Mother Earth, Earth Mother: Gabriela Mistral as an Early Ecofeminist

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Abstract: Historians have noted that male bureaucrats and natural resource experts tended to dominate early twentieth-century national and hemispheric conservationist movements in Latin America, but a constellation of female activists, notable among them Gabriela Mistral, strengthened conservationism in the cultural sphere. Capitalizing on her leadership in Pan-Americanism, transnational feminist networks, and cutting-edge teaching, Mistral functioned throughout her career as an advocate for conservationism, gendering the natural environment in strategically essentialist ways. Important tropes throughout her poetry, Nature and Mother Earth became specific themes in Mistral’s journalistic prose. Here, Mistral blended conservationism with anti-imperialism, arguing that Mother Earth was threatened both by man’s failure to care for her and by predatory imperialists. Environmental stewardship also played a central role in her Pan-American initiatives and complimented the “official” Pan-American Conservation Movement of the interwar period. Mistral’s de facto ecofeminism is echoed in Latin American women’s writing of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, suggesting that Nature represented an alternate sphere for women beyond the urban manifestations of modernization. The gathering of female voices around the gendered image of Mother Nature also represents a corpus of early environmental prophets in Latin American letters and culture.

Keywords: ecocriticism/ecocrítica, ecofeminism/ecofeminismo, Gabriela Mistral, nature/naturaleza, Pan-Americanism/pan-americanismo, poetry/poesía

Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957), the Chilean poet, educator, diplomat, and first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, maintained an international voice throughout her career with both her poetry and journalistic prose. She also directly influenced a number of other early twentieth-century female intellectuals by meeting with them on speaking tours and inspiring an international Gabriela Mistral Society, which promoted educational opportunities for women.¹ These women emulated Mistral’s progressive poetics and politics, embracing feminist and Pan-American values in their writing and organizational activities. Considered the consummate canonical teacher and “mother” of the Chilean nation, Mistral has historically attracted scholars studying themes of Pan-Americanism, homosexuality, maternity, and feminism.² Only in passing has her work been appreciated for its conservationist content. In 1979, a Chilean editorial anthologized her prose writings on nature in Elogio de las cosas de la tierra, and more recently critics Alex Latta and Niall Binns have suggested that Mistral’s poetry can be read with an ecocritical approach. This essay examines how Mistral and other Latin American female intellectuals following her lead coherently combined the movements of feminism, Pan-Americanism, and conservation as mutual ideologies that can be read as expressions of an early ecofeminist discourse.

In 1931, the Costa Rican cultural magazine, Repertorio americano, published an article by Mistral that called upon Latin American women to come to the defense of the land. Making a primarily anticapitalist and anti-imperialist case, Mistral urged women to take up the fight both for conserving Latin America’s natural resources and for keeping Latin American land in
Latin American hands. In order to appeal to her female readers’ perceptions of femininity, she reminded them of the ancient and fundamental relationship they had with the Earth:

> Cuando el padre, el marido o el hermano hipotecan esa lonja labrada, la mujer es la única que llora, que siente en ese suelo una calidad de carne y se duele de la pérdida como una amputación. Cuando los pueblos primitivos asignaban al hombre el fuego y el aire como elementos suyos y señalaban a la mujer la tierra como su lote, tenían razón redonda, y acertaban en plano, y más acertaron dando a la costra cultivada nombres femeninos, como Ceres o Pomona o Diosa del Maíz. (Mistral, “Conversando” 173)

Accordingly, Mistral argued, women had a responsibility to conserve the land, which was inherently connected to their femininity and their families’ well-being. Although such an essentialist link between women and the natural environment might cause some late twentieth-century feminists—such as Butler, Gatens, Grosz, and Spelman—to shudder, at the time, Mistral’s ideas were radical not only in their autonomist politics, but also in their implicit linkage of feminism and environmentalism to promote common goals of autonomy and well-being for the earth and her inhabitants. In *The Death of Nature*, ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant describes that the two separate ideologies of feminism and ecology converge as “sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy’s modus operandi in nature and society” (xx). In this way, Mistral and other female writers of her generation articulate conservation and feminism to envision alternative realities to contemporary capitalist, industrialist, and imperialist models that routinely disenfranchised and exploited women, children, and the working poor throughout Latin America.

Mistral’s ecofeminist values resonated throughout her cultural work in Mexico and the Americas. A classroom teacher in her early career in Chile, Mistral was contracted in 1922 by Revolutionary Mexico’s Secretary of Public Education, José Vasconcelos, to visit the country’s schools and libraries with ideas for education reform. During her controversial stay in Mexico, she compiled a primer for adult peasant women learning to read called *Lecturas para mujeres* (1924). In it, she dedicated a long section to Nature, which included short pieces on the earth, sea, trees, and animals. She also included several nationalist pieces by the indigenous literary expert, Antonio Mediz Bolio, which dealt specifically with the flora and fauna that signified Mexico. *Lecturas* has been described by critic Elizabeth A. Marchant as “an intervention in the social and educational development of a revolutionary Latin American country . . . and are implicated, therefore, in the discussions about women as cultural subjects and producers of knowledge within the arena of nation building and politics” (54). As a reader intended for women and compiled by a woman, *Lecturas* embodies an alternative textual space for *campesinas*.

Marchant explains that Mistral amplifies this separate space “by linking women’s identity to domesticity, [thus sidestepping] the male-identified public sphere. . . . The home[,] . . . a female space over which women have complete control[,] . . . thus becomes a place of resistance to patriarchal public order” (51). Reenforcing the value of traditional gender roles by contrasting the “mujer nueva” and “mujer antigua,” Mistral further demarcates the boundaries between masculine and feminine and the spaces associated with each (*Lecturas* 8). Although the segregating effects of Mistral’s *Lecturas* may seem disconcerting to modern-day feminists, in 1923 this project was nevertheless radical because it extended for the first time a public space for women outside of their homes. The rural school and its texts, then, invited women on both intellectual and practical terms to become agents in their community and to organize. Mistral’s careful positioning of the anthology within traditional gender roles serves as a strategic essentialism that did not alienate the *campesino* population and that allowed rural women to occupy this alternative space at little social cost.

*Lecturas* is divided thematically into seven sections, which include *El Hogar, Maternidad, México y la América Española, Trabajo, Motivos espirituales, La Navidad, and Naturaleza.*
Whereas the first two sections inscribe women in their conventional, domestic roles, the weighty third section situates the domestic woman within national and, importantly, Latin American culture. In this way, *campesina* women are interpellated as both Mexican and Pan-American citizens. Mistral writes that women’s relationships with the nation are more “sentimental” than “intellectual” and for this reason, instead of including historical texts about battles and heroic feats, this section contains readings that capture “la emoción del paisaje nativo cuya visión, agradable o recia, ha ido cuajando en su alma la suavidad o la fortaleza. Según este concepto, en la sección ‘México’ del presente libro, dominan las descripciones de ambientes y de panoramas” (*Lecturas* 10). Here again, national pedagogy equates Mexican land—symbol of agrarian reform, national autonomy, and Revolutionary achievements—with femininity. Mistral thus extends the feminine space of the home to the land and constructs a feminine identity for nature. She re-emphasizes this essentialized femininity in her poem, “Himno al árbol,” which is included in *Lecturas*’ lengthy “Naturaleza” section, when she proclaims, “Árbol, que no eres otra cosa / que dulce entraña de mujer” (334). Carefully gendering the earth female, Mistral’s anthology of nature-themed readings for women also articulates an environmental ethos that is represented and celebrated by later female writers and pedagogues emulating the Mexican Revolution.

Following the rhetorical example set by Mistral, Latin American schoolteachers, who were also often writers and public intellectuals, contributed to the hemisphere’s growing concern for conservation. In 1929, for example, Nicaraguan teacher, feminist, journalist, and magazine editor, Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, founded the national Fiesta del Árbol. Throughout Latin America, teachers not only led Arbor Day celebrations, but also educated their students and communities on the value of trees and other natural resources. Other female intellectuals, such as Peru’s activist poet Magda Portal, followed suit with large civic celebrations that featured music, poetry declamations, tree planting ceremonies, and parades for schoolchildren. Mexico’s rural education program actively promoted land stewardship through its rural teachers, or *maestros rurales*, program. Mexican environmental historian Lane Simonian writes that “teachers trained by the Ministry of Education gave practical lessons to *campesinos* on the formation of nurseries and the reforestation of mountain slopes, explaining to them the paramount importance of forests in protecting agriculture, bettering the climate, and in maintaining all of the ‘phenomena necessary for life of the villages’” (83). The monthly journal dedicated to Mexico’s rural teachers, *El maestro rural*, regularly published articles about environmental stewardship geared towards women, and Mistral was a frequent contributor to this organ. It is here that Elena Torres, one of the sub-secretaries of the Revolution’s Ministry of Education, published her home economics articles for *campesinas* in ecofeminist terms reminiscent of Mistral: “Los campesinos suelen decir que la tierra es como la mujer, mientras más amorosamente se le trata, menos agota sus bondades” (4). Torres also appeals to women’s essential link to Mother Earth in order to motivate them to cultivate kitchen gardens, maintain a clean homestead, and encourage their male partners in conservation-minded agricultural practices.

Mistral was considered by Latin American feminists to be a model of femininity and women’s activism, so it is no surprise that her ecofeminism was accompanied by that of other women throughout the hemisphere. Because ecofeminist rhetoric was diffuse throughout Latin America during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, it is inappropriate to trace a genealogy that places Mistral at the chronological head of this trend; however, because Mistral carried so much influence for Latin American women, it is accurate to depict her as playing a critical, if not a leadership, role in promoting an early ecofeminist ethos. In fact, both *Lecturas para mujeres* and *Ternura*—two Mistral texts that explicitly privilege nature in gendered terms—were published in 1924, which was early during the long interwar decade of the 1930s that marks the emergence and circulation of ecofeminist writing in Latin America. With these dates in mind, I argue that Mistral was an ecofeminist pioneer.

The internationalism of Mistral and other hemispheric female writers bears heavily on the environmentalist character of their writings. With respect to Mistral’s nationalist and naturalist
epic Poema de Chile, critic Mary Louise Pratt states, “If feminists were more concerned with Pan-Americanism than with loyalties to individual countries, and women’s relationship to the land was circumstantially different from men’s because of inheritance and ownership laws, then we could expect a different kind of ‘epic,’ which in turn would change how we read traditional nationalist poetry” (“Introduction” 6). Women’s transnational affiliations not only inflected how they related to the land and poetry, but also how they dealt with issues of national sovereignty, cultural autonomy, and early environmentalism. As critic Francine Masiello discusses, Pan-Americanism served feminists throughout the hemisphere with an ideological and international space around which to organize and support one another (12). This international community was extremely important because, especially in Latin America, many feminist activists felt isolated in their home countries. As a result, narratives of Latin American women’s role in national issues were (and continue to be) less pronounced than women’s histories in the transnational arena. Because of history’s nationalist tendencies, however, these Pan-American feminist histories have yet to be told in a comprehensive, coherent manner.

Mistral’s embrace of Pan-Americanism and its implied anti-imperialism led her to argue that foreign land ownership and occupation were associated with the depletion of soil and natural resources. Mistral thus links Pan-Americanism and anti-imperialism with conservationist imperatives, deriving from them a concern for the natural environment. In her essay “Conversando sobre la tierra,” she associates the depletion of natural resources with the deletion of possibilities for Latin American autonomy and self-sufficiency:

>Mientras la tierra es nuestra, existen todas las posibilidades, porque la creación tiene donde asentar los pies. . . . Pero venga la pérdida del suelo; cambie de dueño la mina que alimenta a una ciudad; pasen definitivamente el cafetal y los cafetales a manos lejanas; váyase el depósito de salitre de nuestro poder; en una palabra, córrasenos debajo de las plantas el territorio como una bandeja, y se han acabado con . . . todas las posibilidades de hacer perfecta [la tierra]. (172)

It is possible that this naturalism was influenced by the conservationist efforts underway in Revolutionary Mexico and the United States, two entities with whom other Latin American intellectuals enjoyed a lively cultural and political exchange (see Cushman and Finzer). Accordingly, their naturalism can be seen as taking part in a larger hemispheric environmentalist discourse that was beginning to be articulated in the 1930s and 40s through conservationist policy-making and the promotion of nature to nationalist ends.

Environmental historian Gregory T. Cushman describes the male-dominated hemispheric conservationist movement of the early twentieth century (246–55). Active between 1938 and 1948, the Pan-American Conservation Movement was founded at the Eighth Conference of the Pan-American Union held in Lima, Peru, in 1938. This movement enabled hemispheric collaboration on a number of conservationist campaigns that, as Cushman discusses, largely owed their success to the presence of autochthonous conservationist movements already in place in many Latin American countries. Cushman describes this movement as predominantly male and technocratic, out of touch with the quotidian values that could have helped the committee have more success and credibility among workers and youth. As Cushman tells us, only one woman was known to have associated with the committee during its tenure: Peru’s Luz Jarrín de Peñaloza, who had also been active in women’s political causes, legal services for the poor, and tree-planting campaigns. Jarrín was sadly never granted official membership to this “males-only conservation club” (Cushman 250).

Although female writers of this time period may not have been recognized or explicitly identified with this official male-dominated movement, they would have been aware of burgeoning conservationist efforts in the hemisphere, especially as their Pan-American affiliations often overlapped with those of the official movement. The work of these women amplified the
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technocratic attempts of the male-dominated movement by inscribing environmentalist concerns in the cultural sphere. Female writers thus not only humanized the Pan-American conservationist movement, but also articulated the possibilities of spaces still unoccupied and unmarred by man. The presence of these idealized, primal spaces, however imaginary, asserted the possibility, if not the imperative, of wholly untainted and healthy ecosystems to which modern-day ‘deep’ environmentalism aspires.

Mistral’s biographers and critics have stated that she must have taken her poetic inspiration for gendering Nature from her native valley of Elqui in rural Chile. Marjorie Agosín writes, “The curves in the road [at Elqui] remind one of the body of a voluptuous woman, a vision of Mother Earth offering nature, pure and fertile. . . . Mistral never left this landscape behind. . . . Mistral nourished herself on this landscape, and a great part of her life was spent imagining this particular valley” (xiii). Likewise, Veronica Darer states that “her pastoral surroundings [in Elqui] inspired her curiosity and reverence for nature, a recurring theme in her literary work as well as in her pedagogical writings” (49). These utopian, feminine descriptions envision Elqui as an idealized Gaia, both fertile and nurturing to healthy ecosystems and young poets. Indeed, Nature takes a center stage in Mistral’s poetry, beginning with her first collection, Desolación (1922), which was initially published in New York. Throughout the final section of this book, titled “Naturaleza,” the poetic voice develops intimate, loving relationships with diverse elements of Nature, such as mountains, rain, stars, seasons, and clouds. Significantly, this section begins with the stark, depressing depiction of “Paisajes de la Patagonia.” The first section of this poem, “Desolación” (from which the entire collection takes its title), maps in arte mayor the bareness of the widowed landscape (42–43). The second section, “Árbol muerto,” grieves the felling of the trees in the form of the silva, the traditional lyric for praising nature and exploring mystical union (43). The third poem, “Tres árboles,” identifies the woodcutter as the party guilty of this environmental degradation: in reference to three dead trees left on the side of the road, the poem repeats “el leñador los olvidó” as if it were a refrain (43–44).

Mistral’s 1924 book, Ternura, is commonly regarded as a collection of nursery rhymes, or verse for children. It is here in her poetic trajectory, however, that she first introduces the ecofeminism that will play a role in her later prose and poetry. In Spanish, the title Ternura carries with it connotations of vegetation, in that the word tierno, or tender, is often used to describe young, green plants and vegetables. In this collection, Mistral initially inscribes a vision of a feminine earth and man as her destructor, which is repeated in later works of both prose and poetry. In the poem, “Plantando el árbol,” she refers to “Tierra hija de Dios” and then to “hombre matador” in the final verse of the poem (94). In other poems, man is represented as a logger, and Tierra, whose divinity is inscribed with a capital letter T, is consistently personified as a woman. Although the Spanish noun for tree, árbol, is masculine, it is as if Mistral addresses this grammatical inconsistency with her eco-philosophy when, in “Himno al árbol” (a poem not included in Ternura, but that appeared a year earlier in Lecturas para mujeres), she proclaims, “Árbol, que no eres otra cosa / que dulce entraña de mujer” (334). Also in Ternura, Mistral takes a poetic inventory of Mother Nature in the section “Cuenta-Mundo”: here she describes natural elements, such as air, light, water, rainbows, butterflies, animals, fruit, mountains, fire, forests, and crops (84–89). Evocative of childhood fairytales or modernista verse, rainbows and butterflies enchant this environment. Together with other non-human elements, these wonder-filled aspects of nature pave the way for an ecological ethos of radical interconnectedness between humans and non-humans like that recently theorized by writers such as Timothy Morton and Jane Bennett.

Using a trope of nature, specifically man’s destructive relationship to nature, Mistral’s early poetry challenges the patriarchy that she sees as both mobilizing war and defacing the earth. By using nature’s destruction as a metaphor for war’s destruction, she conlates peace with a healthy, verdant environment that ensures the well-being of its inhabitants. The publication date of Mistral’s 1938 poetry collection, Tala (or Clearcutting) corresponds with the initial organization of the Pan-American Conservation Movement, which would last throughout the
1940s. Dedicating this book and its proceeds to Basque children afflicted by the Civil War in Spain, Mistral's motives and poetic are not ostensibly environmentalist. Nevertheless, the image of felling trees underlines a structure of feeling, to use Raymond Williams's term, of scarcity, lacking, desolation, and plunder. This structure of feeling corresponds not only with preoccupations with the Spanish Civil War (a favorite theme among Latin American progressives), but also with a rising tide of Fascism across Europe and harsh dictatorships in Central America. Political oppression on a global scale dovetailed with worldwide economic depression and rapid modernization and consumerism, which were already beginning to have devastating effects on Latin America's environment through agricultural industries, such as the notorious United Fruit Co., owned by US corporations.

In her 1954 collection *Lagar*, translated as *Winepress*, though suggestive of the word *lugar*, meaning *place*, Mistral organizes her poetry in fifteen sections. Much of the anthology deals with the theme of place, as she dedicates individual poems to describing people she associates with or certain environmental features of different places she has traveled to throughout the world. Although Mother Earth does not appear as a particularly common motif throughout the collection, she does take the form of the speaker's mother in both “Ceiba seca” and “Madre mía.” Moreover, the second section of the collection is “Naturaleza, II,” with twelve poems dealing with different aspects of Nature. The most compelling image of Mother Earth, however, can be found in what is perhaps the best-known section of the book, “Locas mujeres,” in which Mistral describes a type of crazy (read: strong or liberated) woman, a trope somewhat uncommon for her day, in each poem. Along with poems titled, “La abandonada,” “La ansiosa,” “La desasiada,” and “La fugitiva,” one poem stands apart for its generic title: “Una mujer.” Here the character described is none other than Mother Earth. The poem opens with a phrase that signifies space: “Donde estaba su casa sigue / Como si no hubiera ardido” (195). The earth has had its nutrients refreshed by a therapeutic burn, which, although at the time destructive, sows the opportunity for new life. This new life inevitably takes the form of a tree, depicted as a child to be raised. The speaker explains that “Cuando dice 'pino de Alepo' , / no dice árbol que dice un niño” (6), and ends the poem with the following stanza:

En cada árbol endereza
al que acostaron en tierra
y en el fuego de su pecho
lo calienta, lo enrolla, lo estrecha. (195)

By avoiding naming “that which sleeps in her soil” specifically, the speaker implies the mystery of this substance, cared for like a child and adapted to her orthopaedics. This enigma—perhaps soul or Earth-spirit—is surely divine, for like the Hebrew *Yahweh*, it cannot be named. In the epilogue of the collection, which consists of the one poem “Último árbol,” the speaker expresses her desire to embody the familiar, protective image of a tree in the afterlife.

Mistral's naturalist ethos not only resonated with her politics of Pan-Americanism and anti-imperialism, but also functioned as an aesthetic resistance to modernization, reminiscent of Romanticism. Yet Mistral was anything but a Romantic poet. As critic Ivonne Gordon Vailakis has argued, Mistral’s difficult verse and socially engaged writings place her rightly within the rubric of the vanguards, seen by conventional criticism as predominantly male and preoccupied with masculinity (see McKee Irwin). Critic Adrian Kane has shown how a handful of these male vanguards categorically rejected tropes of Nature and embraced the city and urban themes as the ultimate articulation of modernity. Conversely, Mistral and other experimental female writers of the day expounded on Mother Nature in their verse as an alternative space for women and exploration of feminine subjectivities that allowed them to reject the male-dominated urb.

Mistral's *de facto* ecofeminist voice was not alone. Other female writers of the period also privileged nature in gendered terms in order to promote Latin American autonomy from
imperialist pretensions and women’s autonomy from misogynist laws and traditions that precluded them from being equal participants in public life. Perhaps because of its unique geopolitical situation, Central America takes a lead in early ecofeminist discourse, as it was also the cradle of the banana novel and the novela criolla, a regional variation of the novela de la tierra. In Nicaragua, Olga Solari published the poetry collection Selva in 1944, which lamented devastation to her beloved Matagalpa jungle. In Costa Rica, Carmen Lyra depicted the damage done to women and children, as well as the land, by the United Fruit Company in Bananos y hombres (1931). Lyra also exposed women and children as the primary victims of environmental injustice through a lack of sanitation in the urban slums of San José in Cuentos del Barrio Cothneco-Fishy (1923). In Guatemala, the poet Romelia Alarcón de Folgar feminized nature with her first published poetry collection, Llamaradas (1938), which discursively grafts Maya cosmology and signs of Western modernity onto the image of a feminine cebia tree. As I have discussed elsewhere, Central America’s prolific conservationist writing is likely due to the defining and environmentally devastating presence of the United Fruit Company on the isthmus during the first part of the twentieth century (“Grafting the Maya World Tree”).

Other Latin American female writers, such as Mexican pedagogue Elena Torres and poet María Luisa Vera, engaged the themes of land reform and conservation as primary preoccupations for campesina women. Also in Mexico, social realist writers, such as Magdalena Mondragón, published novels depicting women as natural defenders of land reform due to their intrinsic relationship to Mother Earth. The cover of Mondragón’s 1937 novel, Puede que'lotro año: Novela de la laguna, features an angry woman defending her homestead with a long rifle. Peruvian Magda Portal’s poetic motifs of trees and sea open her writings to a revolutionary ecocritical reading. In her cultivated Jardín (1951; written between 1928–35), Dulce María Loynaz of Cuba and other, lesser-known authors of the Spanish Caribbean, such as Carmen Cadilla Rubial in Zafra amarga (1937), reflected on the artifice of modern sugar and fruit monoculture and the construction of landscapes that served as cloistered alternatives to the modern city experience.

Considered together, the significant corpus of Latin American women’s writing of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s offers alternative visions for how human society, especially its women, can interact with the natural environment in ways that preclude the violent, profit-driven structures of economic inequality, environmental degradation, nationalist xenophobia, and modern warfare. In all of these texts, women and Mother Earth are either depicted as mutual victims of man’s unsustainable agricultural practices, clear cutting, and warfare or celebrated together as twin embodiments of a spiritual, feminine, environmental essence. Both cases elevate and endorse women as the logical and necessary defenders of Mother Earth. Connected as they were with the Pan-American initiatives of the interwar period, the writers in question—chief among them Gabriela Mistral—introduced and advocated ecofeminist ideas across Latin America. Although female writers of the later twentieth century and the millennium, such as Gioconda Belli, Sabina Berman, Tatiana Lobos, and Anacristina Rossi, write more self-consciously ecofeminist texts, these women follow a tradition of women’s writing that strategically genders Mother Earth to the empowerment of women and the defense of the land from environmental and imperialist threats.

NOTES

1 These intellectual women routinely traveled and networked in the Inter-American Commission of Women, Gabriela Mistral Societies, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. See Cohen, Fiol-Matta, Varas, and Wolfe.

2 For criticism that explores Mistral as a “mother” (of the nation, of Latin American letters, etc.), see Fiol-Matta; Horan; Marchant; Ryan-Kobler; and Welden and Mohler.

3 Classical, romantic representations of the earth from the nineteenth century were also commonly gendered in essentialized ways. These texts are not considered ecofeminist, however, because they present
no strategic, critical link between environmentalism and feminism that serves to promote both movements as mutually reinforcing.

1 Her presence in Mexico was met with widespread resentment because she was perceived as a foreigner ‘meddling’ in national affairs.

2 Here ‘man’ refers both to humankind and members of the male sex in the sense that Mistral and her generation of female intellectuals and activists created and expressed a need for women’s own spaces in the guises of national and international women’s organizations. Early ecofeminist writings routinely essentialized the relationship of women with Nature, even equating woman and land, and rhetorically cast men as her violator. As an extreme example of women’s advocating for their own political space and land tenure, a group of Mexican feminists established la República Femenina in 1936. Historian Soto describes how this organization promoted a feminist republic to be located in south-central Mexico that would organize campesinas into ejiditarias with day care centers and banks (135).

3 The bareness of this landscape calls to mind Eliot’s Wasteland, also published in New York in 1922. Critics de la Torre and Cabello Hutt explore the thematic and formal convergences of Desolación and Wasteland, concluding that Mistral’s publication is as innovative and significant to global modernist expression as was Eliot’s.

4 Examples of the banana novel are Lyra’s Bananos y hombres (1931), Fallas’s Mamita Yunai (1940), Asturias’s El Papa Verde (1954), and Joaquín Gutiérrez’s Murámonos, Federico (1973). Guatemalan Carlos Wyld Ospina’s La gringa (1935) is the novela criolla par excellence.

5 See Belli’s Waslalá (1998), Berman’s La mujer que buceó dentro del corazón del mundo (2010), Lobos’s Calypso (1996), and Rossi’s La loca de Gandoca (2006).

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