

UNREPENTANT TRAVELER, ACCIDENTAL DIPLOMAT,  
TRIUMPHANT NOBEL: GABRIELA MISTRAL IN WARTIME BRAZIL

*VIAJERA IMPENITENTE, DIPLOMÁTICA ACCIDENTAL Y EL  
TRIUNFO DEL NOBEL: GABRIELA MISTRAL EN BRASIL EN  
TIEMPO DE GUERRA*

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ABSTRACT

This study reveals the strategies behind Gabriela Mistral's literary and consular activities in Brazil during the two and a half year period leading up to that nation's declaring war against the Axis (Germany and Italy) in August of 1942. Mistral's allies within Itamaraty helped make her a public representative of anti-fascism during this time. They facilitated the translation and publication of her work in Brazil, and her addresses to the Brazilian academies and contacts with other writers, where the Chilean writer shows a clear understanding of Brazil's importance to the war's outcome. At the same time as Mistral's wartime discourse in Brazil decisively influenced her successful Nobel Prize candidacy, her correspondence registers her increasingly acute estrangement from Chile, including strained relations with Pedro Aguirre Cerda amid her grave concern for Chile's wartime foreign policy. To counter the atmosphere of mistrust and the documented insecurity of her wartime correspondence, Gabriela Mistral systematically expanded her already immense social network. She moved from the fishbowl of Río to the stronghold of Petrópolis, where she made her homes into way-stations for debriefing anti-fascist travelers in the circuit to and from Washington D.C. In all, during Mistral's residence in Brazil she served multiple masters and uniquely bridged otherwise non-overlapping, outlying nodes of writer-diplomats, war refugees, translators, performers, and more.

KEY WORDS: *Gabriela Mistral, Politics and literature, Chile, Politics and literature, Brazil, World War 2, Latin America, Diplomacy, Nobel Prize.*

## RESUMEN

Este artículo revela las estrategias detrás de las actividades literarias y en el Consulado de Gabriela Mistral en Brasil durante el periodo de dos años y medio, los que terminan en la declamación de guerra en contra del “Eje” (Alemania e Italia) en agosto del 1942. Los aliados de Mistral dentro de Itamaraty le ayudaron a convertirse en representante público del anti-fascismo en ésta época. Facilitaron la traducción y publicación de su trabajo en Brasil, y sus comunicaciones a la academia brasileña y sus contactos con otros escritores, donde la escritora chilena demostró una clara comprensión del papel de Brasil en el desenlace de la guerra. Al mismo tiempo que el discurso durante la guerra de Mistral en Brasil influyó en su candidatura para el Premio Nobel, sus correspondencias registran su distanciamiento (que aumentaba) con Chile, incluyendo una relación tensa con Pedro Aguirre Cerda debido a su preocupación sobre la política chilena frente la guerra internacional. Para responder a una atmósfera de desconfianza junto con la inseguridad documentada dentro de sus cartas durante la guerra, Mistral expande, de manera sistemática, sus redes, las que ya eran inmensas. Se cambió de Río al fuerte de Petrópolis, donde convirtió sus casas en “way-stations” para informar a viajeros antifascistas en el circuito hacia y desde Washington D.C. Durante la residencia de Mistral en Brasil, sirvió a varios “amos” y creó puentes entre nodos de escritores-diplomáticos, refugiados, traductores, performers entre otros.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gabriela Mistral, política y literatura, Chile, Brasil, Segunda Guerra Mundial, América latina, diplomacia, Premio Nobel.

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*“Pai!/ Conta mais uma vez/como é que era mesmo o Brasil”*

(Bopp, “*Versos de um cônsul*”)

As war broke out across Europe, Brazil presented Mistral with an apparently ideal site from which to promote the anti-fascist cause.<sup>1</sup> As she knew the dangers of sailing from Bordeaux to Lisbon and on to Río de Janeiro in March of 1940, Mistral scrawled out a will that left most of her considerable estate to the fourteen-year-old Juan Miguel, who joined her and the Puerto Rican Consuelo “Connie” Saleva, whom

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Mistral had earlier described as “medio secretaria, medio enfermera” (GM/PAC, 30 dic 1936). Crossing the Atlantic, their ship dodging U-boat patrols and surface raiders, the two women probably felt well prepared to staff the consulate in Niteroi. Thanks to Mistral’s two years in Lisbon followed by six months in Brazil (1935-37), she and “Connie” had a reasonable command of Portuguese. They knew that Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas was a dictator in all but name: in November of 1937, they’d quickly left Río de Janeiro and relocated to São Paulo two days ahead of the coup that had created the *Estado Novo*. Knowing to avoid any direct comment on the matter, she’d written to her consular supervisor, Carlos Errázuriz, expressing dismay that friends and foes were dragging her into politics (GM/CE, dic. 1937).

The poet’s friends in Brazil knew to sweeten her reception and excite the public’s anticipation. She’d scarcely left France when São Paulo writer Mario de Andrade, employed in the Education Ministry, announced her Nobel candidacy in the press (quoted in Pizarro 19). When the poet’s ship docked in Río on 12 April 1940, newspapers confirmed the poet’s well-established status as an icon of travel by printing photos of Mistral alongside Consuelo Saleva (figure 1).

Few studies consider Mistral’s five and a half years’ residence in wartime Brazil in any depth, exposing the contradictions of a leading anti-fascist writer’s uneasy cooperation with a government that included pro-Nazi figures such as Río’s all-powerful chief of Police, Filinto Strubing Müller, “*uma das estrelas principais da constelacio estado-novense,*” who chose his subordinates from the dregs of the army (Hilton, *Oswaldo* 265). Müller’s exaggeration of the communist threat had encouraged Vargas’s declaration of the *Estado Novo*, turning the “provisional” government into a dictatorship. Another open admirer of the Reich was Brazilian Justice Minister Francisco Campos, who’d organized brownshirts in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Defense Minister Goés Monteiro sought armaments and made secret deals with German-based Krupp manufacturers. “*As tendencias profundamente antidemocráticas de todos esses homens eran indisfarçáveis,*” remarks Hilton in one of several well-sourced accounts (*Oswaldo* 265).

Admiring Mistral as a primarily literary figure who also engaged in acts of public charity begs the question not just of her ability to engage in what Aizenberg calls “consul-speak,” but of how she actively used her politico-diplomatic status in wartime (118, 120, 133). She conspicuously chose consular sites—Lisbon, Nice, and Río de Janeiro—that boiled with spies and let her work, often covertly, in collaboration with others on behalf of war refugees (Horan, *Una Mixtura*). The present study builds on Ana Pizarro’s detailed summary, in *Proyecto*, of Mistral’s friendships with Brazilian poets, and joins in Pizarro’s call for deeper analysis of Brazil’s impact on Mistral’s work and thought: “el desconocimiento de la etapa brasileña oscurece formas importantes de comprensión del discurso de Mistral” (“Hispanoamérica,” 57). Other answers to that challenge include Peña’s literary study of Mistral’s poetics alongside

those of her friend, the Brazilian poet Cecilia Meireles. Relatedly, Pellegrino Soares demonstrates how Mistral's and Meireles' shared interests in children's literature and libraries developed and operated both within and beyond state-sanctioned educational and populist contexts. Gazarian-Gautier notes the poet's contacts with displaced European intellectuals who'd relocated to Rio and Petropolis and avers that "Gabriela nunca perteneció al cenáculo literario brasileño presidido por el príncipe don Pedro, nieto del emperador del mismo nombre" (72). Especially useful is Luiza Moreira's micro-historical analysis of the Brazilian politico-diplomatic power relations underlying the Portuguese-language newspaper publication of work by Mistral and other Frente-Popular-identified Americanist intellectuals. The present work combines these previous studies with a triangulation of archival materials, memoirs, and well-sourced historical narratives to reveal the political and diplomatic conditions that governed Mistral's move to and residence in Brazil. These polyphonic sources both document and justify the poet's obsessions with the security of her mail as she alerted friends and colleagues about fascist influence in neutral Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Delivering such warnings was among her uppermost concerns, prominent among the several reasons that Mistral relocated first to Rio and then to Petrópolis.

#### CONTEXTS FROM IR (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) THEORY

Mistral's travel to Brazil was a calculated gamble for a stable consular post for the duration of the war. As she'd earlier tried and failed to secure a post in the United States, she came to Brazil knowing that her diplomatic survival depended on her proximity to power. Within International Relations, Sharp identifies the "radical" school of thought as arguing that proximity to power leads people enter diplomacy "for much the same reason as Willie Sutton is said to have robbed banks: because that's where the power is" (51). Little wonder, then, that Mistral sought out the Chancellor of Itamaraty, Oswaldo Aranha, who led the pro-US faction within the Presidential Cabinet. In contrast to skeptics who regarded Mistral's consular position as ornamental or accidental, that is, inessential, Itamaraty recognized her diplomacy as accidental in the musical sense: the tone of her actions markedly differed from both the sharps—ephemeral elected politicians like González Videla, who accepted Ambassadorships while awaiting a run for the Presidency—and from the flats—the permanent government of toiling civil servants who don't rotate with figures in power. Unlike both groups, Gabriela Mistral actively preferred living abroad, and she had become a consul in part because it enabled her to pass easily over borders, working as a foreign correspondent and in international organizations.

IR theorists Sharp, Der Derian and Constantinou regard estrangement, separateness and "in-betweenness" as defining conditions for the diplomat. These very conditions mark the poet's stance from her earliest publications. Loosely linked to

these are the conditions of sexual indeterminacy or “intrasexualidad” (in Marañón’s language of the time, which Mistral’s friend Augusto Iglesias takes up) that likewise characterize her earlier work and that interviewers regularly noted in her demeanor. Similar conditions mark the writings of the two poet-diplomats with whom the writer was in steady contact by 1917: the Mexican Amado Nervo, author of “La Amada Inmóvil” and the Uruguayan Alberto Nin-Frias, who by the early 1920s was writing and publishing the first openly homoerotic novels in the Spanish language.

An underlying pattern and strategy for remaining abroad informs all of Mistral’s diplomatic travels and changes of residence. She had perfected that strategy by the time of her move to Brazil. Beginning with her consular residence in Spain (1933-1935), Gabriela Mistral had learned to identify and simultaneously serve three different masters. The first was nearby, in the host country; the second was in the place she planned to move after that, and the third was in Santiago, responding to requests from afar. Shifting between these masters, Mistral’s diplomatic travel became a waltz that began with the writer’s scanning the ranks of influential writer-diplomats. She used personal letters and the media to ensure a favorable reception from potential partners. Without that favorable reception from her hosts, the dance music would halt, as she’d found when the Mussolini regime declined to recognize her 1932 appointment as Chilean consul to Naples. She did not care to repeat that experience, which left her footing the bill for her travel and moving expenses as well as the lodgings and consular office that she’d rented and furnished at her own expense.

That diplomatic waltz was necessary. Despite the 1935 legislation that made Gabriela Mistral (Lucila Godoy) a Chilean consul for life with the freedom to choose her residence, she always had to work to ensure her host country’s recognition of her consular status. To do so, she sought to ally herself with the most politically influential writer-diplomat or politician available in the country where she planned to move. At the same time, she cultivated similar allies, masters or waltz partners in the site to which she next aspired. Her experience in Spain had taught her not to move without having first identified and cultivated her escape-hatch. Meanwhile, Mistral turned to her third and most distant master (or partner, ally, or set of masters) in Santiago: the well-placed friends on whom she counted to press her interests with the Chilean Foreign Ministry, which had to ratify her choice before her exequatur (i.e., funds) would be released. The celebrated 1935 law didn’t guarantee Santiago’s acquiescence or support, as she learned in 1946, when the Chilean Consul General in Los Angeles, California effectively pushed her out, despite her status as recent Nobel Laureate, despite the approval from the US State Department, and despite a recent chummy photograph with President Truman (Horan, “Clandestinidades”).

On learning of Germany’s blitzkrieg attack on Poland, Mistral re-initiated contact with Itamaraty, presenting her plans for moving to Brazil. As August 1939 ended, Europe’s so-called “*drôle de guerre*” was beginning as the poet awaited

Connie's arrival with Juan Miguel from Geneva. Mistral turned to the Brazilian poet Rui Ribeiro Couto, who'd befriended her ten years earlier, during his first diplomatic post, an honorary consulate in Marseilles. He'd since returned to Brazil and was now working as Chancellor Oswaldo Aranha's private secretary. From Nice, Mistral sent Ribeiro Couto a copy of her latest volume, *Tala*, with her compliments. In that volume Mistral commemorates the origins of their friendship in her nostalgic "País de la Ausencia," published with a dedication to Ribeiro Couto. Many poems in *Tala* register their shared Americanism as a fusion of Iberian or Mediterranean classicism with Indian primitivism: "Ribeiro Couto comulgaba los temas relativos a la gente simple, las vidas anónimas de los pueblos" (Pizarro 67).

Mistral's letter to Ribeiro Couto contains queries that he likely shared with his boss, as when the poet inquires how "a Chilean couple" might go about purchasing a half-million francs' worth of farmland in Rio Grande do Sul? The letter acknowledges Brazil's immigration restrictions by asserting that this couple—clearly fictive—is not Jewish. Mistral effectively but indirectly admits that the query reflect her own self-interest: "yo, criatura errante, adoro la tierra, el aire y el resplandor de su país que veo despierta y dormida, siempre.... Ud. sabe que esta india-vasca es poco efusiva. Y vea Ud.. ...En realidad, lo que quieren mis paisanos es lo que los argentinos llaman una "parcela," con una casa mediana, habitable, que es lo que nosotros llamamos "finca," un poco mas que la granja francesa. (GM/RC, 30 ago 1939).

Ribeiro Couto was part of a network of Brazilian friends located in and near Itamaraty whom Mistral shared and somewhat inherited from the writer Alfonso Reyes, who was Mistral's prime mentor in diplomacy, and who'd very happily served as Mexico's Ambassador to Brazil from 1930-1938. That network of friends had welcomed Mistral to Brazil in 1937: it included the writers Cecilia Meireles, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge de Lima, Murilo Mendes, Alceu Amoroso Lima, and Manuel Bandeira. At the conclusion of that earlier visit, Mistral's enthusiastic embrace of Portuguese included her translating work by several of these and other writers into Spanish, which is just the tip of the iceberg in this still-unpublished literary vein (GM/CE, dic. 1937).

Mistral's contacts in Washington made her keenly aware that Brazil would be impacted by the Roosevelt administration's decision to scuttle and replace "gunboat diplomacy" with "the Good Neighbor Policy" of concern and economic assistance for Latin American nations. Ironically, the U.S. became a far better "Good Neighbor" to Brazil than originally intended. Three-quarters of all U.S. WW II aid to Latin America went to Brazil. The funds that underwrote the construction of ports, airfields, railways and roads also subsidized the exchange programs that brought several of Mistral's close friends to Washington and that also brought many US-based journalists to Brazil. Some of these programs operated through the offices of Mistral's friends in the Washington DC-based Pan American Union (today, the OAS). A timely sign of Washington's support

for Mistral's overtures to Itamaraty was the March 1940 issue of the *Pan American Bulletin*: they printed her recent "Salto de Laja" on the page facing the speech that Chancellor Aranha had delivered on signing agreements pledging Brazil's cooperation to join the United States in protecting the hemisphere from aggression.

#### OSWALDO ARANHA, GETÚLIO VARGAS, AND FILINTO STRUBING MULLER

The interests of Oswaldo Aranha, Brazil's tall, lanky, movie-star handsome Chancellor of Foreign Affairs ensured Mistral's favorable reception in Brazil. Like Getúlio Vargas, Aranha came from the cattle-raising province of Rio Grande do Sul. A gaúcho who'd grown up on a huge ranch amid a numerous family, Aranha loyally served Vargas despite the two men's being opposites. Aranha was a man of action rather than ideology, a classic liberal, trained in law, a diplomat whose non-diplomatic qualities included delivering very emotional speeches (Hilton, *Oswaldo* 9). Vargas, by contrast, was a short, cigar-smoking, scheming politician, self-proclaimed populist and "Father of the Poor" who often sympathized with Europe's fascists.

Alfonso Reyes, who knew and worked with both men, compared Vargas's political methods to fishing for Amazonian *piraracú*: "Primero los deja actuar, los lleva a donde los quiere tener y después da el golpe final" (Reyes qtd in Perea). Aranha's career ran in close parallel to Vargas's rise to near-absolute power. During Aranha's first elective office as *intendente* of the small town of Alegrete, he'd emerged, a skilled equestrian, leading men in the field during the 1930 "October Revolution" that ended with Getúlio Vargas heading a "provisional government." Vargas appointed Aranha first to serve as Minister of the Treasury and then to reorganize the Justice Ministry. His next post proved transformative. As Brazil's Ambassador to the US from 1934-1938, Aranha overcame his lack of previous diplomatic experience. He developed a personal friendship with Franklin Delano Roosevelt and spent two summers driving all over the United States. A fervent admirer of U.S. democracy, Aranha wasn't in Brazil during the November 1937 coup when Getúlio Vargas closed Congress, scuttled the Constitution, cancelled elections and established rigorous censorship, factors that led the *Boston Post* and *New York Times* to describe Brazil as a fascist state (Hilton, *Oswaldo* 265).

In March 1938, shortly after Hitler annexed Austria, Vargas named Aranha to head Itamaraty, but the self-proclaimed "Father of the Poor" retained all decision-making for Brazil's foreign policy. Otherwise, Aranha would have been second-in-line for the Presidency. As Vargas sought to exploit the war to maximum Machiavellian effect, he declared Brazil's neutrality and named a cabinet that split down the middle. Aranha led the pro-American faction, in contrast to the openly pro-Nazi sentiment among the police, defense and security forces.

In effect, Mistral's 1940 arrival found Brazil in a state of war: police agents operated with impunity, free of any judicial oversight, regularly detaining, torturing and killing suspected communists. Diplomats up to and including Chancellor Aranha suffered police harassment. Aranha sent Vargas detailed complaints about "*as torpezas e misérias dessa Polícia, que não respeitou minha casa, minha família nem minha villa*" (Hilton, *Oswaldo* 355). The police also singled out Chilean Ambassador Mariano Fontecilla: "*O que provocou a reclamação foi o fato de agentes policiais, apesar da intervenção de Aranha, estarem ostensivamente acompanhando os passos do embaixador do Chile, que dera asilo a alguém procurado pela polícia. O chanceler escrevia a carta enquanto o embaixador esperava na ante-sala como medo de sair do Itamaraty*" (Ibid). Spurring this activity was competition between Germany and the US for access to Brazil's strategic resources and access to the South Atlantic, vital to staging the war's expansion from Europe into North Africa. By mid-1940, Rio, Recife and Santos had all become midway stations and prime posts for clandestine operations among competing powers (Hilton, *Suástica* 25).

#### ANTI-FASCIST GOOD NEIGHBORS IN THE PALACE OF ITAMARATY

With her slowly, oscillating walk, Gabriela Mistral approached Itamaraty's soaring pink pillars and perfectly symmetrical central portico. Palms towered over the reflecting pool that stretched out to meet her. Ribeiro Couto ushered Mistral through the white, plantation-shuttered doors. He introduced her to the head of Brazil's newly formed department for publishing and propaganda, the DIP (Departamento da Imprensa e Propaganda) at her service. From shortly after her arrival and throughout her residence, Themistocles da Graca Aranha (the son of a famous writer) complied with Mistral's various instructions and requests.

The poet initially rented a house in on Avenida Tijuca in Rio de Janeiro, next to the botanical garden, "en una de las colinas más altas de la ciudad, al lado del Corcovado". Euphoric, the poet wrote to Victoria Ocampo: "con mis dos muros vegetales de montaña espesa a cada lado, me he preguntado, con un llanto caliente en la garganta, qué he hecho yo catorce años en Europa!" (GM/VO, 19 mayo 1940). A visitor from France, the Hispanist Henri Focillon, observed the clouds of butterflies that descended from the forests of the neighboring mountain, stringing along the vines; the occasional breeze set their papery wings lightly aflutter. But this hilltop aerie did not isolate her from the war. To avoid Brazil's ruinous exchange rate, Mistral divided her funds between accounts that Palma Guillén monitored in Switzerland and New York. With the fall of France, Mistral returned to the theme of the traitor and the hero: "Muy bien que busquen y castiguen traidores, pero los suyos deben ir adelante: son los más y los menos imperdonables... en Niza, vi cosas que avergüenzan del ser humano..." (GM/VO, 19 mayo 1940). Her ears humming with the "versos cursis" of "Virgen del



mundo, América inocente,” she warned against “. . . la quinta columna, en cada uno de nuestros pueblos, y hay otra que no alcanza a ser lonja, de gente lúcida, que ve y tiene calofrío, no de susto, de horror” (Ibid.) Two weeks later, she told friends in Uruguay to resist the racism and colonialism of “la marejada totalitaria. . . la nueva demagogia, mucho peor que las criollas. . . no habla de nosotros como de pueblos sino de meras fuentes o de cornucopias llenas a rebosar . . . . Para el continente padre del racismo no tenemos nosotros semblante racial honorable. . . somos ramas quebradizas por aisladas” (“Recado sobre herodismo criollo”).

In contrast to Itamaraty’s welcome to (some) foreign guests, Getúlio Vargas launched a patriotic campaign of “*brasilidade*” that extolled the virtues of Brazilian culture to encourage unity within the country. The campaign restricted cultural expression in its prohibitions on foreign language clubs, schools, and newspapers (Morris, *Odysey* 180). First-person accounts of Jewish refugees, printed in Morris, provide grim evidence that their terror of the Brazilian police was fully justified. Argentine writer María Rosa Oliver shared that terror when she traveled by train along the Paraná, en route to visiting Mistral in mid-1942: writing to her mother, she detailed the repeated searches that she and her fellow travelers endured: “Oh, la policia brasilera. . . hay que evitarla a todo precio!” (Oliver).

#### ICE-CREAM WITH MARIANO FONTECILLA, THE CHILEAN AMBASSADOR TO BRAZIL

The formal reception of Mistral’s credential letters at the Chilean Embassy in Rio is documented in a set of black-and-white professional photos. The event began out of doors under gleaming summer-white umbrellas, where dark foliage contrasts with the low, gray, grainy walls surrounding the mute building. Perhaps a rainstorm led the group to move inside where a candid snapshot shows them finishing their ice cream [figure 2]. Towards the end of this moderately friendly encounter, the Embassy staff reminded her of her duty to keep Ministry in Santiago informed of her actions, as is shown in Mistral’s letters on the following day. Where the Ambassador likely spoke of Mistral’s Nobel Prize nomination as an honor to Chile, Mistral downplayed the likelihood of her receiving the prize, and preferred continental, as opposed to nationalistic gestures. “Nunca tuve optimismo,” she wrote, expressing hope that “un acto continental” would promote “la casi unidad de nuestra raza” (GM/Cristóbal Saenz, 29 mayo 1940). This put the consul’s anti-fascist politics on the table. Unlike an Ambassador, who was professionally obliged to support Chile’s official neutrality, this consul could and would think as she wished.

Mistral’s self-confident diplomacy was that of an envoy who’d now twice declined appointments to serve at the level of an Ambassador. She took pains to appear cooperative, as she’d earlier explained to a friend in England: “Mi Gobierno ha hecho,

sin consultarme para nada, la presentación de mi candidatura al Premio Nobel, a través de la Facultad de Filosofía de nuestra Universidad. Yo estoy en una situación un poco delicada con el Presidente: he rehusado dos cargos diplomáticos que me ha ofrecido y él está algo resentido conmigo. No puedo pues, desautorizar esa presentación ordenada por el Presidente” (GM/W. Entwistle, 24 enero 1940). Mistral joked that Aguirre Cerda’s promoting her Nobel Prize candidacy would produce a reverse stampede of cooperation among compatriots who’d previously conspired against her: “el criollo es tan adulator, se han movido por él, por complacerlo y además, por parecer generosos, los que están en culpa conmigo por sus viejas intrigas” (GM/M. Petit, 28 enero 1940).

Mistral wasn’t in joking mood during the formal reception in the Chilean Embassy in Rio, which took place shortly after the fall of France. The consul reminded her colleagues that she’d left France as soon as they’d sent her travel tickets, and that while Santiago might prioritize her Nobel candidacy, she’d been helping her stranded compatriots. “Tal vez el Ministerio retardó mis pasajes en el deseo que yo me ocupase directamente de diligencias editoriales. Me hubiese quedado en Francia por otras razones que estas literarias (nunca di a mi obra la trascendencia que los demás le ha dado); pero el Consulado en Niza pasó a ser una oficina inútil con la guerra. Despaché a los chilenos pobres que quisieron repatriarse y que era toda mi preocupación” (GM/Marcelo Ruíz, 29 mayo 1940).

During or shortly after the Embassy meeting, Mistral learned that the French edition of her poems was well underway, as arranged by Chile’s new Minister in France, Gabriel González Videla, her fellow provincial, through Madame Palma Guillén in Geneva. The translated edition proved a very sore point for Mistral, even though she had been the first one to stress the need for a book-length translation. Shortly after the machinery of the Nobel Prize ratcheted into gear—between Christmas of 1939 and New Year’s of 1940—Mistral had observed that “La Academia Sueca no puede premiar, ni con su mejor buena voluntad, a un autor no traducido en libro, al inglés 1º y al francés en segundo términos” (GM/M. Petit, 28 enero 1940). To this end, Mistral had named two well-regarded French-based translators, Francis Miomandre and Mathilde Pomes. The latter had just spent that Christmas with Mistral in Nice, while bombers flew overhead, the city distributed sandbags, and refugees flooded in, anxious to leave Europe.

The scenes of corruption that Mistral witnessed in wartime France alerted her to collaborators and resolved her against trusting the police, the judiciary, the camp officials and quite likely her diplomatic colleagues. Or perhaps she’d never received and thus never answered the letters from González Videla. In either event, she was aghast to learn that the French translations had been suspended and that “según los hábitos criollos” her translator, Matilde Pomes, might not be paid. Mistral strongly objected. “No es posible hacer chacota con gente seria. Jugar así con gente seria de Europa en un viejo hábito que desprestigia allá lo sudamericano” (GM/Juan Mujica, junio 1940).

Writing several decades later in his *Memorias*, Gabriel González Videla defends his role in promoting Mistral's Nobel Prize from France. He shows more audacity than  *finesse*. While he writes of having leapt at the chance to serve his nation and President Aguirre Cerda, he delegated the President's charge to his cultural attaché, Salvador Reyes. Without consulting the poet, Reyes had approached Mistral's former colleagues at the Instituto de Cooperación Internacional. Reyes was apparently unaware that *L'Institut* had already voted, so to speak, by reiterating its ongoing support for the eternal Nobel candidacies of its two senior-most French members: Paul Valery and Georges Duhamel. (The Nobel Prize Database shows that Mistral was right to guess that two long-time colleagues would be her present and future rivals for the Nobel (Database; GM/M. Petit, 28 mayo 1940)).

As the poet left Nice and Germany's tanks rolled towards the Channel, the Chilean Embassy to France made some quick phone calls that led to café conversations that produced the names of Mistral's French rivals. Despite his desire to delegate, only González Videla could sign the checks that went out in these tense days.

At the reception at the Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, Mistral picked up a letter from the "official" translator Francis Miomandre. Writing on the eve of Holland's surrender, Miomandre cushioned the blow with indirect, elegant phrasing. He purred that her verses, the volume translated into French needed a preface, and that Paul Claudel would be sought. Or, if not him, then Paul Valéry, not because "*ces écrivains sont illustres, mais parce que l'autorité de leur nom sera plus utile au succès du livre*" (Miomandre).

In fact, the preface was already written and paid for. Portents of that event's impact appear in the margin of the note from Miomandre, where Chilean poet jotted down a set of figures that represent the small sum that she had just realized from the sale of her house in Santiago's Población Huemul, minus the various taxes and exchange rate surcharges that would have been levied (Frei *Memorias* 108-109). Mistral's penny pinching stands in stark contrast to the Chilean Minister's largesse in paying for Valery's three-page preface. Only much later, with studied carelessness, do González Videla's *Memorias* tally up a sum that wasn't at all stingy (*Memorias* 331-35; Iglesias 331). 50,000 francs! Mistral was irate. This was more than what she received for a full year of consular service in wartime Nice, and more than twice what she and Ocampo had earned from *Tala* and had donated to aid Spanish war orphans (Horan, "Una Mixtura"). If later rumors are to be believed, the publisher of her French verses even asked the Chilean Embassy to subsidize the printing of this volume by "una poetisa desconocida" (Gómez Bravo 89).

Distraught to learn that her poems would appear with a French preface from Valery, Gabriela Mistral begged her original translator to intervene. "Yo soy una primitiva, una hija de país de ayer, una mestiza y cien cosas más que están al margen de Valéry" (GM/M. Pomes, ~ junio 1940). She had not read the prologue, yet insisted that

if the book had already been printed, it should be repressed and more; "...me obligaría usted a algo muy feo: a cortar el prólogo de los libros uno por uno" (GM/M. Pomes, antes del ago. 1942). Valery's text confirms the Chilean poet's suspicions. He opens mildly, stating his doubts about his qualifications to effectively present "una obra tan distante como ésta de los gustos, ideales y hábitos que se me conocen en materia de poesía" (Valéry). Three pages later, he's still quite inconclusive as to what, if anything, he understands of Latin America.

"NO PUEDO TOMAR EN SERIO ESO DE PN [PREMIO NOBEL]... ESA AVENTURA CRIOLLA DE PN REALIZADA EN CRIOLLO" (GM/M. PETIT, 28 ENERO 1940)

A successful Nobel Prize campaign involves talent and luck along with literary, political and diplomatic skills of the highest order. Nurturing Mistral's campaign was the Ecuadorian Foreign Relations Minister Gonzálo Zaldumbide, who set his close associate, the writer Adelaida Velasco Galdós, to the task; she later recalls that she soon presented the idea to Pedro Aguirre Cerda (Velasco/GM, 10 nov 1954). Meanwhile, Mistral recognized that Ecuador's role made her nomination far more viable for having originated from beyond her country of origin (GM/Velasco, 12 sept 1939).

Deeply hidden European connections, crucial to Mistral's case, appear in the allegiances within the Swedish Academy. The Swedish philologist and translator Carl August Hagberg was a "miembro corresponsal de la Real Academia de Bellas Letras de Barcelona", whom a Swedish consul had recommended back in 1928, while predicting that "le sería muy grato a más de un miembro del Comité Nobel poder entregar el premio a algún autor que no tuviera la ventaja de ser europeo y muy especialmente a un sud-americano o a una sud-americana" (Schonmeyr).

It immeasurably helped Mistral's case that two of her strongest advocates in the Swedish Academy were translators. Corinne Pernet, who has examined the dossier, indicates that Hagberg prepared the section with expert reports, writing a lengthy evaluation, and that he'd personally translated "Poema del Hijo" while Academy's Secretary, Hjalmar Gullberg, translated some of her early poems into Swedish for a major literary magazine (Pernet). Sentimentality likely influenced Hagberg's taste, writes Pernet: he felt bitterly the stigma he'd suffered as a child whose biological parents had relinquished him for adoption as the product of illicit affair, he became the poet's fierce advocate. Both his lengthy evaluation and eighty pages of Mistral's poetry translated into Swedish helped guide his colleagues; Pernet contrasts these to the scant four pages of comments that accompanied the unsuccessful nomination of Alfonso Reyes in 1949 (Pernet).

Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs acted decisively in the poet's favor by sending to Stockholm the poet's good friend, consular supervisor and recent host in

Chile, Carlos Errázuriz. He took direct charge of collecting the dossier, meticulously keying the letters of nomination to the Nobel Prize criteria. Mistral's file thus opens, chronologically, on 12 January 1940, with a letter of nomination from the Facultad de Filosofía at the Universidad de Chile, dated two months earlier by its secretary, Yolando Pino and Décano, Luis Galdames (Pernet; Mistral, Nobel Dossier). Three days later, Errázuriz filed a second letter of nomination from the Instituto Cultural Germano-Chileno, an institution that was distributing Nazi propaganda as late as November of 1939: would Mistral have complained of its addition to the dossier, had she known?

Errázuriz wisely heeded Mistral's indication to seek letters of support from scholars in the Caribbean and Central America: "son países de muchos odios literarios, pero tienen sus islas limpias y secas, como todos" (GM/Juan Mujica, July 1940). The dossier next featured telegrams of adherence that arrived from Havana, San Salvador, Quito, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and from some National Committees of Intellectual Cooperation. The most substantial and thoughtful letters of support sent to Stockholm, listed in the Nobel Prize Database, come from the leaders of Brazil's literary academies: Celso Viera of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, an early and influential supporter, supplies an extended letter, while Afonso Costa of the Academia Carioca de Letras reiterated that support one year later in a detailed statement, a thoughtful eleven points about the merits of Gabriela Mistral's writing (Pernet; Mistral, Nobel Dossier). Without these heavy hitters from Sweden and Brazil, without Mistral's courting and speaking to numerous cultural and academic groups in Brazil, and without Carlos Errázuriz's personal attentions to developing the dossier, Mistral probably would not have won the Nobel.

#### UFANISMO AND ITS INVERSE OR ABSENCE

*Ufanismo* is the hyperbolic praise of Brazil's natural resources and geography (Sadler 4-5). It might be the opposite of the cool-headed Europeanism that Mistral found in France. *Ufanismo* underlies her first years in Brazil, with her return to botanical themes. Her previous concern for land reform is translated into celebration of Brazil's land, curiously bereft of cultivators or colonists. For Gabriela, "el resuello del suelo americano sobre mi cara... delante de la selva virgen" was both compensation and consolation for having abandoned Europe (GM/Juan Mujica, julio 1940). It felt better than depending on "los dueños del presupuesto fiscal" (Mistral, "Primer Recado"). Her writing spins out her fantasy of acquiring agricultural land and creating a plantation on which to work and dwell in the primeval forest.

Mistral's *ufanismo* in praising Brazil's people and institutions might have begun in courtesy, yet her genuine fascination with the Portuguese language is evident in her notebook pages. It's evident in the modest "portuñol" of the shopping list that she scribbled on the reverse of a letter from Madame Focillón: "*Lombo de porco asado, vitellas asadas, ravioli acelgas, pudding de pan, figos.*" It's evident in the speech that she gave

to the May 1940 meeting of the PEN Club in Rio de Janeiro and her June 1940 address to the elite Brazilian Academy of Language. In the former, Juan Miguel Godoy sits uncomfortably packed in at the far end of the first row in the audience [figure 3]. He didn't share her identification with Portuguese as "el Ángel de las lenguas, el idioma sin fogonazo, más parecida a la plata dulce que al oro enfático," or her enthusiasm for "el café confortador, el arroz y el maíz criollo, el santo algodón" (Mistral, "Palabras").

Mistral's *ufanismo* curiously shirts race -aside from praising Brazil's mestizaje followed by the polite flattery of Spanish America's need to follow Brazil's example, "no por tolerancia sino por rebosaduría vital." This is an about-face for a poet who'd previously made mestizaje central to her self-fashioning. Race vanishes from her wartime letters, notebooks and public statements in Brazil. It's only after Mistral has left Brazil for California, where she suffers from diabetes, heart problems, and lucid paranoia about the Cold War, that she begins spinning stories steeped in anxieties about race and privilege (Fiol-Matta). Race isn't entirely absent from the democratic vistas that Mistral and her Brazilian friends represented: it hovers in the background of her poem "País de la ausencia", which Ribeiro Couto translated and featured on the first page of the first issue of *Pensamento da America*, the literary supplement that he created and edited for the Brazilian public:

*Nasceu-me de coisas  
que não são país:  
de pátrias e pátrias  
que tive e perdi,  
bem como criaturas  
que morrerem vi;  
do que já foi meu  
e se foi de mim.*

As Moreira shows, Ribeiro Couto developed *Pensamento da América* as a very high quality literary translation section, separate yet part of the regime's official newspaper, the otherwise uninspired but widely circulating *A Manhã*. Moreira points to Mistral's and Reyes' writings as typifying the most leftist phase of that supplement, from October 1941 to January 1942. During this period, Mistral's writings appeared in Portuguese alongside those of other anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and anti-totalitarian writers such as Rodó, Martí, and Walt Whitman, whom she admired. This lineup of poets promoted the freedom of thought, liberty, national and individual sovereignty underlying Aranha's pro-democratic and pro-Popular Front agendas. Such publications implicitly criticized the Estado Novo.

One of Mistral's numerous notebooks from her residence in Brazil shows that she returned Ribeiro Couto's attentions by translating his "Diálogo sobre la felicidad" into Spanish. The first speaker is the host who welcomes the foreigner, offering "el

bien que en vano procuraste en el tuyo...Abundancia, riqueza, fortuna.” That host’s warm welcome and thanks to “el extranjero” for having joined his family then takes an unexpected turn as the host declares that he now wants to leave as his guest did, to find a better life elsewhere: “Enséñame cuál es el camino. Yo quiero irme. Yo también quiero ser feliz, extranjero” (Mistral, *Cuaderno* 1944).

“SÉ BIEN QUE SE PIERDEN CARTAS Y QUE NO LOS COGEN LOS  
BRASILEÑOS” (MISTRAL A E. FREI, 01 JUNIO 1942)

Mistral’s vast correspondence was crucial to how she did her work; it also helped her to counteract the diplomat’s central condition of estrangement (Der Derian) or separateness (Sharp). In Brazil, she quickly found that her mail was compromised, subject to intervention on multiple levels. It turns out that Mistral was right to be concerned: the mail of diplomats, especially from neutral Argentina and Chile, was subject to the most intense scrutiny within Brazil’s and England’s immense and comprehensive pattern of multinational surveillance that included off-shore laboratories in Bermuda (Hilton, *Suástica* 200). Experienced in clandestine correspondence, Gabriela Mistral developed numerous alternate modes for her letters to reach her addressees, but her formerly close and mutually respectful relationship with Pedro Aguirre Cerda was among the first casualties of wartime suspicions. Portents of the upcoming break include the Chilean leader’s curiously impassive response to Mistral’s anguish over France, or her concern with “la traición comunista en Francia, antes del debacle.” Facing what she called “la tragedia civil y militar de ese país,” Aguirre Cerda told her that “las brutales vicisitudes de una guerra” would produce “si no el aniquilamiento material del país, sí de su existencia y valer como nación” (GM/Frei, 14 junio 1940; PAC/GM, 27 mayo 1940). She did not heed her sister, Emelina Molina, who indirectly warned that the poet’s new lawyer, Eduardo Frei, was not the best person to be handling Mistral’s needs in Santiago. “El señor Frei será muy bueno, pero es un hombre sumamente ocupado sobretodo de política. Viven estudiando los falangistas y los demás derechistas la manera como derrocar a don Pedro cuyo pueblo lo aclama y le aplauden sus pensamientos con delirio” (Molina).

As of July 1940, Aguirre Cerda ceased answering Mistral’s letters. This is an abrupt change from his previous esteem for her carefully-tailored information about Chile’s reputation abroad. Now he didn’t answer when she told him of Chile’s reputation as “uno de los tres [países] maduros para una acción nazi en la América,” and urged him to clean up the foreign service: “Entre los diez funcionarios chilenos del nuevo régimen que he tratado en el extranjero, desde hace un año, hay siete, nada menos, que pertenecen al orden nazi-comunista...” (GM/PAC, 25 julio 1940). Meanwhile, Frei’s dark prophecies encouraged Mistral’s estrangement from the President: “Dicen

que don Pedro irá a la dictadura y el Ejército. Es lo más probable y el panorama se en-tenebrece. Ya la semana pasada cerró diarios y allanó casas” (Frei/GM, 24 julio 1940).

Costas Constantinou proposes that diplomacy is needed to mediate estrangement while retaining separateness. By the end of 1940, Mistral’s separateness became total estrangement from Aguirre Cerda. Rather than communicate directly, the President sent his regards through the Chilean Ambassador to Brazil (GM/EF, 14 dic. 1940). This drove Mistral closer to both Washington and to Itamaraty, “donde tengo más amigos que ellos y de más en más se me prueba la mayor consideración” (Ibid). Between Frei and Carlos Errázuriz, her consular supervisor, she seems to have put greater faith in the latter, to whom she wrote letters as tightly plotted and as entertaining as operettas, providing specific detail about blackmailers such as “la pseudo-Condesa Pacci” who with her confederates operated from within the Chilean Embassy in Rio, intervening in her mail (GM/CE, 25 julio 1942). Carlos Errázuriz trusted the poet’s judgment; as he brought her complaints to the attention of higher-ups, the Chilean writer was able to stay in the game, avoiding the ignominy of (for example) a forced return to Santiago. By contrast, Frei, more interested in politics than in diplomacy, seems dismissive, recalling Mistral’s concerns for the security of her mail: “Aunque Gabriela efectivamente tuvo problemas durante su carrera consular, no es menos cierto que la poetisa sobredimensionaba algunas situaciones que le era adversas” (*Memorias* 147). The evidence weighs heavily in Mistral’s favor.

#### NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS: MISTRAL AMID RIO’S FARANDULA

Populism was one of Mistral’s means for countering estrangement and connecting with non-elite culture in Brazil as in her earlier consular residences. Francisco Ayala, an exiled Spanish Republican, recalls an anecdote suggestive of how Brazil stretched Mistral’s horizons and taste in entertainment. Apparently Mistral insisted that Ayala join her in attending a performance by “Eros Volusia,” “*a criadora do balé nacional*...una mulatica preciosa quien hacía furor por entonces con una nueva danza,” opening that year’s carnival in Rio (343). When Mistral and Ayala arrived, a huge crowd had gathered around the doors of the official, state-sponsored music hall. Scarcely had the two visitors taken the seats reserved for the consul when Eros Volusia appeared and with rhythmic motions, began to sing “y contonearse en medio de una gran algarzara, muy ligera de ropa.” The famous artist held multiple microphones and the entire city, singing and leading a parade towards the street, without stopping or slowing “su actividad frenética artística” (Ibid.). As an interminable line formed behind the dancer, sweeping up the room and all those who’d been standing outside, each person encircled the hips of the one in front of them. As the line snaked along the city’s avenues, gathering new participants, Ayala was amazed to be following



Gabriela Mistral, “en semejante batucada”, his hands on her waist until he spoke up, “en un trecho providencial, ‘Basta, Gabriela, vámonos, eso no acabará nunca” (344).

This official representation of mulatto sexuality from the *Estado Novo* contrasts with Mistral’s personally arranging a visit by the roving puppeteer Javier Villafañe, from Argentina. Here was the sort of semi-romantic and broadly popular artist that Mistral preferred, a *trotamundos* who appealed to youth and who’d help build a bridge between Brazilian and Argentine non-dogmatic leftists<sup>2</sup>. Inviting him to Brazil, she avoids politics and plays, instead, the holy fool: “Javier, venga con su teatro y sus títeres. Enséñame ese oficio maravilloso. Así el día que me muera y vaya al cielo pueda entretener y divertir a los ángeles” (Villafañe 8). Cecilia Meireles hosted several performances, to the delight of her three children and others who watched Villafañe fling and pummel his vast city of puppets across an amazing collapsible stage (Pelligrino Soares 146). Mistral wrote that these performances resembled the poems of the gloomy modernista Carlos Drummond de Andrade, “por los gritos elementales que damos, tan elementales como los del animal” (GM/Povina Calvalcanti, 30 nov 1943).

Leaving the modernista poets to officialdom, Mistral sought out younger Brazilian writers such as Vinicius de Moraes, who’d come to one of the Villafañe performances. This now-legendary composer was then in his late twenties; Mistral’s friend Maria Rosa Oliver later recalls the superb first impression that Vinicius de Moraes made: “un joven con tipo lusitano y ademanes, soltura y languideces brasileñas, que me hablaba de poetas ingleses y me cantaba canciones bahianas y zambas cariocas, que bailaba con descoyuntada gracia de negro y cautivaba con sutilísima gracia de latino...” (Oliver, sin fecha). With huge, limpid brown eyes, he was introspective yet attentive in person and in letters. Oliver writes that he won friends wherever he went, thanks to his warmhearted yet lightly ironic way of speaking and the generosity with which he shared his musical talents, two qualities that commanded Mistral’s attention (Ibid.).

As WW II began, Vinicius de Moraes was simultaneously studying in the hope of getting employment within Itamaraty, while writing film criticism that contributed to the foundations and rebirth of Brazilian cinema. He and Mistral meet through one of the Chilean’s most unusual guests: the strangely mediating figure of the French stage

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<sup>2</sup> Villafañe described his vocation as having come to him in a flash. At an iconic moment in his youth, he’d been looking down from a balcony onto a street in Buenos Aires, where he’d glimpsed “un carro conducido por un viejo, y sobre el heno que llevaba iba un muchacho mirando el cielo mientras masticaba un pastito largo y amarillo... ¡Qué hermoso sería poder viajar toda la vida en un carro y que el caballo nos llevara adonde quisiera,” he thought, creating the drama known as “La Andariega.” <http://portal.educ.ar/noticias/agenda/homenaje-a-javier-villafane.php>

and silent film actress Renee Jeanne Falconetti, of whom Vinicius's interview with her announced that "Jeanne D'Arc, in pessoa" was staying in Copacabana..." (de Moraes).

In her career's heyday, Falconetti had the starring role in Carl Theodor Dreyer's "Passion of Jeanne D'Arc" (1928). One of the world's great silent movies, "among the finest performance ever recorded on film", the script was developed entirely from trial transcripts; Dreyer filmed the entire cast from below, without makeup (Ebert and Kael 219). Falconetti triumphed as the androgynous Joan, head shaved, facing her cast of tormentors, forced to kneel, hours on end, on the cold stone floor, in shot after shot, betraying no emotion. "Five months of torture," Falconetti now declared (qtd in de Moraes). Absolute renunciation: Mistral adored it.

Vinicius de Moraes now revealed how the war had pushed the actress from Paris to Geneva, to Brazil where the star of "Jeanne D'Arc" would be present at Rio's Bastille Day celebration, where Falconetti's performance of "La Marseillaise" brought down the house. As Vinicius de Moraes squired Falconetti around town, including to a lecture by Orson Welles, the last in a series about theater, she wildly applauded Welles' conclusion: "no actor can beat a good line." Citizen Kane, meet Joan of Arc.

The film star sorely tried the anti-fascist patience of Citizen (some might say "Queen") Gabriela. It seems that Falconetti needed permanent rescue: she overstayed her visa, provoked a misunderstanding that narrowly avoided charges for attempted bribery, ran through her money at an extraordinary rate and (least of all) left her 11 year old son, Jean-Claude, in Gabriela's care for days and even weeks on end (GM/Roger Caillois, 17 abril 1943). With scarcely a sou or cent to her name, Falconetti and son decamped to the sumptuous Hotel Alvear in Buenos Aires and got a role as Phaedre (GM/Roger Caillois, 11 nov 1943). Cecilia Meireles, Mistral's other lasting friendship from her years in Brazil, pronounced the entire episode with Falconetti to be almost unbelievable. "*Mas o seu karma não o consente: ela esta numa grande prova, não sabemos até quando... mas nunca eu vi un caso tão espantoso de cegueira, di ante de vida e de tudo*" (Meireles/GM, 27 junio 1943).

#### TERNURA AND "LOCAS MUJERES" IN WARTIME BRAZIL

Guillermo de Torre, the Buenos Aires-based editor for Losada publishers, was alert to the potential for immense sales, the so-called "Nobel Bonus," as he got her to sign three contracts for work that she'd essentially completed: a single volume of her several essays on Martí, a revised edition of *Lecturas para mujeres* (for which she wrote a new prologue in Brazil), and *Ternura*, whose first edition, "plagado de errores, porque no hubo nadie que los corrigiese" had gone out of print (GM/Juan Mujica, junio 1940). No sooner had Guillermo de Torre learned of the English-language anthology of Spanish American Literature that she was then preparing, slated for U.S. publication, he got Mistral to contract for that one, too.

Of these castles built in air, only the revised *Ternura* made it into print during the poet's lifetime. "Me sacó Ternura a tirones, única manera de sacármela," Mistral later admitted (GM/de Torre, 29 junio 1946). An inexplicable gap in criticism; few studies even notice the vast differences between the poet's first, rapidly assembled edition of *Ternura* (1923), comprised of the poet's early and ongoing attempts to write children's poetry, taken almost entirely from *Desolación*, as opposed to the second, expanded edition of *Ternura* (1943), which continues the interest in folklore evident in *Tala* (1938) and in the presentations, talks and letters that Gabriela Mistral wrote and delivered throughout her 1937-1939 tour of the Americas. The revisions that Mistral completed in Brazil extend the mixing of indigenist and Mediterranean influences that pervades *Tala* (1938). Amid the indigenous and mestiza cultures of America, the poet meditates on the human geography of the New World and its contexts. This new fusion of the Americas and the Mediterranean emerges from Brazil, "un país de refugio," and concludes with the poet's masterful "Colofón con cara de excusa," a declaration of women's creative agency and of Latin America's political and cultural independence from Spain.

Mistral adapted the form of her anti-fascist message to differing national contexts. Eduardo Mallea, director of the literary section of Argentina's *La Nación*, recognized the power and originality of the poems that she was writing: he apparently published them all, without exception. When she gathered them into the volume *Lagar* (1954), she renamed them as the series "Locas mujeres." Despite that ten-year gap, their true historical background or correlate stems from her wartime residence in Brazil. They are verse counterparts to Mistral's numerous warnings about espionage and fifth column efforts. Argentina's neutrality required Mistral to employ metaphor: her verses detail sleepless nights and the threat of home invasions. These poems return to her earlier concern with isolation, pursuit, and betrayal. She expands on the gothic theme of hidden traitors and haunts who pursue and are pursued by isolated subjects who aren't quite alone in a lonely house, hearing footsteps just beyond. It's the world of "La Fuga" transported from the sublime and dramatic setting of a chase across dusky mountain ridges, in flight from what she termed "la operación carnicera del Viejo Mundo."

Each of the extraordinary women to whom Mistral was closest responded differently to the deepening war. In Buenos Aires, Victoria Ocampo sheltered French intellectuals and used her personal fortune to finance the publication of *Lettres Françaises*. In Geneva, Palma Guillén worked without interruption for five years to move Spanish Republicans from the mortal dangers of France to new lives in Mexico. In Brazil, Consuelo Saleva took refuge in routine, mechanically typing and retyping. The poet's friends (de Torre, Salotti) criticized the Puerto Rican as dry and officious, or lacking "la maravillosa dedicación de Palma" (de Cáceres/GM, feb 1940). They failed to see that Mistral pushed Saleva very hard, a fact that Mistral as much as admitted to Swedish Academy member Hagberg, while implying that the situation lay beyond

her control: “ella [Coni] tiene que ir cada día —en mi lugar— a Niteroi, y como me he venido a vivir a la montaña, la pobre tiene tres horas solo de viaje cada día” (GM/C.A. Hagberg, 05 mayo 1940).

Mistral’s off-hand remarks belie the hardworking Puertorican’s now indispensable role in the poet’s life: Consuelo Saleva deserves a full-scale vindication. Her access to English-language newspapers at the US Embassy helped meet the poet’s need for relatively uncensored news. Saleva’s initiative got the household out of Rio, first by identifying the location, then by dealing with the real estate agents, next by traveling every weekend to Petrópolis to narrow down the prospects, and ultimately by contributing her personal savings to the down payment on that first house in Petrópolis. Throughout it all, Saleva deployed her extensive knowledge of medicine: the daughter of a highly-regarded professional pharmacist, from a family of pharmacists, physicians and educators: she did what she could to monitor the poet’s health in addition to her other chores.

With Petrópolis identified as her next site, Mistral pushed for a transfer, not hesitating to employ racist stereotypes and tropicalist language in doing so. “No sé si sabe usted que mi famoso Ministerio me dio por sede una ciudad de negros y con rachas de paludismo, no sé por qué razón y si por burla” (GM/Frei, 26 julio 1940). Twelve weeks later, “el idilio de Tijuca” ended with the poet’s household moving to the orchid-covered mountains behind Rio de Janeiro, far from the fishbowl of the Embassy.

The household’s move from Rio to Petrópolis at the end of December 1940 opens a new chapter, one that coincides with increased contacts between Brazil and the United States. The stream of long-term guests in Mistral’s home included members of the influential Rio Branco and Nabuco families, whom the poet regarded as security. She expected to turn to Itamaraty, rather than to the police, in the event of any difficulty. More generally, Mistral turned her home into a way station for debriefing anti-fascist travelers in the circuit between Santiago, Buenos Aires, Río de Janeiro, Washington, and vice-versa. There was a sharp division between male versus female guests or V.I.P.’s. Before her close friend, the celebrated U.S. writer and lecturer Waldo Frank arrived, a private traveler who was nonetheless an emissary of Rockefeller, Mistral sent Juan Miguel Godoy off to board at an agricultural school near Minas Gerais. She kept the boy there until after both Frank and her next guest, the Chilean writer Benjamín Subercaseaux, had safely departed. By contrast, Mistral went out of her way to introduce the boy to visiting women friends such as María Rosa Oliver. The problem was that Frank vocally advocated legalized prostitution and admired the openness to sexuality that he encountered in Brazil. Meanwhile, Subercaseaux’s openminded and uncloseted homosexuality —evident, for example, in the epigraphs to each of the chapters throughout his brilliant *Chile, una loca geografía*— could have been reason enough for Mistral to keep the boy ostensibly sheltered. And both men experienced serious difficulties in the next stages

of their travels: Frank was declared *persona non grata* and assaulted in his Buenos Aires apartment by five anti-Semitic thugs, off-duty police officers. Victoria Ocampo brought him to a clinic and Eduardo Frei crossed the Andes at Mistral's request, serving as Frank's bodyguard en route to Santiago. While Benjamín Subercaseaux, continued on to "Yankilandia," he had no trouble until his return to Santiago, when Mistral was forced to intervene so that Chile's then-Minister of Foreign Affairs didn't charge Subercaseaux with libel for a sarcastic newspaper column, "Alemania no nos ha ofendido," that had denounced Chile's toleration of Nazi spies (Gómez Bravo 175; see figure 4: Subercaseaux; see figure 5: GM, Meireles et al).

There was no shortage of dangers "en este momento del mundo en que se camina como un saco de vidrios rotos, porque no hay hueso del alma que no esté quebrado." In letters such as this, the writer hid her identity in the *ufanismo* of her signature: "un abrazo de tus tres... brasileros. Tu Lucila." (GM/V. Ocampo, 10 dic 1942). Throughout all, the writer's vast network of friends and her eternally mobile identity proved her first and last defenses amid the vivid contradictions of Brazil's *Estado Novo*.

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## A mais alta poetisa da America no Rio

Gabriela Mistral chegou hoje á nossa capital, onde permanecerá durante alguns meses



A grande poetisa Gabriela Mistral, conhecida por A NOITE, ao lado de uma dama responsável do viagem, a senhora de "Antarctica".

Chegou hoje ao Rio, pela "Antarctica", a conhecida poetisa chilena Gabriela Mistral, uma das mais altas representantes da literatura latino-americana. Gabriela Mistral, que representará, juntamente com o Chile, na Commissão de Literatura Latino-Americana, organizada a Liga das Nações e está sediada em Paris, foi recebida a bordo pelo Sr. Consuelo Saleva, responsável da "Antarctica", e pelo Sr. Consuelo Saleva, responsável da "Antarctica".

Gabriela Mistral, que chegou ao Rio de Janeiro para a NOITE, permanecerá aqui por alguns dias, antes de ir para o Rio de Janeiro, onde se realizará a reunião da Liga das Nações, organizada pela "Antarctica".

A NOITE, a revista de cultura e arte, fundada em 1934, tem como objetivo a divulgação da cultura latino-americana e a promoção da literatura e da arte. A revista é publicada mensalmente e é considerada uma das mais importantes publicações da América Latina.

1940, abril. "A mais alta poetisa na América no Rio." Gabriela Mistral y Consuelo Saleva. BNCH: AE000015508.



1940. Mayo. Gabriela Mistral, entre el embajador chileno Mariano Fontecilla Varas y el escritor-diplomático Rui Ribeiro Couto.



Foto de 1943, foto grupal de Consuelo Saleva, Cecilia Meireles, persona no identificada, Gabriela Mistral, Hector Grillo, y Juan Miguel Godoy.