

**GABRIELA MISTRAL AND
THE ETYMOLOGY OF ECOLOGICAL THINKING
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ABSTRACT

This project frames itself around the poetry and prose of Chilean poet and essayist Gabriela Mistral, and considers their function as a foundation for contemporary feminist ecological discourse. To do so, the study takes up Greta Gaard's call to revive ecofeminism in her 2011 article "Ecofeminism Revisited," and explores to what extent ecofeminism, a theoretical school of thought that emerged and was cast aside as essentialist during the last few decades of the twentieth century, persists in the guise of less controversial monikers. One such moniker is Lorraine Code's "feminist ecological thinking," a term that appears in her 2006 book entitled *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. Code is careful to avoid essentialist language when she describes feminist ecological thinking as an "imaginary" that infuses, shapes and circulates "throughout the social-material-intellectual-affective atmosphere(s) like the air we breathe."¹ Yet, to what extent does this name change constitute a true paradigm shift, and what carries through from ecofeminism to feminist ecological thinking? To approach the question, this project first addresses how Mistral's 1931 essay, "Conversando sobre la tierra" ("Talking About the Land"), anticipates early ecofeminist rhetoric, and then illustrates how etymological considerations of "nostalgia," "lunatic" and "soul" in her later poems echo Code's feminist ecological imaginary. This analytical trajectory speaks to Gaard's call for the revision and revival of ecofeminism, and it is through the oeuvre of Mistral that ecofeminism and feminist ecological thinking find common ground.

The symbolic nature of the poetry and prose of Gabriela Mistral, a Nobel Prize winning Chilean poet and essayist from the early half of the twentieth century, resonate with contemporary feminist-ecological discourse. Contemporary feminist-ecological thinking revisits “ecofeminism,” a term associated with the 1980s, which “gain[ed] prominence in the early 1990s...was critiqued as essentialist and effectively discarded by the end of the decade.”² As Greta Gaard summarizes, feminists interested in the intersections between feminism and environmentalism “thought it better to rename their approach at the end of the twentieth century due the attacks ecofeminism endured as being an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature.”³ As the name and essentialist ecofeminist leanings of the eighties and nineties become replaced by various monikers, one of which is Lorraine Code’s concept of “feminist-ecological thinking,” Gaard and others ask: to what extent does this name change constitute a true paradigm shift, and what carries through from ecofeminism to feminist-ecological thinking? What ideas might provide, “feminist foundations for current liberatory theories and activism?”⁴ Gabriela Mistral’s poems help to elucidate a foundation for the intersections between feminism and environmentalism, especially as posited by Lorraine Code, who carefully draws from the ecofeminist tendencies as she presents parallels between institutions that experience shared oppression. Gaard’s earlier work as an ecofeminist even seems to echo symbolic aspects of Mistral’s poetry, particularly in her 1992 article, “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism.”

Code seems to update the late twentieth century term “ecofeminism” in her 2006 publication entitled *Ecological Thinking*, and describes feminist ecological-thinking “as infusing, shaping, and circulating throughout the social-material-intellectual-affective atmosphere(s) like the air we breathe...an imaginary.”⁵ Code is careful to use non-committal language, verbs that are becoming, in formation and certainly not essentialist, words like “infusing, shaping, and circulating,” yet in doing so Code still touches on how ecofeminism yokes together world patterns of environmental degradation with women’s oppression, just as ecofeminism did in the eighties and nineties. Poststructuralist schools of thought critiqued this as an essentialist equation of women with nature and

...discredit[ed] ecofeminism’s diversity of arguments and standpoints to such an extent that, by 2010, it was nearly impossible to find a single essay, much less a section, devoted to issues of feminism and ecology (and certainly not ecofeminism), species, or nature in most

introductory anthologies used in women's studies, gender studies, or queer studies.⁶

Code's imaginary, a "transformative, interrogating and renewing imaginary," takes shape on a symbolic and ideological level in some of Mistral's poems, especially the poems entitled "Ausencia" ('Absence'), "Volverlo a ver" ('To See him Again'), and "Todos ibamos a ser reinas" ('We were All Going to be Queens'), in addition to Mistral's 1931 essay entitled "Conversando sobre la tierra" ('Talking about the Land').⁷ Mistral's poetic presentation of an imaginary space turns on etymological analyses of "lunatic," "ecstasy," "nostalgia," and "soul." These analyses highlight poetic tropes of water, light, and nostalgia; and through Mistral's verse these tropes become themes of ecological thinking, especially as it attends to transformations of patterns and binaries. Such boundaries—light/dark, human/nature—are places of creative energy and birth, which translates from the Spanish "dar a luz" as "to give to light." The interplay across and along conceptual value dualisms presented by Mistral's verse is a metaphor for viable approaches to feminist ecological thinking, which brings together issues across and along boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality and species in such a way that people can recognize a common cause among them. Approaching Mistral's poetry in this way reveals its support of an imaginary that lauds the shared breath of interdependent relationships over hegemonic systems that perpetuate, to quote Code, "tacit agreements" and, "spectator consciousness" towards and away from the world.⁸ Like unsettling a western hegemonic imaginary, mapping the transformations or births of words and "lights" that shape the chiaroscuro of Mistral's verse is by no means a linear process, but considering early nature writers' conceptions of ecology provides a helpful starting point.

According to Code, for Anne Carson and Sharon Kingsland, ecology is "the study of patterns in nature, of how these patterns came to be, how they change in space and time."⁹ The early nature writers' rhetoric attends to transformations and patterns as frameworks of ecology; and Mistral's poetry and prose function as a framework for feminist ecological thinking that in turn finds an ally in the framework of queer theory, as outlined in Gaard's article, "Towards a Queer Ecofeminism." "Talking About the Land" especially illustrates how Mistral's poems operate as pieces of ecological rhetoric, which has sought to dismantle conceptual value dualisms and emphasizes interdependent relationships. In the essay Mistral writes, "Voy a hablarles...sobre las relaciones de la mujer con la tierra y sobre la voluntad de

conservación que une a ambas,” (“I will speak to you concerning relations of women with the land and about the will of conservation that unites them”).¹⁰ Mistral draws parallels between the subjugation of women and the earth, a tendency that would be picked up by ecofeminists later in the century, in opposition to hierarchal dichotomies.

Lorraine Code further addresses hierarchal dichotomies in *Ecological Thinking*: “Patrick Hayden persuasively suggests Gilles Deleuze is in fact proposing a naturalistic, ecologically oriented way of thinking that ‘seeks to eliminate the traditional dichotomy separating humanity (as subject) and nature (as object).’”¹¹ Hayden’s suggestion mirrors Mistral’s claim in “Talking About the Land.” Both acknowledge and aim to eradicate hierarchal dichotomies. Gaard’s definition of ecofeminism in “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism” also speaks to the shared oppression set forth by Mistral in her essay. For Gaard, ecofeminism is “the understanding that many systems of oppression are equally enforcing,” like sexism, racism, ageism, also specieism and naturism.¹² Like Mistral, Gaard seeks to inspire unity and inclusive identities by acknowledging this shared oppression: “the goal of this essay is to demonstrate that to be truly inclusive, any theory of ecofeminism must take into consideration the findings of queer theory; similarly, queer theory must consider the findings of ecofeminism.”¹³ For Gaard, these findings include the addition of the conceptual duality “heterosexual/queer” to the list of inextricably linked dualities that social ecofeminists recognize and seek to “dismantle,” like public/private, self/other. This essay prefers “transform” or “rebirth” to Gaard’s “dismantle.”

Gaard particularly begs the dismantling of the reason/erotic value dualism, which addresses procreative and non-procreative sexuality. Mistral’s verse speaks specifically to this particular value dualism as it extends outward into dialectics with the complex sexuality of Queen Elizabeth I, who, just like Mistral, was adopted as an iconographical, virginal mother of a nation. Dialectics between Mistral and similar Madonna figures illustrate that it is impossible to divorce motherhood from pain—in raising children and in the act of giving birth or “giving to light.” Though she never experienced biological maternity herself, Mistral addresses the pain of motherhood and “giving to light” throughout her poetry. Pain also manifests itself through unfulfilled desire or nostalgia in her poetry. The unfulfilled desire critics notice in her work is most often attributed to a lost lover and speculated love interest, as well as her lack of children. Although she never had children of her own, Mistral nonetheless came to be known as the surrogate mother of the Chilean nation. Two biographical events might be said to fuel the unfulfilled desire and nostalgia that Mistral speaks to in “Poema del Hijo,”

(‘Poem of the Son’) from *Desolación*: “Quise un hijo tuyo / y mio...un hijo con los ojos de Cristo engrandecidos,” (‘I wanted a son both yours / and mine...a son with ennobled Christ-like eyes’).¹⁴ The first event is the suicide of Mistral’s adopted son, Juan Miguel, who, “exhausted by an overly emotional existence, committed suicide in a most sentimental way.”¹⁵ This was not the Mistral’s first experience with suicide: the 1909 suicide of Mistral’s friend and speculated love interest Romelio Ureta is often said to be the crux of images of unfulfilled desire in her work, particularly the content of poems in *Desolación*, published in 1922, which also attend to loneliness and nostalgia. Poems like “Poema del hijo” and “Volverlo a ver” (‘To See Him Again’), and “Dolor” (‘Pain’), which is dedicated “a su sombra” (‘to his shadow’), are examples. To connect the dots between the poet’s personal life and the content of her poetry, however, becomes a problematic strategy for some recent critics.

Foster comments on this autobiographical approach: “to take these [scenes of pain] as symptomatic of female jealousy toward the philandering male lover, with feelings of guilt and betrayal intervening consequent to his suicide would reduce the poet’s multiple expressions of rage...to individual frustration,” when Mistral so emphasizes the power of the collective in “Talking About the Land”—both female and universal.¹⁶ For Mistral’s contemporary critics, then, Mistral’s scholarly and publicly perceived “virginity,” derives from unfulfilled erotic tension and loss: it may be deemed a heterosexual virginity of circumstance. That is to say, circumstances beyond her control—the voices of critics and choices of Ureta and her adopted son—led to the creation of Mistral’s virginal public persona. It’s possible, however, that Mistral’s ability to recognize shared oppression among groups is revelatory—both in terms of her private and public sexuality, and as a portend of the alliance that would be forged between ecology and queer theory later in the century.

As mentioned above, Mistral’s emphasis on collective, shared subjugation seems echoed in Gaard’s “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism.” In the piece, Gaard specifies her working definition of ecofeminism as “the understanding that many systems of oppression are equally enforcing,” like sexism, racism, ageism, also speciesism.¹⁷ In Mistral’s work, the correlation between ecofeminism and similar systems of oppression manifests through poetic scenes of pain. Mistral intends the nostalgically painful scenes to inspire unity and mobilization among oppressed groups, and Gaard similarly seeks to inspire unity and inclusive identities: “the goal of this essay is to

demonstrate that to be truly inclusive, any theory of ecofeminism must take into consideration the findings of queer theory; similarly, queer theory must consider the findings of ecofeminism.”¹⁸ It seems that Gaard picks up where Mistral leaves off, and for Gaard, these findings include the addition of the conceptual duality “heterosexual/queer” to the list of inextricably linked dualities that social ecofeminists recognize and seek to dismantle: public/private, self/other. Considering the scholarship on Mistral’s own queerness, particularly in *Queer Mother for a Nation*, may shed light on her understanding of shared oppression.

There exists an entire branch of scholarship that speculates on Mistral’s lesbianism—which identifies with the erotic side of Gaard’s reason/erotic dualism. Lucil Fiol-Matta’s 2002 book *Queer Mother for the Nation* explores the implications of Mistral’s motherly moniker in the context of a queer sexuality. Less than a decade prior to the publication of Fiol-Matta’s *Queer Mother*, David W. Foster commented on the scant scholarly acknowledgment of Mistral’s sexuality:

Though Mistralian scholarship includes some 100 books and hundreds of articles in which a biographical approach is the rule, scholars until recently have been reluctant to situate Mistral’s erotic representations of women within a lesbian matrix.¹⁹

Fiol-Matta is not reluctant in her portrayal of Mistral’s sexuality; Mistral’s lesbianism rather defines this biographical account. Fiol-Matta explains how clarifying the truth about Mistral’s sexuality affects queer writers’ scholarship today, especially in terms of constructing a queer canon. Fiol-Matta does not directly address feminist ecology, yet by engaging with a queer canon some scholars would say that she also inevitably engages with feminist-ecological thinking. Articles like Greta Gaard’s 1997 “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism,” and Timothy Morton’s 2010 “Queer Ecology,” observe an intrinsic connection between ecology and queer theory, for example, and it’s possible that Mistral did as well. Like Mistral, Gaard seeks to inspire unity and inclusive identities: “the goal of this essay is to demonstrate that to be truly inclusive, any theory of ecofeminism must take into consideration the findings of queer theory; similarly, queer theory must consider the findings of ecofeminism.”²⁰ This parallel informs the consideration of Mistral’s feminist-ecological and lesbian personae, and Morton clarifies the tenable link between queer theory and ecology: “Ecology stems from biology, which has nonessentialist aspects. Queer theory is a nonessentialist view of gender and sexuality.”²¹

Mistral’s sexuality, whether closeted lesbianism or virginity of circumstance, does not ignore eroticism in the way Gaard feels eroticism,

women, and nature have been equally devalued by Western culture. While this argument seems to value the reproductive aspects of nature, Gaard goes on to show that nature is a culturally constructed place of domination and that not all sexuality must be reproductive.²² For Gaard, the argument that sexuality must imply procreation attacks both women and queers. Notably, neither presentation of Mistral's sexuality implies procreation and thus leaves itself open to eroticism. For Gaard, Mistral's poetic celebrations of symbolic and biological maternity may be "a pretext for an eroticism at once concentrated on the female yet utterly devoid of masculine influence."²³ Such eroticism is notably not procreative, as it's free from male influence. As mentioned above, Mistral's contemporary critics speculate that loss and death confine Mistral's sexuality, which she harnesses as fuel for tension and depth in creative expression throughout *Desolación*.

If Mistral indeed laments loss and death, and does not "give to light" in her poetry, she then nods to a more nuanced and ancient source of light that draws an unlikely parallel between this virginal mother of Chile and Queen Elizabeth I of England, known during her reign as "The Virgin Queen." Meditating on the shared trope of this light source, the moon, reveals a cyclical, interdependent feminist-ecological imaginary. It begs the addition of the binary "light/dark" to Gaard's list of conceptual value dualisms that ecofeminists seek to dismantle. Ecological thinking, as it attends to transformations and syntheses of binaries, mirrors the cyclical nature of the moon. Ecological thinking casts into question the hegemonic status of,

...one true story...and the process is of necessity gradual...and plays on certain incongruities and tensions: productive tensions that unsettle taken-for-granted authoritarian assumptions of self certainty, yet resist efforts to return to comfortable stasis.²⁴

Literary images of moonlight throughout Mistralian and Elizabethan poetry embody the productive tension between light and dark that Code speaks of in *Ecological Thinking*.

Panegyric works dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I compare her to Diana, the virginal Roman moon goddess. The comparison especially exists in panegyrics written during the latter portion of her reign. Phillip Sydney considers textured images of light and their symbolic implications of sterility in "Now was our Heavenly Vault Deprived of Light." In the poem, light symbolizes an heir and Elizabeth is the empty vault devoid of light. Sydney's imagery recalls the Spanish translation of giving birth: "dar a luz," ("to give to

light),’ and implies that light is favorable to darkness; that procreative sexuality is favorable to non-procreative sexuality. He does not, however, consider the productive tension between light and darkness, best symbolized through the stayed moonlight of Elizabeth and the madness or “lunatic-ness” of Mistral’s poetry.

Because Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the throne by divine right, she might be said to depend on the light of God as the sun, and even repeatedly emphasized her Godly right to rule during her reign. In that sense Elizabeth as the moon depends on the light of God as the sun, a light source more fixed and stable than Mistral’s claim of the cyclical moon. Ptolemaic cosmology bolsters the understanding of the sun as a stable source of power. For Ptolemaic cosmologists, all things below the moon’s sphere are mutable and all above are stayed, thus rendering Elizabeth’s deference to God as the sun reflective of a stayed power that contrasts with the volatile functions of madness in Mistral’s poetry—a function further elucidated by the etymology of “lunatic.” In Spanish, “luna” translates to “moon;” and lunatic literally means “moon-sick,” or, “affected with the kind of insanity that was supposed to depend on changes of the moon.”²⁵ Moving to etymological considerations of “lunatic,” “ecstasy,” “nostalgia,” and then “soul” through Mistral’s poems “We were all Going to Be Queens,” and “Absence” is helpful in dismantling dualities like light/dark and reason/eroticism, and Mistral’s references to madness and moon-sickness in her poetry have not been lost on critics.

In “La Locura en Gabriela Mistral” (“The Madness in Gabriela Mistral”), Santiago Daydí-Tolson explains a Christian tradition of madness or lunacy as a representation of the highest expression of love to God.²⁶ This might call to mind medieval mystic writers who seek ecstasy as a form of divine union, but also imitation: “the spiritual knowledge imparted in books could not compare to the knowledge of God through the experience of imitating Christ and identifying with his passion.”²⁷ Ecstasy originates, “...via late Latin from Greek *exstasis* ‘standing outside oneself.’ Classical senses included ‘insanity’ and ‘bewilderment’; this developed to mean ‘withdrawal of the soul from the body.’”²⁸ The state of ecstasy is etymologically passive, yet for medieval mystics it is an imitation that depends on active cognitive interpretation, and projection of that cognitive interpretation.

Daydí-Tolson presents ecstasy and “madness” as a recurrent motif throughout Mistral’s work, and he cites madness as a prevalent theme in all four of Mistral’s books of poetry. Daydí-Tolson further maps the origin of moon-sickness:

it has a long history that, overcoming antiquated magic and religious

interpretations, has arrived in modern times to directly influence poetic theory and the unique capacities in the poet to unearth a reality inaccessible to the normal faculties of the individual.²⁹

This is a nod to magical and religious interpretations that recall fourteenth century mysticism and religious ecstasy—thus, contextualized by Daydi-Tolson’s rhetoric, Mistralian moon-sickness resembles ecstasy.

Like Daydi-Tolson says, the evolved form of madness is successful in poetry when its readers rely on devices for poetic interpretation outside of “normal” or base faculties, like the five senses. This calls to mind the poetic device of synesthesia, which occurs in Mistral’s poem “We were all going to be Queens.” Mistral writes: “y Lucila; que hablaba a río / a montaña y cañaveral / en las lunas de la locura / recibió la verdad” (“and Lucile; who was talking to river / to mountain and reedbed”).³⁰ Lucila speaks to tactile elements in a synesthetic personification of nature. The ultimate lines of the quatrain read, “in the moons of madness / she received the truth.” Clarity in madness is paradoxical, and Mistral explicitly links “la luna” or the moon, to the lunatic.

“We were all going to be Queens” falls in a section of *Tala* entitled “Saudade,” or ‘Nostalgia.’ Recall that critics often attribute Mistral’s nostalgia to regrets about motherhood and unfulfilled desire; and consider that nostalgia reads as a type of dwelling, etymologically: “homesickness, compiled from *nóstos* to return home and *álgos* pain.”³¹ Mistral often makes allusions to her birthplace, Vicuña, and her piece “Chile’s Poem” is a nostalgic homage to her homeland. Soledad Falabella addresses Mistral’s poetic nostalgia in “Desert: Territory, Displacement, and Nostalgia in ‘Chile’s Poem.’” Falabella honors the etymological reading of nostalgia and considers it as a sickness. For Gaston Bachelard, nostalgia is a sickness contracted from a lack and a longing for one’s first dwelling, elucidated in *Poetics of Space*: “for our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe.”³² In each reading, nostalgia has one object. It is not a multi-desirous longing but rather one with a linear objective. This reading of nostalgia contrasts with that of lunacy, which depends on the waxing and the waning of the moon. Nostalgia is static and lunacy is mobile—a dwelling and a noun; and an action and a verb, respectively. These prominent and apparently contrasting Mistralian themes resolve themselves in the context of Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* and his definition of “poetic image.”

Nostalgia is a space to poetically light and sift through the “polarities” between soul and mind, as Bachelard outlines in *Poetics*:

In my opinion, soul and mind are indispensable for studying the phenomena of the poetic image in their various nuances, above all, for following the evolution of poetic images from the original state of reverie to that of execution.³³

The soul possesses an inner light that is not a reflection of the world—it dwells calmly while the mind is more intentional. For Bachelard and Mistral, one nuance of poetic image is the character of the past. The static character of the past resembles Code's established imaginary of mastery, or an instituted social imaginary that carries a fixed "view of the appropriate human relation to the natural world as one of a spectator consciousness standing outside and apart from that world."³⁴ Mistral blurs the line between spectator and spectacle when the "past" emerges as a character, as does Bachelard in *Poetics of Space*, when the phenomenon of the poetic image is described as an instance in which this image's "brilliance," to use Bachelard's word, causes the past to resound, reverb, re-act.

We, as readers, reverberate the poem and then own it. The past becomes mobile through poetic image as it reacts to the image's brilliance, which "derives from the adjective brilliant, from brillant, of briller, to sparkle or shine."³⁵ Brilliance reflects light. Mistral could not biologically give to light so she gives it poetically, which is a manner of rewriting the past and resolving and moving from the dwelling of nostalgia, virginity of circumstance and the unfulfilled desire that some critics observe in her work. For Mistral's motherly and, according to some critics, sexual nostalgia, poetic nostalgia functions as an initially masochistic yet ultimately cathartic time machine. Understanding masochism in relation to Mistral's persona as a schoolteacher reveals in part the didactic relationship between past and present, particularly as they relate to nostalgia and are contextualized by Bachelard.

Gilles Deleuze outlines the history of the term in "Coldness and Cruelty:"

In coining the term masochism, Krafft-Ebing was giving Masoch credit for having redefined a clinical entity not merely in terms of the link between pain and sexual pleasure, but in terms of something more fundamental connected with bondage.³⁶

Masochism associates pain and pleasure. It involves the desire to feel pain through punishment that liberates the masochist from guilt, free to experience sexual gratification. A masochistic agenda involves an exchange: one gives and one takes—"bondage"—as opposed to sadism, where the goal is demonstrative loyalty to and authorship of violence. "In every respect, as we shall see, the sadistic 'instructor' stands in contrast to the masochistic

‘educator.’”³⁷ Mistral’s role as “schoolteacher of a nation” and her poetic nostalgia speak to this reading of masochism. Masochism depends on interaction and contractual alliance between a master/servant dialectic rendered educator and student. When Deleuze distinguishes between sadism and masochism he makes a link to the feminist-ecological and Mistralian emphasis on interdependent and dynamic relationships.

A poetic expression of nostalgia is masochistic for Mistral because it involves interdependent relations between poet and a poetic image that “teaches” the distant past. Through this relationship, the poet overcomes punishment—static memory and nostalgia—to experience catharsis by rewriting the past. Brilliant poetic images are the catalyst. “Masochism is characterized not by guilty feelings but by the desire to be punished, the purpose of masochism being to resolve guilt and the corresponding anxiety and make sexual gratification possible.”³⁸ Poetic nostalgia functions masochistically for Mistral, so it purges in manners that may allow her gratification in the future, whether sexual or more generally cathartic. Nostalgia exists as a theme throughout Mistral’s poetry and also in “Talking about the Land”—fittingly: it’s impossible to divorce both nostalgia and motherhood from pain.

The article by Soledad Falabella, “Desierto: Territorio, desplazamiento y nostalgia en ‘Poema de Chile’ de Gabriela Mistral” “Desert: Territory, Displacement and Nostalgia in ‘Poem of Chile by Gabriela Mistral’” further illuminates the intrinsic link between nostalgia, pain, and desire in Mistral’s work: “La herramienta psíquica que el hombre desarrolla para fijar la memoria es el dolor...el dolor fija al deseo en la memoria,” (“The psychic tool that man develops to secure the memory is pain...pain secures desire in the memory”).³⁹ Mistral’s pain is retrospective, like nostalgia—a yearning for something external, solid, and written informs the pain (the past), rather than a mental, spoken, and liquid concept (the now). Nostalgia represents the desire to rewrite.

Like the poem, “To See him Again” *Poetics of Space* bolsters the link between Mistral’s personal nostalgia and a poetic nostalgia. Bachelard outlines the marriage of poetic image and a poet’s distant personal memory:

The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depths these will reverberate and die away.⁴⁰

The poetic image resurrects the distant past in subtle repetitions or re-

speakings of static acts. Echoes, as auditory phenomena, present opportunities for re-readings or re-interpretations.

Like these echoes, poetry functions for Mistral as a modifier of the past, especially regarding the suicide of Romelio Ureta and content of “To See him Again.” The brilliance of a poetic image inspires an auditory transformation of the past, which is a fixed concept similar to the “instituted social-political-epistemological imaginary of the affluent western world that generates and sustains hegemonic practices of mastery within a web of assumptions, of tacit agreements that are everyone’s and no one’s” that Code seeks to interrupt with her cyclical, interdependent conception of feminist ecological thinking.⁴¹ We may reverberate ecological thinking and then share its ownership, just as Mistral and Bachelard demonstrate the readers’ and authors’ capacities to reverberate the past, the poem, and own it through brilliance, through light.

Finally, Mistral’s dynamic re-writings and the breath of Code’s ecological imaginary engage with Mistral’s poem “Absence,” which falls in the section of *Tala* or “The Felling” entitled ‘The Dead Wave.’ Appropriately, water emerges as a transformative character in the poem. The speaker liquefies its body in the first line: ‘My body leaves you drop by drop.’⁴² Tactile images expound the physical effects of leaving: the speaker’s body drips away like water, its face leaves like deaf oil, its hands go like mercury, and its feet leave like dust. Absence is a gradual, fluid process to compare the speaker’s body with the elements water, oil, mercury and dust is to name the process of absence organic and natural, especially contextualized by death and regeneration.

The process becomes collective in the second stanza with the introduction of a (‘we’: ‘Everything leaves you, everything leaves us!’).⁴³ The space between bodies and identities blurs. Enjambment in the second stanza contrasts with linear ideas in the first and causes tension with watery imagery. Enjambment also emerges as a form of play by presenting opportunities for layered interpretations of Mistral’s verse. Lines 6-7 break at the word “bell:” (‘My voice leaves, that made you a bell / closed to how much we are not ourselves’).⁴⁴ Interestingly, it’s ambiguous whether “closed” describes the speaker’s voice or the bell, because each yields a feminine pronoun.

Repetition and enjambment are the breath of “Absence:” (‘I leave from you with your same breaths’), which takes us to the last etymological consideration of the paper, that of the soul.⁴⁵ Enjambment is an unnatural break within a fluid body, and the poem emphasizes it through auditory images of bell-ringing and rhythmic breath. Bachelard explains in *Poetics of Space* explains that: “The different names for the soul, among nearly all

peoples, are just so many breath variations, and onomatopoeic expressions of breathing.”⁴⁶ The Spanish word for soul is “alma” which derives “from the Latin *anima* ‘breath, soul’, akin to *animus* ‘soul, mind, spirit, breath.’”⁴⁷ Breathing is a cycle. Like a relationship and even like masochism, it is a give and take process.

Furthermore, the cycle is akin to Code’s “brief for ecological thinking” which conceives of feminist ecological thinking “as infusing, shaping, and circulating throughout the social-material-intellectual-affective atmosphere(s) like the air we breathe...an *imaginary*.”⁴⁸ Ecological thinking within this imaginary is the soul of social-material-intellectual-affective relationships. Harnessing Code’s conception of ecological thinking ultimately undermines “spectator consciousness” and its sense of detachment that is perpetuated by value dualisms. The shift to this ecological imaginary and interplay along boundaries in Mistral’s verse is a process that recalls the symbolic trajectory of the poem “Absence;” it is organic, natural, gradual and by no means linear.

ENDNOTES

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- ³ Gaard, 26.
- ⁴ Gaard, 26.
- ⁵ Code, 28.
- ⁶ Gaard, 31.
- ⁷ Code, 26.
- ⁸ Code, 26.
- ⁹ Code, 26.
- ¹⁰ Mistral, Gabriela. *Materias: Prosa Inédita*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria: 1978. 298.
- ¹¹ Code, 27.
- ¹² Gaard, Greta. “Towards a Queer Ecofeminism.” *Hypatia* 12. 1 (1997): 114-137.137.
- ¹³ Gard, 138.
- ¹⁴ Mistral, Gabriela. *Desolación*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1983. 2,3,7.
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- ¹⁶ Foster, David William. “Mistral, Gabriela.” *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994. 227.
- ¹⁷ Gaard, 137.
- ¹⁸ Gaard, 138.
- ¹⁹ Foster, 221.

- ²⁰ Gaard, 138.
- ²¹ Morton, Timothy. "Queer Ecology." *PMLA* 125.2 (2010): 273–282. 275.
- ²² Gaard, 141.
- ²³ Foster, 227.
- ²⁴ Code, 30.
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