

FROM GABRIELA MISTRAL TO VIOLETA PARRA TO ADRIANA PAREDES PINDA IN THE CULTURAL COMPOST FLOW

Andrea Casals Hill¹

Abstract: Ecocriticism was initially concerned with the representation of the physical world in literature, first the natural, then the constructed environment. Later, “experiments on ecocriticism” questioned texts beyond their content. In Chile, antipoet and eco poet Nicanor Parra supports the idea that everything has been created, prompting composers to cultivate the “art of recycling”. In many of his poems, and not only in ecologically oriented ones, N. Parra repeatedly recycles his own production as well as that of others. In many ways, however, cultural production is an act of recycling, whether it is produced within the frames of given structures and modes or discusses and confronts recurrent tropes and themes; cultural production must manage “anxiety of influence”, rendering tribute to earlier works or defying them. This essay explores the ways in which Nicanor Parra, Gabriela Mistral and Violeta Parra, in their nature tuned writing, reveal that they are aware of the fact that culture is always produced like compost, as they practice the art of recycling language, recovering the land and restoring traditions.

Keywords: Composting culture, compost writing, literary recycling. Violeta Parra, Gabriela Mistral. Mapuche poetry.

DE GABRIELA MISTRAL E VIOLETA PARRA A ADRIANA PAREDES PINDA. A EFUSÃO CULTURAL DA RECICLAGEM

Resumo: A Ecocrítica inicialmente preocupava-se com a representação do mundo físico na literatura, primeiro o ambiente natural e como ele era construído. Mais tarde, “experimentos ecocríticos” questionaram textos para além dos seus conteúdos. No Chile, o antipoeta e eco poeta Nicanor Parra defende a ideia de que tudo foi criado, levando os autores a cultivarem a “arte da reciclagem”. Em muitos de seus poemas, e não apenas em aspectos ecologicamente orientados, N. Parra repetidamente recicla sua própria produção, bem como a dos outros. De diversas formas, no entanto, a produção cultural é um ato de reciclagem, seja produzida dentro dos quadros de estruturas e modos determinados, ou discute e enfrenta tropos e temas recorrentes. A produção cultural deve gerenciar a “ansiedade da influência”, pagar tributos aos trabalhos anteriores ou desafiá-los. O presente ensaio analisa as maneiras pelas quais os poetas, Nicanor Parra, Gabriela Mistral e Violeta Parra, em sua natureza sintonizada, estão cientes de que a cultura sempre é produzida como um composto reciclado e praticam a arte de reciclar a linguagem, recuperando-se a terra e as tradições restauradoras.

Palavras chaves: Reciclagem cultural. Escrita. Violeta Parra. Gabriela Mistral. Poesia Mapuche

¹ Professor of English at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. She was one of the winners of the contest: *Haz tu Tesis en Cultura*, Chile 2017, with the essay *Violeta Parra en el flujo del compostaje cultural*.

E-mail: acasals@uc.cl

Pondering on the negative and ever accelerating impact of human activity on Earth, in the last decade Bruno Latour has offered a series of talks proposing an interdisciplinary discourse he calls “composition” which would hopefully bring together understandings and means of expression from diverse fields of cultural production in order to raise awareness, foster creative solutions and active engagement to deploy all efforts towards decelerating human impact over climate change and anthropic transformations of our planet in the age of the Anthropocene². His point of view is that scientific data alone – “facts” as he calls them – are no longer effective arguments³, since even the scientific community does not seem to agree on their interpretations of the data and the prediction models.

Following Latour’s invitation to cultivate composition as a form of resistance, in this paper I explore the ways in which three Chilean poets, Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), Violeta Parra (1917-1967) and Adriana Paredes Pinda (b.1970) reveal awareness that culture is produced like compost, while they engage in ecological writing practices such as recycling language, recovering one’s relationship to the land and restoring traditions. In an effort to display the local landscape before foreigners, Mistral revisits her childhood landscape in *Poema de Chile* (1967). She speaks as an urban pilgrim who describes the northern desert as she recalls it from afar, reusing themes from her poetry to rejoice with the landscape⁴. In a quest to restore almost forgotten traditions, prompted by her brother Nicanor (as she declares in her poetic autobiography *Décimas: autobiografía en verso*), Violeta Parra explores the farming region, reclaiming folk wisdom, rural poetic and musical traditions which she recycles – or rather *upcycles* – into her own work. Violeta Parra recollects many voices that eventually merge with hers as she brings together *décimas*⁵ and chants. Contemporary *Mapuche* poet Pinda⁶ recycles her people’s oral tradition in her writing, renewing their means of expression. In the poetry collection *Üi* (2005), Pinda recreates a chamanic dialogue with her ancestors, who are native to the southern rainforests. Pinda narrates how she speaks to her predecessors – the carriers of the

² “El Estado de la Naturaleza” conference by Bruno Latour at the international cultural festival *Puerto Ideas* held in Valparaíso, Chile, on November 18, 2014 (see “Puerto de Ideas 2014: Bruno Latour y el Estado de la naturaleza” at <https://vimeo.com/112164684>)

³ Latour at the Dublin University “*From Critique to Composition*” (watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-02aCvQ-HFs>)

⁴ Mistral worked on *Poema...* for many years, from different locations on the globe. Upon her death, her manuscripts were scattered, some poems corrected and edited many times.

⁵ A *décima* is a structured poetic composition based on the Spanish Espinela verses. A *décima* is a 10 lines stanza; each verse composed of 8 syllables; with a specific ending rhyme pattern (abbaaccddc). Violeta Parra appropriates the *décima* elaborating loosely with it.

⁶ Though in Chile a person’s last name is determined by the father’s name, Pinda uses her mother’s family name—which usually comes second – because it is through this line that she is trying to restore her Mapuche identity. In *Mapuzungún* – the Mapuche people’s language – , *pinda* means hummingbird.

oral gift – about her position towards the land, her people and culture, depicting the journey through which she eventually accepts her ancestors calling to perform as a *machi*⁷ for her people. Nonetheless, she can write profusely only after she has dared to write down the language of the *Mapuche*⁸ (the “people of the land” in *Mapuzungún*), defining her position between two cultures as that of an *oralitor*, an “oral-writer”⁹. These three poets intentionally fight back the overwhelming power of modernity that eradicates land-marked language, a sense of place, knowledge of the land, seasons and tradition. They are aware of what makes their art and their contribution to culture, and therefore their writing stands out as compost writing, as in Latour’s “*composition*.”

Whether it is produced within the framework of given structures or discusses and confronts recurrent tropes and themes, in many ways, poetic creation is always an act of recycling. As Harold Bloom proposed, the “anxiety of influence” must be managed, either by rendering tribute to earlier works or challenging them. Nevertheless, the fact that artistic and cultural production is created from compost is not always a conscious act. In this essay, compost writing will be defined as an artistic text that reveals some connection to nature, but most significantly, shows an intention to recycle and build on composted material, openly sorting it out, injecting new energy, or reassembling it to provide a fresh interpretation; thus, contributing to progressive layers of cultural compost.

Chilean poet Nicanor Parra asserts that everything has already been created, prompting authors to cultivate the “art of recycling”. Earlier, influenced by Dadaism and *ready-made* art, Nicanor Parra successfully explored with antipoetry. In the 1980s however, after reading the Meadows Report on *The Limits of Growth*, Nicanor Parra saw the need to become an ecological tutor (“*alfabetizador ecológico*”); that is, an ecopoet rather than an antipoet¹⁰. Consistent with his invitation to other artist to cultivate the art of recycling, in the article *La Autotextulaidad en Nicanor Parra: Acotar/Agotar/Reciclar*, María Ángeles Pérez López uses the term literary recycling (“*reciclaje literario*”) to define Nicanor Parra’s work (170-71). According to Pérez López, literary recycling suggests new ways of producing, where the same fragment may be reused to create a new meaning, thereby increasing its potential, extending the pieces’ life span. Pérez López says that “literary recycling implies the inclusion of elements that may be

⁷ A *machi* is the Mapuche chaman, usually a female.

⁸ In *Mapuzungún*, “mapu” means land, “che” means people.

⁹ Contemporary Mapuche poets call themselves *oralitor*, from the words “oral” and “*escritor*”.

¹⁰ This information is first hand testified in the interviews offered by N. Parra, compiled in the book “*Así habló Parra en El Mercurio*” (2011).

recognized as part of a larger discourse”¹¹. In her example, when we read the first half of N. Parra’s artefact¹² “the left and the right united...”¹³, the Chilean audience may anticipate that what comes next is “Left and right together... will never be defeated”¹⁴, acknowledging it as a popular saying. In an initially intertextual exercise, N. Parra has taken possession of the leftist political slogan “The people united will never be defeated”¹⁵ which points at class struggle. Through his intervention, however, N. Parra not only reverses the meaning of the political slogan, saying that the left and right together will become victorious, but he inverts its function, transforming the slogan into a proverb which acts as a warning to the audience. In other words, N. Parra takes an existing fragment, acknowledges its recyclable potential and processes it, changing its original meaning by introducing new elements which allow the fragment to stand on its own. The recycled political slogan is still a recognizable piece even before it has been completely read, just as proverbs are anticipated before they are completely quoted. Thus, in the Chilean context, the artefact, with renewed meaning and function, has become a cultural product in its own right.

Pérez López also argues that N. Parra’s works are open processes that invite the reader to move beyond a linear interpretation. The fact that N. Parra’s work seems unfinished and imperfect, she goes on, makes Parra a contributor to “cultural compost”. Pérez López defines cultural compost in an analogy to recycling processes, which are open, always mutating, and interchanging with the surroundings, always in transformation and which reintegrate in a holistic, circular, sometimes even chaotic, evolving process (169).

In order to discuss literary recycling, cultural compost and compost writing, I will be using many terms related to the recycling process in very specific ways. Taking into account ordinary dictionary definition and common understanding, to recycle a literary text, whether it is a fragment, a complete text or an independent artefact, implies intertextuality and involves reprocessing a text, an image, a figure or a trope in an original manner, adding elements or aggregating them creatively, in order to compose a new and independent work. To reuse however does not imply the renewal of an element but merely its repetition in a later work; in other words, the original function and meaning of the element is maintained, even though the fragment is incorporated in a new ensemble. To restore implies fixing something that was

¹¹ My translation for: “[El reciclaje literario implica] elementos [...] que pueden ser reconocidos como integrantes de un discurso más amplio” (165)

¹² In Nicanor Parras’s works, artefacts are brief poems that disseminate rapidly (Valente in Cárdenas 2012, 180).

¹³ My translation for: “*la izquierda y la derecha unidas...*”

¹⁴ My translation for: “*jamás serán vencidas.*”

¹⁵ My translation for: “*el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*”; “*el pueblo*” meaning the working class.

damaged, submitting the element or fragment, to a renewal process. To recuperate or recover means literally to find something that was lost or to put back into functioning something that had been dismissed. Both restoring and recovering imply preservation because they allow elements that have been dismissed in the modernization process to function again, such as local voices, country wisdom, native language, identity and traditions. However, to recover or recuperate is also figurative: what is recovered is a sense of place rather than an object, literary fragment or a specific place; in other words, following Niall Binns¹⁶, Ursula Heise's "sense of place" or Yi Fu Tuan's "topophilia", to recuperate suggests the recovery of a sense of belonging. All these forms of literary recycling contribute to the compost flow just as they are open to receiving from it.

To collect, however, is the step prior to any recycling and composting process as it requires finding, sorting out and gathering. In literary terms, I will refer to recollecting since it implies recalling and putting together long lost or hidden cultural expressions in order to preserve them in cultural memory and resist erasure. In V. Parra's case, her quest to recollect meant the preservation of endangered expressions; reuniting them allowed their mechanical or artistic reproduction as well as their conservation. In other words, collecting precedes all recycling, reusing or restoring and composting processes. Similar to eco-friendly practices, literary recycling expresses an ecological intention that is not only efficient as Pérez López notes, but is also an expression of austerity, or as Lawrence Buell suggests, exhibits an "aesthetic of relinquishment". In "*Décima #58*"¹⁷ V. Parra maps out the places she has visited. Following Binns, in an act of recovery, she names different country villages and train stations:

I left one eye at *Los Lagos* / due to casual carelessness; / the other one was left at Parral / in a pub. / [...] / My right arm remained in Buin / [...] / the other one by San Vicente / [...] / My chest in Curacautín / [...] / My hands in Maitencillo / Waving at Pelequén / My skirt at Pequilalú / [....]¹⁸

And so on. The poet goes on and on naming locations where she has left some part of herself.

¹⁶ "Criaturas del desarraigo..." (2002)

¹⁷ Please note that in this article — as other scholars do — I have identified each of the poems within Violeta Parra's poetic autobiography with a number; as in "*Décima #58*"

¹⁸ My translation for: *Un ojo dejé en Los Lagos / por un descuido casual, / el otro quedó en Parral / [...] / Mi brazo derecho en Buin / [...] / el otro por San Vicente / [...] / Mi pecho en Curacautín / [...] / Mis manos en Maitencillo / saludan en Pelequén. / Mi falda en Perquilauquén / [....]*

In each of the places she mentions, the literary persona expresses that she has left a part of her body. That is, in an act of relinquishment, the poet offers herself. In an act of resistance against the exclusion caused by the modernization process that disregards the livelihoods of rural communities, V. Parra cries for to the inclusion of all parts in the body of the nation. Inverting St Paul's letter to the Romans, V. Parra suggests that her body becomes one with all the people and the land; in Violeta's *Décimas, autobiografía en verso*, there are neither hierarchies nor exclusions.

Just as well, considering the intertextual cultural flow, "Décima #58" establishes a dialogue with Pablo Neruda's "Manuel Rodríguez"¹⁹ included in *Canto General* (1950²⁰), which was later musicalized by Vicente Bianchi²¹. In Neruda's imagery, the independence hero Manuel Rodríguez visits remote rural locations, as he hides from the local authorities, giving away his life in this quest, just as V. Parra leaves a part of her body in each location. If V. Parra emphasizes her performative act by naming herself within the *décima* and suggesting the towns' people as her witnesses, "Violeta Parra was seen"²², Neruda proposes that wind and water can give testimony that Manuel Rodríguez visited the places he names: "wind and water say they've seen the *guerrillero*"²³. Neruda celebrates Manuel Rodríguez's subversion, highlighting the *guerrillero's* capacity to elude any eyewitness; contrarily, Violeta Parra (1998) subversion relies precisely in the fact that she is first hand witness of the misery she encounters in each of the places she visits: "as a child my soul witnessed / miseries and malicious intent"²⁴. The speaker in the poem is aware of the performative quality of the verses and tells the reader that we have seen the poet in those places she actually visited. The poetic exchange highlights Violeta Parra's heroic achievement in denouncing the injustice that dates back to the colonization process which the mythical Manuel Rodríguez

¹⁹ Manuel Rodríguez (1785-1818) is known as a *guerrilla* leader (*guerrillero*), one of the founding fathers of the Chilean Independence.

²⁰ Neruda's *Canto General* was published in México in 1950, whereas V. Parra wrote her *Décimas...* between 1954 and 1958. Neruda and V. Parra were acquainted and participated in the same circle of intellectuals, artists and creators. V. Parra attended P. Neruda's 50th birthday, offering a concert at the poet's home in Santiago.

²¹ V. Bianchi (b.1920) is a Chilean musician and composer; he received the National Arts Award in 2016. P. Neruda was deeply surprised when Bianchi musicalized his poem, acknowledging that Bianchi's composition contributed to popularizing his poetry.

²² My translation for: "*se vio a la Violeta Parra*"

²³ My translation for: "*el viento y el agua dicen que vieron al guerrillero*"

²⁴ My translation for: "*de niña vio el alma mía; / miserias y alevosías*"

fought as well. The dialogue established among these two poems positions them in the same cultural flow that informs both poets, from which they receive, sort and select fragments, to which they contribute with enriched layers of compost writing.

Similarly, along *Poema de Chile*, Mistral mentions specific geographic places such as Atacama, Valle de Elqui, Concón, Valparaíso, Monte Aconcagua, Bío Bío, Selva Austral and Patagonia. In the atlas that *Poema de Chile* depicts, Mistral performs a conservation act as she brings forward remote locations, peoples, native flora and endemic fauna also excluded from the Chilean national imaginary. In a more intimate tone, in her poetic construction, Pinda names specific people within her Mapuche community and heritage: Filipa, Mercedes Millapán and all the women in the Pinda family. reviving them, bringing them to life so as to perceive their voices, recover their wisdom and hear them insist that she comes to be their *machi*. *Üi* is an initiation journey to the acceptance of the poet's calling to become a *machi*. She must embrace her tradition – which she does – but also come to terms with written language as a tool she can deploy to heal the Mapuche dignity and cultural identity that cannot be understood without the *Mapu*, their land.

Compost writing makes direct reference to the way in which the soil is made fertile by using disposed organic material and the combination of time, humidity, air, heat, and bacteria. In this analogy, cultural compost implies that once the sorting out and collection of organic texts has taken place, the artist adds creative energy to produce a new piece of art. Thus, compost writing becomes a form of cultural resistance in as much as it allows cultural artifacts to remain within the compost flow, resisting erasure. In a beautiful triangular flow, such as the Mobius strip, Pinda challenges both G. Mistral and her *tordos*²⁵ asking them to hush. If in the poem “*Tordos*” Mistral's poetic voice strives to hear the blackbirds from her childhood northern valley sing,

²⁵ *Tordo*, Austral blackbird, *curaeus curaeus*

At this time and just the same / as when I was a girl / and they spoke to me eye to eye
 / the fig tree and the vine, / they are singing drunk / [...] / But if I am silent / like a hill
 or a Beguin / the drunkards song / reaches me at foreign lands / because it isn't hard,
 no it isn't / to recover the lost song.²⁶

²⁶ My translation for: *"A estas horas y lo mismo / que cuando yo era chiquilla / y me hablaban de tú a tú / el higueral y la viña, / están cantando embriagados [...] Pero con que yo me calle / como el monte o la beguina, / el cantar del embriagado / me alcanza a la extranjería, / porque no me cuesta, no / recobrar canción perdida"*.

Pinda wants the blackbirds to hush – to shut up – so that they can hear her poetic voice: repeating the command “listen and hush”²⁷ throughout *Üi*. Likewise, in the poem “Tenca”²⁸, G. Mistral notes that a *tenca*’s resemblance is ordinary and dull, “as if she was nothing / because of the dull color”²⁹, though the poet will identify the bird as a beloved one: hoping to hear her, the poet says “stay under the pear tree / until the sings”³⁰. That is, though people may consider a *tenca* as an insignificant bird because of her color washed appearance, the poet recognizes her unique singing. *Tencas* are also present in Pinda, and again, the Mapuche poet’s perception of the bird is at odds with Mistral. In the first part of the collection, *Ralum I*, in poem “10”, the *tenca* is a negative omen, underlining the hunger and scarcity the Mapuche undergo from colonial to postcolonial and contemporary Chile: “This is how I see you / now / that the mockingbird has put up its power / upon your offsprings’ hunger”³¹. The poet addressing an ancestor, Filipa, a breastfeeding mother whose body is described as dried up.

Completing this three-way convergence into the compost flow, though she was a folklorist, a poet, a composer and singer, in the verses dedicate to Violeta Parra, her brother Nicanor writes that Violeta was neither *bandurria*, nor *tenca*, *zorzal* nor *codorniz*: “neither black faced ibis / neither mockingbird / neither thrush / neither free nor captive quail”³² (N. Parra “Defensa de Violeta Parra”), yet, Violeta herself identifies her meaningful and committed singing with that of a *diuca*³³. *Diucas*, *tencas* and *tordos* are all common native birds which are easily seen and heard in gardens and fields. Though they are used as simple first-hand metaphors³⁴ by these poets, the incorporation of these birds into these compositions brings forward the poets’ ability to make a close observation of nature, as well as the suitable appropriation of local birds that stand out for their melodic twittering rather than their apparent beauty or bright colors, function as eloquent imagens to stand for these mestizo poets themselves.

²⁷ My translation for: “oigan y callen”

²⁸ *Tenca*, Chilean Mockingbird, *Mimus tenca*

²⁹ My translation for: “[c]omo que ella nada fuese / por la color deslavada” [sic]

³⁰ My translation for: “quédate bajo el peral / hasta que cante en su rama”

³¹ My translation for: “Así te veo / ahora / que la tenca aposentó su poderío / en el hambre de tus hijos”

³² My translation for: “ni bandurria / [blank] ni tenca / [blank] ni zorzal / Ni codorniza libre ni cautiva”. Notice that in Spanish a quail is referred to as a “codorniz”, identified as a female noun; yet Nicanor Parra accentuates its feminine character adding an ending “a”: “codorniza”.

³³ *Diuca*, Common diuca-finch, *diuca diuca*

³⁴ In *El libro mayor de Violeta Parra*, professor Gastón Soublette highlights that V. Parra’s imagery is based on what he calls “simple first-hand metaphors”, alluding to the poets direct personal experience amongst nature.

Self-proclaimed ecopoet and ecological tutor³⁵, already in 1982, Nicanor Parra declared himself an ecologist, stating “everything I do is ecologically sound”³⁶ (PARRA; CÁRDENAS, 2012, p. 178). From then on, his poetic praxis has been consistent with his awareness. Along these lines, conscious ecological practices such as incorporation of borrowed pieces and the evident intention to resist cultural erasure distinguishes cultural compost above spontaneous cultural renewal. Quoting Álvaro Salvador, Pérez López argues that Nicanor Parra “builds his poetic scaffolds [...] with full awareness that these are artificial products” (171)³⁷. The concept of awareness is present in definitions of ecopoetry, ecoliterature and ecocriticism. In *Ecocríticas*, as a significant characteristic of what is considered the canon of Spanish eco-literature, José Manuel Marrero (2010) describes an awareness of the physical surrounding and locality, which enhances the concrete environment and the elements it contains, and intentionally gives it its own voice. In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate (2002) describes ecopoetry as that which can awaken images that evoke a way of being and of dwelling, where the words themselves create a space and habitat, and where it is possible to recover the sense of place that has been lost with modernity. Bate refers to the content, as Marrero does, but also to the imaginative way in which it is presented, and through this imagination, elicits a renewed way of dwelling; thus, there is an eco-intention to elicit an eco-experience.

Compost writing may be regarded as writing that can be traditionally associated with or identified as ecopoetry, environmental literature, ecoliterature, or even nature-tuned. By the latter I understand texts that are not necessarily centered on nature, and which may even refer to the environment in an oblique manner, though the speaker is someone who is situated in a specific place, the influence of which is inescapable, and therefore, reveals land-marked language. Following Bate, we may also consider an aesthetic writing that makes the poem a habitat in itself; that presents itself in such a performative manner that the readers may imagine that they dwell differently, or that it offers the reader the opportunity to see the environment from an alternative point of view to our anthropocentric programming. These texts allow the readers to identify themselves as part of the ecosystem that it describes. In other words, compost writing allows the reader to bond once again with the environment and awaken that imagination that helps

³⁵ Nicanor Parra defined himself as an *ecopoeta* (ecopoet) and an *alfabetizador ecológico* (ecological tutor) in an interview titled “Parra se convirtió al ecologismo” (Parra; Cárdenas, 2012, p. 163).

³⁶ My translation for: “[t]odo lo que yo hago es de orden ecológico.”

³⁷ My translation for: “[Parra] construye sus tingaldos poéticos, sus antipoemas, sus artefactos, con plena conciencia de que son productos artificiales.”

perceive rather than only assess with the intellect. Such writing restores the sense of place, and situates the reader in a given space, physically, temporarily and sensuously.

Finally, forwarding the Latin American identity that flows into these three poets' compost heap, and acknowledging the contributions of intellectuals such as Leonardo Boff, Paulo Freire or Eduardo Galeano, besides embracing their mestizo heritage, these poets resist cultural erasure, denounce environmental injustice and portray the "environment of the poor" (Nixon), which are traits that distinguish Latin American compost writing³⁸.

With these criteria in mind, I will now analyze some poems included in Gabriela Mistral's *Poema de Chile* (1967), in Violeta Parra's *Décimas autobiográficas* (1998), and Pinda's poetry collection, *Ūi* (2005). These three poets – along with Nicanor Parra – produce and compost their art by assembling layers of personal creativity over layers of existing cultural elements. *Poema de Chile* (1967) is a collection of poems in which Mistral (1889-1957) speaks as an urban pilgrim who describes Chile in a dialogue between a native boy and the spirit of a *mama*³⁹ as they travel the country. This long poem is a project Mistral began working on in the 1940s. After her death in 1957, the scattered manuscripts were selected and organized by Doris Dana. From the many conversations with Mistral, Dana's editing criteria was to arrange the poems following Chilean geography from north to south. Mistral's intention was to depict an atlas of Chilean landscapes, native flora and fauna and indigenous peoples that the hegemonic modernization project excluded.

"*Tordos*" is a poem within *Poema de Chile* which is written in short verses, as if wandering swiftly. In this poem, Mistral represents the northern valley in an austere manner, concentrating on the song of the *tordos* (blackbirds) perched on a fig tree or a vine. In an ascending, rotating movement, Mistral reuses the few elements in the poem which sometimes seem to negotiate among themselves or at other times seem to contradict each other, as in "And the mother goes with me / she goes with face and goes without tears / [...] / and she invents me company. / My mother goes, goes with me / not forgotten nor surrendered"⁴⁰. The poet is aware that the motherly presence that is evoked by the birds' song recreated in the poem is imaginary ("and she invents me company"),

³⁸ For further reference on Latin American ecological writing see Casals "Environmental (in)justice and mestizo writing." ISLE – Oxford Journals.

³⁹ A *mama*, without an accent, is a female caregiver.

⁴⁰ My translation for: "*Y la madre va conmigo / [...] / va con rostro y van sin llanto / [...] / y me inventa compañía. / Mi madre va, va conmigo / ni olvidad ni rendida*".

yet, the poem creates a soothing company. Mistral speaks as someone who is far away in time and space, as she actually was when she wrote these poems, away from the idyllic childhood that she is trying to convey, in an effort to restore the feeling of comfort that she used to experience then. This is the poem's matrix: even though she knows she cannot return to her childhood landscape, poetic recreation makes it possible to recover, and therefore restore the sense of place. Following Binns, naming specific places in poetry is a way of reviving a lost place. In this poem, Mistral not only refers to Montegrande, her hometown, but also includes her own given name, Lucila, thus reviving her-child-self. Nevertheless, this effort to recover the lost place is full of tension with the recognition that the speaker is not that Lucila anymore, but "another Lucila"; that is, Gabriela⁴¹.

Mistral recuperates her childhood landscape through sensory descriptions: visual elements, warmth and scents are evoked, but mainly Mistral relies on auditory senses and in particular the blackbirds' song, the "lost song"⁴² which allows the speaker to restore the sense of place. Mistral's blackbirds sing this lost song as the Israeli pilgrims sing the psalms on their way back to the promised land; in Mistral's case, her long lost childhood garden. In other words, the blackbirds' song as recreated in these verses, comforts her and restores the sense of a place that is holy to her.

Mesmerized by their song, Mistral does not react to urgent calls, and "ignores the screaming" which suggests a connection to Munch's painting *The Scream* (c.1893):

"They [the blackbirds] sing and spellboud the branch / which is readily reviving / and in following their ballad / I do not react to the screaming / and in this listening all goes / the nap and the day is over."⁴³

The poet seems to avoid modern life and prefers the dreamlike, or even mystic space that allows her to listen beyond the blackbirds. However, her act is in itself very modern, since she is aware of time and space: she knows she is half way through her life (noting awareness of time); and she knows that her pursuit to recover the land where she grew up (awareness of space), will lead her to restore the ambience where she once felt she belonged. This environment marked her, and though she is far away when she writes, she

⁴¹ Gabriela Mistral is the pseudonym with which the poet and public figure was known; her given and family names were Lucila Godoy.

⁴² My translation for: "*canción perdida*".

⁴³ My translation for: "*Cantan y embrujan la rama / que ya va cobrando vida / y por seguir su balada / no respondo a lo que grita / y en este escuchar se va / la siesta y se acaba el día.*"

says she has with her what is lost⁴⁴; that is, she still holds the essence of the Elqui Valley where she grew up. Mistral refers to the flower, the scent of which has distilled in her hand, the poet's hand that she writes with. Writing these rhythmical verses is a performative act: Mistral not only evokes the blackbirds' song, she actually recreates it as she writes, which allows her to restore the haven that only a beloved place can offer, as Tuan suggests.

Returning and recovering is a recurrent theme in Mistral. She recognizes that to hear her childhood blackbirds again, she only has to be quiet, like the mountains that surround the Valley. These mountains are an inescapable presence, and for Mistral, as described by Grínor Rojo (2010), the mountain is also the mother (both recurring images that Mistral recycles in her poetry). In this context, however, Mistral refers to biblical mountains, where men and women can be quiet, like a beguine, she says. Whilst she is in silence, the joyous blackbirds' song may reach her, in spite of the distance, and bring her back to the Valley. The landscape she recreates is therefore auditory: as she hears their lullaby, Mistral feels as if she were a baby cuddled in her mother's arms.

Summing up, "Tordos" is a poem that restores a sense of place by means of an awareness of time and place; by naming the long-lost location and self, by summoning reverential silence, by idealizing and making sacred this primal space, and by means of images that affect the senses. Warmth, fragrance, the visual landscape and the song of the blackbirds contribute to recovering the comfort and safety a child experiences in their mother's arms. Though Mistral does not physically go back to this sanctuary, she revives the sense of place and belonging, literarily feeling that she is there.

In mid XXth century, Violeta Parra (1917-1967) undertakes a recollection quest to safeguard folk tales, rhythms and chants from the mestizo farmers in the Chilean central rural area. The two major literary works by V. Parra are *Décimas, autobiografía en verso* (1998), written in rhythmical and rhyming ten-line stanzas, and her own lyrics sung along with folk melodies. In contrast with Mistral's *Poema de Chile* where Mistral tries to represent a picture of Chile and ends up talking about her own experience, in *Décimas, autobiografía en verso* V. Parra's intention is to communicate the story of her own life, but she ends up telling that of the Chilean working class. V. Parra acknowledges her diversion by addressing the reader and excusing herself for having digressed into other topics. As María Ester Martínez says, through *Décimas, autobiografía en verso*, V. Parra

⁴⁴ My translation for "yo me tengo lo perdido".

goes from the individual being to the universal self. However, the way in which she speaks for, and personifies the underprivileged and the excluded classes is not only in the actual episodes she depicts but also in her use of a performative, vernacular language.

Her everyday language is consistently linked to her understanding of the land and her learning from informal experiences, as reported by many of her biographers. In *Décimas, autobiografía en verso*, Parra speaks out against the modernist impulse that standardizes all, adapting everything to a norm. She hated her primary school⁴⁵, and felt true learning was achieved on the road, and in particular in the fields; she writes: “Because I was born a wanderer, / not even the devil can catch me; / inconsistent to school, / consistently going to the hills. / ... / jolly among tiny birds, / dreaming of little angels; / I wish I were a little tree” (*Décima* #39)⁴⁶.

In her lyrics and poetic autobiography Violeta Parra constantly recycles by appropriating and inverting popular sayings and country wisdom. For example, there is a religious proverb that states “God blesses those who move home” but V. Parra inverts the saying and describes how things went all wrong once her family moved. V. Parra also refers to the divine female figure, Mother Mary instead of the male God, but even though Violeta and her siblings prayed and “sang litanies [...] like innocent canaries” (*Décima* #37)⁴⁷, things became even worse at the Parra-Sandoval household. Though it appears at odds with her preference for natural open areas, notice that for the metaphor of the children, V. Parra chooses a canary and not a native bird⁴⁸; precisely because male canaries are kept in captivity to entertain humans with their twittering, the metaphor of the captive animal emphasizes that the arbitrary situation V. Parra is pointing at. Her bitter family circumstances were shaped by men, and in particular an alcoholic father and the greedy adults around him⁴⁹. Like the canaries, who no matter how much they please with their singing, they are never liberated, Violeta and her siblings were never given respite from poverty and hardship, no matter how hard they prayed. V. Parra felt that she and her siblings were trapped, and therefore the metaphor could not be based on a native bird that is free to wander around.

⁴⁵ In Parra’s childhood, primary schools were referred to as *Escuela Normal*.

⁴⁶ My translation for: “*Como nació pat’e perro, / ni el diablo me hecha guante; / para la escuela inconstante, / constante para ir al cerro. / ... / feliz con los pajaritos, / soñando con angelitos; / ¡quisiera ser arbolito!*”

⁴⁷ My translation for: “*Cantamos las letanías / ... / como inocentes canaries*”

⁴⁸ Canaries were first introduced to Europe from the Canary Islands and later introduced by Europeans to the Americas.

⁴⁹ As reported in *Décimas: autobiografía en verso*, fellow players took advantage of their father’s word who bet the family house while drunk.

Gastón Soublette, who is an expert in *décimas* as traditional country expressions that sing to both the human and divine being, argues that the metaphors V. Parra uses are first hand metaphors; that is, simple and direct metaphors that compare people with flowers, herbs and crops. The images that nurture her metaphors come from the ordinary more-than-human world she encounters when she escapes to the hills; she speaks from her everyday experiences out in the countryside. Soublette describes V. Parra as a pilgrim on a mythical quest when she journeys through the country, contacting elderly peasants who still sing *décimas* and tell traditional stories. Soublette highlights the fact that Parra rediscovers ancient and authentic musical and poetic Chilean tradition which she merges with her own work by “composing” her autobiography in what he regards as superlative *décimas* (Soublette in I. Parra 76-82).

Likewise, Victor Casaus supports the notion that as V. Parra recollects, her voice speaks for the people of the land she has met. Casaus says Violeta wants to revive the traditions that have been marginalized, creatively returning them to the people; that is, composting what we may call an *upcycled* creative work. Casaus acknowledges the synergy activated in this cycle, and how her recollections become the input for her own songs. He also argues that V. Parra’s loyalty to folklore is not paid back by merely reproducing, but by surpassing it. V. Parra reprocessed and recreated the music she had rescued from the droppings bin; she composted it, adding her creativity to the old traditions. However, it is important to distinguish between reproducing and recycling: whereas reproduction connotes mechanical repetition which can lead to the standardization that V. Parra deplores, recycling implies a new composition using pre-existing material; in other words, V. Parra’s upcycling, implies composting culture (Casaus in I. Parra 16). Along these lines, as in Duchamp’s *ready-made* art, to upcycle implies adding value to a found object⁵⁰, allowing the renewed object to continue in the compost flow.

Later, in this flow of cultural compost, V. Parra becomes renewed soil: she is the inspiration for younger generations of folklorists and even local rock. As Fabio Salas claims, V. Parra is THE reference point for local rock female figures because of her artistic quality, the coherence between her life style and her creation, added to the fact

⁵⁰ Though upcycling traces its predecessor in *ready-made* art, the term appears to have been coined in 1994 by Reiner Pliz in an effort to distinguish the process of adding value by recycling (or upcycling), from the apparent recycling of construction and demolition trash used to produce concrete; process which he called *downcycling* (Thornton. *Salvo News*: 99)

that her art allows everyone to identify with it (28)⁵¹. Though V. Parrás' poetic autobiography is not nature driven, she cannot keep her direct personal experience of nature from her poetry, nor can she silence her profound and lucid awareness of environmental injustice. While we may not call her work eco-literature, we can say that it is attuned with nature in so far as it is literature that is permeated by the natural experience of the author.

Both Mistral and V. Parra exhibit awareness of their *mestizo* heritage and the marginalized position of the indigenous peoples of Chile. In the poem “*Araucanos*”, for example, Mistral denounces that the dominant class has ripped off the Mapuche of their land and even of their own name, calling them “*Araucanos*” instead of Mapuche. Though V. Parra's statement is not as evident, she manifests awareness of the mixed blood society depicting how she rejoiced as a girl when the family visited the Araucanía Region. None-the-less, it is not until the end of the XXth century that Mapuche poets begin to publish their own works and upon the turn of the millennia, female Mapuche poets gain public recognition. In the poetry collection *Üi*, Pinda (born 1970) addresses her Mapuche ancestors as she struggles to write down their oral language, the written expression being seen as a violation of the ancient oral ritual. Pinda's writing is an act aimed at restoring and renovating her peoples' tradition in an effort to resist the threat of erasure that has been present ever since the arrival of Europeans in America. Pinda's restoration, as well as V. Parra's, is not a mere act of transference and reproduction of tradition, but an effort to recover a language. A previous generation of Mapuche intentionally disposed of their language to protect their children from bullying at school; to them it appeared threatening and virtually useless in the domains of *huincas* (white men). Pinda's renewal relies on merging her ancestors' language with the communication needs and means of today, that is, writing. Yet, Pinda is torn between the calling of her Mapuche blood and her surrendering to *huinca* language: she confesses she could not help being seduced by writing, which to her is a synonym of Spanish and colonialism. In her poetry, Pinda acknowledges her betrayal, but she is somehow atoned by the resistance her act of cultural translation implies, as well as by the appropriation of writing as a healing tool for a contemporary *machi*.

⁵¹ Just as V. Parra is a current referent in the cultural compost flow for contemporary creators, in the *décimas* she composed as farewell verse for Mistral, V. Parra honored Mistral calling her “goddess”, “president”, “benefactor”, “American woman”, “celestial lady”, “the best guest”, “crowned Saint Mistral” (V. Parra 207-8).

According to Rodrigo Rojas, cultural translation is the leading resistance strategy used by Mapuche poets. Mapuche poets are bicultural creators because they are situated in an intermediate linguistic and cultural space, and therefore these poets use this intermediate space to their benefit (Rojas, after Walter Mignolo). Cultural translation is different here from cultural assimilation, and has a resistance function against the political and cultural reduction that Mapuche poetry has encountered. (ROJAS, 2009, p. 10). Rojas goes on to state that in a cosmopolitan and multicultural context, Mapuche poets have had to demonstrate that what they create is also “literature” not just something perceived by cultural and intellectual chauvinism as “oral and rural”, fixed in a pre-modern age. In other words, cultural translation resources are an assembly of strategies used in various ways by Mapuche authors, and through her book *Üi*, Pinda shows awareness of this process and skill in using this tool, particularly in the way in which she establishes a relationship between the native and the dominant language, sprinkling words and phrases in *Mapuzungún*, inconsistently spelling the Mapuche words through the poem, causing anxiety in the non-Mapuche reader.

Pinda’s recovery of the land and the stories that it tells, is coloured by the tension that the material she is working with – the *ül* – does not exist in the written form and her recycling does not neglect this strain. Pinda is aware that she cannot bring *Mapuzungún* back to life as it was, not merely because of the passing of time, but because her act of communication relies on writing, and writing is a tool learned from *huincas*. In *Mapuzungún*, *üi* means identity or name. The title of Pinda’s book, however, is often confused with the word *ül*, which is the word given to oral verse or ritual Mapuche chants. As a poet, Pinda cannot actually record an *ül* because “the written” is not part of their tradition, and in writing, its spontaneity is lost; the written song loses both its spirit, and its identity (Pinda 7). Thus, although the written poem is not an *ül*, in the book *Üi* Pinda is making a claim to restore Mapuche identity, which is inseparable from the land.

In an attempt to escape the chauvinist image of the Mapuche people as unaffected by the process of modernization, in the foreword of *Üi*, Pinda refers to the impossibility of swimming in the same water twice, and explains the metaphor. She says: “reconstruction of cultural conditions [...] has not expired, these regenerate daily though this does not mean that everything is renewed at once [...] from the very moment prior to death, we begin to revive, we begin to de-organize and re-organize, just as happens with

Mother Earth”⁵² (10). Thus, Pinda is conscious how culture is composted, layer over layer, always renewing what once seemed dead.

The idea of creating something new by recycling previous elements, and building up strata as in composting, is present in the way Pinda assembles her poetry. Her poetry does not follow traditional patterns. Pinda hardly includes punctuation other than to prevent a verse from flowing all the way to the end of the line, only disrupting it once the illusion of completeness has been created in a verse that seems continuous. Pinda uses short lines and blank spaces, forcing the reader to pause. These interruptions contribute to the notion of moving one-step-forward-two-steps-back, and yet scaffolding, where the last word before the pause may be added either to complete the previous verse or to start off a new one, building up the strata. For example, she writes: “*una semilla ciega* [blank] *somos* [change line] *un rewe* [blank] *abrazado* [change line and blank] *por la furia*” which I suggest may be read as: “a blind seed we are [...] [we are] a sacred altar [...] [a sacred] altar embraced... [embraced] by fury” (15). This representation supports a sense of circularity in the embrace and also in the phrase “we are” with which the verse began. Scaffolding and repetition are present throughout the book. Circularity is present in the recycling processes which coil and recoil, as well as in the holistic world vision of the Mapuche culture in which “we” includes more than human beings.

Most striking is how Pinda denounces the displacement and consequent scarcity to which the Mapuche have been evicted. Pinda’s poetry depicts a land that cannot feed its people, she writes: “starved rocks”⁵³ (33) and repeats “the land cannot stretch enough to fulfill the urgency of the hand”⁵⁴ (51), ghostly dried up female figures as Felipa and Mercedes Millapán, and hungry mountain lions that come down the mountains to feed, “come wounded mountain lions”⁵⁵ (49). In her poetic account, *machi* and mountain lion establish kinship as they meet eye to eye: “kin lions that cry like children / when we see our sorrow eye to eye”⁵⁶ (18), matching their pain.

In their particular ways, these three creators resist erasure and intentionally perform a conservation act, rescuing old cultural memories and traditions that are tied to

⁵² My translation for: “*la reconstrucción de las matrices culturales ... no están agotados, se regeneran cotidianamente y no significa esto que de un día para otro todo se le ocurrió renacer, ... desde el instante previo a la muerte, ya comenzamos a renacer, comenzamos a desordenarnos ... nos reordenamos tal cual pasa en la ñuke mapu, la madre.*” (emphasis mine, indicating that this expression is not in Spanish, but in *Mapuzungún*, meaning Mother Earth).

⁵³ My translation for: “*hambrientos peñascos*”

⁵⁴ My translation for: “*la tierra no alcanza a colmar la urgencia de la mano*”

⁵⁵ My translation for: “*pumas heridos bajen*”

⁵⁶ My translation for: “*“leones hermanos que lloran como niños” / cuando nos vemos la pena en el ojo*”

the experience of the land. Mistral recovers paradise as she writes, presenting a performative poem which recreates the song of the blackbirds as well as the landscape of her beloved childhood valley; V. Parra recollects endangered material that she recycles and composts into her own work, offering such art back into the cultural compost flow; Pinda restores the heritage of the people of the land, recovering a language and tradition that had been neglected and discarded by the ideal of the modern nation, re-telling her people's story in written form, incorporating compost materials and renewing contemporary Mapuche means of expression to affirm identity and denounce injustice. These three creators accomplish compost writing in so far as they situate their texts in nature: in Parra the writings manifest through first hand metaphors; in Mistral the landscape is part of her identity, and what she is trying to recover; while Pinda exhibits an allegiance to the natural and more-than-human world. All three poets express awareness of the loss, conservation intention and composting praxis: in her cultural translation, Pinda shows her awareness of the impossibility to truly recover; whereas V. Parra is totally aware of her quest for cultural compost; and Mistral shows awareness of the distant time and place. With regards to their praxis, Pinda restores a means of expression in order to recover her heritage; while Mistral recovers and recycles not only her childhood landscape, but also her own identity, which cannot be understood without the Valley. Finally, V. Parra recollects and merges her findings in her own compositions, intentionally placing her creation in the flow of cultural compost. Most outstandingly, all three poets resist social and ecological injustice, placing them along the cultural flow with other Latin American artists' cry. In their austere choices, simple language, repetition rather than accumulation, they exhibit an aesthetics of relinquishment. In all three poets we see an intention to preserve language and culture, the land and landscape, flora and fauna in a conservation act that is not static, but plastic, recyclable; that is, compostable. Their creative creations released into the cultural compost flow...

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