Gabriela Mistral.
The Teaching Journey of a Poet.

by
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ABSTRACT
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Gabriela Mistral. The Teaching Journey of a Poet
(Under the direction of María A. Salgado)

Gabriela Mistral, the first Spanish-American Nobel Laureate, is best known as a poet and prose writer; even though it is widely recognized that her writings are didactic in nature. Little has been written concerning her ideas and how she conveyed them through her writings. This dissertation seeks to open a space that will respond to a need for a consideration of her contributions as a teacher who endeavored to enrich the lives of women and those who had limited educational opportunities. Emphasis is placed on her collaboration with the Mexican poet and Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos, in Mexico’s modernization of its educational system, in particular on behalf of women and the rural areas.

In chapter 1, I provide the introductory information with “Some Thoughts on Gabriela Mistral and Education.” In chapter 2, Gabriela Mistral’s educational philosophy, in the light of her career as an author and a teacher, briefly sketching her familial and education background, is discussed. Chile and Mexico’s impact on her life, both in the sense of the Constitution and the system, is the focal point of chapter 3. Chapter 4 examines her use of poetry and fiction as educational tools. Three main texts have been analyzed: two poems from Gabriela Mistral’s Desolación, “Decálogo del artista” and “La maestra rural,” as well as selected prose and poems from Mistral and other authors she anthologized in her textbook Lecturas para mujeres. The fifth chapter studies the meaning of the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” in the poet’s life and educational career. The hymn that Mistral wrote for
this school, and a bulletin issued by the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral,” served as the points of reference to evaluate the strength of the Chilean author-educator’s contributions to the renovation of the educational opportunities for the women of Mexico.
DEDICATION

This dissertation would have never become a reality without the encouragement that I have received from my family. There are four individuals; however, that have earned special acknowledgment for their invaluable support and encouragement: my father, Dr. Robert L. Wood, the master editor and analyst; my mother, Joyce Shirley Young Wood, who believed in my success every step of the way until her untimely death; my son Daniel D. Royo, who did everything he could within his power to lighten the load for me by being responsible, respectable, and honorable; and my daughter Irene A. Royo, who is trustworthy, principled, and faithful to her commitments, which permitted me to focus on my studies. Thank you to each one of you, from the depths of my heart.
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Furthermore, I must mention two of my colleagues who have had a lasting impact and have left an indelible impression on my life both academically and personally. The first is Dr. Rita Martin, who so willingly guided me through the labyrinth of the literary field, who instilled in me confidence in my capabilities, and contributed to my mastery of the art of organization and the development of literary writing. The second individual is Dr. Rebeca
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This statement of recognition would not be complete without the mention of Tom Smither, the Graduate Student Services Assistant for the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, whose attention to detail was essential to my assurance that I had fulfilled the necessary requirements for my program and completed the submission of all necessary forms and documents. Lastly, I must mention Machina Williams, an unshakable friend who was always willing to be a sounding board and an advisor at the most critical moments.

I wish to extend this statement of heartfelt acknowledgement to each one of you for the critical role that you have played in the accomplishment of my goal to prepare for full-time employment in the field of Spanish education at the post-secondary level, as well as research in the field of Spanish-American literature.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SOME THOUGHTS ON GABRIELA MISTRAL
AND EDUCATION

1.1. Gabriela Mistral’s Image

The literary world knows the Chilean writer Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) as one of Latin America’s major poets of the twentieth century; her work as an educator however was also outstanding. Yet, although many of her writings are didactic, and she spent many years teaching in the classrooms of Chile and Mexico, this topic did not take center stage in her poetic imagery. This does not mean, however, that she did not express her ideas on the subject. On the contrary, she did; and several of her works both in prose and in poetry stand as examples of Mistral’s involvement in educational projects at home and abroad. This dissertation seeks to define the Chilean poet’s educational views by tracing and analyzing her ideas in some of her key works, written both in prose and in poetry, that I have selected from her single textbook, Lecturas para mujeres, and two poems from her book Desolación.

Gabriela Mistral’s educational concerns, as they appear in her writings, exemplify her insistence on communicating her educational views. Readers and critics have amply recognized her role as a teacher in the classrooms of her country and Mexico, as well as her role as a pedagogue that expressed her ideas in her writings. The general awareness of her
pedagogical influence stands in stark contrast to the lack of studies concerning this topic.

Fernando Alegría, one of her biographers, points out the importance of her didactic work:

Detrás del nombre [Gabriela Mistral], a modo de retablos en un panteón; veo organizadas múltiples alegorías: coros de niños en delantal blanco; caballeros mexicanos de suculentos y repolludos bigotes que miran la hora en relojes de oro macizo; banderines de todas las naciones americanas que flamean con un ruido de s sibilante y pedagógica; constreñidas damas de pelucas blancas rizadas y hombros de raso negro polveado de ceniza; inmensas piezas de piano frente a las cuales un dedo de maestra repiquetea el ritmo de una ronda, y, finalmente, mujeres votantes, de voz y además viriles, doctas en estadísticas y en educación moderna, cuyas manos agitan desaforadamente un ramillete de Recados de Gabriela. (11)

For Alegría, the name “Gabriela Mistral” and education are synonymous. As he explains in this quote, the mention of the name Gabriela Mistral evokes a number of different images in association with learning environments, i.e., education as well as intellectual matters, such as theatrical pieces, songs, and allegories. In each one of these settings there are individuals whose lives have been transformed; those who have gained a mastery of music, children attending school in their uniforms, and last but not least the active participation of women in civic and educational matters. In Alegría’s allegory there are men and women pictured who have advanced in their status in society, as evidenced by their dress or their new found privileges, such as the women who are well informed and have gained the right to vote. The biographer attributes these advances to the writings of Gabriela Mistral by showing some of these individuals carrying copies of her recados (messages) in their hands. The image projected by Alegría is the one portrayed most often by those who speak of this teacher-poet.

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1 All quotations that are included in this dissertation preserve the original document’s grammar, spelling, and syntax. The quotations also preserve the author’s visual presentation.
1.2. Pertinent Bibliography

In spite of Alegría’s and many other critics’ perception that the name “Gabriela Mistral” and pedagogical issues are one and the same, my search of critical sources reveals only four journal articles and the prologue to a selection of Gabriela Mistral’s prose that specifically address the subject of the poet and education. The first article, written by Gabriella De Beer in 1966, and titled “Pedagogía y feminismo en una olvidada obra de Gabriela Mistral, Lecturas para mujeres” was originally published in the journal Cuadernos Americanos, and subsequently in Monographic Review. In this brief study of ten pages, De Beer defines her perception of this textbook as a volume that combines these two concepts (feminism and pedagogy), which she depicts through her notion of a reader’s impression:

Par el lector moderno formado por las nociones igualitarias de este siglo y más aun por el feminismo tan característico de los últimos decenios, los conceptos esbozados en Lecturas para mujeres conjugan lo antiguo y lo moderno. Por un lado, la “Introducción” Insiste en el papel tradicional de la mujer, pero al mismo tiempo nota su participación cada vez más activa en la vida nacional. Para la Mistral la mujer antigua, más leal a los fines verdaderos de la vida, cuidaba de los intereses eternos y sentía hondamente por la maternidad y la santidad del hogar. En cambio, la mujer, la mujer nueva está dispuesta a cambiar estas virtudes por los éxitos mundanos. Para equilibrar estas tendencias contradictorias Gabriela Mistral reunió sus Lecturas para mujeres. (213)

As a follow-up to this representation, De Beer then provides a brief synopsis of the types of readings that Gabriela Mistral included in each of the five divisions of Lecturas para mujeres. In her summaries, this critic explains how she notes that in her textbook Mistral blends the previous social traditions with the modern ones through a combination of readings that exalt the home, while at the same time providing literary selections whose inclusion in this work leads one to the conclusion that Gabriela Mistral wants to broaden women’s education.
Insiste en que la educación de la mujer no debe limitarse a cuestiones domésticas por nobles que éstas sean. Su educación debe incluir todo tipo de problemática—la justicia social, el trabajo y la naturaleza. La cultura de la mujer debe tener la profundidad espiritual que sólo el estudio de la música, la pintura y la literatura pueden proporcionarle. (214)

This piece also offers a succinct description of the factors that brought the poet from Chile to Mexico, to join forces with the poet and Minister of Education José Vasconcelos (1882-1949), in quest of the restructuring of women’s education in Mexico.

The second article is a fourteen page piece written by Ivette Malverde Disselkoen, entitled “Gabriela Mistral quiere educar mujeres. Relectura de “Introducción a estas Lecturas para mujeres,” published in Acta Literaria, in 1989. This critic considers the idea of the education of women as presented by Gabriela Mistral in the introduction to her textbook. Malverde points out that the introduction is the pivotal point “… en la que cristalizan las ideas que ella sustentaba en esa época acerca de la educación de las mujeres” (12). In her following discussion, the critic asks these questions:

¿Qué pretendía Gabriela Mistral con sus Lecturas? ¿qué imagen de mujer proyectan? ¿Cómo se insertan las ideas mistralianas en el contexto de las proposiciones para mejorar las condiciones de vida de la mujer en esa época? (12)

In the rest of this article, Malverde answers her own questions, explaining her understanding of what she perceives to be the reasons why Gabriela Mistral wrote the introduction. She concludes that the poet’s concept of education is one in which the poet-teacher balances her own patriarchal ideas with an insightful understanding of the plight of women:

La educación para mujeres que nos propone Gabriela Mistral exhibe la tensión entre las ideas convencionales, patriarcales, dominantes, y las percepciones perspicaces acerca de la situación desmedrada de la mujer, exhibe la coexistencia contradictoria entre una posición patriarcal que asume la mayoría de las condiciones de subordinación de la mujer y una postura que diagnostica certeramente esa subordinación. (12)
When referring to her perception of the poet’s ideas, this author notes an inherent contradiction: “exhibe la coexistencia contradictoria entre una posición patriarcal que asume la mayoría de las condiciones de subordinación de la mujer y una postura que diagnostica certeramente esa subordinación.” This statement points out the paradox between Gabriela Mistral’s seeming to sustain a patriarchal ideology through the choice of the topics she includes in her readings, while at the same time indicating that she feels that patriarchal ideology is a major concern. As Malverde further develops her study, she draws attention to the tension that Mistral creates in her approach towards the education of women, through on the one hand, the compilation of Lecturas para mujeres and, on the other, the divisions she used in the organization of this textbook. This critic however, does not focus on the specific educational content that each selected reading offers, which is a part of my dissertation.

The third article, by Regina Claro Tocornal and published in Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica in 1999, is titled “Presencia chilena en la educación mexicana durante el gobierno de Obregón: Gabriela Mistral y José Vasconcelos.” This article does touch on some of the topics that I will cover in my dissertation. Its brevity however--it is only fourteen pages long--does not allow the critic to fully develop the relevance of Mistral in the Mexican educational project. Claro Tocornal focuses first on the background, formulation, and implementation of José Vasconcelos’ plans for the educational system of Mexico before and during the four-year period in which he was Mexico’s Secretary of Education (1920-1924). She then touches upon the factors that went into the pedagogical and literary formation of the Chilean poet. Finally, she addresses the subject of Gabriela Mistral’s role and contributions to Mexico and the fact that she merges her efforts with those of José
Vasconcelos’ to interface with his endeavors to fulfill his dreams for Mexico in the field of education through the establishment of a new focus on schools and libraries.

The final study that addresses Mistral’s educational concerns is authored by Iván Carrasco M., and titled “Poema de Chile’: un texto pedagógico.” It was published in Revista Chilena de Literatura, in 2000. In this rather brief eight-page article, the critic states that

Poema de Chile es uno de los textos más polisémicos de Gabriela Mistral. Aunque en apariencia es simple, casi como un relato para niños o adultos con poca instrucción, monotemático, sencillo en su estructuración retórica, restringido en sus asociaciones discursivas, al leerlo con más cuidado aparece como un texto complejo, plural, que requiere lecturas variadas desde puntos de vista interdisciplinarios, para aprehenderlo en su múltiple complejidad. (Carrasco M. 117)

This statement addresses the fact that in most instances the readers of this poem look at it as uncomplicated, almost to the point of being a story to be enjoyed simply for its entertainment value. However, for Carrasco, a reading of Mistral’s Poema de Chile goes much beyond that. It is in fact a work of great complexity, he insists. The critic cites a number of different scholars and experts on Mistral’s literature who have also read this poem and drawn similar conclusions in that Poema de Chile, like the rest of her poetry, exhibits:

. . . una tendencia al macrotexto, es decir, un afán de superar el fragmentarismo o asistematicidad del poemario tradicional, mediante la construcción de conjuntos temáticos y discursivos en forma de secciones. (Carrasco M. 119)

Through this poem, Carrasco points out that Gabriela Mistral’s writings are not only artistic creations but that they carry underlying didactic messages. She attains this aim by constructing a series of connected poems that draw together a variety of ideas under various titles. He asserts that in this particular text all the ideas are combined under one title. For Carrasco, Gabriela Mistral’s desire to share the topics that were important to her inspired her to write a poem with the observations of her travels throughout Chile, which collectively
presents her ideas on what her whole country meant to her. Through the writing of this poem, Gabriela Mistral accomplished an additional feat: to poetically describe the varied geographical features of her homeland and to teach them to her countrymen.

In the main, this article is concerned with the analysis of the structure and techniques used in this poem. After such a study, Carrasco concludes that the use of a multiplicity of topics in a single work is a common strategy used by the poet, and that she does it most successfully in Poema de Chile.

The final piece on Mistral’s education is Roque Esteban Scarpa’s prologue to Magisterio y niño (1979), which he entitled “Exaltación y riesgo de la pedagogía.” In this eighteen-page introduction, Scarpa provides information to establish the biographical and the philosophical reasons why she chose to become, and why she became a teacher, by terming her choice as “esa elección que nos hacen” (11). Scarpa also explores the impact of her career by directly addressing her as a teacher:

Sí, Gabriela, verdad parecía que su clase después de la última palabra dicha, se desvanecía, pero usted tuvo la certeza de que era sólo una apariencia. Su clase fue una saeta de oro que atravesó y sigue atravesando no en el alma siquiera de una alumna, sino de quienes pueden, para honra nuestra, seguir siendo sus alumnos. . . . Es incuestionable verdad que lo invisible engendra lo visible, que lo eterno perdura en el tiempo, que el que fue criatura del espíritu no puede tragarlo la tierra. Usted lo sabía Gabriela: ‘Ni el mármol es más duradero que este soplo de aliento si es puro e intenso.’ (29)

Gabriela Mistral is depicted as being conscious of the fact that her teaching involved both a temporal and an enduring component, in that when she was in the classroom she was not only sharing with the students the subject-matter of the class; she was also molding the student’s future character, which carries a lifelong impact on their lives. The importance of what Mistral teaches is compared to the durability of a piece of marble, when Scarpa indicates that “ni el mármol es más duradero que este soplo de aliento si es puro e intenso.”
This image emphasized that Gabriela Mistral not only impacted her pupil’s life during the time that he or she was in her classroom, but that also her influence would continue as long as the students lived.

Finally, Scarpa explains Mistral’s roles as a teacher and a writer through what she terms la “vocación vertical” (11) and el “oficio lateral” (12). According to Scarpa, Mistral perceived a calling to imparting “lúcidez y la realidad” (11), accompanied by the determination to take the steps to become the exemplary teacher that everyone came to admire.

1.3. In Summary

My dissertation seeks to fill the gap in the studies concerning Gabriela Mistral and her ideas on education. The selected prose and poetry pieces I have chosen define her pedagogy. Reading them from this point of view brings into focus her concepts directly as opposed to presenting them as an abstract explanation of her contributions or as an account of her involvement in the activities within a sector of society or of a nation.

It is my hope that this dissertation will open a “door” to an understanding of what Gabriela Mistral offered to the women of Mexico through her involvement in the educational project of their country. I also posit that, by extension, and through her many trips and contacts, the women of many other areas in the Americas may be included in the group of individuals that garner the benefits of her efforts. I intend to provide, through the study of the selection of literary pieces that I incorporate into the chapters of this dissertation, an avenue through which the reader will be able to appreciate the pedagogical concerns that
characterize the thinking of the Chilean writer, Gabriela Mistral, and how she implemented them within the Mexican school system.
CHAPTER II

THE TEACHER, THE WRITER, AND THE INTELLECTUAL

The stage was set for the formation of Gabriela Mistral as a teacher, writer and intellectual almost from the time of her birth. The course of her career continued to assert itself throughout her life, culminating in her becoming a world-renowned “illustrious individual.” The Nobel Prize in Literature, granted to her in 1945, was the high point of her literary career, having gained recognition not only through the multiplicity of activities in which she was involved and the varied circumstances in which she found herself, but also, through her poetry. The distinctiveness of this educator, writer and intellectual’s thinking was identifiable from the earliest words she penned in Ecos where her first published poem appeared in 1905. As Jaime Quezada states, throughout her lifetime she continued to write and educate others in an array of settings and locations, “que supo decir buenamente lo suyo-y en lo suyo lo de los otros--ya en el poema, ya en la prosa, ya en el recado-carta motivadora” (Bendita mi lengua sea 11). Her eventual trip to Mexico to help shape the educational system of that country gave her international recognition through her accomplishments during her two-year stay. Quezada further states in this book, “Gabriela Mistral se hispanoamericaniza viajando a México. Y a contribuir en los asuntos y reformas educacionales en un país que reordenaba su vida después de una revolución” (14). He points out that the remaining thirty-five years of her life were occupied with the activities that reflected this particular concern and her background:
Su pensamiento y su acción en los temas tutelares que harán de su escritura un acercamiento al prójimo y una enseñanza cotidiana de vida. Ella, Gabriela Mistral, que nos nace en un valle de Elqui, que se recorre el territorio patrio en andanzas educacionales, se nos irá luego por otros países y continentes en una errancia o extranjería de vagabunda voluntaria. Será como quien echa cuerpo y alma a rodar tierras, hablando con dejo de sus mares bárbaros, y con no más que un destino por almohada. Pero en todo lugar será siempre fiel a sus permanentes preocupaciones y motivaciones: su país natal de Chile su América indígena. Y los habitantes de ese país y de esa América en sus geografías y sus costumbres, en sus vivires y realidades, en sus maneras de rescatar lo mal deletreado o lo mal averiguado. (Bendita mi lengua sea 11)

As an indication of the appreciation for the influence that Gabriela Mistral exercised in Mexico, she received another invitation to come to this country in 1948. Upon her return, and during her second two-year stay, she offered additional aid in furthering the development of the Mexican educational system. This second visit has moved me to formulate the following two questions: 1) what was so valued in what Gabriela Mistral brought to the Mexican educational system during her first visit that she would be invited to revisit the nation; and 2) did the Chilean educator’s influence have a long-term impact upon Mexico’s educational system?

I will draw the answers to these questions from two primary sources: Gabriela Mistral’s own life as exemplified in certain events, in tandem with the influences that molded her life and made her into the person she became; and her literary production, namely: a) the types of literature she composed; b) the principal themes that are central to her writings; and, c) the contributions she made to the literary world with respect to pedagogical and educational plans.

The remaining pages of this first chapter present the historical elements that merged to create the mythical figure of Gabriela Mistral, the teacher, the writer, and the intellectual. I
accomplish this objective by highlighting her literary creations along with other scholarly records drawn from other writers and critics who have studied her literature and her life.

2.1. The Creation of the Teacher

Gabriela Mistral was born in Huasco, Fragüita, Chile, on April 7, 1889. The birth name that Mistralian biographers most commonly mention is that of Lucila Godoy Alcayaga. However, expanding on this information, and according to an article posted by the Colegio de los Sagrados Corazones del Arzobispo de Santiago de Chile, entitled “Biografía de Gabriela Mistral,” the same day of her birth, her father Juan Jerónimo Godoy Villanueva (1856-1915) had her baptized in the Parish Church of Vicuña, with the much longer name of Lucila de María del Perpetuo Socorro Godoy Alcayaga. Immediately following the baptism of his newly born daughter, don Jerónimo composed a poem to express his emotional reaction to the two events of the day. In this piece entitled “Biografía,” the reader can gain a better understanding of don Jerónimo’s state of mind. The section entitled “Largo viaje al nacer” explains he had been fired from his teaching position because of a misunderstanding with the school. He was, therefore, unemployed and at home. Although his jobless situation had caused a strain on his marriage with Petronila Alcayaga Rojas (1845-1929), the birth of his daughter brought him joy amidst his sorrows:

Oh dulce Lucila
que en días amargos
piadosos los cielos

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2 Quotations and information that is included in my dissertation that does not have page numbers is taken from speeches, conference transcripts, interviews, or other documents that are published online. Each time that one of these sources is included, I will follow the MLA Style format of indicating the title or subtitle of the source, and if available, the author will be part of the cited information also.
In 1908, Lucila Godoy used the name Gabriela Mistral for the first time as her authorial pen name, but did not adopt what was to become her lifelong pseudonym until after she received first-place honors in 1914 in the Juegos Florales, a poetry competition in Santiago de Chile. Before choosing her pen name for this event, she had experimented with several others, such as those of Soledad and Alma, and the anagram Alguien. The most widely accepted explanation of the origin of her eventual pseudonym is that it is the amalgamation of the names of two of her favorite authors: Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), an Italian poet and politician, and Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), a French poet who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1904. Christine A. Elmore, in her online article entitled “Exploring Character and Culture in the Lives of Three Remarkable Women of Latin America” states that the name “Gabriela” also has its basis in the biblical messenger angel “Gabriel” (III. Gabriela Mistral). Volodia Teitelboim agrees that Gabriela refers to the angel Gabriel and proposes that her surname “Mistral” refers to a type of wind that blows north on the Mediterranean from Africa to France, which bears that name. Antonio de Undurraga supports this interpretation explaining that in the latter part of her life, Mistral was asked why she chose the name, whereupon she stated, “que lo hizo pensando en un viento” (215). However, Teitelboim states that the most apparent reason for the combination of the given name and the surname is that Lucila formulated it by blending those of the two above-mentioned authors whom she idolized (50).

3 All quotations preserve the grammar, syntax and orthography from the original texts.
The daughter of an elementary school teacher and seamstress, Petronila Alcayaga, and another teacher and dilettante poet, Jerónimo Godoy, Mistral spent the greater part of her childhood with the third teacher in her life, her “second mother” and half-sister Emelina Molina Alcayaga⁴ (1873-19??) (“Curriculum vitae’ de Gabriela Mistral” 60). Emelina became her principal caretaker and mentor until Lucila grew into adulthood. Because Emelina lived and taught in Montegrande, Gabriela Mistral spent the greater portion of her childhood in this location. Her paternal grandmother, doña Isabel Villanueva (18??-19??), was the fourth individual who had a long-lasting influence in the poet’s life, and was her source of inspiration for attaining a love for reading, the Bible, beauty, and spiritual matters.

Because of her social concerns and the educational career orientation that was so prevalent in her background and rearing, Gabriela Mistral became a teacher and a social activist. Her social involvement began about 1904 or 1905. At the time she became politically engaged, she was a teacher’s assistant, a position that afforded her the opportunity to teach poverty-stricken children during the day and to assist in the founding of night schools for adult workers in her free time. She eventually taught classes in the schools she helped found (Darer 50). In “Cuaderno de varia lección (1918-1921),” written during her residence in southern Chile, she relates her experience with this type of school:

A pedido del Ministro de Instrucción [1918-1920] el futuro Presidente [1938-1941] Aguirre Cerda ⁵, fui nombrada directora del Liceo en Magallanes, y navegué hacia las grises postrimerías chilenas. El encargo que me diera mi venerado amigo era doble: reorganizar un colegio “dividido contra sí mismo” y ayudar en la chilenización de un territorio donde el extranjero superabundaba. . . .

⁴ Emelina was her mother’s daughter from a previous marriage.

⁵ As Chilean president, Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1879-1941), would be responsible for submitting Gabriela Mistral’s name for the honor of the Nobel Prize in Literature, at the request of Adelaida Velasco Galdós (1894-1968), in 1940, after having nominated her as Special Envoy and Plenipotentiary to Central America (Vargas Saavedra).
Building on her background as teacher and social activist, and the experience she gained in
Mexico, many years later Mistral would play an important role as an engaged activist consul
to Naples, Italy; Geneva, Switzerland; Madrid, Spain; Lisbon, Portugal; Los Angeles, USA;
and Veracruz, Mexico. In all these places, she persisted in her role as advocate for the
education of the underprivileged, the weak, and the less fortunate. As a representative of her
country, she also made significant contributions to the League of Nations, in the United
States, where she served as a delegate and was involved in various educational and cultural
capacities for nearly three decades (Arce de Vázquez 61-62).

2.2. Four Major Figures in Gabriela Mistral’s Early Life

Earlier in this chapter, I stated that the most significant persons in Mistral’s formative
years were her father, her mother, her half-sister, and her paternal grandmother. I will seek to
establish whom these four persons were who exercised such a high degree of influence in the
formation of Gabriela Mistral and how and why these individuals impacted her life.

Gabriela Mistral’s father, Jerónimo Godoy, a man of Basque and Indian heritage, a
traveler, a poet, and a teacher, abandoned his home and family when Lucila was three years
old, to return only once many years later. In spite of her father’s absence, he seems to have
left a lasting impression upon his daughter’s life:

Even though her father was gone, his influence on Lucila remained in
the form of his writings. It happened like this. When Lucila was 12, she
found some of her father’s verses and was inspired to try writing poetry herself. Her love of writing grew as strong as her love of teaching. (Elmore)

There are also apparent similarities linking their characters in that she, like he, loved to travel, write poetry, and had a predisposition for teaching. According to Fernando Alegría’s biography of Mistral, Jerónimo Godoy was a nature lover, a wanderer, and a loner, which are also recurring themes and characteristics in Gabriela Mistral’s life and writings. Mistralian biographers, among them Alegría, portray Jerónimo Godoy’s unconventional persona:

> En su vida privada sí que la particularidad de su carácter era remarcable. Caminador sin fatiga, ello le daba lugar a inquietantes ausentismos. Gustaba de domesticar y guardar en casa serpientes, iguanas, lagartos, etc., con la natural desesperación de doña Petita [Gabriela’s mother]. Rara vez consentía en habitar recintos cerrados. (21)

The traits of a tireless walker, his repeated unsettling absences from his home, and the fact that he loved to domesticate creatures from the wild, as described in the quote, are characteristics that could also be attributed to Gabriela Mistral as one discovers when reviewing her lifelong activities. When she left Chile, she traveled extensively, never establishing a place of residence in any given location for any extended length of time. She discloses this trait in “Cuaderno laminar (Años diversos)” by saying, “siempre me muevo entre extraños” (qtd. by Quezada, *Bendita mi lengua sea* 20); she preferred to reside and work in rural areas. The remote locations where she lived and her places of employment were sources of inspiration for Mistral as it is evidenced in the numerous images and themes of mountains, animals, trees, and other aspects of nature, which are topics that emerge in both her poetry and her prose. Chile and its landscape were the sources of recurring themes in her works, even during her long absences, as characterized by Mistral herself, according to Quezada, in *Bendita mi lengua sea*, “yo soy una chilena ausente, no una ausentista” (15).
Undurraga points out Mistral’s understanding of her country’s lack of appreciation for that which is Chilean by stating that she knew that, “en Chile hay un tremendo complejo de inferioridad para valorar todo lo chileno” (214). Mistral esteemed her country but she returned to her native land only three times during her lifetime, in 1925, 1938, and 1954. After her death in Hempstead, New York, January 10, 1957, her remains were returned to the land of her birth. At her funeral, her vocation as a teacher, which also included her maternal instincts for all things, her love of literature, and her inner drive to include in her writings Chile’s as well as the continent’s geography and history, were stated in a eulogy delivered by the Chilean poet Luis Oyarzún (1920-).6

Pues la poetisa que hoy lloramos fue una maestra a la manera en que lo son las madres, por vocación natural, por necesidad y amor. Entendió su oficio como el de la Cuenta Mundos que ella cantara y en sus canciones nos reveló como en un viejo libro de horas, cosas e historias de cosas, que son y serán una suerte de retrato de la tierra que nos rodea dulcificada por una ternura que nos hace mejores. Sintió Gabriela Mistral en toda su crudeza la fuerza dura de nuestra geografía y aún de nuestra historia, y ella misma, criatura de este continente, poseyó esa fuerza como una estatua de piedra alzada en medio del paisaje. Más, vio también cómo es posible extraer del yermo la fuente de agua pura que lo hace fértil. (36)

According to Alegría, Gabriela Mistral’s role may fall into the realm of what he describes as Gabriela’s call for his presence, “Gabriela solía poner una directa ternura en las palabras que escribía sobre su padre. Dijérase que intentaba rescatarlo y asentarlo en el predio familiar como a una sombra necesaria” (21). In contrast, her mother, Petronila Alcayaga, also a mestiza of Basque descent, seems to have had much less of a direct impact, with respect to Lucila’s choice of lifestyle. In referring to her mother, Gabriela seems to describe a relationship based on an early childhood spiritual connection. In the verses I quote below, she

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6 “Discurso pronunciado en los funerales de Gabriela Mistral, a nombre de los escritores chilenos” (Oyarzún 34).
evokes the image of a mother rocking her child, an action that consoles the baby preventing the mother from feeling lonely, and which seems to allude to her own childhood. This image is evoked in the poem “Yo no tengo soledad”:

Es la noche desamparo
de las sierras hasta el mar,
pero yo, la que te mece
¡yo no tengo soledad!
Es el cielo desamparo
si la luna cae al mar,
pero yo, la que te estrecha,
¡yo no tengo soledad!

Es el mundo desamparo
y la carne triste va.
Pero yo, la que te oprime,
¡yo no tengo soledad! (Desolación 148)

As depicted in the lines of this poem, the role that Gabriela Mistral attributed to her mother was that of an ever-present, consoling spiritual influence in her life. 7 Her mother was the one who appears to have given some sort of security to her existence through the love that Lucila sensed in her early childhood and across the distances in spite of their physical separation throughout most of her life. Her mother seemed to “caress” her and keep her close, in spirit. It would thus appear that in her wanderings, in her afflictions, and even in the moments when she felt oppressed or she sensed an oppressing force upon her activities, Gabriela Mistral may have always sensed the abiding presence of her mother.

The poet describes these feelings and her mother’s subliminal role in her life with words I quote from an early prose piece on the theme of poetry entitled “Pájina de mi alma (Dedicada a mi madre). Especial para La Voz de Elqui,’” which she composed while residing in La Compañía, on April 19, 1905, and published the following day in that local newspaper,:

7 A link to Gabriela Mistral’s poetry, from the website for Universidad Gabriela Mistral, indicates that when the poet wrote this poem she was referring to her mother. (“Yo no tengo soledad”).
. . . ¡Arpa de vibraciones sublimes i divinas, ajita sus cuerdas solo cuando quiere ahuyentar con sus acordes de consuelo i de ternura las remembranzas angustiosas de mi alma, i hacerme volver de mis horrores paroxismos de dolor! Dios, que tiene por templo mi corazón mismo i por sacerdote mi afecto. Dios, que en la comunión de su amor me da sus besos como hostias consagradas i en sus santos consejos me dá sus mandamientos. ¡He ahí lo que es ella para mi alma!

En mi marcha fatigosa por la áspera senda cubierta de abrojos son sus manos exánues las que curan mis pies desgarrados de las heridas hechas por las grietas i las rocas, son las que enjugas en mi frente pálida el sudor del cansancio. (Zegers and Toro 13-14; my emphasis)

As the reader considers the preceding description of poetry, and the fact that Mistral dedicated it to her mother, it may be valid to suggest that she is drawing a parallel between the role of poetry in her life, and that of her mother’s perceived presence. The words of the prose poem seem to convey the idea that both her mother and her poetry are a fountain of comfort from which the poet draws consolation and calm when life demoralizes her, bringing rhythm into her life. She shows her deep emotions in the following excerpt, “. . . Arpa de vibraciones sublimes i divinas, ajita sus cuerdas solo cuando quiere ahuyentar con sus acordes de consuelo i de ternura las remembranzas angustiosas de mi alma, . . .” indicating that Mistral found a sanctuary evoking the double image of her poetry-mother, as she appears to do in the second part of this same sentence:

. . . Dios, que tiene por templo mi corazón mismo i por sacerdote mi afecto. Dios, que en la comunión de su amor me da sus besos como hostias consagradas i en sus santos consejos me dá sus mandamientos. ¡He ahí lo que es ella para mi alma! (Zegers and Toro 14)

This prose poem seems to suggest that expressing her feelings in poetic terms, that is to say, that writing poetry provided her a calming and stabilizing emotion. Of parallel significance is the comfort that she seemed to draw from sensing her mother’s spiritual presence; she was able to overcome the feelings of anguish and the fits of pain that overwhelmed her with the presence of her poetry-mother. When exhaustion overtook her, she found rest and refuge in
the thought that her mother loved her. These feelings and strength were an outcome of the affection she felt from her mother’s spiritual presence. For her, the fact that she was able to partake of her mother’s soothing spiritual presence was a gift from God. The difficulties and challenges of life became much more manageable and easily overcome through the awareness that her mother was standing behind her. One may thus conclude that her mother’s spiritual presence was an important element behind her recovery from any situation.

Despite Mistral’s love for her mother, life’s circumstances determined that during a large part of her childhood and youth, her sister Emelina was the principal maternal figure in her life. As stated above, her own mother’s influence remained more of a moral, invisible presence. Alegría underlines this anomalous situation in reference to her mother’s absence during large part of her formative years, “Gabriela crece, más bien, bajo el cuidado de una hermana de madre, Emelina, maestra también, quien la ampara y le cultiva la afición a la lectura y se la lleva a la escuela de Montegrande” (22). Mistral’s half-sister’s impact was immeasurable. She recognized this fact and was inspired on July 11, 1905, while living in Compañía, to write and dedicate another piece of poetic prose to her, which she entitled “De mis tristezas (Para mi hermana).” This text, in which she speaks of the sadness she felt living in a cold and cloudy climate, was published in the Elqui newspaper on July 13, 1905:

¡Oh como recuerdo aquellos años en que ella [la tristeza] cubrió también con su blanca mortaja el techo del hogar que cobijó la flor grácil de mi adolescencia. ¡Un día sin Sol! Día como mi corazón, nebuloso, frío, sin un trino ni un aliento de vida. . . .

Días en que la tristeza de la Tierra es un reflejo de la vida glacial y monótona que impera en las regiones polares de mi corazón!
Yo contemplo en ellos el paisaje muerto de la Naturaleza Otoñal, paisaje que vive en el fondo de un cuadro sombrío hijo del pincel del Dolor. . . mi corazón. . . .

Tú no amas estos días ¡oh madre mía! Tu alma es un jirasol a quien los rayos de luz i calor, llevan la vida y la alegría. . .
¡Oh! recuerdas, madre mía, los días invernales en que mi cabeza se recostaba sobre tu seno buscando amor i abrigo, i mis manos buscaban las tuyas como pájaros entumecidos? (Zegers and Toro 15-16)

Her words make it evident that Gabriela Mistral remembers with fondness her relationship with her sister-mother during her adolescent years. She recalls this period of her life as one in which Emelina made a home for her. Her half-sister, as a mother figure, provided the sense of security that was vital to her training and her adjustment to life itself. It was through the guidance that her sister provided that the adolescent Mistral was able to cope with the challenges of life and then, as time passed, to mature into the sensitive, caring, concerned adult she became. Once again, this passage implicitly reveals the melancholy spirit that appears so frequently in her writings throughout her career. What is of significance in this piece is that her half-sister intervenes in Gabriela Mistral’s forlorn state to bring back brightness and joy to the young girl’s being.

According to Mistral’s critics, the presence of God and religious themes in her writings is due to the effect that her paternal grandmother, Isabel Villanueva, had upon her during her childhood years. This influence took place because of the guidance, direction and care, as well as the passion for books that Isabel Villanueva was able to transmit to her grandchild. It was through her that Gabriela was able also to maintain the memory of her father and attain a love for the Bible and the classics of world literature, as she described in her “Cuaderno laminar (Años diversos)”:  

> Yo iba a verla cada sábado. Me pedía cada vez, que yo quisiese a mi padre “a pesar de todo” y me hacía repetir los Salmos de mi Padre David. Fue de ella de donde me vino el amor de la Biblia; no lo habría yo tenido sin ella. (Quezada, Bendita mi lengua sea 21)

These two areas of culture and learning—the Bible and the classics—proved to be among the most important sources of information she needed for poetic subject material as well as for
spiritual inspiration throughout her life. Gabriela Mistral’s familiarity with the Bible accompanied her throughout her life in that, as Lautaro Yankas states, it provided her comfort and consolation:

La poetisa abreva la entraña herida en los veneros de la Biblia el Eclesiastés, David, Salomón, los Profetas, el Apocalipsis y su dolor de criolla herida en el umbral de la ternura se eleva y sublima sin merma de su pulso embravecido. (“Responso a Gabriela Mistral” 52)

The poet found the Bible to be a source of strength and healing. David and Solomon, the Prophets, and Revelation were wells from which she drew a type of “healing” for the conflictive family situation with which she was dealing because of the absence of a father in the home, and her impoverished economic situation, from a very young age. By means of the uplifting she experienced from the Scriptures, she was able to bring steadiness to the tempestuous heritage that defined her family background.

With respect to the legacy of Gabriela’s grandmother’s literary instruction, one must take into account the poet’s future contributions to the founding of libraries, as well as the enhancement of already existing collections. Mistral’s love for the knowledge of world literature—learned from Doña Isabel—eventually provided her with the ability to function as a consultant in the founding and organizing of “bibliotecas” in Chile, Mexico, and other countries she visited in her travels. In Mexico and other locations, her contribution was a pivotal part in helping the communities through her consulting work, as well as her donations of books. And it was due precisely to her experiences during her childhood with her grandmother that she learned that libraries provided the opening to broader horizons for educational opportunities. As mentioned by Teitelboim, through her involvement in such endeavors, she attained a much greater sphere of influence in the societies that she impacted:
Gabriela Mistral arribó [in Mexico] procedente de Santiago; Henríquez Ureña vino de Minnesota, a fin de encabezar el Departamento de Intercambio y Extensión Universitaria. Todos ellos, y la chilena desde luego, cómo su compatriota Rubén Azócar, viajaron a diversos estados de México. Fueron a Michoacán, a Puebla, con el fin de entregar libros de los clásicos y ella en particular a fundar escuelas y bibliotecas. (146)

On the following page, this same critic adds other details, thus providing a broader view of Mistral’s activities, on behalf of libraries and the building of their catalog. This critic indicates that the poet was not only involved in the enhancement of print collections in Mexico, but in Chile as well:

Sintió que no sólo era una creadora de poesía. También fundaba bibliotecas. Dato imprescindible de su biografía es la historia de una niña que consideró un tesoro ‘el deslizamiento hacia la fiesta pequeña y clandestina que sería mi lectura vesperal-nocturna, refugio que se me abría para no cerrarse más’. No se olvida de Magallanes. Envía una colección de libros para el Liceo de Hombres. “Hasta Punta Arenas de Chile, es decir, el ápice del continente comunica se ha hecho llegar una dotación semejante.” Era una devolución que soñó en su infancia. “Las bibliotecas que yo más quiero son las provinciales, porque fui niña de aldeas y en ellas me viví juntas a la hambruna y a la avidez de los libros.” (147)

Her enhancement of libraries was constant, and it was this love of books and her broad knowledge of education as well as of a diversity of authors and literatures that was priceless when the Mexican government would eventually commission her to prepare a textbook for the humanities classes of the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral.” The reason she was obviously successful in this request is that she already had the knowledge needed to make the appropriate choices of the reading materials that would be suitable for compiling Lecturas para mujeres. Gladys Rodríguez Valdés, a modern critic, reiterates the importance of the link between Mistral’s relationship to books and her paternal grandmother:

Lucila escapa el tedio de la pobreza cuando va a casa de su abuela paterna, doña Isabel Villanueva. Esta mujer le da a conocer un libro mágico [la Biblia] que tendrá constante resonancia en la vida y en la obra de Gabriela. Entonces La Serena [a rural area, isolated territory; where her grandmother resided],
marítima y colonial, significa la leyenda, las historias de mujeres fuertes que
vivían en el desierto amamantando varones para descubrir la Tierra
Prometida. Desde Monte Grande viaja Lucila a visitar a la abuela que le
cuenta pasajes del tránsito del pueblo judío, de sus desdichas y victorias. La
soledad se convierte, por momentos, en abierta ventana a otras vidas que
como la de ella debieron ser duras sin los arroyos de leche y miel. (9)

This quotation provides further insight into one aspect of Gabriela Mistral’s childhood
circumstances, by recounting the fact that the poet broke out of the tedium and boredom of
the impoverishment of her childhood home by means of the trips she made to visit her
grandmother. Mistral herself has commented on the impoverished circumstances of those
Chilean mountain towns, in which she spent her childhood, in “Cuaderno laminar (Años
diversos),” presented by Jaime Quezada in Bendita mi lengua sea:

Yo sé que el valle de Elqui adentro, que es en verdad mi pueblo, porque
en Vicuña nací de casualidad, vive una miseria incalificable, igual que la de
todo el Chile montañés que está lejos de las ciudades gastadoras y cursis. En
la aldea de la Unión me hicieron. Y en la otra, Montegrande, me crié. Esta
es la realidad. (21)

Doña Isabel provided the means through which the young Gabriela became familiar with a
captivating book, the Bible, which came to be her refuge and source of solace for the rest of
her life, as Rodríguez Valdés explains, “esta mujer le da a conocer un libro mágico [la Biblia]
que tendrá constante resonancia en la vida y en la obra de Gabriela” (9). The knowledge that
she gained through the time she spent with her paternal grandmother resonated in her
writings. God and spiritual matters were guiding threads for her approach to life and the
manner in which she spoke to her readers or listeners. The blend of the Biblical stories that
her grandmother recounted to her and the pious environment to which she was exposed
during her trips to the colonial and nautical city of La Serena to visit her grandmother were
two significant aspects in the development of her life-long perspectives. As Rodríguez
Valdés asserted in the previous quote, Mistral’s spirit was strengthened through, “la leyenda,
las historias de mujeres fuertes que caminan por el desierto amamantando varones para descubrir la Tierra Prometida”(9). In other words, the Bible and its legends of strong women represented her hope for a better life in the metaphor of the Israelites’ “Promised Land” of Canaan with the “arroyos de leche y miel.” Gabriela Mistral drew strength from the understanding she gained from these stories, and was able to acquire a vision for a future that would overcome her childhood poverty and empower her to bring about change in society, “en abierta ventana a otras vidas que como la de ella debieron ser duras” (Rodríguez Valdés 9).

2.3. Gabriela Mistral’s Educational Mis-Adventures and their Impact in her Pedagogical Ideas

Gabriela Mistral’s unorthodox academic background contributed considerably to shaping the way she lived her life as well as many of the themes she incorporated into her poems and prose. Her humble rearing is of importance in that she could empathize and understand the value of receiving an education in order to get out of poverty. This was of particular importance for those who, like the poet herself, suffered from difficulties brought about by the lack of money while belonging to a middle class family. Rodríguez Valdés describes Mistral’s family’s ambiguous social economic states: “los Godoy Alcayaga pertenecieron a ese peculiar estrato de clase media que lleva lustrados los zapatos con suela rota, y no se permite excesos por considerarlos de mal gusto” (9). Her family’s impoverished economic situation impacted her daily life to such an extent that immediately following her withdrawal from school, at the age of fourteen, Gabriela was forced to go to work, “fue
entonces, a La Serena y obtuvo una ayudantía en la escuela primaria en Compañía Baja” (Alegría 23). Rodríguez Valdés gives further details of what took place in Lucila’s home, by stating that familial low economic circumstances had already forced her sister into teaching in rural schools:

Parte el padre embelesado sin percatarse del hueco que ha cavado para siempre en el espíritu de Lucila. El hogar se bambolea; el pan escaso es traído por dobles manos maternales de Petronila y Emelina, que se hace maestra rural para allegar algunos centavos a la precaria economía familiar. (8)

Luís Vargas Saavedra sheds further light on the reasons why, following her half-sister’s path, Mistral too entered into the field of education as a lowly teacher’s aide, at such an early age and without any formal training:

Había escogido ser maestra por apremio de ganar el pan para un hogar que tras el abandono paterno estaba apuntalado por la docencia de Emelina, su hermanastra. Desembocó (debió hacerlo) en el oficio pedagógico de su padre y su hermanastra; un duro trabajo que no impedia lo literario. Años más tarde contará que quiso ser linotipista pero que su madre opuso. El carecer de estudios regulares, por expulsión de las Preparatorias (acusada de ladrona), le impedirá avanzar a Humanidades y, por lo tanto, no podrá ir a la universidad (no sabemos que lo haya deseado). Todo ello contribuyó a su elección, en 1905 del oficio de maestra, dadas las limitadas posibilidades de empleo digno, para una persona de su clase, con tal entorno y dentro de ese tiempo. (“¿Merecía Gabriela Mistral el Premio Nobel?”)

Given these hardships and the need to place food on the table, it is not surprising that among the topics that are recognizable in Mistral’s works as coming from her difficult childhood are those of the need for kindness to the underprivileged, solace for the lonely, and patience towards the less fortunate. These subjects are prevailing themes throughout her literature and transcend genres, periods of writings, and subject matter. Verónica Darer has already pointed out the poet’s insistence in the need for universal education for all, which can be seen as her way of preparing everyone to find well-paid jobs, “Lucila Godoy Alcayaga was one of the
first voices in Latin America to propose democratic education for all, with no differentiation for students’ gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status” (47).

From the point of view of a formal education, Gabriela Mistral was not a well-prepared individual. According to Pedro Pablo Zegers, she only received formal in-classroom training for three years (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral . . . ”). In these early years, her performance does not seem to have impressed her teachers, as depicted by Margot Arce de Vázquez: “at school Lucila’s timidity and withdrawn character created difficulties for her teachers who thought her dull” (2). According to a letter that grade school director, Adelaida Olivares, wrote while she was still attending school in her hometown of Vicuña, she advised her mother that her child should abandon school and dedicate her time to domestic chores, “por falta de inteligencia y desamor al estudio . . .” (qtd. in Fernando Alegría 23). Following the recommendation of Adelaida Olivares (Teitelboim 24), who was also Lucila’s godmother in the Catholic sacrament of confirmation (“su madrina de confirmacion”) (Zegers, “El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral . . . ”), Doña Petronila withdrew her fourteen-year-old daughter from school. Thus, Gabriela Mistral abandoned her formal education, never to return to it (Alegría 23). Contributing to that decision was an additional incident involving her classmates and teacher in which the poet-to-be was accused of thievery:

Her classmates took advantage of her, but she never complained, nor did she ever say a word in her defense. Once in Vicuña, Lucila acted as aide and secretary to a blind teacher who put her in charge of distributing class materials; since she tended to be absent-minded, the students stole all they could from her. When the teacher discovered the theft, she accused Lucila and expelled her from school. Her classmates, waiting outside threw stones at her as she passed. This cruel experience marked the end of her childhood. It was an experience that left a lingering, painful imprint on her memory and sensitivity. (Arce de Vázquez 2)
To gain a different understanding of this incident, and the impact that it had on Mistral’s life, we turn to the poet’s own words as quoted by Zegers. It is curious that in this text Mistral’s memory unites two distinct incidents (the director’s letter and the stolen materials) into one cataclysmic event:

Yo repartía el papel de la escuela a las alumnas, el gobierno daba en aquel tiempo los útiles escolares. Era yo más que tímida; no tenía carácter alguno y las alumnas me cogían cuanto papel se les antojaba con lo cual la provisión se acabó a los ocho meses o antes. Cuando la directora preguntó a la clase la razón de la falta de papel, mis compañerías declararon que yo era la culpable pues ellas no habían recibido sino la justa ración. La directora, salió sin más hacia mi casa y encontró el cuerpo del delito, es decir, halló en mi cuarto una cantidad copiosísima no sólo de papel, sino de todos los útiles escolares fiscales. Habría bastado pensar que mi hermana era tan maestra de escuela como ella, y que yo tomaba de ella cuanto necesitaba. Yo no supe defenderme; la gritería de las muchachas y la acusación para mi espantosa de la maestra madrina me aplanó y me hizo perder el sentido. Cuando doña Adelaida Olivares, que así se llamaba la profesora, regresó con el trofeo del robo hizo con el caso una acción de moral que yo oía medio viva medio muerta. El escándalo había durado toda la tarde, despacharon las clases y todas salieron sin que nadie se diese cuenta del bulto de una niña sentada en su banco, que no podía levantarse. Al ir a barrer la sala la sirvienta que vivía en la escuela me encontró con las piernas trabadas, me llevó a su cuarto, me frotó el cuerpo y me dio una bebida caliente hasta que yo pude hablar. Faltaba algo todavía; las compañeras que se iban por mi calle me esperaban, aunque ya era la tarde caída en la plaza de Vicuña, la linda plaza con su toldo de rosas y de multiflor, era todavía primavera. Allí me recibieron con una lluvia de insultos y de piedras diciendo que nunca más irían por la calle con la ladrona. Esta tragedia ridícula hizo tal daño en mí como yo no sabría decirlo. Mi madre vino a dar explicaciones acerca de este hecho, y aunque logró convencer a mi maestra y madrina de mi inocencia, salió con la idea, por supuesto que impuesta, de que yo no tenía condiciones intelectuales de ningún género y que sólo podría aplicarme a los quehaceres domésticos. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral l . . . . “)

The details that are presented depict a situation in which a guiltless but timid girl is embarrassed and shunned by her teacher and her classmates. The extent of her embarrassment put her into such a frame of mind that she could not function. To make matters worse, her teacher was arrogant and in spite of admitting that the young girl was not...
guilty of the crime, she was not even amenable to having her return to the classroom; doña Petronila had no recourse but to remove her daughter from school.

Following Mistral’s withdrawal, she was home-schooled by her mother, her half-sister Emelina, and her paternal grandmother; all three committed themselves to imparting to the child the best education possible. They were so successful in their project that not only did they meet the goal of educating Gabriela, but they actually were able to comply with the type of education prescribed by the 1857 law, Artículo No 222, which mandated an elementary education for all children. According to Fredy Soto Roa, the mandate stipulates:

... señala a los padres de hijos legítimos su obligación y en la crianza y educación de éstos. Más aún, el Artículo No 279 del Código obligaba al padre o la madre que ha reconocido al hijo natural su obligación de educarlo, por lo menos, hasta la educación primaria (inciso 2º). A mayor abundamiento, el Artículo No 323 dispone en su inciso final que es obligación de los padres proporcionar la enseñanza primaria. (29-30)

These three individuals had been able to recognize Gabriela’s abilities and despite the official opposition of the schools’ teachers, had made sure that she received a good education:

On Sundays, her paternal grandmother would read passages from the Bible and her mother and sister would tell her stories. She was extremely fond of imaginative literature and poetic and musical folklore; the readings from the Bible left a profound impression on her spirit and on her poetry. Emelina was her first teacher. She took Lucila to school with her and taught her reading, writing, and her very first concepts of geography and history. (Arce de Vázquez 2)

In accordance with the regulations for elementary education in Chile, her three at-home-teachers would have covered the following four subject areas:

* Reading and writing of the Spanish language
* Christian doctrine and morality
* Practical elements of arithmetic
* The legal system of weights and measures
According to Soto Roa, these areas had been part of the basic mandated curriculum for public schools since 1858 (28).

While Lucila was working in her first teacher’s aide position and being schooled at home, her mother and sister applied for her admission to the Normal School in La Serena (Arce de Vázquez 2). As explained in the film, Focused on Love, unexpected by the members of the family, the school denied her application, as directed by the school’s chaplain because of the, “allegation that she espoused atheistic and socialist beliefs.” Arce de Vázquez, in Gabriela Mistral: The Poet and Her Work, conceptualizes the priest’s apprehensions when she explains the literary source of some of the “dangerous” ideas expressed by Mistral during those early years:

> At about this time, Lucila began to write for the local newspapers. She published poems and prose articles in which she freely expounded her Socialist philosophy and her admiration for Vargas Vila, the controversial Colombian writer. The chaplain of the normal school rejected her application, claiming that her ideas could harm the students. (2)

Zegers sheds further light on this happening when he comments on what occurred and the subsequent results. For this critic, it was because of the young poet’s love for writing and then publishing in the local newspapers that she was thwarted from pursuing her dream for study at the Normal School:

> Lucila Godoy Alcayaga comenzó a ser reconocido en la zona por sus colaboraciones en la prensa regional, pero esta pasión de escribir, le cerró las puertas de una de sus más anheladas aspiraciones: ingresar a la Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de La Serena. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral … .”)

This same author further elaborates the event by offering Lucila’s own appraisal of what took place:

> En uno de sus [Lucila’s] escritos para este periodo ella narra los sucesos de esta forma:
Cuando yo fui echada del Liceo de La Serena mi madre y mi hermana pensaron en sacrificarme en bien mío y hacerme regresar a la Escuela Normal pues las tres habíamos visto que yo no haría carrera en la enseñanza a menos de conseguir la papeleta consabida, que las gentes llaman título, palabra que quiere decir nombre pero que no nombra nada. Yo acepté e hicimos el triple esfuerzo de preparar exámenes, de obtener la fianza del caso, y de comprar el equipo de ropa. El día que mi madre fue a dejarme a la Escuela Normal la subdirectora, una gruesa señora; nos recibió en la puerta y sin oírnos y sin dar explicación alguna que le valiese y me valiese me declaró que yo no había sido admitida. Pedimos hablar con la directora y la obesa señora lo rehusó porque la directora era una norteamericana que no hablaba español. En esto no mentía, el ministerio contrataba para sus criollos algunos profesores que ignoraban la lengua. En mis andanzas por el mundo recibí una vez una invitación a su casa de esta pedagoga yanqui es lástima que no tuviese tiempo de ir para conocer a la buena mujer que me echó de la Normal chilena sin saber porqué y sin haberme visto. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral . . .”)

According to Mistral, in an attempt to move beyond the position of teacher’s aide, and at the prodding of her mother and her half-sister, the young writer consented to return to school to obtain the indicated degree. Her application was rejected and no explanation given, under the pretext that the School director did not speak Spanish. As it would happen, the real reasons for her rejection were not revealed to her until a number of years later. Mistral describes this final episode in another text quoted by Zegers:

Pasaron muchos años y cual fatalísimo del mestizo yo no averigüé porqué había sido eliminada. Cuando era profesora de los Andes unos ocho o diez años después, recibí la versión que dio a mi jefe de mi rechazo aquella subdirectora estupenda. Ella contó a doña Fidelia Valdés como decía mi jefa de la época, que en un consejo de profesores de la Normal de La Serena el capellán y profesor don Luis Ignacio Munizaga, había exigido al personal que por solidaridad con él se me eliminase pues yo escribía unas composiciones paganas y podría volverme en caudillo de las alumnas. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral . . .”)

Judging from this text, the excuse given for her rejection by the school board was the fear that the aspiring teacher’s “dangerous ideas” would negatively influence the other students at the Normal School in La Serena.
This occurrence however, did not prevent Mistral from proceeding with the pursuit of her goals. Once again, her half-sister, with the help of her mother tutored her to complete her training: “Emelina and her mother were not deterred by this setback and through their tutoring helped her finish her course of study” (Arce de Vázquez 2). In this case, the goal was to obtain the equivalency of a basic type of secondary Normal School education. The subjects that were included in a Chilean Normal School curriculum and that she learned at home were:

*El castellano

*La aritmética y la geometría

*La historia y la geografía

*El dibujo lineal

*La música

*La educación física

*La física y la química

*La higiene

*Lecciones de cosas

*Trabajos manuales. (Soto Roa 35-38)

The tutoring that Mistral’s mother and sister offered the young girl served to fulfill a dual purpose in that, in addition to providing Lucila with the necessary knowledge to take and pass the Normal School exam, which she eventually did, it also prepared her to accept interim employment as an inspector for another elementary school for girls in La Serena. After obtaining this position she began to work at a number of different school-related jobs that eventually, and along with the varying degrees of tutelage her mother and her half-sister
continued to impart, led to her being able to sit for and pass the Normal School competency exam at the No. 1 Normal School in Santiago de Chile. Zegers provides the particulars pertinent to her job in Chile’s capital city, the exam that she took, and what type of certification was approved:

En 1910, Gabriela Mistral se traslada a Santiago y allí se desempeña como maestra primaria en la Escuela de Barrancas, lo que hoy corresponde a un barrio en los suburbios de Santiago. Estando en la capital, da exámenes especiales en la escuela Normal de Preceptoras. La examinadora de la época, Brígida Walter, estando en conocimiento de las aptitudes literarias de la joven, le solicita que responda a su examen oral en verso. Lucila así lo hizo y obtiene su título de “Propietaria y Preceptora,” que la capacita para desempeñarse en escuelas primarias de 4ª clase. No obtuvo el título de Normalista, por no haber hecho estudios sistemáticos. Se le reconoció sólo su práctica. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral … .”)

While working in a school on the outskirts of the city of Santiago the poet took her exams and was granted an official elementary school certification. This official recognition was based on her poetic answers to an oral examination and her several years of classroom experience. She did pass the exams at the Normal School, but she was prevented from receiving any higher diploma because of her lack of a consecutive classroom attendance at an official school.

Having passed this examination, Mistral received her teaching certificate in 1910 (Alegría 28). Emelina’s long struggle on behalf of her younger sibling had culminated in allowing Lucila the possibility of finding a lifelong successful career as a teacher or in some other position related to the field of education. Years later Mistral commented on the difficulties that her lack of official training had produced when she had wanted to be treated as an equal by other teachers and professors she encountered during the twenty years she taught in Chilean schools:
Mistral had overcome those situations and had moved on with her career in spite of the hurdles that she dealt with in the early years of her life. Nonetheless, she continued to hold all those who contributed to creating obstacles to her receiving a normal education answerable for the difficulties that she encountered, and she called them to accountability. This thought is conveyed in the final line of the previous quotation, “saben muy bien de cuánto me costó vivir una carrera docente sin la papeleta, el cartel y la rúbrica aquella.” Be as it may, one may say that all the difficulties Mistral had to overcome made her into a person most determined to succeed. Her success is indeed undeniable. Arce de Vázquez has summarized Mistral’s successful career path while teaching in Chile’s public schools, a path that would place her in the right position for moving to the broader stage of her eventual international teaching accomplishments:

With the award of her official certificate of study in 1910, she was finally able to hold positions in high schools throughout the country: La Serena, Traiguén, los Andes, Antofagasta, Tenuco, Punta Arenas, and Santiago, the highest rung on the ladder always with the encouragement and moral support of her friends Fidela Pérez Valdés [1890-1972] and Pedro Aguirre La Cerda, who was later to become president of Chile. (3)

2.4. Gabriela Mistral’s Professional Recognition

In 1923, and in spite of her irregular educational background, Gabriela Mistral’s merits within Chilean schools were important enough that she was awarded the title of “Teacher of the Nation.” Two years later, in 1925, after twenty-one years of service, she
officially retired from the classroom (Arce de Vázquez 4). Her retirement though early seems to have responded to her new life style, in which she lived mostly outside of the country. Vargas Saavedra explains it as a logical move: “Regresada a Chile en 1925, se acoge a la jubilación que la ley chilena permitía, dado su temprano ingreso al oficio” (“Gabriela Mistral antes de 1945”). Henry Lester Smith and Harold Littell add that her request was supported by the Chilean provision for retirement in that, “all teachers are eligible to a pension and in addition they have certain allowances on premature retirement” (69).

As the years passed, the teacher-poet traveled more and more extensively and became internationally recognized. She found many opportunities to become involved in various activities in the field of education as teacher, principal, consultant, lecturer, or delegate to congresses dealing with issues pertaining to education, as well as with children and women’s affairs. Her continued involvement in teaching allowed her to participate in a variety of cultural events. She taught Spanish literature as a Visiting Professor at a number of foreign institutions of higher learning such as Columbia University, Vassar College, and Middlebury in the U.S.A. as well as at the University of Puerto Rico (Alegria 8). Her international prestige as a teacher and as an excellent poet reached its zenith in 1945, in Stockholm, Sweden, where she received the Nobel Prize in Literature, having been nominated for the candidacy of the honor as early as 1939 by Adelaida Velasco Galdós. At that time, however, Mistral did not agree that she was worthy of receiving the prize:

Ser la gestora inicial de la candidatura era mérito de la ecuatoriana Adelaida Velasco Galdós. Se habían conocido en 1938, durante la estadía de Gabriela Mistral en Ecuador. El gobierno de Ecuador la designó para atender y guiar a Gabriela Mistral (el mismo cargo tuvo Palma Guillén8 en México); tras conocerla, decidió contribuir al reconocimiento universal de la escritora. Más tarde, cuando Gabriela Mistral está de Cónsul en Niza le envió una carta

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8 Gabriela Mistral’s “primera secretaria y su compañera de trabajo cuando ella llega a México en 1923-1924” (Quezada, “Conferencia sobre Gabriela Mistral”).
para expresarle que ‘nadie como ella sería la más digna acreedora a ese máximo galardón de Alfredo Nobel. . . Gabriela Mistral le respondió que era una loca aventura y no se consideraba bajo ningún aspecto acreedora de semejante honor (“¿Merecía Gabriela Mistral el Premio Nobel?”)

According to Vargas Saavedra, in his online article, Adelaida Velasco Galdós was not dissuaded by Mistral’s opinion and approached the Chilean President who lent his support to this enterprise:

Adelaida Velasco Galdós recurrió entonces al presidente don Pedro Aguirre Cerda (a quien, junto con su señora, está dedicado Desolación, para pedirle el apoyo oficial de Chile a la incipiente candidatura. . . . (“¿Merecía Gabriela Mistral el Premio Nobel?”)

Gabriela Mistral was the first Spanish-American author to receive such an honor, but this would not be the only one she received in her lifetime. The Nobel was both preceded and followed by several other important awards, and cultural and professional recognitions. Among the most important stand out the honorary doctoral degrees she was granted from the Universities of Guatemala (1930), Puerto Rico (1933), Florence, Italy (1945), and Mills College in Oakland, California (1947). Additionally, during the years in which she resided in various countries that range from Chile, to Mexico, Spain, and Cuba, she was also offered, and accepted, several honorary memberships to a number of cultural societies, honors that were granted in perpetuity.

2.5. The Making of the Writer and the Intellectual

The seed of Gabriela Mistral’s career as a writer was planted when she discovered some of her father’s poetry and determined to follow his example. She published her first poem in Elqui’s local newspaper, concurrent to her employment as a rural teacher’s assistant.
However, many years earlier while Gabriela was still attending grade school she was already writing prose and poetry that would later be published in the local newspaper La Voz de Elqui (Alegría 22). A prose poem entitled “Ecos,” cited by Virgilio Figueroa, and dated March 21, 1905 was the first text ever published by the poet (55):

> Mis cantos son pálidos crepúsculos de tardes invernales cuyos lánguidos i moribundos fulgores bañan sólo las fuentes que acarician la ahíerta mano del infortunio i hacen brillar sólo las pupilas en que vagan las lágrimas i se reflejan imájenes sombrías. . .

> Mis cantos son lúgubres jemidos i lastimeros acordes que se arrancan del harpa misteriosa que pulsa la Amargura en el fúnebre templo del Dolor; son ayes que en la copa de un árbol sin follaje lanza una ave herida por el arma homicida del Pesar… .

> Mi alma es una fuente de límpidas aguas, negruzco es el cristal de ellas porque están sombreadas por una roca negra; cuando las celestes luminarias se reflejan en su oscuro espejo, esas aves nocturnas pasan bajo, mui bajo i encrespan con la punta de sus alas las aguas tranquilas que formando ondas semejan entónces caballera de una virjen morena. (11-12)

The excerpts from this first published prose poem represent the morbid thoughts that characterize Mistral’s early productions. Her words reflect the fact that her poetry can mirror life and portray personal experiences. She depicts a melancholy spirit through which she reveals that her childhood was not a happy one. At this stage of her poetic career, Gabriela Mistral’s pieces are barely able to summon a scene in which there is not a reflection of a cold, weak, and languishing being that seems to possess a dying spirit. Her images describe an individual in a hostile atmosphere without the warmth of a receptive love that protects, inspires, and enriches. Tears of sadness are all that is seen in her compositions rather than the joys of the newness of life.

Subsequent to 1905, Gabriela Mistral’s writings continued to appear in the local newspapers in whichever city or town she resided. She first published in such periodicals as El Coquimbo, Penumbras, and La Reforma (Alegría 23), all within her native Chile; later she
continued to distribute her work in many other local papers and magazines as she traveled from place to place and country to country.

In 1914, Mistral won the first prize in the Juegos Florales de la Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores of Santiago de Chile. This was the first time that her poetic creation, Sonetos de la muerte, became part of a public presentation. These poems appear to have been born of her romance with Romelio Ureta Carvajal, and allude to his subsequent suicide in 1909. Many of the people of La Serena and the surrounding areas where she lived during that period believed that Ureta ended his life because of Gabriela Mistral. This belief stemmed from the fact that when he was found dead, the only item on his person was a card in his jacket pocket with the words “Lucila Godoy” (Alegría 25-26).

Gabriela Mistral’s first great collection of poems, the Sonetos de la muerte (1909), brought her national and international recognition. Further attention was drawn to her literary brilliance in 1917 when Professor Manuel Guzmán Maturana included fifty-five of her prose and poetry pieces in his five-volume series, Libros de lectura (Arce de Vázquez 5). In 1918, shortly after Mistral was named to the position of Director of the “Liceo de Niñas de Punta Arenas,” in Magallanes, Chilel, collaborated with the two Chilean poets Olga Acevedo (1895-1970) and Julio Minizaga Ossandón (1888-1924), to found the literary magazine “Mireya” (Vega Letelier). In 1922, her first poetry book Desolación was published under the auspices of “Instituto de las Españas,” at Columbia University in New York, which was under the directorship of a well-known intellectual and literary critic, the Spaniard Federico de Onís (1885-1966). In 1923, commissioned by the Mexican government, she published Lecturas para mujeres, a textbook that includes literary pieces that she composed specifically

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9 According to Fernando Alegria, this collection was written in 1909, but not brought to literary attention until the Juegos Florales de la Sociedad de Artistas y Escritores, in 1914, where Gabriela Mistral won the first prize for the same. (5)
for this volume in addition to a range of texts from authors from a wide diversity of countries in Europe, the Far and the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. That same year, the people of Spain became acquainted with Mistral and her work through the publication of a poetry anthology, entitled Las mejores poesías, by Editorial Cervantes of Barcelona, with a prologue by Manuel de Montoliu (1877-1961), a Spanish literary critic and historian. In 1924, Ternura, another volume of poetry dominated by the theme of childhood, was published. In 1945, this same title appeared in a second edition as a collection containing all her children’s poems to that point but also including additional poetry with the themes of motherhood, the earth, praise of hard work, the Americas, and religion. Similarly, the themes of childhood and maternity, God, and related subjects play a significant role in Tala (1938), her next collection of poems. This volume focuses more on the artistic and the fantastic and places less emphasis on the didactic that is noted in her earlier volumes of poetry. The year 1944 saw the publication of another poetic work, Lagar. Its title: “wine press,” alludes to the challenging events that took place in her life, some of which are described so succinctly by Rolando Gabrielli in “Galope de yeguas sobre Gabriela”:

Desde niña, acusada de retrasada, ladrona, perseguida a peñascazos en las aulas de estudio primario, cuestionado y bloqueado su trabajo como profesora sin título, la mítica maestra rural, pasó las de Caín antes de abandonar Chile, para ser recibida con honores en el Zócalo de México, país que le erigió estatuas en vida.

This same piece makes evident that for Mistral, the lack of acceptance and recognition on the part of the Chilean educational system and literary circles is not limited to her youth and early adulthood, it persisted during her adulthood; once again quoting from “Galope de yeguas sobre Gabriela”:
Si la ceguera física de su madrina, la directora de la escuela de Vicuña, Adelaida Olivares, le impidió ver con buenos ojos a la joven Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, la crítica chilena, no sólo de la época, no tiene excusa para haber vivido con los ojos vendados durante cincuenta años, con raras excepciones.

The conflicts that followed Gabriela Mistral during her lifetime—due to the controversies with respect to her education, training for her teaching career, and her calling as a writer—were many. In addition, the poet’s life had been affected by such international turmoil as those set up by the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the inception of the Cold War that followed the end of the Second World War, and the Korean Conflict. On a personal level, the suicide of her love Romelio Ureta and the death by poisoning of her nephew, Juan Miguel Godoy (1925-1943), whom she called Yin-Yin (Teitelboim 215) were events that obviously impacted her intimate life in a most negative manner. According to information from Mistral’s diary, provided by Jaime Quezada, Bendita mi lengua sea, the poet explained the death of her nephew in “Cuaderno de California (1946-1947)” refusing to accept the possibility of a suicide; instead she refers to it as the, “asesinato de Juan Miguel (suicida no ‘suicidado’ por mulatos xenófobos)” (181). Mistral’s family ties to Yin-Yin have remained ambiguous. On the one hand, the most widely published belief is that this boy was the son of an illegitimate half-brother of the poet, Juan Godoy, and of his Spanish wife, Marta Mendoza.10 Mistral considered him her adoptive son because she raised him from the time he was an infant due to the death of his mother very soon after his birth (Teitelboim 211, 212). On the other hand, in an online article authored by Lautaro Yankas, in 2002, Doris Dana, Mistral’s close friend, in an interview with Cherie Zalaquett Aqua from

10 Volodia Teitelboim explains that Gabriela Mistral’s half-brother was born to her father after he left the marital home with the poet’s mother (215). Isolina Barraza de Estay states that Gabriela Mistral did not adopt him because legal adoption was not available to her; therefore, she had a verbal agreement with her half-brother that he would never take her nephew from her.
the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, states that, “Juan Miguel Godoy Mendoza, Yin Yin, era en verdad el hijo biológico de la poetisa.”\(^{11}\) However there are those who question the veracity and the intentions of the information provided by Dana, and Dana herself has added her own ambiguous comments:

Muchos hasta hoy opinan que la revelación de Dana fue tardía y poco creíble. Escritores como Luís Vargas Saavedra rechazaron esa versión, indicando que Gabriela en sus últimos años daba señales de Mitonomía y “pudo incluso habérselo creído, tal como se creía el reajuste imaginario que constantemente efectuaba de su vida. Por ejemplo, Alfonso Reyes le dijo que el Premio Nobel se lo dieron antes de irse a Brasil. Doris todavía duda si hizo bien o no en contarla. ‘Lo pensé mucho. Pero cuando yo muera ¿quién iba a decir la verdad? Las amigas más cercanas de Gabriela en esta vida éramos Palma Guillén y yo. Gabriela quiso el muchacho con tanto amor. Su muerte fue la tragedia más grande de su vida. Pensé que ella, ahora, en este mundo que es muy diferente al de su juventud, hubiera querido mostrar que este sí era su hijo. En verdad creo que este hubiera sido su deseo ahora. En el tiempo de Gabriela hubiera sido un escándalo. (Yankas)

Zalaquett Aquea tried to confirm Dana’s answer concerning this topic when she asked Dana to identify Yin Yin’s father. But, as noted in the same interview, the answer did not shed light on the subject:

No tiene nombre. No es una persona conocida. Ni ella recordaba su nombre. Fue un italiano. No era un amigo de ella ni nada. Era una cosa que pasó en un momento de pasión y resultó un niño. Pero ella después nunca vio a este hombre. Estas cosas sucedieron mucho antes de que yo la conociera. Palma Guillén la acompañó a dar a luz en Francia. Ella lo llevó a Italia hasta que llegó Mussolini, el fascismo y para evitar que él viviera la guerra, ella se fue a Brasil donde murió. (Yankas)

\(^{11}\) She is considered Gabriela Mistral’s closest friend during her lifetime. She is also the person who holds in her possession twenty-one boxes of manuscripts from the poet, “cuyo destino final aún no ha decidido.” She met the poet in 1946, and looked after her until her death. She denies being her secretary as noted in the following statement “nunca fui la secretaria de Gabriela como dicen en Chile. Hablo español, pero no lo escribo y mientras vivió conmigo, ella siempre tuvo otras personas que redactaban sus cartas y documentos” (Zalaquett Aquea).
Dana’s vague response confuses the issue further, underlining that Yin Yin was born as the result of a casual relationship, a passing encounter between Mistral and an unnamed man; there was no further contact between the two of them and his name was not preserved.

The aforementioned disquieting deaths of Mistral’s first love and her nephew and the negative events that plagued her early years as well as the more recent historical circumstances in which she lived are some of the elements that affected her life and impacted the poetry that she integrated into the collection titled, Lagar. This volume is composed exclusively of poetry, and termed by Arce de Vázquez as Mistral’s “swan song” (61). It depicts an individual who perceives that her youth has passed and that a different person has emerged. In her poem entitled “La otra,” included in the Prologue to this poetry volume, the images chosen appear to suggest that the speaker no longer was the person she was in younger days. As noted in the subsequent stanzas, she points out that the poetic persona has killed a side of herself in order to become a better being:

Una en mi maté;
Yo no la amaba.

Era la flor llameando
del cactus de montaña;
era aridez y fuego;
Nunca se refrescaba.

En rápidas resinas
se endurecía su habla,
por no caer en linda
presa soltada.

Doblarse no sabía
la planta de montaña,
y al costado de ella,
yo me doblaba. . .

La dejé que muriese,
robándole mi entraña.
Se acabó como el águila
que no es alimentada.

Sosegó el aletazo,
se dobló, lacia,
y me cayó a la mano
su pavesa acabada. . .

Cruzando yo les digo:
--buscad por las quebradas--
y haced con las arcillas
otra áquila abrasada.

Si no podéis, entonces
¡ay! Olvidadla.
Yo la maté. Vosotras
También matadla! (Lagar 9)

These stanzas describe a poetic persona who has changed through time. In the past, there was
a side of her that was violent and wild and that she hated, finding it unattractive. As life
progressed, that side that she named “la otra,” or the other one, was discarded. As María A.
Salgado states it:

. . . lo que sí es indudable en este poema, es que al hablar de ‘la otra,’
Mistral (otra ella misma, ya que su nombre oficial era Lucila Godoy), habla
no de una persona externa a ella, sino de otra faceta de sí misma que, aunque
propia, se concibe en términos antagónicos. (70)

Lagar was the last tome that Mistral brought to printing during her lifetime; although
in this same year, she also saw the publication of the second edition of Ternura. In 1958, after
her death, her poetic contributions to the literary world were honored with the publication of
a collection containing the totality of her poetry.
2.6. Gabriela Mistral the Educator

Although my dissertation concentrates on Mistral’s contributions to education in Mexico, we have already seen that the poet’s activities as an educator went much beyond her engagement with teaching in Mexico and her native Chile. Throughout her career as an educator and writer, with its diversity of levels of involvement and responsibility, Gabriela Mistral sustained the ability to have a transcending impact wherever she went, whether in the field of pedagogy, in literature, or in cultural matters. Marta Elena Casaús Arzú has pointed out this aspect of Mistral’s career in her article, “La voz de las mujeres guatemaltecas en la década de 1920,” where she speaks of the poet’s involvement in effecting changes conducive to the increased participation of women in the cultural circles of Guatemalan society. The literary “Sociedad Gabriela Mistral,” according to Casaús Arzú, was one of the vehicles through which the poet and her ideas labored to bring change for the women of Mexico and Central America:

La Sociedad Gabriela Mistral, muy inspirada por la poetisa chilena con la que mantenían una fluida correspondencia, sus vinculaciones teosóficas y sus viajes a Guatemala con cierta frecuencia la apoyaban, se declaraba en sus principios constitutivos como una asociación feminista. . . . (208)

The author highlights the importance of underlining the work of earlier Guatemalan women, such as those involved with the Gabriela Mistral Society, in opening the way for the participation of today’s generations of women in matters of education and civil rights:

Resulta novedoso para la historia de las mujeres guatemaltecas descubrir que nuestras antepasadas formaron un consistente movimiento social feminista y que lo lideraron mujeres ilustres, poetasas, escritoras, políticas,. . . muchas de ellas pertenecían a sociedades teosóficas vinculadas a las redes latinoamericanas de Gabriela Mistral, que mantenían abierta una columna de debate con otros compañeros de su generación, tratando de crear opinión pública en la población en general y en las mujeres en particular sobre
la necesidad de incorporarse a la sociedad con plenos derechos: al trabajo, a la maternidad libre, al acceso a la cultura, al voto femenino, etcétera. (204)

This describes the efforts of the individuals who participated in a Society that was named after Mistral and that shared Mistral’s middle of the road feminist project and her desire to better the lot of women:

Lo que pretendían estas mujeres era que un grupo más amplio de su sociedad tomara conciencia de su identidad de género y que adquiriera las herramientas que le brindaba para incorporarse plenamente y en igualdad de condiciones a la sociedad . . . . Piden el derecho a una mujer culta con las mismas oportunidades que los hombres y por ello fundan una asociación cultural . . . . (208)

The purpose of these literary circles was to attain equal access to opportunities and not for just women, but rather, for both genders. There was an evident desire on the part of Mistral and shared by the members of these civic societies, for individual respect and cooperation for all. Women, as well as men, sought the acceptance brought about by intellectual development, striving to expand their horizons beyond the traditional home responsibilities without denying the importance and significance of these household tasks:

. . . Formaron un importante espacio de sociabilidad que les permitió salir del ámbito privado y empezar a generar opinión pública acerca de temas feministas, que hasta el momento no habían podido ser debatidos más que en círculos muy reducidos y siempre en espacio doméstico. (Casaús Arzú 204-05)

The focus of these associations was to bring change by promoting the importance of the role of both genders in the overall success of society. As these circles envisioned the future, all members of the community, regardless of gender, would receive the educational tools they needed to facilitate the realization of their potential.

In Gabriela Mistral’s tome, Mujeres de Puerto Rico: lecturas suplementarias para estudiantes de escuela elemental (1932), the poet offers another set of readings through
which young girls could develop intellectually and culturally. In this textbook, compiled specifically for Puerto Rican students, Gabriela Mistral had as her goal to supplement the materials that she had already provided in her textbook for Mexican women, Lecturas para mujeres. In 1931, during her travels in various regions of the Antilles, she lectured on the literature of Spanish-America and on social and educational matters at several centers of higher learning, such as the Universidad de Puerto Rico, the Universidad de La Habana in Cuba, and that of Panama City, in Panama. As a result of her association with both the educators and the students of these Caribbean countries, she further realized that women did not have access to materials on education that were specific to their gender and cultural context. She believed that they too needed to be aware of their social and cultural surroundings in order to facilitate their involvement in their respective communities. To facilitate this task, she prepared this culturally specific volume for use in Puerto Rican elementary education humanities classrooms.

Another example of Mistral’s contribution to the field of education in Puerto Rico appears in the commencement address, which she delivered at the University campus in Rio Piedras. This speech, of which I only quote a small part, was entitled Palabras para la Universidad de Puerto Rico, and it focuses, once again, on an adequate education for all. But her message is mixed: while on the one hand she congratulates the Puerto Rican government for building decent housing for the rural masses, on the other, she bemoans the 29% rate of illiteracy in the country:

Mi quinta satisfacción arranca de la campaña oficial que busca la transformación de la vida rural por medio de viviendas dignas del hombre. Asimilo a esto el grito de alarma que se da respecto de la salud pública tan desmedrada en el cuerpo del campesino.

Y como en cualquier juicio tiene que haber residuos amargos, anoto con dolor ese veintinueve porcentaje de analfabetos, que aunque
esté por debajo del que toleran algunos países opulentos del hemisferio, debe ser visto como un punto ulcerado que nos empaña el decoro cívico y no digamos el electoral. Cuando la institución universitaria llega en su matrícula a los 13,000 alumnos sobre población de dos millones, las cifras cantan rotundamente y sobra subrayarlas. (8-9)

Later on in this same address, she points out that the young people of the day are seeking true values:

Busca la juventud de hoy más o menos estas cosas: un orden social en el cual las diferencias de clases no rigen correspondiendo a nombre y a dineros sino a la capacidad comprobada por el oficio o la profesión, es decir, a los valores reales. (16)

Early in her speech, Gabriela Mistral stresses her satisfaction with the steps towards progress that have been made in the rural areas through a governmental campaign. Following those words of commendation, however, the poet focuses on the need for further change in the rural areas of the island and appeals for overlooking Puerto Rico’s racist and class conscious past in order to move towards a new democratic future. Within this focus, she emphasizes the uplifting of social status, applauding the efforts to improve working conditions in order to enrich opportunities for a better quality of life. The poet’s greatest concern was the continuous and still ongoing high rate of illiteracy:

Y como en cualquier juicio tiene que haber residuos amargos, anoto con dolor ese veintinueve porcentaje de analfabetos, que aunque esté por debajo del que toleran algunos países opulentos del hemisferio, debe ser visto como un punto ulcerado que nos empaña el decoro cívico y no digamos el electoral. (9)

She then follows with a series of observations concerning public health, “asimilo a esto el grito de alarma que se da respecto de la salud pública tan desmedrada en el cuerpo del campesino” (Palabras para la Universidad de Puerto Rico 9). The poet provides these observations as her imminent concerns in spite of the significant improvements in education that she notes had taken place on the island. Finally, she closes this portion of her speech
insisting that the level of illiteracy should be a priority, a matter of public and political interest.

These two examples of her involvement with education and civic matters in Puerto Rico and Guatemala are representative of the diverse types of teaching missions that she carried out not only in Chile and Mexico but also throughout all the countries in which she served as a representative of the Chilean government.

2.7. Gabriela Mistral’s Literary Productions within a Didactic Context

As it must have become evident by now, a large proportion of Gabriela Mistral’s literary work, both prose and poetry had a didactic intent. Much of her literature in prose was written with the objective of being used in the classroom and with a focus towards the awakening and formation of a moral and religious conscience, although she always presented it with an acute aesthetic sensitivity.

By far, most of Mistral’s literary writing was in the form of verse although she did write a significant amount of poetic prose also. Among these latter texts are those that she termed croquis (sketches) and recados (messages), although these works could also be written in verse form, as we shall see below. Jacqueline C. Nanfito has defined the multifaceted type of literary creation that Mistral called recados:

The “recado,” a term which can connote varied meanings, from a simple “message” or “greeting”, to “complimentary regards” or “gift”, to “outfit”, “tool or implement”, “daily supply of provisions” and even “abundance”, were journalistic pieces, impressionistic articles, sketches, portraits, that Mistral published in several Latin American newspapers: El Mercurio, Chile; El Repertorio Americano, Costa Rica; El Tiempo, Colombia; El Universal, Mexico; El Universal, Caracas; Sur, Buenos Aires; La Revista Bimestre Cubana, to name a few. Although several have
been composed in verse, the vast majority of the “recados” are prose texts that constitute a new genre in Gabriela’s literary development as an author. (117)

Nanfito elaborates the reasons why Mistral created this genre, emphasizing its didactic value as a means to keep in touch with friends and general readers:

Lamenting the lack of opportunity to maintain faithful correspondence with friends and acquaintances due to the increased demands on her time, particularly with regard to travel and her consular duties, Mistral invokes the “recado” as a forum from which to continue to educate the world on the wonders and woes of her beloved American continent, as she had been doing hitherto throughout her informative journalistic pieces, while simultaneously delving into expansions and expressions of the self. Through an opening up of epistolary expression from the merely personal, subjective rendering of realities recollected by the author to the more extensive commentary of geographical topographies and mapping of intersubjective and cultural identities, Mistral successfully engages in interpretive discursive practices often inaccessible to women during the first half of this century. (117)

An example in verse that appears in Lagar II, titled “Recado sobre una copa,” illustrates this union of the concept of teaching and transmitting a message, while developing a sense of beauty:

Quince años hace que yo bebo leche y agua en esta copa, amartillada y manida por el indio de Colombia que para mi vieja mano la hizo azul, suave, redonda. De roca que nunca vi bajó el metal de mi copa. Un indio jadeó su plata otro lo fundía en gotas; Y pulsos de otro cantaron mimando su luna azulosa.

El indio que la torneaba la celó como a la esposa, y su prestado destello al beber me vuelve hermosa; y yo dejo siempre un sorbo para la sed que la ronda.
Se vuelve lacia mi mano,
grisea el lino en mis ropas,
y ando viendo, ando buscando
boca que mi sed conozca.
Porque ya oigo que llaman
Las señales urgidoras
y no quiero que ella quede
¡olvidada, vana y rota! (Antología Poética 157)

The message stresses that objects and people have a value. Mistral represents this idea by portraying a poetic speaker that owns a silver goblet that she utilizes on a daily basis. The humble object receives honor and veneration because of the effort, the carefulness, and the beauty the craftsmen invested in its creation. The cup’s construction out of elements from nature and the work of its artisans are to be kept in the forefront by the user because it was crafted with such care that it magnifies the beauty of the materials that were used to make it. Its beauty is both in the metal used and in the color, shape, and style that give it form.

In these four stanzas, Gabriela Mistral teaches the principle that no matter how humble the material, the age of the item, or the person, there is a dignity and beauty in them, assigning a responsibility of preservation and safeguarding. The treatment granted all persons and objects should reflect an attitude of consideration for everything. People are to pay attention to detail, in order to extend the life and quality of all things and persons about them.

Another instance of Gabriela Mistral’s aesthetic approach to teaching appears in the type of composition called croquis (sketch),12 which I exemplify this time in a piece of poetic prose entitled “La palmera real,” which she includes in Lecturas para mujeres:

12 A collection of these sketches were compiled and published by Alfonso Calderón in 1969, under the title of Croquis mexicanos. Mistral wrote these texts as a means of recording information concerning her travels throughout Mexico. Luis Mario Schneider has referred to the time when she created this genre: “En aquella época empezó a escribir sus impresiones, hoy clásicas en nuestra lengua, sobre el aspecto del indio, su modo de vivir y pensar” (“Gabriela Mistral en México” 154). This same critic further defines the form and themes for the collection of croquis… “en prosa y verso, aglutina temas variados: naturaleza, personajes históricos, situación del indígena, propuestas educativas, productos de la tierra como el maíz y el maguey y hasta el ‘himno matinal’ que escribiera para su escuela” (155).
La palmera busca el sol más recta que las otras criaturas; se extasía en la luz mejor que todas ellas. Ningún tronco de árbol es bañado de claridad como su desnudo tallo maravilloso; es el mediodía como un inmenso pistillo cubierto de polen ardiente.

La palma es una copa, una copa veneciana de esas de cuello larguísimo y que acaban en una breve hendidura de cristal. El follaje hace arriba una copa ancha, perfecta y sensible. El viento en ella se escucha a sí mismo con goce. A veces el choque de su penacho es seco, como de velas fuertes, duras de sal; a veces, en el viento suave, se hace una risa innumerable; otras se llena como de cuchicheos de mujeres, de muchedumbres femeninas. .. Cuando está el aire quieto, la palmera tiene una mecedura lenta, una mecedida suavísima de madre. (Porque en lo alto, ella como todas las cosas se parece a un regazo.) (75)

The first striking element of this piece is the sense of joy and brightness this sketch depicts through the portrayal of light and clarity. There is a sense of life and vibrancy in the visibility of the trunk of the royal palm as pollen, an element in nature that provides for life and the procreation of the species.

Gabriela Mistral personifies nature and objects by ascribing to them human qualities, such as is seen in her descriptions of a palm and a humble goblet,. Through this technique, she conveys her message of caring, imparting comfort, a sense of security and of warmth towards nature and the domestic environment. Within the scenarios she paints, there is a feeling of the merging of the home, the world, and the persons that are included in these surroundings.

The narrative prose of “La palma real” portrays a poetic sense of beauty and the exquisite, with the comparison of the tree’s characteristics to an exotic item such as a Venetian goblet, with its stunning curvatures. The crown of the tree becomes part of a whole, with the trunk being the neck of the piece of crystal, and the leaves the cup itself and the medium through which the musicality of nature is heard in the blowing of the wind through the foliage. The palm’s slow back and forth sway suggests the mother’s rocking of a baby.
The wind, however, not only is the means for stroking the leaves for the production of beautiful sounds, but it is also a medium for producing strife and experience. These harsh conflicts, however, are not negative elements since they harden the individual making him or her stronger and more resourceful (“como de velas fuertes, duras de sal”).

Santiago Daydí-Tolson’s study of Gabriela Mistral’s posthumous book Poema de Chile (1967) offers a clearer understanding of how to read Mistral and her literary production as a didactic tool. This critic characterizes her writing as that of a poet-teacher:

For the spirit of the poet, the various places, animals, and plants seen in her walk south [Mistral’s journey through Chile as she depicted in the lines of the poem] are mostly evocative of a world that was lost to her when she lived in exile, but they also have a pedagogical value, as she uses them to show the country to the boy [character in the poem] who accompanied her as a pupil, the inheritor of her poetic wisdom. A teacher above all, Mistral walks her country for the last time for her own spiritual need and to show it and explain it to her people, toward whom she feels a moral obligation. It is difficult to separate in her at this point the poet from the teacher. The pedagogical value of her writing, be it lyrical poetry or journalistic essays, is particularly evident in this extremely personal book. Showing the world, or teaching, is also the function of the poet. The fact that the speaker in the poem is a poet insists also on the exact correspondence between the author and the lyrical voice. (141)

The poet-teacher that protagonizes this book, Poema de Chile, was, like Gabriela Mistral, a product of the same home, school, and society that was instrumental in giving shape to the poet’s world view. These Chilean institutions had molded Gabriela Mistral into a pedagogue who had captured the essence of what is needed to form the character of a person. Because of her understanding of what forges the future of a nation and an individual, she made it her life work to contribute to an appreciation of the above-mentioned factors in the relationship of society to its members.

As all individuals, Gabriela Mistral was the product of her circumstances; her environment and her experiences contributed to her desire to share her feelings, anxieties,
hopes, and concepts with others. She engaged in the writing of lyrical “pictures” taken out of her life that served to elucidate, uplift, enrich, and educate those around her. For her, the teacher is an artist because she brings “beauty” to the classroom not so much through the information she imparts to her students but rather through the manner in which she teaches her pupils. The teacher and the artist in tandem have a moral responsibility for what they teach and how they carry out their professional obligations and activities. Mistral explains her philosophy concerning this subject in her introduction to Lecturas para mujeres: “El maestro verdadero tendrá siempre algo de artista; no podemos aceptar esa especie de ‘jefa de faenas’ o ‘capataz de hacienda,’ en que algunos quieren convertir al conductor de los espíritus” (xix). Jaime Quezada articulated observations that serve to depict the blend of who and what is represented in the person of the Teacher, the Writer, and the Intellectual, that was Gabriela Mistral:

De Temuco se nos viene a Santiago Gabriela Mistral, que no quería para nada Santiago de Chile porque Santiago no tenía lo que ella siempre amaba que eran los árboles, muchos árboles, más sosiego, más paz, esta casi de paso en Santiago en un liceo que se había abierto recién, entonces no como directora, assume ese cargo durante unos meses, muchas críticas también de sus propias colegas de la época, Gabriela Mistral no tenía un título de maestra secundaria de manera que recibió críticas de la gente de la época, por fortuna le llega una invitación y esa invitación viene de México, y se no va a México el año 1922, a colaborar en los planes y estudios de la enseñanza y de la educación mexicana en un país que recién venía saliendo de una revolución, porque Gabriela Mistral andará desde entonces siempre en los momentos más ardientes de la historia de América y también del mundo. (“Conferencia sobre Gabriela Mistral”) 13

As an educator who preferred to live and teach in the rural setting, and who did not follow the traditional career path in preparation for her profession, Mistral eventually received the honor of an invitation to leave her native land to share her knowledge and expertise with Mexico, another country in a critical moment of its development. This first international

13 As with all my quotes, this one maintains the original grammar, orthography, and syntax.
educational success would be continued throughout the remainder of her life, with many opportunities to share her message and exercise her influence in other countries in Spanish-America as well as around the world. Moreover, the “Mistral phenomenon” that commenced during the 1912-1917 years in Chile, and expanded in scope during the two years that she was in Mexico, would continue for generations via her textbooks and anthologies of pedagogical materials:

Su poesía y prosa escolar, que, según ella misma cuenta, fue escrita sólo para ser un complemento del aula. Se convierten en material de antología, cuando Manuel Guzmás Maturana, las incluye en sus libros de lectura, que fueron material docente obligado de tantas generaciones. (Zegers, “El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral ….”)

The Teacher, the Writer, and the Intellectual are the three facets of Gabriela Mistral’s persona that fused to make her the eminent individual she came to be. This persona, which was formed at home in close contact with a family of educators, progressed through life with her multi-faceted career as a teacher-writer, culminating in her involvement as an intercontinental contributor to a wealth of intellectual development for young people that still today awakens the interest of scholars and poets.
In the post-Revolution fervor of the nineteen-twenties, Mexico elected a new president, Álvaro Obregón (1880-1928), who early in his term of office (1920-1924) established the Cabinet position of Secretary of Education, to fulfill the mandate of Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. He appointed as its first Secretary the writer and intellectual José Vasconcelos. As the newly appointed Secretary of Education, Vasconcelos sought to make it a reality that all peoples of Mexico should receive a free education. He invested a significant portion of his efforts in one of his highest priorities, rural schools. According to Augusto Iglesias Palau, in his desire to meet his country’s educational needs, Vasconcelos decided to, “invite an illustrious individual from Spanish-America that could assist him in his plans” (Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral y Santos Chocano 38). Jaime Concah describes the partnership and the outcome of the Chilean poet and teacher Gabriela Mistral’s efforts with the Mexican Secretary of Education: “el espíritu de la mujer [Mistral] se ajusta a la utopía de las escuelas rurales [through the initiatives of José Vasconcelos] como anillo al dedo, produciendo una de las amistades heterosexuales de mayor nobleza que se han dado en un continente más bien pobretón en esa materia” (111).

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14 Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 reads as follows:
La enseñanza es libre; pero será laica la que se dé en los establecimientos oficiales de educación, lo mismo que la enseñanza primaria, elemental y superior que se imparta en los establecimientos particulares. Ninguna corporación, ni ministro de algún culto, podrán establecer o dirigir escuelas de instrucción primaria. Las escuelas primarias sólo podrán establecerse sujetándose a la vigilancia oficial. En los establecimientos oficiales se impartirá gratuitamente la enseñanza primaria. (Constitución 3)
3.1. The Meeting of Mistral and Vasconcelos

In August of 1921, Gabriela Mistral wrote a letter to José Vasconcelos in response to having received a copy of his newly established journal for teachers, *El Maestro*. Vasconcelos published this letter in volume two, 1921-1922, of this journal. In it, Mistral states that while reading his journal she had noticed that his attitude and ideas in the field of education were parallel to her own teaching philosophy. This exchange provides an insight as to why, years later, the Secretary of Education may have chosen to seek her assistance in improving the country’s educational system. Gabriela Mistral describes both her point of view and that of her Mexican admirer in the following excerpts from her letter. It is important to note that she wrote it to Vasconcelos without having any specific knowledge of the Mexican’s eventual plans for an educational reform for his country, since this exchange preceded by several years her invitation to travel to Mexico:

He recibido su Revista *El Maestro*, i quiero i debo felicitarlo por ella, útil, sencilla i sana de la primera a la última página.
He de confesarle que tengo la antipatia de las publicaciones pedagógicas. . . . I muchas veces había pensado que tales publicaciones, llamadas pomposamente de educación, pero que no pueden educar a nadie, pues apenas son leídas, debieran ser semanarios amenos, donde halle algo aplicable a su vida todo hombre i toda mujer . . . i halle el profesor lectura espiritual. La crisis de los maestros es crisis espiritual: preparación científica no suele faltarles, les faltan ideales, sensibilidad i evangelismo, (perdone la palabra). La enseñanza técnica que recibieron primero i la cátedra después han ido haciendo de ellos, un recitador ordenado i paciente de textos i fórmulas i el alma, o no la tuvo o la ha perdido. Tal semanario haría más por la formación moral de un pueblo que la escuela muerta, fábrica de bachilleres; limpiaría las costumbres; crearía, con el amor a la lectura, una fuente delicada de placeres al hombre y la mujer pobre; haría más patria que los discursos del parlamento, i por último, obligaría a los escritores a ver claramente que tienen el deber de dar el sustento espiritual de su raza, que ésa es su razón de que lleven el nombre i los honores de intelectuales.
This letter highlights the attitudes that both Vasconcelos and Mistral espoused concerning education. The first point deals with Mistral’s suggestion of making the bi-annual *El Maestro* a weekly publication, available to teachers for the purposes of their professional enrichment, “debieran ser semanarios amenos . . . i halle el profesor lectura espiritual.” As she suggests, by providing these materials on a weekly basis, Mexican teachers would have resources available that would be helpful to their didactic mission. The materials accessible to them should not be merely entertaining, or scientific; these materials were already available. For Mistral, the problem was the lack of stimulus and ideals “. . . preparación científica no suele faltarles, les faltan ideales, sensibilidad i evangelismo.” According to Mistral, pedagogical and uplifting materials should be published frequently and feature practical career-oriented materials and tools, and not be written solely for the sake of engaging the readers. The second point of significance argues that whatever an author pens should be well written. Mistral emphasizes that what appears in print needs to be informative but it should also have an aesthetic component to uplift the spirit, “. . . obligaría a los escritores a ver claramente que tienen el deber de dar el sustento espiritual de su raza, que ésa es su razón de que lleven el nombre i los honores de intelectuales.” She also underlines that this weekly publication should be useful and instructive to both genders, “donde halle algo aplicable a su vida todo hombre i toda mujer.” Mistral next maintains that the crisis that existed among teachers was due to the fact that they lacked a vision of their role and function as educators and of their mission, “la crisis de los maestros es crisis espiritual.” The Chilean educator’s understanding of this mission had a spiritual dimension, but she seems to have sensed that this stand placed
her in a conflicted situation vis-à-vis Vasconcelos’ views on Mexican education. This conflict is apparent when the Constitution is examined since it directed that education was not to be of a religious nature. She therefore asks him to forgive her for the use of the term “evangelismo,” a religious, not an educational word. Mistral understood that her use of this expression could possibly be misinterpreted and considered counterproductive to her teaching mission, particularly in light of the fact that Mexico’s modern educational system had moved away from the dominance of the Catholic Church since the days of Benito Juárez. Her final point is that she wants the weekly to be a tool designed to guide teachers to a comprehension of how they are to formulate and develop their educational environment. All teachers need to be aware of the goals to be attained by their classroom activities and realize the impact of what they are sharing with their students. She wants teaching to be much more far-reaching than the sharing of a body of knowledge, and thus envisions the journal as a dynamic learning resource to supplement the lifeless, mechanized learning tools she thought Mexico was providing its schools at that time. This new version of the journal she envisioned would be of greater value to teachers in their daily classroom activities than anything they had currently available.

Despite Gabriela Mistral’s enthusiastic comments to José Vasconcelos, her intervention in Mexico’s educational reform was not a result of this exchange but, rather, somewhat of a coincidence. Nonetheless, when years later the new Constitution promised the opportunity to bring about a change in education, this contact had already alerted Vasconcelos to her ideas on education.

A point of interest in the eventual collaboration between Vasconcelos and Mistral is that when originally planning his reforms, the Mexican did not think of her, but instead
extended an invitation to the Uruguayan poet Juana de Ibarbourou (1895-1979), known as “Juana de América,” who did not accept his offer (Claro Tocornal 126). When she declined, he made known to the poet Enrique González Martínez, a personal friend and Mexico’s Ambassador to Chile, his intentions of bringing a highly qualified intellectual to help in the restructuring of Mexico’s rural educational system. Iglesias Palau explains that González Martínez answered with the recommendation that Gabriela Mistral was the individual with the appropriate background and the experience to aid in Vasconcelos’ efforts (Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral y Santos Chocano 38). In June of 1922, and in response to this recommendation, Vasconcelos extended an invitation to Mistral to come to Mexico to advise and assist him in the establishment of rural schools, in particular, but also, in any other areas of educational concerns that he may deem appropriate (Pincheira 192). Schneider provides further details with respect to the particular tasks for which the Chilean poet was traveling to Mexico:

El propósito de la visita de Gabriela Mistral era primordialmente pedagógico según lo manifestó la Secretaría de Educación Pública a través del Heraldo de México el 16 de julio de 1922. La mentora venía invitada para dar una serie de conferencias culturales e instructivas y a escribir algunos libros de educación que se pondrían de texto en las escuelas primarias. La invitación oficial la hizo el Presidente Álvaro Obregón y se calculaba la estancia de la maestra en tres meses. (“Gabriela Mistral en México” 151)

As stated, the Mexican President Álvaro Obregón was inviting the Chilean educator to come to Mexico for a period of three months for the very clear mission of presenting didactic conferences and writing primary-level textbooks that were to be placed in the country’s schools.

Upon receiving the call from José Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral accepted his invitation (“Curriculum” 61). When the day arrived for her to depart for the port of Veracruz,
the Associated Press posted a communiqué highlighting that fact and outlining an additional reason for which the educator and poet was traveling to Mexico. The Mexican newspaper, El Dictamen, dated June 24, 1922, published that news story the day after she left her homeland:

Lucía Godoy, poetisa chilena que desempeña la dirección del Liceo de niñas en esta ciudad y la cual es conocida en el mundo de las letras con el seudónimo de Gabriela Mistral, salió en el vapor Orcoma con destino al puerto de Veracruz, aceptando la invitación que le hizo el gobierno mexicano, para asistir a la inauguración de un liceo que lleva su nombre en la ciudad de México. Esta es la primera mujer intelectual chilena que sale del país aceptando la invitación de un país extranjero. (qtd. in Schneider “Gabriela Mistral en México” 150)

Mistral was thus going to Mexico on the request of the government to assist in the country’s educational initiatives, but she was going also for the inauguration of a secondary school for girls that had been established in her honor.

Mistral’s decision to accept the invitation opened the way for José Vasconcelos to realize his dream of collaborating with an educator that could enhance his plans of reform. The Chilean poet, who had already expressed her philosophy on education as early as 1910, brought to Mexico her multifaceted identity as a rural and urban teacher, a director of schools, a poet, and a woman. Her prior experiences in her own country provided Mexico with a well-rounded individual who shared José Vasconcelos’ vision and complemented his desire to forge a new and all-encompassing educational system (Gill 1).

Zegers explains her position in relation to Vasconcelos in these words:

Gabriela apoyaba abiertamente el surgimiento de la escuela Nueva o Activa porque recomendaba una enseñanza que estaba en directa relación con la naturaleza, pero por sobre todo, lo que más le interesaba a Gabriela era que toda la infancia tuviese acceso a la educación y que fuese obligación de los adultos, de los padres el que los niños no dejassen de ir a la escuela. Así en 1910, en un original que titula “Ventajoso canje” y que corresponde a un escrito que fue enviado a la prensa de su región natal, donde, ante las

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15 Appendix D provides a historical synopsis of Chile’s educational system, contextualizing Gabriela Mistral’s background regarding this subject.
numerosas actividades que se preparaban para la celebración del primer centenario de Chile, exhortaba la joven maestra a las autoridades de la provincia, para que una de esas actividades fuese la instauración de una Ley de Instrucción Primaria Obligatoria. Corresponde este al primer trabajo donde expone su postura con respecto a materias educacionales y a los cambios que según su opinión era necesario efectuar en ellas. Se debería poner especial énfasis, según Gabriela, en la instalación de escuelas en las aldeas, porque es allí donde los padres privilegian para sus hijos el trabajo físico en desmedro de la enseñanza, colaborando con esto al alto índice de analfabetos en el país. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral . . .”)

The Chilean educator promoted a new type of school that coupled academic materials with nature, but of even greater importance was her desire that all children have access to an education and that their parents, and teachers, should not permit dropouts to occur. She espoused the idea that elementary schools should be mandatory for all the minor children of each community, and supported compulsory rural educational institutions because, due to economic need, and at the expense of their literacy, in too many instances parents preferred to involve their offspring in agricultural work.

In 1922, José Vasconcelos penned words of welcome to the poet in which he expressed his thoughts concerning the role that Gabriela Mistral was to play in the mission to re-organize and transform Mexico’s education. He explained that she was to provide a means for the country to leave its past behind and forge a new educational perspective.¹⁶ He asserts that Mistral would fulfill this role, because she would come with an open mind and could thus propose the changes that Mexico needed. He also praises her for having an uncommon understanding of the duties that are inherent to teaching and a commitment to follow her conscience rather than being inhibited by protocols:

Usted es un resplandor vivo que descubre a las almas sus secretos y a los pueblos sus destinos. Así no la concebimos como una gloria de cenáculo sino como una presencia que borra todo recuerdo extraño. Si yo siguiera

¹⁶ Appendix E outlines the history of the development of education in Mexico and puts into perspective this country’s desire for reform.
diciéndole todo lo que México siente y todo lo que espera de Ud., no terminaría nunca. Ud. misma va a mirar muchas cosas que tal vez nosotros no hemos visto, y Ud. no se sentirá cohibida para decirme su pensamiento porque encima de sus sentimientos de cortesía, están sus deberes de maestra que dice la verdad conforme a su limpio corazón. (Pincheira 44)

Vasconcelos’ words convey the idea that her impact on Mexico and its schools would be immeasurable and long lasting.

3.2. The Partnership between Gabriela Mistral and José Vasconcelos

Regina Claro Tocornal states that Gabriela Mistral and José Vasconcelos were in agreement concerning their pedagogical and social ideas. She leaves no doubt that the Chilean fulfilled the needs of those interested in establishing schools in the rural areas:

Es éste el bagaje espiritual de Gabriela en su primer encuentro en la ciudad de México con un ministro a quien la unían coincidencias de pensamiento filosófico, religioso y americanista, y vocaciones pedagógicas y sociales. Encajó plenamente en los planes de su anfitrión y aportó todo su entusiasmo y celo apostólico al proyecto de misión rural. Pudo optar por un desempeño de escritorio o atenerse a su contrato que le pedía seis conferencias para maestros en dos años, pero ella escogió el papel de misionera. (127)

As Claro Tocornal suggests, because of Gabriela Mistral’s experience in her own country and her enthusiasm, she could offer Vasconcelos the support he needed. This critic also points out that Vasconcelos offered the Chilean poet two choices in fulfilling her contractual duties. During her two-year obligation, she could remain in an office in Mexico City engaged in administrative activities or she could offer six conferences in the field and work with the teachers presenting hers and her host’s ideas on education. Being the born teacher that she was, she chose to use the hands-on method by means of conferences and writing.
Gabriela Mistral came to Mexico committed to her conviction that all children in rural areas should receive an education that included the humanities and the sciences. During the two years she resided in Mexico, she shared her philosophy with people in many areas of the country. Her undertaking culminated in 1924 with the publication of twenty thousand copies of her governmentally commissioned volume, Lecturas para mujeres (Claro Tocornal 129). This volume, written for young women, as the title indicates, has been characterized by Gabriella de Beer as, “. . . un libro concebido para enseñar lengua y letras a las mujeres del México posrevolucionario de los años veinte” (211). Onilda A. Jiménez describes Mistral’s project in greater detail, pointing out that in addition to Mistral’s own writings, it brought together selections from many of the books the poet-teacher had read through the years, and which she organized to teach the girls in the school that had been named after her:

Una de las tareas más importantes y qué más la ayudaría intelectualmente fue la preparación del libro Lecturas para mujeres, destinado a servir de texto en la escuela-hogar de su nombre. Hasta ese momento, y debido a su carencia de estudios formales, ella había leído arbitrariamente, sin verse forzada a una labor metódica.

Esta obra, antología de poesía y prosa con algunos textos originales suyos, significó un trabajo de recopilación de más de un año, pero que, según ella dice en el Prólogo, requeriría por lo menos tres, ya que no se trata de una antología de autores por orden cronológico sino organizada por temas, según los gustos e intereses de la mujer. (42)

This critic underlines that the task Mistral undertook was a turning point for her as well, in that through the years the poet had not read with this purpose in mind, but now she was forced to organize her readings in a cohesive thematic fashion.

Lecturas para mujeres is a compilation of a series of readings that supported Mistral’s concerns that in addition to household duties, child rearing, and spousal responsibilities, women should receive an education that enhances their knowledge and the value of their role in society. Therefore, this textbook includes information dealing with a broad range of
subjects in the humanities and the sciences. Because she also believed that women should be encouraged to read texts other than those of a religious nature, her book only dealt with secular topics.

*Lecturas para mujeres* emphasizes respect for others, virtue, preservation of the family structure, and the safeguarding and protection of the family and its members. Although these ideas are not innovative, the fact that Mistral was promoting respect for these conventional values in relation to a formal education for all people served to open the way for strengthening traditional mores. By means of her textbook, the Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” as well as the other technical schools that used *Lecturas*, began to bring to realization her life-long dream.

The Chilean poet’s involvement in Mexico’s educational system allowed her to implement her pedagogical ideas. Her success, however, was not solely her own, but rather due to the fact that she and Vasconcelos were able to blend their goals and had the power to implement their ideas. The process they started evolved progressively during the remaining years of the twentieth century, and today it can be asserted that the “renowned” woman from the humble Chilean Valley of Elqui was able to make a solid contribution to Mexico’s “new direction” on the educational front.
CHAPTER IV

WINDOWS TO GABRIELA MISTRAL’S CONCEPTS ON WOMEN’S EDUCATION

No hay ritmo más suave, entre los cien ritmos derramados por el “primer músico,” que el de tu mecedora, madre y a la par que mecías me ibas cantando, y los versos no eran sino palabras juguetonas, pretextos para tus mimos. En esas canciones tú me nombrabas las cosas de la tierra: los cerros, los frutos, los pueblos, las bestiecas del campo, como para domiciliar a tu hija en el mundo, como para enumerarle los seres de la familia, ¡tan extraña!, en la que la habían puesto a existir no hay palabra nombradora de las criaturas que no aprendiera de ti. (Lecturas para mujeres 11)

The quotation from Lecturas para mujeres, “Recuerdo de la madre ausente” that opens this chapter, suggests Gabriela Mistral’s perspective on teaching, her methodology, and her techniques. It describes a picture of a mother rocking her daughter, singing to her, and teaching her about her surroundings. In recited words, the parent is teaching the child her first vocabulary integrating affection and teaching. This motherly approach lends itself to be understood as Mistral’s concept of the preparation of the very young for the remainder of their life; the mother-as-teacher being the first step in this process.

This quote sets the tone for my study of Gabriela Mistral’s perspective on education and concepts on the teachers’ approach to instruction. The elements exhibited are: 1) the mother as an early participant in a child’s education; 2) the surroundings as providing inspiration for subject matter; 3) verse as a medium for teaching the subjects the child should learn; 4) love portrayed as a facet of the well-being of the child; and 5) a sense of gentleness and caring as essential to developing the type of relationship that should exist between a “teacher” and a child.
Mistral espoused and exemplified in her everyday life her belief that literature is a teaching tool. She insisted that those that teach children have an obligation to guide them in their preparation for the responsibilities they will confront in life. For Mistral, literature, whether it is a poem, a lullaby, or a work of prose, is an avenue to impart this knowledge. Her interest in integrating literature with teaching materials is outlined by Pedro Pablo Zegers, based on articles published in local newspapers, as indicated:

En 1911, Lucila Godoy ingresa a las ligas mayores de la enseñanza del país cuando se la traslada a la ciudad de Antofogasta, en el extremo norte de Chile. Allí en el diario El Mercurio se dan a conocer todos sus trabajos literarios, así como otras noticias relacionadas con su presencia en el Liceo de Niñas y lo novedoso y práctico del método de enseñanza de la educadora. . . .

Otro trabajo que llama la atención en este su período antofogastino es el que se refiere a la necesidad y el llamado que hace Lucila Godoy a los poetas y a los maestros, conminándolos a hacer cuentos y versos destinados a los niños. Se trata del texto ‘Cuentos (oyendo los del kindergarten),’ que aparece el 14 de enero de 1912. (“El legado literario de Gabriela Mistral …”) This biographical account makes it obvious that since her earliest teaching days; Mistral was calling upon teachers to prepare their didactic materials in the form of literary pieces, –verse or short stories.

This chapter elucidates the “Gabriela Mistral methodology,” beginning with two of the Chilean’s poems from Desolación, “La maestra rural” and “Decálogo del artista,” which reveal her viewpoints concerning the two components she presents as essential to her literary creations: artistic quality and pedagogical traits. Mistral notes this blend to the Chilean journalist Ana Michelet in a text quoted by Zegers:

Así, encontramos en La Aurora de los Andes, el primer texto relacionado con Gabriela. Se trata de una entrevista que sostuvo Ana Michelet con la poetisa y que fue publicada en este periódico el 19 de octubre de 1913. La entrevista, encabezada con el título “Justicia al mérito,” deja entrever la enorme dimensión que a esas alturas había alcanzado
Mistral depicts herself as a veteran teacher speaking from her personal experience. The poet explains her concerns that the materials she presents to her students must be pleasing to their ear, and of a didactic nature; guiding the children with love and decisiveness. According to Gastón Figueira, Mistral is one of the very few writers who attained a balance of these two elements:

Hasta su llegada, no había casi en nuestra América, ni en España, salvo algunas excepciones, como la de Juan Ramón Jiménez, poetas dignos de ser llevados a la educación estética del niño, a la comprensión del maravilloso mundo en que se abren sus ojos. Gabriela clarificó y dignificó el poema infantil, infundiéndole, a la vez que una gracia finísima, un sentido germinativo, que da al alumno anticipos de la vida misma, sentido necesario, imprescindible para un porvenir de superación. (18)

For Figueira, Mistral was one of the very few writers in the Spanish-speaking world who produced children’s poetry worthy of educating their young minds concerning the beauty of the world. He considers that the Chilean author wrote children’s literature for spreading characteristics of grace, and a sense of expectancy, instilling in their young minds the knowledge that would prepare them for a life of achievement.

Mistral was interested in writing a literature with new ideas expressed through new metric forms and new sounds. When questioned about her techniques, the Chilean poet pointed to changes in her poetic expression to accommodate a new more modern musicality:

Ante una pregunta sobre su escritura modernista, sus ideas originales, etc., responde, hoy se afanan los poetas por dar una música nueva al verso, dentro de la armonía, distinta de aquella uniforme y melosa que nos tenía cansados los oídos; notas de una eufonía al parecer inarmónica, a la cual luego

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17 Jiménez (1881-1958), a Spanish Nobel Prize poet well known for his Platero y yo (1914), a series of prose poems featuring a young boy and his donkey. Throughout his literary production Jiménez sought to express the essence and the beauty of the world (“Juan Ramón Jiménez…”).
The poet’s words make it plain that Mistral considered it her charge to bring a new form and a new musicality to poetry. She was interested in forging a new vehicle of expression; a more up-to-date “modernista” way of approaching poetry.

4.1. Education through Poetry

“La maestra rural” and “Decálogo del artista” focus on the subject of education through poetry. In his essay “Tejer y trenzar, aspectos del trabajo en la Mistral,” the critic Jaime Concha, characterized her poems as reflecting her concerns for the theme of work:

Concha perceives a direct link between Gabriela Mistral’s on-going project of writing poetry and her concepts on work or “el trabajo.” Concha’s conclusion indicates that by reading Mistral’s creative works, the reader can come to an understanding of her concept of work in the context of her life’s mission as a poet.

As seen through the eyes of Gabriela Mistral, the teacher needs to understand that each student is a potential piece of “artwork” from which each instructor can develop a “masterpiece.” The teacher must do his/her utmost to attain this end. Through the conjoining
of art and education, the educator will be able to fulfill his/her true purpose by transforming for the better, individuals and society.

4.1.1 Defining the Teacher, “La maestra rural”

“La maestra rural,” a long eleven-stanza poem, composed of tetrameter quatrains with a half-rhyme scheme of abab with alternating masculine and feminine endings, presented in the third-person voice, provides the first window through which one can gain an understanding of Mistral’s perspective on the characteristics that should be exhibited by a rural teacher. It is important to remember that working on rural education was the emphasis for the Chilean writer’s visit to Mexico, as reforming this type of education was the reason Vasconcelos had invited her to his country. Thus, comprehending the ideas of this poem makes it possible to understand what may have been her educational project for reforming rural schools in Mexico. Each stanza, excepting six and ten, which are elaborations of the

18 The literary critic Elizabeth Horan speaks to this strategy in her tome Gabriela Mistral: An Artist and Her People, in asserting that Mistral used the third-person in the writing of “La maestra rural” because it: frames and distances the potentially explosive subject of how women are to labor and contribute to society, in the world-at-large, while apparently receiving none of the benefits. By using the third-person in “La maestra rural” the poet creates the impression that the title figure is silent and, uncomplaining, while the poem in fact does the opposite. Using the third person, moreover, allows the poet to exploit the ambiguities of this unattached woman’s relationship to the community that receives but scarcely acknowledges the benefits of her work. The third person permits the poet to create the impression that her portrayal of the schoolteacher is an objective one that neither the uncomplaining “maestra” herself, nor the callous and unappreciative community would be capable of. (Chapter 2: “The Schoolteacher’s Authority: in Loco Parentis”) The female teacher, according to Horan, in proposing to impact society with her principles, eludes to the extent possible, being viewed through the lens of being a woman, rather than, an educator. As Horan states it, “taking on the persona of the maestra gives the poet access to two channels of authority. To identify the schoolmistress’s interests with the school’s interests is to partake of the palpable authority of the state” (Chapter 2: “The Schoolteacher’s Authority: In Loco Parentis”). Although Horan makes these assertions from a socio-political point of view, I believe that they are appropriate from the perspective of the individual instructor also.
respective preceding ones, presents a desired teacher quality or characteristic and elaborates on it, with a summary of the eight character traits in the eleventh stanza.

The first one is that of purity:

La maestra era pura. “Los suaves hortelanos”, decía, “de este predio, que es predio de Jesús, han de conservar puros los ojos y las manos, guardar claros sus óleos, para dar clara luz.” (57)

Through the wholesomeness that the teachers (“Los suaves hortelanos”) maintain in their own life “conservar puros los ojos y las manos,” the school becomes pure; it should be a space within which Christ himself could work “predio de Jesús,” to enable teachers (“los hortelanos”) to instruct their students with clarity of thought. Their clearness (“dar clara luz”) provides the means through which they can cultivate qualities that will be of the same genuine caliber. Because educators have a spiritual and moral responsibility to their students, they are to teach and model concepts that are of the highest standards. They are to maintain the principles of excellence at all times through vigilance: “guardar claros sus óleos.”

For Mistral, the second characteristic a rural teacher must possess is that of poverty:

La maestra era pobre. Su reino no es humano.
(Así es el doloroso Sembrador de Israel.)
Vestía sayas pardas, no enjoyaba su mano
¡y era todo su espíritu un inmenso joyel! (57)

The teacher is poor, in that her kingdom is not of this earth, “su reino no es humano,” another allusion to the spiritual mission implicit in teaching. Her role, like that of Jesus (“el doloroso Sembrador de Israel”), is that of poverty and serving others, sacrificing personal gains, and comforts. Due to her lack of material means, she dresses simply, “vestía sayas pardas,” and does not wear jewelry on her hands “no enjoyaba su mano,” but in its place, it is her spirit that is a gemstone, “¡y era todo su espíritu un inmenso joyel!” She has accepted Jesus as a
guide, and lives and dresses simply, like Him. In order to teach, she chooses to live a life of privation to avert any appearance of ostentation, preferring a character bejeweled with the beauty of goodness.

The third characteristic that Mistral stresses is that of an optimistic spirit, in spite of the negative circumstances in which life may place her:

La maestra era alegre. ¡Pobre mujer herida!
Su sonrisa fue un modo de llorar con bondad.
Por sobre la sandalia rota y enrojecida,
tal sonrisa, la insigne flor de su santidad. (57)

The method she must utilize to project an optimistic front is to cover her hurt with a smile, “su sonrisa fue un modo de llorar con bondad.” Facing life’s troubles with a smile and resignation, she can teach the children how to survive the difficulties they too face in their daily lives. Her sandals are tattered and her feet are reddened, “la sandalia rota y enrojecida,” but she wears a smile that is the external sign of her sainthood, “tal sonrisa, la insigne flor de su santidad,” signaling her attitude of commitment and sacrifice to the profession to which she has dedicated herself. The message that the reader gleans from this stanza is that the teacher should be willing to do whatever is necessary to accomplish her goals in spite of any discomfort and inconvenience she might have to confront.

The fourth characteristic the rural teacher must have is a sweet demeanor, described as, “¡Dulce ser”!

¡Dulce ser! ¡En su río de mieles, caudalosa,
largamente abrevaba sus tigres el dolor!
¡Los hierros que le abrieron el pecho generoso
más anchas le dejaron las cuencas del amor! (57)

The depth and breadth of this rural teacher’s goodness have led to her experiencing much mistreatment, “¡en su río de mieles, caudalosa, / largamente abrevaba sus tigres el dolor!” In
spite of the extended period of time that she has dealt with the pain inflicted by others she has not lost her pleasant qualities. Her loving nature prevents her from becoming embittered no matter how deeply she is wounded, “¡Los hierros que le abrieron el pecho generoso / más anchas le dejaron las cuencas del amor!” The hurt that she has suffered has created a deeper well of love that she displays in the fulfillment of her mission as a teacher.

An additional characteristic, the fifth, points out that the teacher is unpretentious; a quality that sometimes may lead to her being unnoticed and unappreciated for her knowledge, by the humble parents of her students:

¡Oh, labriego, cuyo hijo de su labio aprendía el himno y la plegaria, nunca viste el fulgor del lucero cautivo que en sus carnes ardía: pasaste sin besar su corazón en flor! (57)

The farm worker’s child has been learning prayers and hymns from the teacher, but the depth and breadth of the effort of this unassuming educator’s spirit are not esteemed nor experienced by the parent. The metaphorical imagery used on this stanza denotes the idea that the teacher had a deep well from which to draw for any given opportunity, but that she does not act in such a way as to draw attention to herself. The driving force within her is to teach her children, in spite of difficult circumstances.

The next stanza, the sixth, does not present an additional point, but rather it is a commentary on the previous one, as the poetic voice asserts that the people malign the teacher, because they really do not understand her worth as a missionary:

Campesina, ¿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! (57)
The poetic speaker states that the campesino’s wife has often made untrue mean or petty remarks concerning her child’s teacher, “Campesina, ¿recuerdas que alguna vez prendiste / su nombre a un comentario brutal o baladí.” She then goes on to emphasize the teacher’s important part in the child’s life, “¡y en el solar de tu hijo, de ella hay más que de ti!” signifying that the educator has had a greater impact on the child’s life, than the parent. Furthermore, she indicates that the mother should apologize for her previous disrespect.

The sixth point is presented in the seventh stanza, when Mistral stresses that the rural teacher sows seeds of excellence in the hearts of her pupils, thus providing the tools for the proper formation of her students’ character thus enabling them to acquire the best preparation for life:

Passó por el su fina, su delicada esteva,
abriendo surcos donde alojar perfección.\(^{19}\)
La albada de virtudes de que lento se nieva
es suya, Campesina. ¿no le pides perdón? (57)

The teacher is working in the field of her classroom as an opener of furrows (the minds of her students), with her gentle ploughshare (her teaching methods and skills). The teacher is a “laborer” who, through a slow process of teaching, fills in those furrows with virtues, “... su delicada esteva, abriendo surcos donde alojar perfección. / La albada de virtudes de que lento se nieva / es suya.”

The rural teacher’s seventh characteristic is represented in the eigth stanza: her trust in God, her belief that God has a place for her on this earth. The rural teacher appears as a...

\(^{19}\) Jaime Concha comments on Gabriela Mistral’s frequent use of the image of the “surco” to signify the scar of human suffering, in this poem as well as in her poetry in general: Pero sobre todo, la doble línea de los versos crea, desde el origen del poetizar mistraliano, la figura del surco, marca del sufrimiento humano por ser herida, cicatriz, hendidura en el rostro y en la tierra y, a la vez, firma primera y personalísima de su escritura poética. De esta andadura en surcos va a derivar la norma serial de su poesía más temprana. ... (99-100)
tree extending its shade over those that need it until the day she is asked to abandon this world for the next one, “...el día en que la muerte la convidó a partir”:

Daba sombra por una selva su encina hendida.  
el día en que la muerte la convidó a partir.  
Pensando en que su madre la esperaba dormida,  
a La de Ojos Profundos se dio sin resistir. (57)

She has completed her mission and she thus approaches death with a calm that is only enjoyed by those who have fulfilled their life vocation. The rural teacher is not afraid of the after life because she hopes that her mother is waiting there for her, “pensando en que su madre la esperaba dormida.” However, God is the One to whom she gives her soul without any resistance. Believing that she would join Him, she went to sleep as peacefully as a baby, “a La de Ojos Profundos se dio sin resistir.”

In the ninth stanza, the speaker expands on the rural teacher’s dependence upon God. Knowing that He will provide for her she has no fear in placing her life on His hands, “en su Dios se ha dormido, como en cojín de luna; / almohada de sus sienes”:

Y en su Dios se ha dormido, como en cojín de luna;  
almohada de sus sienes, una constelación;  
canta el Padre para ella sus canciones de cuna  
¡y la paz llueve largo sobre su corazón! (58)

She has developed such reliance upon Him that she is certain that He will receive her and sing her lullaby songs to fill her heart with peace, “¡la paz llueve largo sobre su corazón!”

The poem suggests that in both life and death, the rural teacher’s faith allows her to remain within God’s realm.

In the tenth stanza, the rural teacher is described by another characteristic, the eighth and last, that of being a missionary charged with the role of bringing enlightenment to children through the planting of seeds of understanding. In fulfilling her mission she is
working in partnership with God, “y era su vida humana la dilatada brecha / que suele abrirse el Padre para echar claridad”:

Como un henchido vaso, traía el alma hecha para volcar aljófares sobre la humanidad; y era su vida humana la dilatada brecha que suele abrirse el Padre para echar claridad. (58)

From the beginning of her life on earth, the rural teacher had been inspired to carry out her mission.

The eleventh and final stanza encapsulates what this teacher has done throughout her life. Furthermore, her long-lasting impact continues to be seen and felt in both nature and people’s lives after she is gone:

Por eso aún el polvo de sus huesos sustenta púrpura de rosales de violento llamear. ¡Y el cuidador de tumbas, como aroma, me cuenta, las plantas del que huella, sus huesos, al pasar! (58)

The dust from her bones fertilizes the plant life that is growing around her grave. The rose bushes with their flaming colors depict to the cemetery’s caretaker, the nobility of her life. However, what is most striking is that the last two lines suggest that those that she instructed may still come by her tomb and may continue to transmit their education to future generations, as they carry the dust of her remains on the soles of their feet to wherever they go, “¡Y el cuidador de tumbas, como aroma, me cuenta, / las plantas del que huella, sus huesos, al pasar!”

In her analysis of this poem, in Gabriela Mistral: An Artist and Her People, Elizabeth Horan, limits her comments to pointing out some differences between Mistral’s earlier self-descriptions and her picture of the rural teacher: modesty vs. haughtiness; humbleness vs. pride; indifference vs. combativeness.
The strong contrast between the poet’s earliest self-descriptions, which show an insistent, scarcely concealed combativeness, and the view she later adopts, looking back on herself having been a timid child, strongly suggest that reticence was a learned behavior for Mistral, who would need to cover up the pride that was bound to make her a target of attacks. Stalwart and impassive as she had claimed to be in the earliest self-description, there can be no doubt that she was extremely sensitive to criticism. (Chapter 2 : “A Combative Adolescent”)

Be as it may, in my analysis of this poem, I additionally find that “La maestra rural” underlines eight points that Mistral considered essential in a great rural teacher: 1) purity; 2) poverty; 3) optimistic spirit; 4) sweet demeanor; 5) unpretentiousness; 6) ability to facilitate knowledge; 7) trust in God; and 8) possess a clear vision of her mission. These eight points are wrapped up in the last stanza in which Mistral emphasizes that the long lasting impact of a good teacher extends beyond her life. Upon consideration of these points, one deduces that for Mistral the teacher’s character traits, her approach towards her students, her personal attitude toward life, and her source of strength and inspiration are the essential characteristics in the profiling of an educator. A pedagogue is savvy in his/her field, but does not limit his/her instructional pursuits to the sharing of the subject matter; he/she is involved in the education of the whole person. The rural teacher senses that there is a mission to be accomplished and is never dissuaded from its fulfillment.

The qualities of a rural teacher that are underscored in the preceding poem are a reflection of the overall educational aims Gabriela Mistral learned in Chile. As noted in my Appendix D, from the time that her country gained its independence, its governmental officials demonstrated visionary behavior in that they made education a high priority. This viewpoint contrasts with the widely accepted attitude of government officials in Mexico that I described in Appendix E. For Chile, education was a means to an end, whereas, until the Mexican Revolution, Mexico’s educational system was an end in itself, limited to the
majority of both the country’s secular, as well as ecclesiastical leaders. Chile, since its inception, had established a public school system accessible to all; Mexico incorporated this concept only into its 1917 Constitution; a decision that led to Vasconcelos bringing the Chilean poet to Mexico. “La maestra rural” exemplifies some of the ideas on the mission of the teacher that Gabriela Mistral brought with her and that she shared with those that carried out the needed reforms in the country’s rural educational system.

4.1.2 The Concept of the Artist in “Decálogo del artista”

“Decálogo del artista” outlines in one page the ten precepts that Gabriela Mistral considers necessary to guide the creation of all literature, including didactic pieces. The opening precept deals with the love of beauty:

I. Amarás la belleza, que es la sombra de Dios sobre el Universo.

It underlines that the love of beauty must be a matter of priority: it is a reflection of God upon the universe. Because of this priority, an artist—in this case of Mistral a writer—is to instill a love for and an understanding of loveliness in each sense of the word, since it is the quintessence of God. The second provides Mistral’s perspective on art:

II. No hay arte ateo. Aunque no ames al Creador, lo afirmarás creando a su semejanza.

In this principle, Mistral states that there is no such thing as an exclusively atheistic art. Even if one does not believe in a Creator, the artist affirms His existence through his/her creation. All art carries the similitude of God’s character in its very essence. Art is of God by
definition. The artist’s work reflects God. In the third stanza, Mistral discusses what she believes to be the reason for the existence of beauty:

III. No darás la belleza como cebo para los sentidos, sino como el natural alimento del alma.

The poet-teacher makes clear that beauty does not exist for the feeding of the senses, but rather, it is to be a natural nourishment of the soul. In other words, beauty is inherently functional and is not to be limited to the external. Loveliness is to be a channel for learning and enrichment, not an end in itself. Beauty promotes the development of other aspects of life, lifting the spirit, enabling a greater desire for life. The artist is to realize that the beauty that he/she exhibits and facilitates has a far-reaching bearing on others. She continues her “decálogo” with an explanation of the function of art:

IV. No te será pretexto para la lujuria ni para la vanidad, sino ejercicio divino.

In this latest precept, she emphasizes that art is not to be an alleged reason for lustfulness nor vainglory; it is in truth a divine exercise. Artists are not to understand their role as that of self-aggrandizement or self-exaltation; it is a calling from above to be fulfilled.

Subsequently, she offers as her fifth precept a definition of beauty:

V. No la buscarás en las ferias ni llevarás tu obra a ellas, porque la Belleza es virgen, y la que está en las ferias no es Ella.

Beauty is presented as forever possessing a new and untouched quality. It is created during the course of life. If one finds it for sale, it is not authentic. Loveliness is neither an object to be on display nor to be bought or sold in the marketplace. Through the following precept, the sixth one, Mistral adds information concerning the origin and effect of beauty:

VI. Subirá de tu corazón a tu canto y te habrá purificado a ti el primero.
She contends that beauty rises from the wellspring of the heart in the form of a song, bringing about a lasting effect as it purifies the soul. Moreover, true beauty is also merciful:

VII. Tu belleza se llamará también misericordia, y consolará el corazón de los hombres.

For Mistral, mercy is another name for beauty because one of its functions is to console the hearts of mankind. By creating beauty, the artist provides a means through which both genders can participate in an act of caring, as they are given a redeeming role in society. The poet continues elaborating her understanding of beauty in the eighth precept by means of a birth metaphor:

VIII. Darás tu obra como se da un hijo restando sangre de tu corazón.

The artist ought to produce his or her works with the same heartfelt feelings that one uses to bring forth one’s own child. Thus, when the new artifact comes into existence it exhibits characteristics that are drawn from the heart of its creator. Beauty must have a prominent place in each individual artist’s life:

IX. No te será la belleza opio adormecedor, sino vino generoso que te enciende para la acción, pues si dejas de ser hombre o mujer, dejarás de ser artista.

Beauty cannot be allowed to dull the senses of the creator, states the ninth precept; on the contrary, it needs to be a motivator for action. If one does not act one ceases to be a man--or a woman--, and consequently ceases to be an artist. Finally, in the tenth precept, the author advises the artist to be humble concerning his/her stance in the creative process:

X. De toda creación saldrás con vergüenza, porque fue inferior a tu sueño, e inferior a ese sueño maravilloso de Dios. (126)
Mistral adds that this humility should come out of the realization that human creation is always inferior to the way it was dreamed of by the artist, and even more inferior yet to God’s Creation.

That Mistral places teachers in the category of artists is made plain in “La maestra rural.” Thus, her “Decálogo del artista” may be read as instructions on how to be a good teacher. Educators should implement the ten precepts that define beauty and the “artist,” as they work with their students and prepare the materials that will enrich their lives. While exercising their labor of love, they are encouraged, like the artists they are, to demonstrate their love for beauty and to constantly strive for higher attainments.

4.2. FOREGROUNDING EDUCATION THROUGH A LITERARY ANTHOLOGY

4.2.1. Why Study Lecturas para mujeres?

Compiling the textbook Lecturas para mujeres was part of Gabriela Mistral’s explicit fulfillment of her Mexican contract. The critic Elvia Montes de Oca Nava places in context the project of the Mexican government to write this volume:

Alvaro Obregón gobernó a México durante el cuatrienio 1920-1924. Obregón . . . invitó a José Vasconcelos como secretario de Educación, quien se encargó de hacer una intensa campaña educativa que incluyó, entre otros programas, la edición de libros de lecturas dirigidos especialmente a los sectores más marginados de la cultura como eran las mujeres de esos años. Vasconcelos invitó a la poetisa chilena Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, mujer conocida como Gabriela Mistral, para que colaborara en esta tarea. (309)20

20 All quotations from critics and readings from Lecturas para mujeres in this section preserve the original grammatical structures, syntax, and orthography.
Post-revolutionary Mexico was embarking on an innovative educational program and Mistral was asked to participate in this project through the writing of a book for women, in addition to being asked to lecture and speak with educators throughout the country.

Paula Miranda, in an on-line published presentation from the University of Chile titled “La prosa de Gabriela Mistral,” has defined the compilation produced by Mistral, explaining that Lecturas is a “texto . . . elaborado y diseñado por la propia Mistral, donde seleccionó una amplia antología de textos, incluidos los suyos, para ser leídos por las alumnas de la Escuela Industrial de Mujeres ‘Gabriela Mistral,’ en México.” Later on in the same article, Miranda comments further on the work of the Chilean, as a teacher, repeating what so many other critics have said, that it was due to her reputation in the educational field that she was invited to Mexico:

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No la invitaban sólo por sus rondas infantiles ni por sus sonetos de la muerte . . . durante 18 años había ejercido su labor de maestra en Chile, desempeñándose su labor como directora en algunos liceos y su labor literaria era, para entonces, pequeña, “pero efectiva.” Muy conocidas eran sus colecciones de poesía para textos escolares y su nombre recorría el continente con el Repertorio Americano.21
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For Miranda, the awarding of the Nobel Prize was not simply to recognize Mistral’s poetic works, it was also to reward her labor as a teacher: “El mismo Premio Nobel de Literatura fue otorgado no sólo por la belleza estilística de sus versos, sino por la armonía que había entre su praxis y su pensamiento.”

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21 A journal by this name was originally published in London, England, 1826-1827, by Andrés Bello, during the time that he was Secretary of the Colombian Embassy, in the same city. This journal was re-born in Costa Rica, under the directorship of the teacher, editor, and journalist, Joaquín García Monge, who was “interested in establishing a forum, like Bello, which would be available to all currents of thought but partisan toward none” (Henkin 347). Monge edited Repertorio Americano, from his return from self-exile in New York, in 1919, until his death in 1958, a total of fifty volumes (Henkin 345). Gabriela Mistral published in this journal during the years 1919-1951.
If one takes the two poems I discussed above ("La maestra rural" and "Decálogo del artista") as examples of the seriousness with which Mistral took her educational mission, one must also realize that the readings she included in *Lecturas para mujeres* reflect her concern for bringing beauty and wholesomeness to the more pragmatic education of the students at the Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral.”

In her introduction to this textbook, Mistral writes that women should have a broader education, not only to prepare them for their role as mothers and wives, but also and particularly, to take them beyond the themes and jobs of domesticity. Nonetheless, her stance is problematic. She appears on the one hand to want women to become members of the working force, on the other hand, however, her literary pieces also point out that she wants women to keep the feelings and concerns traditionally considered part of the feminine nature and sphere. To offer a more clear understanding of what Mistral wanted an educated woman to know, I will analyze some selections from *Lecturas* that point toward the criterion she may have used in selecting her materials. My inquiry hopes to answer two questions: 1) did she challenge the roles that had been constructed for Mexican women, and 2) did the poetry and prose she wrote and anthologize provide a solid foundation for the goal of educating women to live in a new society.

*Lecturas para mujeres* may be considered Mistral’s answer to the development of an educational program for women. She wishes to show that indeed women can contribute literally, artistically, and intellectually, but also as part of the general workforce. This idea is not so revolutionary; after all, women had expressed it before, among them the nineteenth-

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22 For a view of the very practical Escuela Industrial’s plan of studies see Appendix C.
century Peruvian writer, Clorinda Matto de Turner, who stated the need for women to be educated, in an essay from her *Hojas sueltas* entitled, “Para ellas”.23

Mujeres, ilustraos, aspirad a la gloria cuyo resplandor es tan vivido que puede iluminar siglos, generaciones y mundos, sin aquel brillo efímero del oro.

Educaos, y podréis leer, serenas y satisfechas, los versos que tal vez alarmaron vuestra delicada susceptibilidad, al tomar la modesta hoja que os visita poniéndonos en contacto intelectual. (Matto de Turner190)

### 4.2.2. The Rationale for *Lecturas para mujeres*

Gabriela Mistral describes her rationale for the writing of *Lecturas para mujeres* in her introduction to her textbook. She emphasizes the importance of creating a tradition of serious women’s literature:

Ya es tiempo de iniciar entre nosotros la formación de una literatura femenina, seria. A las excelentes maestras que empieza a tener nuestra América corresponde ir creando la literatura del hogar, no aquélla de sensiblería y de belleza inferior que algunos tienen por tal, sino una literatura con sentido humano, profundo. (xvi)

Mistral underlines the importance of creating a meaningful body of literature; she felt the need for a kind of writing that went beyond the superficial, sentimental-type traditionally judged as appropriate for women. In her opinion, women needed readings with human depth, that is to say, texts that open the mind to a wide range of perceptions. Onilda A. Jiménez comments that Mistral came to this conclusion precisely when she started collecting the readings for her textbook:

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23 1852-1909. A poet and writer of “tradiciones,” in addition to being a journalist, playwright, and novelist. She was concerned about the plight of the poor, of women, and in particular of the indigenous populations of her country. She created a place for herself in literary history with her 1889 *indígenista* novel, *Aves sin nido* (Mayock [on-line source]).
Prior to her involvement in the compilation of the materials for “Hogar,” Mistral seems to have been unaware of the one-sided dominance of male writers, in such subject matter. Once she learned of the problem, however, she chose to play a significant role in initiating the change. She discussed her concern at this lack of feminine authors and the urgent need to produce it in another prose piece entitled “La enseñanza, una de las más altas poesías (1917)”: 

Hasta hoy hemos dejado que las almas finas de Martínez Sierra o Amado Nervo digan nuestras emociones, adivinándolas, surprendiendo, felizmente, algún instante de nuestra vida íntima honda. Ahora queremos hacer cantar lo nuestro. En vez de hacer odas como la Avellaneda, muy aplaudida por los clásicos españoles, quiero que hagamos prosa y poesía del hogar, sin énfasis, con la sencillez con que desgrana una oración, que es poesía, sin ser literatura, es decir, emoción, aunque no sea retórica. (Magisterio y niño 272-73)  

Martínez Sierra and Nervo are well known for their efforts at expressing women’s feelings and addressing feminine issues. The first of these two writers, a Spaniard, or rather his wife, penned plays including monologues for women, discussing the attainment of knowledge and

24 Gregorio Martínez Sierra (1881-1947), was one of the few commercially successful progressive dramatists from Spain, who concentrated his professional efforts in the areas of publishing and directing plays. Contemporary critics have pointed out that actually the plays were written by his wife, María Martínez Sierra. Among their plays stand out: Canción de cuna, El reino de Dios, and La esposa de un hombre famoso (“Gregorio Martínez Sierra...”).

Amado Nervo (1870-1912) was a modernist Mexican poet. His life in many respects parallels that of Gabriela Mistral: 

Por el camino de la sinceridad, de la sencillez y del trabajo silencioso, llegó a situaciones brillantes. Justo es lo que dijo en su momento de plenitud:

Amé, fui amado, el sol acarició mi faz.

¡Vida, nada me debes! ¡Vida, estamos en paz! (“Biografía de Ámado Nervo”)

Amado Nervo himself stated in his brief 1905 biography; “Ahí están mis canciones, allí están mis poemas: yo, como las naciones venturosas, y a ejemplo de la mujer honrada, no tengo historia: nunca me ha sucedido nada” (“Biografía de Amado Nervo”)

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873). A Cuban dramatist, novelist and poet who moved to Spain in 1836, and resided there for most of her life (“Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: Autobiografía” ) (all three biographies come from on-line sources and are listed in my bibliography).
learning at the feet of an adult, a concept expressed by Mistral in some of her literary creations. In the case of the latter, love and nature were points of expression in his poetry. Onilda A. Jiménez more specifically speaks of his and Mistral’s affinity: “En Nervo había sensibilidad, delicadeza, espiritualidad. Ambos [Mistral and Nervo] buscaban el misterio sobrenatural tras la muerte de sus amados...” (35).

Ana Figueroa describes the type of woman who defies the time-honored functions assigned to her gender, which Mistral portrayed in her poetry book Lagar. The poet places these women under the designation of “locas” or crazy women--crazy from the point of view of society’s prescribed roles, due to their refusal to follow them:

En esta sección [de Lagar], ellas, las mujeres, se caracterizan por romper con las reglas y normas impuestas por la sociedad, lo que las lleva a ser catalogadas de “locas” en la medida que no cumplen con lo estructurado. La palabra que las designa, que las nombra, que las define frente al mundo y su logos, es “loca.” Palabra que no hace sino insertarlas dentro del paréntesis, dentro de la clausura de lo que hace al ser “normal” de un entendimiento masculino, acostumbrado a descifrar bajo la inteligibilidad de su propio logos, y que es ahora aplicado no sólo a todas aquellas que subvierten el orden creado en la ciudad y que intentan ver desde sus propias perspectivas, sino, por el contrario, es aplicado a todo “otro” con el que no se comparte una idea del mundo. (60)

Figueroa’s statement that the women characters in Mistral’s Lagar who break with the past, are classified as madwomen, is based on the observation that in a patriarchal society anyone that does not agree with masculine thinking is perceived as “another.” Using this same type of reasoning, I argue that when Mistral wrote her textbook, she placed herself in the position of “la otra.” Jiménez points out that according to Mistral, women need to read more than men and have their reading guided in order to avoid falling prey to male prejudice against women’s intellectual capacity. This same critic quotes Mistral in an interview in Brazil, in which the poet explains further her reasons for her interest in promoting women’s reading:

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La lectura en la mujer tenía que ser aún más intensa y organizada, ya que ella [Mistral] no pudo librarse por completo de los prejuicios de su generación sobre la capacidad intelectual femenina: “Hay que decir que en nosotras, mujeres, el criterio artístico y la sazón de la cultura llegan tarde . . . Por lo mismo necesitamos leer más y leer guiado.” (Jiménez 31)

Jiménez emphasizes the difficulties regarding women and their participation in the intellectual field, due to existing sexist biases. She explains that due to the need to combat this sexism, women must read and be prepared. The Chilean writer understood that only through intense reading and guided learning could women work towards overcoming the past. Lecturas para mujeres is her attempt to provide a tool for the young girls of Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” to embark on the same path, or a similar one, to the one she had followed.

4.2.3. Mistral’s Selections for Lecturas para mujeres

Amidst the many readings in Lecturas para mujeres, Mistral includes selections from two male authors from Chile and fifteen from Mexico, as well as one Chilean and three Mexican women, which I mention specifically because of my focus on the association between Gabriela Mistral and Mexico. As my Appendix A shows, there are also a large number of authors from other countries in Spanish-America and multiple writers from other areas of the Western Hemisphere, to make a total of sixty-eight males and five females, plus one more male from India. The majority of the writers are Mistral’s contemporaries, although a few come from earlier modern times, and two from the pre-Christian era.

This upcoming section examines a selection of works, some authored by Mistral and several by other writers, to provide the background for Mistral’s ideas on women’s roles in
society. My reading of these texts affords a vehicle for understanding what the Chilean writer may have wished the students in the Escuela Industrial to learn in reference to the functions of women in society.

Do Mistral’s writings and those from other male and female writers that she chose to include in her anthology provide a foundation for an education for women? It is my contention that they do. The soundness of Mistral’s stratagem of educating women through literature as well as her inclusion of readings written by both male and female authors can be better appreciated through the findings offered in a study entitled Out of This World: Why Literature Matters to Girls. The critic, Holly Virginia Blackford, conducted a series of experiential tests among girls between the ages of eight and sixteen, from a variety of backgrounds, with respect to their relationship to reading (specifically fiction). In her study she discovered that girls do not draw meaning from a reading depending on the author’s gender, instead, they place themselves in the position of an impersonal reader that identifies with an omniscient genderless narrator:

They [the girls] deny identification with character [or author], male or female, and instead, embrace a formal self-construction through taking on the role of impersonal reader, identifying with an omniscient narrator, and emphasizing the mental activities of “seeing” and “imagining” a storytelling world, which includes seeing the shifting points of view of characters and narrator within a text. (19)

According to this study, the gender of the author, and/ or characters, does not define the impact of a reading, the work itself does. Girls read the piece of literature, glean their experience from it, and then set it aside having learned from the underlying story, disregarding the specific gender of the author. Blackford elaborates this finding further when she states that the girls are able to engage in the story without having to assume the role of a character:
The girls emphasize that literature gives them a way of seeing and imagining, thus standing for the materialization of vision. The key terms of seeing and imagining proliferate through the girls’ description of literary experience, and they often combine these two terms to define the process of reading. . . . They contrast these actions of seeing and imagining with the concept of being a person or character, embodying a human person or role in the story. . . . (24)

Blackford’s conclusions, with respect to how girls read, are a pragmatic verification that Mistral’s use of literary readings from both male and female authors provided a legitimate educational tool for her to broaden the students’ education.

4.2.4. **A Study of Some Representative Readings from Lecturas para mujeres**

*Lecturas para mujeres*, through its topical organization, provides a guide to the framework Mistral used to arrange the readings (see Appendix B). Each presents a lesson, through an exemplary scenario or story, considered by Mistral essential to the development of a well-rounded woman. As Paula Miranda states: “cuando Gabriela describe la índole de los textos que seleccionó . . . parece resumir su propio quehacer: ‘he buscado, primero, intención moral y a veces social; segundo, belleza; tercero, amenidad’” (“La prosa de Gabriela Mistral”). Through this strategy of teaching and entertaining, the Chilean educator proposes to provide women with the tools to accept a greater role in society. These selections open a space for learning through engaging topics that they will also enjoy. My first sample underlines the importance and value of poetry to society, as reflected in the Cuban poet José Martí’s (1853-1895) essay “Valor de la poesía.” In the second one, Gabriela Mistral’s own “Silueta de la india mexicana,” the poet speaks specifically on the subject of the image and

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26 José Martí, the father of Cuban Independence, was a late nineteenth-century modernist poet, essayist, and novelist.
the social situation of the indigenous woman in Mexico. In the third example, the Hindu Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), addresses the maternal role in the cycle of life in his prose piece entitled “Maternidad.” 27 The challenges that poor uneducated women encounter, in their position as mothers, is the subject of the fourth sample, “Las dolorosas,” by the Italian writer Ada Negri’s (1870-1945).28 The Mexican, María Enriqueta (1872-1968), in “Soledad,” my fifth example, focuses on a single woman and how she deals with her difficult status in life. 29 The Biblical Solomon (970-928 B.C.) offers, in the sixth sample, the model for the ideal strong married woman, “La mujer fuerte.” My seventh example, “Una mujer del pueblo,” by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), draws attention to a poor working woman and how she is to handle herself in that circumstance, in conjunction with her maternal role.30 Finally, my eighth example, “Himno al árbol,” is a poem by Gabriela Mistral, in which the poet compares the strength of a tree to that of a woman.

27 Rabindranath Tagore was a writer of noble birth and lineage who defended India and its rights to be independent and preserve its culture. This 1913 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature was a prolific poet and composer who among many other works wrote Jana Gana Mana, the Indian national anthem. He was a universalist in that he traveled extensively, fought for the rights of all, and in particular, for the underprivileged and the less fortunate. This author sought to create materials that would be edifying and enriching. He strove to engender an appreciation for the beauty of nature, according to this on-line biography (“Rabindranath Tagore”).

28 Ada Negri was a poet born to an artisan family. She became a schoolteacher who first taught in a village school and later at the Milanese Normal School. Her first book of poetry Tempeste (1891), speaks to the neglect of the helpless poor. Her writings bear a touch of loveliness about the sad state of the deprived, as explained in this on-line biography (“Ada Negri (1870-1945)”).

29 María Enriqueta’s full name was María Enriqueta Camarillo y Roa de Pereyra. At the inception of her writing career, she also used the pseudonym Iván Moszkowski. She was a prolific modernista short story writer and novelist, and a romantic poet, who became known as a national treasure. This on-line source indicates that during her literary career, she collaborated in the highly influential Mexican modernista journal Azul (Hernández Palacios).

30 Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, according to an on-line source, is characterized as . . . a profound and prolific writer in the Danish “golden age” of intellectual and artistic activity. His work crosses the boundaries of philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature and fiction. . . . Kierkegaard brought this potent mixture of discourses to bear as social critique and for the purpose of renewing Christian faith within Christendom. He is known as the ‘father of existentialism. . . . (McDonald)
The first sample appears in the section “Motivos espirituales,” in the subsection “Literatura y artes,” in which the essay by José Martí titled “Valor de la poesía,” presents the Cuban poet’s ideas on the function poetry plays in society:

¿Quién es el ignorante que sostiene que la poesía no es necesaria a los pueblos? Hay gente de tan corta vista mental que cree que toda la fruta se acaba en la cáscara.

La poesía que congrega o disgrega, que fortifica o angustia, que apuntala o derriba las almas, que da o quita a los hombres la fe y el aliento, es más necesaria a los pueblos que la industria misma, pues ésta les proporciona el modo de subsistir mientras que aquéllas las da el deseo y la fuerza de la vida. (142)

Martí reflects on the fact that there are those who do not grasp the significance of the impact that poetry has on people’s lives. For him, poetry is the medium through which dialogue and thought are provoked. Poetry adds vibrancy to life, thus providing a greater spiritual significance that is more important for surviving in society than what industry provides.

Martí affirms that people who cease to appreciate the beauty that can be found in poetry, and insist on concentrating on the material aspects of life, are failing to comprehend the deepest needs of the soul:

¿A dónde irá un pueblo de los hombres que haya perdido el hábito de pensar con fe en la significación y el alcance de sus actos? Los mejores, que unge la Naturaleza con el sacro deseo de lo futuro, perderán en un aniquilamiento doloroso y sordo todo estímulo para sobrellevar las fealdades humanas, y la masa, lo vulgar, la gente de apetitos, los comunes, procrearán sin santidad hijos vacíos, elevarán a facultades esenciales lo que debe servirles de meros instrumentos y aturdirán con el bullicio de una prosperidad siempre incompleta la aflicción irremediable del alma, que sólo se complace en lo bello y grandioso. (142)

For Martí, those who do not appreciate poetry live an empty life making material prosperity, instead of beauty, their final aim. By choosing this selection, Mistral seems to indicate that for her, poetry, in addition to its own aesthetic value, is a vehicle that is useful for educating,
imparting a lesson that would teach women and mankind in general to value beauty and spirituality in life.

The section of Lecturas entitled “México y la América española” contains a narrative written by Gabriela Mistral. In her “Silueta de la India mexicana,” the Chilean celebrates the graceful image of a native Mexican woman, thus providing an indigenous picture of womanhood in which many of the Mexican girls can see their reflection:

La India mexicana tiene una silueta llena de gracia. Muchas veces es bella, pero de otra belleza que aquella que se ha hecho costumbre en nuestros ojos. Su carne, sin el sonrosado de las conchas, tiene la quemadura de la espiga bien lamida de sol. El ojo es de una dulzura ardiente; la mejilla de fino dibujo; la frente, mediana como ha de ser la frente femenina; los labios, ni inexpressivamente delgados ni espesos; el acento, dulce y con dejo de pesadumbre, como si tuviese siempre una gota ancha de llanto en la hondura en la garganta. Rara vez es gruesa la india; delgada y ágil, va con el cántaro a la cabeza o contra el costado, o con el niño pequeño como el cántaro, a la espalda. Como en su compañero, hay en el cuerpo de ella lo acendrado del órgano en una loma. . . . (61)

The image of the Mexican indigenous woman profiled by Mistral is full of grace, beautiful, a spirit of burning sweetness, with feminine features that grace her being. The beauty that Mistral represents is quite the opposite from what has been portrayed in most canonical texts dealing with indigenous figures, in which she most frequently is depicted as a beast of burden, abused, having to take care of her children, and busy with the menial labors of her home and her work in the fields. Mistral’s depiction reminds the reader of the “maestra rural,” who was idealizad, but also portrayed as suffering in silence, “y con dejo de pesadumbre, como si tuviese siempre una gota ancha de llanto en la hondura en la garganta.”

This piece continues with an elaboration of the Indian woman in her role as mother:

Con él [el rebozo], la india ata sin dolor, lleva blandamente su hijo a la espalda. Es la mujer antigua, no emancipada del hijo. Su rebozo lo envuelve, como lo envolvió, dentro de su vientre, un tejido delgado y fuerte, hecho con su sangre. Lo lleva al mercado del domingo. Mientras ella vocea, el niño juega
con los frutos o las baratijas brillantes. Hace con él a cuestas, las jornadas más largas: quiere llevar siempre su carga dichosa. Ella no ha aprendido a liberarse todavía . . .

Y esa mujer que no han alabado los poetas, con su silueta asiática, ha de ser semejante a la Ruth moabita, que tan bien labraba y que tenía atezado el rostro de las mil siestas sobre la parva. . . . (61-62)

The indigenous woman-mother described by Mistral, continues to maintain the ancient customs of having her child by her side, taking her baby wherever she goes, making her day longer and more laborious. This lack of progress in the woman’s situation makes Gabriela Mistral expresses her regret, “ella no ha aprendido a liberarse todavía . . .” The writer knows that this woman’s life must change as modernity sets in, but in the meantime, she celebrates her sense of dignity. She is an unsung hero, whose situation needs to be changed; Mistral also pays homage to her beauty and strength, qualities that she compares to those of the Biblical Ruth.

Rabindranath Tagore is another author included in Lecturas para mujeres, this time in the section “Maternidad.” His prose piece is entitled “El principio” and it deals with the various steps in the progression of maternity:

‘--¿De dónde venía yo cuando tú me encontraste?,’ --preguntó el niño a su madre. Ella, llorando y riendo, le respondió, apretándole contra su pecho:

‘--Estabas escondido en mi corazón, como un anhelo, amor mío: estabas en las muñecas de los juegos de mi infancia; y cuando, cada mañana, formaba yo la imagen de mi Dios con barro, a ti te hacía y te deshacía; estabas en el altar, con el Dios del hogar nuestro, y al adorarlo a Él, te adoraba a ti: estabas en todas las esperanzas y en todos mis cariños.

‘Has vivido en mi vida y en la vida de mi madre. Tú fuiste creado, siglo tras siglo, en el seno del espíritu inmortal que rige nuestra casa. Cuando mi corazón adolescente abría sus hojas, flotabas tú, igual que una fragancia, a tu alrededor; tu tierna suavidad florecía luego en mi cuerpo joven como antes de salir el sol la luz en el Oriente.

‘Primer amor del cielo, hermano de la luz del alba, bajaste al mundo en el río de la vida, y al fin te paras en mi corazón . . . (34-35)
“El principio” addresses, by means of a question from a child to the mother, the subject of
the cycle of life. This selection suggests that the continuation of life across the generations is
a gift from God. Maternity is depicted as an innate part of womanhood, transmitted from
childhood and persisting into marriage and beyond. The maternal figure borrowed from
Tagore that Mistral chose to offer as a model portrays a sense of love, which she attributes to
the fact that God always has been part of her home and her very existence; guiding her life.
The narrator quotes the mother’s words to her child:

‘¡Que misterioso temor me sobrecoge al mirarte a ti, hijo, que siendo
de todos te has hecho mío, y que miedo de perderte! ¡Así, bien apretado contra
mi pecho! ¡Ay! ¿Qué poder mágico ha enredado el tesoro del mundo a estos
mis débiles brazos?’ (34-35)

The speaker conveys a sense of awe; yet fear, in realizing the value and the responsibility of
receiving the gift of a child. She feels unworthy of what has been given to her. She knows
she is holding a treasure in her arms, and afraid of losing it, she wonders what magical power
has placed this miracle of life in her arms. Tagore depicts motherhood as divinely appointed,
and Mistral’s choice of this piece, points out the central roles that she assigns to both God
and maternity in the construction of an orderly society.

The Italian writer Ada Negri is another author chosen by Mistral to teach the students
another lesson. In this case, it is about the unneeded suffering of women and children, and
thus the need for change in society. Negri is represented by her piece “Las dolorosas,” in
which the reader is given a glimpse of a most painful side of life. In this text, suffering
depletes the energies of a mother whose child has been affected by the poisoned environment
in which they live. The author begins her message of condemnation to society through the
imagery of tears and turbulent waters:
Llega a mí un ulular de llantos que suenan como muchas aguas hirvientes. . .

Parece que viene de muy lejos, con blanco espumajear de océano, o que, surgiendo del inmenso corazón de la tierra, llena el mundo y el aire en torno de mi estancia solitaria, y entra con el viento penetrándome de espanto en la oscuridad. (39-40)

The outcry that is heard in the distance appears to rise from the ground. It is of such magnitude that it breaks through the quietude and darkness that surround the narrator; encompassing the whole earth:

Dicen las voces que oí en la tormenta y que quedaron para la eternidad en mi alma estremecida:

‘Concebimos sin gozo al hijo que en nuestro ensueño esplendía como un lirio. Lo llevamos en el seno con hambre, con miedo y con cansancio, y, bajo las techumbres sin luz, por los arrozales envenenados, en los campos por donde pesa la diosa terrible, la podagra de ojos de loca, en los lugares de miseria y servidumbre, pedimos al Señor valor y fuerza rogándole, cuando la virtud decae: ¡Recoge al hijo, Señor, mejor que no viva! . . .’ (40)

They are the voices of clamoring mothers and are so powerful that they are etched forever in the soul of the listener. The wailing comes from those women who have conceived amidst all types of difficulty, poverty, and adverse conditions, including servitude in the fields, and laboring in venomous surroundings. The voices ask God for strength in their terrible plight; they even ask Him to take their children away as they would be better off dead:

‘Procrean nuestras entrañas enfermas tristes criaturas nacidas para llorar, que tendrán nuestra sangre gastada y llevarán el peso de nuestras cadenas . . .’

‘Anhelamos estar con ellos en el día; pero las horas son breves y el trabajo es largo, y nos clavan las duras garras de la necesidad, mientras en las calles nuestro hijo se corrompe . . . Cántalo tú. ¡Que el mundo se apiade de este suplicio de la maternidad!’ (40)

Because of the mothers’ poverty, they must work long and hard at menial jobs while their children are sick and in need of untold attention. The offspring carry the ills of their mothers, who are unable to take care of their illnesses, neither can they educate and guide. God is the
only one who can help under these circumstances; and there is not much even He can do in the miserably circumstances depicted by Negri.

Mistral chose to address this message on the problems of poverty faced by mothers, to the young girls of Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral,” to point out that women and children find themselves in difficult circumstances all over the world. It is important to note that for Mistral; although, faith in God is a positive message, it is obvious that this is not enough, and that women should be adequately prepared in order to support themselves and their children, thus avoiding the problems that arise from a lack of an education.

The work of the Mexican poet, María Enriqueta also appears in this same section of “La casa y la familia.” Her poem, “Soledad” is a five-verse stanza aabba consonantal rhyme, eighteen-stanza poem, written in the first person. The poetic voice first celebrates her own activities in the home, such as setting the table, preparing the meal, or knitting, assigning to these domestic actions a place of honor and giving them a poetic quality:

Mientras cuido la marmita
y el gato blanco dormita,
la lluvia afuera gotea,
y el viento en la chimenea
se revuelve airado y grita. . .

Sobre los rojos tizones
hierbe el agua a borbotones,
y si se mueve la tapa
de la marmita, se escapa
suave olor de requesones. . . (13)

This verbal picture of a woman cooking and a sleeping cat, with the drizzle and raging wind outside, leaves the impression of a peaceful setting provided by a mother’s activities within the home. The speaker also describes a meditative scene:

Miro en los brillantes leños
cómo se forman los sueños:
The burning logs in the fireplace and the brilliant light that they emit depict an image that suggests love when it is first “lighted.” With time, however, that first passion dims becoming ashes. The poetic voice emphasizes this image by associating it to that of the plant that flowers, but when the “cold” comes it withers and dies. Love starts as a dream, with all the expectations of a “warm” and positive experience, but when the relationship does not continue to develop love dies and the lovers grow apart. The following two stanzas express the cat’s response to the new loveless situation:

Despierta el gato y suspira,
abajo del fogón, se estira,
el lomo alarga y arquea,
viene hacia mí, ronronea,
y luego mis ojos mira.

¿Su mirada indiferente
pregunta por el ausente?
No sé; más va a la ventana
y ve la extensión lejana
tristemente, tristemente.

The cat’s actions reflect the inner feelings of the protagonist in that when it awakens from its sleep remembers that someone is missing, looks at the eyes of the woman and then looks forlornly out of the window into the distance. The cat seems to search for the missing person. Through eye contact and the animal’s behavior, there is an implied message of loneliness and sadness in this picture. The poem continues by characterizing the speaker’s parallel reaction:
Y yo también el camino
con ansiedad examino. . .
Nadie viene, nadie viene. . .
El viento moviendo está
las ramas de aquel sabino. . .

Tras ver el confín lejano,
tomo la aguja en la mano,
y una tras otra puntada
queda la tela cerrada. . .
Después, el lino devano.

Y, al terminar la faena,
abro la vieja alacena,
y en ella guardo el cestillo
con la aguja y el ovillo.
Después preparo la cena. (13-14)

The woman reacts in a similar manner as the cat, peering down the long desolate road; and
then concluding that the person sought after is not returning. The knitting and the sewing that
were in progress are then resumed and completed, suggesting that a project that is begun
must be finalized. When the sewing projects are completed, supper is prepared, giving the
sense of continuing on and keeping order, whether anyone else is present or not. The “verbal
picture” next presents a darkening scene in which both the prior dynamic activities and the
positive outlook seem to be fading:

Ya la bruma se ennegrece . . .
Flotante crespon parece
que se enreda en el sabino. . .
Ya el solitario camino
Se borra y desaparece. . .

La luz, confusa e incierta
cual una esperanza muerta,
se refugia en lontananza. . .
“¡Adiós, adiós, esperanza!”,
le digo, y cierro mi puerta. (14)
As dusk falls, the path becomes darkened and disappears in the shadows, vanishing all hope for the return of the absent, literally and metaphorically the “door” is shut, “Adiós . . . / le digo, y cierro mi puerta.” The once clear light that illuminated the way has become nebulous, which the poet compares to the death of hope, “¡Adiós, adiós, esperanza!” The poetic voice then changes the scene to the activities in the home:

También el gato tiritita
y ansioso ve la marmita
que borbota y cuchichea,
y en mirándola que humea
se pone grave y medita. . .

Tiempo es de saborear
el cotidiano manjar
que aderezo en los tizones
con harina, requesones
y miel de mi colmenar.

A tender la mesa voy.
“ . . .¡Qué, sola, qué sola estoy!”
Fue nada más para mí
la mesa que ayer tendí:
¿mañana será cual hoy. . .? (14)

The cat and the woman next turn their attention to enjoying the supper that has been cooking, “Tiempo es de saborear / el cotidiano manjar / que aderezo en los tizones,” resuming the activities in the house. The fare is described with a sense of beauty, suggesting that what has been prepared should be enjoyed. The poetic voice describes the setting of the table for one lonely person, suggesting a solitude that began sometime before this verbal picture and will continue for an indefinite period. But, life must go on, and courage and hope are never lost. Then, abruptly, the scene changes once again, focusing on the front door:

. . . Mas alguien llama al postigo. . .
-- “¡Voy al punto, al punto!” --digo,
y me lanzo en un momento
a abrir la puerta . . . Es el viento,
¡el viento!, mi único amigo. . .

Y viendo una luz incierta
que en la llanura desierta
alguien lleva en lontananza,
“¡Adiós, adiós, esperanza!”
le digo. . ., y cierro mi puerta (14).

Briefly, hope is renewed when there is a “knock” at the door, but it is only the wind, the woman’s only friend. When hope is dashed once again, it is bid farewell and once again, the door is closed.

Mistral seems to be saying in this selection that in living, women, like all human beings, hope they will not be alone, but life does not always evolve as one would hope. People however must continue to live and hope, thus, the woman in the poem goes on with the accustomed routine and responsibilities, regardless of whether there is anyone with whom to share them. Loneliness and being alone do not imply either inactivity or the lack of creativity for Gabriela Mistral. Men and women both have their role in a home; when there is no man, however, the woman is to continue with life effectively; she always has to persist. The reading’s message is clear, living does not cease when a woman is widowed, abandoned or divorced. Faith lives on, in spite of what life might present in one’s path.

“The strong woman,” from the Hebrew king Solomon, was also chosen by Mistral to become part of her book. This character appears in the section “La casa y la familia” under the subsection “Retratos de mujeres.” “La mujer fuerte” provides the Chilean poet the profile for presenting to the students an ideal or model married woman:

Mujer fuerte ¿quién la hallará? Su estima sobrepuja largamente a la de las piedras preciosas.
El corazón de su marido está en ella confiado y no sufrirá despojo.
Darále ella bien y no mal todos los días de su vida.
Buscó lana y lino y con voluntad labró de sus manos.
Fue como navío de mercader: trajo su pan desde lejos.
Levantóse aún de noche y dio comida a su familia y ración a sus criados.
Consideró la heredad, y la compró, y plantó viñas con el fruto de sus manos. (19)

This prose piece presents the image of a married woman who is respected by all, and trusted by her husband. She efficiently handles the affairs of her home, but also has enough knowledge in business matters to allow her to manage the family’s affairs appropriately. She goes into the marketplace making wise purchases for her family’s needs; buying goods for the home, or even property. The portrait continues with an elaboration of the strong woman’s character:

Abrió su boca con sabiduría y la ley de la clemencia está en su lengua. Considera los caminos de su casa. No come el pan de balde. Levantáronse sus hijos y llamáronla bienaventurada, y su marido también la alabó. Muchas mujeres hicieron el bien; pero tú las sobrepujaste a todas. Engañosa es la gracia y vana la hermosura; la mujer que teme Jehová, ésa será alabada. Dadle el fruto de sus manos y alábenla en las puertas sus hechos. (19)

When this virtuous woman speaks, wisdom comes from her lips and mercy directs her words. She fears God and has a demeanor that far surpasses the superficial beauty appreciated in the everyday world, and which induces her children to call her blessed and her husband to praise her. In this reading, the students can notice that women can play a meaningful and significant role in the affairs of the community. The male members of the family represented in the text respect the women in their lives, praise them, and allow them the freedom to make decisions at home and of an economic and public nature.

Soren Kierkegaard’s “Una mujer del pueblo,” also within the section “La casa y la familia,” and the subdivision “Retratos de mujeres” depicts a poor woman at work and how she approaches her status as such:
Con frecuencia solía observar una pobre mujer que tenía un pequeño comercio, no en un quiosco, sino en plena vía pública. Estaba allí bajo la lluvia, el viento, la nieve, con un niño de pecho entre sus brazos. Su vestimenta, lo propio que los pañitos de su vástago, estaban cuidadosamente limpios. (40)

This woman was a small-business owner whose locale was situated in the street of an urban well-to-do district. She is depicted as a very responsible individual who takes good care of both her child and herself. However, certain individuals from a higher social class come to her business and challenge her role:

Cierta vez, una dama distinguida pasó delante de ella y la reprochó porque no había dejado en su casa al pequeñuelo, tanto más cuanto que éste la dificultaba en su comercio.

En otra ocasión pasaba por la misma calle un pastor protestante. Acercóse a ella y pretendió llevar al niño a un asilo. ¡La pobre madre, con buenas maneras, agradeció la intención. (40)

The female passer-by and the protestant minister both question her ability to fulfill her dual obligations of maintaining her shop and caring for her child, the former encouraging her to abandon her boy at home, and the latter insinuating that in order to tend to her work she should place him in an orphanage. Her polite answer and her reaction, demonstrate dignity and poise:

Mas “hubierais visto con qué mirada contempló a su infante! ¡Si hubiera estado helado, aquella mirada lo habría recalentado! ¡Si hubiera estado agonizante de hambre y de sed, aquella mirada lo habría restaurado! ¡Si hubiera estado muerto, aquella mirada lo habría resucitado!"

Pero el niño dormía, y ni siquiera una sonrisa de sus labios podía recompensar a la madre.

Esa mujer era madre. Sabía que un hijo es una bendición. Si yo fuera pintor, la pintaría en aquella actitud. (40-41)

Kierkegaard indicates that this woman very competently cares for her offspring by holding a job and shows that she understands the love that her child needs by keeping him by her side. This mother never loses her composure under the pressure of the inquiries of the two
meddlers, interestingly enough one female and one male--and a minister, a representative of
religion that shows no Christian feelings. She appears to be able to balance both the stress
that comes from the public, and her responsibility to motherhood, as she is successfully
taking care of her offspring and involved in the world of commerce. Grínor Rojo, in his
article, “Gabriela Mistral en la historia de la mujer latinoamericana,” speaks to the issue of
the tension that had developed, at the time of the writing of Lecturas para mujeres, between
the feminist movement of liberation of women’s roles and the traditional position of the
woman in the home:

    Ella [Gabriela Mistral] hace gala como por sus arduos esfuerzos para
    legitimar una zona de equilibrio entre ‘la mujer antigua’ y la ‘mujer nueva,’ en
    la que se le daría un lugar a la segunda pero sin abolir los supuestos
    privilegios que la tradición le reservara a la primera. (61)

Rojo makes it clear that for Mistral these two positions are not mutually exclusive in that
there is a place for a balance between the two. Kierkegaard’s story teaches the young girls
the importance of women’s work, even of starting their own business, but also the
importance of their responsibility as mothers.

    In another of Gabriela Mistral’s pieces, the “Himno al árbol,” in the section
    “Naturaleza;” subsection “La vegetación,” she associates the qualities of a tree to female
    human characteristics:

    Arbol hermano, que clavado
    por garfios pardos en el suelo,
    la clara frente has elevado
    en una intensa sed de cielo,

    hazme piadosa hacia la escoria
    de cuyos limos me mantengo,
    sin que se duerma la memoria
    del país azul de donde vengo. (224)
The tree is well anchored, and stands tall, reaching for the sky. These same characteristics find an affinity in the human race, through the voice of the speaker, who introduces the first stanza with the words, “Arbol hermano.” The poetic voice pleads with the tree that it might grant her the ability to be pious and forgiving of past conditions, without forgetting their heritage. The author describes the tree further, when ascribing it a sense of compassion:

Arbol que anuncias al viandante
la suavidad de tu presencia
con tu amplia sombra refrescante
y con el nimbo de tu esencia:

haz que revele mi presencia,
en las praderas de la vida
mi suave y cálida influencia
sobre las almas ejercidas. (224)

This tree gives unselfishly and universally, “Arbol que anuncias al viandante / la suavidad de tu presencia / con tu amplia sombra refrescante.” The tree’s presence is felt as a refreshing relief and a soft cooling shade, and the speaker asks the “árbol” to endow her with those same qualities. She seeks to have a similar quiet influence upon others with whom she comes in contact, “haz que revele mi presencia, / en las praderas de la vida / mi suave y cálida influencia / sobre las almas ejercidas.” Then, the tree is depicted, as useful:

Arbol diez veces productor:
el de la pompa sonrosada,
el del madero constructor,
el de la madera perfumada,
el del follaje amparador;

el de las gomas suavizantes
y las resinas milagrosas,
pleno de brazos agobiantes
y de gargantas melodiosas:

hazme en el dar un opulento.
¡Para igualarte en lo fecundo,
el corazón y el pensamiento
The tree is represented as a multi-faceted provider. The speaker wishes to be one also, both in feelings and ideas, and to be just as generous, to such an extent that her heart and her thoughts may become as vast as the world. The tree is then compared to a woman:

¡Arbol que no eres otra cosa!
quedulce entraña de mujer,
pues cada rama mece airosa
en cada leve nido un ser:
dame un follaje vasto y denso,
tanto como han de precisar
los que en el bosque humano --inmenso--
rama no hallaron para el hogar! (224)

In this section of the poem, the tree and the woman are analogous, “Arbol que no eras otra cosa / que dulce entraña de mujer, . . .” Just as the tree has life-giving qualities that come from within, the woman too is to have an impact, by her giving of life, and the sheltering that she provides. The tree is then described as resolute; whereupon, the speaker desires to acquire that same quality of steadfastness:

¡Arbol que dondequiera aliente
tu cuerpo lleno de vigor,
asumes invariablemente
el mismo gesto amparador:

haz que a través de todo estado
--niñez, vejez, placer, dolor--
asuma mi alma un invariado
y universal gesto de amor! (224)

The poetic voice calls upon the tree, asking that she too be able to accomplish her mission of sheltering, protecting, and demonstrating universal love to all who come around her with as much assuredness as it is done by this “árbol.” This mission of love should be exercised throughout one’s lifetime. For Mistral, the poetic persona, and by extension all women
reading and learning from her textbook have a noteworthy role in life; they should receive their inspiration from the tree that gives unselfishly to others. A woman is to stand tall in her dignity, and reach down to the earth to exercise a calming influence, while giving of herself to those who need her.

This selection, as well as the previous ones, underline that Mistral used poetry, short stories and essays to provide examples that stress the value of women’s roles and character, by pointing out the positive impact that a woman can have on her family and her community when she has self-confidence. Self-confidence, however, can only be provided through education.

4.3. In Summary

After reviewing the readings I have selected from Lecturas para mujeres, my question, on whether Gabriela Mistral challenged the roles established for Mexican women, may be answered. The answer is negative, Mistral did not essentially challenge the traditional gender roles; however, she did redefine those roles by restoring to women the dignity that a machista patriarchal attitude had denied them. She also disputes the types of literary readings that were to be made available to women. Her aim was to teach them to think for themselves and to be self-sufficient. Montes de Oca Nava states it this way:

Más que lecturas para reflexionar sobre temas diversos, sobre los cuales sólo lo han hecho los varones, la literatura de y para las mujeres debía estar dirigida al fomento y cauce de una voluntad de reivindicación y decisión a dejar de ocupar el puesto que “el otro” le asigna, y que a veces le hacen “la gracia” de dejarlo ocupar, pero que no se le reconoce como derecho legítimamente logrado. (318)
She implicitly called into question the idea of a body of readings for women written by males with the intention of keeping them in their assigned roles in society. That is to say, she did not object to the writings of men in general, as her many selections show, she objected only when those writings had the deliberate aim of keeping women subservient to men. In this manner, she opened a path of discussion concerning women’s literature. For Gabriela Mistral, women need to read a type of writing that leads them toward developing their own will and a sense of decisiveness; in order to, vindicate the role that is rightfully theirs, not settle for what is given to them.

Montes de Oca Nava draws some conclusions from the introduction to *Lecturas para mujeres* concerning Mistral’s intentions in writing this text. He asserts that the Chilean writer stated that women do have the ability to analyze mankind’s very deep issues:

La mujer, afirmó Gabriela Mistral, tiene capacidad para analizar los grandes y profundos temas humanos, no sólo para solazarse con la literatura “galante” y superficial, o para memorizar y cantar canciones de cuna. Podía y puede adentrarse a través de la lectura, en temas tales como el trabajo, la naturaleza, la justicia social. (310)

As Montes de Oca underlines, Gabriela Mistral contends that through literature women can delve into such serious subjects as nature, social justice, and work. They do not have to be limited to superficial topics, rote memorization, or cradlesongs. The women the Chilean educator chose to protagonize in her textbook’s readings were strong women who provided alternative models from which the girls of the Colegio Industrial could learn; in order that they might be part of the creation of a new, modern and more just Mexican society.
CHAPTER V

AN OVERVIEW OF GABRIELA MISTRAL’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN’S EDUCATION IN MEXICO

5.1. Mexico’s Role in Fulfilling Mistral’s Program

Mexico offered Gabriela Mistral the opportunity she needed in order to expand her sphere of influence throughout Latin America. A Chilean educator and writer, Reinaldo Villegas Astudillo, in his online article, explains the crucial role played by Mexico in allowing the poet to begin to implement her educational ideas:

México es la única nación del continente que le ofrece a la educadora chilena la posibilidad de plasmar ideas y proyectos, que mínimamente realizó en Chile en una época de ausencias y abandonos. . . . (“Revolución educativa mexicana”)

The ideas and plans that Gabriela Mistral had developed through years of teaching in her native homeland became building blocks for some of the educational changes that were being sought by the northernmost country of Spanish-speaking America:

Al arribar al país azteca, Gabriela se encuentra con un pueblo y el gobierno del presidente Álvaro Obregón, alborozados, por cuanto se hayan [sic] lanzados en una tarea revolucionaria, centrada especialmente en el sector agrario en esa época cuando América, al sur del Río Grande está todavía sumida en una larga siesta semicolonial, con un elevadísimo porcentaje de analfabetismo y la presencia de una oligarquía, que en la práctica sucedió omnimodamente a los colonizadores españoles, súbditos de un imperio real. (Villegas Astudillo)
Gabriela Mistral came to Mexico at the moment in which she was most needed; she became part of a country that was undergoing a social and educational revolution of unprecedented proportions. Mexico’s initiatives in the education of the agrarian sectors offered her unlimited opportunities to “evangelize” the country with her message on the importance of educating all citizens, but in particular women, not just in the urban areas, but also in the countryside, where illiteracy was widespread:

Será en México, donde Gabriela desarrolle en plenitud un pensamiento y quehacer educativos, que impulsó solitariamente, como una figura quijotesca, en las escuelas rurales donde se inició como maestra en Chile, y careció siempre del apoyo necesario para llevar a cabo proyectos, que iban mucho más allá de modalidades pedagógicas asfixiantes, imperantes en aquella época. La realidad que le ofrece México es extraordinaria sobre todo con, un jefe de estado, a quien la escritora lo califica como un ‘mestizo ilustrado,” nacido en Oaxaca, la misma tierra originaria de Benito Juárez. A esto se agrega, el contar con un ministro-filósofo, José Vasconcelos. . . .

(Villegas Astudillo “Revolución educativa mexicana”)

Villegas indicates that the poet became the Don Quixote of Mexico, who contributed to the conquering of the “giants” of illiteracy, ignorance, and a lack of educational vision for the people in the former Aztec nation. He also equates her work with that of three great Mexican leaders, intent on education: Benito Juárez, the nineteenth-century Minister of Justice (1855-1857), and president (1861-1864; 1867-1872), called the “Abraham Lincoln of the nation,” who had published the Ley Juárez (1855) to promote equal opportunity for all citizens. Later, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1857-1859), he included freedom of education in the Constitution of 1857. The second Mexican leader mentioned, Porfirio Díaz, the late nineteenth, early twenty-century dictator (1876-1880; 1881-1911) that ruled the country at the time the Mexican Revolution erupted, first thought of the concept that eventually led to the “Sistema de Educación Tecnológica (1921)” and the “bachillerato tecnológico.” The third figure was José Vasconcelos, the twentieth-century reformist Secretary of Education (1920-
1924) that brought Mistral to Mexico. All three were born in Oaxaca. Their educational programs came together under the leadership of the Sonora-born post-revolutionary president and education proponent from Oaxaca, Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924).

5.2. The Mexican Journey

As already stated, Gabriela Mistral arrived in the port of Veracruz, in July, 1922 (Schneider 153), to assist José Vasconcelos in his organization of Mexican rural schools. Her original plans were to stay in the country for three months, but she remained for two years, through April 1924. She left at that time because of political changes, and did not return until 1948 (Schneider 153). As Jaime Quezada explains in Bendita mi lengua sea, during the first two years, she resided in Mexico City in barrio San Angel, as well as in towns such as Mixcoac and Cuernavaca, and in various remote villages (87). She also traveled throughout much of the country meeting mostly with the common people, such as: “los pescadores en el lago de Chapala . . . los obreros de Puebla en la fábrica de cerámicas, y por todas partes con los campesinos” (92). According to Volodia Teitelboim, during these trips Mistral was involved in multiple activities relating to instruction and matters of literacy, for example, “fundar escuelas y bibliotecas” (146) in the states of Michoacán and Puebla. She was also, and as part of her Mexican mission, an “alentadora de escuelas rurales” (Teitelboim 147). Literacy for the indigenous populations was of particular interest to her, “quería enseñar a leer y escribir al indio” (Teitelboim 148). In 1923, she was invited to speak at the Congreso Mexicano del Niño (Teitelboim 148). Gladys Rodríquez Valdés, in her volume Invitación a Gabriela Mistral 1889-1989, published the speech she delivered on this occasion. Titled, “A
la mujer mexicana,” this conference is Mistral’s exhortation to Mexican women to demand clean and sunny schools, educational theatre and books, and the opportunity to collaborate in the formulation of legislation pertinent to their offspring, as well as better workplace conditions for themselves and for their children (220). Quezada quotes from information penned by Mistral concerning her hectic schedule while in Mexico, in _Bendita mi lengua sea:_ “Hace meses que vivo en un ajetreo del que no puedo dar idea. Cada día es una visita a una escuela o a un pueblecito. Y todo esto significa una clase, muchos discursos, y un oír cosas que me dan vergüenza, vergüenza verdadera” (88). In 1924, at the time of the inauguration of the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral,” she was still residing in Mexico (Schneider 154). That the school was named in her honor suggests that the specifics concerning the philosophy and/or the subjects taught at this institution may provide a clearer understanding of what Mexico was attempting to accomplish through an educational initiative of which Mistral had been part. The particulars of this institution are in a school bulletin published by the Office of the Secretary of Education in 1926. The items delineated in this publication are the following: 1) origins and process through which the school came into being; 2) school calendar; 3) goals of the school; 4) courses of study; 5) class schedules; 6) registration and cost information; 7) grading system; and 8) parameters and function of final exams.

The programs and curricula that were implemented can clarify the question of the poet’s influence on Mexico’s educational system and determine whether the guidance that Gabriela Mistral had been providing through her writings and her meetings with local educational personnel were effective. Two main questions will be answered: 1) Are the ideas that she expressed concerning the eradication of illiteracy and the lack of educational vision reflected in the guidelines and programs established by the school? 2) Had it been practical
or possible to implement the educational ideas that she offered, into the educational system of Mexico? These questions will be answered through an analysis of two items: the hymn that she wrote for the school and the school bulletin published by the Mexican Department of Education. This examination is limited to two items because I believe that they express eloquently the essence of the goals that she and the school determined for the students.

5.3. The School Hymn

Ana María Cuneo, in her volume entitled Para leer a Gabriela Mistral, explains that to understand Mistral’s writings, one must read them as a metatexto: “es desde el metatexto que se puede comprender el ámbito de producción e interpretación de los textos” (90). In offering this perspective, this critic refers to the Chilean’s creations as the expression of the essence of the poet’s innermost thoughts concerning what is impacting her life in her historical context, and that must be shared, giving birth to a poem, “el poema es el resultado del hondo impacto que algo produjo en el alma del creador. Esta comunicación especial e ineludible posibilita la existencia de un objeto nuevo; el poema” (103). Cuneo further elucidates this point of view when she describes Mistral’s writing, as a type of testimony: “. . . los metatextos afloran como testimonio de lo que está ocurriendo en su interioridad” (101). In the instance of the hymn, Mistral’s attention is directed to the establishment of Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral,” and specifically to the feelings and educational concerns that she expresses in the words of the school song. The six quatrain hendecasyllabic poem, titled “Himno matinal de la ‘Escuela Gabriela Mistral,’ de México” was written in 1924, by Gabriela Mistral, to be sung each morning at the opening of the school day (Lecturas para mujeres 112). I have
selected this text for three main reasons: 1) the Mexican government’s request for Mistral to write the hymn can be understood as an implicit recognition of the poet’s success during her two previous years in Mexico; 2) the words poetically express the message she wished to communicate to the students; and 3) the hymn and its integration into the activities of the institution may be considered a means to highlight Mistral’s educational aims on an ongoing basis.

Given Mistral’s deep religiosity, it is not surprising that the first stanza opens with an allusion to God as a Creator who is shedding light on those who praise Him for keeping up their hopes:

Oh, Creador, bajo tu luz cantamos, porque otra vez nos vuelves la esperanza.
Como los surcos de la tierra alzamos la exhalación de nuestras alabanzas.

The image of the “surco,” noted previously in my analysis of “La maestra rural,” appears in the hymn once again. In this instance of the school song, the furrow provides a metaphor for the hope and joy being celebrated by those who sing. The image speaks of the ploughing and tilling of the soil; the planting follows, which will lead to the germination, culminating in a mature “plant.” In this case, the result is a joy that arises from a sense of hope, which, in the context of this poem could be attributed to the fact that the students are in school preparing for the future, and perceive that being in the classroom opens new educational opportunities.

The second stanza continues to give thanks to the Provider for the new opportunities brought by each new day. The daily activities are the basis of happiness, in that each daybreak brings vibrancy to life through the sense of energy that is formed in each grateful student’s soul:

Gracias a Ti por el glorioso día
en el que van a erigirse las acciones;  
por la alborada llena de alegría  
que baja al valle y a los corazones.

The “alborada llena de alegría” reaches down to the earth and its inhabitants when it “baja al valle y a los corazones.” The body is stimulated to action and joyful for the upcoming activities that will occupy their day.

In the third stanza, the poetic voice continues to speak of praising God through the actions of the hardworking hands and arms that undertake the chores to be accomplished eagerly and with joy:

Se alcen las manos, las que Tu tejiste,  
Frescas y vivas sobre las faenas.  
Se alcen los brazos que con luz heriste  
En un temblor dorado de colmenas.

This stanza continues to remind the young women students that they are a product of God’s creation and that their strength and future are a result of what He has done for them. With the daily inspiration that they receive from Him, they can work diligently, always rendering the highest quality effort while they prepare for the future.

This following stanza, the fourth, emphasizes to the young women that though they are currently carefree daughters they need to develop their character and ask God to prepare them honorably for the future, as they will soon be responsible wives:

Somos planteles de hijas, todavía;  
haznos el alma recta y poderosa  
para ser dignas en la hora y día  
en que seremos el plantel de esposas.

The speaker suggests that the practical instruction and moral strength these young women receive at the school is the means through which they will be trained for work and spiritually fortified for the upcoming challenges, all with the help of the Almighty.
In stanza five the students are “heard” calling upon God to contemplate the notable beauty with which they are metaphorically weaving the pure wool with the white linen:

Venos crear según tu semejanza,
con voluntad insigne de hermosura;
trenzar, trenzar, alegres de confianza
el lino blanco con la lana pura.

The suggestion is that all can be achieved, through consistent diligence and confidence, in similitude of the Creator, who makes beauty out of the simplest objects.

In the sixth stanza, the young women continue to speak to God and to consider Him the source of beauty and inspiration, whether they are making bread from the whole grain, placing fruits on a table, or weaving reeds:

Mira cortar el pan de las espigas;
poner los frutos en la clara mesa;
tejer la juncia que nos es amiga;
¡crear, crear, mirando a tu belleza!

Mistral insists that the contemplation of God’s beauty inspires the girls to create with artistry. The whole hymn thus becomes a supplication to the Creator from those who are currently sisters (dependent children at home), but in time will grow up to become wives, and hold the power in the home:

¡Oh, Creador de manos soberanas,
sube el futuro en la canción ansiosa,
que ahora somos el plantel de hermanas,
pero seremos el plantel de esposas! (Lecturas 112)

For Ana María Cuneo, a hymn serves the purpose of uniting: “el canto tiene, entre otros efectos: el de unir . . . . ” (98). In the case of Mistral’s school song, this can be understood as the uniting of the students and teachers to a daily celebration to thank God for the opportunities they will experience during the school day, to train and be trained, to learn, create, and produce with loveliness. The poetic words Gabriela Mistral wrote for the hymn
depict above all her religious faith and her belief in God; within this ideology, one must notice the ideas on learning, artistry, and beauty that I have already pointed out in my analysis of “El decálogo del artista,” “La maestra rural,” and the selected readings from Lecturas para mujeres.

5. 4. The Government’s Educational Plan for Training Women in Vocational, Industrial, or Commercial Careers

The Sistema de Educación Politécnica (SEP) became the framework for the establishment of Mexico’s educational plan. It called for the establishment of a number of vocational schools for men and women; the Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” was one of them:31

La creación de la SEP en 1921 establece la estructura que ha de multiplicarse en forma continua para sistematizar y organizar la transcendente labor educativa del México del siglo XX.
En esta primera estructura se instituyó en 1922 el Departamento de Enseñanza Técnica Industrial y Comercial con la finalidad de aglutinar y crear escuelas que impartieran este tipo de enseñanza.
A partir de entonces, se establecen y reorganizan un número creciente de escuelas destinadas a enseñanzas industriales, domésticas y comerciales, entre ellas: el Instituto Técnico Industrial (ITI), las escuelas para señoritas Gabriela Mistral, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y Dr. Balmis, el Centro Industrial para Obreras, la Escuela Técnica Industrial y Comercial (ETIC) en Tacubaya y las Escuelas Centrales Agrícolas, posteriormente transformada en escuelas Regionales Campesinas (“Historia de la DGETI”32)

It is important to emphasize that the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” was only one of the many vocational schools for women established across Mexico, as the country sought to

31 The Sistema de Educación Politécnica, the umbrella under which the technical schools of Mexico were operated, was known by the acronym SEP.

improve and diversify its educational system following the 1910 Revolution. The goals to be accomplished by its students are presented in a subsection of the bulletin entitled, “Finalidades de la Escuela.” They emphasize that the school was to prepare the girls to function in the workforce with skills that not only gave them a profession, but also a sense of independence, aimed at making them self-supporting; further goals sought to increase intellectual development and the ennobling of character:

I. Impartir a las alumnas las enseñanzas necesarias para la adquisición de los conocimientos técnicos de las diversas ocupaciones, industriales u oficios.
II. Capacitarles a fin de que por si solas provean a su subsistencia de una manera independiente y decorosa y
III. Promover su mejoramiento por medio del desarrollo intelectual y elevación del carácter. (Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” 10)

In order to make the goals a reality, the coursework from elementary school was to provide a foundation for choosing from a variety of vocational and industrial training options. The students were also taught concepts of utilization of time. All available teaching resources were to be drawn upon to reach the proscribed goals:

... para la realización de estas finalidades se procurará, por todos los medios posibles y dentro de lo marcado por programas y reglamentos, lo siguiente: Observar la vida de las educandas, hacen que éstas conozcan sus aptitudes y habilidades, darles oportunidad para desarrollarlas a fin de que la elección de un oficio o industria no las lleve al fracaso o a la desilusión. (10, 12)

As the pupils went about preparing their class work and general activities at the school, the teaching staff was to observe them and discern their aptitudes and abilities. They could then guide them into the most appropriate vocation, thus assisting them in avoiding the election of a career that would be unsuitable, leading to failure (10, 12). The students were educated in the usefulness of their training in the context of their future job. In learning, they were to discover the utility of their academic pursuits, presently and for the future (12).
Their preparation was not limited to skills’ development and the practical application of the chosen-profession. The type of training was to reflect individual aptitudes and abilities. The classroom learning was to be applied in the workshop. The production techniques were to replicate those of commercial workshops, emphasizing utility and productivity, while bearing a touch of individualized perfection and beauty. Attention was to be paid to the avoidance of class scheduling conflicts and there were to be opportunities for rest to prevent the possibility of fatigue (12, 14).

The objectives of each plan of studies were to be met through a multi-faceted training program, in which the pupils would be guided through a process of discovery, development, and skills acquisition. The teachers were to bear in mind individualized aptitudes, abilities, and interests that were to be developed to the optimum attainable level, requiring personal responsibility for the progress (12, 14). The young women were to learn to self-evaluate by taking notes concerning the “deficiencias de cada trabajo para corregirlas en los subsecuentes” (14). The parents were to be an integral part of this process by being aware of the importance of the intellectual, moral, and professional development of their daughters. They were to allow their offspring to excel in their areas of interest and excellence, without imposing their personal preferences. Parents and teachers were to work in tandem: “se invitará a los padres de familia para que colaboren con los maestros y ayuden a descubrir la vocación de sus hijas y no se les exija seguir carrera para la cual no se sientan inclinadas” (14). Meanwhile, the abstract pedagogical experience became alive through the invitation of professionals who were to give tangible insights into their training, as well as into their personal everyday experiences. Field trips were also to be a part of the students’ experience.
These goals were accompanied by the same focus on beauty and correctness in each student’s work that Mistral emphasized in her school song, “procurar que los trabajos ejecutados por las alumnas tengan el tinte de perfección y belleza” (14). All activities at the school were to show self-improvement, attention to detail, and preparation for the future.

The points on personal development, creativity, and self-reliance noted in the guidelines for Colegio Industrial, appeared as constant threads, to a greater or lesser degree, not only in the school hymn, but also, in the texts of “La maestra rural” and “Decálogo del artista,” as well as, in the readings included in Lecturas para mujeres. As noted previously, beauty is a constant theme in Mistral’s writings, and in the writings of those authors she chose to include in her textbook, along with the concept of creativity, and inspiration from God. Emphasis on the value of art and spirituality is evident in José Martí’s “Valor de la poesía.” A vision for change and focus towards the future are highlighted in Mistral’s “Silhueta de la india mexicana.” Nobility of character and a contributing role in the home and society are themes that appear in Solomon’s “La mujer fuerte.” The importance of family and the continuation of life is conveyed in Rabindranath Tagore’s “Maternidad.” A cry to God and a plea for strength and better working conditions are ideas brought out by Ada Negri. María Enriqueta’s poem, “Soledad,” presents the need for a woman busying herself and being occupied, even when she is alone. Gabriela Mistral’s poem “Himno al árbol,” attributes the qualities of a tree to a woman: the tree is a provider and an influence, while standing tall in its dignity. Mistral’s overall message seems to emphasize that dreams are something to be sought after, which in the case of attaining an education, seems to suggest that each girl can mold a future that provides new horizons and personal satisfaction.
Upon comparing the school curriculum with the lessons proposed in “La maestra rural,” “Decálogo del artista,” and Lectura para mujeres, one discovers significant areas of correlation. As I have stated above, the goal of this school was the development of the whole person. The girls were to receive guidance for mental, physical, vocational and moral development. The intellectual component of the program was provided through a multiplicity of formal courses that promoted cultural and professional information; the physical aspects of developing a healthy life style were taught in physical education classes; and the moral aspect was approached not only through carefully chosen readings, such as those provided in Lecturas, but also from the mentoring, guidance, and ongoing encouragement provided by the institutional staff. The school’s personnel were to be vigilant concerning the daily activities of their students.

The women students had three options in areas of study (for details see Appendix C: 1) vocational; 2) industrial; and 3) commercial. Each provided similar choices for the development of the students’ talents and abilities. Consideration of the curriculum makes obvious the dual approach implemented in the instructional program, as there were practical, applied courses (such as sawing, cooking, and business correspondence) and more abstract, intellectually stimulating ones (such as mathematics, drawing, and reading and writing); classes for personal development were another aspect foregrounded in the curriculum (such as those in foreign languages and music).

It is important to notice that even though the curriculum included classes in civics, and that Gabriela Mistral emphasized the role of God and spirituality in the readings she provided in the school’s textbook, there were no classes in religion, in accordance with the spirit of the 1917 Constitution’s emphasis on decreasing the influence of the Church.
5.5. The Educational Goals of the “Gabriela Mistral” School

The “Plan de estudios,” in the publication “Escuela Industrial ‘Gabriela Mistral’” (16-23), specifies the organization of the coursework that had been devised for the various programs of the school (see Appendix C). Each one of the courses of study, i.e., vocational, industrial, and commercial, provides for practical and basic academic type course work. There are also subjects intended to develop the intellectual aspects of each young woman’s formation as a person. All programs included general education courses such as language; writing; mathematics; geography and physical education. There were also classes to prepare for career possibilities in natural sciences and financial matters, as well as practical “nociones de farmacia y medicina doméstica,” and hygiene. Additionally, the school that Vasconcellos named in Mistral’s honor, and all the other industrial and technical schools in the new system, offered something totally new and different: programs in which the women could be trained to fill jobs normally held by men, such as mechanics, carpentry and wood carving. This new emphasis suggests that one of the main goals of the Revolutionary government’s plan of studies was a conscious attempt to break down the work barrier established by traditional sex roles.

According to the stated purposes, and as can be ascertained in Appendix C, the programs were formulated in such a manner as to produce excellent results in a minimum amount of time, “el plan de estudios de esta Escuela está inspirado en la necesidad de alcanzar en el menos tiempo posible una buena preparación y una utilidad inmediata . . .” (14, 16). These practical not gender specific educational plans are compatible with Mistral’s concerns for providing new opportunities for women. At the same time, the emphasis on a
well-rounded physical and intellectually stimulating development centered on high ethical and religious values coincides with the messages repeated in the words of the school hymn and the selections of Lecturas para mujeres. This coincidence between the Mexican government’s plans and Mistral’s educational ideas is what originally stood behind Vasconcelos’ invitation to the Chilean poet. Her help was recognized in the naming of the school. Additionally, aside from paying tribute to Gabriela Mistral by naming a school in her honor, the Mexican government commissioned the sculpting of a full figure statue of the poet-teacher, which stood in the Industrial School’s yard.

5.6. A “Sculpted” Homage to Gabriela Mistral’s Contributions

In order to honor Mistral’s presence in the country and her participation and contributions to the reforms implemented by Mexico’s Department of Education, a statue was erected in her honor, in the courtyard of the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral.” In a statement concerning Mistral’s impact on Mexico, made by Vasconcelos many years after her original trip to the country, the ex-Minister of Education summarized the valuable work of the Chilean poet:

Y desde entonces [su llegada a México], pasando temporadas cortas en la capital, [Gabriela Mistral] dirigía sus actividades por distintos rumbos del país. Una misión muy noble. Así por ejemplo, al llegar a una aldea y recordando, quizás, cierta costumbre árabe, dedicábase, por las tardes, a leerles a la gente el periódico, desde su púlpito: un banco de la plaza. Esto provocaba polémicas, establecía relaciones y creaba amistades, entre el maestro y la población. De allí venía el pedido de libros, la fundación de una pequeña biblioteca y todo lo que puede hacer una persona bien preparada y bien intencionada, para levantar el nivel moral de la gente. De esta suerte, cada maestro misionero, era una especie de enviado especial del Ministro, dedicado a averiguar las necesidades locales y a resolverlas con las medidas y posibilidades del gobierno. Pero cuando esta tarea estaba a cargo de personas
de categoría, como la era Gabriela, omprobábanse otras ventajas. Es lo que ocurrió con nuestra amiga. En aquella época empezó a escribir sus impresiones, hoy clásicas en nuestra lengua, sobre el aspecto del indio, su modo de vivir y pensar. El indio mexicano al cual se aficionó tanto, como tema literario, lo midió y lo describió ella en forma magistral. (qtd. by Schneider 153-54)

Vasconcelos’ description of Mistral’s extensive journeys throughout the countryside of Mexico and her assistance in promoting culture provides an understanding of some of the factors that went into the Mexican government’s desire to build her a statue. The Mexican Minister of Education describes the poet-teacher involved in a public forum, reading aloud the newspaper and talking to the townspeople; thereby promoting the acquisition of knowledge. On occasion, these activities provoked debate, but they also led to the formation of friendships and created a desire for learning and the acquisition of books and libraries. Mistral promoted an emphasis on literacy pursuits, paving the way for raising the cultural level and the moral standards of the inhabitants:

Esto provocaba polémicas, establecía relaciones y creaba amistades, entre el maestro y la población. De allí venía el pedido de libros, la fundación de una pequeña biblioteca y todo lo que puede hacer una persona bien preparada y bien intencionada, para levantar el nivel moral de la gente. (Iglesias, Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral y Santos Chocano 42)

The endeavors sponsored by the government, described above, created an environment in which each teacher became a special envoy from the Minister of Education. Each one strove to discover the needs of the local area, “de esta suerte, cada maestro misionero, era una especie de enviado especial del Ministro, dedicado a averiguar las necesidades locales y a resolverlas con las medidas y posibilidades del gobierno” (Iglesias, Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral y Santos Chocano 42). This awareness and accomplishment increased when Gabriela Mistral was the “missionary,” the teacher carrying the message, as Vasconcelos states in the quote above.
By means of a consideration of the sculpting of Mistral’s statue by the renowned Mexican-born artist Ignacio Asúnsolo (1890-1965), and the dedication ceremonies that followed, Schneider focuses on Mistral’s impact on Mexico. He considers the opening of the school and the erection of the sculpture to be the most significant event during the educator’s twenty-two month stay in Mexico: “quizás el acontecimiento más monumental fue la inauguración de la escuela con su nombre en cuyo patio se erigió una escultura de Ignacio Asúnsolo en la que el artista la plasma sentada en actitud meditativa” (154).

In a letter dated April 2, 1924, Gabriela Mistral showed a different opinion. She wrote to Ignacio Asúnsolo expressing her admiration of the accuracy of his depiction of her persona, while rejecting her worthiness of such a sculpture. Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), a renowned plastic arts critic, published her letter in a biography of the sculptor.

Mi admirado y estimado amigo: He visto, hace dos días, la estatua de la escuela de Peralvillo i le debo a usted mi impresión fresca I espontánea. Ha cojido usted lo mío más verdadero, es decir más interior: el cansancio triste, el abatimiento grande i total. Se siente allí, desde la espalda al rostro, línea a línea; me he visto yo algo así como el alma arrojada hacia afuera, me he visto revelada en lo que los otros no conocen de mí, I esto es, por excelencia, la labor profunda del artista, Maestro: revelar al hombre interno, apartar entre los jestos i las actitudes circunstanciales I falsas, lo esencial I eterno. Tiene, además, la obra aquella nobleza que debe poseer siempre la estatua I que no obliga a dar el retrato nobleza de concepto i de espresión. Yo no sé. Maestro, nada de técnica de su arte. Intuyo que hai allí muchas virtudes del “oficio”que el profano no sabe definir, aunque reciba la visión jeneral de belleza, de trabajo cuidadoso, honradísimo. (10)

Mistral agreed that the sculptor captured the essence of her character, and that the statue was a piece of art, “ha cojido usted lo mío más verdadero, es decir más interior: el cansancio triste, el abatimiento grande i total. Se siente allí, desde la espalda al rostro, línea a línea; me he visto yo algo así como el alma arrojada hacia fuera. . .” (Nelken 10). She chose to be absent from the dedication ceremony, as well as from the unveiling of the statue. Mistral next

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33 This quotation reproduces the original grammar, orthography, and syntax of the document.
explains that she did so because she never agreed with the concept of sculpting a full representation of her body:

Creo también que debo explicar a usted el por qué no me quedo a la inauguración de la escuela, i con ella de su obra. Usted recuerda que nunca fui partidaria de que se hiciese una estatua, sino una simple cabeza, para alguna sala. Desde Cuernavaca, escribí al Licenciado diciéndole dos cosas netas: que yo no he hecho nada definitivo que justifique un homenaje de tal significación i que los vivos no sabemos cómo terminamos la vida, i por eso no debemos recibir estos dones profundos. A la vez le manifestaba que no quería defraudar su noble entusiasmo, de usted, y que posaría para una cabeza. Con mi conciencia tan despierta, sintiendo hasta lo profundo que yo no merezco lo que se ha hecho, sería imposible asistir a esa fiesta; la asistencia significaría aceptación y yo no he “aceptado” ni exterior ni interiormente. Por cierto esta misma consideración de que el don me resulta demasiado grande, de que se ha exajerado por jenerosidad, yo lo agradesco como se agradecen las cosas que exceden a la bondad común. Lo agradesco al Ministerio enormemente, i lo agradesco a usted, artista de primera fila, que puede dar a una mujer oscura transcendencia con su sola obra. Pero estas dos gratitudes fuertes, que durarán lo que la vida, no quebrantarán mi decisión, que explico para no ser mal interpretada. Perdóneme usted i acepte mis saludos más cariñosos, con mi buen recuerdo para su señora. Amiga y admiradora de su labor. (Nelken 10)

As this correspondence indicates, the type of sculpture had been discussed prior to its production. It makes clear, that the Chilean teacher had stated that she would consent to a sculpture of her head, not a full representation, “usted recuerda que nunca fui partidaria de que se hiciese una estatua, sino una simple cabeza.” Mistral’s disagreement with the final product is not surprising, given the previous agreement and her humble character. Even so, she states her appreciation for what the Ministry of Education and the sculptor had done for her. At the conclusion of the letter, Mistral underscores her gratitude to the sculptor and to the Ministry, “lo agradesco al Ministerio enormemente, i lo agradesco a usted, artista de primera fila.” She is grateful for what they have done by giving prominence to what she calls “an obscure woman” through this tribute, “que puede dar a una mujer oscura transcendencia con su sola obra.” I believe that the Mexican government’s, and in particular Vasconcelos’
and Obregón’s response to her contributions to the educational revolution taking place under their leadership, were very much in character with the manner in which the poet was received in their country. In accordance with Mistral’s lifelong attitude of humility and her avoidance of honors that could convey the idea of ambition it is very much in character that she would reject an invitation to be present for the unveiling of a statue that she appears to have considered too grandiose. She had expressed this attitude in a diary entry written during her stay in Mexico: “yo acepto de lo que me dan aquellas cosas que no significan arribismo” (Quetzal 89).

   The establishment of the school in Mistral’s honor, along with the erection of her statue, and the writing and publication of Lectura para mujeres, were the capstones in her Mexican sojourn in pro of education for women. These events mark the end of her first journey to Mexico and the beginning of a lifelong journey that would take her to varied places, in diverse capacities, carrying the same message on the eradication of illiteracy and the provision for educational opportunities for women. These activities culminated when she was honored for her poetry and her labors as “maestra” of several generations of Hispanic people, with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945.
CHAPTER VI

Conclusions

6.1. A Brief Review

Gabriela Mistral’s concepts on education and her contributions to the Mexican reforms for rural schools that took place in the 1920s--particularly in what it pertains to women’s education--has been the focus of this dissertation. In order to contextualize the poet’s didactic ideas I have examined her familial and educational background within the context of the Chilean school system. To evaluate her contribution to Mexican education, I have first studied and contrasted the trajectory of both Chile’s and Mexico’s history of education (included in Appendix D and E); the Mexican government’s reform plans to modernize schools after the Revolution of 1910 have also been discussed.

In order to ascertain Mistral’s concepts on education, three of her major texts have been analyzed: two poems from *Desolación*, “Decálogo del artista,” and “La maestra rural,” in addition to a selection of poems and prose from Mistral and other authors, from the textbook *Lecturas para mujeres*. After establishing the parameters of her thinking, a bulletin issued for the “Colegio Industrial ‘Gabriela Mistral’” has provided the information necessary for evaluating the strength of the poet-teacher’s contributions to educating Mexican women.
6.1.1. Gabriela Mistral’s Career as Author and Teacher

Chapter two, “The Teacher, the Writer, and the Intellectual” studied the diversity of components that molded who and what Gabriela Mistral became during the course of her life. She grew up in a rural area of Chile, and was self-taught and home-schooled. These circumstances were determining factors in the development of the Chilean educator’s perspective concerning educational opportunities, the need for making available reading materials to the general population, and her desire to reach out to all citizens, without regard to economic status. Within this same context of being home-schooled, Mistral seems to have developed as a major theme throughout her writings, the importance of having a loving and reassuring home life in order to form well-rounded individuals. To spread her educational message, Mistral used a two-pronged thrust, in that she both taught in the classroom and conveyed her message by means of the pen.

6.1.2. Chile’s Impact on the Poet’s Life

The third chapter, “Gabriela Mistral in the Context of Education in Chile and Mexico,” looked at the historical, constitutional, and pedagogical ideologies that came into play to shape the educational system that formed Gabriela Mistral. What she learned within her country’s system and her particular home circumstances clearly influenced what her role was to become in life, in both Chile and Mexico.

Another topic covered by this chapter, looks at the fact that the Chilean poet first became aware of José Vasconcelos, Mexico’s Secretary of Education, through a pedagogical
publication and an exchange of letters. Independent of this early contact, Vasconcellos would later make the decision to extend to Mistral the life-altering invitation to come to Mexico to assist in the implementation of the country’s educational reforms.

Appendices D and E provide information on the distinct paths that Chile and Mexico followed, with respect to their historical development of educational programs. With Chile’s independence came the formation of its first pedagogical project, under the leadership of a progressive president who recognized the importance of an education for all citizens. His foresight was to be continued by his successors who contributed to establishing one of the most democratic public educational systems in the continent. Mistral was one of those who took full advantage of the many opportunities for education--in the classroom and at home--offered by her country of birth.

In the case of Mexico, shortly after the conquest, and contrary to the democratic path followed by Chile’s colonial powers, the vice royal government also established colegios, but these for the most part were limited in scope and did not extend education to all the people. Mexico’s free public education did not become part of the government’s plan until the political and social transformations that followed the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The opposite paths of these two educational systems made possible the contributions of Gabriela Mistral to Mexican education. As a person formed in the modern, liberal ideas of Chile’s solid free education for all she was able to provide the right kind of advise to a country as conservative and in need of reforms, as Mexico was in the 1920s.
6.1.3. Poetry and Fiction as Educational Tools

In chapter four, “Windows to Gabriela Mistral’s Concepts on Women’s Education,” the focus was placed on two poems written by Gabriela Mistral, as well as on some representative works authored by herself and other writers, which she selected for inclusion in *Lecturas para mujeres*, the textbook she composed to be read in the Humanities classes of the Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral.” My choice of these texts allowed me to carry out a close analysis of the Chilean poet’s ideas on education.

The study of these literary pieces elucidated the importance that the Chilean author placed upon physical, mental, and moral integrity, as a holistic approach to education. The texts indicate that individual, as well as professional principles, were to be instilled in all children; thus, providing each one the tools to direct their life in a beneficial manner. These principles were to be the guiding values for determining the choices made by teachers and students with respect to their home life, career, and attitudes. Opening “the windows” on these texts made clear that Gabriela Mistral considered informed personal choices, God-centered perspectives, and love-directed attitudes toward fellow human beings seminal factors in promoting a meaningful experience for each person’s life. She taught that imparting this message was the central mission of every teacher who was to be in charge not just of the subject matters taught in the classroom, but also, of the personal physical, mental, and spiritual development of each student. *Lecturas para mujeres* was the textbook written by Gabriela Mistral to spread this message among the many students enrolled in Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral.”
6.1.4. The Significance of Colegio Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” in the Poet’s Mexican Endeavors

“An Overview of Gabriela’s Mistral’s Contributions to Women’s Education in Mexico,” Chapter V, studied the curriculum from the Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral,” the all-girl institution for which she wrote Lecturas para mujeres. This school was established in a newly remodeled colonial building that had more recently served the function of army barracks; it served one thousand women students:

En el ex-cuartel de Peralvillo (Ave. Peralvillo 124) se estableció en el año de 1924 la Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” siendo Presidente de la República C. Gral. de División Álvaro Obregón y Secretario de Educación José Vasconcelos, habiendo dirigido la obra el Arquitecto Arnulfo C. Cantú y el Escultor Ignacio Asúnsulo.

Este plantel fue arquitectónicamente un edificio colonial del que no se conserva ahora más que la fachada; este edificio estuvo destinado antes de ser cuartel a los servicios de garifa, esencialmente a los de almacenaje transitorio de mercancías que eran detenidos en la ciudad; posteriormente se tornó en cuartel y ahora, después de experimentar una renovación total, es un plantel educativo.

Todo el vetusto edificio fue echado abajo con excepción de la fachada que se utilizó para la nueva construcción y sólo se grabó en la parte más alta de ésta, en relieve, y en dirección de la puerta de entrada, el escudo de la Secretaría de Educación Pública.

La superficie del edificio es aproximadamente de 4,800 metros cuadrados, y en su construcción efectuada a base de economía, se han gastado $150,000.00 (ciento cincuenta mil pesos), faltando algo más aún que tendrá que erogarse en el arreglo del tanque, regaderas, gimnasio y parte poniente del edificio que no está terminada.

Las condiciones de ventilación, iluminación y amplitud quedan satisfechas.

Concurren a este Planatel 1,000 alumnas. (Escuela Industrial “Gabriela Mistral” 9, 10)

The Mexican government, through the Secretary of Education, made the decision in 1922 to re-organize and establish “un número creciente de escuelas destinadas a enseñanzas industriales, domésticas y comerciales.” One of those was to be named in Gabriela Mistral’s honor (“Historia DGETI”). According to Federico Lazarín Miranda, she was invited to
Mexico for the inauguration of this school, which was opened in 1924, and for which she wrote the school song (264). President Alvaro Obregón’s government (1920-1924), asked the teacher-poet to prepare a textbook that would be specifically for women in the area of Humanities. In this chapter, I discussed the curriculum that was offered to the women who attended this school. I additionally speak of the statue that was sculpted in Gabriela Mistral’s honor. This is a clear indication of the Chilean author’s dream of being able to implement some of her ideas in the field of education, that had been successfully carried out in Mexico, a country so distant from her own. This supports the contention that Gabriela Mistral did effectively convey her educational ideas during her stay in Mexico.

6.2. Gabriela Mistral’s Legacy lives on . . .

“An author ought to write for the youth of his generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of the afterward,” stated the novelist and short story writer Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940) (“Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald,” on-line reference). His words are a précis of Gabriela Mistral’s impact on Mexican education, especially because the story of her educational mission to that country that I have told did not end with the events of this isolated invitation. The many acknowledgments of her contributions that she received in Mexico, determined that she would go on to fulfill many other positions and missions in other countries, underscoring her world-renowned standing as an educator. She was a leader for attitudinal changes concerning academic opportunities for all, with particular emphasis for those on rural areas, women, and the less economically fortunate. Her work as a teacher
and diplomat continued until her death. The legacy of her missionary educational journey as well as the parallel messages of her poetry has continued until the present.

Some words Gabriela Mistral penned in Mexico, in January of 1923, summarize her perception of the importance of educating Mexican women, and the impact that their progress would have on other women throughout Latin America. Her words also provide an insight into the significance that she placed on the work she had accomplished with the help of José Vasconcelos:

I love you, Mexican mother, sister of mine, who embroiders exquisitely, weaves placemats the color of honey, and crosses the country dressed in blue like the Biblical women to carry provisions to her child or her husband, who is watering the cornfields.

I speak to you, therefore, in the same manner that I speak to the women of my race in the South, with an accent that you will not perceive as cold or intrusive. I repeat to you: the Latin American race will be tested and proven by your children; in them, all of us from the entire Southern continent will be judged and saved or we will be lost. God has given them the unfortunate luck that shall enemies advance, the Northern swell shall break upon their chests. Therefore, when your children fight or sing, the southern countenances will turn toward this land, filled at once with hope and with despair.

Mexican women: upon your knees, you cradle the Latino race and there is no greater or more decisive destiny than yours at this hour. (Women 151)

The Chilean poet-teacher emphasized in this text once again that women have their God-given role in the home and that their function within those activities is to be awarded a place of distinction within society. She asserts that in Latin America, the future of the individual, the community, the nation, and the continent rests in the hands of its women, because how they raise and educate their offspring is pivotal to determining the potentials of any society. For Mistral, women have the all-important dual role of homemaking and educating, and the worth of these activities is not to be diminished by anyone, to the contrary, it is to be supported and exalted.
The value of Gabriela Mistral’s poetry and her many contributions to the advancement of women and human rights in general, lead me to conclude that the “memorable” female that José Vasconcelos invited from Chile to help in Mexico, did travel to Mexico and accomplished her task, but she did not stop there. She went on to reach the Latin American “world,” through her physical journeys as well as by way of the printed page. Her concern for female education was to increase the number of Hispanic women receiving an adequate educational experience and her example provided a model that many other women eagerly imitated. Her ultimate recognition may not have been her winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, but rather, the words inscribed by the Chilean people on her tombstone, located in the rural town of Monte Grande, Chile, as explained by John Oliver Simon in his on-line publication, The Road to Iguazú:

“Lo que el alma es para el cuerpo, es el artista para su pueblo,”
APPENDIX A

AUTHORS INCLUDED IN LECTURAS PARA MUJERES

Chile and Mexico:

Chile -

Barrios, Eduardo (1884-1963)
Mistral, Gabriela [Lucila Godoy Alcayaga] (1889-1957)
Monvel, María [Brito de Donoso, Tilda] (1899-1936)
Neruda, Pablo [Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto] (1904-1973)
Prado, Pedro (1886-1952)

Mexico –

Caso, Antonio (1883-1946)
Díaz Mirón, Salvador (1853-1928)
Enriqueta, María [María Enriqueta Camarillo y Roa de Pereyra] (1872-1968)
Estrada, Gerardo (1887-1937)
Gonzaga Urbina, Luis. (1867-1934)
González Martínez, Enrique (1871-1952)
Inés de la Cruz, Sor Juana [Juana de Asbaje y Ramírez] (1648-1695)
López, Rafael (1873-1943)
Mediz Bolio, Antonio (1883-1957)
Monterde García Icazbalceta, Francisco (1894-19??)
Nervo, Amado (1870-1919)
Othón, José (1858-1906)
Pereyra, Carlos (1877-1944)
Reyes, Alfonso (1889-1959)
Tablada, José Juan (1871-1945)
Torri, Julio (1889-1970)
Vasconcelos, José (1881-1959)
Zendejas, Josefina (18??-19??)

**Other Countries:**

Álvarez Henao, Enrique (Colombia, 1871-1914)
Azorín [José Martínez Ruíz] (Spain, 1874-1967)
Baudelaire, Charles (France, 1821-1867)
Bonnard, Abel (France, 1883-1906)
Borrantes, Vicente (Spain, 1829-1898)
Borrero, Juana (Cuba, 1878-1896)
Capdevila, Arturo (Argentina, 1889-19??)
Carducci, Giosue (Italy, 1835-1937)
Carlyle, Thomas (Great Britain, 1795-1881)
Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de (Spain, 1547-1616)
Dario, Rubén (Nicaragua, 1867-1916)
D’ors, Eugenio (Spain, 1882-1954)
Fabre, Jean-Henri (France, 1823-1915)
Fénelon, François de Salignac de la Mothe (France, 1651-1715)
Flaubert, Gustave (France, 1821-1880)
Fort, Paul (France, 1872-1960)

Gabriel y Galán, José María (Spain, 1870-1905)

Gálvez, José (Peru, 1885-1957)

George, Stefan (Germany, 1868-1933)

Góngora, Luís de Argote y (Spain, 1561-1627)

Gorky, Maksim {Aleksei Maximovich Peshkev} (Russia, 1868-1936)

Guyau, Jean-Marie (France, 1854-1888)

Hello, Ernest (France, 1828-1885)

Henley, William Ernest (Great Britain, 1849-1903)

Herrera y Reissig, Julio (Uruguay, 1875-1910)

Horace [Quintus Horatius Flaccus] (Roman Empire, 65-8 B.C.)

Hugo, Victor Marie (France, 1802-1885)

Ibarbourou, Juana de (Uruguay, 1895-1979)

Jammes, Francis (France, 1868-1938)

Jiménez, Juan Ramón (Spain, 1881-1958)

Juarros, César (Spain, 1879-1942)

Junqueiro, Guerra (Portugal, 1850-1923)

Kierkegaard, Soren (Denmark, 1813-1855)

King Solomon (Israel [Tribe of Judah], c. 982- c. 928 B.C.)

Lasserre, Enrique (France, 18??-19??)

Lincoln, Abraham (United States, 1809-1865)

Lisle, Laconte de (France, 1818-1894)

Lugones, Leopoldo (Argentina, 1874-1938)
Machado, Manuel (Spain, 1874-1947)
Maeterlinck, Maurice (Netherlands, 1862-1949)
Maragall, Juan (Spain, 1860-1911)
Marquina, Eduardo (Spain, 1879-1946)
Martí, José (Cuba, 1853-1895)
Mauclair, Camille (France, 1872-1945)
Medina, Vicente (Spain, 1866-1937)
Michelet, Jules (France, 1798-1874)
Miró, Gabriel (Spain, 1879-1930)
Montalvo, Juan (Ecuador, 1832-1889)
Negri, Ada (Italy, 1870-1945)
Papini, Giovanni (Italy, 1881-1956)
Pascal, Blas (France, 1623-1662)
Philippe, Charles-Louis (France, 1874-1909)
Renard, Jules (France, 1864-1910)
Richepin, Jean (France, 1849-1926)
Rod, Edouard (Switzerland, 1857-1910)
Rodó, José Enrique (Uruguay, 1871-1917)
Rolland, Romain (France, 1866-1944)
Rossetti, Christina Georgina (Great Britain, 1830-1891)
Rusiñol, Santiago (Spain, 1861-1931)
Ruskin, John (Great Britain, 1819-1900)
Saint-Victor, Paul de (France, 1825-1881)
Samain, Albert (France, 1858-1900)
Santos Chocano, José (Peru, 1875-1934)
Sewell, Anna (Great Britain, 1820-1878)
Shiffer, C. (Germany, ?)
Silva, José Asunción (Colombia, 1865-1896)
Tagore, Rabindranath (India, 1861-1941)
Tolstoi, Leo (Russia, 1828-1910)
Valencia, Guillermo (Colombia, 1873-1943)
Vigil, Constancio C. (Uruguay, 1876-1954)
Wagner, Charles (France, 1852-1918)
Whitman, Walt (United States, 1819-1892)
Zorrilla de San Martín, Juan (Uruguay, 1855-1931)
APPENDIX B

LECTURAS PARA MUJERES

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HOGAR

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“Misión de la mujer” - John Ruskin

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“El sereno amor. -- amor de esposa” - Rabindranath Tagore

“Aconsejan los poetas” - César Juarros

“El espectador” - César Juarros

Dos elogios de la madre:

I. “La madre y el niño” - Charles-Louis Philippe

II. “Recuerdos de la madre ausente” - Gabriela Mistral

“Soledad” - María Enriqueta

“La casa y el arquitecto” - Pedro Prado

“Salmo de la casa, la esposa” - Eduardo Marquina

“El bosque y la casa” - Eduardo Marquina

Retratos de mujeres:

I. “La mujer fuerte” - Salomón

II. “La pacificadora” - Walt Whitman

34 Modified by deleting authorial nationalities, dates of birth and death, and page numbers.
III. “Jefe de faena” - Walt Whitman

“Mi carta” - Maria Enriqueta

“La familia” - Edouard Rod

“El protector” - Eduardo Barrios

“La abuela” - Víctor Marie Hugo

**Interiores:**

I. “Noches de lluvia” - Juana de Ibarbourou

II. “La llama del hogar” - [Anonymous]

III. “La paz” - Leopoldo Lugones

IV. “El comedor” - Francis Jammes

V. “La comida reparada” - Albert Samain

“La azotea” - Juan Ramón Jiménez

“La amistad” - Romain Rolland

“Eran dos hermanas” - Enrique González Martínez

“El orgullo y la sencillez en las relaciones sociales” - Charles Wagner

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“La dulzura” - Gabriela Mistral

“El dolor eterno” - Gabriela Mistral

“Imagen de la tierra” - Gabriela Mistral

“Nacimiento” - Francis Jammes

“La recién nacida” - María Monvel

“El principio” - Rabindranath Tagore

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II. “Dos canciones de cuna de la Virgen.-- I. Pues andáis en las palmas” - Anónimo

III. “Caído se le ha un clavel” - Luis de Góngora

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“El hijo ilegítimo” - Rabindranath Tagore

**Mimos del hijo:**

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H. “El cartero malo” - Rabindranath Tagore

HI. “El fin” - Rabindranath Tagore

“Castigos” - Constancio C. Vigil

“¡Los hombres!” - Constancio C. Vigil

“Madre desventurada” - Ada Negri

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“La patria dolorosa” - Antonio Caso

“El águila y la serpiente” - José Vasconcelos

“El paisaje de Anáhuac” - Alfonso Reyes

“La dulce patria” - Arturo Capdevila

“Un pueblo” - Juan Maragall

“Cantos de Netzahualcóyotl” - Primer canto
“Ciudad conquistada. - Las gentes de Cortés” - José Santos Chocano

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“El maíz” - Juan Montalvo

“El girasol” - Antonio Mediz Bolio

“El venado y el faisán” - Antonio Mediz Bolio.

“El faisán” - Abel Bonnard

“México maravilloso. -- Las grutas de Cacahuamilpa” - Gabriela Mistral

“Colón” - Carlos Pereyra

“A la mujer mexicana” - Gabriela Mistral

“Himno de los estudiantes americanos” - José Gálvez

“España” - Juan Montalvo

“Bolívar” - José Martí

“Unidad hispanoamericana” - José Enrique Rodó

“San Martín” - José Martí

“Chile” - Gabriela Mistral
“Caupolicán” - Rubén Darío

“Retrato de José Martí” - Domingo Estrada

“Pensamientos de José Martí” - José Martí

“A Roosevelt” - Rubén Darío

TRABAJO

“El desdén del oficio” - Eugenio D'Ors

“La cerámica griega” - Leopoldo Lugones

“La vida de los productores” - John Ruskin

“La molinera” - Guerra Junqueiro

“Pobres y ricos” - John Ruskin

“Mi vaquerillo” - José María Gabriel y Galán

“La hora que pasa” - Gabriela Mistral

“Maestranzas de noche” - Pablo Neruda

“El deber próximo” - Charles Wagner

“Himno matinal de la escuela ‘Gabriela Mistral’ de México” - Gabriela Mistral

MOTIVOS ESPIRITUALES

A) LA CARIDAD

“A los grandes” - Blas Pascal
“La buena voluntad” - Rabindranath Tagore

“Dar” - Amado Nervo

“Falsa piedad” - Juan Maragall

“La aldea” - Gabriel Miró

“Parábola del huésped sin nombre” - Enrique González Martínez

“Los ojos de los pobres” - Charles Baudelaire

**Dístico:**

I. “Piececitos” - [Gabriela Mistral]

II. “Manitas” - Gabriela Mistral

“Irás por el camino” - Amado Nervo

“La rosa blanca” - José Martí

“La lámpara de Aladino” - Arturo Capdevila

“Los motivos del lobo” - Rubén Darío

**La transformación por el amor:**

“Jesús y el lobo” - José Enrique Rodó

“El perro muerto” - Léon Tolstoi

**Fraternidad humana:**

“El corro” - Paul Fort
“Estatus de la guerra (de doña Rebeca Mate)” - Guillermo Valencia

**B) LITERATURA Y ARTES**

“Libros y libros” - John Ruskin

“Elogio de la palabra” - Juan Maragall

“Valor de la poesía” - José Martí

“La poesía popular” - Juan Maragall

“La canción triste” - Vicente Medina

“Estilo obscuro. Pensamiento obscuro” - Azorín

“El consuelo en la música” - Camille Mauclair

“Las canciones populares. -- Fragmentos de ‘Juan Cristóbal’” - Romain Rolland

“El canto” - Gabriela Mistral

“La Venus de Milo’ - Paul de Saint-Victor

**C) LA VIDA SUPERIOR**

“La cámara escondida” - José Enrique Rodó

“Balada de las hojas más altas” - Julio Torri

“Oración al pan” - Guerra Junqueiro

“Las vidas heróicas” - Romain Rolland

“El sermón de la montaña” - Giovanni Papini

“El fantasma” - Salvador Díaz Mirón
“Retrato del Dante” - Thomas Carlyle

“Miguel Ángel” - José Enrique Rodó

“Retrato de Cervantes” - [Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra]

El Cid:

I. “Castilla” - Manuel Machado
II. “Cosas del Cid” - Rubén Darío

“Proclama de la guerra antiesclavista” - Abraham Lincoln

“Regreso de héroes” - Walt Whitman

“Retrato de Sarmiento” - Leopoldo Lugones

“Sacrificio” - Jean-Marie Guyau

“Los héroes” - José Martí

“La libertad” - Rabindranath Tagore

“Lo sublime” - Maurice Maeterlinck

“Tu cuerpo” - Ámado Nervo

“Deseo de infinito” - Jean Richepin

“El instinto de bajeza” - Enrique Lasserre

“El reclamo” - Charles Wagner

Soneto:

“En que da moral censura a una rosa y en ella a sus semejantes”

- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz
d) LA VOLUNTAD

I. “La pampa de granito” - José Enrique Rodó
II. “El miedo de vivir” - C. Shiffer
III. “El infortunio” - Ada Negri
IV. “Amo de su destino” - William Ernest Henley
V. “El himno de la vida” - Ada Negri

E) LOS MUERTOS

“Se fueron antes” - Amado Nervo
“Muerta” - Amado Nervo
“Los muertos” - Constancio C. Vigil
“Así fue . . .,” - Luis Gonzaga Urbina

F) LA ALEGRIÁ

“La pasión de la desdicha” - Ernest Hello
“Alégrate” - Amado Nervo
“Mirando jugar a un niño” - José Enrique Rodó
“La sonrisa” - Alfonso Reyes
“La esperanza” - Charles Wagner
“La confianza” - Pedro Prado
g) MOTIVOS DE NAVIDAD

I. “El establo” - Giovanni Papini

II. “El establo” - Gabriela Mistral

III. “Navidad” - Juan Maragall

IV. “La rosa niña” - Rubén Darío

V. “Paz en la tierra” - José Enrique Rodó

NATURALEZA

A) LA TIERRA

“La tierra” - François Fenelón

“El manantial” - Gabriel Miró

“Elogio de la vida campestre” - Horace

Horas:

I. “La siesta” - Leopoldo Lugpnes

II. “El ángelus” - Julio Herrera y Reissig

III. “La noche” - Leopoldo Lugones
B) MOTIVOS DEL MAR

I. “Al mar” - José Enrique Rodó
II. “Se pinta el mar” - Eduardo Marquina
III. “La canción del álbatros” - Maksim Gorki
IV. “La barca” - Pedro Prado
V. “Las ondinas” - Juana Borrero
VI. “Marina” - Santiago Rusiñol
VII. “Parábola de la ciega” - Enrique González Martínez

C) LA VEGETACIÓN

“Los árboles son sagrados!” - José Juan Tablada
“Himno al árbol” - Gabriela Mistral
“Algunos árboles” - Francis Jammes

Flores:

I. “La retama” - [Anonymous]
II. “La violeta” - [Anonymous]
III. “La amapola” - Leopoldo Lugones
IV. “Canción del tomillo” - Eduardo Marquina

“Una familia de árboles” - Jules Renard
“Selva” - Juana de Ibarbourou

“Los elfos” - Leconte de Lisle

“La aurora” (Himno oriental) - [Anonymous]

“Primavera artificial” - Santiago Rusiñol

“Eras a la luna” - Guerra Junqueiro

**d) ANIMALES**

“Orfeo encantando a los animales” - Paul Fort

“El canto del ruiseñor” - Jules Michelet

“Los tordos” - Leopoldo Lugones

“El nido” - Jules Michelet

“Cigueñas blancas” - Guillermo Valencia

“Las guacamayas” - Stefan George

“La abeja” - Enrique Alvarez Henao

“El cisne” - Jules Renard

“El pavo real” - Jules Renard

“Las golondrinas” - Jean-Henri Fabre

“Vaca” - Juan Montalvo

**Dístico:**

I. “La vaca ciega” - Juan Maragall
II. “El buey” - Giosue Carducci

“La doma del caballo” - Anna Sewell

"Ritja,’ la querida yegua’” - Vicente Borrantes

“El vals del osezno” - Paul Fort

“El perro” - Manuel José Othón

“Platero” - Juan Ramón Jiménez

“El escarabajo” - Abel Bonnard

“Canción de la cigarra y la hormiga” (Canción popular de Provenza) - [Anonymous]

“Una cacería fantástica” - Gustave Flaubert

“El espejo” - Pedro Prado
APPENDIX C

COURSES OF STUDY OFFERED AT
COLEGIO INDUSTRIAL “GABRIELA MISTRAL”

CURSOS VOCACIONALES

Primer año

Lengua castellana         Caligrafía
Aritmética y Geometría    Inglés
Historia, geografía nacional y civismo  Ejercicios físicos
Química orgánica          Canto y solfeo
Corte y confección de ropa Observación de talleres

Dibujo

Segundo año

Lengua castellana         Solfeo y canto
Aritmética y contabilidad Observación de talleres

Ciencias naturales, higiene y medicina doméstica
Trabajos manuales

Dibujo

Caligrafía

Ejercicios físicos
Tercer año

Correspondencia en general

Química industrial y nociones de física

Economía industrial

Conocimiento de efectos y materias primas

Conocimiento de maquinarias y herramientas

Dibujo

Francés

Ejercicios físicos

Solfeo y canto

Observación de talleres

CURSOS INDUSTRIALES*

I. Cursos electivos

II. Cursos completos

* The original document indicates: “La duración de estos cursos será dos años.”
Sección “A” – curso completo

I. Corte y confección de ropa – lencería, bordado en máquina, bordado a colores,
   lengua castellana, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “A” bis. curso completo

II. Modas, sombreros, galones, flores, historia del arte, lengua castellana, aritmética,
    dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “B” curso completo

I. Camisería, bonetería, paragüería, trabajos con piel, aritmética, lengua castellana,
   dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “B” bis. curso completo

II. Jabonería, perfumería, fabricación de espejos y fabricación de estuches y cajas,
    química, lengua castellana, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “C” curso completo

I. Cocina y repostería, dulcería, industrial, conservación de frutas y legumbres,   panadería,
   aritmética, lengua castellana, química, ciencias naturales, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “C” bis. Curso completo

II. Salchichocería, fabricación de pastas alimenticias, fabricación de jarabes y refrescos,
   conservación de carnes y pescados, ciencias naturales, química, lengua castellana,
   aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.
**Sección “CH” curso completo**

I. Repujado y pirograbado, trabajos manuales, grabados en madera, batik, aritmética, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “CH” bis. Curso completo**

II. Tejidos, artefactos de mimbre y bejuco, calado en madera, cerámica, lengua nacional, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “D” curso completo**

I. Tipografía, grabado en general, fotograbado y encuadernación, aritmética, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “D” bis. Curso completo**

II. Fotografía, nociones de física, química, aritmética, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “E” curso completo**

I. Modelado, juguetería, lacas, barnices y esmaltes, aritmética, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “E” bis. curso completo**

II. Carpintería, ebanistería y tallado en madera, aritmética y geometría, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

**Sección “F” curso completo**

I. Economía doméstica, tintorería, lavado, aplanchado y desmanchado, higiene, aritmética, lengua castellana, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.
Sección “F” bis. Curso completo

II. Puericultura, Nociones de farmacia y medicina domésticas, nociones de enfermería, lengua castellana, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “G” curso completo

I. Calzado para niños, curtiduría, talabartería, lengua castellana, química, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos.

Sección “G” bis. curso completo

II. Peluquería, manicure, peinados, lengua castellana, aritmética, dibujo, ejercicios físicos, perfumería y jabonería.

SECCIÓN COMERCIAL

Lengua castellana, aritmética mercantil, mecanografía, taquigrafía, correspondencia mercantil, documentación oficial, teneduría de libros, práctica de trabajos de archivos y oficinas, caligrafía, dibujo comercial, inglés, geografía nacional, ejercicios físico.

* The original document indicates: “La duración de este curso será dos años.”
APPENDIX D

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN CHILE

Chile, a country that was interested in education since its early history and that continually improved its educational system, followed a path quite dissimilar from Mexico’s. In the second decade of the twentieth century, Chile was modernizing its system once again. In 1920, it adopted a code of compulsory attendance while maintaining its centralized approach with the philosophy that “... education is strictly a federal function and is conducted accordingly. Local control of education was limited” (Smith and Littell 66).

Educational opportunities had been already available for the indigenous people, along with the mestizo and criollo children of the region, prior to Chile becoming an independent nation. These opportunities were initiated since the early Colonial Period, as described by Fernando Campos Harriet:

El Cabildo de la capital, por su parte se preocupó desde el comienzo de la enseñanza de las primeras letras, autorizando a algunos sujetos para ejercer de maestros de enseñar niños, previa exigencias de condiciones de idoneidad, de buenas costumbres y de un arancel. (42-43)

The authorities made sure from the very early times of European influence in this remote area of the Spanish empire, that education was a matter of great import. The students were to receive the basics of an education imparted by teachers, who had to receive approval as to their suitability, and good habits, and were required to pay a certification fee.

The efforts toward the advancement of primary education were not limited to the capital, but also included rural areas, particularly after Chile became independent. At that point, the government’s leaders and intellectuals placed a high priority on the success of the
educational institutions, led by the father of the country and its first president (1817-1823), General Bernardo O’Higgins (1788-1842).35

When O’Higgins first declared Chile’s independence in 1810, one of his early decisions was to establish public schools across the country, the first step on the road that would earn him the title of the ‘Educator President.’ According to Óscar Fernando Valderrama Bravo, one of the reasons O’Higgins earned this designation was because he personally became involved, attending school festivities and being present for exams (60). Soto Roa describes in greater detail the President’s activities and attitude toward education:

O’Higgins demostró un profundo interés por la educación. Conocidas son las visitas que realizaba a las escuelas, donde asistía a clases, a exámenes, a fiestas escolares y estimulaba a los docentes. En el Proyecto de Constitución Provisoria para el Estado de Chile, sancionado y jurado el 23 de octubre de 1818, en el Artículo N°2 del Título VI referido a los Cabildos, indica que éstos deberán fomentar el adelantamiento de la población, industria, educación de la juventud, hospicios, hospitales y cuanto sea interesante al beneficio público. (22)

This historian depicts Chile’s president as an individual for whom education plays an important role in public life. For O’Higgins, in order for the country to advance, educational institutions needed to develop in tandem with the business sector and with medical care, thus helping people of all age groups, and all segments of society. In order to meet his goals, he facilitated the shaping of one of Chile’s first federal governmental documents, the 1818 Provisional Constitution, that would make his plan for education part of the judicial framework. In order to succeed he personally became involved in the academic as well as the festive programs.

35 O’Higgins, Chile’s liberator, was also the originator of the first national public school system accessible to all sectors of society. The public schools were to be set up in all regions of the country, including the rural areas, and they were to admit the indigenous peoples, as well as students from all socio-economic levels; only in rare instances were they gender exclusive.
In 1821, President O’Higgins pursued another path for the enhancement of his country’s education when he invited the Peruvian Dr. Diego Thompson (17??-18??) to come to Chile to explain the Lancaster system of education, which he was interested in instituting, and which involved a close association between teachers and teaching assistants. Soto Roa comments on O’Higgins contribution to the advancement of education by bringing Dr. Thompson to Chile:

. . . es sabido el esfuerzo de O’Higgins por impulsar el sistema de enseñanza mutua de José Lancaster, que Diego Thompson trajo al país en 1821. Así por decreto, del 22 de noviembre de 1821, se creó la Sociedad Lancasteriana. (23) 37

President O’Higgins’ commitment to promote the Lancaster method was such that he brought Dr. Thompson to Santiago in order that he might explain the teaching system to him and to the pertinent federal government officials and educators. His decision opened the way for the adoption of the Lancaster organization of schools by governmental decree, in 1821. This system was still in place when Gabriela Mistral attended school as well as when she began to teach. Thus, in her first job as a teacher’s aide, she worked under a “master” teacher.

Following the school initiatives established by President O’Higgins, the country continued to be active in developing and consolidating its educational system throughout the nineteenth century. Chile wrote several constitutions through the remainder of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, up to 1925, when a new constitution was ratified under the

36 The Lancaster system is detailed in footnote #32.
37 On occasions his name appears in print—as well as on the name of the ISPP Instituto Superior Diego Thomson, located in Lima, Peru, named in his honor—with the alternate spelling of Diego Thomson, with the deletion of the “p.”
leadership of President Arturo Alessandri Palma (1868-1950). However, some of the most significant judicial steps pertinent to the field of education and the government’s responsibilities with respect to schools, teachers, and government officials that led up to the Constitution of 1925 were already noted in earlier constitutions and national laws.

The first document to consider is the 1813 Regulations for Primary Teachers, which in Article 1 made provision for each city, village and town with more than fifty inhabitants to have a school supported financially by the local area. If, for some reason, the local power was financially unable to comply with this directive the head of the province was to take the necessary measures to comply with this mandate (Soto Roa 22).

Article 2 mandated that education be free for all children, and under no circumstances were the parents to be required to contribute financially for their education (Soto Roa 22). Another provision stipulated that teachers were required to pass two exams verifying their knowledge of Christian doctrines, and demonstrating their competence in the fields of writing and the four basic mathematical operations:

Para ejercer la labor docente exigía como cuestión previa un doble examen. El primero versaba sobre doctrina cristiana, el segundo sobre competencia, rendido ante dos miembros del cabildo y un maestro. En aquellos lugares donde no había cabildo la comisión examinadora la conformaban el jefe del lugar, el cura y un maestro. El candidato debía mostrar dominio en la enseñanza de la escritura y de las cuatro operaciones aritméticas. (22)

38 The President of Chile, following the national elections of 1820, 1824, and 1832. He supported legislation guaranteeing workers’ rights, the development of judicial statutes for women, and a provision for mandatory primary education (“Alessandri Palma, Arturo”).

39 This legal document, dictated in 1813, was entitled El Reglamento para Maestras de Primeras Letras. A three-man Governmental Commission consisting of “Pérez [?]-Infante [José Miguel Infante Rojas, 1778-1844, President of the Government Commission]-Eyzaguirre [Agustín Eyzaguirre, 1768-1837, President of Chile (1826-1827)] formulated this manuscript.” According to Soto Roa, the document is composed of twenty-one articles, which set the norms for schools, teaching, and teachers’ qualifications. The provisions were preceded by a text criticizing Spain’s handling of education in Chile and America at large: “...un preámbulo, en el que se critica la política educacional de España en Chile y América, seguida de 21 Artículos que norman sobre las escuelas, los maestros, la educación femenina, la enseñanza particular y la fiscalización de la enseñanza” (21, 22).
In addition to those requirements, the applicant had to obtain three character witnesses who were to address issues concerning their patriotism, their morals, and their lifestyle (Soto Roa 22). These very specific guidelines established a framework within which qualified persons would be certified to teach. Soto Roa underlines that the two areas of concern to an educator’s qualifications were both of a spiritual, and of an academic nature. Compliance to these regulations was such that, “ninguno podrá enseñar en Chile sino en la forma dispuesta por este Reglamento” (22). These guiding principles were also valid for women’s education, and forced the government to create schools for girls, “el Reglamento obligó a crear escuelas para niñas en cada villa. En ellas se debía enseñar a leer, escribir y labores propias de su sexo” (22).

Article 12 instituted further regulations as far as female education is concerned, stating that each Township was required to maintain one free elementary school for girls (Valderrama Bravo 57). And Article 15 encouraged that in private schools both sexes should attend classes together, due to the fact that, “el gobierno reconoce que en esto practican un servicio a la Patria, muy recomendable.” It does appear that for the government, having both genders enrolled in the same classroom fostered a positive environment for the students (Valderrama Bravo 57). When schools were separated by sex, a different viewpoint prevailed; as the government was concerned that teachers and students should be of the same gender. Article 16 stipulated that each class was to have a teacher of the same gender as the students, though the type of education imparted was to remain equal (Valderrama Bravo 57). The government established in Article 17 two official textbooks for all classrooms, the Catechism and La historia de Chile (a compendium of the history of Chile, authored by Molina) (Valderrama Bravo 57). The government also developed an inspection program
under which there was to be a monthly inspection of the schools that were located near each
town council (Cabildo), and every six months for those located in the provinces. The
government could assure adherence to the established policies throughout the country, as
well as enhance the uniformity and quality of the educational programs (Valderrama Bravo
58).

As early as the 1818 Constitution, the townships had control of promoting education,
as noted in Article 2 in which each town council (Cabildo) had the mandate to foster the
education of the young people under their jurisdiction (Valderrama Bravo 59), once again
emphasizing the importance that the Chilean government placed upon the education of its
citizens.

The Constitution of 1822 reinforced some of the same points and added others. Article
8 stated that all Chilean schools were to have a uniform system of education (Valderrama
Bravo 60). According to Article 230, all students were to receive an education in religious
principles, reading, writing, and mathematics (Valderrama Bravo 61). Articles 232 and 233
provided that the Supreme Director of the educational institutions was to be responsible for
verifying that all monasteries and convents were following the same educational guidelines
as the other public schools (Valderrama Bravo 61). The Constitution of 1823 included further
and important provisions for Chile’s institutions of learning.\textsuperscript{40} In Article 9, the country
divided its national expenditures into three major categories: defense, public administration,
and instruction of its citizens; these three areas were determined to be national priorities. The
federal government thus placed public instruction on the same level as top national concerns.
Teaching students was to be of no lesser importance than the country’s defense or the

\textsuperscript{40} This document, which was signed into law, December 29, 1823, was titled the “Constitución
Moralista” which, legislatively-speaking, touched upon the precepts that were to guide the varied activities of
the country, its government, and its citizens (Soto Ros 23).
operation of the nation itself. National expenditures, as well as the executive organization of
the government, were to reflect the importance the government placed on instruction. Since
1823, schooling was not only a priority locally and regionally, as reflected in previous
legislative decisions, but also a nationwide concern. Soto Roa considers article 257 the most
important, as it made a matter of nationwide interest to impart specific training in the areas of
scientific and industrial study. Not only did the national government issue a directive for the
establishment of the institutes for these two areas of specialization, but also it provided
models from which the provincial areas could draw information for the organization of its
own centers:

. . . la instrucción pública, industrial y científica, es uno de los primeros
deberes del Estado. Habrá en la capital dos institutos normales: uno
industrial y otro científico, que sirvan de modelos y seminario para los
institutos de los Departamentos. Habrá escuelas primarias en todas las
poblaciones y parroquias. (24)

Chile dealt with further matters concerning education in its 1828 Constitution.
President Francisco Antonio Pinto Díaz (1775-1850) created a national commission to visit
the schools in the capital city of Santiago, as well as across the country, to allow the
government to bring into conformity the national efforts to enable, as far as possible, a
uniform educational program.

Under the leadership of Diego Portales, through the promulgation of the Constitution
of 1833, the Chilean government sought to bring a new focus and prominence to its
educational structure.41 Article 153 stated that education was to be one of the areas of

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41 This Constitution, signed into law on May 25, 1833, was considered one of the most durable charters
ever devised in Latin America. From a judicial point of view, it gave Chile the means to establish, on a national
level, a high priority on education (Soto Roa 24).

According to Charlene Richardson, Diego Portales Palazuelas (1793-1837), the framer of the 1833
Constitution, was a member of the Chilean Cabinet and exceptionally active behind the scenes primarily under
the 1830-1836 and 1836-1841 terms of presidency of General José Joaquín Prieto Vial (1786-1854). His heavy
participation in the writing and establishment of this Constitution has brought historians to call his term in
importance to the central government, and an annual report on the progress of the educational institutions was to be presented to the Republic by the Minister of Education.

En la Constitución promulgada el 25 de mayo de 1833, se señala, . . . que la instrucción pública es una atención preferente del ‘Gobierno.’ Debe recordarse que en la Constitución de 1925 se usa el concepto de ‘Estado.’ Si bien jurídicamente son distintos, la idea de los redactores en ambas constituciones debió ser que la educación jugaba tan importante rol en el desarrollo político, social y económico del país que, entre las tareas de los conductores de la nación, ésta debía considerarse como un deber. (Soto Roa 24)42

Within this same Constitution, the Roman Catholic Church was established as the official church. Prior to this declaration, the Church’s involvement in the government and education was quite divergent from the central role that it played in Mexico and other Spanish-American countries:

The Roman Catholic Church served as the main buttress of the government and the primary instrument of social control. Compared with its counterparts in Peru and Mexico, the Church in Chile was not very rich or powerful. On the frontier, missionaries were more important than the Catholic hierarchy. (“Chile-Conquest and Colonization, 1535-1810: Politics and War in a Frontier Society”)

office “The Portalian State” because of the multiplicity of activities and the political power he enjoyed during the time he dominated Chilean politics, 1830-1837. While residing in Peru (1821-1823), he had already formulated his political views. “Little did he know, at that time, that these beliefs would lay the foundation for the new Chilean rule” (“Portales, Diego: A Chilean Biography”). As Donald Mabry describes it, Portales’ wanted:

A strong government, centralizing, whose men are true models of virtue and patriotism, and set the citizens on the road of order and virtues. When they have made themselves moral, the government comes to be completely liberal, free and full of ideals, where all citizens take part. (“Portales Era”)

His central role in Chilean politics and his participation in the formulation and implementation of the 1833 Constitution has been summarized by Richardson:

Even though he was never the president or head of state, Diego Portales’ ideals and principles were the building blocks that Chilean government rests upon. His desire to design and manage a stable, peaceful government allowed the country to behold the beginning of economic prosperity and growth. (Richardson, “Portales, Diego: A Chilean Biography”)

42 These provisions re-emphasized the principles that were set forth in the 1825 Constitution with respect to the duties that were entrusted to the national government.
At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Chile only had a Catholic university, which offered a degree in theology. If students wished to pursue other non-religious subjects, such as law, medicine, architecture, or engineering, they had to relocate to Lima, Peru. The government officials of Colonial Chile resolved to establish a university to offer training in a wide-range of professions:

If the means to train lawyers, doctors, engineers and architects in Santiago were provided there would be no need to leave the country, and they would also be able to attract students from neighboring countries, thus reducing the cost of professional training making an education more accessible.

Once the decision to found a university was made, Santiago-born Tomás de Azúa e Iturgoyen (1700-1769) was commissioned to go to Spain in 1727 and reactivate the founding of the Real Universidad de San Felipe. This plan was originally proposed as a public university by the mayor of Santiago, Francisco Ruiz de Berecedo (?) in 1713. However, the establishment had to be postponed for twenty-five years, because of the inability to obtain the authorization for this level of education, despite the fact that the creation of this institution enjoyed active and broad-based support:
A través del Alcalde Francisco Ruiz de Berecedo, había propuesta la creación de una casa de estudios superiores. Esta iniciativa contó con el apoyo del Gobernador y de otras autoridades, no sólo por los beneficios que reportaría, sino también debido a que se le consideraba como un poderoso instrumento de progreso. (“Tomás de Azúa e Iturgoyen”)

The proposal was renewed and succeeded, in 1727, because of the election of Azúa e Iturgoyen as a deputy attorney from Santiago before the Spanish Court. He prepared the documents and eventually obtained the Royal Seal from Felipe V for the foundation of the Universidad de San Felipe in Santiago in 1738. Because of his successful efforts, he was named the founder and first rector of the first university in Chile on March 11, 1747. The doors of this institution were subsequently opened in 1748; it became the Universidad Nacional de Chile, during the nineteenth century, and today still continues to function in its role as Chile’s principal center of higher learning. According to Jone Johnson Lewis, in the 1880s, the University of Chile graduated Latin America’s first female lawyers and physicians (“Family Structure and Attitudes Toward Gender Roles”).

Because of the high priority that Chile placed on instruction, many outstanding individuals were involved in educational endeavors across the years. Most prominent among them was Andrés Bello (1781-1865), who had been significantly influenced by the German educational system. Although born in the region of what is now Venezuela, Andrés Bello moved to Chile and worked to stimulate a strong educational framework for his adoptive country. Due to his vast contributions, he came to be recognized as the Father of Education, not only for Chile, but also for Spanish-America at large. His efforts, beginning in 1832 when Chile founded the Commission on Education, led to the strengthening of the University of Chile and the organization of the public schools throughout the country. His school system reflected his philosophy that a nation’s people can expand their possibilities by attaining a
high level of literacy. André Bello delineated his ideas in an essay titled “El maestro de Hispanoamérica” (1843), which, along with some of his other writings, influenced both Gabriela Mistral’s and José Vasconcelos’ work. His ideas are summarized in these words:

La educación . . . que prepara a los hombres para desempeñar en el gran teatro del mundo el papel que la suerte les ha destinado, es lo que enseña los deberes que tenemos para con la sociedad como miembros de ella, y los que tenemos para con nosotros mismos si queremos llegar al mayor grado de bienestar de que nuestra condición es susceptible. Procurar bienes y evitar males al individuo y a sus semejantes es el objeto que nos proponemos al formar el corazón y el espíritu de un hombre; y por consiguiente, podremos considerar la educación como el empleo de las facultades más a propósito para promover la felicidad humana. (“El maestro. . . .” 3)

As this quote makes evident, he believed that receiving an education is the key to success.

For him, education is a vehicle through which the heart and the spirit can receive training.

Through the figure of Gabriela Mistral, some of Bello’s and Chile’s interest in education would be felt in Mexico. The Chilean poet brought her ideas to José Vasconcelos, and both dedicated their efforts to the training of the people, teachers, students, and parents. Their persistent efforts were successful in providing far-reaching changes in Mexico.
APPENDIX E

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN MEXICO

The history of education in Mexico followed a very distinct path from that of Chile. In a sense, Mexico, originally known as the Vice Royalty of New Spain, and the center of cultural and economic activity within the Spanish Empire, could boast an involvement with education that far surpassed the limited experiences of the marginal colonial area of Chile. Prior to the Mexican Revolution, there were very important centers of learning, but, in contrast to Chile, education was not readily available to everyone. Since Colonial times, educating the general population was not a priority, in fact some leaders considered it a liability rather than an asset; therefore, a person of vision from the outside was needed in order to help the new revolutionary government change this country’s educational climate.

From the time of the Conquest until the period following the formulation and ratification of the laws concerning education and the separation of Church and State as set forth in the Constitution of 1917, the educational atmosphere of Mexico had changed little. There were enlightened individuals such as the educator Gregorio Torres Quintero (1866-1934) who during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the first one of the twentieth promoted change in the field of education. Nonetheless, the Mexican Revolution became the watershed for re-directing Mexico’s educational systems.

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43 Mexico. Gregorio Torres Quintero was a primary school teacher, head of Education and Beneficence for the State of Colima, Mexico and creator of a law for public instruction. He was an intellectual within the field of modern education who developed new teaching methods, such as the concept of seeking means through which learning can be fascinating and animated, such as teaching history through narration and dramatization, instead of through the memorization of dates, names, and events. He developed the onomatopoeic method of teaching reading and writing. He maintained that books should not substitute for the learning that the teacher can provide to the classroom. The two texts that he wrote are La patria mexicana and Elementos de Historia Nacional. (Camacho Navarrete, Avilés Quezada, Trejo López, Nava Chaparro, Cruz Ruiz, and Gutierrez Roa)
Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru opens her book *La educación de la mujer en la Nueva España*, with a quote from Gregorio Torres Quintero, who became one of the key players in the development of Mexico’s modern educational philosophy. The words she cites characterize this educator’s forward-looking philosophy and attitude towards teaching. He believed that educators should adopt an attitude towards themselves and their students, that had not been the prevailing one in Colonial and post-Independence nineteenth-century Mexico:

> El maestro tiene por tarea esencial desarrollar el respeto y el amor a la verdad, la reflexión personal, los hábitos de libre examen al mismo tiempo que el espíritu de tolerancia, el sentimiento del derecho de la persona humana y de la dignidad, la conciencia de la responsabilidad individual al mismo tiempo que el sentimiento de la justicia y de la solidaridad sociales, y la adhesión al régimen democrático y a la República. (Gonzalbo Aizpuru 5)

This pedagogue’s words draw attention to the fact that a teacher is to instill in her or his students a desire to appreciate and love truth, to reflect and to maintain a spirit of tolerance. An educator is to teach about individual rights and human dignity, a sense of justice and social solidarity, coupled with respect for the government. These ideas bear a great similitude to those that were described in the history of education in Chile, and are those that Mistral espoused in her work.

In the setting of Colonial Mexico, those with money had had the widest range of opportunities to study, while those without financial resources had little or no access. The Catholic Church’s schools dominated in educational matters:

> Educationally, the history of Mexico may be summed up in a few words. Prior to the third decade of the twentieth century, education was conducted primarily for the elite. Those who were fortunate enough had their children trained in foreign lands; those less fortunate, in private schools of their own country. Since education was considered a liability rather than an asset for the lower classes, there was little or no provision
made for this class. But the overturn of government [after the Mexican Revolution] changed all this. Mexico . . . entered upon an era of what might be termed “The New Education.” If any nation . . . remade her educational system, Mexico [did] and has. (Smith and Littell 240)

In 1821, when Mexico gained its independence, religious, vocational, and homeschooleds had been in operation for almost three centuries. The Catholic Church founded the majority of these institutions, which were created to instruct the Spaniards and their American-born children, together with a plan to meet the goal of religious training for the indigenous population. The objective was to integrate these indigenous people into the Christian faith, but since there was little focus on literacy, teaching was limited to offer enough reading and writing to carry out religious instruction. During colonial times, there were separate schools for women, whose purpose was to prepare them for their future domestic responsibilities as spouse, homemaker, and mother, unless they chose encloisterment in a convent, where they were free to pursue an education, as is the case with the seventeenth-century intellectual poet and playwright Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Within this colonial society, males who had mastered the first stages of education and could afford it had access to a university career. Those with a more modest income received their higher education in Mexico, while those of greater means attended universities in Spain.

Students who remained in New Spain had these options almost from the time of the founding of the Vice Royalty. In 1536, the Archbishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga (1468-1548) expressed his interest in the establishment of such an institution.44 Subsequent to his proposal, the Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza (1493-1552), expressed his support, which was

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44 Archbishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga was the first bishop of New Spain and Protector of the Indians, named as such by the Spanish Crown.
then followed by the Crown’s endorsement in 1547. On September 21, 1551, the Crown issued the Royal Seal of approval for the creation of the “Real y Pontífica Universidad de México.” This university opened its doors on January 25, 1553 and remained open throughout the years, with the exception of brief closures in 1833, 1857, 1861, and 1865 (“Antecedentes”). When Mexico gained its independence, the university removed the word “Real” from its name. Ultimately, it was simplified to “Universidad de México.” In the early twentieth century, Justo Sierra Méndez (1848-1912), the respected head of the Department of Executive Power, announced that president Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) had approved Sierra’s project to establish a national university. The approval opened the way for restructuring the old institution into what is now the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México (CHEWBACCA). The importance of Mexico City as a center of culture and learning is highlighted by the fact that there were additional institutions of higher learning established during the Colonial Period, such as the Real Escuela de Cirugía, 1778, the Real Colegio de Minería, 1792, and the Fine Arts -Academia de San Carlos, 1794. In 1867, the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria opened its doors, basing its educational curriculum on the ideas of the French thinker Augusto Conte (1798-1857).

45 Antonio de Mendoza was the first individual named by the Spanish Crown to occupy the position of Viceroy in New Spain.

46 Justo Sierra Méndez was a poet, journalist, intellectual, and teacher.

47 The idea of combining the different fields of study under one institution was first proposed by Justo Sierra Méndez in 1881, in his presentation the 11th of February, 1881, before the Mexican Chamber of Deputies.

48 Isidoro Augusto María Francisco Javier Conte. The French-born proponent of the positivist philosophy that held that society’s social order and mankind’s social behavior came from reason and science, not from theology.
According to Angela Thompson, the educational climate during most of the Colonial Period at the primary and pre-primary levels did not encourage free education, a situation changed by royal decree in 1779:

Until the late eighteenth century, Mexican children had few options for basic education at the primary and preprimary levels. There were dames’ schools, pious schools, convent schools, private schools, and tutors, all of which served mostly the wealthy or the very poor and the Indians. In 1779, however, a royal decree ordered towns to establish free primary schools. While the measure was particularly designed for the poor, it also included all children, both girls and boys, of any social or ethnic background without access to schools. In conformity with the decree, municipalities in Mexico established more public secular schools and religious primary schools. (20-21)

This description depicts a learning environment that reinforces my descriptions above concerning limited opportunities for students; only the very rich or the very poor were provided for within the educational system, until almost the close of the Colonial Period. This atmosphere made it difficult for what we now call the lower, working middle class to obtain an education.

Officially, under Spain’s rule, there were educational opportunities for the wealthy, the very poor, and the indigenous children, however, Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru (1935- ),49 in her book El Humanismo y la educación en la Nueva España, provides a quote that describes a more accurate overview of the actual situation in New Spain in relation to the training of indigenous children:

Los que miran y consideran las cosas conforme á la calidad y necesidad de cada una dellas, no enseñan indiferentemente á los niños hijos de los indios, sino con mucha diferencia, porque á los hijos de los principales, que entre ellos eran y son como caballeros y personas nobles, procuran de recogerlos en escuelas que para esto tienen hechas, adonde

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49 Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru was born in Spain, but became a history professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and is currently a researcher at Centro de Estudios Históricos at El Colegio de México.
aprenden á leer y escribir y las demás cosas que abajo se dirán, con que se habilitan para el regimiento de sus pueblos y para el servicio de las iglesias, en lo cual no conviene que sean instruidos los hijos de los labradores y gente plebeya, sino que solamente deprendan la doctrina cristiana, y luego en sabiéndolo, comienzan desde muchachos á seguir los oficios y ejercicios de sus padres, para sustentarse á sí mismos y ayudar á su república, quedando en la simplicidad que sus antepasados tuvieron lo cual por no se haber guardado entre nuestros cristianos viejos, ha sido causa que esté depravado y puesto en confusión el gobierno de los reinos é provincias, antiguamente cristianas, y asimismo por haberse en esto descuidado algunos Religiosos, no conservando la loable costumbre que en este caso tenían los indios de la Nueva España en tiempo de su infidelidad, han enseñado y habilitado a muchos hijos de labradores y gente baja, de tal manera que se han alzado á mayores, y son ellos los que gobiernan en muchos pueblos, y tiene supeditados y abatidos á los principales, los cuales antes que recibiesen la fe, eran sus señores absolutos. A esta causa, los que advierten en ello no permiten que los hijos de los populares entren en las escuelas ni aprendan letras, sino sólo los hijos de los principales. . . . (37, 38)

In the past, the Indians had educated those of a lower social status, but had lost their place to them. Thus, now, the priests are educating the children of the Indian leaders very carefully, in order that they not feel threatened by those below them. According to this account, the children of influential indigenous citizens were able to benefit from schooling and thus could learn to read, write, and prepare for leadership. However, the children of the same indigenous laborers only received enough schooling to allow them some religious training and to participate in the daily morning masses. They were then to return home where the girls would receive instruction in domestic chores, and the boys were to work along side their fathers, in order to learn the skills necessary for engaging in agriculture or other manual labor.

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50 Gonzalbo Aizpuru footnotes this quotation by stating: “Esto significa que para esas fechas ya se habían puesto en práctica los métodos de evangelización recomendados en los primeros tiempos y que se había atenuado el ardor misionero” (37).

51 Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru indicates that this statement was drawn from a declaration entitled “El orden que los religiosos tienen en enseñar a los indios la doctrina, y otras cosas de policia cristiana,” and is extracted from “Códice franciscano: colección de documentos del siglo XVI, editados a finales del siglo XIX.” which corresponds to “... parte de un informe que la provincia del Santo Evangelio de la orden franciscana . . . envió a España alrededor de 1570” (37).
activities. What is of particular interest in this quote is that it indicates that, on occasion, and
prior to Colonial times, those of the lower class who had had access to instruction had been
able to successfully challenge the leadership; consequently, an effort was subsequently made
to prevent this class from having the opportunity to subvert the status quo.

Angela T. Thompson states that with the establishment of the Enlightenment there
was a progressive move in Spain, as in other European nations, to institute free public
instruction throughout the country and its colonies. Laws and directives were passed but the
effectiveness of the endeavors remained local and varied widely from area to area:

Concern about the education of children and the role of children in a
changing society engaged the attention of officials, intellectuals, and
concerned citizens alike in Spain and in parts of its vast empire in the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As part of their program of
transforming the empire into a modern, economically progressive entity,
the liberal reformers of Spain’s Bourbon monarchy envisioned the
establishment of free public instruction, particularly at the primary level,
that was to go beyond the traditional religious instruction offered in most
schools during the colonial period. In response to directives issued by the
Spanish crown, towns throughout the empire, including those in New
Spain, began to reform both the content and structure of public instruction.
Even after the people of New Spain declared their independence from
Spain in 1821 and named their new nation Mexico, this reforming impetus
continued at the local level particularly after the formation of the Mexican
republic in 1824. The consequences of the renewed interest in education
and children, however, varied from locality to locality. (19)

As Thompson explains; although progress was realized in some areas, specifically in Mexico
there was not a uniform local initiative to make the Crown’s good intentions a reality.

Thompson also points out the difference between the education for boys and girls in
pre-Independence Mexico:

Traditionally, girls did not attend school beyond ages ten to twelve except
for the few in special colleges or convent schools, most of whom were
orphans. Rarely did girls receive more than rudimentary instruction. On
the other hand, boys who attended school beyond the primary level had
several options, Latin grammar school, college (colegio), seminary,
convent school, or military academy. Some had tutors. A very few went to a colegio mayor, a college that offered instruction beyond the secondary level, or to the country’s only university in Mexico City, which offered advanced degrees in law, medicine, or theology. (Thompson 23-24)

This difference in educational opportunities does not come as a surprise however, since during these centuries it is characteristic of all-patriarchal societies in the western world. The same can be said, of course, of the advantages brought about by the privileges of money and class. In fact, Chile can be seen as an exception to this rule.

In spite of the early establishment of educational institutions in New Spain, the Independence leaders did not try to take advantage of this fact in order to modernize the system:

Although public schools were secularized by removing priests and nuns from the classroom, the curriculum retained a strong religious component well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, the primary purpose of one new method employed soon after Independence in some areas, the Lancasterian method, was to teach the Bible simultaneously to large numbers of students. Furthermore, modernization of administrations, implementation of new teaching methods, and modifications to curriculum. Many of the texts and teaching manuals used in the 1820’s and 1830’s were the same as those used before Independence.  

**52 Padre Ripalda’s catechism** and **Máximas de buena educación** remained the basic texts at the primary level. (Thompson 26)

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52 A system of education formulated by the British educator Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838), who founded his own school and subsequently published in a pamphlet entitled *Improvements in Education*. His ideas towards providing an education for all children are reflected in the notice that he posted outside his school in Southwark, England: “All who will may send their children and have them educated freely, and those who do not wish to have education for nothing may pay for it if they please.” Because of a deficit in funds, but a high enrollment, he developed a monitorial system of education in which each class would have a “master” teacher, who was assisted by teaching assistants. This type of staff was required because the Lancasterian philosophy of education demanded a physical and practical approach. (“Joseph Lancaster”)

53 Padre Jerónimo Ripalda (1535-1618) of La Compañía de Jesús. He studied the language and the needs of the Mexican population and then wrote *Catecismo de las Doctrinas Cristianas* (1616), in response to the unique characteristics of the region.

54 Published in 1819 by Pedro Antonio de Septién Montero y Austri (?), “... que ocupó diversos cargos en el gobierno como regidor, alférez real, procurador general, y comisario, que dedica su obra al ayuntamiento de Querétaro [México]. El texto está dividido en dos partes: una sobre la educación religiosa y la otra sobre la educación política (Torres Septién 277). Montero y Austri’s motivation for writing this volume, according to Torres Septién, was: “desea que los niños de la nueva nación independiente, esto es de México, aprendan a ser ‘políticos cristianos’ y puedan servir tanto a la religion como al Estado” (281).
Even with independence, not much changed, including the strong emphasis on religious training. In addition, whereas the Lancaster system was adopted in Chile to enhance the effectiveness of the classroom teacher, in Mexico it was used to strengthen religious teaching thus maintaining the status quo. Nonetheless, Mary Kay Vaughan provides a different insight into the implementation of this instructional approach. She underlines a more progressive and modern approach in the use of the Lancaster methodology, than is reported by Thompson:

Many liberals patronized the founding of the Lancaster Society in Mexico in 1822 and the reforms of 1833 were intended to use its instructional method. Municipal, state, and federal governments provided the Lancaster schools with financial assistance and space in former churches. In 1842, the society became the re instituted Dirección General de Instrucción Primaria, and in a three-year period organized normal training institutions and primary schools in the capital and states. In 1859, the Lancaster schools taught the three r’s, Christian doctrine, political catechism, and elements of urbanity, to which were later added geography, geometry, and drawing. (16)

Despite these minor successes, Vaughan reports that not until 1854 (forty-four years after Mexico’s independence movement began with Miguel Hidalgo [1753-1811] and his “Grito de Dolores”), did Benito Juárez (1806-1872) a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, and Minister of Justice, formulated educational reforms (Ley Juárez) that gave rise to the first actual movements towards change. Liberal reforms were instituted for enhancing educational

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55 The first proclamation of independence in Mexico was by the Irish-born William Lamport (a.k.a. D. Guillén Lombardo de Guzmán, or “El Zorro” [1615-1659]), in 1650 (Salum).

56 In 1855, Benito Juárez became the Minister of Justice and issued a series of reforms (Ley Juárez): The principal points were:
- The abolition of the fueros and the use of special military and ecclesiastical courts in civil cases.
- All church property except buildings used for worship was confiscated without any compensation. The onies from the sale of these properties were confiscated.
- Non-civil marriages were declared annulled.
- The separation of church and state was proclaimed.
- Cemeteries were now public property and burial fees abolished. (“Cinco de mayo”)
opportunities and reducing ecclesiastical power. In 1857, Juárez, while governor of Oaxaca, wrote a new constitution in which further attempts were made to limit ecclesiastical involvement in educational matters. Despite his reforms, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the renewed dominance of education by the Church and wealthy landowners as well as the growth of Positivist ideology, with its emphasis on empirical and scientific data. Positivist thought became dominant during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.

As Mexico entered the twentieth century and the post-Revolution period, intellectuals such as José Vasconcelos and Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959) did much to enhance the country’s educational endeavors and focus on the issues concerning the instructional state of affairs. Vasconcelos published many essays attacking the on-going Positivist philosophy espoused by Porfirio Díaz, while Alfonso Reyes expounded on the printed page his ideas on educational reform. In 1912, he, along with Justo Sierra, founded the School of Higher Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico in addition to co-founding El Colegio Nacional, in 1945.57 Reyes, together with José Vasconcelos, Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946), a writer and critic from the Dominican Republic, and another Mexican writer and educator Antonio Caso (1883-1946), founded the Ateneo de la Juventud (Atheneum of Youth) literary society, which would have a strong influence in Mexican intellectual life in the years to come. Their activities in conjunction with the Ateneo de la Juventud were instrumental in the ultimate collapse of Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship in 1911. The Mexican

57 In the article “Antecedentes” the following information is provided concerning this endeavor: Para que el proyecto fuera realidad, la Secretaría [Justo Sierra] envió al pedagogo Ezequiel A [deadato] Chávez [1868-1946] [having been commissioned in 1903] a Europa y a los Estados Unidos en tres ocasiones ‘para que analizara el funcionamiento de varias universidades.’ De los estudios llevados a cabo por Chávez surgió el proyecto definitivo de la Universidad Nacional de México. Chávez also, “redactó la parte medular de su [Universidad Nacional de México] Ley Constitutiva” (Ezequiel Adeadato Chávez).
Revolution, which started one year earlier, in 1910, also led to the sweeping reforms that were introduced in the Constitution of 1917 and implemented after Álvaro Obregón became president. José Vasconcelos, supported by President Obregón, fought to make a reality the new constitutional mandate that would lead to education becoming compulsory for all individuals, regardless of class, economic status, ethnic origin, or gender.

José Vasconcelos was pivotal to the modernization and establishment of Mexico’s school facilities, educational programs, libraries, editorial houses, and many other cultural institutions as well as the guide for transforming Mexico and its relations with the rest of Spanish-America:

Sus aportaciones fueron valiosas en diversas esferas, no obstante, de entre las múltiples contribuciones de su obra, un punto relevante, son sus logros en la consolidación del Sistema Educativo Nacional. Desde sus diversos ámbitos de trabajo, Vasconcelos emprendió una cruzada educativa única, que consistió en: realizar la promoción de la primera campaña de alfabetización que se recuerda en el país; impulsar la construcción de escuelas y bibliotecas públicas, apoyado en una campaña de publicación y distribución masiva de libros; crear un plan de fomento cultural al que llamó Misiones culturales, las cuales tenían como fin, enlazar la educación, el desarrollo social y la cultura, para ofrecer así oportunidades de progreso en todo el territorio nacional, además de generar las circunstancias propicias para el acercamiento de México con otras naciones hispanoamericanas. ("Maestro de la Juventud de América")

Under the leadership of José Vasconcelos, Mexico embarked on a plan of educational reform of a magnitude that had never been attempted. His vision allowed him to spearhead a modern educational revolution that would launch his country into a position of leadership in Spanish-America. Some of the areas that he perceived as of utmost importance were those of improving teacher education, enhancing school curriculums, and making an array of learning materials accessible to teachers and students. He was aware that he could not accomplish his aggressive programs without the aid and support of individuals who had more specific
knowledge than he. These circumstances are what created the nexus between Gabriela Mistral and José Vasconcelos, and together they worked for the development of rural schools.


“Antecedentes.” 10 Jan 2003. <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/rectoria/htm/ante.html/>. [Chronicles the history of the development of UNAM (Universidad Nacional de México), beginning with the inception of the idea, by arzobispo fray Juan de Zumárraga, of a university in Mexico, in 1536, to 1907, when the Universidad Nacional was established under the leadership of Justo Sierra, Secretaria de Instrucción Pública, with the approval of the President of Mexico, Porfirio Díaz.]


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The resources listed in this volume are limited to the University of Indiana collection, at the time of publication.


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