

Another Waste Land: Gabriela Mistral in 1922

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Cabello-Hutt, C. & de la Torre, O. "Another Waste Land: Gabriela Mistral in 1922." *Modernist Cultures* 7.1 (2012): 1-14.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/mod.2012.0026>

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Abstract:

1922 has been described as an exceptional year in what we may (hesitatingly) call the globalising of modernism as an early episode in the contemporary history of 'World Literature'. For the European and Anglo-American contexts, it was the year of publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Paul Valéry's *Charmes*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, W. B. Yeats's *Later Poems*, Henri Bergson's *Durée et simultanéité*, Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*, and the revised edition of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918), to mention a few prominent examples.¹ The English translation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921) also appeared the same year; it was a work, as Michael North indicates, that inaugurated a 'linguistic turn' in Western philosophy and thus stands as a proper complement to the linguistic reflection and experimentation practiced by the emerging avantgardes.² In the Hispanic world, 1922 represented an equally-significant year: to mention a few examples, at this time César Vallejo published his ground-breaking verse collection *Trilce*, Juan Ramón Jiménez his highly influential *Segunda antología poética*, and Oliverio Girondo his *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en un tranvía*. In 1920, Miguel de Unamuno had issued his ekphrastic masterpiece, *El Cristo de Velázquez*, which is worth noting because Christological symbols abound in Mistral, who also wrote at length on Francis of Assisi.

Keywords: modernism | world literature | Gabriela Mistral | Spanish

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Mistral brought out her first book of poems, *Desolación*, in New York in 1922. Its success was such that a second edition of 20,000 copies was printed in Chile in 1923, the same year the all-powerful Mexican Minister of Culture, José Vasconcelos, issued her an invitation to come to Mexico and had a statue built in her honour. Unlike many of the experimental works appearing elsewhere in 1922, the poems in *Desolación* combined modernista precepts with a preoccupation for social engagement, and thus may have come across to readers and specifically critics as out of place, even anachronistic.³ This supposed anachronism may explain why, many years later, Octavio Paz would omit Mistral – by then a Nobel laureate – from his panorama of modern poetry as presented in his influential study *Los hijos del limo* [*Children of the Mire*] (1974). Paz seems primarily concerned with poets of ‘rupture’, with figures that perform a ‘visible’ (i.e. primarily formal) break with tradition, a gesture that Mistral’s work does not ostensibly carry out. Nonetheless, she certainly broke with modernismo poético as practiced in the Hispanic world – narrowly understood as a conservative or escapist adaptation of the French *poésie du Parnasse*.⁴ In other words, a trait that may from a certain viewpoint appear as anachronistic appears from another viewpoint as historically-grounded, as it pulls away from the figurations of artistic autonomy envisioned by art-pour-l’art poetics – from hermetic symbolism to modernismo parnasiano to highmodernism’s culturalist practitioners.

Mistral’s *Desolación* undoubtedly registers the influence of modernismo in some of its techniques and themes: the critique of the world of positivism and secularism; a heightened linguistic selfconsciousness, a concern with form and rhyme, a renewed interest in the prose poem, the pervasiveness of a melancholic sensibility, and the fascination with death.⁵ Her poetry also confronts cultural, existential, and philosophical issues appearing in the more visibly experimental works of both the Latin American avant-garde and the high modernists of the English-speaking world. Yet because it engages meaningfully with the implications of writing a poetry of autochthony, austerity, and geographical marginality, it also challenges the hyperculturalist autonomy advocated by a cosmopolitan brand of modernist poetics.

Mistral finds the archive of cultural ruins that is modernist cosmopolitanism of little use for her local project of cultural renewal and pedagogical advancement in the Americas. She is reluctant to romanticise and re-elaborate the obscure and difficult traditions of the past to fit the modernist programme of maximal instability of meaning and maximal intensity of sentiment to the point of making emotional derangement and indirect citation the main focus of the poem (as, for example, Eliot does in both *The Waste Land* and especially ‘*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*’). Only an elitist market of hypereducated and discriminating readers for whom neurosis is an accepted condition of modern consciousness could become the consumer of high modernist lyric or of such middlebrow modernista equivalents as Rubén Darío’s ‘*Lo fatal*’

(1905). Nonetheless, her *Desolación* shares important thematic parallels with César Vallejo's *Trilce* and Eliot's 'The Waste Land' – to take a prominent example from the Spanish – and from the English-speaking contexts, respectively. All three works may be said to allude in some way or another to landscapes of spiritual and existential desolation that evoked the mass migrations of the 1910s and the signing of the punitive and ill-fated Treaty of Versailles after the First World War. Although their worldviews and poetic trajectories cannot, of course, be reduced to a common cultural or poetic vision, they nonetheless all share a critical attitude towards what they perceive as the 'spiritual barrenness' of modern societies.

A linguistically experimental work typically situated within the Hispanic avant-garde tradition (at times seen as its very inaugurator), Vallejo's *Trilce*, like Mistral's brand of posmodernista humanism, seeks to distance itself from the formalist perfection and thematic exoticism of cosmopolitan and culturalist modernism.⁶ By means of jarring and at times disorienting linguistic experimentation, *Trilce* attempts to convey the estrangement and pain of human life. Guillermo Sucre suggests that Vallejo's poetry is marked by 'rigor' and 'austerity';⁷ his poetry represents a disillusioned critique of 'the barrenness of the contemporary world';⁸ *Trilce*, in particular, 'is dominated by a sense of barren man [hombre desértico]: his time is a "stagnant" present [presente "estancado"] (II), and the "parched today" ["la seca actualidad"] is sterile (XXVII); suffering is his ultimate reality: "Another ay has triumphed. Therein lies the truth" ["Ha triunfado otro ay. La verdad está allí"] (LXXIII)'.⁹ Pain and disillusionment stem in part from the uneasy and tortuous relation which Vallejo's speakers sustain with a distant, cold, and even hurtful God. Vallejo's relation with the God of 'Los dados eternos', who shows himself indifferent to the world, to the God of 'Los heraldos negros',¹⁰ who hates his presumed creation, is characterised by constant struggle, doubt, fury, but also devotion and hope. His animadversion on organised religion is also a passion, a profession of faith. If for Vallejo human existence is something of a cruel 'error', a journey plagued with obstacles and disappointment, this collective plight does not foreclose the possibility of human solidarity. Vallejo's is therefore an ethics grounded on pain and suffering, one which paradoxically emerges all the stronger because subjects are wounded and fragile.

If, as suggested by Sucre, Vallejo portrays 'barren man' in conjunction with a 'parched today', Eliot gives form to analogous figures: 'the hollow men' and 'the dead land' they inhabit. But the emptiness and infertility of 'The Hollow Men' (1925) is already manifest in *The Waste Land*. Although Eliot's religious convictions were to become more pronounced in later poems such as 'Ash Wednesday' (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1935–42), *The Waste Land* already points to a desire to attain stability through a religious, or at least 'spiritual', discovery. *The Waste Land* has thus been seen in part as a disenchanting response to a general process of secularisation, to which the essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) had memorably referred as a 'dissociation of sensibility'.¹¹ While Eliot views his era as one permeated by secular disorder, his poem, according to Paz, suggests that medieval Christianity might nonetheless become the emblem of spiritual order.¹² Therefore, if *The Waste Land* is formally a 'revolutionary poem' (one which – ironically, given its title – 'irrigated' and 'made fertile' the Western poetic landscape), it is also a poem suffused with a strong longing to reinstate some kind of historical and existential order – such that 'revolutionary' would have to be read here in its original sense: as a return to a former state or condition. This is what drives Paz to conclude that the theme of *The Waste Land* 'is not

simply the description of the gelid modern world, but the nostalgia for a universal order whose model is the Christian order of Rome'.¹³

Neither Modernist nor *modernista*

While Mistral's early work, like Eliot's and Vallejo's, issues a powerful criticism of the cultural and spiritual barrenness of modern societies, it has usually occupied a problematic position with respect to the literary movements prevalent during the early twentieth century, both in Europe and in Latin America. In relation to Latin American modernismo, her work represents a shift away from its ostensive aestheticism in favour of a non-exoticising integration of marginalised social groups and humanistic themes. Mistral avoids the overtly nationalistic impetus of posmodernismo (in which her work is sometimes placed) in favour of a nuanced incorporation of underrepresented social sectors that are neither internationalist (i.e. aggressively oppositional) nor nationalist proper (i.e. self-complacent).¹⁴ Finally, in contrast to the vanguardias, Mistral's work comes across as formally outdated, even simplistic, inasmuch as she gives preference to thematic social engagement over formal experimentation and rupture. Nonetheless, she consciously historicised her output as a reaction against the hegemony of modernismo parnasiano (poets such as Amado Nervo, Leopoldo Díaz, and Guillermo Valencia were at the height of their popularity when *Desolación* came out), which is to say, she remained aware at all times that the writing of lyric in an age saturated with historiographic concerns and accelerated cultural change involved the rewriting of literary history as part of one's poetic praxis, as numerous modernists in the Anglo-American tradition (from Virginia Woolf to William Carlos Williams) knew very well.

If Mistral's work seems outmoded or unoriginal vis-à-vis these important aesthetic tendencies, this is because our definitions of them tend to adhere to the formal and thematic characteristics of a canonised literary genealogy whose central stem is predominantly white, male, culturalist, and cosmopolitan. Historical criticism of various kinds, from Roy Harvey Pearce's minute reconstructions of concealed contexts of production to Raymond Williams's Marxist interventions, challenged the sway held by the often ahistorical New Critics over the study of both romantic and high-modernist poetry. Between roughly 1969 (the year of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*) and 1990, first-wave feminists (those who studied so-called 'images of women') and second-wave ones contributed to making discourses of resistance more visible, as did the more historically inclined poststructuralists, from Joseph N. Riddel to Frank Lentricchia. Bonnie Kime Scott's ground-breaking books of the 1980s illustrate the unfolding of these various genealogies and concerns. As the New Historicism came of age in the eighties, it showed that it shared with Lentricchia a primary interest in Foucault's work rather than Derrida's. New Historicists such as Walter Benn Michaels attempted to restore the social and economic dimension of literary production and circulation without sacrificing the poststructuralists' attention to conflicted textualities. In more recent years, AngloAmerican modernist studies have witnessed the emergence of a multidimensional materialist new history and new textual studies (think, for instance, of the contributions by Cary Nelson, Jerome J. McGann, and Michael North) and of a new sociology of literature inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and launched by such scholars of early modern and modernist literature as John Guillory, Lawrence Rainey, and David E. Chinitz, even if they may at times neglect to mention their obvious indebtedness to Bourdieu's revolutionary studies of Flaubert and Monet.¹⁵

The history of Spanish American modernismo is less rich. Octavio Paz's influential booklength studies cited in this essay are to Spanish-American poetry what Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971) are to modernist studies. They validated the assumption that the literature written at the close of the nineteenth century and in the ensuing decades was best understood by focusing on the intricacies of each author's craftsmanship and network of influences, which would then be assembled magisterially in a grand récit of collective cultural modernisation and artistic autonomy. The materialist critique and sociological interpretation of modernismo was slow in coming, its arrival heralded by Ángel Rama's twin books, *La ciudad letrada* (1984) and *Las máscaras democráticas del modernismo* (1985) as well as (to a much lesser extent) Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot's *Modernismo* (1983). Such recent and not-so-recent critical developments have challenged both the high-modernist and the modernista canons and their respective hierarchical organisations to take into account each movement's conflicted history and multiple intersections with various disciplinary and social contexts.¹⁶ In the words of Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker:

A more historicized and materialist deconstruction will seek to disclose how different modernisms are marked by the accents of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and region, and . . . will investigate the relations between artistic forms, techniques, and strategies and prevailing social and economic conditions.¹⁷

We may begin to do this for Mistral's case by looking at the development and surrounding social context of modernismo in Chile, a movement which simultaneously conditioned Mistral's early work and from which she sought to distance herself. John M. Fein divides the modernista period in Chile into two phases. The first phase encompasses the years 1886–1889, a period in which Rubén Darío resided in Chile (in the cities of Valparaíso and Santiago); the second phase is configured around Darío's absence, that is, once he had left for Buenos Aires, where his presence was more enthusiastically received and where his poetic influence, both in Argentina and in the American continent at large, began to show its true extent. Following this clearcut division, Fein recapitulates the trajectory of modernismo in Chile by saying that 'the first period consisted of a leader without followers, the second of a school without a leader'.¹⁸

In many respects, the second modernista period in Chile, which developed in Darío's absence, proved more interesting than the first. It is during this period that poets like Francisco Contreras and Carlos Pezoa Véliz began to publish (the latter's movement away from 'aristocratic' themes and towards his own brand of criollismo influencing the path which Mistral's own poetry would later take), and during which several important literary reviews and magazines emerged, among them *Pluma y lápiz* and *Revista cómica*.¹⁹ The second modernista period distinguished itself from the first not only by Darío's absence as a leader, but also by its inclusion of writers of modest economic and social origins. Referencing Domingo Melfi's 1945 study, *El viaje literario*, Fein suggests that 'writers did not derive exclusively from the upper classes as they had previously'.²⁰ This more diverse and open social make-up explains in part the greater 'spirit of social awareness' exhibited by emerging poets such as Diego Dublé Urrutia, who attempted to portray 'the Chilean landscape and its inhabitants' and became very well-known during this time.²¹

This movement towards a more ‘humanitarian poetry’ reflected not only the influence of personal background (lower-class writers entering into the until-then ‘aristocratic’ literary sphere), but also a response to concrete historic situations.²² On a transnational scale, the consequences of the 1898 Cuban-Spanish-American War – the end of Spain’s overseas empire and the onset of U.S. hegemony in the trans-Atlantic space – would ripple through the entire Hispanic field, compelling certain authors on both sides of the Atlantic to practise a more socially and historically engaged type of writing (in Spain, Miguel de Unamuno and the Generación del 98 would be the paradigmatic examples of this shift).²³ Local social developments that impacted the country’s literary production, and which took place prior to the Spanish-American War, included social protests called for by the Partido Democrático (founded in 1887) and, years later, protests of a more violent nature in cities like Santiago, Valparaíso, Antofagasta, and Iquique. Additionally, the country underwent in 1891 a brief yet bloody civil war, which pitted the majority of Congress (which had the support of the Navy) against President José Manuel Balmaceda (who had the support of the Army). This power struggle ended with a victorious Congress and with the suicide of the President – who preferred killing himself rather than surrendering.²⁴ ‘Indications of depression, unemployment, and financial panic’, Fein further indicates, ‘were widespread in 1897, due in part to the crisis in nitrate production, poor harvests, and heavy defense expenditures’.²⁵ Although the refined aesthetics of modernismo by no means disappeared (but in fact persisted for several more years), the nineteenth century ended with a preoccupation with how to account for the abrupt and momentous disruptions in the social field and its actors. As Naín Nómez points out, though starting in 1907 modernismo proper became a waning force in Chile, ‘this does not mean that modernismo did not linger as a residual tendency’.²⁶ This being said, between 1907 and 1916

social and popular modes of poetry were accentuated, along with representations of the American landscape and its people. Autochthony is universalized, and there is reaction against exoticism and artifice as part of a search for [the country’s] roots in native customs, peasant origins, and snapshots of urban life.²⁷

Poets of the second modernista and posmodernista phases attempted, as part of a renewed concern with historical and social issues, to incorporate previously marginalised subjects into the scope of poetic representation. In most instances, however, such writing was informed by idealising or aestheticising habits of thought. For Bernardo Subercaseaux, they specifically enabled the construction of ‘national-popular characters who cumulatively may constitute a trustworthy representation of their country – ‘characters performing the nation’ [personajes en función de país].²⁸ Writers and poets tended to assume a superior position with respect to both the countryside and its inhabitants; literature incorporated the land and the peasant, for example, as objects that embodied a cultural ‘essence’ and thereby demanded preservation, or as objects that demanded to be civilised and educated by the metropolis. In the literature of this period, we find, ‘with few exceptions, characters conditioned by a middle-class gaze (the need to preserve but also to educate rural or indigenous life) or by an elite one (nostalgia for the countryside, serfdom, and for the old values of blood and land)’.²⁹ The rural geography, particularly the peasant landscape, becomes the space wherein ‘are preserved . . . customs and habits not yet wiped out by modernity’.³⁰

Among the poets whose work prolonged the tradition/modernity dichotomy Subercaseaux mentions Carlos Pezoa Véliz, whose poem 'Alma chilena' (originally published in a book of poems of the same title [1912]) represents an example of the metropolitan poet's exaltation of subjects and customs which, by virtue of their distance from the social 'centre', supposedly embody an authentic national identity. This exaltation is exemplified in 'Alma chilena' by the port of Valparaíso, where people from the countryside labour in the ship industry, all the while retaining their former 'authentic' way of life. In his prose writings, Pezoa Véliz forcefully affirms that 'a poet will be that person who makes his verses with the soul's tatters, with the flag's shreds, with hungry flesh' [será poeta el que haga sus versos con jirones de alma, con trozos de bandera, con carnes hambreadas].³¹ He reiterates poetry's engagement with those who are lacking (in food, shelter, political representation, property, and so on), describing these subjects in terms that would later be echoed by Mistral – whose entire poetry, both thematically and stylistically, may be said to embody and represent a poetics of dispossession. Pezoa Véliz insists that

If the poet speaks of water with the water's voice, let him also speak of those who thirst . . . If he wants to confide his problems to the landscape, let him also speak from the rotten door of the miserable shack, with its ruined hopes, walls, and rosebushes . . . Let him sing to the wind that carries the pollen – the beginning of life – and to the cry of the disinherited – the beginning of death [Si el poeta habla del agua con la voz misma del agua, hable también de los sedientos . . . Si quiere contar sus cuitas al paisaje, hable desde la tosca puerta del rancho carcomido, donde hay tapias, rosales, organismos y esperanza ruinosas . . . Cante al viento que arrastra el polen . . . principio de vida, y el ¡ay! de los desheredados, principio de muerte].³²

This shift from the 'ivory tower' to the public sphere is visually explained by Jaime Concha's study of Mistral's work as a movement from the 'cold niche' [nicho helado] to the 'communal grave' [fosa común], a movement already evident in the work of Carlos Pezoa Véliz,³³ and to which Mistral alludes in her 'Sonetos de la muerte', where the speaker, addressing her dead beloved, says: 'Down from the cold niche in which the men placed you, / I will take you to the humble and sunny earth' [Del nicho helado en que los hombres te pusieron, / te bajaré a la tierra humilde y soleada].³⁴ Mistral's symbolic movement from the private, enclosed 'niche' to the common, open 'grave' highlights her own early and subsequent engagement with the politically disenfranchised and physically vulnerable masses.

In undertaking a comparative analysis of Mistral and her modernista, posmodernista, and modernist precursors and contemporaries, the particularities of her socio-cultural field should not only be acknowledged, but also engaged. Doing so may prove helpful in unsettling and expanding our definitions of modernism in general, which have tended to emphasise aesthetic aspects proper to the European and Anglo-American contexts that are not necessarily visible or even practiced by other modernist traditions (the African and Latin American traditions, for example). Andreas Huyssen has rightly pointed out that 'non-Western modernisms have either been ignored in the West as epistemologically impossible since only the West was considered advanced enough to generate authentic modernism, or they were dismissed as lamentable mimicry and contamination of a more genuine local culture'.³⁵ He concludes that we still 'lack a

workable model of comparative studies able to go beyond the traditional approaches that still take national cultures as units to be compared and which rarely pay attention to the unevenness of flows of translation, transmission, and appropriation'.³⁶ For Huyssen, the definition of modernism has been traditionally determined by the 'local' contingencies of the Western European and North American contexts, even when modernism defines itself as an 'international' or 'global' phenomenon; the centre (the European and North American 'local') wins over the peripheries when it comes to defining and constructing modernism's canon. Within this confined framework, 'processes of translation and transnational migrations and their effects remain insufficiently studied outside of local specializations'.³⁷

The need arises, then, to resignify the general concept of modernism beyond the European and North American cultural boundaries in such a way that it takes into account historical processes and socio-cultural concerns not necessarily dealt with by high modernist production; the purpose, in other words, would be to avoid the gesture that makes modernism equivalent to the high modernist canon, thereby including other authors and forms of modernist expression. John T. Matthews, for example, proposes 'ethnic modernism' as a category which, when read alongside institutionalised modernist production, 'challenges the traditionally accepted notions of center and periphery in modernism, not only geographically but also aesthetically'.³⁸ He adds:

A focus on the ethnic peripheries exposes the ideological investments and interests served in the traditional definitions of modernism while it also widens its cultural import. The recovery of a more or less coherent ethnic modernist production that paralleled its high modernist 'other' demystifies and brings to the surface the definitional processes and received ideas of high modernism.³⁹

Gabriela Mistral's work may be fruitfully analysed as an instance of this peripheral type of modernism, which challenges received notions of centre and periphery and high and low culture. In the case of Mistral and of other women writers of her time, this challenge is also pressing inasmuch as it is situated within a changing political and social environment where the place of women in the public sphere was being radically contested. Mistral's own vision of herself as both a poet and an intellectual writing from an uneven (Latin American) modern landscape allowed her to become the first Chilean professional female figure to achieve a prominent status outside of her own country. Throughout her life, Mistral would exhibit a 'transnational' consciousness, engaging with the modern, shared sense of social and personal crisis, and actively contributing to the dissemination of ideas through her participation in, for example, high-circulation printed media. Mistral's essays and poetry thus elaborate on the particular challenges that an imported model of modernity had on a very complex and unequally developed Latin American reality. Her modernism is therefore tied to specific gender, class, race, and geopolitical concerns. Having laid out the literary/ poetic panorama out of which Mistral's socially conscious work emerged, we will now explore – by way of her prose output and assorted work for governmental institutions – the original position that she developed as an intellectual who both witnessed and reflected upon the processes and perils of modernity.

Balancing Acts: the Intellectual and the Poet

Mistral wrote more than five hundred prose texts from 1905 until her death in 1957.⁴⁰ These texts provide a unique perspective on the aesthetic and socio-political movements of the first half of the twentieth century in Latin America, the United States, and Western Europe, places in which Mistral lived and worked as a professional writer and intellectual. The prose of her Chilean period (1905–22), produced before her trip to work in the rural public education system in post-revolutionary Mexico, reveal the systematic effort undertaken by a young woman from the provinces to fashion herself into a public intellectual and modern writer by means of strategies determined by incipient modern spaces and practices.⁴¹ In this respect, Mistral broke from the nineteenth-century model of the woman writer associated with the literary salon, which rarely had an impact beyond her national boundaries. Despite not yet having published a poetry collection, by 1920 she was widely recognised as a poet both in Chile and abroad, and admired as an essayist and public intellectual (an ‘intelligent prose writer’, as literary critic Carlos Soto Ayala described her back in 1908) who had already made substantial public interventions in topics ranging from literature to workers rights, public education, and national identity.⁴²

Mistral did not claim a place for herself in the journalistic world as a result of her previous fame as poet or educator; rather, she used the press as a medium to establish her intellectual authority from the very onset of her career in the public sphere. Through her participation in aesthetic and political debates in the press, her name became gradually recognised – first locally, then nationally, and finally internationally. In this sense, her journalistic prose played a key role in her self-fashioning as a public intellectual, granting her access to both symbolic and real spaces to which the poet – though regarded by the literary establishment as a ‘genius’ – normally did not have access. It also brought her closer to the cultural and political centre (both the geographical centre embodied by the capital, Santiago, and the symbolic centre from which the most visible writers and intellectuals operated).

It is worth noting that during these early years in Chile, Mistral lived in provincial cities and small towns, far from the capital. Her essays, then, do not correspond to the terms that Julio Ramos uses to describe the highbrow *crónicas* of the late nineteenth century (particularly the Cuban José Martí’s stylised prose, which transcended the more accelerated news cycle denoted by the journalistic English term *chronicle*): as an ‘archive of the “dangers”’ implicit in the new urban experience, an ordering of daily life as yet unclassified by instituted forms of knowledge’.⁴³ While many urban intellectuals of the early twentieth century wrote *crónicas* and essays that reflected on the changes of modernity – listing the dangers of new urban experience, organising and trying to make sense of the rapid changes and threats to the place and power of the ‘man of letters’ – Mistral adopted a different stance. Speaking from a marginal place, that of the woman and of the rural teacher, she built an alternative archive of the modern experience, exposing what remained beyond the urban centre’s gaze: the process of uneven modernity, marginalised social subjects, as well as the cultural creations, literary engagements, and socio-political discussions emerging out of the provinces and undertaken by women and other new social subjects.

Mistral, like other women intellectuals of her time such as Victoria Ocampo and Alfonsina Storni, was instrumental in redefining central aspects of Latin American modernity and of the role of intellectuals within it.⁴⁴ The difference evident in the texts of these writers is not directly tied to their being women, nor to their immediate engagement with women’s situation, but – as

Nelly Richard and other feminists have argued – is a response to their being ‘situated at the borders of the discrimination of the masculine system’.⁴⁵ In Mistral’s and Storni’s cases, this difference is also linked to their working-class identity (Ocampo, by contrast, was a bourgeois belle born into immense economic privilege), a trait that in Mistral’s case is as important as her gender identity. Thus, when Mistral’s essays are read in relation to the intellectual tradition and the canon of the Latin American essay, it is possible to understand more fully ‘the relationship of continuity/ rupture that can lead “difference” to interrupt the official systems of identity and repetition’.⁴⁶ Mistral’s essays responded from a peripheral position to the crisis of Latin American modernity by reflecting on a period of major intellectual and social change and by strongly questioning a State-promoted model of modernisation that neglected the countryside, public education, and the types of popular-culture expressions that she championed. Mistral used her identity as a member of a minority to justify both an alternative mode of thinking about the political, social and aesthetic issues of her time, as well as to voice her dissent from the dominant ideas of her socio-cultural context.

When criticising certain forms of nationalism, Mistral would, for example, argue that ‘feminine patriotism is more sentimental than intellectual and is informed not so much by the description of battles and historical narratives as it is by those traditions that woman has created and over which she has presided’ [El patriotismo femenino es más sentimental que intelectual, y está formado, antes que de las descripciones de batallas y los relatos históricos, de las costumbres que la mujer crea y dirige en cierta forma].⁴⁷ Appealing to this ‘sentimental’ stereotype of femininity, she goes on to discuss ways of understanding patriotism grounded on a personal and primal experience of the native landscape. In a public lecture in 1919, Mistral thus re-defined patriotism from a non-military perspective that avoided a masculine, fixed, and centralised definition:

This new age deserves a new form of patriotism. It is necessary to understand that not only in times of war does one practice a militant and heated form of patriotism. In the most absolute peace the fate of the nation is still at play and its destinies are in the making. Vigilance is not kept at the borders, but needs to be kept throughout the territory and by men, women and even children. Understanding this and feeling this truth profoundly is to carry the hero’s sacred gravity on one’s face and in one’s thought [A la nueva época corresponde una nueva forma de patriotismo. Es necesario saber que no es sólo en el período guerrero cuando se hace patriotismo militante y cálido. En la paz más absoluta, la suerte de la patria se sigue jugando, sus destinos se están haciendo. La guardia no se efectúa en las fronteras y es que se hace a lo largo del territorio y por los hombres, las mujeres y hasta los niños. Saber esto, sentir profundamente esta verdad es llevar en la faz, y en el pensamiento, la gravedad casi sagrada del héroe].⁴⁸

If war has traditionally called for men’s participation, peace and progress require a broader participation from all across the territory, not just the capital. This public talk (originally published in the newspaper *El Magallanes*) goes on to detail the challenges of what Mistral defines as a ‘patriotism of peace’, an idealistic form of patriotism that is constructive rather than destructive, that creates culture and prosperity and that is open to the positive influence of other nations and regions. But modern challenges, according to Mistral, also call for ‘thinkers’, for

engaged intellectuals willing and able to listen to people from diverse backgrounds: ‘Often only intellectual men have been called upon to decide on reforms. For eighty years Chile has been run by them. Now all voices are invited and the university and the factory both have equal access to the discussion of the common good’ [Muchas veces han sido llamados a decidir sólo los hombres intelectuales en las reformas. El Chile de ochenta años ha sido dirigido por ellos. Ahora todas las voces son demandadas y tienen igual acceso la cátedra y la fábrica en la discusión del bien común].⁴⁹

Challenging Modernity’s Terms

For Mistral, modernity as an idea did not necessarily imply improvement. In fact, modernity, as her essays make clear, is in many respects perceived as a threat. While it is possible to identify elements of idealisation of pre-modern times in her prose, there is also a clear attempt to redefine the concepts of modernity and of progress by associating these concepts with ideas not included in the agenda of the dominant political and intellectual elite. Therefore, topics such as women’s education, compulsory primary instruction, land reform, and children’s rights emerge in opposition to what she wants to eradicate from society: war, urban poverty, inequality, and discrimination against indigenous communities.

In 1918, while Mistral served as Principal of the girls High School in the southern city of Punta Arenas, she declared:

Honorable are those Nations that dignify education, exchanging poor and dark-lit classrooms for bright and airy ones. It is not possible for a nation to have beautiful theaters, comfortable clubs [yet] shameful schools. In order to witness the lie of a beautiful or grotesque drama, magnificent and decorated rooms have been built and even better ones for talks on mundane subjects. Must we, in order to teach the history of nations and impart modern ideals, have miserable dumps, deficient, vulgar buildings? [Se honran a sí mismos los pueblos que dignifican la enseñanza, llevándola desde la sala pobre y oscura hasta el aula aireada y llena de luz. No es posible que un pueblo tenga hermosos teatros, cómodos clubes y vergonzosas escuelas. Para escuchar la mentira de un drama, bello o grotesco, se han hecho salas decoradas y magníficas y otras mejores aun para charlas de asuntos mundanos. Para enseñar la historia de los pueblos y sugerir los ideales modernos ¿vamos a tener sitios miserables, tugurios, mezquinos, vulgares edificios?].⁵⁰

Here, as in other texts, Mistral, as a teacher employed by the State, asks for better schools, more books, and greater resources for students. At the same time, she is able to question the nation’s priorities from the sanctioned place of an intellectual. As Principal, she gives thanks for the new school – thereby adhering to the diffusion of modern ideals – but at the same time challenges the logic of a national modernisation project that excludes the poorest sectors, the provinces, and the nation’s children. It is clear that Mistral’s discourse did not stop at what was required from her as a State employee; it did not, in other words, merely articulate the State’s vision of the Nation; rather, her discourse appropriated the Right – a Right, until then, almost exclusively open to the ‘man of letters’ – to imagine and promote an alternative vision of national progress.⁵¹

The vision of modernity Mistral publicly supported argues that the progress of nations, their status as modern and civilised societies, depends on the broadening of the economic, educational and social benefits of modernisation. For example, she argued, for land reform in terms of civilisation versus barbarism, an opposition widely used by nineteenth-century intellectuals; however, in Mistral's case, her use of this dichotomy does not target or blame the subjects that presumably embodied barbarism (indigenous people, the uneducated working class). Instead, she employs this opposition to attack an urban elite that, according to Mistral, is blind to the difficulties of rural reality:

The rural civilization evident in Mexico is about to become a reality in our countries. We have a vain urban culture, meaning, we have civilized [only] the fifth part of our population. We forget that many peasants are illiterate and that lands are not being farmed. The abandoned soil is an expression of barbarism; green fields, more than literature, reveal nations [La civilización rural que verifica México está por hacerse en nuestros países. Tenemos una vanidosa cultura urbana, es decir, hemos civilizado a una quinta parte de nuestra población. Olvidamos el analfabetismo campesino y las tierras baldías. El suelo abandonado es una expresión de barbarie; el campo verde revela mejor que una literatura a los pueblos].⁵²

Though Mistral's ideas have been read by many as conservative and pre-modern, the whole of her work suggests instead that her conservatism was limited to her ideas regarding women's professional advancement and her rejection of city life as specifically hostile towards poor people and children. Furthermore her ideas regarding public education, community organising, and workers' rights, as well as her fashioning of an anti-imperialist, anti-totalitarian, and pacifist discourse were quite innovative and groundbreaking. Her essays and her activism made clever use of her multiple identities as an intellectual, poet, and teacher who moved between and negotiated the differences dividing the modern and the pre-modern, the rural and the urban, high and popular culture.

Mistral's socially-engaged discourse is characteristic of her intellectual generation, a generation that, according to Rama, has been obscured by previous and subsequent generations despite its inclusion of several of the greatest literary and intellectual figures of the twentieth century who crucially shaped the Latin American 'lettered city':

In a manner suggested by Karl Marx almost a century earlier, young intellectuals from the emerging middle class spoke with ringing tones in the name of all the excluded and dispossessed in proposing a political opening that would be most advantageous to themselves as individuals.⁵³

Mistral, according to Rama, belonged to this 'populist and nationalist generation that accompanied Latin America's first twentieth-century revolutions – sometimes termed the generation of 1910'.⁵⁴ The 'bridging' function of her generation was evident in Mistral's attachment to the fin de siècle 'Arielist' idea (so called after the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó's essay Ariel [1900]) of a spiritual aristocracy, although in her case it was socially progressive and in the service of democratisation. Nevertheless, as Rama points out, it can be argued that these intellectuals (particularly women) worked to create a space for their own participation at all

levels of both intellectual and institutional spaces, thus reshaping the traditional definition of the Latin American intellectual in their favour. The intellectual profile embodied by Mistral was therefore that of a transitional intellectual figure shaken by novel means of cultural production, by the concepts of ‘the people’ and of ‘the masses’, and by a political landscape peppered with social revolutions and class struggles.

Mistral reacted to the anxiety and crisis of her time by fashioning herself as a socially engaged intellectual, and by publicly distancing herself from the elite, upper-class segment of writers, highlighting, whenever possible, her humble background and closeness to the working classes. During a lecture at a workers’ centre in 1921 she stated: ‘The only social value that my heart recognizes is that of the people and I just want to be one of you’ [el único valor social que reconoce mi corazón es el pueblo y que no deseo sino ser una de ustedes].⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Mistral envisioned the educated, cosmopolitan intellectual who could act as spokesperson for the disempowered classes, as a key element of national cohesiveness as well as continental change and progress.

At a continental level, Mistral’s great master, who appears frequently in her texts, was José Martí, a figure that in 1934 she defined as a remarkable humanist intellectual and as a unique thinker and poet. The originality of his style stemmed from his departure from the natural tendency towards imitation – a defining tendency, according to Mistral, of the Latin American continent – which placed Martí among the top writers and thinkers of the Spanish language: ‘Imitation predominates in Latin America during the periods that precede and follow Martí: one hundred years of romantic imitation and fifty of modernista furor’ [La imitación cubre en América la época anterior y posterior a Martí: cien años de calco romántico y cincuenta de furor modernista].⁵⁶ However, in Mistral’s view, Martí was not only a poet who developed an exceptional poetic style, but also a writer who assumed a larger social role: ‘living in a time in which the world experiences pressing needs, he will consent to lead men, becoming a journalist and a lecturer’ [puesto en el mundo a una hora de necesidades angustiosas, él aceptará ser conductor de hombres, periodista y conferenciante].⁵⁷ Martí thus possessed the attributes of the modern Latin American intellectual who responds to the urgency and crises of his time, who leads the masses, and who uses the press to disseminate his ideas continentally. Mistral may have come from the working class and advocated for a democratisation of culture, yet her comments on Martí still show her approval of a paternalistic notion of the intellectual as leader, bridge, and translator between the popular classes and the dominant elites. Similarly, on a different occasion Mistral would reaffirm

the duty that we, so-called intellectuals and artists, have toward those in need such as children, the poor, the powerless, the wretched, the ones wounded by the passion against injustice . . . it is this form of love towards one’s neighbor that we should offer, for we have the privilege of possessing spiritual resources that make us the truly strong ones, though we may appear as the weak ones [el deber que tenemos los llamados intelectuales y artistas con respecto a los necesitados en la conmovedora dimensión humana de esta palabra; los niños, los pobres, los desvalidos, los infelices, los heridos por la pasión a la injusticia . . . es esta forma de amor al prójimo la que deberíamos nosotros regalar pues tenemos el privilegio

de poseer recursos espirituales que nos convierten realmente en los más fuertes aunque parezcamos débiles].⁵⁸

This type of intellectual belonged to an aristocracy of the spirit given the authority to formulate and understand the needs of disempowered groups and to become a bridge between them and the ruling elites. Rodó's idea of the intellectual as a spiritual leader of the elite, who distantly watches in fear over the masses, was adapted from a discourse of social justice and progress that forsook the ivory tower but nevertheless maintained a distance between them – the common people, the masses – and us – the strong spirits. That said, this shift was fundamental to the modern idea of the Latin American intellectual as a politically and socially engaged public figure. The Mistralian ideal would see the need for public intellectuals satisfied by the figure of a writer who placed his concern and work for the people ahead of literary aspirations and theoretical speculation. This idea was strategically reinforced by Mistral when in the early 1920s her fame as a poet threatened to interfere with, and perhaps even displace, her work as a state employed intellectual and educator, the first hemispheric letrada to emerge from Latin America:

Some people in South America have believed that all of this is just me 'posturing'. I am not taken seriously when I assert that my work as a teacher is the most important thing for me. Poetry may be felt but not discussed. Poetry is a thing unto itself; teaching, on the other hand, is simultaneously human and poetic, it is action, ideas put to work. I am more interested in a person's soul than in what it says in verse: there are souls that are more interesting than what we may come to know about them through printed words [Pues algunos han creído en Sud América que todo eso es 'pose' mía. Cuando afirmo que me interesa más mi labor de maestra, no lo creen. La poesía se siente pero no se discute. La poesía es en sí, pero el profesorado es algo humano y también es poesía, es acción, es ideas en marcha. A mí me llama más la atención una (sic) alma que lo que ella dice en verso: hay almas más interesantes que lo que de ellas sabemos por medio de las letras de molde].⁵⁹

There existed at all times a tension between Mistral as a poet of international fame and Mistral as an intellectual and educator devoted to a social agenda. She invested the work of the teacher with the utmost value; its interpersonal nature and fulfillment seemed, in fact, to authorise Mistral's own literary practice.⁶⁰ Of course it is worth noting that making a living was one of Mistral's top concerns during most of her career. What provided her with income until 1920 was her work as a teacher in Chile; later, it was her work as an educational advisor for the federal government in Mexico along with the articles, columns, and short essays she wrote for newspapers across the continent. In the end, Mistral may be said to represent not only the general trend of writers' professionalisation in Latin America, but the extraordinary case of a woman writer who appropriated for her sex the function of the 'man of letters' and even pioneered the office of the female letrado or bureaucrat-writer. In this capacity she played an active role in key national and transnational debates throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁶¹

As we have seen, Mistral's ambivalent relationship with modernismo, her simultaneous adoption and critique of some of its most salient aesthetic principles, opens up the possibility for an equally ambivalent attitude towards her work on the part of literary critics, who may find it

difficult to situate her work within the poetic scene of the early twentieth century, both in Latin America and in Europe. Mistral's early poetry, emerging around the exceptional year that was 1922, may strike an anachronistic chord due to its lack of formal experimentation or innovation. If academic histories of the early twentieth century have been dominated by the elitist and culturalist sign of cosmopolitan modernism and the avant-garde, and if the modernist tradition places great value on formal experimentation, then those authors who practised an alternative type of modernism would seem condemned to critical neglect at best or to being characterised as retrograde at worst. One would do well, however, to remember that naturalism in Latin America remained a vital force at the time of the publication of Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* in 1929 and indeed, even later. From Théophile Gautier and Stéphane Mallarmé to Paul Valéry and Ezra Pound, 'difficult' or stylistically challenging poets were most often skeptical about liberal parliamentarism, while their coevals in the trade of fiction writing (the realist-naturalist cohort of Émile Zola and Benito Pérez Galdós, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and Miguel Otero Silva) just as often sympathised with socialism and targeted a mass audience. In other words, the correlation of aesthetic choices with political dispositions is not a seamless process; linguistic and stylistic innovation has almost always been hard to reconcile with progressive agendas for the social emancipation of the oppressed masses.

Such a correlation between stylistic 'poverty' and increased social commitment is applicable to Mistral's literary career. Her politically conscious brand of intellectualism translated into an equally fervent brand of socially engaged poetry. Her poetic output thus allows us to problematise, expand, and perhaps even redefine the literary concept of modernism, and of doing so by looking at the ways in which her poetic outlook was shaped by the political functions she fulfilled and social concerns she developed throughout her career in public life. This task involves questioning the echoes of literary form as much as the formal determinations that impinge upon political awareness and social activism. Through a strategic combination of journalistic prose, popular verse (whether non-modernista or postmodernista), and multiple critical rapports with state institutions (as a teacher and, later, a diplomat), Mistral gained access to a public platform that allowed her to articulate an alternative vision of progress for both Chile and Latin America – a vision that validates her as a controversial yet decisively modern intellectual.

Notes 1. These works, among others, are mentioned in Hugo J. Verani, 'Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamérica', in Hugo J. Verani (ed.), *Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamérica (Manifiestos, proclamas y otros escritos)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986), 9–44, p. 11.

2. Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 8.

3. Modernismo is not equivalent to European or North American modernism. A closer Hispanic equivalent to the latter term would be *las vanguardias*, or the *arte deshumanizado* or *desrealizado*, as theorised in José Ortega y Gasset's influential formulation of 1925, which he coined with Cubist painting and poetry in mind – from Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso to Jorge Guillén and Gerardo Diego. Multiple and often contradictory definitions of modernismo have been proposed. Generally speaking, modernismo is a movement that develops in the Hispanic literary world between 1880 and 1920, and which has as its central figure the Nicaraguan poet

Rubén Darío. Thus, some critics prefer to frame the movement between 1888 and 1916, which are respectively the year in which Darío published his first book, *Azul*, and the year in which the poet died. Modernismo is generally regarded as a movement that renovated Hispanic poetry through original assimilations of various nineteenth-century tendencies such as romanticism, symbolism, decadentism, and the Parnasse, which elsewhere developed more or less independently from one other. Owing to Darío, the modernistas' verse became a culturally recognisable movement in its own right, the translation and paraphrase in Spanish of French poems became almost indistinguishable from the crafting of original verse. For more on the history of the movement see Max Henríquez Ureña, *Breve historia del modernismo* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962).

4. Andreas Huyssen, for example, summarises the critical bias towards formal experimentation in modernist poetry: 'A very different kind of approach has focused not on the contents of modernism, not on the ideas or attitudes which it embodied or expressed, but on its procedures, the various devices, techniques, stratagems, and strategies by which modernist works achieve their effects. If modernism has a history, in such accounts, it is essentially a formal one, with one innovation paving the way or clearing the path for another. Multiple and unsteady points of view, stream of consciousness, illusionism with a self-consciousness of formal structure, collage, montage, juxtaposition, a display of raw medium (language, sound), a unified but lost order beneath apparent fragmentation – these are only a few of the techniques which have been repeatedly highlighted in these discussions' ('Modernism at Large', in Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (eds.), *Modernism*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 53–66, p. 55.

5. For more on Gabriela Mistral's relation with modernismo, see Augusto Iglesias, *Gabriela Mistral y el modernismo en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1949).

6. 'Cosmopolitan' and 'culturalist' can also be used to describe the modernism embodied by both Pound and Eliot, which was canonised as early as the 1940s by the New Critics. Its autochthonous and vernacular counterpart, best represented by William Carlos Williams, was not canonised until the 1960s, when New Criticism's dominance began to dwindle. See José María Rodríguez García, 'Discovering the Classic: Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams', *The Comparatist* 47 (May 2003): 21–40, pp. 35, 38 n.17. Michael North, David Chenitz, and others have also recently advanced the case for making Eliot's vernacularising side more central to discussions of his massively influential culturalist output.

7. Guillermo Sucre, *La máscara, la transparencia: Ensayos sobre poesía hispanoamericana* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), p. 115. Unless otherwise indicated, we have provided our own English translations from texts originally published in Spanish.

8. *Ibid.* p. 117.

9. *Ibid.* p. 123. Roman numerals designate the poem being referred to from *Trilce*. Sucre also establishes a brief comparison between *Trilce*'s 'hombre desértico' and Eliot's 'hollow man', p. 122.

10. 'My God had you been a man, / today you would know how to be God; / but you, who were always fine, / feel nothing for your own creation' [Dios mío, si tú hubieras sido hombre, / hoy supieras ser Dios; / pero tú, que estuviste siempre bien, no sientes nada de tu creación.] in Clayton Eshleman (trans. and ed.), *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 134–35; 'There are blows in life, so powerful . . . I don't know! / Blows as from the hatred of God; as if, facing them, / the undertow of everything suffered / welled up in the soul . . . I don't know!' [Hay golpes en la vida, tan fuertes . . . ¡Yo no sé! / Golpes como del odio de Dios; como si ante ellos, / la resaca de todo lo sufrido / se empozara en el alma . . . ¡Yo no sé!], pp. 24–25.

11. See T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pp. 59–67. Eliot's essay was originally published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1921.

12. Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, trans. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 37.

13. Octavio Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre: The Poem, The Poetic Revelation, Poetry and History*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 64 (originally published as *El arco y la lira: el poema, la revelación poética, poesía e historia* in 1956). Note also that José Ortega y Gasset, Oswald Spengler, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Ernst Robert Curtius were centrally concerned with the question of 'Rome' even before the polarity Germany/ Europe emerged in the late 1920s. For more on T. S. Eliot and the figure of Rome with respect to the divide between cosmopolitanism and autochthony in US American modernism, see Rodríguez García, pp. 29–32, 37 n. 12, and throughout.

14. Unlike 'modernismo', 'pos(t)modernismo' is not a ubiquitous term within Hispanic literary criticism focused on the early twentieth century. Temporally, posmodernismo follows modernismo and precedes the Latin American avant-gardes, overlapping with them. The term, José Olivio Jiménez reminds us, was first used in Federico de Onís's 1934 *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana (1882–1932)* to classify a number of poets whose work prefigured a rupture with the earlier aesthetic, and included, most notably, women poets such as Delmira Agustini, Alfonsina Storni, and Juana de Ibarbourou, in addition, of course, to Gabriela Mistral. See José Olivio Jiménez, 'Introducción a la poesía modernista hispanoamericana', in José Olivio Jiménez (ed.), *Antología crítica de la poesía modernista hispanoamericana*, 4th edn (Madrid: Hiperión, 1994), 9–51, p. 18.

15. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Michael Whitworth (ed.), *Modernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007). Whitworth's anthology collects and introduces critically representative selections from the work of Rainey and Chinitz as well as Shari Benstock, Janet Wolf, and others.

16. We thank José María Rodríguez García for providing invaluable information for the writing of the last two paragraphs and for his keen editorial eye.

17. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, General Introduction, in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–26 (10). Note that in this quotation deconstruction is made synonymous with radical critique and therefore is not used to denote Derrida's philosophical interpretation of the free play of the linguistic signifier.
18. John M. Fein, *Modernismo in Chilean Literature: The Second Period* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 12.
19. For more on these two important journals, see Fein, pp. 39–89. Fein's book explores the development of these two literary venues and their influence in shaping this second modernista period.
20. *Ibid.* p. 13.
21. According to Fein, 'The work of Baldomero Lillo, Guillermo Labarca, Fernando Santiván, Rafael Maluenda, Augusto D'Halmar, and Federico Gana was the foundation of the mighty edifice of criollismo which was to dominate the Chilean literary horizon for many years until the writers of the 1950's began to shout for its demolition', p. 24.
22. *Ibid.* p. 27.
23. Octavio Paz affirms that 'Spanish modernismo – I am thinking primarily of Valle Inclán, Antonio Machado, and Juan Ramón Jiménez – has more than one point of contact with Spanish American postmodernismo: criticism of stereotyped attitudes and precious clichés, repugnance toward falsely refined language, reticence toward antiquarian symbolism, search for a pure poetry (Jiménez) or an essential poetry (Machado)' (*Children*, p. 98). It is of course interesting that the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío – universally acknowledged as the greatest and most influential modernista poet – would not meet the criteria of completely renouncing 'falsely refined language' and the use of exoticising cultural clichés. The two movements would also exhibit clear differences, particularly in what Paz regards as a stronger use of colloquial and conversational idiom on the Spanish American front: 'In its early stages Spanish modernismo coincided with postmodernista reaction against the literary language of Spanish America's first modernismo; later this opposition developed into a return to the Spanish poetic tradition: the song, the ballad, the copla', *Ibid.* p. 99.
24. Simon Collier and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile, 1080–2002*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 154–7.
25. Fein, p. 27.
26. Naín Nómez, 'Origen y desarrollo de la poesía chilena moderna', in Naín Nómez (ed.), *Antología crítica de la poesía chilena*, vol. 1 (Santiago de Chile: LOM, 1996), 7–46, p. 37.
27. *Ibid.* pp. 37–8.

28. Bernardo Subercaseaux, 'Literatura, nación y nacionalismo', *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 70 (2007): 5–37, p. 6.

29. *Ibid.* p. 7. Subercaseaux rightly reminds us that the literary attempt to be inclusive of marginalised subjects nonetheless perpetuated a masculine position: the marginal or excluded other, in other words, was still predominantly a middleaged man (peasant or city worker). Writers used the figures of the huaso and of the roto (Chileanisms for peasant and low-class urban-dweller, respectively) as emblems of the nation's racial and cultural origins: 'The roto and the huaso, in all their variants and characteristics, expose – as icons of "Chileanness" – the patriarchal and gender partiality proper to nationalism' (p. 11). One of the original contributions of Mistral's work is to have attempted to correct this imbalance by incorporating women, children, and even animals as the main protagonists of her lyric community.

30. *Ibid.* p. 19.

31. Quoted in Fein, p. 26.

32. *Ibid.* p. 26.

33. See Jaime Concha, *Gabriela Mistral* (Madrid: Júcar, 1987), p. 64 n.14. Concha refers specifically to Carlos Pezoa Véliz's 'Entierro de campo', a poem in which a subject on horseback observes from afar and describes a humble burial taking place in the countryside (Pezoa Véliz, *Alma chilena* (Santiago de Chile: Biblioteca Chilena Moderna, 1912), p. 66.

34. Gabriela Mistral, *Desolación* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, [1922] 1988), p. 124.

35. Huyssen, p. 55.

36. *Ibid.* p. 53.

37. *Ibid.* p. 53.

38. John T. Matthews, *A Companion to the Modern American Novel 1900–1950* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 327.

39. *Ibid.* p. 327.

40. These texts comprise mainly essays, open letters, poetic prose and literary criticism published in newspapers and magazines throughout the American continent and Europe. For a thematically organised catalogue of her prose, see Luis Alberto Ganderats (ed.), *Antología mayor*, vol. 4 [Vida y obra] (Santiago de Chile: Cochrane, 1992).

41. The professionalisation of the Latin American writer is a process already underway in the late nineteenth century: 'From an institutional point of view, modernismo was characterized by the progressive professionalization of Latin American intellectuals. The "commerce" of writing

(in most cases writers were journalists or worked as scribes for their respective governments) is a recurring topic in the prose of the time and the figure of the writer, of the artist, frequently becomes a topic in poetry.’ The foregoing quotation is from Graciela Montaldo and Nelson Osorio Tejeda, ‘El modernismo en Hispanoamérica’, in José Ramón Medina (ed.), *Diccionario enciclopédico de las letras de América Latina (DELAL)*, vol. 2 (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho/Monte Ávila Editores Latinoamericana, 1995), 3184–91, p. 3187.

42. In the influential Chilean anthology, *Selva lírica* of 1917, which aimed to map out the state of Chilean poetry around the time of the centenary, Gabriela Mistral is one of two women and one of the youngest poets to be included in the first section of the book, which grouped various modern poets of the time (called *los neolíricos*). The editors regard Mistral among the very best in Chilean letters: ‘her relatively sparse yet decisive production has placed her . . . at the top of that group of six distinguished poets which are the greatest in Chile’s history’. See Julio Molina Núñez and Juan Agustín Araya (eds.), *Selva lírica* (Santiago de Chile: Soc. Imp. y Lit. Universo, 1917), p. 156

43. Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, trans. John D. Blanco (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 113.

44. For more on the particular relationship between modernity and Latin American women writers, see Alicia Salomone, *Modernidad en otro tono: escritura de mujeres latinoamericanas, 1920–1950* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2004).

45. Nelly Richard, *Feminismo, género y diferencia* (Santiago de Chile: Palinodia, 2008), p. 21.

46. *Ibid.* p. 24.

47. Gabriela Mistral, ‘Introducción a estas “Lecturas para mujeres” ’ [1923], in Gabriela Mistral (ed.), *Lecturas para mujeres* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1967), xiii-xx, p. xviii.

48. Gabriela Mistral, ‘El patriotismo de esta hora’ [1919], in Pedro Pablo Zegers B. (ed.), *Recopilación de la obra mistraliana 1902–1922* (Santiago de Chile: RIL, 2002), 347–50, p. 348.

49. *Ibid.* p. 349.

50. *Ibid.* p. 331.

51. Mistral’s multidimensional and transnational participation in the public sphere is, considering her gender and class, foundational. The disruption that her work as a professional intellectual represents to the concept of ‘men of letters’ can be observed in the words of the highly regarded scholar and critic Pedro Henríquez Ureña: ‘The men of letters – literature not being really a profession, but an avocation – became journalists or teachers or both . . . Some obtained diplomatic or consular posts; the custom is maintained to this day, and it includes women now, such as the Chileans Gabriela Mistral and Marta Brunet, the Cuban Flora Díaz Parrado and the Colombian Laura Victoria’ (*Literary Currents in Hispanic America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 161.

52. Gabriela Mistral, 'La Reforma Educacional de México' [1925], in Pedro Pablo Zegers B. (ed.), *Gabriela y México* (Santiago de Chile: RIL, 2007), 159–65, p. 165.
53. Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John C. Chasteen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 101.
54. *Ibid.* p. 102.
55. Mistral, 'Oración a los obreros' [1921], in Mistral, *Recopilación*, 468–70, p. 468.
56. Gabriela Mistral, 'La lengua de Martí' [1934], in Roque E. Scarpa (ed.), *Gabriela piensa en* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1978), 163–76, p. 163.
57. Gabriela Mistral, quoted in Jorge Benítez, *Gabriela anda La Habana: a medio caminar el olvido y la memoria* (Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones, 1998), p. 76.
58. Gabriela Mistral, 'Conference, Santiago, 1954' (audio), accessed 17 July 2011, <http://salamistral.salasvirtuales.cl/>.
59. Gabriela Mistral, 'Aquella tarde con Gabriela Mistral', Interview with Rafael Heliodoro Valle, *Repertorio Americano*, 16 April 1923: 2–5, p.3.
60. This relationship between politics and literature represents a change from the previous generation of modernista writers such as Rubén Darío, when 'the attitude demanded from these intellectuals by the political realm [during the fin de siècle] constitutes a real and heavy burden that does not allow for any peace and that draws them away from an exclusive engagement with matters of "the spirit" ' [las cuestiones 'del espíritu'] (Graciela Montaldo, *Ficciones culturales y fábulas de identidad en América Latina* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo, 1999), p. 94.
61. This paragraph has benefited from José María Rodríguez García's detailed comments on an earlier draft of the present essay. After her two-year stay in Mexico as an educational consultant, Mistral's work gradually approximates that of a professional intellectual. Her activity increases and diversifies as she continues to write in newspapers, serves as diplomat, gives lectures, and is employed by international organisations such as the Intellectual Cooperation Institute of the League of Nations and the Institute of Educational Cinematography of Rome, UNESCO, among others.