mistral with her son, Juan Miguel Godoy (Yin-Yin)
Mistral and children.

Mistral receiving the Nobel Prize from King of Sweden, Gustav V.

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