

NEW SELECTED POEMS OF GABRIELA MISTRAL: A TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Chilean writer Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945. Though Mistral herself was once well established in American literary circles, her works are not well-known among English-speaking readers today. Only about a third of her published poems has so far been translated into English, partly because critics favoured Mistral's early verses about motherhood or unfulfilled love and failed to appreciate her more *engagé* works. This thesis contains translations of 30 poems from Mistral's four volumes of poetry, as well as from the posthumous *Poema de Chile* (1967). Only one of these 30 poems belongs to Mistral's early phase. A total of 19 poems are here translated into English for the first time. In my introduction, I examine some of the reasons why Mistral's *oeuvre* has not been translated more often. I also review the works of other North-American translators and describe my own approach to the renditions contained in this volume.

Sommaire

Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), du Chili, obtint le Prix Nobel de Littérature en 1945. Bien qu'elle ait été connue de l'intelligentsia américaine, peu de lecteurs de langue anglaise sont aujourd'hui familiers avec l'ensemble de son oeuvre. Un tiers seulement de ses poèmes publiés est en fait traduit vers l'anglais et ce, car la critique a favorisé surtout ses premiers vers, qui traitaient de maternité et d'amours malheureuses, sans bien apprécier la profondeur de sa poésie engagée. La thèse suivante contient des traductions vers l'anglais de trente poèmes tirés des quatre volumes de poésie de Mistral, ainsi que de son oeuvre posthume, *Poema de Chile* (1967). Un seul de ces trente poèmes appartient à la première phase du développement de l'auteur. En tout, dix-neuf poèmes sont ici traduits vers l'anglais pour la première fois. De plus, je m'interroge, dans mon introduction, quant à certaines des raisons qui ont fait que l'oeuvre de Gabriela Mistral n'a pas été plus souvent traduite. J'effectue également un examen critique des efforts produits par les traducteurs nord-américains de l'auteur et je décris, finalement, mon approche personnelle aux versions incluses à ce volume.

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“Gabriela Mistral” (Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga): A Chronology

1889 Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga is born on 7 April to Petronila Alcayaga Rojas, a seamstress, and Gerónimo Godoy Villanueva, a school teacher, in Coquimbo, a province of Chile, North of Santiago, in the city of Vicuña. She has an older, maternal half-sister, Emelina Molina Alcayaga.

1892 Gerónimo Godoy abandons his family.

1904 Lucila Godoy’s first verses are published in two local periodicals, *La voz de Elqui* and *El Coquimbo*, under the pseudonyms of “Someone,” “Solitude,” and “Soul.” In the same year, Lucila Godoy meets Romelio Ureta, a young train station employee.

1908 Lucila Godoy, who began teaching elementary school at the age of fifteen, becomes principal of the La Cantera elementary school, south of La Serena.

1909 Romelio Ureta, with whom Lucila Godoy had corresponded after a brief relationship, commits suicide on 25 November, before being charged with fraud. Godoy writes her “*Sonetos de la muerte*,” a series of poems on the themes of loss and death.

1910 Though mostly self-taught from childhood, Lucila Godoy passes a competency test in the Escuela Normal of Santiago.

1911 Lucila Godoy teaches at a girls’ high school in Traiguén.

1912 Godoy moves to Antofagasta to teach history at the local secondary school and then moves again to teach at the Los Andes Girls’ High School.

1914 Lucila Godoy sends in her “*Sonetos de la muerte*” to the *Juegos Florales*, a literary competition sponsored by the Association of Artists and Writers of Chile, and wins the first prize on 22 December. It is on the occasion of the *Juegos Florales* that Lucila Godoy may, according to some critics, have adopted the pseudonym of Gabriela Mistral, under which she is commonly known today.

1915 Death of Gabriela Mistral’s father.

1918-1921 Gabriela Mistral is principal of the Punta Arenas Girls’ High School, of the Temuco Girls’ High School, and of Santiago’s No. 6 Girls’ High School, successively.

1922 Gabriela Mistral travels to Mexico at the invitation of the Mexican Minister of Education, to assist the local government in the organization of the country's rural schools. Her first volume of poetry and poetic prose, *Desolación*, is published in New York, under the auspices of the Instituto de las Españas.

1923 In Chile, Gabriela Mistral receives the title of Teacher of the Nation.

1924 Gabriela Mistral travels to Europe and the United States. Her second volume of poetry, *Termura*, is first published in Madrid by Saturnino Callejas. A second and revised edition of *Desolación* is published in Santiago by Nascimento.

1926 Gabriela Mistral represents Chile at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, a division of the League of Nations, in Geneva. She travels to Argentina. A third edition of *Desolación* is published in Santiago by Nascimento.

1927 Gabriela Mistral represents the Chilean Association of Teachers at a Teachers' Congress in Locarno. She attends the Congress on Child Welfare in Geneva.

1929 Death of Gabriela Mistral's mother. Mistral decides to raise her nephew, Juan Manuel, as her son.

1930 Gabriela Mistral travels to the United States and teaches Hispanic American literature at Barnard and Middlebury College (Vermont).

1932 Gabriela Mistral is named Chilean Consul in Naples, but the Mussolini regime prevents her from exercising her duties when she expresses her anti-fascist position.

1933 Gabriela Mistral is named Chilean Consul in Madrid.

1935 On 2 October, a letter sent by Gabriela Mistral to an old friend is published without her consent in the Santiago periodical *Familia*. The letter contained unflattering remarks about the Spanish character and creates something of a diplomatic incident. Gabriela Mistral becomes Chilean Consul in Lisbon. A group of European writers sends a petition to the President of Chile so that Mistral may obtain a salary ensuring her economic security. In Chile, a special law is passed on 24 September, assuring her a position as consul *per vita* with the right to choose her residence at will.

1938 Gabriela Mistral's third volume of poetry, *Tala*, is published in Buenos Aires by Sur. The proceeds from the book are assigned to the benefit of the Basque children who were victims of the Spanish Civil War.

1940 Gabriela Mistral is Chilean Consul in Niteroi, Brazil. Her *Antología*, an anthology of her works, is published in Santiago by Zig-Zag.

1941 Mistral becomes Chilean Consul in Petropolis, Brazil.

1943 Gabriela Mistral's nephew, Juan Manuel, commits suicide on 14 August at the age of 17.

1945 A revised, second edition of *Ternura* is published in Buenos Aires by Espasa-Calpe. Gabriela Mistral receives the Nobel Prize for literature. She becomes Chilean Consul in Los Angeles and then in Santa Barbara, where she purchases a house with the funds she was awarded in Sweden.

1947 Gabriela Mistral receives an honorary doctorate from Mills College, Oakland, California.

1948 Mistral becomes Chilean Consul in Veracruz, Mexico.

1950 Gabriela Mistral receives the Serra Award of the Americas granted in Washington by the North American Academy of American Franciscan History. She becomes Chilean Consul in Naples and works for UNESCO. When offered the directorship of UNESCO she refuses, for health reasons.

1951 Gabriela Mistral is awarded Chile's National Prize for Literature.

1953 Mistral becomes Chilean Consul in New York and represents her country at the United Nations' General Assembly.

1954 *Lagar*, Gabriela Mistral's fourth volume of poetry, is published in Santiago by Pacífico. Mistral travels to Chile, but returns to live in the United States.

1956 The Chilean legislature passes a law in November granting Gabriela Mistral a special pension.

1957 Death of Gabriela Mistral on 10 January, of pancreatic cancer, in Hempstead, Long Island, in the State of New York.

Posthumous Works

1965 *Motivos de San Francisco*, edited by César Díaz-Muñoz Cormatches and published in Santiago by Pacífico.

1967 *Poema de Chile*, edited by Doris Dana and published in Santiago by Pomaire.

1983 *Reino: Poesía dispersa e inédita, en verso y prosa*, edited by Gastón von dem Bussche and published in Valparaíso by Universidad Católica.

1991 *Lagar II*, compiled by the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos of the Biblioteca Nacional in Santiago.

Introduction

1. Gabriela Mistral's Political Allegiances and Her America of the Heart

Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poet, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, thus becoming the fifth woman and the first Hispanic American to win the prize in 44 years.¹ Mistral -- also a teacher, prose-writer, and diplomat -- is known throughout Latin America in much the same way as Charles Baudelaire is known to the French or Walt Whitman to the Americans, but few of today's English-speaking readers are familiar with her works.

Mistral was born Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga on 7 April 1889 in Vicuña, the small capital of the department of Elqui in northern Chile, and died in 1957 in Hempstead, New York. Her father, a teacher and amateur poet, abandoned the family when Mistral was three years old and she was consequently raised by her mother and her older half-sister, Emelina, also a teacher. Mistral herself began her career as an elementary and high school teacher at the age of fifteen. At the same time, she submitted poems to local newspapers. Between 1918 and 1922, she was appointed principal to several colleges across Chile. In 1922, at the request of José Vasconcelos, the Mexican Minister of Education, she left for Mexico to collaborate on a rural education reform programme. At home, she was awarded the title of Teacher of the Nation in 1923 and, shortly after, retired from public education while still in her thirties. The rest of her life was spent writing, lecturing on

¹ The attribution of all Nobel Prizes was suspended between 1940 and 1943 due to the events of World War II. Hitler had prohibited German nominees from accepting the prize and much of Europe was, at any rate, occupied by Germany. Nobel Prizes in categories other than literature were awarded again in 1944. In 1945, the Nobel Prize for Literature was bestowed simultaneously upon Danish novelist Johannes Vilhelm Jensen, for 1944, and upon Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, for 1945.

To say that Nobel Prize nominations and awards are apolitical is, of course, absurd. Between 1901 and 1944, only one Prize was awarded for literature to a writer -- Sir Rabindranath Tagore, of India -- who did not hail from a European country, from the USSR, or from the United States. It is possibly significant that the first Latin American prize was awarded immediately following World War II, upon the foundation of the United Nations, and just as the Cold War was about to begin. Whether this was meant as a deliberate moral condemnation of European actions during the War, and of the two emerging political powers that were the United States and the Soviet Union, is open to speculation. It remains that the timing of the award may not have been fortuitous. This does not, however, undermine the greatness of Mistral's *oeuvre*.

various topics, and travelling across Europe, Latin America, and the United States, both as private citizen and as consul of Chile.

Biographers disagree as to the date when Lucila Godoy first adopted her pseudonym,² but all acknowledge that 1914 marks the year of Mistral's official entry into the world of Chilean letters. It was then that she won a first prize for her three "*Sonetos de la muerte*" at a national poetry contest, the *Juegos florales*, in Santiago. She continued sending poems to newspapers and literary magazines and in 1922, *Desolación*, her first collection of poetry and poetic prose, was published in New York under the auspices of the Instituto de las Españas.³ Then came *Ternura* (1924)⁴, *Tala* (1938)⁵, *Lagar* (1954)⁶, and, among other posthumous works, *Poema de Chile* (1967).⁷ Mistral also published several texts in prose, including newspaper pieces on a number of cultural, religious, and political issues.⁸

Desolación contains poems and short poetic texts in prose on the themes of motherhood, children, religion, tragic love, and nature. It appeared years after her contemporary sister-poets -- Uruguayans Delmira Agustini and Juana de Ibarbourou, and Argentinian Alfonsina Storni -- published their first works.⁹ By then, Ibarbourou and

² Compare, for instance, Francisco Aguilera, foreword, *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*, ed. and trans. Doris Dana (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1971) xi, who seems to suggest that the pseudonym predates 1914, and Frederick S. Stimson, *The New Schools of Spanish American Poetry*, University of North Carolina, Estudios de Hispanófila, No. 13 (Madrid: Castalia, 1970) 42, and Margaret Bates, "Gabriela Mistral," *The Americas* 3 (1946): 17, who insist that it was first used in 1914.

Lucila Godoy's possible reasons for choosing this particular pseudonym are reviewed in Bates, "Gabriela Mistral" note 13. She may have selected "Gabriela" in honour of the archangel Gabriel and named herself "Mistral" after the Mediterranean wind. The pseudonym may therefore be indicative of the poet's respect for both the spiritual and the material realms. See also Carmelo Virgillo, "Gabriela Mistral," *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, ed. Diane E. Marting (New York: Greenwood P, 1990) 330. Virgillo suggests another possibility: it seems that Mistral was an admirer of writers Gabriele D'Annunzio and Frédéric Mistral and may have appropriated part of their respective names.

³ *Desolación* (New York: Instituto de las Españas, 1922).

⁴ *Ternura* (Madrid: Saturnino Callejas, 1924).

⁵ *Tala* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1938).

⁶ *Lagar* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1954).

⁷ *Poema de Chile*, ed. Doris Dana (Santiago: Pomaire, 1967).

⁸ For an exhaustive list of Gabriela Mistral's works, including periodical publications, consult Onilda A. Jiménez, *La crítica literaria en la obra de Gabriela Mistral*, diss. New York U, 1979 (Miami: Universal, 1982) 227-71.

⁹ Delmira Agustini, *El libro blanco* (Montevideo: O.M. Bertani, 1907); Juana de Ibarbourou, *Las lenguas de diamante* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Cooperativa, B.A., 1919); Alfonsina Storni, *La inquietud del rosal* (Buenos Aires: Juan Roldarín, 1916).

Storni were already famous for their respective brands of literary iconoclasm. Their bold and sensual verses were also noted for breaking with traditional and modernist versification patterns.¹⁰ Mistral was soon compared to these post-modernist poets.¹¹ In fact, her vocabulary is far rougher and more violent than theirs.¹² As early as 1913, Mistral's poems had appeared in Ruben Darío's Parisian review, *Elegancias*, and her prosody borrowed much from the early Chilean *modernistas*. Like Darío and his followers, Mistral used sonnets, alexandrines, and nine-syllable lines, yet she also allowed herself occasional metric irregularities.¹³ E. Allison Peers, in her "Tentative Evaluation," noted the following:

With the new century came new themes, new accents, new melodies. First, echoes of the Spanish poets Campoamor, Nunez de Arce and Bécquer; then -- with Pedro Prado's *Flores de cardo*, with Guzman, Mondaca, Jara -- an orientation towards Ruben Darío, whose early works had, of course, been published in Chile; finally, the revolutionary atmosphere of *ultraismo* -- Neruda, Huidobro, Rokha, and many more. It will be easier for us to understand the literary vogue of Gabriela Mistral if we realize what a propitious moment she chose for making her picturesque irruption into the field of poetry.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Modernismo*, a Hispanic, literary movement that originated in Latin America in the 1880s and continued, for some, into the 1920s, is defined in Fernando Alegría, "Spanish American Poetry," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 795. See also Mario Rodríguez Fernández, *El Modernismo en Chile y en Hispanoamérica* (Santiago: Universitaria, 1967).

Briefly, *Modernismo* began with the successive launchings of Cuban José Martí's *Ismaelillo* (1882) and Nicaraguan poet Ruben Darío's *Azul* (1888). The movement is now considered to have developed in two distinct phases, so that we may speak of a first period (pre-1896), at the end of which most of the movement's founders had died, and of a second period, led mostly by Darío after 1896. The *modernistas* were, at first, mainly poets who sought in the practice of their art a defense and a protection against the increasing materialism of their time. Art was therefore to be found in exotic details, in religion and esotericism, in the use of symbols, and in prosodic experimentation. As such, the Hispanic modernists were to a certain extent inspired by the French Parnassians.

¹¹ Most critics regard Hispanic post-*Modernismo* as a rather ill-defined and ill-definable movement that quite simply follows modernism and precedes vanguardism. Compare Fernando Alegría 796; Sidonia C. Rosenbaum, *Modern Women Poets of Spanish America: The Precursors -- Delmira Agustini, Gabriela Mistral, Alfonsina Storni, Juana de Ibarbourou*, diss. Columbia U, 1945 (New York: Cocce P, 1945) 7, and Stimson 56.

¹² See Bates, "Gabriela Mistral" 186:

The striking intensity of Gabriela's poetry is attained to a great extent through her constant use of words denoting extreme physical pain; like singeing, scorching, howling, nailing.

¹³ Stimson 47.

¹⁴ E. Allison Peers, "Gabriela Mistral: A Tentative Evaluation," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 23 (1947): 102.

Desolación kindled the readers' interest and curiosity because of the intensity of its imagery and the references, in the section headed "*Dolor*," to the suicide of a man the poet had loved.¹⁵ In Mistral's case, mundane emotion often goes hand in hand with religious sentiment. In the poem titled "*Éxtasis*" for instance, a woman overwhelmed by the memory of her lover begs Christ to stop her heartbeat, close her eyes, and shield her spirit and her flesh from other earthly feelings. Due to her exalted lyricism, Mistral's popularity was instantaneous. The powerful and at times masochistic eroticism of her poetry, however, may have prevented readers from looking beyond the surface of her works. Elizabeth Horan, a feminist scholar, has pointed out that the prose-like "*Poemas de las madres*" included at the end of *Desolación* are in fact notable for their condemnation of domestic abuse against women in general and pregnant women in particular. In the poems' "*Al esposo*," for instance, a pregnant woman asks her husband's forgiveness for her clumsiness and begs him, for the sake of their child, not to give her reason to become agitated. In Horan's words,

[t]he fear of male violence that pervades these prose poems has been strangely overlooked by critics who would rather codify the desire, in these poems, as desire for a male lover and/or child, rather than as a desire for refuge within a community of women.¹⁶

In another work, Horan deconstructs the myth of Gabriela Mistral as virginal rural schoolmarm.¹⁷ The story has it that the sudden suicide of Romelio Ureta, the young man with whom she had fallen in love as an adolescent, prevented Mistral from pledging her love to another and thus know the rewards of motherhood. As a result, the legend goes, she became devoted to the nation's children both in her teaching and in her writing. In fact, Mistral was a strong woman, with cropped hair and a fondness for both scotch and cigarettes. She lived for part of her life outside Chile with a string of intelligent and creative female companions who acted as her friends, travelling mates, editors, and

¹⁵ Ciro Alegría, *Gabriela Mistral Íntima* (Bogotá: La Oveja Negra, 1980) 36-37.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Rosa Horan, "Matrilineage, Matrilanguage: Gabriela Mistral's Intimate Audience of Women," *Revista Canadiense de estudios Hispánicos* 14.3 (1990): 451.

¹⁷ See Elizabeth Horan, "Gabriela Mistral: Language is the Only Homeland," *A Dream of Light and Shadow: Portraits of Latin American Writers*, ed. Marjorie Agosin (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995) 119-142.

secretaries. Mistral's sexual ambiguity, however, goes unmentioned or is barely insinuated in the early biographical writings, but this is hardly surprising given the times and the society from which she came. Mistral was, after all, a self-taught school-teacher of modest means whose powerful, angular features betrayed her Indian ancestry.¹⁸ Chilean society was racist, classist, and sexist. Mistral therefore had very little going for her. The nation's establishment, however, looked favourably upon virtuous women and educators. For many women, the teaching profession was something of a source of power and influence. Mistral herself may have therefore contributed to the creation of her legend as heart-broken maiden. The "bio-mythography" was doubly useful, since it allowed her to write on the theme of eroticized suffering without offending social mores.¹⁹

In time, Mistral would move away from the woeful and seemingly introspective laments of her youth. In *Termura*, she began an obstinate and long-winded search for what she called a *criollo* (or indigenous) and truly American poetry. With this second volume, as well, Mistral's compassion for those who are most marginalized and oppressed becomes evident.

Termura consists mainly of a collection of poems and lullabies for children. Mistral went on favouring nine-syllable lines and wrote hexa- and heptasyllabic ballads. Again, like Darío, she sought inspiration in the *seguidilla*, a 17th-century Spanish metric form of popular origin.²⁰ At the end of her second book, Mistral added a "*Colofón con cara de excusa*," a brief apology to her readers for her failure to produce lullabies fit for the children of the Americas. Mistral blamed her difficulties on the notion that the American continent had been rushed from birth into puberty without the benefit of a childhood. The conquest of Latin America by the Spaniards had eradicated most traces of Indian antiquity while leaving the people without a medieval period or a folklore similar to that of Europe. Latin American mothers were therefore forced to borrow their lullabies from the Spanish provinces of Andalusia and Castile.²¹ Mistral looked for solutions to this problem, which

¹⁸ On the matter of Mistral's possibly mixed heritage, see Ciro Alegría 16-17; Jiménez 103-105; and Horan, "Matrilineage" 448.

¹⁹ Horan, "Language is the Only Homeland" 130.

²⁰ Stimson 51.

²¹ Bates, however, in her "Gabriela Mistral" 188, disproves Mistral's contentions. According to Bates, whose article was published in 1946,

she considered pressing. In *Ternura*, she made use of traditional Spanish forms to introduce topics of interest to the children and educators of the New World. She found a wealth of new material in the American continent itself. Through the sing-song rhythms of her lullabies, Mistral wrote of the fauna, flora, landscape, and history of Latin America. The poverty and suffering of peasants and Indians are also depicted in otherwise innocent lines full of vivid imagery. Along with topics of a religious nature, such themes would from then on be present in her verse.

It was with *Tala* that Mistral reached a turning point in her career as a poet. At times written in free verse yet also featuring the nine-syllable lines used in her previous works, *Tala*, of which the proceeds went to a camp of Basque refugee children, contains a series of end-notes to ten of the volume's poems. In these notes, Mistral again addressed her readers to expound her views of her craft.

In her work devoted to Mistral's literary theories, Onilda Jiménez supplements these same notes with quotations taken from the poet's letters and articles. It became evident to Mistral that the two sources of Spanish American originality were nature and the folklore of Indian myths and legends.²² In her notes to *Tala*'s "*Dos hymnos*," Mistral wrote a brief apology of the hymn, that ancient devotional medium, which she believed to be the genre best suited to describe the formidable landscape and history of the American continent. *Modernistas* and nineteenth-century poets, she added, had shown the minute exotic peculiarities of Latin America. They had written about wild orchids, fragrant fruit, small snails, and hummingbirds, yet had failed to capture the essential magnitude of the land and waters of America.

Mistral set out to meet her own challenge. *Tala* includes a group of five poems headed "*América*." The mad rumble of the Panamanian drum is rendered by a rhythmic

Spain in spite of its medieval tradition produces little of any value in children's literature today. In fact all the Hispanic nations are lagging far behind in this art which has been lost some place along the way. It is far more likely that the difficulty which Gabriela feels comes from her maternal attitude which is fatal in children's literature because it is incomprehensible to the child. Adults enjoy her work more than children.

Be that as it may, the contents of Mistral's *Colofón* are certainly indicative of the author's desire to create a native literature that is autonomous from the canons of Spain.

²²

Jiménez 110-15.

pattern modelled after a popular folk song. Mexican cornfields appear to the poet as in ancient times they had appeared to the Aztecs. In the hymns to the sun and to the *cordillera* of the Andes, a mythic past is interwoven with contemporary reality.

Language posed another problem. Was there one Hispanic American idiom that could serve as a vehicle for a new *criollo* literature? Mistral interspersed her poems with neologisms, archaisms, and popular words and expressions, but explained that she did so only if they were commonly used and understood by the majority of her readers. Again, her wish was to produce a literature of continental breadth. Regionalism was to be avoided.²³

According to Carlos Clavería, who wrote one of the earliest studies of Mistral's American vision, *Tala* reveals a genuine desire to give poetic substance to the American world she knew in the course of her travels, and which she grasped as a compact whole.²⁴ Yet, Clavería adds, Mistral's references to nature, landscape, folklore, and mythology are not seeped in thorough biological, geographical, anthropological, or sociological knowledge.²⁵ Mistral's biographers would argue that she was an avid reader with a passion for learning. Clavería is right, however. Mistral gave her readers a personal vision of America. It is an America of the heart; a vast territory without the frontiers imposed by nationalism and hatred -- an open, often overwhelming, and timeless stretch of land where past and present are one.

In *Poema de Chile*, on which Mistral worked before her death, this view of a beloved continent is narrowed down to a close and nostalgic exploration of an area with marked boundaries. But before *Poema de Chile* came *Lagar* with its dark and desperate songs.

Between *Tala* and *Lagar*, Mistral lived through the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Holocaust, and the suicide in Brazil of a nephew she had raised as a son. *Lagar* is the book of a survivor and witness to loss and sorrow. Religious themes and psychological observations prevail. In the section titled "*Locas mujeres*," Mistral pores

²³ Jiménez 116.

²⁴ Carlos Clavería, "El americanismo de Gabriela Mistral," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 23 (1947):

117.

²⁵ Clavería 122.

over various lifestyles and circumstances through which women become “madwomen” or otherwise marginalized elements of a harsh world. Other sections such as “*Guerra*” and “*Vagabundaje*” depict the ravages of war and exile. With *Lagar*, Mistral presented once again to her readers a dark and bitter vision of the world, though the effect, this time, was less subjective, less melodramatic, and more severe.

The poems from *Lagar* that speak of America, however, are similar to those of *Tala*. They could have belonged in the latter, but for one exception. In *Lagar*, Mistral included a poem titled “*Amapolla de California*,” thus extending her vision of a cherished territory into North America.

Lagar represents Mistral’s need to face the suffering and sadness that, in the years between 1936 and 1945, existed beyond the American continent and in her own life. Yet she was always at work to achieve both a forceful and candid voice of American inspiration. Nowhere is her will to do away with the “prettiness” associated with poetry more evident than in the posthumous *Poema de Chile*.

Written, for the most part, in the United States and during her numerous trips abroad, this last work combines Mistral’s autobiographical concerns and her interest in children’s literature; her ideas about America, and her indignation at social injustice. *Poema de Chile*, however, differs from Mistral’s previous works. Margaret Bates has presented this last book as follows:

The *Poema* describes a journey Gabriela makes through Chile in the company of a little Chilean boy of Indian extraction (*mi niño atacameno*) and a baby fawn. It takes place after her death when her spirit returns to Chile for its last journey on earth. In the northern province of Atacama she adopts the little boy to whom she intends to show the wonders of his native Chile. To everybody but the boy and the fawn she is invisible.²⁶

Bates adds that “[t]he boy stands for common sense, a very necessary foil for a gay, disembodied spirit.”²⁷ Lidia Neghme Echeverria, of the University of São Paulo, has given these narrating characters greater political weight. To Neghme Echeverria, the aboriginal child represents the continent’s future generations, while the spirit of the old woman

²⁶ Margaret Bates, “Gabriela Mistral’s *Poema de Chile*,” *The Americas* 17 (1961): 263.

²⁷ Bates, “*Poema de Chile*” 264.

symbolizes the memory and conscience that natives must repossess in order to resist oppression.²⁸ Though this last interpretation is undoubtedly satisfying to our contemporary consciousness, it fails to account for the amusing, light-headed tone of many of the poems, or for the fact that the small Indian boy is often mortified by his ghostly companion's lackadaisical behaviour.

More recently, Elizabeth Horan has argued, convincingly, that *Poema de Chile* owes much to Dante's *Divine Comedy*,²⁹ though the emphasis here is on the enjoyment of nature and on the recognition of a territory, rather than on spiritual salvation.³⁰ Horan has also been the only critic to point out that far from being a "minor work," as some have claimed, *Poema de Chile*, with its cheerful optimism and its belief in community, represents Mistral's hopeful look at a world that may, after all, still be good.³¹

The posthumous edition of *Poema de Chile* is a collection of 77 poems. Each can be read separately or as part of a long narrative. In her article on *Poema de Chile*, Bates suggests that Mistral was uncomfortable writing "in this narrative genre in which she had little training."³² Mistral believed that the colloquial passages in which the ghost spoke to the child would add a true *criollo* tone to her poetry. As such, they could not be too

²⁸ Lidia Neghme Echeverría, "El indigenismo en Poema de Chile de Gabriela Mistral," *Revista Iberoamericana* 56.151 (1990): 561.

²⁹ Elizabeth Horan, *Gabriela Mistral: An Artist and Her People*, Interamer No. 33 (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1994) 188-89:

[T]he role of "Gabriela" (as teacher and ghostly guide) corresponds to Virgil's role, and the little boy, as the "student," parallels Dante's role. Each character's salvation depends on his or her ability to assimilate what the other teaches. As with Virgil and Dante's journey, the two travel downwards; like the earlier pair, these two are vagabonds who observe the citizenry at a safe distance whenever feasible. Yet in her desire to avoid humans, "Gabriela" is more extreme, and more cunning than the wise mentor in the *Divine Comedy*. She instructs the boy to obtain food by stealth, to sleep in the open, to avoid houses, to remain in the natural realm. This preference for contact with an essentially benevolent and purifying nature . . . rather than with human society reinforces the extent to which the protagonists are outsiders. Finally, the phantom "Gabriela" dwells as an outsider in the world of the living, just as the living Dante is an outsider in Hell.

³⁰ Horan, *An Artist and Her People* 189.

³¹ Horan, *An Artist and Her People* 182.

³² Bates, "Poema de Chile" 265.

refined, too classically poetic. Mistral claimed, however, that most attempts “had failed and had turned out to be either vulgar or forced or unnatural.”³³

Mistral died before she could complete *Poema de Chile*. Doris Dana, who edited the manuscript for publication, realized that

[a] special difficulty presented itself with the *Poema*: instead of working with one rough draft, of correcting it and copying the corrections until it was finished, Gabriela would often begin a new version that would run parallel to the other.³⁴

This indicates that Mistral kept experimenting with a poetic style and language that she had devised, but had difficulty putting into practice. Still, the subject matter of *Poema de Chile* is undeniably *criollo*.

Throughout their journey from North to South, the narrator/ghost introduces the Indian child to sites, beasts, plants, minerals, and elements typical of or essential to Chile. Mistral kept an exhaustive list of natural phenomena and historical facts on hand for her *Poema*,³⁵ yet these are not presented to the reader with either scientific rigour or accuracy. Instead, the often comic dialogue between the ghost and the child is crossed with invocations and descriptive passages in which the elements, as well as most geographic locations and marvels, are humanized. Fire becomes “Father Fire,” the land of Patagonia is likened to a woman, and the Bio-Bio River is an impassive, though potentially dangerous, character. Moreover, poems such as “*Campesinos*,” “*Reparto de tierra*” and “*Alcohol*” denounce the subhuman life and working conditions of the rural and native population. Yet while decrying injustice the author never lapses into political partisanship and attempts instead to convey a message of hope.

Having tried to give a continent a voice, Gabriela Mistral chose, in the end, to dwell on the splendours and miseries of her own homeland. Onilda Jiménez has called *Poema de Chile* a “long song to the geography of Chile.”³⁶ Above all, it is a song to a country the poet carried within her during her countless journeys abroad. Through these

³³ Bates, “*Poema de Chile*” 265.

³⁴ Bates, “*Poema de Chile*” 269.

³⁵ Bates, “*Poema de Chile*” 269, 270.

³⁶ Jiménez 113: “. . . el *Poema de Chile* no es sino un largo canto a la geografía chilena.”

and earlier poems Chile and Latin America in general become accessible to the imagination of readers from all nations. Yet without translations the poet's uncommon vision of a territory and of peoples teeming with complexity can cross neither geographical nor linguistic and cultural boundaries.

2. Gabriela Mistral and her North American Translators

The history of Mistralian translations in English reveals a puzzling fact. Besides being scarce, most of these translations focus almost exclusively on the autobiographical poems found in *Desolación*, *Ternura*, and *Tala*. Later works and especially her *criollo* poems were largely left untouched by her North American translators (and by Anglo-Saxon translators in general).

Years before the attribution of her Nobel Prize, Mistral was an established figure in American intellectual circles. *Desolación* was first published in New York. From then on and until her death, Mistral remained in close contact with the United States. She received honorary degrees from the University of California in Los Angeles, Mills College in Oakland, California, and Columbia University in New York City. She lectured on Hispanic American literature at Barnard College, Columbia University, Middlebury College in Vermont, and Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. In 1946, Mistral was appointed to the position of Consul of Chile in Los Angeles, where she wrote many of the poems in *Lagar*. She was also given the title of Woman of the Americas by the Union of American Women in Washington. Finally, Mistral settled definitively in Long Island in 1954 for health reasons.

Neither is Mistralian scholarship absent from American academies. Since 1945, nine dissertations in English, analyzing Mistral's *oeuvre*, were issued by eight universities in the United States. A third of these are from the State of New York alone.³⁷ To this day, Spanish dissertations written in the United States keep looking into new aspects of her work.³⁸ Also, the few existing translations of Gabriela Mistral in English are mostly the works of American writers and translators.

³⁷ Marie Lise Gazarian, "The Prose of Gabriela Mistral: An Expression of Her Life and Personality," diss., Columbia, 1967. See also Jiménez, and Rosenbaum.

³⁸ See, most recently, Aurea De Lozano, "*México en la obra de Gabriela Mistral*," diss., U of Colorado at Boulder, 1987; Gordon Vailakis and Ivonne Carrera, "*La feminidad como máscara: Una actualización de Gabriela Mistral*," diss., U of California, Irvine 1990; Francisco Juárez-Torres, "*La poesía indigenista en cuatro poetas latinoamericanos: Manuel Gonzalez Prada, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda y Rosario Castellanos*," diss., Florida State U, 1990; Enrique Valdés Gajardo, "*La prosa de Gabriela Mistral: Cultura, época y estilo literario*," diss., U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992.

Still, only about a third of Mistral's 500-odd published poems have been translated into English. None of her volumes of poetry or prose was translated in its entirety, whereas her compatriot and fellow-poet Pablo Neruda -- the Nobel Prize winner for 1971 -- saw the totality of his works translated into English a number of times.

In one of her many articles devoted to Gabriela Mistral, Margaret Bates states that

[t]he fundamental reason we know so little of this remarkable woman who enjoys such a great popularity in the Spanish-speaking world . . . is because the limited number of her poems which have been translated into English, by heavy hands, for the most part, allow hardly a glimmer of the real Mistral to shine through them.³⁹

It was only in 1957, the year of Mistral's death, that a first, substantial selection of her works was translated into English. African-American poet Langston Hughes' *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* covers Mistral's first three books and features two previously untranslated poems from *Lagar*: "Helpers" ("Ayudadores") and "Indian Christmas" ("Noel Indio").⁴⁰ Hughes' publication is especially worthy of praise since the definitive edition of Mistral's poetic works, excluding *Poema de Chile*, appeared only in 1958.⁴¹ Prior to this edition of her collected poems, individual volumes of Mistral's verse were hard to find and their content varied from one edition to another as Mistral kept revising her poems years after their initial publication.

In 1971, Doris Dana, the American heir to Mistral's papers, published her own *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* in translation.⁴² Dana translated 58 poems from the author's first four books. Her versions of 26 out of the 71 poems in *Lagar* were, up until 1993, the only ones from that collection in the English language.

Finally, in 1993, American writer and translator Maria Giachetti published a collection of 70 free verse translations of Mistral's poems from *Desolación*, *Termura*, *Tala*, *Lagar*, and *Poema de Chile*, along with 28 renditions of Mistral's prose.⁴³

³⁹ Margaret Bates, "Gabriela Mistral" 168.

⁴⁰ Langston Hughes, trans. *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1957).

⁴¹ Gabriela Mistral, *Poesías completas*, ed. Margaret Bates (Madrid: Aguilar, 1958)

⁴² Doris Dana, ed. and trans., *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1971).

⁴³ Maria Giachetti, *Gabriela Mistral: A Reader*, ed. Marjorie Agosin (Fredonia, N.Y.: White Pine P, 1993).

Besides these three volumes, most English versions of Mistral's poetry were rendered by a handful of admirers who published their works in American magazines such as *Poet Lore* and the *Bulletin of the Pan-American Union* shortly after the issue of *Desolación*. Mistral has also been anthologized. Each anthology contains generally five or fewer versions of her poems, often reprints of periodical publications. Of these, some are worth mentioning.

In 1920, in the *Hispanic Anthology* edited by Thomas Walsh, American translator Roderick Gill published a rendition of the third sonnet from the "*Sonetos de la Muerte*."⁴⁴ Gill's version, "The Hands of Evil Have Been On Your Life," is the first translation of Mistral in the United States. At that time, the poet herself had not yet published *Desolación*, though a limited edition of the "*Sonetos*" had appeared in Santiago in 1915. Similarly, in 1921, fourteen of Mistral's 17 "*Poemas de las madres*" were translated by an anonymous author and published in *InterAmerica*.⁴⁵ Clearly, the first translators of Mistral's verse were *aficionados* who came across Mistral's very first works in Hispanic periodicals.

Following the publication of *Desolación* and *Ternura*, the choice of translated poems varied slightly. In 1924, Isabel K. MacDermott met Gabriela Mistral in Washington and decided to translate six of her poems.⁴⁶ Of these, "*Manitas*" will become a favourite among American translators.

One of the most prolific of Mistral's first translators is Alice Stone Blackwell. Her anthology, *Some Spanish-American Poets* (1937), includes six versions of poems from *Desolación* and *Ternura*.⁴⁷

Since 1945, "*La extranjera*," "*La flor del aire*," and "*País de la ausencia*" have been the poems from *Tala* most often translated. Between 1961 and 1971, two

⁴⁴ Roderick Gill, "The Hands of Evil Have Been On Your Life," by Gabriela Mistral, *Hispanic Anthology*, ed. Thomas Walsh (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920) 735.

⁴⁵ "Poems of the Mother," by Gabriela Mistral, *Inter America* 6 (1921): 363-65.

⁴⁶ Isabel K. MacDermott, "Gabriela Mistral and Inter-American Spiritual Understanding," *Bulletin of the Pan-American Union* 58.7 (1924): 647-61.

⁴⁷ Alice Stone Blackwell, trans., *Some Spanish American Poets* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1937) 236-78.

anthologies, *Spanish-American Literature in Translation* (1966)⁴⁸ and *Unstill Life: An Introduction to the Spanish Poetry of Latin America* (1969)⁴⁹ included reprints of early translations published in American periodicals. In 1967, *Latin American Writing Today* featured a translation by Doris Dana of "La Llana," a poem never included in the *Obras completas*.⁵⁰

Then, in 1971, the *Penguin Book of Latin American Verse* introduced prose translations of Tala's "Medianoche" and "La extranjera" by Tom Raworth.⁵¹ That same year, George Dundas Craig also included four poems from *Desolación* in his *Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry*.⁵²

Finally, in the *Penguin Book of Women Poets* (1978), Gunda Kaiser and James Tipton co-signed a translation of "Lluvia lenta" (*Desolación*),⁵³ while Dora M. Pettinella translated "Todo es ronda" and "Apegado a mí" (*Termura*).⁵⁴

Mistralian translations in English slowed down in the 1980s, only to pick up again in the 1990s. Aside from Maria Giachetti, who is mentioned above, American poet and academic Christiane Jacox Kyle is, to this day, the most prolific translator of Mistral's verse and poetic prose in the English language.⁵⁵

Extra-literary reasons often lie behind the absence or existence of translated works at a given time and place. In Mistral's case, these reasons are conjectural. The vast

⁴⁸ Roderick Gill, Dorothy Gonzelman and Isabel MacDermott, trans., "A Sonnet of Death," "Intimate," "The Rural Teacher," by Gabriela Mistral, *Spanish American Literature in Translation*, ed. Willis Knapp Jones, vol. 2 (New York: Ungar, 1963) 120-24.

⁴⁹ Darwin J. Flakoll and Claribel Alegria, trans., "Ballad," by Gabriela Mistral, *Unstill Life: An Introduction to the Spanish Poetry of Latin America*, ed. Mario Benedetti (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969) 29-32.

⁵⁰ Doris Dana, trans., "The Liana," by Gabriela Mistral, *Latin American Writing Today*, ed. John Michael Cohen (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1967) 15.

⁵¹ Tom Raworth, trans., "Midnight," "Foreigner," by Gabriela Mistral, *The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse*, ed. E. Caracciolo-Trejo (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1971) 121-22.

⁵² George Dundas Craig, trans., "The Rural Teacher," "Intimate," "Ballad," "The Prayer," by Gabriela Mistral, *The Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry* (New York: Gordian P, 1971) 194-202.

⁵³ Gunda Kaiser and James Tipton, trans., "Slow Rain," by Gabriela Mistral, *The Penguin Book of Women Poets*, ed. Carol Cosman, Joan Keefe and Kathleen Weaver (Middlesex, England, 1978) 318.

⁵⁴ Dora M. Pettinella, trans., "Everything is Round," "Sleep Close to Me," by Gabriela Mistral, *The Penguin Book of Women Poets* 319-20.

⁵⁵ See, particularly, Christiane Jacox Kyle, trans., "Poems of the Mothers," "Poems of the Saddest Mother," by Gabriela Mistral, *Iowa Review* 23.3 (1993): 170-73, and "Message of a Birth for Chile," "Thrushes," by Gabriela Mistral, *Prairie Schooner* 69 (1995): 21-25.

appeal of *Desolación* established Mistral as a confessional poet famous for a passionate and intense lyricism. Mistral was also a public figure throughout Latin America and the details that are known of her life -- whether they be true or constructed -- have taken on canonical proportions. Mistral never freed herself from the consequences of her fame. She complained to her friends that her readers liked only those poems in which she cried copiously while ignoring her subsequent and more mature works, which she saw as the products of a craft in constant evolution.⁵⁶ Upon receiving the Nobel Prize, the totality of her work up to 1945 was introduced to the world as follows:

[S]he became a teacher in the small village of Cantera. There her destiny was fulfilled at the age of twenty when a passionate love arose between her and a railroad employee. We know little of their story. We know only that he betrayed her. One day . . . he fatally shot himself in the head. The young girl was seized with boundless despair. Like Job, she lifted her cry to the Heaven that had allowed this. From the lost valley in the barren, scorched mountains of Chile a voice arose, and far around men heard it. A banal tragedy of everyday life lost its private character and entered into universal literature.⁵⁷

Thus at that notable, historical moment, the myth of Mistral's unfortunate love affair,⁵⁸ her legend, became as important, if not more so, than the works for which she was supposedly being celebrated.

In an article titled "*Gabriela Mistral: Los contextos criticos*," Peter Earle mentions the four types of critical studies most often applied to Mistral's poetic works.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, Hispanic critics have tended to interpret Mistral's verse from a biographical standpoint.⁶⁰ The same, in fact, can be said of Mistral's English-speaking critics. Some critics have focused only on the religious sentiment present in most of her poetry.⁶¹

⁵⁶ See Bates, "Apropos an Article on Gabriela Mistral," *The Americas* 14 (1957): 149.

⁵⁷ Hjalmar Gullberg, presentation address, Nobel Prize Ceremony, Sweden, 1945, reprinted in Nobel Prize Foundation & The Swedish Academy, *Roger Martin du Gard, Gabriela Mistral, Boris Paternak* (New York: Alexis Gregory, 1971) 168.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Horan, in her "Language is the Only Homeland" 129, calls the tragic myth "soap-operatic."

⁵⁹ Peter Earle, "*Gabriela Mistral: Los contextos criticos*," *Gabriela Mistral*, eds. Mirella Servodidio and Marcelo Coddio (Veracruz: U Veracruzana, 1980) 14-19.

⁶⁰ Earle 18-19.

⁶¹ Earle 17.

Others have insisted that her work is typical of feminine or women's verse.⁶² Since the publication of *Tala*, a few critics have paid attention to Mistral's attempts at a poetry of American inspiration, but their scrutiny often had negative or unfortunate consequences for Mistral. In the late 1940s and in the 1950s, when Mistral entered a new phase in the development of her craft, most Latin American critics were angered and confused. Their appreciation and understanding of art and literature owed much to the formal aesthetic canons of Spain. They rejected Mistral's new material, which they claimed to have fallen from its previous heights, and called her *criollo* poems crude, awkward, and careless.⁶³

Many critics, then, preferred to equate Mistral's talent with her unusual destiny. Predictably, Mistral was first perceived in the United States as an energetic, albeit long-suffering, woman dedicated to philanthropic works. Following her first trip to the United States in 1924, her North American translators were content to introduce her to the American reading public by writing brief commentaries on her life and on the major themes of *Desolación*. Poems such as "Balada," "Intima," and "El ruego" (*Desolación*) were often translated because they are harrowing and intensely confessional. Upon the publication of *Tala*, Mistral's *criollo* verse was ignored, while the book's autobiographical pieces like "La extranjera" were most popular among translators. The die was cast. Mistral's reputation was firmly established and at least half of her work went unnoticed. At the same time, North American literary theory was shifting from extrinsic to intrinsic approaches to artistic creation. The New Critics were immensely influential and works tinged with autobiographical detail were deemed unfit for the application of their theories. Thus, while Mistral's later verse was belittled at home, North American translators were left without English studies of her work despite the fact that she was a Nobel Prize recipient. The translations they might have attempted would have failed to correspond to the needs and tastes of academic publishers and major review editors.

Following the Castrist takeover in Cuba, Latin America entered an age of successive revolutions and *coups d'état* aimed at democratization and self-determination.

⁶² Earle 17-18.

⁶³ See, among others, Peers 113-14, and Fernando Durán, "Lagar de Gabriela Mistral," *La literatura crítica de Chile*, ed. Raúl Silva Castro (Santiago: Andres Bello, 1969) 524-28. For a discussion of the critiques aimed at Mistral, see also Bates, "Apropos an Article on Gabriela Mistral."

Mistral's *engagé* verse could have reached posthumous recognition in the 1960s and 1970s. It did not. It was Pablo Neruda -- once a Chilean Communist Party leader -- who was enthroned abroad as the sole celebrity of Chilean letters. In the 1970s, Elizabeth Horan points out, Mistral's image as a self-abnegating schoolmarm became useful to the fascist regime of Chile, which appropriated her as its only legitimate Nobel laureate.⁶⁴

In the 1980s, however, Mistral at last became the focus of serious and comprehensive studies. Today, feminist analyses of Mistral's work are among the most forceful and innovative in the field since they tend to underline Mistral's creative efforts as well as the political allegiances that fueled them. The feminist movement of the last quarter-century has also had the distinct advantage of introducing new names and works to the general public. Judging from the most recent wave of English-speaking Mistralian translators, general interest in Gabriela Mistral is presently undergoing a revival.

Finally, as political tension in Latin America continues to rivet the attention of the northern half of the continent, and as peace issues turn into a world-wide preoccupation, it is natural that Gabriela Mistral receive the balanced and objective critical consideration she deserves. It is also to be hoped that the totality of her work will from now on be translated by a larger number of translators.

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Horan, "Language is the Only Homeland" 140.

3. *New Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral: Translator's Notes*

I came upon Gabriela Mistral's works in 1983. I wrote poetry then and believed that poets could benefit from reading works from other countries, and in other languages. As I roamed through the aisles of a Montreal bookstore that carried works by Hispanic American writers, I noticed an attractive, leather-bound volume: Gabriela Mistral's *Obras completas* -- her complete works. In my hands, the volume fell open where someone, a reader, had inserted a piece of paper with a short message written in Spanish: "Isn't this wonderful?" To my astonishment, I recognized the handwriting; it belonged to a biology student I had befriended some years earlier. Troubled by the notion that a scientist could be moved to scrawl an anonymous message in a poetry book, I began to read and, a few minutes later, decided to take the volume home. That night, I penned my first English version of a poem by Mistral, not knowing that I would go on translating her verse for the next decade. I soon understood how little known Gabriela Mistral was to English-speaking readers. I was equally puzzled by the fact that very few of her later poems were ever translated into English.

Though I recognized the beauty and power of Mistral's early poetry, I noticed as well that it had already been rendered into English by a number of English-speaking translators. I therefore decided to bring her most *engagé* poems to the English public instead, since they had rarely been translated before. These poems represent and celebrate the enchantment and breadth of the American continent ("*Sol del trópico*," "*Salto del Laja*"), the plight of refugees ("*La huella*," "*Emigrada judía*"), the daily struggles and inner life of women ("*La abandonada*," "*La desasida*"), and the need for justice ("*Campeños*," "*Reparto de tierra*"). Thus, I have translated 30 of Mistral's poems, 29 of which reflect the poet's move away from her early bio-mythographic and introverted phase. I have included the melodramatic "*Éxtasis*" (*Desolación*) so that readers have an idea of the early style for which Mistral has been known in the English-speaking world. Five of the poems are from *Termura*, another five from *Tala*, eight are from *Lagar*, and

eleven from *Poema de Chile*.⁶⁵ With the exception of “*Canción amarga*,” “*Canción Quechua*,” “*Niño mexicano*,” “*Piececitos*,” and “*Manitas*” (*Termura*); “*La extranjera*” and “*Mar Caribe*” (*Tala*); and “*La otra*,” “*La desasida*,” “*Mujer de prisionero*,” and “*La huella*” (*Lagar*), the poems appearing in this study have not, to the best of my knowledge, been translated into English before.

Poetry lies in the harmonious co-existence of imagery, sound, pattern, and rhythm. Form and content are interdependent. Each translator must, however, choose among these elements those that will give the highest poetic value to a new rendition of a work. Such choices are based on a knowledge of linguistic and personal limitations or strengths. While the poet’s work is unique, there are as many translations of one poem as there are translators.

It remains that a translation can become outdated. In *Translating Neruda*, John Felstiner suggests that “ideally, the salient poets from any period deserve retranslating for the ear of each new generation.”⁶⁶ The reason behind Felstiner’s observation is that the idiom chosen by a translator at a particular point in literary history may, in time, alienate readers. Often, the now antiquated style of the translation stands in the way of aesthetic appreciation. But though I have encountered some rather heavy-handed translations of Mistral’s poetry, I have nonetheless learned much from them, for, as Felstiner points out,

[o]ur desultory awareness of Latin American literature until the last decade or so has depended on what a few hardy translators have made available, and any recent translator must be grateful to them.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ I have not, however, translated poems from the posthumous *Lagar II*, Santiago: Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, Biblioteca Nacional, 1991. This work was compiled and published by scholars who followed Mistral’s handwritten corrections to a series of 70 typewritten poems meant as a second volume to the first *Lagar*. *Lagar II*, which is comprised of 64 poems, had not yet been made available to the reading public when I began translating Mistral in the 1980s. Once the work was published, I decided against translating some of its poems because they were similar in both tone and theme to those already found in *Lagar*, and because the Biblioteca Nacional’s edition is so riddled with annotations pointing to Mistral’s doubts and alternative suggestions that the poems lack the impression of inevitability that I find conducive to a sympathetic translation.

⁶⁶ John Felstiner, *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1980) 17.

⁶⁷ Felstiner 14.

I recognize, at the same time, that my own renditions are flawed since the process of translation is one of inevitable loss. Indeed, more than any other theoretician, George Steiner has demonstrated that at the heart of every translation lies the probability, if not the certainty of failure.⁶⁸

Between 1920 and 1947, Mistral's translators adopted a style and tone too far removed from the poet's own directness and simplicity. It is almost as if they refused to trust Mistral herself and believed that the expression of a tortured soul could be rendered only with excessive formality. Consider the third sonnet of the famous "*Sonetos de la muerte*":

*Malas manos tomaron tu vida desde el día
en que, a una señal de astros, dejará su plantel
nevado de azucenas. En gozo florecía.
Malas manos entraron trágicamente en él...*

*Y yo dije al Señor: "Por las sendas mortales
le llevan ¡Sombra amada que no saben guiar!
¡Arráncalo, Señor, a esas manos fatales
o le hundes en el largo sueño que sabes dar!"*

The hands of evil have been on your life
Since when, at signal from the stars, I sowed
It 'mid the lilies. Beauteous was it rife
Till hands of evil wrecked the fair abode.
Unto the Lord I said: "From mortal paths
Oh, let them bear him, -- spirit without guide --;
Save him, O Saviour, from the grip of wraths,
And plunge him in the dreams Thine arms provide!
-- Roderick Gill, 1920⁶⁹

Roderick Gill's version is impeccable from the standpoint of form. Gill is, in fact, a more polished poet than Mistral herself would *seem* to be. Like her, he respects an a b a b c d c d rhyme scheme. Where Mistral resorts to two quatrains in alexandrine and 13-syllable lines, however, Gill adheres to a strict octave in iambic pentameter. At what price

⁶⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language & Translation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 3-50.

⁶⁹ Roderick Gill, "The Hands of Evil Have Been On Your Life" 735.

perfection? Gill commits semantic errors. "*Por las sendas mortales / le llevan i Sombra amada que no saben guiar!*" means, literally, "They do not know how to guide him, and through fatal paths they take his beloved shadow (or soul, or spirit)." We are far from Gill's "From mortal paths / Oh, let them bear him, -- spirit without guide --." Also, as early as 1914, Mistral had abandoned the custom of adorning each new line with a capital letter. In addressing God, she also uses the second person singular, "tú" (i.e., "you") where Gill employs the reverential "Thou." In short, to achieve his aim, Gill had to sacrifice both simplicity and directness.

Similar mannerisms exist in George Dundas Craig's translations, which were published in 1971. For instance:

"Íntima" (Desolación)

*Y me angustiara oyéndote
y hablaras loco y ciego,
que mi mano será sobre tu frente
cuando rompan mis dedos,
y bajará sobre tu cara llena
de ansia mi aliento.*

"Intimate"

And, hearing thee, I'd suffer pain;
And madly, blindly thou would'st talk,
For on thy brow my hand shall rest
When my fingers loose their bonds,
And on thy anguished face
My breath shall fall.

-- G. Dundas Craig⁷⁰

Here, a young woman speaks to her lover, but the intimate, flustered, and halting flow of her words is hindered by Craig's archaic form of address. "And madly, blindly thou would'st talk," gives the verse a furtive, whispered tone that the original, with its bold, short, broad-vowelled adjectives, lacks. The verb's contraction and, again, the use of the pronoun "thou" are too old-fashioned for Mistral's confident lyricism.

⁷⁰

Dundas Craig 197.

Alice Stone Blackwell is successful in recreating a rhythm that echoes that of Mistral's poems:

"Piececitos" (Termura)

*Piececitos de niño,
azulosos de frío,
¡cómo os ven y no os cubren!
Dios mío!*

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

*El hombre ciego ignora
que por donde pasáis,
une flor de luz viva
dejáis;*

"Little Feet"

O tiny feet of children
Blue with the cold, unshod!
How can they see, nor cover you --
O God!

O little feet, sore wounded
By every stone and brier,
Chilled by the snows in winter,
defiled by mire!

Man, blind, knows that where you go,
In valley or on height,
You always leave behind a flower
Of living light --

-- A. Blackwell, 1937⁷¹

Blackwell's mastery of end-rhyme and consonance is noteworthy, but in order to achieve this she must add words and information that are absent in the original.

⁷¹

Stone Blackwell 264.

the fact that, since 1957, many of them have translated "*La extranjera*." The following examples are significant of a new trend among Mistralian translators.

"La extranjera" (Tala)

*Habla con dejo de sus mares bárbaros,
con no sé qué algas y no sé qué arenas;
reza oración a dios sin bulto y peso,
envejecida como si muriera.*

Langston Hughes, 1957:

"Stranger"

She speaks in a slight accent about her wild seas
with God knows what seaweeds and God knows what sands,
so old it's as if she herself were dying,
she prays to a god with no volume and no weight.⁷³

Doris Dana, 1971:

"The Foreigner"

She speaks with the moisture of her barbarous seas
still on her tongue, with the taste
of sands and algae unknown to me.
She prays to a god without form or weight,
and is so old she is ready to die.⁷⁴

Tom Raworth, 1971:

"Foreigner"

She speaks of her barbarous seas with a strange accent; her seas
with what I don't know what kinds of seaweeds and sands. She
raises a prayer to God without form or weight, looking old, as
though she were dying.⁷⁵

⁷³ Hughes 109.

⁷⁴ Dana, *Selected Poems* 101.

⁷⁵ Raworth 121.

Maria Giachetti, 1993:

“The Foreign Woman”

She speaks with abandonment
about her savage seas
of mystic algae and sands.
She prays to God without burden or bulk.
This woman is ancient and ready to die.⁷⁶

Here Mistral uses lines of variable lengths and relies on assonance, consonance, and alliteration. Above all, it is the rhetorical content of the poem that gives it a solemn and mysterious atmosphere that can be associated with poetic expression. Everything in this poem is deliberately vague, imprecise. The “foreigner” speaks with “an” accent of her “barbarous seas” (which accent? What seas?). In those seas there are “god knows what” algae and sands. Her god (“*dios*” is not capitalized in the original) is “without form or weight.” To which god is Mistral referring? Finally, though this foreigner is so old that it is as if she was dying, the reader does not know whether hers is an age brought on by the accumulation of years or by experience alone.

Hughes, Dana, Raworth, and Giachetti have different advantages over each other. Langston Hughes is a well-known poet. This, in theory, endows him with a better grasp of and “feel for” poetic language and expression. Doris Dana lived with Mistral in the last years of the poet’s life and knew both the author and her work well. Maria Giachetti understands that the force of Mistral’s work rests primarily in her use of “plain words.”⁷⁷ Her rendition is therefore pared down, almost primitive. By choosing to produce a prose version of “*La extranjera*,” Raworth is, in turn, freer to disclose the poem’s exact meaning than the other three, who, though they write in free verse, are nonetheless bound to and possibly distracted by the demands of poetic syntax.

Predictably, Langston Hughes’ version is consistent with a personal sense of rhythm found in his own works. Only Hughes can insist on including in this translation the idiosyncratic repetitions for which he is famous (“God knows what . . . and God knows

⁷⁶ Giachetti 100.
⁷⁷ Giachetti 25.

what . . ."). His first line is equally controversial. The original provides no indication as to whether the foreigner's accent is heavy or "slight." Still, Hughes, like Dana, is careful to write about the foreigner's "god" using a lower case "g."

When compared with Hughes's and Raworth's translations, the first two lines of Doris Dana's version are perplexing. Why speak of the "moisture of her barbarous seas / still on her tongue?" Because "*dejo*" can be interpreted to mean an "accent" or an "after-taste." Dana may have discussed this particular poem with Mistral herself. At any rate, her version is both valid and clever. Does the word "tongue" apply to language or to the organ of taste and speech? It applies to both and Dana's skillfulness sheds new light on the original. "[S]ands and algae unknown to me," however, does not do full justice to the idiomatic "*no sé qué algas y no sé qué arenas*," and Dana's last line is rather awkward and anticlimactic. With a few exceptions, Dana's translations are equally simple, clear, accurate, and unpretentious, but her unwavering adherence to the original meaning often results in versions too literal and flat to be appreciated as poems in their own right.

Tom Raworth's prose translation shows that such efforts, useful as they may be, are not always entirely clear. "She raises a prayer to God without form or weight" is a curious and equivocal sentence. What or who is without form or substance? Which is the subject here: the "prayer" or "God?" To be fair, however, the original is equally misleading. Once again, when not spelled as in the original, "God" takes on a meaning Mistral did not necessarily intend. Literal translations, moreover, may be perceived as desecrations of the poetic impulse. As such they rob the reader of a fundamental dimension of the original.

Maria Giachetti, both a poet and a translator of Pablo Neruda's works, writes simply and directly, much like Mistral herself. Her lines are almost as short as Mistral's, yet much of the author's playfulness and sense of rhythm is lost in the process. "*Habla. . . / con no sé qué algas y no sé qué arenas*" becomes "She speaks . . . / of mystic algae and sands." The word "mystic" is meant to convey the mystery suggested in the repetitive "*no sé qué . . . no sé qué*," but simple as Giachetti's solution may be, it adds a dimension to Mistral's words that may not have been intended by the author. It also falls flat when compared with the sing-song quality of the original. Giachetti also capitalizes "God" and

seems to imply that the foreigner is the one “without burden or bulk,” when other translators have chosen to make Mistral’s god the creature “without form or weight.”

Thus, though Mistral’s first translators created rhymed, musical works rather than literal renditions of poems, we have seen so far that they sometimes strayed from the original’s bold novelty and syntactic simplicity. Mistralian translators of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s have fallen into different traps. Their renditions, though direct and modern, are at times unpoetic or idiosyncratic. In 1993, Maria Giachetti’s translations proved that it is possible to create renditions of Mistral’s poems that are simple, straightforward, and devoid of poetic peculiarities. At the same time, Giachetti’s translations are occasionally stiff and emotionless.

A fine new translator appeared in the early to mid-1990s. Christiane Jacox Kyle has so far translated and published several of Mistral’s poems. More particularly, in 1995, she penned “Message of a Birth for Chile,” from *Tala*, and “Thrushes,” from *Poema de Chile*.⁷⁸ Both are remarkable for their easy sympathy with the original. In “Message of a Birth for Chile,” a friend of the poet writes to announce the birth of a daughter. The original is warm, playful and tender, and so is Jacox Kyle’s masterful rendition:

“Recado de nacimiento para Chile”

*Le pusieron my nombre, . . .
Mas añadieron en aquel conjuro
que no tenga nunca mi suelta imprudencia,
que no labre panales para osos
ni se ponga a azotar a los vientos...*

“Message of a Birth for Chile”

They gave her my name, . . .
But they added to that incantation
that she never have my loose imprudence,
that she not fashion hornets’ nests for bears
or take on whipping the winds...

-- Christiane Jacox Kyle⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Prairie Schooner* 69 (1995): 21-25.

⁷⁹ Jacox Kyle, “Message of a Birth for Chile” 22.

Jacox Kyle has opted here for a faithful colloquialism. She could have written “[t]hey named her after me,” or “my reckless (or wild) imprudence,” but preferred instead to follow the Spanish more closely. “[M]y loose imprudence” may not be what an English-speaking person might say, but it renders the Spanish adjective in a lively and simple way that ends up being terribly Mistralian. Next, the comic effect of “*se ponga a azotar a los vientos*” may well be lost in the English version, but with her “take on whipping the winds” Jacox Kyle compensates for the loss with an image that is both memorable and lyrical.

In summary, Mistral’s translators in the 1990s are moving in a direction that suits both Mistral’s verse and today’s unadorned aesthetics. As the affected gimmickry of past translations is abandoned, Mistral’s own sensual originality is finally allowed to peer through.

My own aim was not to outdo Mistral’s other translators and I did not proceed from a particular school or theory of translation. The art of translation is always a difficult endeavour, a madness that relies very much on a method, even when that method is at times instinctive. Though I once studied and practiced the rules of technical translation, I found that literary translation, and poetry in particular, often demands that rules be broken. Literature must, after all, be distinguished from the simple transmission of data or information. My approach to Mistral’s work was that of a practicing translator and occasional poet moved above all by the power, the compassion, and the humour of the original works. Poetry, at its best, assails the reader with an inevitable blow to the heart. Mistral’s poetry certainly has that effect on me and I sought, as much as possible, to reproduce that feeling in my English renditions. Whether I have succeeded is a question that I leave my readers to answer. Unhelpful as it may be to future translators, I must confess that one of my greatest tools has been my sympathy with the author’s passion and generosity; both qualities shine through Mistral’s poems in a manner that cannot be ignored. It is, of course, possible to translate practically anything on demand. The best translations, however, are those in which the author and his or her translator share similar values and sensibilities. In Gabriela Mistral, I found a friend, a mother, a sister.

Writing has often been described as one percent inspiration and 99 percent drudgery. I would similarly describe literary translation as one percent foolish optimism and 99 percent frustration. Every translator knows that the process is one of equivalence rather than exactness or literalness. It remains that several types of literary translation exist, from what has been described as formal or academic translation to what is known as imitative literature.⁸⁰ These types certainly determine the style and linguistic choices adopted by the translator. It is not my aim, in this work, to pen a rigorous, scholarly body of translations complete with detailed annotations referring the reader to literary influences, possible use of archetypes, and biographical information. I wish, rather, to convey in the English language the simple and immediate pleasure that Mistral's poems have given Hispanic readers for the past six decades. My translations are consequently of a *literary* or *interpretive* nature, by which I mean that I have, where necessary for the purposes of both lyricism and the English language, replaced the most obvious and quasi-literal rendition of a word or syntactical construction with one that is more happily lyrical.

Not all of Mistral's poems present difficulties. Though fraught with metaphors and similes, Mistral's poetry can be disarmingly straightforward. Some poems are easily rendered in an almost literal way. Consider, for instance, the first four lines of *Poema de Chile's* "Alcohol:"

*Resbalando los pastales
y entrando por los viñedos
que el Diablo trenza y destrenza
desde la cepa al sarmiento . . .*

⁸⁰ Burton Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (U Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988) 110:

"I classify translations into four broad types and identify each type with a different audience:

1. *formal* translation, aimed primarily at a general audience which reads for scholarly rather than literary purposes;
2. *interpretive* translation, aimed primarily at a general audience which reads for literary reasons;
3. *expansive* (or "free") translation, aimed not simply at those who read for literary reasons but at those who usually prefer to read something, anything, new rather than anything old;
4. *imitative* translation, which in plain truth I think just barely translation at all; it is aimed at an audience which wants the work of the particular translator rather than the work of the original poet; Robert Lowell's accurately titled volume *Imitations* is the model of this type of translation in our time." [Emphasis in the text.]

I was able, in the English version, to provide a faithful rendition:

Sliding down pastures
and entering the vineyards
that the Devil braids and unbraids
from stock to shoot . . .

Many of Mistral's poems, however, present greater difficulties. In "*Mujer de prisionero*," for instance, a prisoner living in misery is filled with wonder at the sight of his visiting companion and at the treats she brings him. The original reads as follows:

*En lo oscuro, mi amor que come moho
y telarañas, cuando es que yo llego,
entero ríe a lo blanquidorado;
a mi piel, a mi fruta y a mi cesto.*

Literally, these lines may be rendered thus: "In darkness, my love, who eats mould / and spiderwebs, when I arrive / laughs with his whole being at the white-and-gold; / at my skin, at my fruit and at my basket." I first translated all poems in this awkward manner in order to include in a first draft all the necessary information contained in the original. In a second, third, and sometimes fourth, draft I chiselled at my literal translation to provide it with a musicality that is more compatible with the English language:

In darkness, my love, who feeds upon mould
and cobwebs, turns to laughter when I arrive,
at the white and golden sight
of my skin and fruit and basket.

Here, the verb "*ríe*" ("laughs") has been moved up to the second line. The expression "*se ríe entero*" has been replaced by "turns to laughter," which seemed to me more pleasant to the ear than "laughs with his whole being" or "laughs wholeheartedly." There is no single English term for "*blanquidorado*;" Mistral herself seems to have made up the word. I could have also invented one that does not exist in the English language in order to render Mistral's playfulness, but "white and golden sight" was an acceptable equivalence that carried the added gain of assonance. The playfulness and sensuality of the moment is rendered, instead, by the coy and breathless repetition of the word "and" in the last line.

In short, I made it my mandate to turn the English rendition of each work into as much of a poem as possible without betraying the author's intent.

It is worth noting that in this, as in other poems, I have not sought to reproduce the original rhyming scheme. Many of Mistral's poems included in this selection display a typically Hispanic rhyming scheme known as *asonancia*, in which the vowels rhyme in the even verses and are free in the odd numbered verses. This, of course, gives Mistral's poetry its rhythm and balance. My goal, however, was, above all, to avoid the formal rigidity of Mistral's early translations and to allow the freshness of the poetry to come through. Except for the odd fortuitous rhyme, free verse is therefore the norm in my renditions. The Spanish versions are included so that the reader may enjoy them for themselves while comparing them to my efforts. The texts of the original were taken from Mistral's *Poesías completas*, which were edited by Margaret Bates and published a year after Mistral's death.

Additional difficulties arose in the course of my translations. Alastair Reid, one of Pablo Neruda's translators, wrote in his introduction to his *Isla Negra* that "[i]n English, Spanish poems often need to be reconstructed, their abstractions particularized."⁸¹ In Mistral's "*Emigrada judía*," the narrator, a Jewish refugee fleeing Germany, confesses that "*el Rin . . . me enseñó a hablar*" -- the Rhine "taught her" to speak. While it is perfectly acceptable, in Spanish, to anthropomorphize natural sites that carry emotional connotations, I preferred, in my translation, to specify that it was "by the banks of the Rhine" that the narrator had "learned to speak."

In "*Sol del trópico*," as well, Mistral writes that ancient Aymaras -- a group of South American natives -- "*como el ambar fueron quemados*." To say that they were burnt "like amber" was misleading since it suggested that amber, the fossil resin, is customarily burnt. It can, in fact, be melted under high temperatures to produce amber oil and succinic acid, but Mistral probably meant, in her own poetic way, that amber must have been burnt to take on its reddish-brown tint. I therefore had to add that the Aymara were burnt "the colour of amber." What Alastair Reid calls the "abstraction" of the

⁸¹ Alastair Reid, trans., *Isla Negra: A Notebook*, by Pablo Neruda (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981) xvii.

Spanish language was compounded, in this case, by the fact that Mistral is unfortunately not alive today to assist me or other translators.

Another problem was posed by Mistral's *criollo* poems. I had to decide whether to keep the names of the Chilean fauna, flora, and geography in their original Spanish or ancient Peruvian. In an article on his translations of Haitian author Dany Laferrière, Montreal translator David Homel addressed a similar problem. Laferrière is fond of describing the ingredients that go into Haitian cuisine. In Homel's words,

[i]t's tempting, when speaking of foods that are foreign to us, to leave them in their original language. Especially if the dictionary is unhelpful, as in the case of *mirlitons*: Harrap's gives us "cream horn" and "mirliton" and "doggerel." I don't believe translators need to leave in foreign terms in order to insure the foreignness of the work they're doing. Especially in Laferrière's case -- though the same is true in all works -- the foreignness is built in, as surely as the letters are printed on the paper.⁸²

Though I agree, in principle, with Homel's admirable purism, I resolved not to practice all that he preaches. I compromised instead. Where the term describes something that can be found in other parts of the world, and which has an English translation, I gave it its English name. Thus the "árbol del pan" became a "breadfruit tree." But where the term is descriptive, for instance, of ancient Quechuan culture, I kept the original word. Thus, the "*quena*," an Indian flute, remains a "*quena*"; the "*Coyas*" were not turned into "princesses," or the "*Viracochas*" into "the four mystics." To explain the meaning of these words I have added footnotes. My reasons for such a decision are simple. Often the original word has no English equivalent that is precise enough. The term "*Coya(s)*," for instance, describes the Empress, the daughters of the Emperor, or the women of the nobility in ancient Peru. The word "princesses" is possibly inaccurate. "Noble women" is unpoetic. "Chosen women" is ridiculous. Besides, some Spanish words, such as "puna" and "yucca" now form part of the English language and can be found in any modern English dictionary. I feel that I have merely stretched the rules of the language a little to

⁸² David Homel, "Tin-Fluting It: On Translating Dany Laferrière," *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*, ed. Sherry Simon (Montreal: Vehicule P, 1995) 51.

include a few more. My solution is arguably imperfect, but it is, I believe, rendered acceptable by the fact that such instances are relatively rare in the course of my work.

Though it is normal for a translator to justify his or her linguistic choices, I have found, while I was translating these poems, that I often had to justify the very fact that I was translating poems from the Spanish in a country like Canada. Other literary translators have pointed out to me that my decision was rather luckless since the few translation prizes and awards that exist in this country are generally bestowed upon translators who translate from French into English and vice versa.

One of the factors in my decision to translate these poems is precisely that the great majority of Mistralian translations come not from Canada but from the United States. Due certainly to our federal government's policy of bilingualism and to the paradoxical reality of a country divided along linguistic lines, few Canadian literary translators attempt to work in languages other than English and French. In the words of Canadian translator Wayne Grady, we assume that "[w]e don't need Canadian translators of, say, Spanish books, because some American will eventually translate them."⁸³ I agree with Grady that translation occurs within a cultural context, and that Canadian culture differs in fundamental ways from that of our neighbours South of the border.⁸⁴ Contrary to the American constitution, for instance, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is animated by collectivist ideals, among which is the recognition of aboriginal treaty rights. On paper, at least, the Canadian social vision may therefore be closer to Mistral's conception of justice than the American one, which tends to over-emphasize the virtues of individualism. Translation, of course, is carried out by individuals whose personal beliefs may diverge greatly from their nation's official ideology. What I am suggesting is, merely, that there is no *cultural* reason why Canadians should be placed at a disadvantage when attempting to translate the works of Chilean, Chinese, or Czech writers.

There may, on the other hand, be economic reasons why French/English and English/French literary translations are more common in Canada. Book sales in this country are appallingly low. Canadian novelists are considered best-sellers when they sell

⁸³ Wayne Grady, "On Becoming a Translator," *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*, ed. Sherry Simon (Montreal: Vehicule P, 1995) 26.

⁸⁴ Grady 27.

5,000 books; poets are granted a similar status if they manage to get 400 readers to purchase their works. Given this state of affairs, local translations of Ivan Klima or Fernando Pessoa may, from the point of view of a Canadian publisher, prove financially hazardous. The issue is a complex one and offers no simple solution. Questions must also be raised about the status and remuneration of writers and translators in Canada. All these considerations notwithstanding, I submit that multilingual translations preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians and should therefore be actively promoted. My decision to translate some of Mistral's works reflects this belief.

In the end, we must remember that Gabriela Mistral is a Nobel Prize winner; a woman who managed, despite her fierce love of the American continent and of her native Chile, to convey through her writing emotions that are universal because they have nothing about them that is petty or chauvinistic. Mistral's poems are as rich, as generous, and as bold as the continent she adored. In these poems, she explored human suffering, a mother's tenderness, a wife's kindness, a child's fear, a lover's passion, a people's pride. Any translator, no matter how flawed his or her art, should be honoured to have had the opportunity to render these works in another language. I know I was.



DESOLACIÓN / DESOLATION



Éxtasis

*Ahora, Cristo, bájame los párpados,
pon en la boca escarcha,
que están de sobra ya todas las horas
y fueron dichas todas la palabras.*

*Me miró, nos miramos en silencio
mucho tiempo, clavadas,
como en la muerte, las pupilas. Todo
el estupor que blanquea las caras
en la agonía, albeaba nuestros rostros.
¡Tras de ese instante, ya no resta nada!*

*Me habló convulsamente;
le hablé, rotas, cortadas
de plenitud, tribulación y angustia,
las confusas palabras.
Le hablé de su destino y mi destino,
amasijo fatal de sangre y lágrimas.*

*Después de esto, ¡lo sé!, ¡no queda nada!
¡Nada! Ningún perfume que no sea
diluido al rodar sobre mi cara.*

*Mi oído está cerrado,
mi boca está sellada.
¡Qué va a tener razón de ser ahora
para mis ojos en la tierra pálida!
¡ni las rosas sangrientas*

ni las nieves calladas!
Por eso es que te pido,
Cristo, al que no clamé de hambre angustiada:
ahora, para mis pulsos,
y mis párpados baja.

Defiéndeme del viento
la carne en que rodaron sus palabras;
librame de la luz brutal del día
que ya viene, esta imagen.
Recíbeme, voy plena,
¡tan plena voy como tierra inundada!

Ecstasy

And now, Christ, close my eyes,
cover my lips with rime,
for each new hour is unbidden
and all words have been spoken.

He looked at me, we watched each other in silence
for a long time, our pupils fixed as in death.
All the stupor that blanches faces
in agony whitened ours.
Beyond that moment, nothing remains!

He spoke to me convulsively;
I spoke to him, my tangled words broken,
strangled with plenitude, tribulations, and anguish.
I spoke of his destiny, of my destiny:
that fatal blend of blood and tears.

Then -- I know -- nothing is left!
Nothing! No scent that does not fade
about my face.

My ears are covered,
my lips are sealed.
What reason on this pale earth
will my eyes now have for seeing?
Roses red as blood, silent snows
are not enough!

And so I beg you, Christ,
to whom I never cried in anguished hunger:
stop my heartbeat now
and close my eyes.

Shield from the wind
the flesh around which his words have glided;
free his image from the brutal light of coming day.
Receive me as I come, so full,
full as a flooded land!



***TERNURA* / TENDERNESS**



Canción quechua

*Donde fue Tihuantisuyo,
nacían los indios.*

*Llegábamos a la puna
con danzas, con himnos.*

*Silbaban quenás, ardían
dos mil fuegos vivos.
Cantaban Coyas de oro
y Amautas benditos.*

*Bajaste ciego de soles,
volando dormido,
para hallar viudos los aires
de llama y de indio.*

*Y donde eran maizales
ver subir el trigo
y en lugar de las vicuñas
topar los novillos.*

*¡Regresa a tu Pachacamac,
En-Vano-Venido,
Indio loco, Indio que nace,
pájaro perdido!*

Quechuan Song

Where Tihuantisuyo¹ went,
Indians came to life.
We would reach the puna²
with dances, with hymns.

Quenas³ hissed, two thousand
bonfires crackled.
Golden Coyas⁴ chanted
along with blessed Amautas.⁵

Blinded by suns, you came down,
hovering, asleep,
to find the land bereft
of llamas and Indians.

And you saw wheat rising
where fields of maize stood
and young bulls locking horns
where once stood vicuñas.⁶

Translator's Notes:

¹ Tihuantisuyo: The Incan Empire, comprised of four regions named Antisuyo, Collasuyo, Contisuyo, and Chinchasuyo.

² Puna: High plateau in the Peruvian Andes.

³ Quena: Indian flute used in several regions of Latin America to accompany traditional songs and chants.

⁴ Coya(s): In ancient Peru, the Empress, daughters of the Emperor, or women of the nobility.

⁵ Amautas: Sages -- i.e., counsellors, philosophers, poets, and historians -- of ancient Peru.

⁶ Vicuñas: Wild South American ruminants related to the llama and prized for their delicate wool.

Dash back to your Pachacamac,⁷
having come in vain,
crazed Indian, fledgling Indian,
bird gone astray!

⁷ Pachacamac: Now a large pre-Colombian ruin (c. 200 B.C.-A.D. 600) located in the Lurín Valley on the central coast of Peru. Once a temple and the seat of an oracle. In late pre-Columbian times the Incas constructed the large Temple of the Sun on that site.

Canción amarga

*¡Ay! ¡Juguemos, hijo mío,
a la reina con el rey!*

*Este verde campo es tuyo.
¿De quién más podría ser?
Las oleadas de alfalfas
para ti se han de mecer.*

*Este valle es todo tuyo.
¿De quién más podría ser?
Para que los disfrutemos
los pomares se hacen miel.*

*(¡Ay! ¡No es cierto que tiritas
como el Niño de Belén
y que el seno de tu madre
se secó de padecer!)*

*El cordero está espesando
el vellón que he de tejer,
y son tuyas las majadas.
¿De quién más podrían ser?*

*Y la leche del establo
que en la ubre ha de correr,
y el manojo de las mieses,
¿de quién más podrían ser?*

*(¡Ay! ¡No es cierto que tiritas
como el Niño de Belén
y que el seno de tu madre
se secó de padecer!)*

*¡Sí! ¡Juguemos, hijo mío,
a la reina con el rey!*

Bitter Song

Oh, let us play, my son!
Let us be king and queen!

This green field is yours,
to whom else could it belong?
And the waves of alfalfa
will sway at your command.

This valley is all yours,
to whom else could it belong?
And apples turn to honey
for us to feast upon.

(No, it is not true that you shiver
like the Child of Bethlehem,
or that your mother's breast
has been withered by worry!)

And I will weave the fleece
that the lamb thickens for you,
and the sheepfold is all yours,
to whom else could it belong?

And the milk from the cowshed
that will course through the udder,
and the yield of the seasons,
to whom else could they belong?

(No, it is not true that you shiver
like the Child of Bethlehem,
or that your mother's breast
has been withered by worry!)

Yes, let us play, my son;
let us be king and queen!

Niño mexicano

*Estoy en donde no estoy,
en el Anáhuac plateado,
y en su luz como no hay otra
peino un niño de mis manos.*

*En mis rodillas parece
flecha caída del arco,
y como flecha lo afile
meciéndolo y canturreando.*

*En luz tan vieja y tan niña
siempre me parece hallazgo,
y lo mudo y lo volteo
con el refrán que le canto.*

*Me miran con vida eterna
sus ojos negri-azulados,
y como en costumbre eterna,
yo lo peino de mis manos.*

*Resinas de pino-ocote
van de su nuca a sus brazos,
y es pesado y es ligero
de ser la flecha sin arco...*

*Lo alimento con un ritmo,
y él me nutre de algún bálsamo
que es el bálsamo del maya
del que a mí me despojaron.*

*Y juego con sus cabellos
y los abro y los repaso,
y en sus cabellos recobro
a los mayas dispersados.*

*Hace dos años dejé
a mi niño mexicano;
pero despierta o dormida
yo lo peino de mis manos...*

*¡Es una maternidad
que no me cansa el regazo,
y es un éxtasis que tengo
de la gran muerte librado!*

Mexican Child

I am where I am not,
upon the silvery Anáhuac,¹
and in its matchless light,
I comb a child's hair with my hands.

Upon my lap he seems
an arrow fallen from the bow,
and I make him as sharp as an arrow
as I rock him with a song.

In this light so young and old,
he always looks so new,
and I change and bounce him
to the refrain I hum.

With eyes so black they might be blue
he gazes at me with eternal life,
and I comb his hair with my hands
as with an eternal gesture.

Pitch-pine resins
run from his neck to his arms,
and he is heavy, he is light
from being an arrow without a bow...

¹ [Translator's Note] Anáhuac: District of present-day Mexico, and heartland of Aztec Mexico. The original Anáhuac of the Aztecs was the central plateau valley of Mexico.

I nurse him to a rhythm,
and he nurtures me with a balm;
the balsam of the Mayas,
of which I was despoiled.

I play with his hair,
I ruffle and smooth it down,
and there I recover
all the scattered Mayas.

Two years have passed since I left
my little Mexican child,
yet by day or in slumber,
I comb his hair with my hands.

It is a kind of motherhood
that does not wear my lap,
and a rapture I delivered
from the womb of the great death!

*Piececitos**A doña Isaura Dinator.*

*Piececitos de niño,
azulosos de frío,
¡cómo os ven y no os cubren,
Dios mío!*

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

*El hombre ciego ignora
que por donde pasáis,
una flor de luz viva
dejáis;*

*que allí donde ponéis
la plantita sangrante,
el nardo nace más
fragante.*

*Sed, puesto que marcháis
por los caminos rectos,
heroicos como sois
perfectos.*

*Piececitos de niño,
dos joyitas sufrientes,
¡ cómo pasan sin veros
las gentes!*

Little Feet

to doña Isaura Dinator

Little feet of children,
blue from the cold,
my God, how can people see
and not cover them?

Little feet, wounded
by all the pebbles,
abused by snows
and mud!

Blind men do not realize
that wherever you step,
you leave
a flower of radiant light;

that where you place
your little bleeding soles,
the tuberose grows
more fragrant.

And since you walk
straight roads,
little feet, be as brave
as you are fair.

Little feet of children,
tiny wretched gems,
how people pass by
and ignore you!

Manitas

*Manitas de los niños,
manitas pedigüeñas,
de los valles del mundo
sois dueñas.*

*Manitas de los niños
que al granado se tienden,
por vosotros las frutas
se encienden.*

*Y los panales llenos
de su carga se ofenden.
¡Y los hombres que pasan
no entienden!*

*Manitas blancas, hechas
como de suave harina,
la espiga por tocaros
se inclina.*

*Manitas extendidas,
piñon, caracolitos,
bendito quien os colme,
¡bendito!*

*Benditos los que oyendo
que parecéis un grito,
os devuelvan el mundo:
¡ benditos!*

Little Hands

Little hands of children,
needy little hands,
you are the rulers
of the valleys of this earth.

Little hands of children
reaching for the pomegranate tree,
because of you fruit
burst aflame.

And the laden honeycombs
are embarrassed.
And the passers-by
will not understand.

Little white hands,
as of soft flour made,
spikes of grain
bow for your touch.

Begging little hands;
blessed, those who fill them
with pine nuts and tiny snails,
blessed!

Blessed,
those who hear your plea
and give you back the world,
blessed!



TALA / THE FELLING



*Sol del trópico**A don Eduardo Santos.*

*Sol de los Incas, sol de los Mayas,
maduro sol americano,
sol en que mayas y quichés
reconocieron y adoraron,
y en el que viejos aimaráes
como el ámbar fueron quemados.
Faisán rojo cuando levantas
y cuando medias, faisán blanco,
sol pintador y tatuador
de casta de hombre y de leopardo.
Sol de montañas y de valles,
de los abismos y los llanos,
Rafael de las marchas nuestras,
lebril de oro de nuestros pasos,
por toda tierra y todo mar
santo y seña de mis hermanos.
Si nos perdemos, que nos busquen
en unos limos abrasados,
donde existe el árbol del pan
y padece el árbol del bálsamo.*

*Sol del Cuzco, blanco en la puna,
 Sol de México canto dorado,
 canto rodado sobre el Mayab¹,
 maíz de fuego no comulgado,
 por el que gimen las gargantas
 levantadas a tu viático;
 corriendo vas por los azules
 estrictos o jesucristianos,
 ciervo blanco o enrojecido,
 siempre herido, nunca cazado...*

*Sol de los Andes, cifra muestra,
 veedor de hombres americanos,
 pastor ardiendo de grey ardiendo
 y tierra ardiendo en su milagro,
 que ni se funde ni nos funde,
 que no devora ni es devorado;
 quetzal de fuego emblanquecido
 que cría y nutre pueblos mágicos;
 llama pasmado en rutas blancas
 guiando llamas alucinados...*

 1

Nombre indígena de Yucatán.

*Raíz del cielo, curador
de los indios alanceados;
brazo santo cuando los salvas,
cuando los matas, amor santo.
Quetzalcóatl, padre de oficios
de la casta de ojo almendrado,
el moledor de los añiles,
el tejedor de algodón cándido;
los telares indios enhebras
en colibries alocados
y das las grecas pintureadas
al mujerío de Tacámbaro.
¡Pájaro Roc, plumón que empolla
dos orientes desenfrenados!*

*Llegas piadoso y absoluto
según los dioses no llegaron,
tórtolas blancas en bandada,
maná que baja sin doblarnos.
No sabemos qué es lo que hicimos
para vivir transfigurados.
En especies solares nuestros
Viracochas se confesaron,
y sus cuerpos los recogimos
en sacramento calcinado.*

*A tu llama fié a los míos,
en parva de ascuas acostados.
Sobre tendal de salamandras
duermen y sueñan sus cuerpos santos.
O caminan contra el crepúsculo,
encendidos como retamos,
azafranes sobre el poniente,
medio Adanes, medio topacios...*

*Desnuda mírame y reconócame,
si no me viste en cuarenta años,
con Pirámide de tu nombre,
con pitahayas y con mangos,
con los flamencos de la aurora
y los lagartos tornasolados.*

*¡Como el maguey, como la yuca,
como el cántaro del peruano,
como la jicara de Uruapan,
como la quena de mil años,
a ti me vuelvo, a ti me entrego,
en ti me abro, en ti me baño!
Tómame como los tomaste,
el poro al poro, el gajo al gajo,
y ponme entre ellos a vivir,
pasmada dentro de tu pasmo.*

*Pisé los cuarzos extranjeros,
comí sus frutos mercenarios;
en mesa dura y vaso sordo
bebí hidromieles que eran lánguidos;
recé oraciones mortecinas
y me canté los himnos bárbaros,
y dormí donde son dragones
rotos y muertos los Zodiacos.*

*Te devuelvo por mis mayores
formas y bultos en que me alzaron.
Riégame así con rojo riego;
dame el hervir vuelta tu caldo.
Emblanquéceme u oscuréceme
en tus lejías y tus cáusticos.*

*¡Quémame tú los torpes miedos,
sécame lodos, avienta engaños;
tuéstame habla, árdeme ojos,
sollama boca, resuello y canto,
límpiame oídos, lávame vistas,
purifica manos y tactos!*

*Hazme las sangres, y las leches,
y los tuétanos, y los llantos.
Mis sudores y mis heridas
sécame en lomos y en costados.
Y otra vez integra incorpórame
a los coros que te danzaron:
los coros mágicos, mecidos
sobre Palenque y Tihuanaco.*

*Gentes quechuas y gentes mayas
te juramos lo que jurábamos.
De ti rodamos hacia el Tiempo
y subiremos a tu regazo;
de ti caímos en grumos de oro,
en vellón de oro desgajado,
y a ti entraremos rectamente
según dijeron Incas Magos.*

*¡Como racimos al lagar
volveremos los que bajamos,
como el cardumen de oro sube
a flor de mar arrebatado
y van las grandes anacondas
subiendo al silbo del llamado!*

Tropical Sun

to don Eduardo Santos

Sun of the Incas, sun of the Mayas,
 ripe sun of America,
 sun recognized and worshipped
 by the Mayas and the Quichés,
 sun against which the ancient Aymaras¹
 were burnt the colour of amber.
 Like a pheasant of fire, you rise,
 and fall, a pheasant of ice;
 dauber and tattoo-master
 of men and leopards.
 Sun of mountains and valleys,
 of abysses, of plains;
 Raphael, archangel of our marches;
 golden greyhound at our heels;
 password of my brothers
 through earth and sea.
 Should we lose our way, let them find us,
 baked in those muds
 where the breadfruit tree stands
 and the balsam endures.

Translator's Notes (unless otherwise indicated):

¹ Aymaras: Major South American Indian group of the Titicaca plateau (central Andes) in modern Peru and Bolivia. The Aymaras were conquered by the Incas around 1430. Later they underwent yet another stage of acculturation under Spanish rule (1535-1821).

Sun of Cuzco,² white above the puna,
 Sun of Mexico, golden song,
 rolling over the Mayab,³
 pagan corn of fire
 to which moaning throats
 turn for absolution;
 you run across stark blue
 and Jesus-Christian skies:
 white deer, red deer,
 forever wounded, never slain.

Andean sun, our emblem,
 sentinel of the men of the Americas,
 ardent shepherd of a fervent flock
 and of a land inflamed with its miracle,
 neither molten nor melting,
 neither devouring
 nor devoured;
 quetzal⁴ bleached by fire,
 creator and nurturer of enchanted peoples,
 spellbound llama leading dazzled llamas
 among milky ways...

² Cuzco: City of Peru, once the capital of the Incan empire.

³ [*Poet's Note*] Mayab: Name long used by the Mexicans when referring to the Yucatan Peninsula.

⁴ Quetzal: Colourful, long-tailed bird of Central America and sacred bird of the ancient Mayas and Aztecs.

Root of the sky, healer
 of the spear-wounded Indians;
 saintly hand that saves them,
 saintly love that kills them.
 Quetzacoatl,⁵ patron of the skills
 of the caste of the almond-eyed --
 grinder of indigo,
 weaver of milk-white cotton.
 You thread all Indian looms
 with maddened hummingbirds
 and give the woven cloths
 to the women of Tacambaro⁶
 Rock Bird, feathers hatching
 two turbulent dawns!

Unlike the gods,
 those white turtledoves in flocks,
 you reach us, sublime yet merciful;
 manna that does not burden us.
 We know not what we did
 to live thus transfigured.
 Viracochas⁷ confessed
 to our solar species
 and we gathered their bodies
 as charred sacraments.

⁵ Quetzacoatl: The "Feathered Serpent." One of the major deities of the ancient Mexican pantheon.

⁶ Tacambaro of Codallos: City in West central Mexico known for its handicrafts.

⁷ Viracochas: The four mystics said to have founded the Incan empire of Peru.

To your flames I entrusted my people
in heaps of glowing embers.

Like salamanders upon an awning,
their saintly bodies sleep and dream,
or walk in the twilight --
bushes of broom afire,
saffron against the sunset;
half-Adam and half-topaz...

Behold my nakedness and acknowledge me --
since you have not seen me in forty years --
with the Pyramid⁸ bearing your name,
the cactus-pears, the mangoes,
the flamingoes of dawn,
and the iridescent lizards.

Like the agave and the yucca,
like the Peruvian jar,
like the chocolate cup of Uruapan,⁹
like the quena of a thousand years,
to you I turn and to you I surrender;
in you I confide and in you I bathe!
Take me as you took them,
pore to pore and limb to limb,
and set me to live among them,
entranced in your own trance.

⁸ Pyramid: The Pyramid of the Sun in Mexico.

⁹ Uruapan: A city of Mexico founded in 1533 and now famous for its lacquerware and Indian handicrafts. Mexican Aztecs consumed a cocoa-bean drink named *xocoatl* (chocolate).

I stepped on foreign quartzes
and ate of their mercenary fruit;
upon hard tables and from mute cups,
I drank languid hydromels;
I recited dying orations
and sang to myself foreign hymns;
I slept where broken dragons
and dead zodiacs lie.

I return to you on a pedestal
of honours and gifts.
Drench me as I am with your red stream;
set me simmering in your broth.
Lighten or darken me
in your bleaches and caustics.

Scald my numbing fears,
dry all injuries, fan away delusions;
roast my speech, burn my eyes,
scorch my lips, my breath, my song;
cleanse my ears, wash my sight;
purify my hands and my touch!

Rouse my blood, my milk,
 the marrow of my bones, and my tears.
 Harden my sweat and wounds
 upon my spine and flank.
 Unite me, whole once more,
 to the choirs that danced your glory;
 the magic, rocking choirs
 upon Palenque¹⁰ and Tihuanaco.¹¹

To you, the Quechuan and Mayan peoples
 swear the same oaths now as then.
 From your womb we tumbled into time
 and we shall climb into your lap again;
 from you we fell as nuggets of gold,
 in torn pieces of golden fleece,
 and straight to you we shall return,
 according to Wise Incas.

Like clusters at the wine press,
 we who went down shall resurface,

¹⁰ Palenque: The modern name of an ancient city of the Classic Period (c. A.D. 300-900.) in Mexico.

¹¹ Tihuanaco, or Tihuanacu: Pre-Colombian ruin near the southern shore of Lake Titicaca by the modern town of Tihuanacu. Construction took place in several stages between the Early Intermediate Period (c. 200 B.C. - A.D. 200) and the Middle Horizon (A.D. 600-1000).

as the gilded shoal emerges,
drawn between wind and water,
and the great anacondas rise
at the signal of a whistle!

*Mar Caribe**A E. Ribera Chèvremont.*

*Isla de Puerto Rico,
isla de palmas,
apenas cuerpo, apenas,
como la Santa,
apenas posadura
sobre las aguas;
del millar de palmeras
como más alta,
y en las dos mil colinas
como llamada.*

*Isla en amaneceres
de mi gozada,
sin cuerpo acongojado,
trémula de alma;
de sus constelaciones
amamantada,
en la siesta de fuego
punzada de hablas,
y otra vez en el alba,
endoncellada.*

*Isla en caña y cafés
 apasionada;
 tan dulce de decir
 como una infancia;
 bendita de cantar
 como un ¡hosanna!,
 sirena sin canción
 sobre las aguas,
 ofendida de mar
 en marejada:
 ¡Cordelia de las olas,
 Cordelia amarga!*

*Seas salvada como
 la corza blanca
 y como el llama nuevo
 del Pachacámac¹,
 y como el huevo de oro
 de la nidada,
 y como la Ifigenia,
 viva en la llama.*

*Te salvan los arcángeles
 de nuestra raza:
 Miguel castigador,
 Rafael que marcha,
 y Gabriel que conduce
 la hora colmada.*

¹ Dios máximo de los quechuas.

*Antes que en mí se acaben
marcha y mirada;
antes de que mi carne
sea una fábula
y antes que mis rodillas
vuelen en ráfagas...*

Día de la liberación de Filipinas.

Caribbean Sea

to E. Ribera Chèvremont

Island of Puerto Rico,
island of palms,
scarcely, scarcely bodied,
like the Holy One,
scarcely touching the waters;
as if made taller
by a thousand palm trees;
like a signal
with its two thousand hills.

Island of dawns
of my delight,
ethereal and free,
vibrantly soulful,
nursed by its constellations,
pulsating with chatter
during siestas of fire,
then suddenly coy
at the break of day.

Island impassioned
with sugar cane and coffee;
its name as soft
as childhood,
as worthy of song
as a blessed Hosanna;
siren without a song
upon the waters,
wronged by sea and surge:
Cordelia of the waves,
bitter Cordelia!

May you be saved
like the white roe-deer,
like the new llama
of Pachacamac,¹
and like the golden egg
from the brood,
and like Iphigenia,
untouched amidst the flames.

May the archangels of our race
guard you:
Michael, the chastiser,
Raphael, the marching one,
and Gabriel, the herald
of the chosen hour.

¹ [Poet's and Translator's Notes] Pachacamac: Creator deity worshipped by the pre-Incan maritime population of Peru. Also a pilgrimage site in the Lurín Valley of Peru dedicated to the god.

Before the journeys and sights
end for me,
before my flesh
becomes a fable,
before my knees
turn to dust in the wind...

Written on the day of the liberation of the Philippines.

“Tamborito panameño”¹

A Méndez Pereira.

Panameño, panameño,
panameño de mi vida,
yo quiero que tú me lleves
al tambor de la alegría.²

*De una parte mar de espejos,
de la otra, serranía,
y partiéndonos la noche
el tambor de la alegría.*

*Donde es bosque de quebracho,
panamá y especiería,
apuñala de pasión
el tambor de la alegría.*

*Emboscado silbador,
cebo de la hechicería,
guiño de la medianoche,
panameña idolatría...*

¹ Nombre de un baile indígena de Panamá.
² Estrofa única del canto folklórico aludido.

*Los muñones son caoba
y la piel venadería,
y más loco a cada tumbo
el tambor de la alegría.*

*Jadeante como pecho
que las sierras subiría.
¡Y la noche que se funde
el tambor de la alegría!*

*Vamos donde tú nos quieres,
que era donde nos querías,
embozado de las greñas,
tamborito de alegría.*

*Danza de la gente roja,
fiebre de panamería,
vamos como quien se acuerda
al tambor de la alegría.*

*Como el niño que en el sueño
a su madre encontraría,
vamos a la leche roja
del tambor de la alegría.*

*Mar pirata, mar fenicio,
nos robó a la paganía,
y nos roba al robador
el tambor de la alegría.*

*¡Vamos por ningún sendero,
que el sendero sobraría,
por el tumbo y el jadeo
del tambor de la alegría!*

“Little Panamanian Drum”¹

to Méndez Pereira

*Panamanian, Panamanian,
Panamanian love of mine,
I want you to take me away
to the beat of the drum of joy.²*

A sea of mirrors on one side,
the mountain range on the other,
and breaking the night in two:
the beat of the drum of joy.

Where there are forests of quebracho³
Panamanian goods and spiceries,
there reign the stabs of passion
of the beat of the drum of joy.

Whistler lying in ambush,
bait of witchery,
wink of midnight,
Panamanian idolatry...

Poet's Notes (unless otherwise indicated):

¹ Title of a Panamanian folk dance.

² Stanza taken from the same folk song.

³ [*Translator's Note*] Quebracho: (Spanish for “axe-breaker”) American tree that yields hard timber and medicinal bark.

Stumps of mahogany
skin of the hunt,
wilder with every roll:
the beat of the drum of joy.

Panting like a beast
that has scaled the sierras;
and the night that melts away
to the beat of the drum of joy!

We follow your call and go
where always we were wanted,
cloaked in tousled manes,
little drum of joy.

Dance of the red people,
Panamanian fever,
we walk as if recalling
the beat of the drum of joy.

Like a child deep in slumber
meets his mother,
we turn to the red milk
of the beat of the drum of joy.

A sea of pirates, a Phoenician sea,
stole us away from our pagan days,
but we are stolen from its sway
by the beat of the drum of joy.

Let us tread no path
for the path would be useless
in the rumble and the throb
of the beat of the drum of joy!

Salto del Laja

A Radomiro Tomio.

*Salto del Laja, viejo tumulto,
hervor de las flechas indias,
despeño de belfos vivos,
majador de tus orillas.*

*Escupes las rocas, rompes
tu tesoro, te avientas tú mismo,
y por morir o más vivir,
agua india, te precipitas.*

*Cae y de caer no acaba
la cegada maravilla:
cae el viejo fervor terrestre,
la tremenda Araucanía.*

*Juegas cuerpo y juegas alma
enteros, agua suicida.
Caen contigo los tiempos,
caen gozos y agonías;
cae la mártir indiada
y cae también mi vida.*

*Las bestias cubres de espumas;
ciega a las liebres tu neblina,
y hieren cohetes blancos
mis brazos y mis rodillas.*

*Te oyen rodar los que talan,
los que hacen pan y caminan,
y los que duermen o están muertos,
o dan su alma o cavan minas,
o en pastales o en lagunas
hallan el coipo y la chinchilla.*

*Baja el ancho amor vencido,
medio-dolor, medio-dicha,
en un ímpetu de madre
que a sus hijos hallaría...*

*Y te entiendo y no te entiendo,
Salto del Laja, vocería,
vaina de antiguos sollozos
y alehuya nunca rendida.*

*Me voy por el río Laja,
me voy con las locas víboras,
me voy por el cuerpo de Chile,
doy vida y voluntad mías.
Juego sangre, juego sentidos
y me entrego, ganada y perdida...*

Falls of the Laja¹

to Radomiro Tomio

Falls of the Laja, ancient tumult,
vigour of Indian arrows,
spout of frantic lips,
pounder of your banks.

You spit out rock, you spend
your treasures, you fling yourself out
and rush down, Indian water,
to perish or to rise.

The sightless marvel falls
and never ceases falling;
the old earthly fervour tumbles down,
the awesome Araucania.²

Suicidal water, you wager
your body and soul.
The times follow you down,
joys and sorrows fall with you;
and so martyred Indianhood
and my life fall down.

Translator's Notes:

¹ Laja River: River that crosses the province of Bio-Bio in southern Chile.

² Araucania: Region of southern Chile between the Bio-Bio and Tolten rivers. Home of the Araucanian Indians, who maintained their independence under Spanish and Chilean authority until the end of the last century.

You cover beasts with foam;
hares are blinded by your mist,
and by your white shafts
my arms and knees are bruised.

They hear your rolling thunder --
the pruners, the bakers, those who journey,
those who sleep and those who are buried,
those who offer up their souls or work in the mines,
those who come upon the coypu and the chinchilla
in pastures and lagoons.

The great relenting love pours down,
half-pain, half-bliss,
with the impulse of a mother
with her children reunited...

Clamour -- I hear and do not hear you,
Falls of the Laja,
sheath of ancient sobs,
enduring hallelujah.

I travel upon the Laja River,
along with the mad vipers,
over the body of Chile,
dispensing my life and my will.
I risk my blood and senses,
and, won over and lost, I surrender...

*La extranjera**A Francis de Miomandre.*

*“Habla con dejo de sus mares bárbaros,
con no sé qué algas y no sé qué arenas;
reza oración a dios sin bulto y peso,
envejecida como si muriera.
En huerto nuestro que nos hizo extraño,
ha puesto cactus y zarpadas hierbas.
Alienta del resuello del desierto
y ha amado con pasión de que blanquea,
que nunca cuenta y que si nos contase
sería como el mapa de otra estrella.
Vivirá entre nosotros ochenta años,
pero siempre será como si llega,
hablando lengua que jadea y gime
y que le entienden solo bestezuelas.
Y va a morir en medio de nosotros,
en una noche en la que más padezca,
con solo su destino por almohada,
de una muerte callada y extranjera.”*

The Foreigner

to Francis de Miomandre

“She speaks with an accent of her barbarous seas
full of I know not what algae and sands;
aged, as if about to die,
she prays to a god without shape or substance.
She made our garden alien
with her cacti and thorn-bushes.
Her breath is as harsh desert blasts
and she has loved with the bleaching passion of the sun.
She tells us nothing of it, though if she did
her tale would be a map from another star.
She will live eighty years among us,
but always as if she had just arrived,
speaking the halting, moaning tongue
only small beasts understand.
And one night, when suffering more than usual,
with her fate her only pillow,
she will die among us
a death mute and *foreign*.”



LAGAR / THE WINE-PRESS



La otra

*Una en mí maté:
yo no la amaba.*

*Era la flor llameando
del cactus de montaña;
era aridez y fuego;
nunca se refrescaba.*

*Piedra y cielo tenía
a pies y a espaldas
y no bajaba nunca
a buscar "ojos de agua."*

*Donde hacía su siesta,
las hierbas se enroscaban
de aliento de su boca
y brasa de su cara.*

*En rápidas resinas
se endurecía su habla,
por no caer en linda
presa soltada.*

*Doblarse no sabía
la planta de montaña,
y al costado de ella,
yo me doblaba...*

*La dejé que muriese,
robándole mi entraña.
Se acabó como el águila
que no es alimentada.*

*Sosegó el aletazo,
se dobló, lacia,
y me cayó a la mano
su pavesa acabada...*

*Por ella todavía
me gimen sus hermanas,
y las gredas de fuego
al pasar me desgarran.*

*Cruzando yo les digo:
-- Buscad por las quebradas
y haced con las arcillas
otra águila abrasada.*

*Si no podéis, entonces,
¡ay!, olvidadla.
Yo la maté. ¡Vosotras
también matadla!*

The Other

I killed her within myself.

I did not love her.

She was the burning flower
of the mountain cactus --
drought and fire;
insatiable.

Stone and sky
were at her feet and back,
and she would bend
for neither fountain nor well.

Where she napped
the grass would shrivel
from her scorching breath,
her features ablaze.

Her words poured forth
like hardening resin,
never beautiful
or free.

She knew not how to bend,
this mountain plant,
yet I, at her side,
would yield...

I left her to die;
I wrenched her from my gut.
She perished
like an eagle unfed.

Her fluttering wings stood still,
and she toppled, limp,
the ash of her spark
in the palm of my hand...

But her sisters mourn her still,
and snags of fiery earth
tear at me
as I walk by.

Passing them I say:
“Look in the rifts
and from their clay
mould another flaming eagle.

Should you fail,
forget her, then.
I killed her, and you women,
you must do the same!”

*La abandonada**A Emma Godoy.*

*Ahora voy a aprenderme
el país de la acedia,
y a desaprender tu amor
que era la sola lengua mía,
como río que olvidase
lecho, corriente y orillas.*

*¿Por qué trajiste tesoros
si el olvido no acarrearías?
Todo me sobra y yo me sobro
como traje de fiesta para fiesta no habida;
¡tanto, Dios mío, que me sobra
mi vida desde el primer día!*

*Denme ahora las palabras
que no me dio la nodriza.
Las balbucearé demente
de la sílaba a la sílaba:
palabra "expolio", palabra "nada"
y palabra "postrimería",
¡aunque se tuerzan en mi boca
como las víboras mordidas!*

*Me he sentado a mitad de la Tierra,
amor mío, a mitad de la vida,
a abrir mis venas y mi pecho,*

*a mondarne en granada viva,
y a romper la caoba roja
de mis huesos que te querían.*

*Estoy quemando lo que tuvimos:
los anchos muros, las altas vigas,
descuajando una por una
las doce puertas que abrías
y cegando a golpes de hacha
el aljibe de la alegría.*

*Voy a esparcir, voleada,
la cosecha ayer cogida,
a vaciar odres de vino
y a soltar aves cautivas;
a romper como mi cuerpo
los miembros de la "masía"
y a medir con brazos altos
la parva de las cenizas.*

*¡Cómo duele, cómo cuesta,
cómo eran las cosas divinas,
y no quieren morir, y se quejan muriendo,
y abren sus entrañas vívidas!
Los leños entienden y hablan,
el vino empinándose mira,
y la banda de pájaros sube
torpe y rota como neblina.*

*Venga el viento, arda mi casa
mejor que bosque de resinas;
caigan rojos y sesgados
el molino y la torre madrina.
¡Mi noche, apurada del fuego,
mi pobre noche no llegue al día!*

The Abandoned

to Emma Godoy

Now I will learn to live
in the land of despair
to unlearn your love,
my only language,
like a river forgetting
its bed, its course, its banks.

Why bring treasures
if you cannot carry oblivion?
Everything overwhelms me
and I survive myself
like a gown in the absence of a ball.
My God, so many things are in excess:
my whole life, from the first day!

So give me the words
that the wet-nurse never told me;
I will stammer them madly,
syllable by syllable:
the word "waste," the word "nothing,"
the words "death" and "end,"
though they twist like slain vipers on my tongue!

I have sat at the centre of the Earth,
my love, at the centre of my life,
slashing my veins and my breast,

baring myself like a live pomegranate,
and fracturing the red mahogany
of my wistful bones.

I am burning what we once had:
the broad walls, the high beams;
one by one, I am pulling out
the twelve doors that you used to open
and rupturing with an axe
the cistern of our happiness.

I toss up and scatter
the harvest hoarded yesterday,
empty goatskins of their wine,
free captive birds,
break all the limbs of the farm
in the image of my own broken body,
and measure the pile of ashes
with wide open arms.

How painful! How it hurts!
How perfect things were,
how they will not die, and cry even as they die,
how their steaming entrails gape!
The logs know, and they talk,
the wine stares with rapt attention,
and a flock of birds rises
like heavy, ragged mist.

Come wind, let my house burn
better than forest resins.
Let the windmill and the highest tower
tumble down, red and oblique.
Though purified by fire, my night,
my poor night comes nowhere near daylight!

La desasida

*En el sueño yo no tenía
padre ni madre, gozos ni duelos,
no era mío ni el tesoro
que he de velar hasta el alba,
edad ni nombre llevaba,
ni mi triunfo ni mi derrota.*

*Mi enemigo podía injuriarme
o negarme Pedro, mi amigo,
que de haber ido tan lejos
no me alcanzaban las flechas:
para la mujer dormida
lo mismo daba este mundo
que los otros no nacidos...*

*Donde estuve nada dolía:
estaciones, sol ni lunas,
no punzaban ni la sangre
ni el cardenillo del Tiempo;
ni los altos silos subían
ni rondaba el hambre los silos.
Y yo decía como ebria:
"¡Patria mía, Patria, la Patria!"*

*Pero un hilo tibio retuve,
-- pobre mujer -- en la boca,
vilano que iba y venía
por la nonada del soplo,*

*no más que un hilo de araña
o que repunte de arenas.*

*Pude no volver y he vuelto.
De nuevo hay muro a mi espalda,
y he de oír y responder
y, voceando pregones,
ser otra vez buhonera.*

*Tengo mi cubo de piedra
y el puñado de herramientas.
Mi voluntad la recojo
como ropa abandonada,
desperezco mi costumbre
y otra vez retomo el mundo.*

*Pero me iré qualquier día
sin llantos y sin abrazos,
barca que parte de noche
sin que la sigan las otras,
la ojeen los faros rojos
ni se la oigan sus costas...*

Anchorless

In my dreams I had neither father
nor mother, neither joys nor sorrows;
there was no treasure
to be guarded till dawn;
I was ageless, nameless,
and I knew no triumph or defeat.

My enemy was free to wrong me,
Peter, my friend, could deny me;
I was so far away
that arrows could not reach me.
To a woman asleep,
there is no difference
between this world and stars unborn...

I stood where nothing hurt:
the seasons, the sun, the moon
did not trouble the heart
or unsettle the verdigris of Time.
Tall silos did not rise,
and neither did hunger prowl about the silos.
And as if drunk I cried:
"My homeland! Mine, mine!"

Alas -- poor woman --
a warm thread clung to my lips:
thistledown that came and went
at the light whim of a breath,

like the silk of a spider's web;
little more than the line
that the ebbing tide leaves behind.

I could have stayed, yet I returned.
Once again with my back against a wall,
I must listen and reply
and, always a pedlar,
I must shout my pedlar's cry.

I have my block of stone
and my handful of tools.
I gather up my will
like scattered laundry
and rouse up my habits
to face the world again.

But I shall leave one day,
without a tear or farewell,
like a boat in the night
that others cannot follow,
that the red searchlight misses,
leaving deaf shores behind...

*Mujer de prisionero**A Victoria Kent.*

*Yo tengo en esa hoguera de ladrillos,
yo tengo al hombre mío prisionero.
Por corredores de filos amargos
y en esta luz sesgada de murciélago,
tanteando como el buzo por la gruta,
voy caminando hasta que me lo encuentro,
y hallo a mi cebra pintada de burla
en los anillos de su befa envuelto.*

*Me lo han dejado, como a barco roto,
con anclas de metal en los pies tiernos;
le han esquilado como a la vicuña
su gloria azafranada de cabellos.
Pero su Angel-Custodio anda la celda
y si nunca lo ven es que están ciegos.
Entró con él al hoyo de cisterna;
tomó los grillos como obedeciendo;
se alzó a coger el vestido de cobra,
y se quedó sin el aire del cielo.*

*El Angel gira moliendo
la harina densa del más denso sueño;
le borra el mar de zarcos oleajes,
le sumerge una casa y un viñedo,
y le esconde mi ardor de carne en llamas,
y su esencia, y el nombre, que dieron.*

*En la celda, las olas de bochorno
y frío, de los dos, yo me las siento,
y trueque y turno que hacen y deshacen
se queja y queja los dos prisioneros
¡y su guardián nocturno ni ve ni oye
que dos espaldas son y dos lamentos!*

*Al rematar el pobre día nuestro,
hace el Angel dormir al prisionero,
dando y lloviendo olvido imponderable
a puñados de noche y de silencio.
Y yo desde mi casa que lo gime
hasta la suya, que es dedal ardiendo,
como quien no conoce otro camino,
en lanzadera viva voy y vengo,
y al fin se abren los muros y me dejan
pasar el hierro, la brea, el cemento...*

*En lo oscuro, mi amor que come moho
y telarañas, cuando es que yo llego,
entero ríe a lo blanquidorado;
a mi piel, a mi fruta y a mi cesto.
El canasto de frutas a hurtadillas
destapo, y uva a uva se lo entrego;
la sidra se la doy pausadamente,
porque el sorbo no mate a mi sediento,
y al moverse le siguen -- pajarillos
de perdición -- sus grillos cenicientos.*

In his cell I feel the scorching blasts,
the icy drafts that both endure.
I feel their twists and turns,
the plaints and complaints made and unmade.
But the night jailer neither sees nor hears
that here are two souls and two sighs!

When our poor day comes to an end,
the Angel rains imponderable oblivion
in fistfuls of dusk and silence
that let the prisoner sleep.
And from my house, wherein I grieve,
to his burning thimble,
I hurry like a shuttle, to and fro.
as if I knew no other course,
until at last the walls open
And I am let in by steel, tar, and cement...

In darkness, my love, who feeds upon mould
and cobwebs, turns to laughter when I arrive,
at the white and golden sight
of my skin and fruit and basket.
Stealthily, I uncover my gifts
and feed him, grape by grape.
Slowly, I pour some cider
so the draught does not kill my thirsty man,
and as he moves, like birds of doom,
his ashen shackles follow.

La huella

*Del hombre fugitivo
solo tengo la huella,
el peso de su cuerpo
y el viento que lo lleva.
Ni señales ni nombre,
ni el país ni la aldea;
solamente la concha
húmeda de su huella;
solamente esta sílaba
que recogió la arena
¡y la Tierra -- Verónica
que me lo balbucea!*

*Solamente la angustia
que apura su carrera;
los pulsos que lo rompen,
el soplo que jadea,
el sudor que lo luce
la encía con dentera
¡y el viento seco y duro
que el lomo le golpea!*

*Y el espinal que salta,
la marisma que vuela,
la mata que lo esconde,
y el sol que lo confiesa,
la duna que lo ayuda,
la otra que lo entrega,*

*¡y el pino que lo tumba,
y Dios que lo endereza!*

*¡Y su hija, la sangre,
que tras él lo vocea:
la huella, Dios mío,
la pintada huella:
el grito sin boca,
la huella, la huella!*

*Su señal la coman
las santas arenas.
Su huella tápenla
los perros de niebla.
Le tome de un salto
la noche que llega
su marca de hombre
dulce y tremenda.*

*Yo veo, yo cuento
las dos mil huellas
¡Voy corriendo, corriendo
la vieja Tierra,
rompiendo con la mía
su pobre huella!
¡O me paro y la borran
mis locas trenzas,
o de bruces mi boca
lame la huella!*

*Pero la Tierra blanca
se vuelve eterna;
se alarga inacabable
igual que la cadena;
se estira en una cobra
que el Dios Santo no quiebra
¡y sigue hasta el término
del mundo la huella!*

The Trail

Of the fugitive

I have only the trail he left behind,
the weight of his body,
and the wind that takes him away,
but neither features nor name,
neither country nor hometown;
only the damp shell
of his footprint;
only this syllable
stamped on sand,
and like a stammering Veronica:
the Land!

Only the anguish

that hastens his flight;
the heart-throbs that break him,
the pant of his breath,
the sweat that causes
gums and teeth to glisten,
and the harsh dry wind
that cuts through his flesh!

And the thorns he jumps over,
the marsh he avoids,
the shrubs that hide him,
the sun that reveals him,
the dune that helps him,
and the one that betrays him,

the pine that makes him stumble,
and God who sets him straight again!

And blood, his daughter,
hollering at his heels:
the trail, my God,
the coloured trail;
the throatless cry,
the trail, the trail!

Saintly sands
swallow his trace.
His trail is veiled
by the haze that hounds raise.
In a leap, dusk overtakes
the sweet, the tremendous
mark of a man.

I see, I tell the story
of two thousand trails.
I keep running, running about
the old earth,
crossing his poor trail
with my own;
or stop and erase it
madly with my braids,
or else, upon my hands and knees,
I lick away his trail!

But the white Earth
turns, eternal;
it lengthens, unending,
like a chain;
it stretches out like a cobra
that the Good Lord does not break
as the trail goes on
to the end of the world!

Manos de obreros

*Duras manos parecidas
a moluscos o alimañas;
color de humus o sollamadas
con un sollamo de salamandra,
y tremendamente hermosas
se alcen frescas o caigan cansadas.*

*Amasa que amasa los barroes,
tumba y tumba la piedra ácida
revueltas con nudos de cáñamo
o en algodones avergonzadas,
miradas ni vistas de nadie
solo de la Tierra mágica.*

*Parecidas a sus combos
o a sus picos, nunca a su alma;
a veces en ruedas locas,
como el lagarto rebanadas,
y después, Arbol-Adámico
viudo de sus ramas altas.*

*Las oigo correr telares;
en hornos las miro abrasadas.
El yunque las deja entreabiertas
y el chorro de trigo apuñadas.*

*Las he visto en bocaminas
y en canteras azuladas.
Remaron por mí en los barcos,
mordiéndolo las olas malas,
y mi huesa la harán justa
aunque no vieron mi espalda...*

*A cada verano tejen
linos frescos como el agua.
Después encardan y peinan
el algodón y la lana,
y en las ropas de los niños
y de los héroes, cantan.*

*Todas duermen de materias
y señales garabateadas,
Padre Zodiaco las toca
con el Toro y la Balanza.*

*¡Y cómo, dormidas, siguen
cavando o moliendo caña,
Jesucristo las toma y retiene
entre las suyas hasta el Alba!*

Workers' Hands

Hard hands resembling
shellfish or beasts of prey;
colour of humus or of things charred
in the searing heat of salamanders;
tremendously beautiful
as rested, they rise and weary, they fall.

They knead and form clay,
and break the acid stone,
struggling among knots of hempcord
or shyly covered in cotton:
hands neither seen nor looked at
by anyone save the magic Earth.

Never the mirrors of their soul,
they take after their picks and hammers,
now twitching in mad twirls
when severed like the lizard,
then widowed of their highest boughs
like human trees.

I hear them running over looms,
I watch them, inflamed in furnaces,
half-opened over anvils,
and clenching sheaves of corn.

I have found them in mine shafts
and inside blueish quarries.
They rowed in boats for me
as they bit into treacherous waves,
and they will dig my grave to fit,
though they never took the measure of my body.

Every summer they weave
linens fresh as water.
Later they dye and untangle
cotton and wool,
and in the clothes of heroes and children
their song breaks forth.

They sleep, stained and covered
with traces and signs.
Father Zodiac has touched them
with the virtues of Taurus and Libra.

And since in slumber they keep
digging, or grinding sugar cane,
Jesus takes and holds them between his own
until the break of day.

Procesión india

*Rosa de Lima, hija de Cristo
y de Domingo el Misionero,
que sazonas a la América
con Sazón que da tu cuerpo:
vamos en tu procesión
con gran ruta y grandes sedes,
y con el nombre de "Siempre",
y con el signo de "Lejos".*

*Y caminamos cargando
con fatiga y sin lamento
unas bayas que son veras
y unas frutas que son cuento:
el mamey, la granadilla,
la pitahaya, el higo denso.*

*Va la vieja procesión,
en anguila que es de fuego,
por los filos de los Andes
vivos, santos y tremendos,
llevando alpaca y vicuña
y callados llamas lentos,
para que tú nos bendigas
hijos, bestias y alimentos.*

*Polvo de la procesión
y ninguno marcha ciego,
pues el polvo se parece
a la niebla de tu aliento
y tu luz sobre los belfos
da zodiacos ardiendo.*

*De la sierra embalsamada
cosas puras te traemos:
y pasamos voleando
árbol-quina y árbol-cedro,
y las gomas con virtudes
y las hierbas con misterios.*

*Santa Rosa de la Puna
y del alto ventisquero:
te llevamos nuestras marchas
en collares que hace el tiempo;
las escarchas que da junio,
los rescoldos que da enero.*

*De las puertas arrancamos
a los mozos y a los viejos
y en la cobra de la sombra
te llevamos a los muertos.*

*Abre, Rosa, abre los brazos,
alza tus ojos y venos.
Llama aldeas y provincias;
haz en ellas el recuento
¡y se vean las regiones
extendidas en tu pecho!*

*El anillo de la marcha
nunca, Madre, romperemos
en el aire de la América
ni en el abra de lo Eterno.
Al dormir tu procesión
continúe en nuestro sueño
y al morirnos la sigamos
por los Andes de los Cielos.*

Indian Procession

Rose of Lima, daughter of Christ
and of Dominic, the Missionary;
you who seasons America
with the perfection of your body:
we join in your procession
of long roads and of great thirsts,
bearing the name "Always,"
and the sign of "Distance."

Wearily, though without complaints,
we carry loads of grapes,
berries that are real,
and those fabulous fruits:
the mamey, the passion fruit,
the cactus-pear and fleshy fig.

The old procession unfolds
like an eel of fire
along the ridges of the vibrant,
the saintly, the tremendous Andes,
with alpacas, vicuñas,
and slow, silent llamas,
so that you may bless
our children, beasts, and food.

The march raises dust
yet we are not blinded,
for the mist of your breath
resembles dust,
and your light upon their lips
makes glowing zodiac figures of our beasts.

We bring you pure offerings
from the fragrant sierra,
and we pass in quick succession
the chinchona-tree and the cedar,
gums with their powers,
and herbs full of mysteries.

Saint Rose of the Puna
and of snow-capped heights;
to you we bring our marches
as necklaces formed by time,
with the hoar-frost of June,
with the embers of January.

The young ones and the old,
we tear away from doorways,
and from the shadows we gather
and bring you the dead.

Open your arms, Rose, open them,
lift up your eyes and look at us.
Summon all the towns and provinces,
count and recount them;
let all regions be seen
as a map upon your breast!

Mother, we shall never break
the circle of your march
in the realm of America
or in the haven beyond.
As we sleep, may your procession
keep unfurling in our dreams,
and in death let us pursue it
along the Andes of the Heaven.

Emigrada judía

*Voy más lejos que el viento oeste
y el petrel de tempestad.
Paro, interrogo, camino
¡y no duermo por caminar!
Me rebanaron la Tierra,
sólo me han dejado el mar.*

*Se quedaron en la aldea
casa, costumbre, y dios lar.
Pasan tilos, carrizales
y el Rin que me enseñó a hablar.
No llevo al pecho las mentas
cuyo olor me haga llorar.
Tan solo llevo mi aliento
y mi sangre y mi ansiedad.*

*Una soy a mis espaldas,
otra volteada al mar:
mi nuca hierve de adioses,
y mi pecho de ansiedad.*

*Ya el torrente de mi aldea
no da mi nombre al rodar
y en mi tierra y aire me borro
como huella en arenal.*

*A cada trecho de ruta
voy perdiendo mi caudal:
una oleada de resinas,
una torre, un robledal.
Suelta mi mano sus gestos
de hacer la sidra y el pan
¡y aventada mi memoria
llegaré desnuda al mar!*

The Jewish Emigrant

I am going further than the westward wind,
further than the stormy petrel.

I stop to ask questions and walk on;
there is no time for sleep!

They have crossed me off the Earth
and left me nothing but the sea.

The house, its spirits, our customs
were left behind in my hometown.

I pass linden trees, marshes full of reeds,
and the Rhine, by the banks of which I learned to speak.

I do not wear sprigs of mint upon my bosom
for their scent might make me weep.

It is enough that I take with me
my breath, my blood, and my dread.

I leave a life behind me
as I turn to face the sea;
the nape of my neck burns with farewells
while my heart seethes with fear.

The village torrent as it swirls
no longer says my name.

I erase myself from my land and air
like footprints along the strand.

With every stretch of road
I lose more of my riches:
streams of fragrant resins,
an oak grove, a tower.
My hand lets go of the gestures
that once made cider and bread,
and now free of recollections
I shall reach the sea unclad!



POEMA DE CHILE / THE POEM OF CHILE



Hallazgo

*Bajé por espacio y aires
y más aires, descendiendo,
sin llamado y con llamada
por la fuerza del deseo,
y a más que yo caminaba
era el descender más recto
y era mi gozo más vivo
y mi adivinar más cierto,
y arribo como la flecha
éste mi segundo cuerpo
en el punto en que comienzan
Patria y Madre que me dieron.*

*¡Tan feliz que hace la marcha!
Me ataranta lo que veo
lo que miro o adivino
lo que busco y lo que encuentro;
pero como fui tan otra
y tan mudada regreso,
con temor ensayo rutas,
peñascales y repechos,
el nuevo y largo respiro,
los rumores y los ecos.
O fue loca mi partida
o es loco ahora el regreso;
pero ya los pies tocaron
bajos, cuestas, senderos,
gracia tímida de hierbas*

*y unos céspedes tan tiernos
que no quisiera doblarlos
ni rematar este sueño
de ir sin forma caminando
la dulce parcela, el reino
que me tuvo sesenta años
y me habita como un eco.*

*Iba yo, cruza-cruzando
matorrales, peladeros,
topándome ojos de quiscos
y escuadrones de hormigueros
cuando saltaron de pronto,
de un entrevero de helechos,
tu cuello y tu cuerpecillo
en la luz, cual pino nuevo.*

*Son muy tristes, mi chiquito,
las rutas sin compañero:
parecen largo bostezo,
jugarretas de hombre ebrio.
Preguntadas no responden
al extraviado ni al ciego
y parecen la Canidia
que sólo juega a perdernos.
Pero tú les sabes, sí,
malicias y culebreos...*

*Vamos caminando juntos
así, en hermanos de cuento,
tú echando sombra de niño,
yo apenas sombra de helecho...
(¡Qué bueno es en soledades
que aparezca un Angel-ciervo!)*

*Vuélvete, pues, huemulillo,
y no te hagas compañero
de esta mujer que de loca
trueca y yerra los senderos,
porque todo lo ha olvidado,
menos un valle y un pueblo.
El valle lo mientan "Elqui"
y "Monte grande" mi dueño.*

*Naciste en el palmo último
de los Incas, Niño-Ciervo,
donde empezamos nosotros
y donde se acaban ellos;
y ahora que tú me guías
o soy yo la que te llevo
¡qué bien entender tú el alma
y yo acordarme del cuerpo!*

*Bien mereces que te lleve
por lo que tuve de reino.
Aunque lo dejé me tumba
en lo que llaman el pecho,
aunque ya no lleve nombre
ni dé sombra caminando,
no me oigan pasar las huertas
ni me adivinen los pueblos.*

*Cómo me habían de ver
los que duermen en sus cerros
el sueño maravilloso
que me han contado mis muertos.
Yo he de llegar a dormir
pronto de su sueño mismo
que está doblado de paz,
mucha paz y mucho olvido,
allá donde yo vivía,
donde río y monte hicieron
mi palabra y mi silencio
y Coyote ni Coyote
hielos ni hieles me dieron.*

*¿Qué año o qué día moriste
y por qué cruzas sonámbula
la casa, la huerta, el río,
sin saberte sepultada?
Ve más lejos, sólo un poco
más, donde está tu morada,
al lugar adonde miras*

*y te retardas, quedada.
No respondas a los vivos
con voz rota y sin mirada.*

*Se murieron tus amigos,
te dejaron tus hermanas
y te mueres sin morir
de ti misma trascordada,
y sueles interrogarnos
sobre tu nombre y tu patria.*

*Llegas, llegas a nosotros
desde una estrella ignorada,
preguntando nuestros nombres,
nuestro oficio, nuestras casas.
Eres y no eres; callamos
y partes, sin dar, hermana,
tu patria y tu nombre nuevos,
tu Dios y tu ruta larga,
para alcanzar hasta ellos,
hermana perdida, Hermana.*

Discovery

I came down through sky, space,
and air: down, ever downward,
without summons, and moved
by the power of my yearning.
And the longer I travelled,
the straighter my course,
the sharper my delight,
and the stronger my instinct,
till, like an arrow,
this second body of mine
reached the tip where begin
the Homeland and the Mother I was given.

What happiness walking brings!
I am stunned by what I see,
what I gaze or guess at,
what I search and find.
But I once was so different
and so changed do I return,
that I falter as I tackle roads,
rocky fields, hills,
my free new breathing,
voices, and echoes.
Either my departure was folly,
or I was foolish to come back,
but my feet have already trodden
shoals, slopes, and paths,
the timid grace of herbs,

and lawns so soft
that I would not wish to crush them
or want to end this dream
of a bodiless journey
through the sweet land, the kingdom
that carried me for sixty years
and dwells within me like an echo.

There I went, criss-crossing
scrubs and clearings,
running into candle cacti
and squadrons of anthills,
when in a field of fern
your head and small body suddenly
stood out in the sunlight like a young pine.

They are sad indeed, my little one,
those roads travelled without companions:
they stretch on like a long yawn,
like the tiresome tricks of a drunken man.
They answer neither
the lost wayfarer nor the blind
and, like the Canidia,
they delight in confounding us.
But you know about them, you do --
all those twists and turns...

Let us walk together,
 as siblings from a tale,
 you, casting your child's shadow
 and I, my fern-like shade...
 (How wonderful in our solitude
 to come upon this angelic deer!)

Go back, little deer of the Andes,
 and do not become a companion
 to this woman madly crossing
 and erring through paths,
 all because she cannot remember a thing
 except for a valley and a town.
 They call this valley "Elqui,"¹
 and I hail from "Montegrando."²

You were born, Baby-Fawn,
 at the last point where Incas lived;
 where we come to life and they vanish.
 And now that you are my guide --
 or is it I who take you with me? --
 how perfect that you understand the soul
 and I recall my body!

Translator's Notes:

¹ Elqui Valley: Region of northern Chile located between the Andes and the Pacific. The climate is mild and the Valley enjoys an abundant fruit production. Gabriela Mistral was born and raised in the nearby town of Vicuña.

² Montegrando: A small village in the Elqui Valley where Gabriela Mistral's parents lived until 1889 and where she was conceived. The family moved to Vicuña when Mistral's mother learned that she was pregnant. Though living in New York at the time of her death, Mistral was buried in Montegrando.

You well deserve that I show you
the kingdom I knew.
Though I left, it moves still
in that region they call the heart,
and since I no longer have
a name or shadow,
the soil does not hear my footsteps,
while in villages my presence goes unsuspected.

How could they see me,
those who, upon their mountains,
nurse the wondrous dream
that my dead ones have recounted.
Soon, I too must come to sleep
and know their dream
so filled with peace,
with such peace and oblivion,
there, where once I lived,
where the river and the mountain
shaped my words and silence,
where neither Coyote nor Coyote
was cause for dread or woe.

In what year, on what day did you die?
And why do you visit like a sleepwalker
the house, the field, the river,
without recalling that you were buried?
Look further, just a little further,
to that place where your home stands,

where your eyes rest,
and where you linger, quietly.
Do not answer the living
with your broken voice and eyeless gaze.

Your friends have passed away,
your sisters have left you,
and you die without dying,
forgetful of yourself
as you keep asking us about
your name and homeland.

You arrive, you come to us
from an unknown star,
wondering about our names,
our occupation, our houses.
You are and you are not; if we are silent
you leave us, sister, without telling us
your new country and name,
the name of your God, the wide road you travel,
and the way to reach them, Sister,
lost Sister.

Cobre

*Están redimiendo el cobre
con las virtudes del fuego.
De allí va a salir hermoso
como nunca se lo vieron
las piedras que eran sus madres
y el que lo befó por necio.*

*Suba el Padre Cobre, suba,
que naciste para el fuego
y te pareces a él
en el fervor de tu pecho.
Todavía, todavía
no confiesas el secreto
del amor y de la fiebre
que está en tus piedras gimiendo.
Nadie to habrá dicho hermoso,
porque el pecho no te vieron.*

*Día a día te volviste
la pobre piedra quedada,
la pobre piedra que duerme
y dura y odia la llama
y eres, ya, todos tus muertos
antes de ser sepultada.*

*Helados, llanto y sonrisa,
la oración y la palabra,
el amanecer la siesta
y la oración no arribada.
Ya es lo mismo, ya es igual
la mudez que la palabra.*

Copper

They are redeeming copper
with the virtues of fire.

Then will he emerge, handsome
as the stones -- his mothers --
and those who once jeered
have yet to see him.

Rise, Father Copper, rise.
For fire you were born
and fire you resemble
in the fervour of your breast.
But still, still,
you do not disclose the secret
of the love and fever
moaning in your stones.
No one can call you beautiful
for your heart remains unseen.

Day after day you toss and turn --
the poor abiding stone,
the poor sleeping stone.
Hard and loathsome is the flame
and you have been through all your deaths
long before the burial.

Stupor, laments, and smiles,
speeches and prayers;
the sun follows its course
and prayers go unanswered.
Silence, words... it is the same now,
it does not matter.

Valle de Elqui

*Tengo de llegar al Valle
que su flor guarda el almendro
y cría los higuerales
que azulan higos extremos,
par ambular a la tarde
con mis vivos y mis muertos.*

*Pende sobre el Valle, que arde,
una laguna de ensueño
que lo bautiza y refresca
de un eterno refrigerio
cuando el río de Elqui merma
blanqueando el ijar sediento.*

*Van a mirarme los cerros
como padrinos tremendos,
volviéndose en animales
con ijares soñolientos,
dando el vagido profundo
que les oigo hasta durmiendo,
porque doce me ahuecaron
cuna de piedra y de leño.*

*Quiero que, sentados todos
sobre la alfalfa o el trébol,
según el clan y el anillo*

*de los que se aman sin tiempo
y mudos se hablan sin más
que la sangre y los alientos.*

*Estemos así y duremos,
trocando mirada y gesto
en un repasar dichoso
el cordón de los recuerdos,
con edad y sin edad,
con nombre y sin nombre expreso,
casta de la cordillera,
apretado nudo ardiendo,
unas veces cantadora,
otras, quedada en silencio.*

*Pasan, del primero al último,
las alegrías, los duelos,
el mosto de los muchachos,
la lenta miel de los viejos;
pasan, en fuego, el fervor,
la congoja y el jadeo,
y más, y más: pasa el Valle
a cuervos de viboreo,
de Peralillo a La Unión¹,
vario y uno y entero.*

*Hay una Paz y un hervor,
hay calenturas y oreos*

¹ Peralillo, caserio situado a 6 km. al este de Vicuña, sobre el Valle de Elqui. La Unión, nombre antiguo del pueblo Pisco-Elqui, sobre el mismo valle.

*en este disco de carne
que aprietan los treinta cerros.
Y los ojos van y vienen
como quien hace el recuento,
y los que faltaban ya
acuden, con o sin cuerpo,
con repechos y jadeados,
con derrotas y desnudos.*

*A cada vez que los hallo,
más rendido los encuentro.
Sólo les traigo la lengua
y los gestos que me dieron
y, abierto el pecho, les doy
la esperanza que no tengo.*

*Mi infancia aquí mana leche
de cada rama que quiebro
y de mi cara se acuerdan
salvia con el romero
y vuelven sus ojos dulces
como con entendimiento
y yo me duermo embriagada
en sus nudos y entreveros.*

*Quiero que me den no más
el guillave de sus cerros
y sobar, en mano y mano,
melón de olor, niño tierno,*

*trocando cuentos y veras
con sus pobres alimentos.*

*Y, si de pronto mi infancia
vuelve, salta y me da al pecho,
toda me doblo y me fundo
y, como gavilla suelta,
me recobro y me sujeto,
porque ¿cómo la revivo
con cabellos cenicientos?*

*Ahora ya me voy, hurtando
el rostro, por que no sepan
y me echen los cerros ojos
grises de resentimiento.*

*Me voy, montaña adelante,
por donde van mis arrieros,
aunque espinos y algarrobos
ma atajan con llamamientos,
aguzando las espinas
o atravesándome el leño.*

Elqui Valley

I must get to the Valley --
its soil bears the almond-tree
and yields plantations of fig-trees
grown blue from generous fruit --
for I want to walk in the evening
with my live ones and my dead.

Over the ardent valley,
as the Elqui River ebbs
and whitens its thirsty strand,
a wondrous pond christens
and cools the land
with never-ending comfort.

The mountains watch me
like awesome godparents
and turn into beasts with lazy flanks
that bellow deeply into my sleep,
for twelve of them made for me
a cradle of stone and timber.

I want us all to sit together
upon alfalfa or clover,
according to the circle and clan

of those whose love is timeless,
 who in their muteness speak only
 the language of blood and sighs.

Let us remain this way,
 sharing glances and gestures
 and mending happily
 the string of our recollections,
 with our age yet ageless,
 with a name yet somehow nameless:
 caste of the cordillera,
 tight burning knot,
 at times bursting into song,
 and then quietly still.

From first to last, they pass,
 all the joys and sorrows,
 the new wine of youth,
 the slow honey of the old;
 quick as thunder, the fever,
 the anguish, the weariness pass,
 and more, more:
 from Peralillo to La Unión,¹
 the valley slithers by, diverse,
 unique, as whole as a snake.

There is a peace and a fervour,
 there are heat spells and soft breezes

¹ [Translator's Note] Peralillo and La Unión: Villages of the Elqui Valley.

over this lush spot of land
that thirty mountains darken.
Gazes travel swiftly,
as if taking stock,
and with or without a body,
the absent ones come running and panting
with their victories and defeats.

I find them each time
more haggard.
I bring them only the language
and gestures they gave me,
and, finally unburdened, I offer them
the hope I lack.

Here my childhood draws milk
from every bough I break.
Rosemary and sage
recall my face, and their gentle eyes
seem to wink with understanding,
and I sleep, enraptured,
amidst their knots and tangles.

Let them give me only
of their mountain cactus-pears.
I want to handle fragrant melons --
sweet children --
passed from hand to hand,

and exchange truths and tales
for their humble nourishment.

And if suddenly my childhood
returns and holds me to its breast,
I yield and soften,
but like a freed seagull,
I soon recover and go on,
for how could I relive everything
with my ash-coloured hair?

I must leave and so I hide my face
to avoid the mountains' eyes
turned grey from resentment.

I am going beyond mountains,
where my muleteers lead me
while thornbushes and carob trees
stop me with their cries
as they sharpen their thorns
or bar my way with their timber.

Alcohol

*Resbalando los pastales
y entrando por los viñedos
que el Diablo trenza y destrenza
desde la cepa al sarmiento,
dan al animal y al indio
tufos de alcohol violento
y ambos ven la llamarada
que salta de pueblo a pueblo,
con la zancada y la mueca
del mono que corre ardiendo.*

*Al indio el payaso trágico
le robó el padre en su juego;
al otro quemó el pastel
que blanqueaba de corderos,
y a mí me manchó, de niña,
la bocanada del viento.*

*Vaciaremos los lagares
y aventaremos los cueros,
para quemar la demencia
de los mozos y los viejos.
¡Ea, el chiquillo y la bestia!
¡Vamos por bodega y pueblos,
vamos, como los cruzados,
hostigando al Esperpento!*

Alcohol

Sliding down pastures
and entering the vineyards,
which the Devil braids and unbraids
from stock to shoot,
gusts of pungent alcohol
reach both Indian and beast,
so that they see the wildfire
reeling from town to town
with the stride and grimace
of an ape running ablaze.

In jest, the tragic clown
took away the Indian's father,
and he charred the meadow of another
though once white with lambs,
and when I was a girl, he stained for me
the very breath of the wind.

We shall drain the wine-presses
and dry all goatskins
to purge this madness
of the young and the old.
Come child! Come deer!
Through cellars and villages,
let us, like crusaders,
expel the Evil One!

Campeños

*Todavía, todavía
esta queja doy al viento:
los que siembran, los que riegan,
los que hacen podas e injertos,
los que cortan y cargan
debajo de un sol de fuego
la sandía, seno rosa,
el melón que huele a cielo,
todavía, todavía
no tiene un "canto de suelo".*

*De tenerlo, no vagasen
como el vilano en el viento,
y de habérmelo tenido
yo no vagase como ellos,
porque nací, te lo digo,
para amor y regodeo
de sembrar maíz que canta,
de celar frutillas lento
o de hervir, tarde a la tarde,
arropes sabor de cielo.*

*Pero fue en vano de niña
la pela y el asoleo,
y en vano acosté racimos
en sus cajitas de cuento,*

*y en vano celé las melgas
de frutillares con dueño...
porque mis padres no hubieron
la tierra de sus abuelos,
y no fui feliz, cervato,
y lo lloro hasta sin cuerpo,
sin ver las doce montañas
que me velaban el sueño,
y dormir y despertar
con el habla de cien huertos
y con la sílaba larga
del río adentro del sueño.*

Campesinos¹

Still, still,
 I cast my plaint in the wind:
 those who plant, those who water the land,
 those who prune and graft,
 those who gather and bear the load,
 beneath a scorching sun,
 of watermelons -- rosy womb --
 and of melons with a scent of heaven,
 still, still,
 they do not own a "patch of land."

If they owned one they would not drift
 like thistledown in the wind.
 And had I owned one
 I would not have wandered like them,
 since I was born, I tell you,
 for the love and pleasure
 of sowing corn that sings,
 of watching slow berries grow,
 and of boiling celestial syrups
 late into the evening.

But in vain, when I was a girl
 did I peel and shell, out in the sunshine;
 in vain did I lay down clusters of grapes
 in their little storybook crates,

¹ [Translator's Note] Campesinos: Left untranslated since the term is also known in English to mean a rural inhabitant, a peasant; one who works the land.

and in vain did I attend to
ridges of strawberries that belonged to another,
for my father and mother did not hold
the land of their ancestors.

And I was unhappy, fawn,
and though bodiless, I still cry
without seeing the twelve mountains
that watched over my yearning,
and I still sleep and awaken
with the prattle of a hundred orchards
and the wide syllable of the river
rolling in my dream.

Reparto de tierra

*Aún vivimos en el trance
del torpe olvido y el gran silencio,
entraña nuestra, rostros de bronce,
rescoldo del antiguo fuego,
olvidadosos como niños
y absurdos como los ciegos.*

*Aguardad y perdonadnos.
Viene otro hombre, otro tiempo.
Despierta Cautin, espera Valdivia,
del despojo regresaremos
y de los promete-mundos
y de los don Mañana-lo-haremos.*

*El chileno tiene brazo
rudo y labio silencioso.
Espera a rumiar tu Ercilla,
indio que mascas recuerdos
allí en tu selva madrina.
Dios no ha cerrado sus ojos,
Cristo te mira y no ha muerto.*

*Yo te escribo estas estrofas
llevada por su alegría.
Mientras te hablo mira, mira,
reparten tierras y huertas.
¡Oye los gritos, los “vivas”
el alboroto, la fiesta!*

*¿Te das cuenta? ¡Entiende, mira!
Es que reparten la tierra
a los Juanes, a los Pedros.
¡Ve correr a las mujeres!*

Land Distribution

We live, still, in the trance
 of thick oblivion and great silence
 -- our womb; with our faces of bronze
 we are embers from the ancient fire,
 forgetful as children,
 absurd as the blind.

Be patient and forgive us.
 Let another man, another time come.
 Arise Cautín. Have faith, Valdivia.¹
 We shall not be crushed by the plunder,
 by those who promise us the world
 or by Misters By-and-By.

Chileans have thick arms
 and sealed lips.
 Keep on hoping as you brood over Ercilla,²
 Indian mumbling memories
 out in your Mother forest.
 God has not shut his eyes;
 Christ sees you and has not died.

Translator's Notes:

¹ Cautín and Valdivia: Agricultural provinces of southern Chile.

² Ercilla: Alonso de Ercilla y Zuñiga, 1533-1594. Spanish poet who wrote the *Araucana* (1569-1589), an epic poem recounting the Spanish war against the Araucan tribe, which lived in the territory of present-day Chile.

Enraptured, I write
these cheerful lines for you.
And as I speak, look, look:
they are giving away fields and land!
Listen to the cries, the "Vivas,"
the clamour and the fiesta!

Don't you see? Listen, look:
they are giving out the land
to the Juans and the Pedros.
See the women run!

Fuego

*Ya se acabaron las noches
del verano que Dios hizo.
No hizo el amoratado
invierno que escarcha nidos,
que traba pies de perdices
y amorata pies de niños.*

*Vamos a encender el fuego
chocando piedras de río
y acarreando gajos muertos
de chañar y de olivillo.
Vamos el niño y yo misma:
¡no cuesta matar el frío!*

*Aunque se apriete la noche
como puño de bandido,
en unos momentos salta
atarantado y divino;
no salta de nuestras manos,
sube como de sí mismo.*

*-- Mira tú, ve cómo saltan
y ojean con gestos vivos.
¡Sí, sí, sí! dicen al fuego,
locas de atar, en delirio.
¡Sí, sí, sí! dicen a la llama
¡y tú teniéndole miedo!*

-- *Mama, ries como loca,
¿cómo es que no tienes miedo?
Son unas loca de atar.
¡Me dan miedo, me dan miedo!*

-- *¡Vaya unas locas de atar
y tú teniéndoles miedo!
-- ¡Vaya unas locas de atar
y tú riendo, riendo!*

-- *Pena de niñito mío
que llora de ver un fuego.
Seguiremos por hallar
en donde duermas sin miedo.*

-- *¿A dónde es que ahora vamos?
Dilo tú, mis cuatro miedos.
Te asustas de una cascada,
de un forastero, del viento,
te asustas hasta del susto
que doy pasando los pueblos.
¿Qué hago contigo esta noche
para que no tengas miedo?*

*El fuego nunca se muere,
él espía entredormido,
malicioso el ojo de oro
y subiendo repentino.*

*Por aquí anduvieron otros
y habrá rescoldos dormidos,
y si sólo son cenizas,
comenzarlo da lo mismo.*

*Ya vienen las ramas muertas
y vienen a su destino;
jueguen a alcanzar el cielo,
sesteen a lo divino.*

*Juega al subir y al caer,
juega al muerto y queda vivo.
¡Ay! la hermosura caída
del cielo...¹*

*Cuando es que desaparece
vuelve en otro y es el mismo.
Todos danzamos por él
y de él desde que nacimos.*

*Está donde cabrillea
en horno y brasero vivo,
está en amor y dolor
rojo-azul, dorado y fino.*

*Pena de dejar atrás
cosa linda, padre fuego.*

¹ *Inconcluso en el original.*

-- *Mama, por esto también
será que te tienen miedo.
Mama, me da miedo el fuego,
tomamé, que doy un grito.*

*No vamos, que comeremos
lo amañado y recogido.
Las castañas gruñen, saltan
del rescoldo, miedosillo.
En comiendo dormiremos
guardados de padres-pinos.*

*Y si también te me vuelves,
niño trabado de miedo
¿con quién voy a caminar
la tierra, si es que yo vuelvo?
¡un hombrecito tan fuerte
que llora porque ve fuego!
Quieres seguir caminando,
pero ¿dónde no habrás miedo?*

-- *Paremos donde haya gente
y yo pido alojamiento.*

-- *Y te despides de mí,
porque ¿cómo yo me acerco?*

"Mama, you laugh as if you had lost your senses!
How can you not be scared?
They're raving mad.
They frighten me! I'm scared!"

"They are stark, raving mad,
and you are afraid of them!"
"They are stark, raving mad,
and you laugh and laugh!"

"My poor little boy,
who cries before a fire.
We shall walk until we find
a place where you may sleep without fear."

"But where is that place, now,
tell me, my little Four-fears?
You tremble before a waterfall,
a stranger, and the wind.
You even dread the fright I cause
as we pass by villages.
What shall I do with you tonight
to make you forget your dread?"

The fire never dies,
like a spy with its sly
golden eye, it seems half-asleep
and then suddenly bounds.

Other bonfires were lit here;
 we should find sleeping embers,
 but if there are only ashes,
 we can start one anew.

Here are the dead branches
 come to meet their fate.
 They play at reaching the sky,
 and nap under the heavens.

The fire likes to rise and fall,
 to play dead and remain alive.
 Oh, what splendour fallen
 from the sky...¹

It vanishes and returns,
 different, yet the same.
 We have all danced by
 and away from it
 ever since our birth.

It dwells where it flickers,
 in ovens and fireplaces;
 it lives in love and pain,
 red and blue, golden, and fine.

What pity to turn our backs
 on Father Fire: such a lovely sight.

¹ [Note in the Spanish text by Doris Dana, editor of *Poema de Chile*] Left unfinished in the original.

"Mama, no wonder
they shrink away from you.
I'm afraid of fire, Mama,
hold me or I'll cry."

We shall not go. We will eat instead
what few things we can gather.
The chestnuts creak and pop
upon the embers, my fearful one.
When we have eaten, we shall sleep,
guarded by fatherly pines.

And if you too should leave me,
little boy paralyzed by fear,
with whom shall I roam the earth,
if indeed I have returned?
Such a strong little man
who wails before a fire!
You want to keep walking,
but of what will you not be afraid?

"Let's stop where there are people
and I'll ask for shelter."

"Then you may say good-bye to me,
for how shall I come near them?"

“Oh, Mama, the idea you had
to come down like a fantasy!
Let’s go on and hope
we find another town.”

“Let’s not go through this again.
Now sleep here, beneath the sky.”

Bío-Bío

-- *Paremos que hay novedad.*

¡Mira, mira el Bío-Bío!

-- *¡Ah! mama, párate, loca,*

para, que nunca lo he visto.

¿Y para dónde es que va?

No para y habla bajito,

y no me asusta como el mar

y tiene nombre bonito.

-- *¡No te acerques tanto, no!*

Echate aquí, loco mío,

y óyelo no más.

Podemos quedar con él

una semana si quieres,

si no me asustas así.

-- *¿Cómo dices que se llama?*

Repite el nombre bonito.

-- *Bío-Bío, Bío-Bío,*

qué dulce que lo llamaron

por quererle nuestros indios.

-- *Mama, ¿porqué no me dejas*

aquí, por si habla conmigo?

El casi habla. Si tú paras

y si me dejas contigo,

*yo sabré lo que nos dice,
por si se me vuelve amigo.
¡Qué de malo va a pasarme,
Mama! Corre tan tranquilo.*

*-- No, no chiquito, él ahoga,
a veces gente y ganados.
Oyelo, sí, todo el día,
loquito mío, antojero.*

*Yo no quiero que me atajen
sin que vea el río lento
que cuchichea dos sílabas
como quien fía secreto.
Dice Bío-Bío, y dícelo
en dos estremecimientos.
Me he de tender a beberlo
hasta que corra en mis tuétanos.*

*Poco lo tuve de viva;
ahora lo recupero
la eterna canción de cuna
abajada a balbuceo.
Agua mayor de nosotros,
red en que nos envolvemos,
nos bautizas como Juan,
y nos llevas sobre el pecho.*

*Lava y lava piedrecillas,
cabra herida, puma enfermo.
Así Dios "dice" y responde,
a puro estremecimiento,
con suspiro susurrado
que no le levanta el pecho.
Y así los tres le miramos,
quedados como sin tiempo,
hijos amantes que beben
el tu pasar sempiterno.
Y así te oímos los tres,
tirados en pastos crespos
y en arenillas que sumen
pies de niño y pies de ciervo.*

*No sabemos irnos, ¡no!
cogidos de tu silencio
de Angel Rafael que pasa
y resta y dura asistiendo,
grave y dulce, dulce y grave,
porque es que bebe un sediento...*

*Dale de beber tu sorbo
al indio y le vas diciendo
el secreto de durar
asi, quedándose y yéndose,
y en tu siseo prométele
desagravio, amor y huertos.*

*Ya el Tolomi te vadea,
a braceadas de foquero;
los ojos del niño buscan
el puente que mata el miedo,
y yo pasaré sin pies
y sin barcaza de remos
porque más me vale, ¡sí!
el alma que valió el cuerpo.*

*Bío-Bío, espaldas anchas,
con hablas de Abel pequeño:
corres tierno, gris y blando
por tierra que es duro reino.
Tal vez estás, según Cristo,
en la tierra y en los cielos,
y volvemos a encontrarte
para beberte de nuevo...*

*-- Dime tú que has visto cosas
¿hay otro más grande y lindo?*

*-- No lo hay en tierra chilena,
pero hay unos que no he dicho,
hay más lejos unos lagos
que acompañan sin decirlo
y hacia ellos vamos llegando
y ya pronto llegaremos.*

Bio-Bio¹

"Let's stop here; this is new.
Look, look, the river Bio-Bio!"

"Oh Mama, wait, please
wait; I've never seen it!
Where is it going?
It does not stop and it speaks so softly,
and it does not scare me like the sea,
and it has a pretty name!"

"Don't go so near to it, now!
Stay here, my little fool.
You may listen to it, but no more.
We can remain here a week if you like,
just don't give me such frights."

"What did you say its name was?
Tell me again its pretty name."

"Bio-Bio, Bio-Bio;
because they loved it,
our Indians named it so sweetly."

"Mama, why not leave me here
to see if it speaks to me?
It can almost talk. If you stop

¹ [Translator's Note] Bio-Bio River: One of Chile's major rivers, it rises in the Andes and enters the Gulf of Arauca in the Pacific Ocean.

and stay with me, I will be able to know
what it says to us;
we could make a new friend!
What could happen to me,
Mama? It flows so quietly!"

"No, no little one. It can drown --
at times people and cattle.
But you may listen to it all day,
you fanciful, silly boy."

Let me take no short-cut
without seeing the slow river
that whispers two syllables
as if telling a secret.
It says Bio-Bio, and says it
in two shudders.
I shall lean forward to drink of its water
until it runs in the marrow of my bones.

I did not see it often in my lifetime;
I recover it now,
the eternal lullaby
reduced to a stammer.
Greatest of our waters,
net in which we gather,
you christen us like John
and carry us upon your breast.

It washes and washes small stones,
the wounded goat, the lame puma.
Thus God "speaks" and answers
its pure shiver
with a whispered sigh
that does not trouble its breast.
And so the three of us look on,
still, as if out of time;
loving children drinking in
your everlasting flow.
And so we listen to you
as we lie on rugged land
or upon saltpetre into which
the feet of the child
and the deer's hooves sink.

No, we know not how to leave,
caught as we are in your silence,
which like the archangel Raphael,
passes by and remains, helpful,
solemn and gentle, gentle and solemn,
for the thirsty are quenching their thirst...

You give your draught to the Indian
and impart to him the secret of endurance
as he stands still, then moves on --
your hiss, a promise
of justice, of love and lands.

Already, like a ship,
the deer wades your current;
the eyes of the child search for
the bridge that will quell his fear,
and I will cross over without using
my feet or a rowing-boat,
for my soul is of better use to me
than my body ever was!

Bio-Bio, broad shoulders
and the babble of a little Abel:
you run, kind, grey, and softly
through a harsh kingdom.
Perhaps like Jesus-Christ
you reign in heaven as on earth
and we shall find you once more
to drink from you again...

"Tell me, you who have seen many things:
is there a bigger, a more beautiful river?"

"Not on Chilean soil,
but there are waters I have not mentioned;
further ahead there are lakes
that flow while seeming to be still,
and we are getting closer now,
and soon we will arrive.

Cisnes
(En el lago Llanquihue)

*Otra vez dejar la ruta
torciendo a cosa vedada.
Yo me sé un agua escondida
que no camina ni canta
y, aunque es tan hermosa, nadie
se la busca ni se la ama.
Es el agua de los cisnes,
verde, secreta, extasiada.*

*-- No te entiendo, a veces, mama,
tuerces el rumbo por nada.*

*-- Callarse y andar. Les tengo
una sorpresa, una gracia.
Cárgate el ciervo; él es loco
y esa "persona" es "quedada".*

-- ¿Es gente, di? Me da miedo.

*-- Caminar para arribar.
¡Qué ganas de hablar, qué ganas?*

*-- Ve que dejas el camino.
¿A dónde nos llevas, mama?*

-- *Yo no te lo cuento, no.
Anda no más, ándate, anda.
Y para que no te aburras
ponte a cantar con tu mama.
Yo me tuve antes caminos
de cascajos, de pedradas,
tuve rutas amorosas
y las tuve envenenadas.
¡Andar, andar, ay qué linda
tierra para caminada!*

-- *Pero di adonde nos llevas
que, a lo mejor, vas "tocada".
Ya me he caído dos veces
y tú, "tú como que nada".
¿Qué es eso que se ve, di?
Es cosa viva y parada.
Y será que tiene frío
que se ve como engrifada.
¿Mama, alguna vez la viste?
Sigues sin saber de nada.*

-- *Tú ya no crees en mi
sólo porque soy fantasma.*

-- *¡Qué grande, y azul y quieto,
parece cosa embrujada!
Haz la señal de la cruz.
Yo nunca vi agua parada.*

-- *Es tu lago de Llanquihue,
la más dulce de tus aguas.
Parece que está adorando;
sólo cuchichea, no habla.
Tal vez estará orando
y le sobran las palabras.*

*Pero se tiene un respiro,
una hablilla, una nonada.
No haber miedo de allegarse;
recibirle la mirada.
Nadie te miró tan dulce
y con tan larga mirada.*

-- *Mama, es tan grande y apenas
apenitas da palabras.*

-- *Siempre me sobró el hablar
con este Señor del Agua,
como la muda quedé
para recibirle el agua
y lavar en él mis vistas
como niña avergonzada.*

-- *¿Y cómo lo llaman, di?
A ver si llamado, él habla.*

-- *Oye: se llama Llanquihue,
el indio así lo mentaba.*

-- ¿Y qué dice eso "Llanquihue"?

-- ¡Ay! para nosotros, nada!

*Porque fue la vieja gente
la que, como Dios, mentaba,
y nombrar es un gran arte.
Tú y yo no sabemos nada.
Ellos nombraron palpando
criaturas bien amadas.
Emparentar se sabían
los sonidos con sus almas
y a dioses se parecían
toda cosa bautizando.*

Swans
(On Lake Llanquihue)¹

Once again we leave the road
 and make for an enclosure.
 I know of hidden waters
 that neither flow nor sing
 and, though very handsome, no one
 draws or loves them.
 It is the swans' water:
 green, still, enchanted.

"Sometimes I don't understand you, Mama.
 You change your course for no reason."

"Hush, and keep walking. I have
 a surprise for you, a treat.
 Watch the fawn, for it is wild
 and this 'person' is 'tranquil.'"

"Is it a person, tell me; I'm scared!"

"Keep walking.
 Talking is quite useless!"

"Look out, you're straying from the road.
 Where are you taking us, Mama?"

¹ [Translator's Note] Lake Llanquihue: One of the largest and best known lakes of Chile, located in the country's southern region.

"I am not telling you a thing.
Come, now, and stop asking questions.
Keep your heart light
by singing with your Mama.
I once travelled roads of gravel.
rocky roads, lovely roads,
and poisoned roads.
I walked and walked, and
oh, what a fair land to walk upon!"

"But tell us where we are going.
You are not yourself;
I have fallen down twice already
yet you go on as if nothing happened.
What are we going to see, tell me?
It is live and still?
Is it cold? Is it bristling?
Mama, have you seen it before?
You keep ignoring me!"

"You have no faith in me,
just because I am a spirit."

"Oh, how big and blue and quiet!
Is it bewitched?
Cross yourself;
I have never seen water this calm."

"It is your Lake Llanquihue,
the sweetest of your waters.
Still, as if in worship,
it sings, but does not talk.
Perhaps it is praying
and words are needless.

And yet it breathes:
a mere nothing, a faint babble.
Get closer; do not be afraid.
You can stand before it.
No one has ever looked at you so gently
or with such a wide, open gaze."

"It's so big, Mama, and it says only
such few, few words."

"I have always remained speechless
before the Lord of the Waters.
Like one who is mute, I was silent;
I contemplated its water
and bathed my sight in it
like a shy young girl."

"What do they call it, tell me?
Let's see if it answers when we call it."

"Listen, call it Llanquihue.
The Indians gave it its name."

“And what does ‘Llanquihue’ mean?”

“To us it means nothing!
Like God, ancient people
named it, and naming
is a great art.
You and I know nothing.
They touched and named
their beloved creatures.
They knew how to couple
sounds with souls,
and gods they resembled
as they christened all things.”

Patagonia

*A la Patagonia llaman
sus hijos la Madre Blanca.
Dicen que Dios no la quiso
por lo yerta y lo lejana,
y la noche que es su aurora
y su grito en la venteada
por el grito de su viento,
por su hierba arrodillada
y porque la puebla un río
de gentes aforesteradas.*

*Hablan demás los que nunca
tuvieron Madre tan blanca,
y nunca la verde Gea
fue así de angélica y blanca
ni así de sustentadora
y misteriosa y callada.
¡Qué Madre dulce te dieron,
Patagonia, la lejana!
Sólo sabida del Padre
Polo Sur, que te declara,
que te hizo, y que te mira
de eterna y mansa mirada.*

*Oye mentir a los tontos
y suelta tu carcajada.
Yo me la viví y la llevo
en potencias y en mirada.*

*-- Cuenta, cuenta, mamá mía
¿es que era cosa tan rara?
Cuéntala aunque sea yerta
y del viento castigada.*

*Te voy a contar su hierba
que no se cansa ni acaba,
tendida como una madre
de cabellera soltada
y ondulando silenciosa,
aunque llena de palabras.
La brisa la regodea
y el loco viento la alza.
No hay niña como la hierba
en abajar bulto y hablas
cuando va llegando el puelche
como gente amotinada,
y silba y grita y aúlla,
vuelto solamente su alma.*

Patagonia¹

The land of Patagonia
is by her children called White Mother.
They say that God forsook her
for she is frigid and distant,
because night for her is dawn,
because of her cry in the storm
that answers the shriek of the wind,
because her bushes stoop,
and because she hosts
a stream of alien people.

They speak in vain, those who never
had such a fair Mother.
The green Earth was never
so angelic and milky
nor so nurturing,
mysterious, and quiet.
What sweet Mother they gave you,
Patagonia, the distant one!
Only Father South Pole
knows and claims you,
he who made you and watches over you
with his eternal and gentle gaze.

Translator's Notes:

¹ Patagonia: Southern territory overlapping Chile and Argentina.

Let the fools talk
and set your laughter free.
I have lived here. I carry her
in my heart and sight.

“Tell us, tell us Mama,
is it such a rare thing?
Tell us about her, even if she is frozen
and punished by the wind.”

I can tell you about her grass
that neither grows weary nor stops growing,
like the wavy, untied hair
of a mother lying down; silent,
yet filled with words.
The breeze plays in it
and wild winds make it rise.
There is no girl like the grass
to lie low and hush
when the puelche² arrives
like a riotous people,
whistling, yelling, and howling
round nothing but her soul.

²

Puelche: Wind blowing from the Cordillera of the Andes westward.

Despedida

*Ya me voy porque me llama
un silbo que es de mi Dueño,
llama con una inefable
punzada de rayo recto:
dulce-agudo es el llamado
que al partir le conocemos.*

*Yo bajé para salvar
a mi niño atacameño
y por andarme la Gea
que me crió contra el pecho
y acordarme, volteándola,
su trinidad de elementos.
Sentí el aire, palpé el agua
y la Tierra. Y ya regreso.*

*El ciervo y el viento van
a llevarte como arrieros,
como flechas apuntadas,
rápido, íntegro, ileso,
indiecito de Atacama,
más sabes que el blanco ciego,
y hasta dormido te llevan
tus pies de quechua andariego,*

*el Espíritu del aire,
el del metal, el del viento,
la Tierra Mama, el pedrisco,
el duende de los viñedos,
la viuda de las cañadas
y la amistad de los muertos.
Te ayudé a saltar las zanjias
y a esquivar hondones huecos.*

Ya me llama el que es mi Dueño...

Farewell

I must go, for I hear the call,
 the whistle of my Master,
 whose signal is like the ineffable
 stab of a straight ray of light.
 Bittersweet is that call
 we recognize upon parting.

I came down to save
 my Atacamanian¹ child,
 to walk the Land
 that nursed me against her breast,
 and to renew during this journey
 with her trinity of elements.
 I have felt the air and touched water
 and Earth. I must now go back.

The deer and the wind will
 guide you like muleteers
 or pointed arrows,
 Little Indian of Atacama --
 so quick, upright, and sound.
 You know more than the blind white man,
 and even in your sleep
 your swift Quechuan feet will guide you,

¹ [Translator's Note] Atacamanian: From Atacama, a province of northern Chile located to the West of Argentina and to the East of the Pacific ocean. The original Atacamanian Indians lived in the desert oases of northern Chile and northwestern Argentina. The last surviving groups of Atacamanians were assimilated into Spanish and Aymaran cultures.

as will the Spirits of air,
metal, and wind,
Mother Earth, hailstorms,
the goblin of the vineyards,
the dowager of the dales,
and the friendship of the dead.
I have taught you to jump over ditches
and keep clear of small hollows.

He who is my Master summons me now...

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