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Moving Identities

Constructing the Self and
the Other in Travel Writing

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Creating a Sense of Pan-American Connectedness: Gabriela Mistral's Travel Writing on Brazil

Marília Jöhnk

Travel writing and Pan-Americanism

In 1945, only shortly after the end of World War II, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Gabriela Mistral, the first woman from the Spanish-speaking world and first Latin American poet to receive the honour. The Nobel laureate was a writer and schoolteacher born in a remote region of Chile. Growing up in a poor family in the Valle del Elqui, a place to which Mistral repeatedly refers in her writing, she later went on to become a rural schoolteacher, specialising in geography. This profession was a vocation for Mistral and deeply influenced her literary and diplomatic career, even though she eventually had to give up teaching. It is therefore not surprising that Mistral is known to this day as 'la maestra de América', meaning 'the teacher of America'. Although she left her home country, Mistral never forgot where she came from; her works were guided by ethical concerns and a profound affection for Indigenous traditions and cultural currents that were not considered part of high culture.

Travelling was a constant in Gabriela Mistral's life. She left Chile in 1922, at the age of 33, to participate in the pedagogical mission of the prominent Mexican Minister of Education José Vasconcelos.¹ Vasconcelos had personally invited the Chilean writer to join the new nation, which was reinventing itself after the Mexican Revolution. After leaving Chile, Mistral returned to her home country only three times.² As a consul for Chile moving became part of her profession, and thus she travelled extensively to Europe and through Latin America, including to Ecuador, Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Cuba. Travelling shaped both Mistral's life and her writing;³ not only her prose but also her poems, for which she received the Nobel Prize, were deeply influenced by the cultures, landscapes, and people she encountered. Mistral's ties to Latin America were also expressed in her teaching career in the United States, where she lectured in the emerging discipline of Latin American Studies.⁴

Whereas most of the research on Mistral positions her as a Hispanic writer and examines her work through this lens, I would like to propose a different approach, defin-

¹ Cf. FIOL-MATTA 2002: XVIII. For more information on Mistral's biography, cf. *ibid.* For further aspects concerning Mistral's relation to Mexico, cf. WEINBERG 2016: 11–41, 17–19, SCHNEIDER 1997 and CABELLO HUTT 2018: 1–2, 32–33. The present chapter builds on my book on Latin American travel writing, especially on Gabriela Mistral's prose; cf. JÖHNK 2021. Some of the insights of this monograph have been adapted for present purposes, although I only briefly allude to Mistral's connection to Brazil in my study and do not interpret the two texts that are at the core of this chapter.

² Cf. FIOL-MATTA 2002: XIX.

³ Cf. for instance ARRIGOITIA 1989: 20. For a map of Gabriela Mistral's travels, cf. <https://marilia-joehnk.de/poetik-des-kolibris> [16 June 2023].

⁴ Cf. WEINBERG 2016: 14, 24.

ing her as a Pan-American author. From this perspective on the Nobel laureate, Mistral's travel writing occupies a core position. In the early 20th century, Pan-Americanism – the endeavour to bring North, Central, and South America closer together – became a popular discourse, in part as a result of the foundation of the Pan-American Union.⁵ Nevertheless, most Brazilian and Hispanic authors looked to Europe for aesthetic inspiration, especially France, and were rarely interested in the intercultural exchanges on their own continent.⁶ Mistral may be one of the few exceptions in this regard.⁷ As a consul for Chile she lived in Brazil, first in Niterói and then in nearby Petrópolis, which not only was a smaller town but enjoyed a more pleasant climate.⁸ In 1927, Mistral had already visited Brazil once and connected with one of the country's most important cultural figures, the 'pope of modernism' Mário de Andrade.⁹ Ten years later Mistral travelled again to Brazil, and at the end of another three years her work brought her back to the largest Latin American country, where she spent five years of her life.¹⁰ Having worked for two years in Lisbon and six months in Brazil, Mistral was already fluent in Portuguese,¹¹ but she also became engaged in the local cultural life and was part of a network of prolific Brazilian writers that included Cecília Meireles, Manuel Bandeira, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade.¹²

The present chapter aims to show how Mistral constructs a specifically Pan-American connectedness in her writing. I will rely on flexible and open terms such as 'belonging' and 'connectedness', which express a sense of collectivity, while also bearing in mind the diversity and heterogeneity of the Americas. Although several works have provided insight on Mistral as a Pan-American writer, only a few publications highlight her relation to Brazil, including the five years she spent in war-time Brazil, a part of her life that is rarely covered in detail in her biographies.¹³ Mistral's prose works remain a rarely discussed topic; it is therefore not surprising that her writing during the Brazilian period also remains a blind spot in the research. Two short texts lie at the heart of this chapter: Mistral's descriptions of the Brazilian cities of Belo Horizonte and Petrópolis.¹⁴ Through a close reading of these two forgotten texts, I will show that Mis-

⁵ On the Pan-American discourse, see PARK 2014. Park traces the history of the "Pan American imagination" from 1910 to 1930.

⁶ The Brazilian modernists, for instance, were more interested in the French vanguard. Many Brazilian artists, such as Oswald de Andrade, travelled to Paris and lived there; cf. JÖHNK 2020.

⁷ In her book on Mistral's time in Brazil, Ana Pizarro shows that the years in Brazil were decisive to Mistral's Pan-American project; see PIZARRO 2005: 9, 63.

⁸ Cf. PIZARRO 2003: 164.

⁹ Cf. PIZARRO 2005: 17.

¹⁰ Cf. PIZARRO 2005: 17.

¹¹ Cf. HORAN 2015: 255.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 258.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 225. Ana Pizarro's research, which portrays Mistral's time in Brazil in detail, is an exception; see PIZARRO 2003 and PIZARRO 2005. Important contributions to Mistral as a Pan-American writer have been published by COHEN 2003 and CABELLO HUTT 2018: 119–129, 129–140.

¹⁴ Ana Pizarro mentions these texts and lists other examples of Mistral's writing that portray Brazil's nature and culture; cf. PIZARRO 2005: 30. For further comments on the article, cf. *ibid.*, 39.

tral's travel writing contributed to shaping a sense of Pan-American belonging. Unlike many travellers who were focused on understanding 'themselves', in the sense of the culture in which they were raised – a common motif in the tradition of travel writing – Mistral sought to expand her readers' horizons. Importantly, this expansion was not concerned with exhibiting the 'exotic' character of Latin America; rather, Mistral sought to educate her readers in Latin America on the history, geography, and cultural dimension of the region. Following this line of thought, Mistral transcended not only national discourse but also the colonial tradition of travel writing. As a Latin American, she wrote for Latin Americans on Latin America.

The gardens of Petrópolis

To visit Petrópolis is to travel back in time. The former summer residence of the Brazilian emperor, not far from Rio de Janeiro, preserves the charm of the Habsburg Empire. Visitors can still explore the summer house of the famous Emperor Dom Pedro II and, in one of the most prominent parts of the city, the imperial gardens. In 1940, when the Imperial Museum of Petrópolis opened its doors, the gardens became accessible to the public, and visitors could finally promenade among the botanical treasures of the last Brazilian emperor.¹⁵

Many readers may be familiar with the city of Petrópolis for another reason, however: the Jewish-Austrian writer Stefan Zweig lived in Petrópolis and ended his life there, and one of his closest friends at the time was Gabriela Mistral.¹⁶ Tragically, Zweig would not be the only of those close to Mistral to take his life in Petrópolis: her (adopted) son Juan Miguel also died by suicide in the city; his grave lies somewhere in Petrópolis and is a testament to one of the saddest times in the writer's life.¹⁷

Despite these tragic incidents, Petrópolis was an important place for writing and intellectual encounters.¹⁸ Mistral dedicated a highly poetical text to a garden in Petrópolis and published it under the title "Un jardín de Petrópolis" (A garden of Petrópolis). It remains unclear which garden Mistral is referring to; indeed, it may be that the described garden belonged not to the emperor's residence but to the private house of Don Luis Fossati and his wife – who is given the fictional name "Doña María-llena de gracia" (MISTRAL 1945a: 79). Although the narrator announces that the text will describe four gardens, we only learn about one, which is connected to Brazilian history through a reference to the country's independence (ibid., 79). This allusion suggests that although the imperial gardens are not mentioned, Mistral is playing with the historical semantics of the gardens in Petrópolis.

¹⁵ Historical research on the development of Petrópolis is limited. Apart from ALQUÉRES 2002, I rely on the instructive documentary GALVÃO 2019.

¹⁶ Cf. PIZARRO 2003: 170.

¹⁷ Ana Pizarro mentions that she was unable to locate the grave of Mistral's son in Petrópolis; cf. PIZARRO 2005: 11.

¹⁸ Many intellectuals met, for instance, in the Casa d'Angelo, "an antique cafeteria"; cf. ibid., 21.

During her time in Brazil, Mistral established relations with different magazines and newspapers, including *A Manhã*, *O Jornal*, and *La Tribuna de Petrópolis*.¹⁹ *Un jardín de Petrópolis* was published not in a Brazilian newspaper but in two different international papers: the Argentinian *El Tiempo* and the Chilean *El Mercurio*.²⁰ This publication practice was typical of Mistral's writing: she strategically published her work in more than one place to reach a broader audience.²¹ Behind this strategy lay a larger ambition: Mistral sought to publish in a variety of newspapers across Latin America. In this case, she chose newspapers from Argentina and Chile to tell the story of a Brazilian garden. This practice contributed to creating a new sense of Latin American belonging that included both the Portuguese-speaking and the Spanish-speaking world. Apart from writing texts for newspapers, Mistral also used the radio for her Pan-American ambitions. Some of her travel writings on Mexico and Chile, for instance, were first published as radio broadcasts from Brazilian stations.²² Whereas Benedict Anderson has shown how newspapers helped to forge a national identity, I would like to suggest that, at least in the case of Gabriela Mistral, they helped to create a *transnational* sense of belonging, one that was rarely found in the contemporary discourse.²³

It is also worth noting that *Un jardín de Petrópolis* was not published as a simple newspaper article. The textual form chosen for this work was the chronicle, or, to use the specific Spanish term, the *crónica*. Throughout Latin America – in Brazil and in Spanish-speaking countries – this prose form remains a celebrated genre of (travel) writing to this day. The *crónica* originated in the European feuilleton but took its own direction and dynamic in the New World, in which many famous authors practiced this daily form of writing for a broad audience.²⁴ Although there are differences between the Hispanic and the Brazilian tradition, they share many characteristics, including brevity, an experimental and playful tone, and an orientation towards the quotidian.²⁵ The aesthetic form that Mistral chose for her travel writing thus also supports the argument that her travel poetics has a specifically Pan-American dimension.

Mistral dedicated her prose piece to an anonymous garden in Petrópolis. As in many other examples of her travel writing, we have a female voice who tells the story of the garden from her own memory, without giving the reader the illusion of currently being there. She describes the garden with the following words: “Hace tres años lo tengo delante; lo ando sin moverme de mi terraza, me lo sé casi como a mis ropas; puedo andarlo con los ojos cerrados...” (MISTRAL 1945a: 79).²⁶ The intimacy that the narrator

¹⁹ PIZARRO 2005: 25.

²⁰ See ARRIGOITIA 1989: 384. Arrigoitia's volume is a valuable source in that it offers the reader a detailed list of Mistral's articles and the newspapers in which they were published.

²¹ Cf. WEINBERG 2016: 23.

²² Cf. PIZARRO 2005: 26.

²³ Cf. ANDERSON 2006: 25, 33–36.

²⁴ For a more detailed analysis and description of the *crónica* and the discourse on it, cf. JÖHNK 2021: 91–98.

²⁵ See for instance CANDIDO 1992, one of the most prominent texts on the *crônica* by the Brazilian literary critic Antonio Candido.

²⁶ [‘Three years ago I have it in front of me; I walk through it without moving away from my terrace, I know it almost like I know my clothes; I can walk it with eyes closed...’] All translations, if not otherwise marked, are my own.

feels towards the garden can be perceived through the comparison to her wardrobe, but also through the strong and emphasised use of the pronoun ‘mine’ (“mi terraza”, “mis ropas”) throughout the text (cf. *ibid.*). The garden is so familiar that the narrator knows it by heart and can recall it from memory. This closeness is further expressed by the fact that the narrator observes the garden from her own house, which is also a striking parallel to Mistral’s travel prose on Mexico. The narrator describes the Brazilian garden with the same familiarity with which Mistral’s travelling narrator had portrayed the Valle de México twenty years earlier: as a result of her stay in Mexico during Vasconcelos’s educational reform, Mistral had published *El paisaje mexicano* in 1922, a text that describes the valley of Mexico, in the vicinity of the capital.²⁷

Un jardín de Petrópolis is a mixture of narration both from memory and from a present promenade to which we assist as readers. The familiarity that connects the narrator to the garden, and the fact that the narrator may be depicting a private garden, reveals another important trait of Mistral’s travel writing: the Nobel laureate is interested in everyday Latin American culture. This tendency becomes even more obvious at the end of *Un jardín de Petrópolis*. Mistral closes her text with a tribute to the two gardeners, José and Antonio. She makes their work and life visible and builds a literary monument to them in her travel writing. One of the last passages of the text consequently seems to be a metapoetological reflection on the poetics of Mistral’s own travel writing: “Ellos no cuentan ni se cuentan como nosotros los escritores, pobre gente de hablaría, y cuando les pido el nombre, creen cualquier cosa, menos que voy a ponerlos en mi escritura como la rúbrica del jardín.” (MISTRAL 1945a: 85–86)²⁸ The narrator directly states that her writing intentionally includes ordinary people who have no means of representation and who would otherwise be forgotten by history.

The reader of *Un jardín de Petrópolis* becomes a visitor whom the narrator guides through the garden, like a cicerone. Walking through the garden and through the text therefore becomes a single movement: “El forastero así invitado entra y cruza al jardín por una Avenida que sorprende el paso por las piedras tajadas en bloques rústicos. No seguimos hacia la casa, la dejamos de lado.” (MISTRAL 1945a: 80)²⁹ The perspective of the “forastero” [‘foreigner’], to which the quote alludes, mirrors the purposes of Mistral’s travel prose, which aims to narrate and depict a Brazilian garden to her readers in Chile and Argentina. As mentioned above, in 1940, shortly before *Un jardín de Petrópolis* was written and published, the imperial gardens became accessible to the public. Precisely at that time, Mistral was working in Petrópolis. The endeavour to depict a garden of Petrópolis in her writing – even though we do not know which one Mistral is

²⁷ Cf. MISTRAL 1922: 47. I analyse this text thoroughly in my book *Poetik des Kolibris* and comment on the dimension of memory in Mistral’s travel writing; cf. JÖHNK 2021: 32–49. Mistral directly alludes to her time in Mexico and to *El paisaje mexicano* when commenting on the “maguays” and her time in “Anahuac”; cf. MISTRAL 1945a: 81. Both aspects are evoked in my reading of *El paisaje mexicano*.

²⁸ [‘They don’t narrate themselves and don’t even narrate like we writers, we poor twaddlers, and when I ask for their names, they think of anything except that I will include them in my writing as the paraph of the garden.’]

²⁹ [‘The foreigner who was thus invited enters and crosses the garden through an Alley that surprises the pace with stones cut into rustic blocks. We don’t continue towards the house, we leave it aside.’]

specifically referring to – can for that reason be considered a further step in the democratisation of the gardens. Not only were the gardens of Petrópolis open to the public at the time, but Mistral also makes them available, through her writing, to a wide readership across Latin America. Her travel writing on Petrópolis is therefore part of a democratic project that shares the culture and history of the Brazilian monarchy with the entire continent. This political and didactic dimension of travel writing is part of Mistral's literary agenda; some of her first travel narratives were published in a schoolbook that the author herself edited for a Mexican school for girls, attended by students who were being trained not for a university education but for manual labour.³⁰

Latin America was a preferred subject of European travel writing. Mistral inscribes herself in this tradition and inverts the power relations connected to the genre. In her work we encounter a Latin American woman writer addressing fellow Latin Americans, a constellation that challenges the colonial tradition of the genre. As we see throughout Mistral's prose writing, the Chilean Nobel laureate constructs the garden as a human place of experience. She immediately connects the garden to the people who take care of it and nourish it (cf. MISTRAL 1945a: 79). This is an important aspect, since it distinguishes Mistral's travel writing from the texts that are analysed in Mary Louise Pratt's famous study *Imperial Eyes*. On her interpretation, Pratt shows that European travellers often portrayed Latin American landscapes as "unpossessed" and "uninhabited", as part of a strategy to appropriate and rule them (PRATT 1992: 51). In this respect they differ significantly from Mistral, who is interested in the human experience connected to Latin American landscapes and nature. The plants and trees that the narrator observes in the garden are not only humanised as "amores" ['dear friends'] and compared to "niños" ['children'] (MISTRAL 1945a: 80) but are also integrated in the space of human relationships – the human and the botanical world are thus connected and cannot be separated.

Another striking feature of the text, which is also a common trait of Mistral's travel writing, is its dramatisation of, and play with, visibility. Not only is the narrator imagining the garden with her inner eye, but the act of seeing is constantly portrayed and commented on. Mistral writes the following of the owner of the garden: "Con lo cual este jardín vive vigilado por ojos expertos y ojos nuevos [...]" (MISTRAL 1945a: 79)³¹ This aspect offers another point of comparison with Pratt's study on travel writing. In contrast to Pratt's authors, Mistral's narrator does not celebrate the male gaze, which appropriates and exploits the landscape.³² Mistral portrays both the gaze of those who are native to the city, as in the present example, and the gaze of the foreigner, who is visiting the garden at the same time. She creates a multiple perspective on the garden, which does not seek to dominate and appropriate what is seen.

Indeed, not only the narrator and the other inhabitants of the garden but also the garden itself possess the capacity to see: "Sesgando su ojo dorado como el gallo, la lengua mira por encima de los magueys hacia una pineda en ciernes [...]. Y, a su vez, la pineda de cinco años mira, por encima del hombro y con el desdén de los perros de raza [...]"

³⁰ Cf. MISTRAL (1924a). Cf. FIOU-MATTA 2002: 74. For more information on this schoolbook, see ARRIGOTIA (1989): 59–61 and WEINBERG (2016): 22–23.

³¹ ['With him this garden is constantly observed by experienced eyes and new eyes [...].']

³² For more information on the male gaze in travel writing, cf. PRATT 1992: 7.

(MISTRAL 1945a: 81).³³ Latin American nature is therefore portrayed not as a passive object that can be conquered and appropriated but as possessing agency, which contrasts with the texts at the centre of Pratt's study.

The narrator evokes a textual presentation of the garden that is reconstructed from memory. It is not only a Brazilian but a Latin American garden, in which the memories of Mistral's American travels interact and blend into one another: "Ahora el jardín se me dispara otra vez, proyectado hacia México [...] Y aquí me para en seco el encuentro de un cinamomo, ¡ay!, no visto desde Vicuña, hace cuarenta años" (MISTRAL 1945a: 82–83).³⁴ Apart from the references to Mexico, which emerge in different passages in the article, Mistral alludes here to Chile. Her home country, Brazil, and Mexico are blended with one another, and the *crónica* becomes an imagined Pan-American space.³⁵

Un jardín de Petrópolis contains botanical knowledge. It can therefore be considered an example not only of postcolonial travel writing but also of a gendered and female way of narrating travel. For centuries, botany was a privileged space for female education, and Mistral apparently inscribes herself in this tradition when offering the reader detailed information on the biological characteristics of the garden.³⁶ Further conclusions can also be drawn from a close reading of one of the descriptions Mistral provides her readers:

Las filas de pinos graves corren entreveradas por matas de azaleas, que durante tres meses los acicatearon con su punzada solferina; y para mayor gloria de la avenida, paralela a la falange conífera, crece otra de los eucaliptus amigos de nuestro aliento. Y detrás de éstos sigue todavía un límite de 'ficus' que ayer no más eran ramillas y ya son muro – ¡fecundidad de tierra que me asusta todos los días! (MISTRAL 1945a: 80)³⁷

Mistral meticulously informs her readers about the characteristics of the different plants and flowers that can be found in the garden. This aspect is important for her travel writing, which also served educational purposes. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Mistral remains to this day 'la maestra de América'.³⁸ During her years in Mex-

³³ ['Bending her golden eye like the rooster, the lagoon watches over the magueys towards a blossoming pine forest [...]. And in turn the five-year-old pine forest looks over her shoulder with the same contempt as purebred dogs [...].']

³⁴ ['Now the garden slips again away from me, projected towards Mexico [...] And here I am suddenly stopped by the encounter of a Chinaberry tree, which, alas, I have not seen since Vicuña, forty years ago.']

³⁵ For another allusion to Mexico and Chile, see also MISTRAL 1945a: 86. It should be mentioned that Mistral also alludes to places in Europe, although these references are much more subtle and less frequent in her writing. Cf. *ibid.*, 83.

³⁶ See for instance GEORGE 2007: 43–80.

³⁷ ['The rows of solemn pines intertwine with bushes of azaleas, which for three months have spurred them on with their purplish stitch; and for the greater glory of the avenue, parallel to the coniferous phalanx, grows another one, made of eucalyptus, friends of our breath. And behind them, there is still a boundary of 'ficus' trees, which only yesterday were mere branches and now already build a wall – such is the fertility of the earth, which surprises me every day!']

³⁸ Cabello Hutt examines how Mistral uses the image of the 'maestra' when constructing herself as a public intellectual; cf. for instance CABELLO HUTT 2018: 18, 50, etc.

ico, she edited a schoolbook for girls in which she included her own travel writing.³⁹ Not only her stay in Mexico but also her textual production in Brazil highlights the didactic purpose of her travel writing. Depicting the garden as a place of knowledge and botanical apprenticeship goes hand in hand with the historical tradition of the imperial gardens of Petrópolis. For Princess Isabel of Brazil, for instance, the gardens served as a place for studying botany, and following Brazil's independence, (convent) schools used them for their biology classes.⁴⁰

Not only does Mistral seek to describe Latin American nature, but she also forges an affectionate relationship with it through her praise of it. Her vocabulary is tender, and throughout the present text she laments that many of the plants she describes have yet to be honoured: “A nadie se lo ocurrió antes honrar así a la planta pajiza de plumero asiático, tan común como cualquier carrizo y tan ‘buena pobre’ que no cuesta nada” (MISTRAL 1945a: 81).⁴¹ Travel writing therefore becomes an instrument for praising nature. In the lines quoted above, Mistral is alluding to a plant, which she describes as a “plume”. Although the identity of the plant remains ambiguous – this could be a reference to the reed *Phragmites australis* – the important thing is that Mistral is referring to a plant that is not only very common but also affordable. In Mistral's prose the botanical world, like the human world, is classified through social divisions. In her travel writing, Mistral often attributes social aspects to Latin American nature, and thus the social and the natural world are not imagined as separate, dichotomous entities.⁴²

Un jardín de Petrópolis is shaped by a very difficult and dense language that relies on terms from different Latin American linguistic varieties, which is yet another common feature of Gabriela Mistral's travel writing. In some passages, Portuguese words are also to be found.⁴³ As biographers have noted, this linguistic shift can be observed in her Brazilian notebooks as well (her shopping lists, for instance, were written in ‘Portuñol’).⁴⁴ Thus not only Mistral's life and writing but also her literary language was influenced by her time in Brazil and testifies to a fluent and unstable (linguistic) identity.

Belo Horizonte, or the birth of a new city

Mistral rarely describes urban spaces in her travel writing. With that said, there are certain exceptions, such as a text she dedicated to the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais. When taking a broader look at Mistral's travel prose, it becomes obvious that it was above all the rural and not the urban landscape that caught her attention. This is a significant departure from many other – above all male –

³⁹ The schoolbook *Lecturas para mujeres*, for instance, contains a portrait of an Indigenous Mexican woman; cf. MISTRAL 1924b (Silueta de la india Mexicana).

⁴⁰ On this dimension of the gardens, cf. the documentation by GALVÃO 2019.

⁴¹ [‘It has never occurred to anyone up to now to honour this straw-like Asian plume plant in such a way, as common as any reed and such a ‘good poor’ thing that it costs nothing.’]

⁴² Cf. my reading of *El paisaje mexicano* in JÖHNK 2021: 41–46.

⁴³ See for instance “morros” and “saudadosa” in MISTRAL 1945a: 79, 84.

⁴⁴ HORAN 2015: 265.

representatives of the *crónica* genre, who, like Roberto Arlt and Carlos Monsiváis, wrote mainly on urban spaces such as Buenos Aires and Mexico City.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Belo Horizonte is far from being a commonly depicted Brazilian city – Rio de Janeiro, Salvador da Bahia, or perhaps even Ouro Preto or São Paulo would have been a far more traditional point of focus. Mistral’s travel prose was fascinated with places that were not typical of travel writing: she dedicated texts to Michoacán, to the Valle de México, but also to European landscapes and locations such as the Italian cities of Sestri Levante and Zoagli.⁴⁶ Like Petrópolis, Belo Horizonte was a planned city; rather than representing the Brazilian monarchy, though, it was associated with the Republic, founded in 1889. Thus, Mistral refers to two cities that were crucial to Brazilian history and which symbolise two important stages of the nation’s historiography. Both cities were founded in the 19th century and represent the country’s development, including its shift from monarchy to republic.

Belo Horizonte, la ciudad creada de una sola vez dates from 1945. Mistral visited the city a couple of times, as is revealed in newspaper articles from the period.⁴⁷ Although the text is from 1945, Mistral had already published the article in Portuguese in 1942. In the Portuguese version, which appeared in the Brazilian newspaper *O Jornal* from Rio de Janeiro, she chose the title “Pequeno elogio de Belo Horizonte”, meaning “Small praise of Belo Horizonte”, thus directly connecting her text to the panegyric tradition.⁴⁸ The title Mistral chose for her Spanish text is highly poetic: “Belo Horizonte, Capital de Minas Geraes, la ciudad creada de una sola vez”.⁴⁹ As in many other examples from her travel writing, Mistral stresses that she lived in the city, although this may be an exaggeration as her stay lasted only ten days. In the opening lines of the text, Mistral describes Belo Horizonte in the context of a larger Latin American space:

Diez días he vivido en la ciudad bien nombrada, que tiene el horizonte espacioso [...]; que por tener el aire seco y agudo, me ha hecho recordar la bocanada que respiramos en los Andes y que, además, es la patria de las rosas americanas más perfectas que haya cogido mi mano de vieja jardinera.⁵⁰ (MISTRAL 1945b: 87)

⁴⁵ On the urban tradition of the *crónica*, see for instance MAHIEUX 2011. For more information on Mistral’s preference for rural spaces, see VALDÉS GAJARDO 2007: 57 and MORALES 2011: 215. In her description, Mistral seems to imagine Belo Horizonte as a rural space or anti-city; cf. MISTRAL 1945b: 88.

⁴⁶ All of these texts can be found in the anthology MISTRAL 1978.

⁴⁷ Cf. UNKNOWN 1942: A estada de Gabriela Mistral em Belo Horizonte. Em companhia do secretario da Educação, a grande poetisa chilena visitou ontem o Instituto Bio-Quimico. *Folha de Minas* 29 Sept. <http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/bnd/623/w3-article-148146.html> [16 June 2023]. The article dates from 1942 and implies that Mistral’s 1942 visit was not her first.

⁴⁸ Cf. MISTRAL 1942: Pequeño elogio de Belo Horizonte. *O Jornal* 1–2, 29 Nov. <http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/bnd/623/w3-article-148186.html> [16 June 2023]. I was able to determine neither whether Mistral wrote the Portuguese text on her own nor whether she translated it into Spanish herself. In the Portuguese version, Mistral includes two paragraphs at the end thanking the writer Henriqueta Lisboa, which may mean that the latter was involved in the translation process.

⁴⁹ [‘Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais, the city that was created all at once’]

⁵⁰ [‘For ten days I have lived in this well-named city, which possesses a spacious horizon [...],

Like the garden of Petrópolis, Belo Horizonte is connected to other places in Latin America, especially to Mistral's own memories of these places, which constitute the starting point of her travel writing. The allusion to "American roses" associates the city with the broader context of the Latin American landscape.

Although descriptions of modern cities were typical of *crónicas*, Mistral's article on Belo Horizonte instead follows in the medieval tradition of the *laudes urbium*. Like the flora in Petrópolis, Belo Horizonte is not only described but praised throughout the *crónica*. Another literary tradition to which Mistral alludes is the description of cities through female allegories: Belo Horizonte is compared to a "cuerpo virgen", a "virgin body" (MISTRAL 1945b: 87).⁵¹ Mistral recurrently inserts metaphors related to birth, emergence, and creation in the *crónica* and even connects the history of the capital to the myth of Minerva, famous for her unusual birth (from the head of Jupiter) (cf. MISTRAL 1945b: 89). The newness of Belo Horizonte entails the need not only to provide a historical account of the city but to invent a new literary tradition. The city was founded after the colonial period, a characteristic that it shares with Petrópolis and which may have motivated Mistral to portray precisely these two cities. Indeed, Mistral's choice of subject distinguishes her travel writing from the European and colonial tradition. The Nobel laureate was writing for Latin Americans about places and cities created by Latin Americans. Her work therefore contributed not only to the dissemination of knowledge about Latin America but also to the literary creation of Belo Horizonte, which to that point had not been portrayed and imagined in literature.

In addition to adding the dimension of gender to her description of the city, Mistral also humanises it. As mentioned in my interpretation of Mistral's depiction of Petrópolis, the Chilean writer was interested in the landscape as a site of human experience. The same can be said of Mistral's writing on Belo Horizonte: the narrator gives special praise to the quality of life enjoyed by its inhabitants.⁵² As in *Un jardín de Petrópolis*, Portuguese interrupts the Spanish text. Mistral uses Portuguese words such as "brasileira" and thus constructs a form of travel writing that is deeply influenced by the linguistic exchanges experienced by the travelling subject (MISTRAL 1945b: 87). Pan-American belonging, as both *Un jardín de Petrópolis* and *Belo Horizonte, capital de Minas Geraes, la ciudad creada de una sola vez* illustrate, also implies a 'moving' linguistic belonging.

which because of its dry and sharp air has reminded me of the mouthful we breathe in the Andes and which, besides, is the home of the most perfect American roses my old gardener's hand has ever picked.']

⁵¹ Mistral further develops this metaphor when she alludes to a new-born city and compares the emergence of new cities to the birth of children; cf. MISTRAL 1945b: 89. Mistral had similarly described Petrópolis through a female allegory in MISTRAL 1945a: 79. On the connection between femaleness and the depiction of cities, cf. WEIGEL 1990: 149–204.

⁵² Cf. MISTRAL (1945b): 88 and PIZARRO 2005: 74.

Gabriela Mistral's Pan-American manifesto

It is especially in her texts on Brazil that Gabriela Mistral reflects on the Pan-American dimension of her travel writing. Mistral's narrator creates a Pan-American space from her memories, in which places in Brazil are blended with Chile and Mexico. In the context of this chapter, the idea of 'connectedness' applies to the development of a Pan-American belonging that Mistral forges through her travel experience. 'Pan-American' is an umbrella term that stands for a plural, transnational, and translingual form of belonging that embraces diversity. This multiplicity is especially palpable in Mistral's portrayal of Brazilian locations from distinct perspectives and in her attribution of agency to the garden. The city and landscape are not passive objects waiting to be appropriated by the eyes of European colonisers; they enter Mistral's narrative as active participants who face us and tell us their stories.

Multiplicity is also an important attribute of Mistral's publication practice. Mistral's articles were published several times, sometimes in different languages. The Nobel laureate's travel writing is thus marked by the flexibility, mobility, and international range of her publication process. Not only the Pan-American connectedness that Mistral constructs through her travel writing but also the cities and countries in which she published her works were shaped by transformation and movement, contradicting monolithic stability. Through her publication process, Mistral not only helped to create a transnational sense of belonging for Latin Americans but also disseminated knowledge to the people of the region. The literary form Mistral chose for her travel writing, the *crónica*, is another aspect that exemplifies her Pan-American ambitions, as a form that is specific to Latin American literature – in both Brazil and the Spanish-speaking countries of the region.

Mistral not only advocated for Pan-Americanism in her travel writing but also served as an ambassador of the movement, holding speeches at the Pan-American Union. In 1924, 1939, and finally in 1946, shortly after receiving the Nobel Prize, she visited the Pan-American Union and spoke in favour of the unity of all American countries.⁵³ In this discourse, Mistral briefly mentions relations between North and South America, which are especially united, on her view, through a common religion (cf. MISTRAL 1946: 2).⁵⁴ Mistral explicitly expresses her sense of Pan-American belonging, identifying it as a social concern for minorities:

No soy una patriota ni una panamericanista que se endroga con las grandezas del Continente. Me lo conozco casi entero, desde Canadá hasta Tierra del Fuego; he comido en las mejores y las peores mesas [...]. Y me atrevo a decir sin miedo de parecer un fenómeno, que la miseria de Centro América me importa tanto como la del indio fueguino y que la desnudez del negro de cualquier canto de la América del Sur me da igual bochorno que a sus nacionales. (MISTRAL 1946: 3)⁵⁵

⁵³ Cf. COHEN 2003: 8–10.

⁵⁴ The convergences and disparities between the United States and Latin America are more thoroughly analysed in MISTRAL [1945c].

⁵⁵ [‘I am neither a patriot nor a Pan-Americanist who is intoxicated by the greatness of the Continent. I know it almost entirely, from Canada to Tierra del Fuego; I’ve eaten at the best and worst

Many texts by the Nobel laureate articulate a political agenda and illustrate, on a discursive level, what Mistral envisioned for the Americas. These political concerns are repeatedly expressed in discourses and programmatic texts written in the 1940s, many of which compare North and South America, identifying similarities and differences. One of the most programmatic articulations of Mistral's Pan-Americanism was voiced in 1931, on the first Pan American Day, and published that same year in the Costa Rican journal *Repertorio Americano* (among other publications), as well as in the journal *Américas* in 1957, after her death.⁵⁶ The English title of the latter version, "Pan American Manifesto", hints at its political agenda and illustrates Mistral's wish to strengthen relations between North and South America.⁵⁷ The short essay identifies common characteristics of the Americas' pasts and envisions a common future. This imagined past is not free of ideological implications; as in other texts by the Nobel laureate, Mistral's privileging of the European and Indigenous history of the Americas is accompanied by an exclusion – and even racist portrayal – of its African heritage (cf. FIOL-MATTA 2002: 3–36). The "consejo unánime de nuestras morales religiosas"⁵⁸ evokes a Christian-centred view of the Americas and thus ignores its religious diversity and the ties between missions and colonialism (MISTRAL 1931: 199). Contrary to many other contributions from the time, Mistral also neglects colonial violence, of which she was aware, as many other texts show. Despite its ambivalent character and the exclusion of African American and Afro-Latino contributions, Mistral's manifesto advocates for democratic values and social equity, emphasising the Americas' potential when it comes to building a diverse and open society:

Situadas por la Providencia entre Europa y el Asia, Ella nos impone un deber de comprensión respecto de las sensibilidades opuestas; nuestra doble costa que mira al Occidente y al Oriente tiene al igual que la costa griega la misión de aceptar comprendiéndolas, a las razas diferentes.⁵⁹ (MISTRAL 1931: 199).

In addition to these discourses, there are further, more hidden traces of Mistral's sense of Pan-American belonging. In the poem *Pan*, for instance, dedicated to a loaf of bread,

tables. [...] And I even dare say without fear of seeming strange that the misery in Central America matters to me as much as the misery of the Indigenous population in Tierra del Fuego and that the poverty of the Black people in any corner of South America shames me as much as their fellow citizens.']

⁵⁶ The English version published in the journal *Américas* does not mention a translator. As explained in COHEN 2003: 7, this manifesto corresponds to the Spanish version of the "Voto de la juventud escolar en el día de las Américas", translated as the "Student's Pledge on Pan American Day" (cf. COHEN 2003: 7, 17), which I quote in this chapter and for which I offer my own translations. With that noted, the title of this chapter refers to the iconic title of the translation published in *Américas*.

⁵⁷ For a different reading of this text, cf. COHEN 2003: 7–10. Cohen comments on Latin America's difficult relationship with the United States (cf. *ibid.*, 9). For another perspective on this relationship, see CABELLO HUTT 2018: 124.

⁵⁸ ['the unanimous counsel of our religious values']

⁵⁹ ['Placed by Providence between Europe and Asia, She imposes on us a duty to comprehend opposed sensibililities; our double coast, facing both the Occident and the Orient, has, like the Greek coast, the mission of accepting – while also comprehending – different races.']

Mistral plays with the prefix ‘pan’. This metaphysical inquiry into bread – a metaphorical allusion to the importance of religion but also a symbol of everyday life – also evokes Pan-American belonging as the essence of the travel experience of the poetic voice. The quotidian ritual of eating bread – the connection to the culinary as a central part of travelling is also mentioned in Mistral’s manifesto – is associated with the geographical dimension of the Americas through deictic references to locations in Chile, Mexico, and the United States:

Se ha comido en todos los climas
 el mismo pan en cien hermanos:
 pan de Coquimbo, pan de Oaxaca,
 pan de Santa Ana y de Santiago.
 (MISTRAL 1938: 76)⁶⁰

Neither the poem on bread nor “Voto de la Juventud Escolar en el Día de las Américas” relates explicitly to Brazil – and the more hidden presence of the Portuguese speaking-world may help to explain why Mistral is not commonly associated with the country.

In 1946, Mistral moved to the United States. Her reception of the Nobel Prize in November of 1945 marked not only the peak of her literary career but also the end of her time in Brazil. After departing to Sweden and receiving the prestigious award, Mistral became known internationally, and new opportunities arose.⁶¹ The United States, as the poem on bread suggests, became her new home. Yet Mistral did not forget to include Brazil in her Nobel Lecture, which refers to “América Ibero” and underscores the importance of the Portuguese language: “Por una venturanza que mi sobrepasa soy en este momento la voz [...] indirecta de las muy nobles lenguas española y portuguesa”⁶² (MISTRAL 1945: n. pg.). Mistral’s travel writing continues to provide an invaluable depiction of the Brazilian experience and a new definition of Latin America – one that decisively goes beyond Hispano-America and embraces the linguistic diversity of this part of the world.

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⁶⁰ [‘In all conceivable climates / the same bread among a hundred brethren was eaten / bread of Coquimbo, bread of Oaxaca, / bread of Santa Ana and of Santiago.’]

⁶¹ Cf. PIZARRO 2005: 23.

⁶² [‘Due to a good fortune that surpasses me, I am at this moment the indirect voice [...] of the very noble Spanish and Portuguese tongues.’]

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