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Gabriela Mistral
and
Allusions to Catholicism
in
Desolación

A Thesis
Department of Spanish
Loyola University
January, 1964
Rev. John J. Martin, C.S.V.

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"A humble life is worth
more than the greatest
work of art."

Gabriela Mistral

Gabriela Mistral

I.

Her Life and Her Person

Introduction --

Poets exist, by the grace of heaven, to make our lives more bearable. Our sufferings might embitter and diminish us, were it not for poets. Because poetry can take even a small emotion and tell us that this small emotion is important. And why is it important? Because a poet has organized it into the beauty of a small ritual, which is another name for a poem.

When our emotions are terrible ones, it takes a major poet to face up to them; it takes a major talent to order them into another, more profound ritual. For it is only by the order and design which a poet can call out of terrible emotions that we are able to bear them. Perhaps that is why God created poets. Perhaps that is why we have throughout the centuries needed poets, much as we have needed teachers.

Lucila Godoy Alcayaga had a tremendous treasure within herself which she could not but share. She loved mankind. This love demanded that she speak and act in behalf of others, especially for those in need. She herself knew what suffering was, and she knew and understood the value of suffering as well as of charity because she had heard and understood Christ's message. From her earliest years she put herself out for others, teaching, writing, sympathising, loving, always in a careful beautiful way. Poetry was her principal means of self-expression; she knew how to say a lot in a few words.

Her self-expression, like herself, was always very simple, clear and beautiful. She wanted to be understood. It was truly right, then, that in 1945 she should be the one selected by the Swedish Academy to be honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature. It was a distinction that she merited through long years of self-sacrifice, "doing the truth in charity"¹, suffering. The influence which she exercised on others in her devotion, says one writer, was a profound one. 'It was not only a literary influence, but rather a moral one which in a mysterious way acted upon minds and hearts. At first sight, it was simply unexplainable. Restless, or simply thinking youth would go to her as to the spiritual Meca of Latin America. They surrounded her with fervor and veneration; they were subject to her spirit but not to her doctrine, which she worried little about expressing.'²

Let us too, then, try to know her. In this paper, we will try to present a quite adequate study of her life, her works and her poetic style, and conclude with some analysis of her poetry to see in what respect "her spirit" is truly Catholic and expresses or at least supports the Catholic position in the various matters she touches upon in her masterpiece, Desolación.

¹ Ephes. 4:15

² Magdalena Petit, Biografía de Gabriela Mistral (Santiago de Chile, 1946), p.4. "Su influencia es profunda; no se trata propiamente hablando, de una influencia literaria, sino de una influencia moral que actúa misteriosamente sobre la inteligencia y los corazones, y resulta, a primera vista, inexplicable. La Juventud inquieta o simplemente pensante va hacia ella como hacia la Meca espiritual de la America Latina; la rodea de fervor y veneracion; esta sometida a su espiritu, pero no a su doctrina, que Gabriela Mistral poco se preocupa de expresar."

1889 -- Birth, Ancestry

Lucila Godoy Alcayaga was born in Vicuña, a small city in the valley of Elqui, Chile, April 6th, 1889. Both of her parents were Chileans of Spanish origin in the Indies. One writer says she possibly has some Basque blood on her father's side, mixed with indigeneous Inca blood on her mother's side.³ Her ancestry is not at all certain. Julio Saavedra Molina says that only her names suggest Basque origin; there is actually no documentary evidence. "Some have thought her to be of Jewish extraction, but this is based merely on her fondness for the Bible, a rarity among Catholics."⁴

Agusto Iglesias thinks there is more to the theory of Jewish origin than merely her interest in the Bible. He points out that her writings are oftentimes a religious dialogue after the example of the Psalmist, David, and other prophets, and in this sense, he says she is truly Hebrew. She loved the Bible and she familiarized herself so well with it that she adopted the 'spirit' of her favorite sacred writers. Iglesias, however, goes on to point out that it is not difficult to assert that she was Hebrew also by the laws of inheritance. Judeo-Spanish immigration to the West Indies was rich in Semitic travelers, and though it be true that these travelers arrived in Chile much

³ Julio Saavedra Molina, Prologue to Poesías Completas by Gabriela Mistral, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1962) p. xvi. "Su madre y su padre eran chilenos, de cepa española crecida en Indias, posiblemente, un tanto vasca, mezclada con sangre indígena procedente de alguna subdita de los incas. Tal "vasconidad" no se basa en documentos, sino en la fragil presunción que sugieren las letras de sus apellidos. La suposición de ascendientes judíos tiene menos consistencia todavía; no se apoya en documentos ni en tradición alguna, sino en la afición de la poetisa por la Biblia, rara entre católicos; su imitación de temas del gran libro, y su antojo de sentirse judía, como si la voluntad bastase para hacer la historia."

⁴ Saavedra Molina, p. xvi

more slowly than in other parts of America, we must nevertheless recognize that the extant proofs indicating such a conclusion are weak, since the 'statistics' on which they are based are generally no other than those given out by the inquisitorial process. In Chile, the Holy Office had neither the authority to interfere nor the political importance which it acquired in other parts of the Continent. It is very possible, then, he concludes, that the Hebrew infiltration during the Colonial period was greater than what is customarily believed.⁵ It is estimated that after the fifteenth century, the Hebrews in Spain constituted about twelve percent of the total population.⁶

We cannot be certain, then, about her ancestry. We know her parents were Chileans; beyond that there are no records. It is important, however, to remember her affection for the Hebrew style as it is expressed in the Bible. From this point of view we can see her as having a typical Hebrew temperament as found in the religious emotions expressed in her writings.

Birthplace

The place of her birth seems to have had a great deal to do with the formation of her character. The valley of Elqui is in the northern part of Chile, in the Province of Coquimbo. One writer describes it as being "en

⁵Augusto Iglesias, Gabriela Mistral y El Modernismo En Chile, (Santiago de Chile, 1949) p. 194. "La inmigración judeoespañola a las indias occidentales fue rica en aportes semíticos, y aunque es verdad que ese aporte llega a Chile con más lentitud que a otros territorios de América, debemos aceptar que las pruebas que existen para arribar a tal conclusión resultan débiles, pues las "estadísticas" en que se basan no son otras, por lo general, que las proporcionadas por los procesos inquisitoriales, y en Chile el Santo Oficio no tuvo ni la ingerencia ni la importancia política que adquiere en otras partes del Continente. Es muy posible, pues, que la infiltración hebrea en la época de la Colonia haya sido mayor de lo que ha sido costumbre creer."

⁶ Iglesias, p. 194. "Se ha calculado que, a partir del siglo xv, los hebreos en España ocupaban el 12% de la población total."

tono menor," almost familiar. There is a river there and the earth is good to men. On the outskirts of the valley there are gardens filled with flowers and fruits. There you see small white houses with grapevines, and in the background of the garden there are the centenary fig-trees, peach trees, avocados, and papayas. The inhabitants of Elqui, los elquiños, are described as "gente sencilla," of austere life, having a profound sense of economy. "El elquiño no gasta por gastar, sabe cuidar el centavo." And this writer goes on to point out that there is an inclination among these people for the contemplative and religious life. He says: "No es extraño encontrar por las tardes a las familias reunidas, junto al más anciano, que lee simplemente la Biblia. Uno de estos 'pastores espirituales' espontáneos llegó a sentirse una vez un Cristo, y después de recorrer su propio valle, caminó a lo largo de Chile, llevando la Buena Nueva del 'Cristo de Elqui'." Later he speaks of Elqui as having a Biblical atmosphere. This seems to be seen both in the cultural characteristics of the people as well as in the geography. "Por algo esta región nos recuerda la Tierra Bíblica: Los cabros, como in Oriente, assoman en cada risco y en cada vuelta del camino. Ahí se quedan mirándonos con sus ojos azorados, agitando sus inquietas barbillas de sátira. Las viñas semejan a las de Jericó; la higuera evangélica muestra en todas partes su silueta stormentada y el asno de la Santa Familia recorre los caminos polvorosos en la misma mansedumbre gris y sonolienta. "¿No se ha dicho que hasta la Mistral tiene un acento que recuerda a los antiguos profetas?"⁸

⁷ Benjamín Carrion, Santa Gabriela Mistral (Ensayos) (Quito, Ecuador, 1956) pp. 101-102

⁸ Carrion, pp. 102-103

Gabriela Mistral herself, in 1928, in the prologue to Benjamin Carrion's book, Los Creadores de la Nueva America, said: "Yo nací en valle al que le faltan yo no sé cuantos grados -- pero muy pocos -- para ser tropical, curiosa quebrada de Elqui, que Dios me dió para que, en la luz perfecta, yo adquiriera esta pasión del sol, con todo lo que le es añadida."⁹ In another place she referred to Elqui as the "olorosa tierra" and curiously said:

Yo nací de una carne tajada
en el seco rinón de Israel

and in another place referred to herself as "mestiza de vaxco".¹⁰ In referring to her own background she was never very clear or definite, as was her privilege. Perhaps, as she was so wonderfully interested in all men, especially the rejected and outcast, she wanted to always be free to identify herself with any group, and on common ground.

Parents

Lucila's parents were both Chileans. Her father, Jerónimo Godoy Villaneuva, was qualified as a teacher with the title Maestro, before he married Petronila Alcayaga, a widow with a twelve year old daughter, Emelina.¹¹ Much more is known about her father than about her mother. He was educated in the Seminary of La Serena. He was considered a good Latinist, he spoke French, sketched with facility, and he had a passion for musical folklore. He had

⁹ Ibid., p 103

¹⁰ Molina, pp xvi - xvii

¹¹ Erna Fergusson, "Gabriela Mistral," Catholic Digest, VII, (April 1943), 70

dedicated himself to rural teaching in order to get away from the pressures his mother put upon him to become a priest.¹² On occasion he also wrote poetry, but his talent here is said to have been only mediocre.¹³ At times he would dedicate some of his poetry to his daughter, and among these there is one which she remembered "with sweetness and melancholy". It is a cradle-song, whose type of composition might have been of inspiration to her, for it is one of her favorites and one in which she proved so successful. The poem follows:

Duermete, Lucila, que el mundo esta en calma,
 Ni el cordero brinca ni la oveja bala
 Duermete, Lucila, que cuidan de vos
 En tu cuna un ángel, en el cielo Dios.

Duermete, Lucila, ojitos de cielo
 Mira que tu madre tambien tiene sueno.
 Angel de la Guarda, hazmela dormir
 Para que a su madre no la haga sufrir.

Angel de la Guarda, cuidame a este lirio
 Que mañana al alba rezara conmigo.
 Duermete, ninita, duermete por Dios,
 Que si no te duermes me enojo con vos.¹⁴

For all practical purposes, nothing is known about her mother.

Sidonia Rosenbaum says merely that she was a very handsome and delicate woman, with a soft and pathetic voice, to whom Gabriela dedicated some of her most

¹² Petit, p. 14, "Jeronimo Godoy, educado en el Seminario de la Serena, era un buen latinista, hablaba frances, dibujaba con facilidad, tenia la pasion del folklore musical. Se habia dedicado a la ensenanza rural para huir de la presion de su madre, que deseaba hacerlo ingresar en las ordenes, luego contraía la union que habia de engendrar a la futura poetisa."

¹³ Sidonia Carmen Rosenbaum, Modern Women Poets of Spanish America, (New York, 1945), p. 171

¹⁴ Rosenbaum, pp 171-172

tender pages.¹⁵ It seems quite certain that Lucila loved her mother very much, even though some of her remembrances of her might not have been very happy ones. This judgment is based on some passages in "Muerte de mi Madre", and in the notes to that work. She says, speaking of her mother: "Ella se me volvió una larga y sombría posada; se me hizo un país en que viví cinco o siete años, país amado a causa de la muerte, odioso a causa de la volteadura de mi alma en larga crisis religiosa. No son ni buenos ni bellos los llamados "frutos de dolor" y a nadie se los deseo. De regreso de esta vida en la más prieta tiniebla, vuelvo a decir, como al final de Desolación, la alabanza de la alegría. El tremendo viaje acaba en la esperanza de las Locas letanias y cuenta su remate a quienes se cuidan de mi alma y poco saben de mí desde que vivo errante."¹⁶

She speaks of her mother as her "long and shadowy dwelling", or as a country in which she lived for five or seven years, a country loved because of death, and hated because of a long religious crisis that tortured her soul. In another place she says "Personas son siempre para mí países".¹⁷ Obviously her emotions toward this "country" are mixed. In the first poem of "Muerte de mi Madre", entitled La Fuga she speaks to her mother.

Vámos las dos sintiéndonos, sabiéndonos,
mas no podemos vernos en los ojos
y no podemos trocarnos palabra,
cual la Euridice y el Orfeo solos,
las dos cumpliendo un voto o un castigo,
ambas con pies y con acento rotos.

¹⁵ Ibid., p 172

¹⁶ Gabriela Mistral, Poesías Completas 2 ed. (Madrid, 1962) p. 803

¹⁷ Ibid., p 808

Do these lines reflect childhood memories? She goes on immediately to say:

Pero a veces no vas al lado mio:
te llevo en mi, en un peso angustioso
y amoroso a la vez, como pobre hijo
galeoto a su padre galeoto,
y hay que enhebrar los cerros repetidos,
sin decir el secreto doloroso:
que yo te llevo hurtada a dioses crueles
y que vamos a un Dios que es de nosotros.¹⁸

The reader of these lines is left with the idea that she and her mother did not see eye to eye. Five or seven years with her mother seemed a "larga y sombría posada", and she herself became "un país ... amado ... y odioso...". If wounds were inflicted on the poet in her relationships with her mother, they were not incapable of being covered over. Lucila Godoy throughout life showed herself to be an extremely just and understanding person, and it would not seem to be careless to assume that she spent long hours trying to understand her mother. But she understood the one thing that was essential: she loved her mother. Thus, in the final poem of "Muerte de mi Madre" she speaks to Christ in behalf of her mother. Her prayer is full of love and tenderness, and filled with allusions to the Old and the New Testament, reminding Christ in an appealing manner of His own words and deeds of mercy among men. The poem is entitled Locas Letanías:

Cristo, hijo de mujer,
Carne que aquí amamantarón,
que se acuerda de una noche,
y de un vagido, y de un llanto:
recibe a la que dio leche
cantándome con tu salmo
y llévala con las otras,
espejos que se doblaron
y cañas que se partieron
en hijos sobre los llanos! . . . ¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 377-378

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 398

Lucila Godoy's parents, then, played an important part in her life, forming her character and setting the tone that predominated throughout her work. The memories of her father were of "sweetness and melancholy", those of her mother aroused mixed emotions. That she maintained a tender love of both is quite important, because it is generally granted that her early years were not happy ones. She never really came to know her father, because when she was only three years old he abandoned the family.²⁰ She did not see him again until she was about ten or twelve, and then he only remained with the family for a short time.²¹ From this time until she was twelve, the information on her life is general and obscure. When her father left, she and her half-sister, Emelina, were left entirely under the care of their mother.²² Her mother "seems to have retreated into her grief and her religion, leaving little mark on their lives".²³

Early Life

One writer describes these years saying that -

"until the age of twelve, she lived a solitary, timid life in the country among farmers and village gossips, with little personal contact with children of her own

²⁰ Saavedra Molina, p. xvii; also Rosenbaum, p. 171. "Como muchos otros hispanoamericanos ilustres, Gabriela Mistral es una autodidacta. No recibió de su padre, quien abandonó el hogar cuando Lucila tenía tres años, ni de ninguna escuela la chispa que inflamó su vocación, sino de su temperamento, los recuerdos familiares y sus lecturas."

²¹ Petit, p. 14, says ten years old; Fergusson, p. 71, says twelve years old; Rosenbaum, p. 171, says he never returned.

²² Rosenbaum, p. 172

²³ Fergusson, p. 70

age. She was precociously serious and thoughtful, as though already conscious of the grave duties which were to be hers in later life. From Elqui, her family moved to the neighboring town of La Serena, where she went to school. The teacher, however, found the new pupil somewhat too simple and uncouth to take the polish of books and school discipline. So she was returned to her parents with the advice to devote her to household duties rather than to intellectual pursuits. Then came bankruptcy. The old homestead, already burdened by mortgages, was lost. Quite suddenly the young girl found herself destitute and alone. She became secretary in a provincial school, a school attended by rich girls, but hermetically closed to the children of poor parents. Protesting against this social injustice, she began to admit into the school girls of all classes, but this led to her discharge. Again Gabriela found herself in dire need, this time with three dollars comprising all her earthly goods.²⁴

In another place, a writer says that "her familiar surroundings during her early years were not among the best, and undoubtedly, this made her character become harsh, reserved and profoundly introspective"²⁵ It is possible that the problems at home occupied her thoughts and caused her to be sad, hence uncommunicative with the children of her own age. For her, life had little joy. Alone in his prologue to her Antología, tells us that, when young, she was afflicted with a speech difficulty that caused her much embarrassment. Her tongue refused to obey her. When she would try to say her own name it

²⁴ A. Ortiz Varga, "Gabriela Mistral," Hispanic American Historical Review, XI (February, 1931) pp. 99-100

²⁵ _____, Enviaje (Santiago De Chile, 1963). "El ambiente familiar en la juventud de Gabriela no fue de los mejores, y ello, sin duda, hizo que se hiciera de un caracter áspero, reservado, hondamente introspectivo."

would come out something like "Totila Llolloy".²⁶ And when she was sent to school in the city of Vicuna, it was being run at that time by a friend of her mother, Dona Adelaida Olivares, who was blind. Lucila became her lazarillo. Every day, morning and night, she guided her from home to school, and from school back home. But Lucila's kindness made little or no impression. Dona Adelaida had confided to her the task of distributing to her classmates the "school material", some small notebooks with memorandum sheets from the fiscal offices, giving her a fixed amount for the month. Some of the girls, however, would snatch away more than their share, and Lucila soon found herself short of the necessary amount. She was asked for explanations, but did not know how to give them. The blind Directress then gathered all the students together and solemnly, before all, accused her of being a thief and condemned her. The child was amazed and speechless. On leaving school that night, a group of girls were waiting for her; they were well supplied with rocks. Lucila fled through the streets, but by the time she got home she was wounded and bloody.²⁷ Another writer points out this unfortunate and bitter event as being that which

²⁶ Alone, Prologue to Antología by Gabriela Mistral, (Santiago de Chile, 1957) p.iii. "Lucila padecía de una timidez enfermiza. Costábale pronunciar las palabras y, según el testimonio de alguien que la conoció mucho, su nombre, Lucila Godoy, convertíasele en algo como "Totila Llolloy" o cosa semejante, La Lengua se negaba a obedecerle."

²⁷ Alone, p.iii, "Dona Adelaida le confió la misión de repartir a sus compañeras el "material escolar", unos cuadernillos con membrete de las oficinas fiscales, fijándole determinada provisión para el mes. Pero ocurría que las muchachas su apoderaban violentamente de cantidades superiores a la prevista y, a poco, la distribuidora de papel se hallaba en deficit. Le pidieron explicaciones. No supo darlas. La ciega Directora, reunió entonces al colegio y, solemnemente, delante de todas, la acusó de ladrona y la condenó. La chica, abrumada, perdió el conocimiento. Al salir, y de noche, un grupo de alumnas la esperaba; se habían armado de piedras. Lucila huyó y atravesó las calles, perseguida por los penascazos, hasta llegar, herida y sangrante, a su casa."

"hará nacer en su corazón un sentimiento no disimulado por las cosas aparentemente sin importancia".²⁸

29

Sometime between 1899 and 1901 her father returned to the family.

Magdalena Petit says that either in school or elsewhere she had overheard certain rumors about him, saying that he was quite an interesting person, despite the reasons for disapproval that existed in the home.³⁰ Erna Fergusson says that she found him to be a charming person, "but her joy in that and having a proper family was soon lost. Jeronimo Godoy was drinking then, and his wife was unable to cope with his complicated nature. He had spells of unreasonable violence, he wrote poetry, and he was given to going off alone. Perhaps he was not kind to Lucila. Soon, he disappeared for the last time."³¹ Miss Fergusson, considering Gabriela's poems about children, says that we can here see the hurt her father caused her by leaving the family, even though as a mature woman she came to understand him.³²

28 _____, Enviaje

²⁹Fergusson, p. 71, says she was twelve years old; Alone, p. 14, says she was ten years old.

³⁰Petit, p. 14. "Cuando la niña tenía unos diez años, el ausente reapareció un día, bruscamente, para irse de nuevo: era un hombre atrayente y su hija había sorprendido en la escuela, o en otras partes, el rumor de ciertos comentarios que se lo presentaban como un ser lleno de interés, a pesar de los motivos de desaprobación que en el hogar existían. Más tarde confesara ella, enigmática: "Era un hombre extraordinario y sabía demasiadas cosas"."

³¹ Fergusson, P. 71

³² Ibid., p. 70

Around 1905, her crippled family left Vicuña and moved to La Serena. Through great sacrifices they prepared her for the Normal school. It must have been at this time that the family mortgaged their goods, because Alone tells us that they even went into debt to gather together the money needed to send her to school.³³ She had by this time already begun to manifest the literary tendencies of her father. One writer says that she was six years old when she began to write verses.³⁴ According to Magdalena Petit and Sidonia Rosenbaum, she was about fifteen when the provincial newspapers, "La Voz de Elqui" and "El Coquimbo" of La Serena, published some of her writings, both prose and poetry.³⁵ These were written in the romantic tradition, "bathed in an emphatic melancholy". As she was her own teacher at this time, she fell into bad hands by becoming an aficionada of the very popular prose of the Colombian Vargas Vila, which, in effect, was perverting American Youth.³⁶ Magdalena Petit says that her writings were characterized at once for the independence of her ideas, and it was probably because of this that she was promptly expelled from school, hardly even having begun. The curate of the

³³ Alone, p. iv. "La llevaron a La Serena. A costa de oscuros sacrificios la preparaban para la Escuela Normal, hicieronla rendir exámenes y, endeudándose, reunieron la suma que su modesto ajuar requería."

³⁴ _____, Enviaje, "A los seis años empieza a escribir poesías con la precocidad propia de los genios, cantando a la naturaleza tanto en verso como en prosa."

³⁵ Petit, p. 15; Rosenbaum, p. 172

³⁶ Alone, p. iv, "Por desdicha, su talento incipiente cayó en malas manos: los inespertos labios de Lucila bebieron el brebaje mortal de una prosa por aquel tiempo celeberrima y cuyos efectos pervertían a la juventud americana."

establishment condemned her writings as socialist and pagan.³⁷ The family could do nothing. They lacked position, influence, and funds. "No le quedaba sino estudiar sola y luchar por su cuenta, formándose en la batalla, día a día, hasta triunfar."³⁸

Hence, because of many unfortunate circumstances and sad experiences, Lucila Godoy, during her early life, found herself, in a sense, alone. She must have realized quite clearly that if she was to make anything out of herself at all in life, she would have to do it alone, through hard work and self-application. She therefore diligently applied herself to reading, studying, and meditation during her long walks in which she found that the fields, the sky, and the mountains received her.³⁹

It was sometime during this period that she came under the beneficial disciplining influence of her paternal grandmother. Alone tells us that she was the only person in La Serena who possessed a Bible, and she was devoted to reading it. He also points out that the encounter between the grandmother and granddaughter was very fortunate for the literary future of the later, for it acted as a powerful corrective against the influence Vargas Vila had exercised on the formation of her mind, ideas, and character. In this incident we see how truly inscrutable are the ways of Divine Providence, that this corrective

³⁷ Petit, p. 15. "Sus escritos se caracterizan en seguida por la independencia de las ideas, y cuando se presenta como alumna en la Escuela Normal de La Serena, para terminar sus estudios, el cura del establecimiento la hace eliminar porque condena sus publicaciones, pretendidamente socialistas y paganas."

³⁸ Alone, p. v.

³⁹ Petit, p. 15. "Así es como Lucila continúa por sí misma su educación: lee, estudia, medita durante sus largos paseos en que los campos, el cielo, la montaña la acogen."

influence should come into the life of Lucila in the person of an old woman who was no longer very secure in her mind.⁴⁰ Lucila learned from her grandmother in somewhat the following way, and the value of the lesson seems to be described quite clearly.

"Cuando llegaba, la abuela le deshacía metódicamente los rizados, le soltaba las alforzas del vestido, a su juicio profanas, y la sentaba a leerle los Salmos de David. Lucila dirá más tarde que el Santo Rey fue su primer amor. En todo caso contrapesaba y reducía a cenizas las flores fatuas del maldito colombiano. La desenfrenada vehemencia de su temperamento, su ansia de expresiones excesivas y su corazón insaciable hallaban su alimento en las metáforas ardientes de la Escritura: repetía los apóstrofes de los profetas, las quejas de Job increpando cara a cara a la divinidad, los gritos de pasión que exhala el Cantar de los Cantares."⁴¹

The Educator

At this point we begin to enter a new phase of her life. We might call it her public life, for it is now that she truly begins to make herself known and heard. Her private life was that of her basic, essential formation. Her character has already been formed; the thread that was to perdure has already been sewn into her thoughts, her personality. Sidonia Rosenbaum aptly describes both the essential elements of this formation and their lasting effects. She says that Lucila

"spent the first twelve years of her life among peasants. And she has always maintained a close contact - and spiritual affinity - with these people of the soil. She likes to speak of her "rurality" and of her humble origin: "Vengo de campesinos y soy uno de ellos". Her work abounds in rural

⁴⁰ Alone, p. v. "La madre de su padre llevaba el apellido Villaneuva, procedente de la Argentina y, según los genealogistas, de origen hebreo, hipótesis confirmada por el hecho de ser esa senora la única de La Serena que poesía la Biblia y se dedicaba a leerla."

⁴¹ Ibid.,

allusions, and a certain earthiness pervades everything that springs from her pen. Without the benefit of "guidance", and entirely devoid of formal training, this quiet, sensitive and sad child early began to feed her eager mind with random reading. While looking over the scant resources she had at hand, she came upon some poems of her father's - "the first I ever read" - which fired her imagination and started her, at the age of fifteen, upon the literary road she has by now so long and well traversed. Her first compositions were in prose - a mellow prose, well grounded in the long-faltering but still prevalent romantic tradition, and surcharged with "poetic" phrases, with baroque imagery and with sadness. Her poems, which flowed from her dolorous soul almost simultaneously, followed the same stylistic mental and emotional patterns. These early contributions of Lucila Godoy were published in the local press: El Coquimbo and La Voz de Elqui. . . . early in life she knew pain to be "the only reality." In a letter written to a friend when she was about sixteen, she says: "There is something in my being which engenders bitterness; there is a secret hand which filters gall into my heart, even though happiness surrounds me." And the same thought recurs in her first articles and poems which speak of grief as the genial lyre which intones the most sublime of songs."⁴²

Miss Rosenbaum here presents us with a sample of her poetry written at about the age of fourteen or fifteen. She says it "is a typical adolescent poem of disillusionment, anguish, despair, and has little in it to forecast the advent of the great poetess of a decade later:

Yo no puedo cantar porque no brota
El verso y de mi alma entristecida.
¿Quieres que vibre el harpa que esta rota?
¿Quieres que cante el alma que esta herida?

Ya no es el tiempo que el papel dejaba
Un reguero de esencias y de amor,
Cuando en mis pobres versos derramaba
Las hojas de la flor de mi ilusión.

Murio la inspiracion, tan solo el llanto
Lleva a mi alma la miel del sentimiento,
Y, si llega a entonar un triste canto,
Es aquel del sollozo y del lamento.

.

Yo que tan sólo sé llorar, no dejo
Sino flores marchitas en mi senda,
Y mis canciones, de dolor reflejo,
Podrán, dime, formarte alguna ofrenda?

Otono, ruina, angustias y cenizas
Son los sueños que viven en mi mente.
¿Los Juncos mil? Se los llevo'la brisa,
¿La idea? Se agoto' como una fuente.

Por eso pido que jamas repases,
Estas estrofas que son flores negras,
Sin perfumene, sin vida, porque nacen
En el valle otoñal de mi alma enferma. ⁴³

Lucila Godoy's literary future then, was clearly foreshadowed in 1905. Her future, however, was to be concerned with much more than literature; in fact, writing was never to be her main interest. ⁴⁴ She was only fifteen when, entirely untaught, she began the career which was to occupy her for the next twenty years, being sacrificed then only so that she might be of even more help to those in need: she was above all a teacher, 'the rural teacher personified'. ⁴⁵ Her father was a teacher and her half-sister, Emelina Molina Valcayaga, ("Mi santa hermana Emelina"), at the time of Lucila's birth, was herself beginning a didactic career. ⁴⁶ So Lucila might be said to have been led into this career by imitation as well as by vocation. Alone, thinking on her past scholastic experiences, which caused her sadness as well as embarrassment, describes the beginning of her teaching career in this way: "Esa primera y profunda amargura esa terrible experiencia escolar no impidieron que, anando

⁴³ Ibid., p. 173

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 172

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 173

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 172

el tiempo, su madre y su hermana resolvieran dedicarla a la enseñanza: no tenía mucho porvenir, pero era la sola carrera que estaba a su alcance."⁴⁷

Hence, in 1905, Lucila's teaching profession began at La Compañía, a primary school in Northern Chile near her birthplace, Elqui.⁴⁸ According to Julio Saavedra Molina, La Compañía is also close to the village of La Serena, and he says that it was in this same year that she began her Master's work there. Rosenbaum says that she did not try to get into the Normal School of La Serena until 1908.⁵⁰ It would seem more probable that her entrance into the Normal School was at a date later than 1905, because as we saw above, it was around this time, (or Alone at least suggests) that the family moved to La Serena. Also several writers say definitely that she began teaching at La Compañía in 1905, and it would seem more likely that she would seek entrance into the Normal School after having had a little experience teaching, as well as having her name and literary ability made known through the provincial newspapers.

At any rate, this effort to enter the Normal School was apparently the unhappy experience mentioned above. "The opposition was strong. Because of her writings and strange ways (she "smoked a great deal", and was, moreover, ad-

⁴⁷ Alone, p. iv

⁴⁸ Margaret J. Bates, "Gabriela Mistral, The Americas, III (October 1946) p.170

⁴⁹ Saavedra Molina, p. xvii, "Lucila fue también maestra primaria ayudante en la escuela de La Compañía, aldea vecina a La Serena (Chile), en donde comenzó su magisterio, a principios de 1905, cuando iba a cumplir los dieciséis años."

⁵⁰ Rosenbaum, p. 173

Judged a girl "with pagan ideas"), she was considered somewhat of a radical."⁵¹ She was not to be too easily let down, however, for "Some three years later," says Miss Rosenbaum, "in spite of her continued lack of formal training - and through the intercession of her good friend, the future president of Chile, Don Pedro Aguirre Cerda - she was considered eligible to teach in the secondary schools."⁵² It must, then, have been at this time, about 1911 according to Rosenbaum, that she obtained her Master's Degree. Julio Saavedra Molina dates this event in 1910, and says that she did it by taking "cursos rápidos".⁵³ These "rapid courses" must have been granted her through her influential friend.

During her stay in and around La Serena, she began to gather some friends. Julio Saavedra Molina points this out, saying that "Siempre se hizo apreciar de su círculo inmediato por sus prendas morales ..."⁵⁴ That she made herself appreciated perhaps points up the fact that the "frutos de dolor" of her previous experience helped her face up to the hard facts of life. She could make friends "A pesar de haber publicado artículos de ideas avanzadas y también versos de menor importancia."⁵⁵

She did not stay in any one place for too long a period while she was seeking her teaching certificate. The teaching certificate made her eligible for secondary school teaching, and she stepped into this work immediately on

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 173

⁵² Ibid., p. 174

⁵³ Saavedra Molina, p. xviii. "Mas tarde, en 1910, regularizó su magisterio en cursos rápidos que le valieron los certificados del caso."

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

⁵⁵ Ibid.,

obtaining the necessary approval, even though she confesses "..... la enseñanza es mi preocupación ...la primaria se lleva mis preferencias."⁵⁶ No doubt, then, the economic difficulties from which she suffered greatly during the early life had a great deal to do with determining her decision. The places in which she taught on the primary school level, however, as well as her move into secondary school teaching, can be summed up as follows: "Tras de ocupar un puesto de "ayudanta" en la escuela de La Compania y La Canterna, y en seguida de secretaria en el liceo de Niñas de la Serena, es destinada a una escuela rural de Barrancas, vecina a Santiago donde es trasladada en Junio de 1911 al Liceo de Niñas de Traiguén en calidad de profesora de higiene, pasando de este modo del servicio de Instrucción Primaria al de la Enseñanza Secundaria."⁵⁷

In the Secondary Schools she also began to move around quickly. She stayed at Traiguén two months. After that her history reads as follows:

1911, Inspectora y profesora de Historia, en el Liceo de Antofagasta.

1912, Inspectora y profesora de Geografía y Castellano en el Liceo de Los Andes.

1918, Directora y profesora de Castellano en el Liceo de Punta Arenas.

1920, Directora y profesora de Castellano en el Liceo de Temuco.

1921, Directora y profesora de Castellano en el Liceo No. 6 de Santiago. ⁵⁸

The Beloved

At this point we must go back and fill in some important events. In 1906 began the sentimental event which occupied the heart, soul and pen of the poetess for ten and more years. It is the story of a great passion of love be-

⁵⁶ Rosenbaum, p. 173

⁵⁷ Iglesias, p. 194

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 194-195

come drama by the death of one of the protagonists, and the affective confusion of the other.⁵⁹ At this time she was working as a helper either in La Compañía or La Canterna. The Directora of the Liceo used to send her to the train station to collect the mail, and as Alone so directly and frankly states, "allá le vio".⁶⁰ His name was Romelio Ureta, and he was seven years older than she. He was a railroad employee.⁶¹ Alone and Augusto Iglesias describe him in the same way: "mediano de estatura, mozo fanfarrón a manera de bigote, los puntos erguidos, y calzado con unos zapatos, de charol inverosímilmente agudos, de los que entonces solían llamar "lengua de vaca""⁶² "....que para mí constituía un problema darnos cuenta como podían caberle los dedos de los pies, en prisión tan estrecha, sin que el indicado poseedor no irrumpiera en lastimeros gritos al andar."⁶³ Iglesias knew him, at least passingly. Neither Iglesias nor Alone appear to have much sympathy for him, as Alone concludes the above description thus: "Nada de esto impide el nacimiento de un amor inmortal

⁵⁹ Saavedra Molina, p. xviii. "Durante este noviciado fue cuando se inició en 1906 el suceso sentimental a que se refiere gran parte del libro Desolación, en el cual la poetisa ha dejado entrever diez años y más de la historia, toda interior, de una gran pasión amorosa, vuelta drama por la muerte de uno de los protagonistas y el desconcierto afectivo del otro."

⁶⁰ Alone, p. vi

⁶¹ Ibid., "Llamábase Romelio Ureta, tenía siete años más que ella ...Desempenaba en la Empresa de los Ferrocarriles el mismo cargo que, en la red sur, el padre de Pablo Neruda; era conductor de trenes."

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Iglesias, p. 197

y la poesía suele venir por extraños rieleles."⁶⁴

Romelio Ureta was apparently Lucila's first love (and perhaps her only one). This love lasted long enough to become quite deep; it ended about three years later in sudden tragedy. The story of that tragic conclusion is told us by Miss Rosenbaum. "It is said that through no fault of his own - to help a "friend in need" - he was prompted to "borrow" some of the company's funds with the intent of returning them. But it evolved into the familiar story - unable to replace the amount before the "borrowing" could be detected, and abandoned in his plight by his "friend", he sought escape in suicide - "shattering his temples like delicate glass". The echo of that shot ... was Gabriela Mistral""⁶⁵ When Romelio's body was found the only thing he had in his possession was a post card Lucila had sent him.⁶⁶ No writer states, however, that the love affair had anything to do with his suicide, but it is generally recognized that it was he "who was so tragically responsible for the flowering and crystallization of her great literary career."⁶⁷

The Prize

Five years after Romelio's tragic death, Lucila entered some poems in a literary contest in Santiago, called Los Juegos Florales, sponsored by La Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores.⁶⁸ Her entry was entitled Sonetos de la

⁶⁴ Alone, p. vi

⁶⁵ Rosenbaum, p. 174

⁶⁶ Alone, p. vii. "Quince días después se dió un balazo. En la cartera interior del paletto guardaba una de dos tarjetas que yo le había escrito.": Hugh Montes and Julio Orlandi, Historia de la Literatura Chilena (Santiago de Chile, 1957, p.197, "En un bolsillo se le halló una tarjeta con el nombre de Lucila Godoy. Era todo lo que tenía en su traje."

⁶⁷ Rosenbaum, p. 17

Muerte. As far as we know, it is the first literary contest she ever entered. She perhaps entered the contest out of curiosity, wondering what might be the popular reaction to her verses. It was immediate and spontaneous. She was awarded first prize, "consistente en una flor natural, una medalla de oro y una corona de laurel."⁶⁹ With characteristic modesty, she refused to be present at the award, but later admitted that, silent and unnoticed, she watched her triumph from an anonymous seat in the gallery.⁷⁰ Her "Sonnets" were read by the poet Víctor Domingo Silva.⁷¹ Actually Gabriela is said to have rarely read her own verses, and usually only to intimate friends. She once said: "They say I read my poetry like my worst enemy." She once read a poem of hers to a friend in Madrid, who relates that before starting, Gabriela "se disculpó advirtiéndole que ella no sabía leer versos, y era verdad, no sabía leerlos, al menos como suele hacerse. Con una voz opaca y en tono humilde de letanía y sámodia, sin un gesto, sin una de esas modulaciones subrayadas con que los recitadores suelen despistar al oyente dándole gato por liebre - y a veces liebre por gato - , Gabriela me leyó La Fuga"⁷²

⁶⁸ Petit, p. 12 "...Gabriela Mistral se había revelado ... en un concurso organizado por la sociedad de Artistas y Escritores, en que obtuvo el primer premio de poesía."

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 13

⁷⁰ Rosenbaum, p. 174

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 175

⁷² Margaret J. Bates, "Apropos an Article on Gabriela Mistral," The Americas XIV (October, 1957) p. 150

Lucila, moreover, entered Los Juegos Florales as Gabriela Mistral. This was the first time she used this name. "Until then her compositions had always borne the signature that revealed her dual Basque ancestry: Lucila Godoy Alcayaga."⁷³ There are many opinions about the origin of her pseudo-name. Some attribute Mistral to her admiration for the Provençal poet, Frédéric Mistral, whom she mentions among her favorites in her poem "Mis Libros". Others say she took it from the name sailors give to the strong wind that blows in the Mediterranean: Maestral, minstral or mistral. Jorge Monach says that in the two names, she synthesized both the spiritual and the material: Gabriela signifies the angelic annunciation, presence of the spirit; and Mistral, the warm breath of the earth.⁷⁴ Clarence Finlayson, writing in Commonweal in 1941, suggests that she took her pseudo-names from the two poets "whose admiration carried her away: Gabriel D'Annunzio and Frédéric Mistral, both Europeans."⁷⁵ Interestingly enough, Brother Basil, F.S.C., writing in the Catholic Educator, 1949, quotes Gabriela herself as saying in a private communication: "I selected Gabriela simply because it is a poetic, sweet-sounding word, and Mistral, as I am a mountaineer and I love the wind."⁷⁶

⁷³ Rosenbaum, p. 175

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Clarence Finlayson, "Spanish American Poet: The Life and Ideas of Gabriela Mistral," Commonweal XXXV (December 5, 1941) p. 160

⁷⁶ Brother Basil, F. S. C., "Gabriela Mistral," The Catholic Educator XIX (May 1949), P. 520

In another place she alludes to her name Mistral, and suggests a spiritual significance to it too: "It is a long tradition among poets to implore the guidance of the mythical muse in the opening lines of their poems; as a Christian artist, I dedicate my work to the Holy Ghost whose symbolic wind transformed the Holy Apostles. I am constantly reminded of this "guiding spirit" by my own name Mistral." 77

It was then, in 1914, that Gabriela Mistral came into being. After that fortunate event, "her name triumphantly resounded throughout the nation. Anthologies and other publications readily sought her collaboration." 78 Alone says that the Juegos Florales "la Lanzaron," 79 but it was actually her Sonetos de la Muerte. Since these proved to be so significant in changing the course of her life, it would be very much to our purpose to present them here, and then look into their historical background and source of inspiration. The "Sonetos" are as follows:

1

Del nicho helado en que los hombres te pusieron,
te bajare' a la tierra humilde y soleada.
Que he de dormirme en ella los hombres no supieron,
y que hemos de soñar sobre la misma almohada.

Te acostare' en la tierra soleada con una
dulcedumbre de madre para el hijo dormido,
y la tierra ha de hacerse suavidades de cuna
al recibir tu cuerpo de niño dolorido.

Luego ire' espolvoreando tierra y polvo de rosas,
y en la azulada y leve polvareda de luna,
los despojos livianos iran quedando presos.

77 Ibid.

78 Rosenbaum, p. 175

79 Alone, p. ix

Me alejare' cantando mis venganzas hermosas,
¡porque a ese hondor recóndito la mano de ninguna
bajará a disputarme tu puñado de huesos!

2

Este largo consancio se hará mayor un día,
y el alma dirá al cuerpo que no quiere seguir
arrastrando su masa por la rosada vía,
por donde van los hombres, contentos de vivir ...

Sentirás que a tu lado cavan briosamente
que otra dormida llega a la quieta ciudad.
Esperaré que me hayan cubierto totalmente ...
¡y después hablaremos por una eternidad!

Solo entonces sabrás el porqué, no madura
para las hondas huesas tu carne todavía,
tuviste que bajar, sin fatiga, a dormir.

Se hará luz en la zona de los sinos, oscura;
sabrás que en nuestra alianza signo de astros había
y, roto el pacto enorme, tenías que morir ...

3

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

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

¡No le puedo gritar, no le puedo seguir!
Su barca empuja un negro viento de tempestad.
Retórnalo a mis brazos o le siegas en flor."

Se detuvo, la barca rosa de su vivir ...
¿Que no se del amor, que no tuve piedad?
¡Tú, que vas a juzgarme, lo comprendes, Señor!

Controversy

According to Augusto Iglesias, who cites a declaration of Gabriela herself, the Sonetos de la Muerte were written two years before Los Juegos Florales.⁸¹ Writers and critics posit and accept the tragic love story as the inspiration of the spirit and content of these sonnets. The same spirit and content are found in many of the poems of her first publication, Desolación, in 1922. It is put forth in a spirit of sorrow, anguish and preoccupation with her lost lover. It is a spirit that, despite the depth of its anguish, immerses itself in religious sentiment, faith and hope, capable of bursting forth in prayer in the darkest moment to Him "que vas a juzgarme," and who alone "lo comprendes".

There is one critic, however, who takes exception to this current, and his reasons are very interesting, even though we have no way of verifying their validity. Hence, we can only take them for what they are worth until the research of others might coincide.

Augusto Iglesias denies that Lucila was ever in love with Romelio Ureta and that there was any true love affair as the source of Los Sonetos de la Muerte. Other writers, even those who personally knew Gabriela or who had personal contact with her, say nothing that would support this theory, in fact statements, even those of Gabriela, to the opposite are in abundance. Mr. Iglesias recognized this fact, for in the beginning of his critical analysis, after having presented the Sonetos, states:

Si mañana sin más antecedentes psicológicos que los ofrecidos por las palabras de estos Sonetos, alguien tratara de penetrar el oculto simbolismo que los

⁸¹Iglesias, p.198. Note: "Hemos oído sostener - basados, los que hablan, en una declaración de la propia señorita Godoy - que los Sonetos de la Muerte fueron escritos con dos años de anterioridad a los Juegos Florales de 1914."

inspiró, creería - nos imaginamos - sin muchos alardes de perspicacia, que nada era más fácil que reconstruir con la simple base de esos vocablos líricos y rimados una parte de la psico-biografía de su autora y los motivos del trágico amor que en sus entrañas palpita. Verso tras verso el drama de un romance infausto surgiría desde las penumbras del símbolo, para perfilarse, gracias al trabajo clarificador y metódico de la exégesis literaria, en una historia pasional truncada por la vista de la Intrusa.⁸²

He then presents the traditional interpretation of her amorous life as given by Saavedra Molina, which we have been following in this paper in general outline. His reaction to this interpretation is as follows:

el procedimiento del señor Saavedra Molina, - ofrece, sin duda, un grande interés, y facilita a los lectores no especializados en el tema, el trabajo de relacionar muchos versos de la poetisa con la época en que ellos fueron aparentemente escritos. No obstante, en el fin que se propone, puede objetarse al distinguido crítico con firmeza.

Hasta ahora no hay ninguna prueba cierta de que el amor temprano de Lucila Godoy por R. U. haya tenido, en la realidad de los hechos, la efectividad que algunos supusieron y que la leyenda alimenta desde entonces sin dejar intersticios por donde pueda filtrarse la luz de la reflexión.⁸³

He proceeds to present his interpretation in the following way:

1. No one among Lucila's family knew about the affair. No one spoke about it even enough to give it slight importance. Even Lucila's sister didn't know about it until five years later. "Y hay que advertir que la gente de los pueblos chicos es muy bien informada ..."⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., p.200

⁸³ Ibid., p.230

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.230-231. "Desde luego ¿quién entre sus familiares de Elqui o sus amigos serenenses sostiene eso del amorío de Gabriela? / Rues..!nadie! Jamás hablaron de ello, para darle siquiera una pequeña importancia, ni su hermana mayor, ni las señoritas Molinas, ni persona alguna relacionada directa o indirectamente con Ureta. Al contrario, como, y lo comprobamos en páginas anteriores, nunca Lucila conversó de esto con su hermana: el ser mas querido y cercano a su

2. Even Gabriela herself never wanted to refer to the matter. Those who knew her could only comment: "Parece que se querían." In her prose writing Gabriela never gives the slightest confirmation to these words. "Todo su fuego lo deja para los versos: para el mundo transmutador y fantástico de su personalidad, donde los Deseos se corporizan, y la vida onírica salta sobre la realidad con su vuelo ágil de fantasma ..."⁸⁵

3. In 1937, Saavedra Molina published an article on Gabriela entitled Vida y Obra de Gabriela Mistral. His approach to the work was based on the principle that "Los mejores versos del libro Desolación están de tal modo ligados a la vida de la poetisa durante los años que precedieron a sus 30 años de edad: que sería vano intentar una explicación de su mérito poético prescindiendo de la vida amorosa de Lucila Godoy." Gabriela herself was not interested in giving the reader that needed explanation, so he tried to supply it in his article. Gabriela later wrote to him, expressing her gratitude for this work and manifesting her desire to tell him so in person. She spoke with frank sympathy of the biography he had written: "Insistió ella en llamar "biografía" a lo que yo nombraba "estudio de la originalidad poética"."
Agusto Iglesias says that these "palabras corteses y amables" of Gabriela are "en absoluto, no satisfactorias ...". She indicates in her letter to Saavedra Molina that one or two corrections had to be made in the biography but she

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.230-231, cont. corazón! .../ En efecto, Emelina, sólo cinco años después del conocimiento de Gabriela con R. U. supo de este flirt. Y hay que advertir que la gente de los pueblos chicos es muy bien informada...."

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 231-232. "Nunca la ilustre mujer ha querido referirse a este asunto. Y no por hermetismo, sin duda, puesto que en ese flirt de muchacha no existe ni la sombra de un desliz, nada incorrecto o bochornoso que deba o debiera ocultarse."

but she never got around to making them for him, although she expressly
86
wanted to.

4. Mr. Iglesias takes his cue at this point and proposes to make the necessary corrections. His theory is that "el romance amoroso de la Mistral es solo un nuevo caso - entre los numerosos que existen en la historia literaria - de una ensoñación convertida en realidad poemática. It was possibly influenced by some of the writings of Amado Nervo before 1912.

5. At this point he produces the first Sonetos de la Muerte, which, he says, were written around 1912. According to Gabriela herself, they were originally supposed to be submitted with the three other sonnets which won first prize in the Juegos Florales of 1914. These original sonnets were never compiled in any book, and their author never referred to them later in any of her writings.
87
The poems are as follows:

Los muertos llaman. Los que allá pusimos
con los labios en cruz y el labio frío,
suelen desperezarse; los quisimos
nos ven vivir; y les parece impío!

Llaman, y a la celeste algarabía
de nuestro carnaval de sangre y risa,
llega a entenebrecernos la alergia
ese loco gritar de la ceniza.

86 Ibid., p. 232. "Gabriela Mistral me expresó por carta su agradecimiento, y cuando vino a Chile el año siguiente, manifestó su deseo de decírmelo en persona. Me habló con franca simpatía de la "biografía" que yo había escrito. También me habló así su secretaria ... Me prometió escribirme desde Estados Unidos sobre uno o dos reparos de detalle. No cumplió su promesa."

87 Ibid., p. 234. "Estos Sonetos de la Muerte, escritos en 1912, según propias declaraciones de la autora, y que primitivamente, de acuerdo con sus propósitos, iban a formar un todo con los otros tres que obtuvieron el Premio en los Juegos Florales de 1914, no han sido compilados en ninguno de sus libros; y jamás Gabriela se ha referido a ellos en sus escritos de más tarde."

El tambien clama; pide que en la senda
el paso apure, y que mi cuerpo extienda
pronto en su huesa, agosta como herida.

Cierro el oido para no escucharlo;
quiero con carcajadas ahogarlo
y el clamor crece hasta llenar la vida!

* * * * *

Yo elegi entre otros, soberbios y gloriosos
este destino, aqieste oficio de ternura,
un poco temerario, un poco tenebroso,
de ser un jaramago sobre su sepultura.

Los hombres pasan, pasan, exprimiendo en la boca
una cancion, alegre y siempre renovada
que ahora es la lasciva, y manana la loca,
y manana la mística. Yo elegi esta invariada.

Cancion con la que arrullo un muerto que fue ajeno
en toda realidad, y en todo ensueno, mio;
que gusto de otro labio, descanso en otro seno;

pero que en esta hora definitiva y larga
solo es del labio siervo, del jaramago pio ⁸⁸
que le hace el dormir dulce sobre la tierra amarga.

6. "...nos atreveriamos a sostener que en estos versos se
halla clara y precisa la clave del romance de Gabriela Mistral, y con ella la
confirmacion de nuestros sospechas." He says that the case of Gabriela was
that of a romantic girl wounded more in her imagination than in her soul by
the bloody destiny of her friend. ⁸⁹ His death was more of a theme for medita-
tion or pondering of sorrowful reflections. "Hechos de esta naturaleza pue-
den "deshacerse" del golpe con un punado de lincas: un glosa, un soneto un

In Memoriam... ⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp 233-234.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.234. "El caso de Gabriela era el de una muchacha romantica herida
mas en su imaginacion que en el alma por el cruento destino de su amigo."

Gabriela was encouraged a great deal by her success in the Juegos Florales with the Sonetos de la Muerte. She therefore continued to write on the same theme "con creciente patetismo." And when in 1922 the lyrical content of what was to be her first book was materially realized, the myth already surrounding the author also helped her literary destiny. And with this publication her parable was complete, and "el ensueño que lo impulsara había llegado a su fin." She could now turn to new fonts of inspiration; the romantic story she set out to tell was now dead.⁹¹

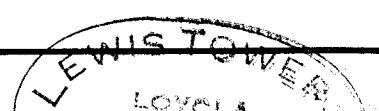
Mr. Iglesias concludes that Gabriela never even knew Romelio Ureta very well, and certainly he had no passionate importance to her spirit. The fact that he died having only her post-card in his possession means little or nothing, because it was a common thing among the young people at that time to send such cards to each other. After Los Sonetos de la Muerte "la memoria de este joven se transforma en una creación en marcha."⁹²

Mr. Iglesias' theory is interesting and his proof of it is persuasive. It is so contrary to what other writers say, however, that the whole

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 235

⁹¹ Ibid. "Estimulada por el éxito que tuvo en los Juegos Florales de 1914 con los Sonetos de la Muerte Gabriela continuó divagando sobre el mismo tema con creciente patetismo ..., compenetrada, cada vez con mayor fuerza, por la voluntad del Mito que forjara su vigorosa inspiración. / Lo que aparece desdibujado y hermético en los Sonetos de la Muerte, cubierto aun por las brumas, las incongruencias y símbolos propios del lenguaje de los sueños, cobran humana nitidez en los poemas subsiguientes; y cuando ya el contenido lírico de lo que debía ser, en 1922, su primer libro, estaba materialmente realizado, el Mito de que Gabriela era la autora tocaba también la meta de su destino literario. Complida ya su parábola, el ensueño que lo impulsara había llegado a su fin. La vena azul de la ilusión buscaba ahora nuevos surcos; y el romance por ella mantenido moriría exangüe mucho antes que las luces de la Tarde envejecieran con su oro pálido la existencia del Poeta que lo creara."

⁹² Ibid.



story of the love affair becomes quite amazing. Iglesias used Gabriela's own words, as well as interviews with her family and friends. Other critics used the same procedure and came up with an opposite conclusion. Alone cites Jerónimo Lagos Lisboa who wrote about a conversation he had with Gabriela in which she told him frankly: "Nos amábamos de verdad. Un mal día rompimos..."⁹³ Alone also reminds us of the Voto Gabriela attached to her first publication of Desolación in which she said: "Dios me perdone este libro amargo y los hombres que sienten la vida como dulzura me lo perdonen también. En estos cien poemas queda consagrado un pasado doloroso, en el cual la canción se ensangrentó para aliviarme."⁹⁴ It, therefore, seems more likely that she actually was in love and that its tragic end truly made her suffer. We can only form our judgment from the facts given. Perhaps Gabriela actually intended to keep her private life truly private and, therefore, allowed mistaken judgments to be made and printed. This was her privilege. Alone's conclusion to the story, however, bears an interesting rationalization. He says: "No cantan los poetas como quieren, cuando quieren, ni aun siquiera lo que ellos mismos quieren. El dolor constituye para muchos un imperativo; cala más hondo que el placer y resulta más fácil pintarlo..."⁹⁵

Theosophism

Before we pass on to the second phase of Gabriela Mistral's life there is one other element in her formation that must be mentioned. Unfortunately, we can do little more than mention it, for of all the writers consulted, only two give it any recognition. It seems that while Gabriela was Inspec-

⁹³ Alone, p. vii

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. xxiii

⁹⁵ Ibid.

tora at Antofagasta she became acquainted with an occult theosophical society called "Destellos" which was presided over at that time by Carlos Parrau, President of the Lodge. This particular Lodge was an affiliate of the Theosophical Society founded in India by Colonel Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky. Mr. Parrau had two sisters in the Liceo de Niñas, and it seems it was for that reason he occasionally visited the Inspectora, Señorita Godoy. Apparently in 1912, Lucila Godoy became a member of the society, "seducida por las explicaciones y libros occultistas que le prestara su amigo."⁹⁶ Among the books which most interested her were those of Mme. Blavatsky, Los Cuentos and La Vox de Silencio. She, however, is said to have been very irregular in her attendance at the Lodge. "Su catolicismo inicial y posiblemente cierto temor a enfrentarse de buenas a primeras, con los prejuicios del mundillo que la rodeaba, debió influir de seguro, en su ánimo de joven provinciana. Tenía entonces 20 años y a esa edad el carácter no ofrece, por lo general, su temple más seguro."⁹⁷.

We do not know how long she belonged to this group, but Iglesias believes she was out of it by 1914. Her Sonetos de la Muerte, made public in that year, he says, "ofrecen indudables huellas de lecturas y creencias occultistas."⁹⁸ On the other hand, he says, "desde el punto de vista de las creencias, están al margen de las enseñanzas ortodoxas de los católicos apostólicos romanos, y aun de los cristianos en general."⁹⁹ A Señor Espinosa, writing in The Americas in 1951, says that Gabriela was still a theosophist in 1924 when she was in Mexico. As his source, he quotes Alone: "En la agitada República,

⁹⁶ Iglesias, p. 210. "Parrau tenía a sus hermanas en el Liceo de Niñas, y por ese motivo, u otro, tuvo que visitar en alguna ocasión a la Inspectora señorita Godoy, lo que dio lugar a la amistad de ambos."

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 211

Gabriela Mistral supo imponer su palabra p acifica; ella, por reacci on, evoluci on hacia una religiosidad dogm atica y de teosofista libre volvi ose cat olica integral."¹⁰⁰ He, however, questions this late date, even though he quotes Gabriela herself as saying: "For a time I was attracted to it (Buddhism)."¹⁰¹ He says that in her first book, Desolaci on, published in 1922, "her Christian ideas and spirit are clear and strong and most of the poems are definitely Catholic in dogma and spirit. "It cannot be denied, however," the author goes on to state, "that in a few poems Buddhistic influences are found: for example in :Intima from Desolaci on, which is apparently inspired by a poem of Rabin-dranath Tagore, as R aul Silva Castro states. In her Lecturas para mujeres, Gabriela Mistral included ten selections from R. Tagore among a little over two hundred, but some of these ten are not of a definite Buddhistic character, but rather universal philosophical truths."¹⁰²

All that has been said so far about Gabriela's participation in the theosophical society and its influence on her thought and character is a far cry from what was said about her by E. Francis McDevitt, writing in America, 1932. Apparently, his only preparation for his article was a reading of some of the poems of Gabriela Mistral, which accidently fell on his desk. In these poems (or poem), he found "...the confining Puritanism of a non-Catholic poet-ess born and reared in a Catholic country on a Catholic Continent."¹⁰³ He

99 Ibid.

100 Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa, "Gabriela Mistral, The Americas VIII (July 1951) p.7; of Alone, Panorama de la Literatura Chilena Durante el Siglo XX, (Santiago de Chile, 1931), p. 70

101 Espinosa, p.8

102 Ibid.

103 E. Francis McDevitt, "Gabriela Mistral," America XLVII (July 16, 1932), p.357

continues; "... it is easily discernable that the notable poetess of a Catholic country, nurtured on a tradition and spirit exclusively Catholic, has been drawing from philosophies and ideals foreign to her people. ..."¹⁰⁴ He goes on to describe her as

... a woman of the world, for years a prominent participant in public feminist movements, a teacher in the public schools of her country, has written a poetry of intangible and, at times, incongruous, fear, of an aversion to humanity, a withdrawal from human creatures, so that "the fever of the century with deep unrest, consumes" her powers and drives her back to the soil with such restlessness that her heart cries out in a desperate effort to press close to the earth and become merged with that soil and all its forms, to mingle pantheistically with the dust, water pitchers, braziers, and lamps. Does she not try to agree with the Potter that "we are all vessels" and does she not say, in her "Prayer for the nest": "Sweet Lord, I for a brother make my prayer -- the nest, defenseless, innocent and fair?"¹⁰⁵

He sees that her "devitalising artistic pantheism, (is) shot through with regret for its own futility ..."¹⁰⁶ Having pointed out her pantheistic tendencies, however, he concludes "But we must hesitate to style her a poetic pantheist because she displays so much restlessness - so much dour shunning of life and yet so much yearning for it - and such a melange of contradictory philosophies that one can only be impressed by the unstable fluency of the thought streams that irrigate her poems. And here it is pertinent to note that the prevailing, permeating mood of Gabriela Mistral, the poetess, is one of sadness."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 358

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Mr. McDevitt was not very well acquainted either with the poetess or her work. Could it be that this writer could only perceive the "indudables huellas de lecturas y creencias ocultistas" and nothing of "her Christian ideas and spirit" described by another as "clear and strong" and that "most of her poems are definitely Catholic in dogma and spirit"? The fact that this article appeared in 1932, by which time Gabriela was "well-traveled" and had in fact become well known in Europe and Latin America, indicates that she had not yet made herself known "north of the border."

A New Life

The second phase of Gabriela Mistral's life is characterized by travel. This actually began in 1922, when she was asked by Jose Vasconcelos, the then Mexican Minister of Education, to come to Mexico to collaborate in the Rural Educational Reform which he was instituting in that country. Saavedra Molina suggests that she came to his attention through an article written by Doña Inés Echevarría de Larraín in La Nación of Santiago in 1921. Gabriela accepted the offer and was even given a commission for the work by the Chilean Government. She went to Mexico in June of 1922, and remained there for two years.¹⁰⁸

Coinciding with this event was the publication of her first book, Desolación. This also came about through the influence of others, this time a

¹⁰⁸ Saavedra Molina, p. xxv. "Habría que mencionar en primer término, llegado el caso, a doña Inés Echevarría de Larraín, quien hizo el más tropical elogio de Gabriela en un artículo que aún recuerdan personas que recibieron al mismo tiempo un trato injusto. Fue en 1921, en La Nación, de Santiago, si la memoria me es fiel. Y vino en seguida el homenaje extranjero, que culminó en la invitación del Gobierno de México, por iniciativa del ministro Vasconcelos, para en junio de 1922, habiendo sido, además, comisionada por el Gobierno de Chile."

North American.

In 1921, Professor Frederico de Onís, of Columbia University, made her the subject of a lecture which he gave in the Instituto de las Españas. His audience, which was composed largely of North American teachers of Spanish, was so impressed by the depth and haunting beauty of her poems, with which Professor de Onís punctuated his critical exposition, that it was eager to become better acquainted with the work of this extraordinary woman - herself a teacher, and when it was learned that they had never been published in book form, the idea of collecting these poems was born. Thus, her first book, Desolación, was published in 1922, not in her native Chile, but in the United States where her admirers have since become legion, and where many of her poems have appeared in translation. ¹⁰⁹

In the prologue to this publication, Professor de Onís states that it was difficult to obtain Gabriela's consent to collect and publish the poems. In her 'genial modesty' she preferred to leave her work scattered.¹¹⁰ After this event she published more readily. In 1923, while she was still in Mexico she published an anthology entitled Lecturas para mujeres. "It contains, among countless compositions in prose and verse by outstanding writers of the world, many of her own."¹¹¹

Finishing her sojourn in Mexico in 1924, she was thereupon named the representative of the University of Mexico in Europe.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Rosenbaum, p. 175

¹¹⁰ Margaret J. Bates, "Gabriela Mistral," The Americas, III (October, 1946) p. 169

¹¹¹ Rosenbaum, p. 176

¹¹² Petit, p. 5, "1924 -- Es nombrada representante de la Universidad de Mexico en Europa."

During this same year she came to the United States and was received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge. She was also the honored guest at a reception held in the building of the Pan American Union.¹¹³

In 1925 she returned to Chile and was sent immediately to Geneva as the official cultural representative of Spanish America at the League of Nations. There she was made secretary of the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation, residing in Paris at the Palais Royal.¹¹⁴

In 1927, she was appointed delegate of the Teachers Association of Chile at a meeting in Locarno, Switzerland.¹¹⁵

In 1928, she represented Chile and Ecuador at the International University Conference at Madrid.¹¹⁶ In this same year she was named by her government a member of the administrative council of the Cinematographic Educational Institute at Rome, an organization formed by the Italian Government, and made up of only eleven great personalities.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ruth A. Wheelock, "Gabriela Mistral," Catholic World, CLXXXVI, (January, 1958), p. 253.

¹¹⁴ Finlayson, p. 160

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Petit, p. 5. "1928 - Representa a Chile y Ecuador en el Congreso de la Federación Internacional Universitaria de Madrid."

¹¹⁷ Ibid. "En esta misma época, el Consejo de la Sociedad de las Naciones acuerda solicitar que acepte un cargo en el Consejo Administrativo del Instituto Internacional de Cinematografía Educativa, creado en Roma gracias a una subvención del Gobierno Italiano, y en el que no forman parte sino once grandes personalidades. En tal ocasión, emprende la faena de hacer filmar el cuento de Perrault, "La Bella Durmiente en el Bosque"."

In 1929 she represented Chile, in Madrid, at the International Congress of University Women.

In 1930 she returned from Europe and came to the United States, this time as a visiting professor at Columbia University, Barnard, Vassar, and Middlebury Colleges.¹¹⁸

In 1931 she was designated to occupy la cátedra de Literatura Hispanoamericana at the University of Puerto Rico. She was also requested to give courses and lectures at many Central American Universities: La Habana in Panama, where in the name of the schools of the Republic, she was given a golden orchid and a symbolic brooch; in El Salvador, where she was officially received by the Universidad Central; in Guatemala she was treated in the same way. In 1933, on a new journey, she was named "Hija adoptiva de Puerto Rico".¹¹⁹

In 1932, Gabriela formally began her long career as a Consul. In this year she was appointed by Chile as permanent consul at large, a post equivalent to Cultural Attaché. She was successively named Consul in Naples, Madrid, (1932) Lisbon (1936), and Nice (1938). Before the latter appointment she declined a similar assignment in Colombia because of poor health.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Espinosa, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Petit, p. 6. Solicitada por otros países de la América Central, realiza diferentes cursos y conferencias en La Habana, en Panama (donde se la obsequia, en nombre de las escuelas de la Republica, una orquídea de oro y un broche simbólico), en Salvador, donde es recibida oficialmente por la Universidad Central, lo mismo que en Guatamala. Dos años Después, (1933), durante un nuevo viaje (provista ahora de pasaportes diplomáticos, que facilitarán sus proximas movilizaciones) es declarada "Hija adoptiva de Puerto Rico". Recordemos, además que Gabriela Mistral ha sido nombrada Jefe de Letras y Consejera técnica en el Instituto de Cooperación Intelectual de la Sociedad de las Naciones, en Paris, y miembro del Comité de Publicaciones Ibero-Americanas."

¹²⁰ Ibid. "La carrera consular de Gabriela Mistral (es la primera mujer que, en Chile, desempeña estas funciones) no comenzo sino en 1932./Nombrada en Genova, donde no pudo desempeñar su cargo, pasa en 1933, a Madrid, y en 1936 a Lisboa.

With the advent of the Second World War, the terror of Naziism in Europe obliged her to request a transfer to Brazil. In December, 1945 she was residing in Petropolis when she was informed that she had won the Nobel Prize. It was not a surprise for her because she knew that Chile had requested it for her years before.¹²¹ After winning the Nobel Prize, Gabriela Mistral, as one writer says: "pasa a ser figura universal."¹²² From this time until her death she devoted herself to writing and teaching. On her way back from Europe in 1946 she again came to the United States and was again received at the White House, this time by President Harry S. Truman.¹²³ On returning to Chile, the Chilean Government gave her a life tenure as consul "with the privilege of choosing whatever post will be most favorable for her health and writing."¹²⁴ Her first choice fell on Los Angeles in California.¹²⁵

Before her death, Gabriela Mistral was yet to receive another award. This came in 1950, when she was presented the Serra Award of the Americas.

120 En 1938 es nombrada en Niza, después de haber declinado, por motivos de salud, un nombramiento de Ministro en Colombia."

121 Saavedra Molina, p. xxix. "La tormenta desencadenada por el nazismo la obligó a pedir su traslado al Brasil. Allí la encontró el Premio Nobel, sin sorpresa, en diciembre de 1945, porque Gabriela sabía que Chile lo había pedido para ella desde años antes."

122 Arturo Torres-Rioseco, Breve Historia de la Literatura Chilena (Mexico, 1956), p. 140.

123 Wheelock, p. 253

124 J. M. Espinosa, "Gabriela Mistral," The Americas II (April, 1946) p. 498

125 Ibid.

This award is bestowed annually for meritorious achievement in the field of Inter-American relations. It had no direct association with her poetic production, though it nevertheless possessed a certain literary resonance. "It recalls to mind both Gabriela Mistral's openly expressed admiration for St. Francis and the attribution more than once by the critics, of a Franciscan spirit to her verse."¹²⁶

Interestingly enough we discover at this time that Gabriela had been a Third Order Franciscan for a number of years prior to receiving this award. An editorial comment in The Americas on the bestowal of the award said that: "There is in all her songs a high quality of Christian resignation and faith. She betrays a deep devotion for all mankind, particularly the lowly and the forgotten, and an intense love for nature which stems directly from the innate Franciscanism of her heart."¹²⁷ Father Alexander Wyse, OFM., The Director of the Academy of American Franciscan History, at the time of the same award spoke very eloquently of Gabriela and her work and evaluated its merit in the following terms: "A life based on spiritual ideals and dedicated to the furtherance of noble objectives cannot but merit the respect of all good men. Yet devotion to these high principles is all the richer a contribution to the betterment of humanity when it is accompanied by a voice that articulates in exquisite tones the spiritual values toward which the external actions strive. Such a union of good works and good words - as rare as it is felicitous - is bound to receive the deserved acclaim of mankind."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Sister John Berchmans, O.P. "Gabriela Mistral and the Franciscan Way of Life," Renaissance, V (Fall, 1952), p. 40

¹²⁷ "The Serra Award of the Americas Conferred upon Gabriela Mistral," The Americas VII (January, 1951) p. 363.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.364

Some like to speak of the mysticism in the verses of Gabriela, others like to attribute this to her admiration for St. Francis. Sister John Berchmans, O. P., discusses the relation between the two and concludes that Gabriela was deeply attracted to St. Francis because of his deep awareness and appreciation of spiritual beauty. She did not consider herself a mystic; rather she attributed this characteristic in her verses to love; "Because of love, because of love's tendency toward exaggeration, I described what I shall never see."¹²⁹ In another place she acknowledges:

I have not seen your St. Francis,
With kneeling body arched like a bow
Between earth and heaven, the symbol
of the "Amen" of his soul's submissiveness.¹³⁰

Death --

Tribute to Gabriela Mistral came also in her death. She died January 10, 1957, of cancer in Hempstead, Long Island.¹³¹ Her funeral Mass took place at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York,¹³² and it was celebrated by Cardinal Spellman.¹³³ There were many United Nations delegates among the mourners. "Her body was flown in a United States Military plane to Lima, Peru, where it was met by a Chilean Military transport. Three days of mourning, previously accorded to top army and government officials only, were declared by Chilean President Carlos Ibanez, and half a million Chileans crowded Santi-

¹²⁹ Sister John Berchmans, O.P., p. 95

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Margaret J. Bates, "Gabriela Mistral's Poema de Chile," The Americas XVII (January, 1961) p. 253

¹³² Wheelock, p. 254

¹³³ Alone, p. xxi, "...fue seguida de exequias que en Estados Unidos presidió un Cardenal, ..."

ago's streets to accompany the body in the funeral cortege.¹³⁴

Conclusion --

Gabriela Mistral will long be remembered and appreciated by her fellow countrymen and friends throughout the world. She loved all men and truly desired their good. She considered herself above all a teacher and wanted to give to all of the abundance that had been given to her. She tried to be always faithful to her maxim that "a humble life is worth more than the greatest work of art,"¹³⁵ and she considered this the greatest lesson she could teach. Because of the purity and wholeness of her soul she truly did become a universal figure. But it is particularly because of that special talent that welled-up in her soul that she will long be endeared to the hearts of many. "Her special talent lies in the writing of lyrical verse, and she has produced poems which it is safe to say, will be read and enjoyed as long as Spanish is spoken."¹³⁶

II

Gabriela Mistral's Career as a Writer

We have already seen that Gabriela began to write and to publish her writings at an early age. She was very young, and, even though without formal education, she felt she had ideas to express and thoughts to share with others, so she did not fail to employ the best means she had. Through her writings,

¹³⁴ Wheelock, p. 254

¹³⁵ Brother Basil, F. S. C., p. 502

¹³⁶ _____, Commonweal, XXXXIII (November, 1945), p. 156, (editorial comment on Nobel Prize).

she came in contact with a whole new world; her influence on the minds and the lives of others broadened its sphere immensely. Her international reputation actually began in 1922 with the publication of her first book, Desolación, and with the commencement of her career as an official representative of her country. Between 1914 and 1922, she made herself known by writing for national and foreign newspapers and periodicals; at this time, too, she even became a controversial figure, as Alone tells us:

Ella colaboraba escribiendo en revistas nacionales o extranjeras, y son numerosas las que registran por entonces, desde "Zig-Zag" y "Sucessos", hasta otras, efímeras un olvidadas, algunas de las mejores composiciones que dió a luz antes de su primer libro. Se la discutía, atacaban sus atrevimientos. Aunque el modernismo declinante y la escuela vanguardista que empezaba habían ampliado considerablemente el gusto, debilitando los escrúpulos retóricos, todavía viejos maestros se llamaban a escándalo o pedían fuegos del Olimpo contra la revolución. Que entre los revolucionarios saltara una mujer agravaba y hacía imperdonable el delito, anadiéndole una falta a las costumbres.¹³⁷

Gabriela did not defend herself in these long arguments and discussions; she was perhaps too modest for that. She did, however, undertake an extended correspondence with recognized personalities in all parts of the world, seeking, perhaps, worthy critical opinions, advice and guidance. In Chile her works were accepted and published in the text books of Guzman Maturana, whose circulation was becoming widespread, thus advantageously promulgating her name, sending it to many unsuspected, distant places.¹³⁸ During

¹³⁷ Alone, p. ix

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. ix-x "Gabriela Mistral no se defendía; pero cartas suyas salían de los Andes en todas direcciones. Algunas llegaban lejos, a Amando Nervo, a González Martínez, a José Vasconcelos, a otras elevadas personalidades, mientras los libros escolares de Guzman Maturana, cuya circulación se extendía mucho, propagaban ventajosamente su nombre, difundiendo hasta insospechadas distancias."

this period, too, Gabriela made many trips to the Capital, and the modest student quarters where she stayed "Convertíase en cita de intelectuales fascinados; porque la maestra, de grave rostro, vestida de 'saya parda' poseía ya la extraña seducción que más tarde sufrirían mujeres y hombres de la más distinta procedencia. Era una especie de majestad sencilla, que se desplegaba serenamente sobre un fondo casi religioso."¹³⁹

Gabriela's influence was a moral one. Perhaps that is why it is so communicative, so self-diffusive. From her earliest years she came into profound philosophical contact with nature. She found even the humblest thing expressive and good, and she sought to understand it, appreciate it, and help others to enjoy its beauty. She became very adept at describing searchingly even the smallest objects - and the deepest, most challenging human experiences. She herself confesses that she wrote poetry for the relief of the spirit, "to undo knots".¹⁴⁰

As Gabriela matured and developed and became an appreciated poet, she constantly evaluated her ideals and her attitude toward poetry and art. She realized that they must adhere to some norm. By the time she was thirty¹⁴¹ this evaluation had undergone its purification and she was able to generalize upon it and extend it to all artists as "El Decálogo del artista". These ten commandments proved to be her guide and her discipline. They are:

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. x.

¹⁴⁰ Bates, III, p. 171

¹⁴¹ Bates, XIV, p. 145

1. Thou shalt love beauty which is the shadow of God over the Universe.
2. There is no art that is atheistic. Even though thou dost not love the Creator, thou wilt affirm His existence by creating in His likeness.
3. Thou shalt not use Beauty as fodder for the feelings, but as the natural food of the soul.
4. It shall not serve as a pretext for luxury or vanity but only as a spiritual exercise.
5. Thou shalt not seek it in the market place, nor put thy talents at the service of the vulgar, for Beauty is virginal and what is found in the market place is not beauty.
6. Beauty will rise from thine heart to thy poem and thou shalt first be cleansed.
7. Beauty shall also bear the name of Pity and will console the hearts of men.
8. Thou shalt bring forth thy work as a child is born, staunching the blood of thy heart.
9. Beauty shall not be for thee an opiate that lulls thee to sleep, but a generative wine which fires thee to action, for if thou dost fall from thy full stature of man or woman thou dost cease to be an artist.
10. After thine every creative act thou shalt emerge humbled, for thou shalt have fallen short of thine own vision and short of that wonderful vision of God which is nature.¹⁴²

The fruits of the observance of this Decalogue are her primary works:

Desolación, Ternura, Tala, Lagar. Many critics have pointed out the moral value of these poems. Max Darieux says she exercises "a moral influence which works mysteriously on the heart and mind." Pedro Prado says "you will recognize her

¹⁴² Finlayson, p. 162

¹⁴³ Bates, III, p. 177

for the nobility she awakens."¹⁴⁴ Some have applied to her her own words about Teresa Prats de Sarratea: "When she spoke life became richer, her presence in the world helped to keep it pure."¹⁴⁵ Diez Canedo points to her Decalogue of the Artist as one in which the moral is of greater importance than the aesthetic.¹⁴⁶ Manuel Montoliú, in the prologue to Los mejores poesías (líricas) de los mejores poetas, is perhaps the most eulogistic of her spiritual depth. He says:

Gabriela Mistral is one of those poets with such rich and solid spiritual substance, that she does not have time to cultivate form for the sake of form. Her expression is characterized by a volcanic violence and by an enormous synthetic force; her words issue forth candent from an interior forge where they have been hammered into shape in the flames of a mind in perpetual fire. She is one of those poets who has an immense and profound interior world which dictates to her spontaneously the law of exterior beauty; in which the imagination, the idea, and the spiritual and physical sensibility form one and the same thing with the emotion ... it is understandable how a poet with such gifts must possess an enormous lyric force... Her lyricism is, in substance, the pure aesthetic emotion of her individual life. Gabriela Mistral is a great lyric poet. She tells us in one of her admirable pieces of prose that "a song is a wound of love which opened up all things to us." This definition, one of the most profound that has ever been given of true lyric poetry, contains the essence of the lyricism of our poetess.¹⁴⁷

The first major stroke of this artist, a gift given to few, was a masterpiece. She called it Desolación. For her it was "un libro amargo" made up of "cien poemas (en que) queda sangrando un pasado doloroso, en el cual la canción se ensangrentó para aliviarme." She thereby indicates the biographical

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 174

nature of this work, material she never really wanted gathered into a single publication. The book, however, contains much more than what the title signifies: "the rent of the soul of the poet who has lost her lover through suicide."¹⁴⁸ This actually is only one part of the book. The rest contains poems to children, to mothers, poems of a religious nature and some prose selections.¹⁴⁹

Desolación was first published in New York, in 1922, through Federico de Onís. A second edition of this work was made in Santiago de Chile in 1923. This second publication was an enlarged and more complete edition, and it contained a prologue by Pedro Prado. Saavedra Molina also points out that this edition was clandestinely reproduced in Buenos Aires, in a compact text (176 pages compared with the 357 of the original).¹⁵⁰ A third edition appeared in Santiago de Chile in 1926. The prologue to this edition was written by Hernán Díaz Arrieta (Alone), and is described by Saavedra Molina as "un estudio valioso".¹⁵¹

The next principal poetic work of Gabriela was Ternura, which was published in Madrid in 1924. Almost all the material in this edition was taken from Desolación. There were, however, some new poems. A second edition of Ternura appeared in Buenos Aires in 1945, increased in size by about thirty poems.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 176

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Saavedra Molina, p.c.x., "La 2.^a ed.: Santiago de Chile, 1923, fue aumentada y es la más completa; 357 págs. y tres de catálogo. Fue reproducida clandestinamente en Buenos Aires en texto compacto: 176 págs. Esta 2.^a ed. contiene un segundo "Prólogo" firmado por don Pedro Prado."

¹⁵¹ Ibid. "La 3.^a ed.: Santiago de Chile, 1926, con 344 págs., ganó un estudio valioso de don Hernán Díaz Arrieta, puesto como "Prólogo", pero perdió el "Prólogo" importante del Instituto de las Españas, y también casi toda la sección de poemas "Infantiles",..."

¹⁵² Ibid. "Ternura. Madrid, 1924, 108 págs. Casi todo el material proviene de Desolación. La 2.^a ed., Buenos Aires, 1945, ha sido aumentado con unos treinta poemas nuevos."

The thematic characteristic of this work is described by Anderson Imbert as a "cándido, puro y transparente amor al prójimo" sung now with tenderness.¹⁵³ The principal object of this tenderness is children.

The third book of poetry that she published appeared in Buenos Aires in 1938, under the title Tala. Magdalena Petit describes it as presenting a new face of the poet, and she quotes the critical observation of Eduardo González Lanuza: "Gabriela Mistral nos da otro libro -- quiero subrayar bien lo de otro -- no como consecuencia y evolución del anterior, sino como si se tratara del libro de otra Gabriela, de una hermana suya cuya hermandad consistiera precisamente en ser impar. Es un fenómeno tan maravilloso por lo inesperado como el descubrimiento del compañero de las estrellas dobles. ¿Superior? ¿Inferior? Distinto."¹⁵⁴

Gabriela's purpose in publishing this new book of poetry was to raise funds for the Basque children who were made homeless during the Civil War in Spain. fala is the only thing the poor poet had to offer to the Spanish children scattered around the earth to the four winds by the Civil War. The proceeds of the book's sale were to go to the homeless Basque children. The desire to help these

Piececitos de niños
azulosos de frío
¡Como os ven y no os cubren,
Dios mío! (Desolación)

prompted the publication of Tala and Gabriela hoped that this gesture might cleanse the work of its essential "miseria".¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Enrique Anderson Imbert, Historia de la Literatura Hispanoamericana II (Mexico, 1961), p. 35

¹⁵⁴ Petit, p. 17

¹⁵⁵ Bates, III, p. 173

Tala is frequently compared with Desolación because of the similarity of its contents. Sidonia Rosenbaum points out the difference between the two books. "Tala," she says, "published in 1938, is the vintage of sixteen years of intense and errant living. This is a more complex book than the first, and reflects the spiritual vicissitudes which attended her for nearly ^{two} decades. Its mastery, its sureness of style and precise choice of words reveal the mature artist who has gone through the bitter exercise of attaining that much-prized "difficult simplicity." The tragic love note, the morbid preoccupation with death, the vehemence -- dominant in Desolación -- are now superseded by far more varied motifs, by a serenity that reveals an emotion more contained (whose key note is hope), and by an expression less tortured."¹⁵⁶

In 1945, Gabriela published her final book of poetry. She called it Lagar, and it was published in Santiago de Chile. In this last book she was even more expressive of her love for the earth and its men. Anderson Imbert says that the verses here "En su mayoría tienen ritmos de canción. El cansancio de la vejez en tierra extranjera ahora la hace recordar y ansiar la muerte, y los versos son duros, secos, opacos, aun prosaicos: "igual que las humaradas / yo no soy llama ni brasas".¹⁵⁷

Besides these four principal works, in 1941, she also published an anthology of her own verses. This book was given an interesting prologue by Ismael Edwards Matte. The book is made up of selections from her works published prior to 1941; added to it is a small selection of prose.

¹⁵⁶ Rosenbaum, pp. 195-196.

¹⁵⁷ Anderson Imbert, p. 35.

Gabriela's writing career includes much more than the publication of her poetic compositions. For many years and in many places, she was also a journalist. Magdalena Petit says simply: "Gabriela Mistral ha escrito en casi todos los grandes diarios de la lengua española entre los cuales se ha de citar principalmente "La Nación", de Buenos Aires; el "A.B.C.", de Madrid; "El Universal", de Caracas; "El Mercurio", de Santiago."¹⁵⁸ Margot Arce de Vázquez adds to this list "El Repertorio Americano" de Costa Rica, "El Tiempo" de Colombia, "Critica" de Buenos Aires, las revistas "Atenea", "Sur", y "Bimestre Cubana", "aparte de lo publicado en España y de lo traducido en los diarios de Francia, Portugal y el Brasil.,...".¹⁵⁹

The newspaperman Armando Zegri, speaking of these articles, said:

"Han desarrollado en mí el amor de su prosa, variada, musculosa, de un sabor y un colorido muy criollos."¹⁶⁰ Magdalena Petit also tells us a word about Gabriela's prose style. "Estos artículos," she says, "se han hecho famosos con el nombre de "Recados", como la autora los llama sencillamente, dando un sentido más íntimo a la palabra mensaje. Hay que citar particularmente los que han aparecido en la forma de esbozos biográficos, que nos presentan a los más importantes personajes de la actualidad o del pasado, como San Francisco de Asís, Charles Peguy, Unamuno, Rainer María Rilke, Lindbergh, Pascal, Buffon, Juana de Arco, Bolivar, Tagore, Amundsen, Selma Laguerloff, y cien más."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Petit, p. 17

¹⁵⁹ Arce de Vázquez, p. 69

¹⁶⁰ Petit, p. 17

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Gabriela's sympathetic interest in people and in life carried her to many places and brought her into contact with many personalities. Like a philosopher she sought in all these travels and experiences the deeper meaning of life. She interpreted these experiences according to the individual light of truth that she herself possessed; and the conclusions of these interpretations, as was natural, were integrated into her own philosophy of life, always clarifying and modifying its various aspects as needed. Such an approach to life and its vicissitudes could not but reflect itself in her thoughts and, ultimately, in the process of her poetic creation. It is with the realization of this background to her work that Margot Arce de Vázquez presents us with the following observation in regard to our understanding and analysis of Gabriela's work. She says:

El análisis de la obra de Gabriela Mistral presentará siempre serias dificultades a quien se proponga estudiarla con rigor. No podrá prescindir quien lo intente del examen de las estrechas relaciones de los motivos poéticos con la vida histórica del poeta; entre los datos que aportan las biografías publicadas tendrá que separar delicadamente lo que es producto del entusiasmo fantasioso de los biógrafos. Y, hasta cuando Gabriela misma cuenta su vida, y en la poesía, y en la prosa, y en la conversación familiar, tendrá que arrancarle la máscara novelesca con que se escudaba por no sé qué pudor, de la curiosidad impertinente o malévola del mundo. Tal vez llegó a sentir en la madurez, ya serenada, la necesidad de desvirtuar por la ambigüedad la franqueza casi brutal de Desolación, su primera salida al público.¹⁶²

III

Allusions to Catholicism in Desolación

We have already passed through two important elements of Gabriela Mistral's life. It was necessary that we get to know her, so that we might

¹⁶² Arce de Vázquez, p. 165

understand her and her work. We have seen her grow out of a lonely childhood into a strong and determined woman, full of kindness, tenderness and charity in her dealings with others. Now we shall try to get to know her interior state of being; and this in reference to the Catholicism of her thoughts. Our sole field of study is her first publication of poetry, Desolación. We must bear in mind that this book was published in 1922. She was still very young. She had been accused of having pagan ideas and practices, of being independent in her thoughts, and, by one writer, of being pantheistic. No doubt, many of the poems in Desolación were written during this period. For example, "Los Sonetos de la Muerte," for which she won Los Juegos Florales in 1914, were said by Iglesias to have been written in 1912. Very likely, many of the other poems about her lost lover collected in "Dolor", the third part of Desolación, were also written during this period.

We have entitled this section "Allusions to Catholicism" because Gabriela does not wave her religion as an ostentatious banner in her verses. Religion to her meant life; hence, Catholicism was one of her principles of life. She meditated on its principles, integrated them into her thoughts and personality, and then breathed them into her verses. Many of her verses are religious. They do not, however, attract our attention to her as to a religious minded person, rather to the object of her aspirations.

Desolación is divided into four parts, under the following titles: "Vida" (22 poems), "La Escuela" (2 poems), "Dolor" (28 poems), and "Naturaleza I" (11 poems). We have divided our analysis of the poems of these four parts into four major themes most often recurring in her thoughts: life, death, love and compassion. All four of these themes, of course, have basic religious implications; perhaps they constitute a testament.

The title of the book, Desolación, is the title of one of the poems. It is the first poem in the last section of the book, and it is the first part of a three part description of the "Paisajes de la Patagonia". The title does then, present a problem. Why did she make it the title of the book? As we saw above, Rosenbaum does not feel that Desolación aptly describes the entire book; rather only one section, "Dolor". Desolación, however, means sadness, melancholy, heaviness of spirit, and one can feel that this desolation is almost a Gethsemane that pervades the entire book. There seems to be sorrow overshadowing everything she says. It is possible that the book was entitled after the poem that she felt best described its contents. In this poem, the author feels aloneness, and the sorrow of aloneness. The landscape she beholds is tragically descriptive of her interior spirit. The falling snow, in the last verse, is like the 'great look of God over her', that is she feels that her sorrow and desolation are given to her as if such were a part of her vocation. This spirit is always with her, and she always remains superior to it.

DESOLACIÓN

La bruma espesa, eterna, para que olvide donde
me ha arrojado la mar en su ola de salmuera.
La tierra a la que vine no tiene primavera:
tiene una noche larga que cual madre me esconde.

El viento hace a mi casa su ronda de sollozos
y de alarido, y quiebra, como un cristal, mi grito.
Y en la llanura blanca, de horizonte infinito,
veo morir inmensos ocasos dolorosos.

¿A quién podrá llamar la que hasta aquí ha venido
si más lejos que ella solo fueron los muertos?
¡Tan solo ellos contemplan un mar callado y yerto
crecer entre sus brazos y los brazos queridos!

Los barcos cuyas velas blanquean en el puerto
vienen de tierras donde no están los que son míos;
sus hombres de ojos claros no conocen mis ríos
y traen frutos palidos, sin la luz de mis huertos.

Y la interrogacion que sube a mi garganta
al mirarlos pasar, me descende, vencida:
hablan extranas lenguas y no la conmovida
lengua que en tierra de oro mi vieja madre canta.

Miro bajar la nieve como el polvo en la huesa;
miro crecer la niebla como el agonizante,
y por no enloquecer no cuento los instantes,
porque la noche larga ahora tan solo empieza.

Miro el llano extasiado y recojo su duelo,
que vine para ver los paisajes mortales.
La nieve es el semblante que asoma a mis cristales:
siempre sera su albura bajando de los cielos!

Siempre ella, silenciosa, como la gran mirada
de Dios sobre mi; siempre su azahar sobre mi casa;
siempre, como el destino que ni mengua ni pasa,
descenderá a cubrirme, terrible y extasiada.

("Naturaleza, I" 1 pt, I)

Desolacion, in its first section, is entitled "Vida". It opens with a meditation on death. The poet projects this meditation into the inert mind and body of "El Pensador de Rodin". The theme of life and death enters into about half of the poems of this first book. Gabriela tried hard to understand these two basic phenomena of reality. In "El Pensador de Rodin" she depicts mortal man's struggle against death.

Y en la angustia, sus musculos se hienden, sufridores.
Los surcos de su carne se llenan de terrores.
Se hiende, como la hoja de otoño, al Señor fuerte.

que le llama en los broncees...Y no hay árbol torcido
de sol en la llanura, ni leon de flanco herido,
crispados como este hombre que medita en la muerte.

Death, obviously, was a terrible thing for her when she wrote this poem. Nevertheless she remains very orthodox throughout the verses. She clearly depicts the mortality of the human flesh.

el Pensador se acuerda que es carne de la huesa,
carne fatal, delante del destino desnuda,

Gabriela must have meditated long hours on the words of the Ash Wednesday ceremo-

ny taken from Genesis 3:19: "Remember man, that dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." The thought of death and the perishableness of the human body were frequently present to her mind, not as a heavy burdensome thought, but as a problem. She tried to understand life, death, humanity. She sees man as "delante del destino desnuda", because he has no choice when it comes to death. But in the verse immediately following she seems to allude to man's pristine glory before sin entered the world. She then carries this theme into the second stanza:

carne que odia la muerte, y tembló de belleza.

Y tembló de amor, toda su primavera ardiente
y ahora, al otoño, anégase de verdad y tristeza.
El "de morir tenemos" pasa sobre su frente,
en todo agudo bronce, cuando la noche empieza.

The image of night is frequently found in liturgical literature as a symbol of death. As night symbolizes death, so the day symbolizes life. Gabriela, then, seems to be here thinking on this cycle in the life of an individual person and also in regard to mankind: life -- death -- immortality; none being-- creation in glory -- death through sin -- immortality gained only through the necessary step of death. And the Thinker, wrapped in these thoughts, "se hiende...al Señor fuerte / que le llama en los broncees ..." Gabriela here gives us a powerful physical image, because she wants us to realize that the Thinker, in his whole being, tends toward Him who created him and who maintains him in being. His tending toward the 'strong Lord' is almost a cry and a prostration, because, even though confident, he fears the awful step he must take to attain that Lord.

The thought of Death occurs again in "Vida" in a poem entitled "In Memoriam", written in honor of Amado Nervo. She asks him, when he will have entered the kingdom of God, to remember her, and

A la sombra de Dios, grita lo que supiste:
que somos huérfanos, que vamos solos, que tú nos viste.
¡que toda carne con angustia pide morir!

This is now a brave cry. Here she equivalently states her desire to die too. She does this because she realizes that mankind here on earth is in exile from its true home. Therefore we are orphans and alone. Only in the embrace of God will there be complete absence of anguish, sorrow and suffering.

If death was so terrible to her and yet so desirable, what was her attitude toward life? It was not a fatalistic or pagan attitude in any way. Just as death became a thought provoking problem for her, so too life presented her with a challenge that she embraced. All that God creates and puts on this earth is good and has a definite finality. Gabriela pondered these basic elements of reality and they soon constituted the core of her philosophical approach to life. In sorrow as well as in joy, her verses show themselves to be bathed in a realization of the purpose of all being: it must return to God who created it.

Life's challenge is represented in the cross. This is a very common concept among spiritual writers. Christ dies for us on the cross. All the sufferings we must experience in this life have greater meaning because of His Cross. Therefore, our sufferings become a cross united to His; thereby giving them eternal value. Gabriela personified life's cross in "La Cruz de Bistolfi".

Cruz que ninguna mira y que todos sentimos,
la invisible y la cierta como una ancha montaña:
dormimos sobre ti y sobre ti vivimos;
tus dos brazos nos mecen y tu sombra nos baña. (Vida, 2)

The cross is always with us. We cannot escape it. It is a real part of life. It is invisible, yet certain. Now and then we cannot but feel its weight. No one is exempted from the cross. Even though no one sees it, we all experience it daily, even in the most profound joys of life. The poem continues:

El amor nos fingió un lecho, pero era
solamente tu garfio y tu leño desnudo.
Creímos que corríamos libres por las praderas
y nunca descendimos de tu apretado nudo.

De toda sangre humana fresco está tu madero,
y sobre tí yo aspiro las liagas de mi padre,
y en el clave de ensueño que le llagó, me muero.

¡Mentira que hemos visto las noches y los días!
¡Estuvimos prendidos, como el hijo a la madre,
a tí, del primer llanto a la última agonía!

Because life is a cross, we must see in it the value of the cross of Christ. Failure to do this deprives life of its true meaning. Gabriela seems to be telling us this in the third poem of "Vida". We gather this thought not only from the contents of "Al Oído del Cristo", but also from the ordered arrangement of the poems. "Al Oído del Cristo" is given immediately after "La Cruz de Bistolfi". In this three part poem she declares her loathing of worldly indifference to the sufferings of Christ. Such indifference amazes her, angers her, and would have her bid Christ call down fire from heaven to consume those who will not amend. The intimacy of her communication with Christ in her heart is evident. She identifies herself with Christ, and in His sufferings she finds the meaning and value of her own.

¡Oh Cristo! El dolor les vuelva a hacer viva
l'alma que les diste y que se ha dormido,
que se la devuelva honda y sensitiva,
casa de amargura, pasión y alarido.

¡Garfios, hierros, zarpas, que sus carnes hiendan
tal como se parten frutos y gavillas;
llamas que a su gajo caduco se prendan
llamas como argollas y como cuchillas!

¡Llanto, llanto de calientes raudales
renueve los ojos de turbios cristales
y les vuelva el viejo fuego del mirar!

¡Retóñalos desde las entrañas, Cristo!
Si ya es imposible, si tú bien lo has visto,
si son paja de eras ... ¡desciende a ayentar!
(Vida, 3, pt. III)

Gabriela came to identify herself with Christ, and in His sufferings she found the meaning and value of her own. In other words, in all things, in sorrow as well as in joy Christ meant all things to her. His life and sufferings absorbed all the meaning of hers. It seems that she lives in expectation of His call, that call which will unite her with Him forever and will put an end to all suffering, sorrow, desolation. These thoughts are gathered principally from her beautiful poem, "Canto del Justo". In the last stanza of this poem she identifies herself with all mankind, making her cry that of all men who have hoped in Christ and who await a participation in the eternal blessings promised to His followers. The four last stanzas of this poem follow:

Costado de Cristo,
otro labio abierto
regando la vida:
¡desde que te he visto
rasgué mis heridas!

Mirada de Cristo,
por no ver su cuerpo,
al cielo elevada:
¡desde que te he visto
no miro mi vida
que va ensangrentada!

Cuerpo de mi Cristo,
te miro pendiente,
aun crucificado.
¡Yo cantaré cuando
te hayan desclavado!

¿Cuándo sera? ¿Cuándo?
¡Dos mil años hace
que espero a tus plantas
y espero llorando! (Vida, 10)

These same beautiful thoughts flowed into her "Tribulación" (Dolor, 10),
"Nocturno" (Dolor, 11) and "Credo":

Creo en mi corazón, ramo de aromas
que mi Señor como una fronda agita,
perfumando de amor toda la vida
y haciéndola bendita.

Creo en mi corazón, que cuando canta
hunde en el Dios profundo el flanco herido,
para subir de la piscina viva
como recién nacido.

Creo en mi corazón en que el gusano
no ha de morder, pues mellará a la muerte;
creo en mi corazón, el reclinado
en el pecho de Dios terrible y fuerte.

(Vida, 16, stanzas 1, 3, 7)

Gabriela lived close to God. Her interior life must, indeed, have been deep and rich. We don't know from biographical data, however, that she always lived so close to God. She seems to have come to a deep appreciation of God through her close contact with Nature. In "El Dios Triste" she contemplates the beauties of an autumn scene. The beauty and goodness of God are manifest in what she beholds. But the thought occurs to her that perhaps God does not exist. This no sooner happens than she awakens from her lethargy and beholds all that surrounds her: He must exist! Nature and all its beauty have no other possible explanation. This poem recalls St. Thomas' proofs for the existence of God based on the notion of order and perfection in the Universe. Speaking anthropomorphically, Gabriela feels that her thoughtless moment 'wounded God'.

Mirando la alameda, de otoño lacerada,
la alameda profunda de vejez amarilla,
como cuando camino por la hierba segada
busco el rostro de Dios y palpo su mejilla.

Y en esta tarde lenta como una hebra de llanto
por la alameda de oro y de rojez yo siento
un Dios de otoño, un Dios sin ardor y sin canto
y lo conozco triste, lleno de desaliento!

Y pienso que tal vez Aquel tremendo y fuerte
Señor, al que cantara de locura embriagada,
no existe, y que mi Padre que las mañanas vierte
tiene la mano laxa, la mejilla cansada.

Se oye en su corazón un rumor de alameda
de otoño: el desgajarse de la suma tristeza.
Su mirada hacia mí como lágrima rueda
y esa mirada mustia me inclina la cabeza.

Y ensayo otra plegaria para este Dios doliente,
plegaria que del polvo del mundo no ha subido:
"Padre, nada te pido, pues te miro a la frente
y eres inmenso, ¡inmenso!, pero te hallas herido."
(Vida, 19)

Her approach to life is philosophical, healthy, and true. She suffered a great deal in life because of love. During this long period of suffering the thought of her lover was an obsession to her. This produced an emotional state which was not healthy. After a time, she began to realize this and she embraced this new light with open arms; first of all because she recognized truth in the commitment it asked of her, and secondly, because it would give her the peace of soul she longed for. She frequently thought about her lover and the tragedy of his life. She prayed intently for him. Prayer, however, must be made with confidence as well as intensity and sincerity. This confidence demands that, after making our prayers, we leave the matter in God's hands, where we put it in the first place. Life must be faced; its responsibilities must be met and accepted. When Gabriela was coming out of her period of emotional unrest, she came to a realization of this. She beautifully tells us this in her "Coplas".

Tal vez lo que yo he pedido
no es tu imagen, es mi alma,
mi alma en la que yo cavé
tu rostro como una llaga. (Dolor, 24, 11.57-60)

Gabriela is now asking for a new start on life. Life was always very meaningful to her and treasured as very valuable. She realized that she must

not let setbacks, no matter how grave, blind her to this reality. When one compares the content of these verses, however, with the content of Gabriela's life, one wonders at what point in her life did she allow herself to be oppressed and dominated by her sufferings and obstacles to the fulfillment of her dreams. Her life was too rich! Too filled with interest in things, people and places! Then, she must not be describing her actual reaction to these events but rather a possible reaction. In other words, she is telling a tragic love story, describing the profundity of her emotional involvement in it, and showing by her actions what the only christian response could be. In reality, she did face up to life and embrace all that it poured out upon her, even exploiting her every talent to be of assistance to others. Her deep interior pre-occupation, however, must at times have seemed too much for her. In "Los Huesos de los Muertos" she seems to allude to this, but now she does it very objectively and with complete self composure. Her soul now enjoys peace and rest.

Los huesos de los muertos
hielo sutil saben espolvorear
sobre las bocas de los que quisieron.
/ Y estas no pueden nunca mas besar!

Los huesos de los muertos
en paletadas echan su blancor
sobre la llama intensa de la vida.
/ Le matan todo ardor!

Los huesos de los muertos
pueden mas que la carne de los vivos.
/ Aun desgajados hacen eslabones
fuertes, donde nos tienen sumisos y cautivos!

(Dolor, 25)

The complete attainment of this peace and serenity is beautifully expressed in the last poem of "Dolor", "Palabras Serenas". Even though the past with its experiences and remembrances is still with her, it has all been left confidently in the hands of God. She can now smile.

No hay nada ya que mis carnes taladre.
Con el amor acabose el hervir.
Aun me apacienta el mirar de mi madre.
¡ Siento que Dios me va haciendo dormir!

Gabriela Mistral's poetry flowed from a heart on fire. Love ruled her heart and her head. It is love that made her superior to every situation. This love was not a common or a worldly one. It was a deep, interior treasure. It was brilliant within her, and it illumined all around her. Gabriela's concept of love was one that gave meaning to her whole life and to all she did. Love for her was not a sensual thing nor a means of satisfying sensual desires. Love is a giving of self. Gabriela shows us that love demands a commitment, and this commitment without warning can mean great self-sacrifice. Christ said "Greater love than this no man has, that one lay down his life for his friends,"¹⁶³ This seems to have been Gabriela's guide line in love. We who read her poetry are her friends. She tries to teach us a higher love, a love that is truly self-giving, one in which the disposition to sacrifice self is a necessary constant companion.

Gabriela knew the effect of love. It is a human phenomenon given to man by God as an image of the divine life itself. Love has its beginning in goodness and in a recognition of goodness in others. Hence love ennoble the one loving and the beloved. Gabriela made this the theme of a poem she called "Verguenza".

Si tú me miras, yo me vuelvo hermosa
Como la hierba a que bajo el rocío,
y desconocerán mi faz gloriosa
las altas canas cuando baje al río.

Tengo verguenza de mi boca triste
de mi voz rota y mis rodillas rudas.
Ahora que me miraste y que viniste,
me encontré pobre y me palpé desnuda.

Ninguna piedra en el camino hallaste
más desnuda de luz en la alborada
que esta mujer a la que levantaste,
porque oíste su canto, la mirada.

Yo callaré para que no conozcan
mi dicha los que pasan por el llano,
en el fulgor que da a mi frente tosca
y en la tremolación que hay en mi mano...

Es noche y baja a la hierba el rocío;
mírame largo y habla con ternura,
¡que yamanana al descender al río
lo que besaste llevará hermosura!

(Dolor", 8)

In the second stanza of this poem, she says

Ahora que me miraste y que viniste,
me encontré pobre y me palpé desnuda.

The love communicated to her made her feel empty. She gave her whole self in love and still felt the gift to be an inadequate return. Such depth of love and humility recalls our efforts to love God adequately, a yearning that has been best described by St. Augustin in the memorable words, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee". Human love at times almost appears capable of infinite depth, and this depth of love can only find its complete satisfaction in the eternal possession of God.

True love must be faithful. While it exists it admits of no exceptions or duality. It is a commitment which must involve the whole person of the lover. Love of God has the same characteristics, except that it goes a step further: it is and must be unswerving and irrevocable. Our love of God must never terminate. Once it does, all human love becomes self love, and our unique raison d'etre falls by the wayside. Love of God is corrupted and lost only by mortal sin.

Gabriela's demands on the lover are similar to those of God. Once one has fallen in love, that love is definitive. To leave one beloved and turn to another is similar to turning to self, that is, it is similar to sin. According to Catholic principles, the only time this would be wrong is in marriage, Marriage is a permanent, indissoluble union. In her verses, and in her life, Gabriela never attained the commitment of marriage. She, then, as well as the one she loves would be free to turn to another in a new bond of love. Love, however, outside of marriage cannot, possibly, without sin, become a complete and perfect giving of self to the beloved. Gabriela, however, speaks as though she were married or at least engaged.

"Dolor" is a love story whose highest point is a tragedy. It is made up of twenty eight poems. The story is autobiographical in character, and it is told from the point of view of the psychological state of being of the poet throughout the entire experience: from the first encounter, through the tragedy, to ultimate psychological rest and peace of soul. In poem seventeen, "Ceras eternas", the beloved is now dead. Gabriela's only consolation in this event is that her beloved can never again turn away from her to satisfy his own sensuality.

¡Ah! Nunca Más concerá tu boca
la verguenza del beso que chorreaba
concupiscencia como espesa lava!

Vuelven a ser dos pétalos macientes,
esponjados de miel nueva, los labios
que yo quise inocentes.

¡Ah! Nunca más conocerán tus brazos
el mundo horrible que en mis días puso
oscuro horror; ¡el nudo de otro abrazo! ...

Por el sosiego puros,
quedaron en la tierra distendidos,
¡ya, ¡Dios mio!, seguros!

¡Ah! Nunca más tus dos iris cegados
tendrán un rostro descompuesto, rojo
de lascivia, en sus vidrios dibujado.

¡Benditas ceras fuertes,
ceras heladas, ceras eternas
y duras, de la muerte!

¡Bendito toque sabio,
con que apretaron ojos, con que apegaron brazos
con que juntaron labios!

¡Duras ceras benditas,
ya no hay brasa de besos lujuriosos
que os quiebren, que os desgasten, que os derritan!
(Dolor", 17)

Sensual love does not ennoble a man. It is based on man's lower animal appetites, and it drags him down to its own level if he allows it to rule him. Gabriela, even though deprived of the one she so deeply loved, still rejoices because he is now "secure". He can no longer be unfaithful. This is the one thing with which she has no sympathy. It even seems that she is thankful that death will now keep him from sin.

The fact that she could find reason to rejoice in his death is amazing enough. If her concern was not only with his unfaithfulness to her, but also with the actual sinfulness of his actions, if he actually was sinning, her sentiments become truly supernatural. But this is not all. She went a step further in her concern, as we see in the third sonnet of "Los Sonetos de la Muerte"; she begged God that either he be snatched from his sinful pursuits and be returned to her, or that God take him to Himself; these being the two possible sources of his soul's security! Even she here expresses the inexplicableness of her sentiments. The "Malas manos" of the first stanza are those which deprived him of his spiritual life, taking from him the purity and innocence which she so respected and loved. Her prayer was answered.

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

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

¡No le puedo gritar, no le puedo seguir!
Su barca empuja un negro viento de tempestad.
Retórnalo a mis brazos o le siegas en flor."

Se detuvo la barca rosa de su vivir...
¿Que no sé del amor, que no tuve piedad?
¡Tu, que vas a juzgarme, lo comprendes, Señor!
("Dolor", 12)

Gabriela's own faithfulness to her beloved is sung of in many of her verses. In "Dolor", where this theme is most obvious, it is given special emphasis in "La espera inutil", "La obsesion", "Volverlo a ver", "El surtidor", "El vaso", and many others. Her faithfulness began with "El encuentro" where love at first struck deep. It persevered throughout his life and became particularly intense with his tragic departure from life. Even in death she proposed to stay with him, as she tells us in the first of the "Sonetos de la Muerte".

Del nicho helado en que los hombres te pusieron,
te bajaré a la tierra humilde y soleada.
Que he de dormirme en ella los hombres no supieron,
y que hemos de soñar sobre la misma almohada.

Te acostaré en la tierra soleada con una
dulcedumbre de madre para el hijo dormido,
y la tierra ha de hacerse suavidades de cuna
al recibir tu cuerpo de niño dolorido.

Luego iré espolvoreando tierra y polvo de rosas,
y en la azulada y leve polvareda de luna,
los despojos livianos irán quedando presos.

Me alejaré cantando mis venganzas hermosas,
¡porque a ese hondor recóndito la mano de ninguna
bajaré a disputarme tu puñado de huesos!

Gabriela felt so united to her lover that when he broke that bond of love, she felt that God Himself would avenge her. Love is a holy thing. Christ himself made marriage a sacrament, a river of living water. God certainly would avenge the sin of unfaithfulness in one who died unrepentent, but He does not hasten the hour of death of those who are unfaithful. Yet, Gabriela speaking to her deceased lover, in the second of the "Sonetos de la Muerte", tells him that his own actions condemned him to death.

sabrás que en nuestra alianza signo de astros había
y, roto el pacto enorme, tenías que morir ...

He was unfaithful not only to her, since in taking his own life, he also proved himself unfaithful to God. Gabriela realized this aspect of his tragedy too. She must have also felt, however, that he might have been out of his mind when he performed this cruel deed. She frequently expresses a hope for his eternal salvation, which would only be possible if he were not morally responsible for taking his own life. This, however, is something that only God could know. Gabriela exploits this hope. In "Interrogaciones" she questions God at length about the final destiny of suicides.

Y responde, Señor: cuando se fuga el alma,
por la mojada puerta de las largas heridas,
¿entra en la zona tuya hendiendo el aire en calma
o se oye un crepitar de alas elloquecidas?
("Dolor", 13)

Her metaphor of Hell is clearly based on a Catholic concept: the fallen angels. She knows that the odds are stacked against him for whom she prays. As she concludes her questioning, she pleads with our Lord and reminds Him that He is Love and the source of all goodness.

¿No hay un rayo de sol que los alcance un día?
¿No hay agua que los lave de sus esitigmas rojos?
Para ellos solamente queda tu entraña fría,
sordo tu oído fino y appretados tus ojos?

Tal el hombre asegura, por error o malicia;
mas yo, que te he gustado, como un vino, Señor,
mientras los otros siguen llamándote Justicia,
no te llamaré nunca otra cosa que Amor!

Yo sé que como el hombre fue siempre zarpa dura;
la catarata, vértigo; asperexa, la sierra.
Tu eres el vaso donde se esponjan de dulzura
los nectarios de todos los huertos de la Tierra!

Gabriela is pleading a difficult cause, and she realizes she is completely dependent on God's mercy and goodness. This is another aspect of the wide stream of her love. She was familiar with God and talked to Him frequently, Now she needed Him, and He was constantly before her. In "Coplas" we see that her every thought soon turned into prayer.

Yo no tengo otro oficio
después del callado de amarte,
que este oficio de lágrimas, duro,
que tú me dejaste.

Ojos apretados
de calientes lágrimas!
boca atribulada y convulsa,
en que todo se me hace plegaria! (Dolor" 16)

In the beautiful poem "El ruego" she puts all she has done before Him in supplication. No matter how horrible the crime, the sinner is not incapable of being the recipient of God's mercy and forgiveness. The poet makes her prayer as follows:

Señor, tú sabes como, con encendido brío,
por los seres extraños mi palabra te invoca.
Vengo ahora a pedirte por uno que era mío,
mi vaso de frescura, el panal de mi boca,

cal de mis huesos, dulce razon de la jornada,
gorjeo de mi oído, ceñidor de mi veste.
Me cuida hasta de aquellos en que no puse nada;
no tengas ojo torvo si te pido por este!

Te digo que era bueno, te digo que tenía
el corazón entero a flor de pecho, que era
suave de índole, franco como la luz del día,
henchido de milagro como la primavera.

Me replicas, severo, que es de plegaria indigno
el que no untó de preces sus dos labios febriles,
y se fue aquella tarde sin esperar tu signo,
trizándose las sienes como vasos sutiles.

Pero yo, mi Señor, te arguyo que he tocado,
de la misma manera que el nardo de su frente,
todo su corazón dulce y atormentado
¡y tenía la seda del capullo naciente!

¿Que fue cruel? Olvidas, Señor, que le quería,
y que el sabía suya la entraña que llagaba.
¿Que enturbió para siempre mis linfas de alegría?
¡No importa! Tu comprende: ¡yo le amaba, le amaba!

Y amor (bien sabes de eso) es amargo ejercicio;
un mantener los párpados de lágrimas mojados,
un refrescar de besos las trenzas del cilicio
conservando, bajo ellas, los ojos extasiados.

El hierro que taladra tiene un gusto frío,
cuando abre, cual gavillas, las carnes amorosas.
Y la cruz (Tú te acuerdas, ¡oh Rey de los judíos!)
se lleva con blandura, como un gajo de rosas.

Aquí me estoy, Señor, con la cara caída
sobre el polvo, parlándote un crepúsculo entero,
o todos los crepúsculos a que alcance la vida,
si tardas en decirme la palabra que espero.

Fatigaré tu oído de preces y sollozos,
lamiendo, lebrei tímido, los bordes de tu manto,
y ni pueden huirme tus ojos amorosos
ni esquivar tu pie el riego caliente de mi llanto.

¡Di el perdón, dilo al fin! Va a esparcir en el viento
la palabra el perfume de cien pomos de olores
al vaciarse; toda agua será deslumbramiento;
el yermo echará flor y el guijarro esplendores.

Se mojarán los ojos de las fieras,
y, comprendiendo, el monte que de piedra forjaste
llorará por los párpados blancos de sus neveras:
¡toda la tierra tuya sabrá que perdonaste! ("Dolor", 22)

Another favorite love theme related to her love story is that of maternity. This theme is centered on a woman's desire to have a child. This maternal love then sweeps out to include the theme of a woman's motherly tenderness toward any child. Gabriela believed that every woman's heart, by the will and ordinance of God, is filled with a motherly love that yearns to pour itself out. Such themes are obviously based on her concept of the nature of woman and woman's role in the world. God created her to be a companion to man and to bear children. This is abundantly clear in the story of creation as told in the Book of Genesis. Woman's role as mother according to the divine plan has frequently been explained and eulogized by recent Roman Pontiffs, especially by Pope Pius XII. In the modern age materialistic tendencies have been minimizing more and more woman's motherliness and her role in the home. Gabriela, then, presents a message in her verses which is of great social and religious importance.

A woman's heart is a treasure of love. In "La mujer esteril", Gabriela pictures a woman in great anxiety to share that love with another so that it might flourish in the blessing of children. The lack of hope that this twofold blessing will be realized in her life is a motive of tremendous and deep felt sorrow.

La mujer que no mece a un hijo en el regazo,
cuyo calor y aroma alcance a sus entrañas,
tiene una laxitud de mundo entre los brazos;
todo su corazón congoja inmensa baña.

El lirio le recuerda unas sienes de infante;
el Angelus le pide otra boca con ruego;
e interroga la fuente de seno de diamante
por que su labio quiebra el cristal en sosiego.

Y al contemplar sus ojos se acuerda de la azada;
piensa que en los de un hijo no mirará extasiada,
al vaciarse sus ojos, los follajes de octubre.

Con doble ^mteblor oye el viento en los cipreses.
¡Y una mendiga grávida, cuyo seno florece
cual la parva de enero, de verguenza la cubre!
("Vida", 8)

Some women are blessed with children, but the paternal love which helped sow this precious seed at times wanes and grows cold. The woman is then left to care for the child on her own. Gabriela laments such a situation. Half of the woman's world has become empty, and she has to try to fill up that void for her child. In "La Mujer fuerte" Gabriela watches such a woman work with persevering dedication to care for her child. The poet, while lamenting the unfortunate situation the woman has been thrown into, praises her spirit and with great respect and love exalts her adherence to the essential moral values she committed herself to in having a child.

Me acuerdo de tu rostro que se fijó en mis días,
mujer de saya azul y de tostada frente,
que en mi niñez y sobre mi tierra de ambrosía
vi abrir su surco negro en un abril ardiente.

Alzaba en la taberna, honda, la copa impura
el que te apegó un hijo al pecho de azucena,
y bajo ese recuerdo, que te era quemadura,
caía la simiente de tu mano, serena.

Segar te vi en enero los trigos de tu hijo,
y sin comprender tuve en ti los ojos fijos,
agrandados al par de maravilla y llanto.

Y el lodo de tus pies todavía besara,
porque entre cien mundanas no he encontrado tu cara
¡y aun te sigo en los surcos la sombra con mi canto!
("Vida", 7)

The childless woman, too, can show a child motherly attention when it is in need. In "El niño solo" Gabriela celebrates this spiritual motherhood. The poem is so beautiful in the tenderness it communicates that is worthy of contemplation.

Como escuchase un llanto, me paré en el repecho
y me acerqué a la puerta del rancho del camino.
Un niño de ojos dulces me miró desde el lecho
¡y una ternura inmensa me embriagó como un vino!

La madre se tardó, curvada en el barbecho:
el niño, al despertar, buscó el pezón de rosa
y rompió en llanto ...Yo lo estreché contra el pecho,
y una canción de cuna me subió, temblorosa ...

Por la ventana abierta la luna nos miraba.
El niño ya dormía, y la canción bañaba,
como otro resplandor, mi pecho enriquecido ...

Y cuando la mujer, trémula, abrió la puerta,
me vería en el rostro tanta ventura cierta
¡que me dejó el infante en los brazos dormido! ("Vida", 9)

Gabriela united all her themes on motherhood in one poem, "Poema del hijo". This poem is found in "Dolor", and it is filled with many autobiographical implications. Her own desire for a child was indeed a profound one.

¡Un hijo, un hijo, un hijo! Yo quise un hijo tuyo
y mío, allá en los días del éxtasis ardiente,
en los que hasta mis huesos temblaron de tu arrullo
y un ancho resplandor creció sobre mi frente.
("Dolor", 23)

Her ideal of a child was that it be Christ-like, even its physical characteristics. Her maternal desire quickly turned into prayer, begging God's blessing as it, too, is essential in the act of generation and conception. The intensity of her prayer is represented in the image of a tree in the spring, stretching its branches toward the sky in search of nourishment and strength, so that it might be the better able to bear its fruit in the fall.

Decía: ¡un hijo! como el árbol conmovido
de primavera alarga sus yemas hacia el cielo.
¡Un hijo con los ojos de Cristo engrandecidos,
la frente de estupor y los labios de anhelo!

Then realizing that children frequently have a close resemblance to their parents, her thoughts become bitter as she reflects on her own qualities and those of him whom she wanted to be the father of her child. She could not bear

to see their moral weaknesses reproduced.

Mientras arde la llama del pino, sosegada,
mirando a mis entrañas pienso que hubiera sido
un hijo mio, infante con mi boca cansada,
mi amargo corazón y mi voz de vencido.

Y con tu corazón, el fruto de veneno,
y tus labios que hubieran otra vez renegado.
Cuarenta lunas él no durmiera en mi seno,
que solo por ser tuyo me hubiese abandonado.

Despite the fact that Gabriela was not blessed with physical motherhood, she was a mother in every other sense of the word. Spiritual motherhood was her vocation. This is a message she wanted to put forth for others like herself. Many people, indeed, do not become parents through physical impossibility; many others do not become parents by vocational choice. Spiritual parenthood is possible for all, and it is a vocation that is very noble and profitable for all mankind. Gabriela alludes to this toward the end of "Poema del hijo".

Y como si pagara la deuda de una raza,
taladran los dolores mi pecho cual colmena.
Vivo una vida entera en cada hora que pasa;
como el río hacia el mar, van amargas mis venas.

And in the last two stanzas she states it quite clearly.

No sembré por mi troje, no enseñé para hacerme
un brazo con amor para la hora postrera.
Cuando mi cuello roto no pueda sostenerme
y mi mano tanteé la sabana ligera.

Apacénté los hijos ajenos, colmé el troje
con los trigos divinos, y solo de Ti espero,
Padre Nuestro que estas en los cielos! recoge
mi cabeza mendiga, si en esta noche muero.

The theme of spiritual maternity is also carried into her beautiful poem "La maestra rural". Such a concept of a teacher is truly catholic. The teacher takes the place of the parents while the student is under the teacher's care. As such, the teacher's influence on the child is far reaching. Gabriela

addressing herself to a student's parent, points this out.

Campešina, recuerdas que alguna vez prendiste
su nombre a un comentario brutal o baladí?
Cien veces la miraste, ninguna vez la viste
y en el solar de tu hijo, de ella hay más que de ti.

Moreover, there is much more in what a teacher is committed to communicate than mere book learning. All aspects of a child's life must prepare him for his future life and for eternal life. This demands the teaching of moral values and virtues. The primary place for learning these higher values is the home, but the same lessons must be taught in school so that the whole person of the child develops properly. If these values are not learned by the student in the home, a greater burden is thereupon thrown upon the teacher and the school. Unfortunately, this is too frequently the case. Gabriela, still speaking to the parent, expresses this beautifully in the last few words of the following stanza.

Pasó por él su fina, su delicada esteva,
abriendo surcos donde alojar perfección.
Le albarda de virtudes de que lento se nieva
es suya. Campešina, ¿no le pides perdón?

It is in the person of a teacher, then, that Gabriela presents us the clearest example of spiritual parenthood and the profound influence such a parent exercises^{on} his children.

The final theme to be considered in this study is that of compassion. This aspect of our study brings us to an even deeper understanding of our poet's personality. "Let your love be without pretense", said St. Paul.¹⁶⁴ Gabriela's love and respect for every human person, especially the deprived, made her reach out without pretense to give of herself. That spirit of 'reaching out'

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Romans 12:9

is perhaps best described by the word compassion. The gentleness and tenderness of her soul prevented her from ever turning her back on anyone through lack of concern. This spirit, then, manifested itself in her verses. Her publications after Desolación are even more revealing of her interior giving of self.

We have already witnessed manifestations of this compassion in poems considered earlier in this paper. Gabriela is compassionate toward "La mujer fuerte" whose spirit and dedication she praises; toward "La mujer esteril" whose sorrow she intimately understands; toward "El niño solo", who has no one to care for him while his mother works in the fields so that he may eat. "La maestra rural", whom she loves and emulates, is also the object of her compassion and deep felt understanding and appreciation. Listen to how she speaks of her:

La maestra era pura. "Los suaves hortelanos",
decía, "de este predio, que es predio de Jesus,
han de conservar puros los ojos y las manos,
guardar claros sus óleos, para dar clara luz."

La maestra era pobre. Su reino no es humano.
(Así en el doloroso sembrador de Israel.)
Vestía sayas pardas, no enjoyaba su mano
¡y era todo su espíritu un inmenso joyel!

La maestra era alegre. ¡Pobre mujer herida!
Su sonrisa fue un modo de llorar con bondad.
Por sobre la sandalia rota y enrojecida,
era ella la insigne flor de su santidad.

¡Dulce ser! En su río de mieles, caudaloso,
largamente abrevaba sus tigres el dolor.
Los hierros que le abrieron el pecho generoso
mas anchas le dejaron las cuencas del amor.

Themes of compassion for her companions who are suffering, deprived and in exile from their true home are abundant and obvious. In this last section of our study, then, we will strive to gain an understanding of the font of that

compassion. What is it that made it flow so freely and abundantly? One would not be reading too deeply into her poetry if he concluded that it was her love of Christ and an earnest and persistent imitation of His spirit. We need only recall some of the biographical data to gain support for this conclusion. She was an avid reader of the Bible. She frequently uses its stories, themes, images and language in her verses. She meditated on what she read. She gave herself entirely to it and her progress could not but be manifest to all.¹⁶⁵ She was a great admirer of St. Francis, who was a great lover of Christ. St. Francis' love of all creatures is known to all. Late in life, Gabriela embraced the habit and the spirit of St. Francis by becoming a tertiary.

Two poems in "Vida", when considered together, help us to understand the source of Gabriela's spirit of compassion. In the one, "Viernes santo", she compassionates the suffering Christ, and she asks all men to join her. In the other, "Al oído del Cristo", she becomes almost enraged in condemning worldly indifference to the passion and the sufferings of Christ. All who receive the gift of faith, which is given because Christ suffered and dies, receive it with the command to nourish it and to help it grow within themselves, so that it might spread itself to others through them. This faith manifests itself in those who faithfully observe the command of Christ: "Love one another as I have loved you".¹⁶⁶ In "Viernes santo" Gabriela shows her love of Christ and her fellowman.

¹⁶⁵ 1-Timothy 4:15-16

¹⁶⁶ John 13:34-35

El sol de abril aún es ardiente y bueno
y el surco, de la espera, resplandece;
pero hoy no llenes l'ansia de su seno,
porque Jesús padece.

No remuevas la tierra. Deja, mansa
la mano y el arado; echa las mieses
cuando y nos devuelvan la esperanza,
que aun Jesús padece.

Ya sudó sangre bajo los olivos,
y oyó al que amaba negarlo tres veces.
Mas, rebelde de amor, tiene aun latidos,
¡aun padece!

Porque tú, labrador, siembras odiando
y yo tengo rencor cuando anochece,
y un niño va como un hombre llorando,
¡Jesús padece!

Está sobre el madero todavía
y sed tremenda el labio le estremece.
¡Odio mi pan, mi estrofa y mi alegría,
porque Jesús padece!

In "Al oído del Cristo" she is indignant against those who give not of themselves for love of Christ. There can be no compassion in their hearts because they know not Christ! We have already seen the third part of this poem; the first two follow:

1.

Cristo, el de las carnes en gajos abiertas;
Cristo, el de las venas vaciadas en ríos;
estas pobres gentes del siglo están muertas
de una laxitud, de un miedo, de un frío'.

A la cabecera de sus lechos eres,
si te tienen, forma demasiado cruenta,
sin esas blanduras que aman las mujeres
y con esas marcas de vida violenta.

No te escupirían por creerte loco,
no fueran capaces de amarte tampoco
así, con sus ímpetus laxos y marchitos.

Porque como Iázaro y hieden, ya hieden,
por no disgregarse, mejor no se mueven.
¡Ni el amor ni el odio les arrancan gritos!

II

Aman la elegancia de gesto y color,
y en la crispadura tuya del madero,
en tu sudar sangre, tu último temblor
y el resplandor cardeno del Calvario entero,

les parece que hay exageración
y plebeyo gusto; el que Tú lloraras
y tuvieras sed y tribulación,
no cuaja en sus ojos dos lágrimas claras.

Tienen ojo apaco de infecunda yesca,
sin virtud de llanto, que limpia y refresca;
tienen una boca de suelto botón
mojada en lascivia, ni firme ni roja,
¡y como de fines de otoño, así, floja
e impura, la poma de su corazón!

There was, indeed, fire and indignation in the heart that bled these verses. That fire was, without doubt, nourished through frequent visits to Calvary and long hours of meditation on the meaning and significance of the terrible sight she beheld there. The real fruit of these thought filled visits, together with a heart-felt consideration of the words of Christ in the Gospels, was another Heart of Christ in the world and a spirit whose sincerity and inspiration are best described in "Canto del Justo".

Pecho, el de mi Cristo,
más que los ocasos,
más, ensangrentado:
¡desde que te he visto
mi sangre he secado!

Mano de mi Cristo,
que como otro párpado
tajeada llora:
¡desde que te he visto
la mía no implora!

Brazos de mi Cristo,
brazos extendidos
sin ningún rechazo:
¡desde que os he visto
existe mi abrazo!

Costado de Cristo,

otro labio abierto
regando la vida:
¡desde que te he visto
rasgué mis heridas!

Mirada de Cristo,
por no ver su cuerpo,
al cielo elevada:
¡desde que te he visto
no miro mi vida
que va ensangrentada!

Cuerpo de mi Cristo,
te miro pendiente,
aun crucificado.
¡Yo cantaré cuando
te hayan desclavado!

¿Cuándo será? ¿Cuándo?
¡Dos mil años hace
que espero a tus plantas
y espero llorando! ("Vida", 10)

It is good and profitable to look upon the poetry of Gabriela Mistral as a testament. Her verses, indeed, are prized for their beautiful lyric qualities, the richness and, oftentimes, the originality of their metaphors, imagery, and language. These qualities were not the object of this paper, but for one versed in these elements of expression, Gabriela's verses could certainly constitute a thought provoking and valuable study. The object of this paper has been the thought content of her poems in four defined areas.

Gabriela's poetry constitutes a testament because she leaves a message. Desolación has been found to be a study of life and love, seen in the light of death and one's neighbor's needs. This approach to her two dominant themes is essentially the same as that found in the Bible for the same themes, and her stream of thoughts, in which the themes develop, is in accord with the Bible's teachings. While she was, on the one hand, studying life and love in the Bible, she was at the same time, studying her own life. She wanted to know herself better so that she could know in what areas she must

develop morally and spiritually. She recognized suffering in her own life and wanted to know its meaning and value. This knowledge was of great benefit to her, for it helped her to maintain a positive, forward-looking approach to life. She realized that others suffer too, so she put her knowledge in verse so that it might console their hearts as well. She knew what it meant to be listened to and understood by others, so in her poetry she tried to communicate to others that sense of being listened to, understood and appreciated.

Gabriela was in love with life, as God would have her be, and she wanted to share that spirit with others. Her first principle was to face up to the fact that life is a cross, that it presents us with many things to suffer. Her second principle was that the sufferings and hardships of life must be encountered with a vigorous will and a willing spirit. This approach to life will be of great moral value to each one personally and it will be more enriching than the opposite approach. This whole spirit of Gabriela is truly christian, and as a social message, it is truly based on and supports Catholic principles. A thoughtful and understanding reading of her verses can lead to life.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Reverend John J. Martin, C.S.V. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Modern Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

James Graham-Lujan
Signature of Adviser