

Writing *Saudade*: Navigating Home, Homeland and Sexuality in the Work of Gabriela Mistral and Elizabeth Bishop

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Abstract

For poets Elizabeth Bishop and Gabriela Mistral, the potential of Portuguese saudade was an answer to the crises of alienation and identity they faced as exiles. Drawing upon their poetry, correspondence, and translations of Lusophone literature, this paper examines how, by engaging with this foreign concept, both queer women poets living outside of their respective homelands engaged with their own senses of isolation and unhomeliness. Describing the potential of saudade in an endnote to the section titled “Saudade” in Tala, her third volume of poetry first published in 1938, Mistral states “I firmly believe, with Stefan George, in a future of borrowing language to language in Latin America. At least, in the case of certain words, clear achievements of the genius of each language, unshakable expressions within their range of ‘true’ words” (2003 p. 244). Both poets turned to this word as they were reconciling the heteronormative forces displacing them within their homelands. Ultimately, Bishop and Mistral mobilize the notion to address the traumas of displacement, loss, and sexual difference as they explore the ‘truth’ and nuance of the word through their writings.

Introduction—Discovering *Saudade*

The word *saudade* has been a concept central to Lusophone literature from early folk poetry to a brief literary period in the 1890s known as *Saudosismo* and beyond. The idea is often translated into English as ‘solitude,’ ‘nostalgia,’ or simply ‘yearning’, and takes on new significance when examined by non-Portuguese speakers upon relocating to Brazil and Portugal. *Saudade* is notable not only for its centrality to Portuguese and Brazilian literature but also for its relative resistance to translation.

In a 2004 survey conducted by the firm Today Translations, the word was ranked as the seventh most difficult to convert and the only word of European origin ranked in the study’s top ten (Young). The difficulty and nuance, as well as its prominence in the Portuguese language, likely resulted in Bishop and Mistral’s affinity for the concept as they attempted to define it in the process

of acclimatizing to the language and its differences from their primary languages. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides three definitions for the word:

Longing, melancholy, nostalgia, as a supposed characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament.

Vague and constant desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist, for something other than the present, a turning towards the past or towards the future; not an active discontent or poignant sadness but an indolent dreaming wistfulness.

[Y]earning for something so indefinite as to be undefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning. (“Saudade, n.”)

Both Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral and North American poet Elizabeth Bishop¹ formed an affinity with the concept, evoking it within their poetry as well as their correspondence with other major writers within their social networks. Ultimately, this idea provided a means for these writers to come to terms with the alienation resulting from their sexuality while living in voluntary exile. Upon becoming acquainted with *saudade*—following Bishop’s complete relocation to Brazil in 1952 and during Mistral’s tenure as a consul in Portugal from 1935-1937—both poets attempted to translate the concept into their respective languages, making note of its centrality to its language and culture of origin. They noted the idea’s usefulness in personal communication, as well as its potential to address broader sentiments and human experiences, including their own understandings of alienation. The vague universality of *saudade*, encompassing an unspeakable, undefinable nostalgia, served as an inspiration to both poets. In their introduction to *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, Bishop and her Brazilian contemporary, Emanuel Brasil, highlight the importance of *saudade* in the context of Brazilian literature. Bishop introduces the word to readers by defining it as “the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia . . . strongly associate[ed] with homesickness,” noting that this feeling “appears obsessively” in Brazilian poetry from the Romantic period to the present (1972, p. xviii). This bilingual anthology serves as an introduction for many English speakers to Bishop’s Brazilian contemporaries, including Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Joaquim Cardozo, whose

¹ In an interview with Regina Colônia for the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, Bishop described herself as “a North-American poet. . . living in Brazil.” Bishop’s self-definition as North American instead of simply American gestures towards her childhood spent with relatives living in Canada and the United States. This distinction also reflects the hybridity of her identity and a heightened sense of unhomeliness considered later in this analysis. This interview was reprinted in George Monteiro’s *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop*, 1996, p. 50.

work Bishop translated in part because of the sentiments of *saudade* select of their poems evoked. Bishop contributed a number of her own translations to the anthology, including “Cemetery of Childhood”, a translation of Cardozo’s “Cemitério da Infância”, a poem dramatizing the loss of childhood innocence as a walk through a garden which decayed long ago. This anthology project reflects the poet’s interests as a relocated writer living in Brazil as well as career-long themes of her work including childhood and losing one’s home, themes which reflect the traumas of her childhood as well as her experiences of alienation as a queer woman.

Mistral, who was also a queer woman, spent the latter half of her life in exile serving as a Chilean diplomat in various countries including Portugal, Mexico, and the United States. Like Bishop, she introduced readers to the concept of *saudade* in her creative work. In *Tala*, her third volume of poetry, first published in 1938, Mistral titled the fifth section of the collection “Saudade”, paying homage to Portuguese romantic and folk traditions while also addressing the topics of loss, childhood innocence, and home in the section’s five poems. In Mistral’s endnote to the section title, she expresses the ecstasy of being inspired by another language and approximates translations for her Spanish-speaking audience on both sides of the Atlantic while admitting the impossibility of understanding *saudade* in her homeland of Chile:

Suelo creer con Stefan George en un futuro préstamo de lengua a lengua latina. Por lo menos, en el de ciertas palabras, logro definitivo del genio de cada una de ellas, expresiones inconvencionales en su rango de palabras “verdaderas.” Sin empacho encabezó una sección de este libro, rematado en el dulce suelo y el dulce aire portugueses, con esta palabra *Saudade*. Ya sé que dan por equivalente de ella la castellana “soledades.” La sustitución vale para España; en América el sustantivo soledad no se aplica sino en su sentido inmediato, único que allá le conocemos. (2001, p. 244)

I firmly believe, with Stefan George, in a future of borrowing language to language in Latin America. At least, in the case of certain words, clear achievements of the genius of each language, unshakable expressions within their range of ‘true’ words. Without embarrassment, I title a section of this book, completed on the sweet soil and in the sweet manner of the Portuguese, with this word “*Saudade*.” I know its Castilian equivalent as “*soledades*.” The substitution is sufficient for Spain; in America the noun soledad does not work but in its immediate sense, the only meaning it has there.²

Admitting the inexactitude and fallibility of the act of translation, she acknowledges that any attempt at translation will ultimately fall short. *Soledad*, her proposed translation, roughly equates to ‘solitude,’ which lacks the nostalgic qualities of *saudade* in Latin American Spanish. As Estrela

² All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted. The author owes thanks, in this instance, to peer reviewers who made valuable suggestions for this translation.

Viera explains in her comparative study of the two words as featured in the work of Portugal's Fernando Pessoa and Spain's Antonio Machado, *soledad* lacks the "complex cultural construction" and "unique psychological facets" as well as its ties to national identity (2007, p. 127).

Mistral also discussed the subject/concept in her prose work. She meditates on the concept in "Recado sobre Anthero de Quental, el Portugués" ["Note about Anthero de Quental, the Portuguese"], which is a biographical sketch of a poet with whom Mistral shared the experience of being an outsider, an exile and a traveler. Quental, a Buddhist born on the island of São Miguel in the Azores, spent much of his adult life in Portugal, and was a product of empire who mastered the language of the colonizer and returned to the European metropole. Mistral would follow the same path decades later, emigrating first to Spain and then to Portugal. In her article on Mistral's tenure as a diplomat in Portugal, Elizabeth Horan notes even more intimate parallels between the lives of these poets. Like Mistral, Quental adopted children when single. As Horan notes, Mistral focuses on these biographical connections and "speculates on the inner life of Anthero de Quental, who never married and had no lovers, in terms relevant to herself" (2009, p. 414). One of the section's titles, "Sin mujer" ["Without woman" or "Wifeless"], reflects Mistral's own public image as motherly without a husband.

Quental was not a contemporary of Mistral. In fact, he died (by suicide) more than forty years before Mistral wrote the piece. Mistral's decision to write about Quental reflects their shared experiences of exile and (at least perceived) queerness. She takes the opportunity to meditate on the concept of *saudade* and its poetic qualities at one point in a lyrical extended sentence:

Ella significa melancolía a secas y entraña luego una dulzura apesadumbrada; ella vale por una sensación estable de ausencia o de presencia insólita; ella es metafísica y se colorea de una nostalgia aguda de lo divino; ella toma la índole de una cosa temperamental permanente y la de una dolencia circunstancial y ella se sale de lo portugués y se vuelve un achaque humano universal, un apetito de eternidad que planea sobre nuestro corazón temporal. (1978, pp. 367-368)

It expresses dry melancholy and also involves a sorrowful sweetness; it equates to a steady sensation of absence or of an extraordinary presence; it is metaphysical and is colored by an acute nostalgia for the divine; it takes on the nature of a permanent temperamental thing, that of a circumstantial ailment, and it comes from the Portuguese and turns into a universal human ailment, an appetite for eternity that soars over our fleeting heart.

For Mistral, *saudade* seems to exist in a series of contradictions—sad yet sweet, absence and

presence, permanent but beyond the ability of the mortal human heart to comprehend. The description seems to reflect the senses of loss and displacement that the author and her subject seem to share.

Horan also notes the political marginalization the poet faced as a result of her rejection to diplomatic posts on the basis of her gender in the region of Western Europe, ultimately resulting in a sense that as the poet writes this piece she “stands literally on the furthest western strand of Europe, turning her back on the Spain that rejected her, facing the Atlantic and Brazil, to which she was likely to transfer” (2009, p. 413). The poet identified with both Portugal and Quental as marginalized entities, and perceived *saudade* as a means of considering the pain resulting from her displacement as well as the marginalization she experienced as a woman, as queer, and as a racialized foreigner. Horan notes the magnitude of the concept’s significance: “*saudade* also appears in her subsequent writings from Brazil and becomes synonymous with the mood of her exile” (2009, p. 413).³

It is precisely the multi-faceted loss and identity-driven significance of the concept that led both poets to meditate upon the concept in-depth and represent it in their poetry and correspondence. As queer exiles, questions of identity, childhood, home and belonging featured heavily in their work. In an essay titled “Pa’ la escuelita con mucho cuida’o por la Orillita’: A Journey through the Contested Terrains of the Nation and Sexual Orientation”, Manolo Guzmán introduces scholars to the term ‘sexile,’ a portmanteau of ‘sex and ‘exile.’ Broadly defined, the sexile is produced as a result of “the exile of those who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation,” fleeing their homelands due to homophobic cultural, social and/or economic forces (1997, p. 227). While one cannot account completely for these writers’ motives, Mistral’s permanent exile (working as a diplomat for Chile across Europe and the Americas) and Bishop’s seventeen-year exile reflect the hostility of their homelands.

Mistral and Bishop voluntarily left their nations of origin as a result of some combination of their writing talents and the sense of feeling out of place in their respective homelands. As Licia Fiol-Matta notes in *A Queer Mother for the Nation*, Mistral received anonymous letters early in

³ The poet identified so much with *saudade* and the marginalization of Portugal that Horan suggests “Mistral chose boldly when she made Portuguese central to her public identity, accepting the Nobel as ‘la voz directa de los poetas de mi raza y la indirecta de las muy nobles lenguas española y portuguesa’” [The direct voice of the poets of my race and the indirect voice of the very noble Spanish and Portuguese languages] (2009, p. 416)

her career as a civil servant “that revolved around her non-femininity and included accusations of her being *una marimacha* [mannish] and *una asquerosa* [disgusting]” (2002, p. 63, Fiol-Matta’s translations in original). Mistral remained closeted her entire life; however, her relocation afforded her opportunities to embrace her sexuality, including the final decade of her life spent with her partner Doris Dana. Fiol-Matta notes that “Mistral left Chile to further her writing career, but also because she was permanently out of place there and felt persecuted” (2014, p. 36). Relocation and her writing afforded her reprieve from the crises of alienation she faced in her homeland and opportunities to process these traumas.

These currents of homophobia became even more evident when Dana died in 2007 and she bequeathed a trove of Mistrals documents as well as audio and video recordings of the couple to her niece, Doris Atkinson. This collection, referred to as *el legado* [“the legacy”] effectively confirmed Mistral’s sexuality. In an article titled “A Queer Mother for the Nation Redux: Gabriela Mistral in the Twenty-First Century”, Fiol-Matta, revisiting her monograph on Mistral’s queerness, considers the reaction of the Chilean state’s cultural apparatus to these revelations following decades of guarding Mistral’s image and signification, a “fixation on the masculine, unmarried, and childless ‘mother’” (2014, p. 36). *El legado* also reveals the degree to which the poet had embraced the very gesture that alienated Mistral early in her career within Chile, pushing her towards what Fiol-Matta describes as an “obsession with finding a permanent home to write in” (2014, p. 46). Mistral would go on to masculinize herself in later life as she “refers to herself with the male gender” and adopts a “signature of ‘Gabriel’” in correspondence with Dana (2014, p. 45). Upon relocating and defining a home for herself while embracing her relationships, the masculinization that had played a significant role in alienating her within her native Chile takes on a new form as the poet playfully and romantically employs her masculinity, perhaps embracing a butch-femme dynamic between herself and Dana. One might also read this as another historical example of the masculinity without men examined by Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*. Mistral’s experience as a sexile, relocating due to homophobic harassment, afforded the poet the distance to reconcile her masculinity and to embrace the elements of her image and subjectivity that resulted in this initial alienation.

Bishop’s various displacements in life were frequently associated with her romantic partners. Bishop relocated to Key West with Louise Crane prior to settling in Brazil with Lota Machado de Soares. In these periods of exile, the insularity of the experience—having few ties to the new

geography—affords privacy and safety, but also opens possibilities of self-acceptance. For both Mistral and Bishop, *saudade* provides a means of understanding and describing the emotions they felt in their state of exile. This is evident in their letters as well as the poetry, short stories and translations they produced while living outside of their respective homelands.

Invoking *Saudade*

In their personal communications, Bishop and Mistral both adopted *saudade* as a means of fondly addressing loved ones. In a letter dated April 16, 1938 to Argentine writer and editor Victoria Ocampo, Mistral used the word offhand in personal correspondence:

A hybrid day, yesterday that is, on one hand pure *saudades* for you, and on the other, Sarita Bollo. (She left last night.)

Broad and emotional nostalgia [*saudades*] for Connie and for me, for those eight *happy* days (it makes me fearful to set down the adjective...). (Mistral, G. & Ocampo, V. 2003, p. 57, ellipsis in original)

It is clear, however, that Mistral's understanding of the concept is more than a simple sense of yearning. For Mistral, a sense of happiness is tempered by the dominant sense of longing in the word as she suggests that for her and her companion at the time, Consuelo 'Connie' Saleva, happiness is, in some way, incompatible with *saudade*. There is fondness but also pain in the word.

Bishop, too, adopted the Brazilian/Portuguese custom of invoking nostalgia for her friends. In a letter to fellow American poet Robert Lowell, dated Dec. 10, 1954, Bishop introduced him to *saudade* in terms of yearning as "a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one" (Bishop E. & Lowell, R., 2010, p. 156). For this reason, Bishop began closing her letters to friends and family with "*abraços* [hugs] *e saudades*" (Millier 1995, p 538). Similarly, Bishop exhibits her understanding of the weightiness of the word in another letter to Lowell, dated Dec. 1958: "It is beautiful here, but Lota [her partner] and I are feeling horribly poor and great *saudades* (that overworked word)" (2010, p. 258). Again, the word's ambiguous nature—fond, yet painful—is on display with this particular usage. Bishop's parenthetical note, however, expresses her understanding of the weight and potential of the meanings carried by the word. Both poets experienced joy at being with their romantic companions but sorrow at being away from their loved ones and/or their homelands, a reflection of their divided existence as exiles.

While both poets exhibited an understanding of *saudade* in its casual senses, such as yearning for a loved one, the writers both understood its more complex uses like yearning for one's former self (e.g., childhood innocence or an identity destabilized in a moment of crisis). As the poets encounter the concept of *saudade*, both turn nostalgically to their respective childhoods for a topic of inspiration. By turning to their losses of childhood innocence, Mistral and Bishop address the losses associated with the distance between themselves and their homelands. Both poetry collections emerging out of their time in Brazil and Portugal—Mistral's *Tala* and Bishop's *Questions of Travel*—reflect this, not only through their focus on childhood but also in terms of the collections' organizational schema, particularly the section titles and the geographic themes of these sections.

Translators of Mistral's work, including her companion Doris Dana, have interpreted *Tala* as "Harvest" for English-speaking audiences. Also translated as "felling" or "cutting down," the word suggests an inevitable end or a seasonal reaping. Ursula K. le Guin explains her choice of the word "Clearcut" as part of her own translation of a volume of Mistral's poetry: "The noun *tala* and the verb *talar* have to do with havoc—felling trees in great numbers, razing buildings to the ground. It is a violent word. Our term for the most ruthless and destructive kind of longing seemed a fair translation" (2003, p. 125). The title suggests an emotional destruction which is perhaps most prominent in the work's opening, "Muerte de me Madre" [My Mother's Death]. With this collection, Mistral turns from her lullabies and verses on motherhood in *Tenura* [Tenderness] to examine the loss of her mother as well as the waning possibility of becoming a mother herself: the beginning of a series of losses cataloged in the collection. Similarly, "Deshecho" [Undone] describes the unraveling of a mother and the speaker's shame for not sharing in the institution of motherhood.

As Horan notes, *Tala* was nearing completion during Mistral's time in Portugal (2009, p. 413). The volume's organization also reflects Mistral's complex geography and memories of places left behind, including Chile. Its sections, particularly those titled "América" and "Saudade", contain poems gesturing towards her time as an ambassador to the countries of Mexico, Portugal, and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, referencing in the poems a range of figures from Aztec gods to Mistral's contemporaries in the world of Lusophone literature. Also reflecting her time abroad, the five poems about Chile in this section reflect her estrangement with her homeland and with her childhood such as "País de la ausencia" ["Land of absence"] and "Todas íbamos a ser reinas" ["We

Were All to Be Queens”], as discussed below.

Though Bishop never brought the actual word *saudade* into her own work, the nostalgic sentiments towards homeland and childhood innocence are clearly perceptible in *Questions of Travel*, first published in 1962. The volume’s two sections of poetry titled “Brazil” and “Elsewhere” are separated by Bishop’s autobiographical short story “In the Village”, which recounts the loss of Bishop’s childhood innocence and the scream of her mother shortly before her mother was hospitalized for mental illness. Like Mistral’s sections of *Tala*, the sections of *Questions of Travel* reflect different geographies and moments in Bishop’s life. While the poems in the section titled “Brazil” capture the country and its culture, the majority of the poems in the “Elsewhere” section take place in Nova Scotia. These poems recount the time leading up to her mother’s institutionalization, placing the three sections of the volume—“Brazil” poems, the short story “In the Village”, and the “Elsewhere” poems—in reverse chronological order, reproducing the qualities of *saudade*: looking towards the lost homeland and the deceased with nostalgic eyes. The poems “Manners”, “Sestina” and “First Death in Nova Scotia” present remembrances of her grandfather, grandmother and cousin respectively. “Sandpiper” (a portrait of a migratory bird) and “Filling Station” (an account of a gas station with traces of domestic life—a doily, comic books—blurring lines between home and work) explore the liminal nature of home and belonging.

This alienating effect is also central to Mistral’s “Saudade” poems in *Tala*. “La Estranjera” [The Foreigner] describes the depth of a woman’s alienation in language and culture. “Beber” [To Drink] presents a woman in search of home in life and in memory. “Todas íbamos a ser reinas” is an account of four seven year-old girls growing up, including one named Lucila, Mistral’s given name, and another named Soledad, Mistral’s approximation of the word *saudade*. The queer utopia of female unity in a land of bounty in northern Chile at the beginning of the poem succumbs to a future of disappointment and separation as their dreams fall apart. They grow older but do not become the queens they dreamed of becoming. While the others experience marriage, motherhood and widowhood, Lucila, is left alone and inherits an imaginary kingdom. Like the poet herself, Lucila finds her happiness not in her literal homeland but in the geographic distance and unimagined queer future she must invent for herself in a state of exile.

Bishop’s “In the Village”, the story dividing the poems about Brazil and the poems about Nova Scotia in *Questions of Travel*, like “Todas íbamos a ser reinas” and “Muerte de mi madre”, brings

to the forefront of the collection the losses of mother, home and childhood as it recounts the events leading up to her mother's descent into madness. After the loss of her mother, Bishop spent the rest of her childhood scuttled between the homes of relatives in New England and Nova Scotia. This break reflects a loss of innocence—a before and an after—reflected in the warmth and the pain of the volume's poetry about her childhood. Bishop's short story reflects what Homi Bhabha defines as an “unhomely moment” catalyzed out of an “incredulous terror” at realizing one's displacement (1994, p. 8). This terror results from the innate sense of not belonging at home as a result of loss, as well as one's queerness and one's foreignness as a result of relocating. While Bhabha's decolonial revision of Freud's notion of the unhomely reflects an “estranging sense of a relocation of the home and the world,” Bishop's “One Art”, as well as Mistral's “País de la ausencia”, perform multiple vectors of displacement and alienation by using elements of repetition, surveying losses, and deploying negative constructions (1994, p. 7). The speakers of these poems both examine deep cultural and personal losses. “One Art” takes the form of an internal dialogue recounting and reassuring oneself, while the speaker of “País de la ausencia” revisits a homeland devoid of everything that made it home.

The speaker of “One Art” systematically catalogues a life's worth of losses while assuring herself that “loss is no disaster.” Everything in the poem, from its structure to Bishop's diction, conveys this sense of *saudade* as Bishop approaches the topic of loss. The poem is written in a traditional style: a villanelle defined by iambic meter and refrain lines which convey its reflective (bordering on obsessive) tone. In an attempt to convince herself that these losses are not so grave, the poem's speaker opens “One Art” by declaring that “The art of losing isn't hard to master” (ln. 1). It soon becomes apparent to the reader that the loss is greater than originally outlined, and that the speaker's words to the contrary are an attempt to convince themselves otherwise. Following the villanelle form, Bishop uses the refrain lines in “One Art” to reaffirm, throughout the poem, that “[t]he art of losing isn't hard to master” (lns. 6, 12, 18). Enacting a performance of pain and consolation, the four lines ending in “disaster” (lns. 3, 9, 15, 19), such as “I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster” (ln. 15), also provoke strong feelings of reassurance and denial. The non-refrain lines call into question the validity of the first line, walking a tightrope between the warmth and devastation of *saudade*—the crisis of loss on the one hand and the potential salve of memory on the other. As the poem echoes, assesses and reassesses its first line, Bishop establishes a sense of loss, yearning, and denial reflecting the idea of *saudade*.

The speaker's feelings of painful reflection continue as they list various personal losses and tells herself that the loss of "None of these will bring disaster" (ln. 9). The specific losses catalogued by the speaker range from small items, such as "door keys" and an "hour badly spent" (ln. 5), to large ones, like a "continent" (ln. 14) and the beloved "you" of the poem (ln. 16). These objects fall into the same categories used to explain *saudade*, including abstract concepts such as innocence and trust as well as material things such as places and people. This painful yearning, reflective of *saudade*, is central to the poem and its catalog of losses. The speaker starts to list this series of personal losses in the third stanza with some abstract losses. Detailing these losses, she instructs herself, "Then practice losing farther, losing faster: / places, and names, and where you meant/ to travel" (lns. 7-9). Bishop uses an understated tone to express the *saudade* of the speaker. Reassurance and denial are expressed as Bishop structures her list of losses from least to most painful. In this sequence, the speaker does not directly mention or describe the pain she feels, but rather denies the gravity of the pain she has experienced by employing words such as "isn't" and "none."

The speaker's list of abstract losses is followed by a set of more concrete losses in the fourth stanza, beginning with an incident from her childhood, stating, "I lost my mother's watch" (ln. 10). The loss of the watch is, in fact, four different losses: first, the literal loss of the watch; second, the supervision of her mother; third, the distant sense of childhood innocence; and lastly, the watch gestures towards the time spent meditating upon these various losses, cycling through them and experiencing the pain of *saudade*. The catalog of literal losses continues as the speaker remembers her "three loved houses," "two cities," "some realms [she] owned, two rivers, [and] a continent" (lns. 11, 13-14). Upon losing these houses, cities, and rivers, the speaker of the poem loses pieces of her personal and cultural identity. The speaker experiences the pangs of *saudade* not only for the places and possessions she has lost, but also these pieces of herself. The same can be said of the last stanza. With the loss of this loved one, the speaker also loses an important relationship. In the case of "One Art", this includes the loved one's gestures and mannerisms, such as her "joking voice" (ln. 16). Ties are severed between self, mother and home (as well as homeland). The speaker's desire to regain the watch, her memories, her homeland and her missing childhood innocence is painful and reflects the different aspects of the Portuguese concept of *saudade*—loss and yearning, immensity and indefinability.

The last lines tie the rest of the poem together and serve as a resolution, declaring "It's evident/

the art of losing's not hard to master/ though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster" (lms. 17-19, Bishop's emphasis). These lines exemplify *saudade* in its contradiction and understatement. They extend the sense of denial, reflection and reassurance expressed in the first stanza and the refrain lines of the poem, preserving the tone of painful, understated loss evoked by the speaker's catalog of losses. Writing *saudade* offers the speaker a means of understanding the crisis of loss not just in terms of material objects or loved ones, but also loss of place. The time that Bishop spent in Brazil resulted in more than just an admiration for its culture, natural beauty, and language. The experiences she had and the knowledge she gained, whether consciously or unconsciously, led to the incorporation of ideas such as *saudade* into the body of her work. The potential of writing *saudade*, for Bishop, was a means of grounding the crisis of loss between loss/displacement and the indelible potential of memory.

For Mistral, *saudade* (as well as its so-named section in *Tala*) serves as a medium for exploring her vague but powerful sense of nostalgia for her homeland, as well as the lost, idealized childhood notions of self and womanhood she ultimately subverts in the section's poems. As Mistral became a nationally recognized figure, she adopted a public persona as mother of the nation of Chile, subtly subverting notions of femininity. Her public persona and the autobiographical nature of much of her work frequently countered cultural constructions defining womanhood as predicated on giving birth, appearance and her dependence upon a man (Fiol-Matta, 2002). The first poem in *Tala*'s "Saudade" section, "País de la ausencia", is also dominated by feelings of loss. Its title, translated as "Absence Country" and "Land of Absence", is the mystical result of the speaker's cumulative losses, a parallel to the structure and function of Bishop's "One Art". Returning to a land the speaker once knew, the poem catalogues the missing flora, fauna, geographical features and people. A mysterious land of absences comes into relief in the poem, almost like a film negative. In the absence of everything familiar, a nightmarish land emerges, bringing to life the speaker's sense of alienation as her life became more detached through death and distance.

"País de la ausencia" begins with a description of this land produced in absence and characterized by its lack of life and color as it is compared to dead seaweed ["alga muerta"] (ln. 5). The land is characterized solely in terms of absence as Mistral catalogues all of the attributes it lacks through a series of comparisons, often relying upon repetition to emphasize this point. Her "Land of Absence" is ageless ["edad de siempre"] (ln. 7), occupying a space outside of the familiarity of time. It bears no pomegranate or jasmine and lacks skies and seas ["No echa Granada,

/ no cria jazmín, / y no tiene cielos / ni mares de añil”] (lns. 9-12). The elements of creation, from flora to fauna, and the elements of the heavens and seas so familiar and foundational as to be established in the creation story of Genesis do not exist in this alien land. This repetition of the negatives “no” and “ni” [“no” and “neither”] emphasize that the land the speaker describes is created out of a general lack of familiarity. This lack of the familiar is precisely how Mistral highlights the constructs of *saudade* as she meditates upon her own disconnect with her homeland of Chile while serving it abroad as a diplomat.

The poem’s form differs greatly from Bishop’s compact villanelle but relies upon repetition to illustrate the constant resonance of alienation within *saudade*. The lines alternate between three and two stresses, always ending with the latter. The end of each stanza is also consistently marked by the rhyming of the last and third to last lines with the sound of í (“neblí” [“fog”] and “feliz” [“happy”] in the first stanza, “oí” [“I heard”] and “morir” [“to die”] in the second and so on) while the first line of each stanza ends with an “a” sound (“ausencia” [“absence”], “granada” [“pomegranate”] etc.). These characteristics, in combination with the refrain lines “and in a land without name / I shall die” [“y en país sin nombre / me voy a morir”] (lns. 15-16, Mistral’s emphasis), produce a reflective sense of loss and unhomeliness approaching the obsessiveness of Bishop’s villanelle (p. 84-5, Dana’s translation). In the case of both of these poems, the presence of *saudade* is visible in this overt obsession with the past and the evasiveness of home and innocence. This disconnection is most clearly emphasized in the third stanza, in which the speaker declares, “Neither bridge nor boat / brought me here” [“Ni puente ni barca / me trajo hasta aquí”] (1971, lns. 17-18, pp. 82-83, Dana’s translation). Mistral can provide no explanation for arriving in this land she never sought out or discovered [“no lo buscaba / ni lo descubrí”] (lns. 21-22). This allusion to the fairy tale, a parallel to the loss of a mother’s watch in “One Art”, invokes *saudade* for childhood innocence as well as the loss of childhood innocence in these fairy tales.

Mistral concludes the stanza with a major turn in the poem as the speaker accepts the land of absence as her new homeland: “Y es mi patria donde / vivir y morir” [And it is my homeland / to live in and die in] (2003, lns. 27-28, pp. 190-1, le Guin’s translation, Mistral’s emphasis). The speaker accepts the loss of homeland and goes on, in the following stanzas, to explain that the origin of this land is in her own losses and that the memories of the things gone by are her closest rendering of home and homeland:

Me nació de cosas
que no son país;
de patrias y patrias
de las criaturas
que yo vi morir
de lo que ero mío
y se fue de mí.

[It was born to me of things
that are not of land,
of homelands and homelands
of all the living beings
I saw die,
of that which was mine
and went from me.

Perdí cordierras
En donde dormí
Perdí huertos de oro
dulces de vivir;
perdí yo las islas
de caña y añil,
y las sombras de ellos
me las vi ceñir
y juntas y amantes
hacerse país.

I lost mountain ranges
where I slept
I lost orchards of gold
sweet to be in
I lost islands
of cane and indigo;
and their shadows
I saw close in around me
together and loving
becoming my country.]

(1973, p. 84)

Mistral's cataloguing of losses from the abstract (connection with the homeland) to the concrete (landscape and people) bears striking resemblance to Bishop's "One Art". The latter, however, lacks the specificity of Mistral's poem. More so than Bishop, Mistral evokes specific geographic features of the homeland she left behind, such as the Andean mountain range, the islands of the sea as well as the country's fruit and flowers. In both cases, the poets' evocation of the loss of home and homeland points to the nostalgic, nationalistic idea of *saudade*. Mistral acknowledges this with the poem's dedication to fellow diplomat and poet Ribeiro Couto, a Brazilian consul to France in the 1930s. Upon writing the poem, Mistral had lived outside of her homeland for approximately fifteen years and shared this feeling of *saudade* with Couto, a fellow South American poet in exile, who was able to appreciate her use of *saudade* in the poem and the so-titled collection.

The final stanza of the poem returns to the formless images of the opening stanzas. Bodiless, headless apparitions (lms. 47-48) follow the speaker slowly, turning into her new homeland over many years of wandering. In this acceptance, the speaker acknowledges the destructive nature of her *saudade*: what she yearns for can never be regained. For this reason, she resigns herself to the declaration that she makes in the poem's refrain: "*Y es mi patria donde / vivir y morir*" [*And it is my homeland / to live in and die in.*] (lms 53-54, Le Guin's translation, Mistral's emphasis). The speaker's new homeland is defined by its emotional and physical distance from the original

homeland and by its formation through the speaker's absence and memory. The poem's focus on homeland [patria] and upon memory elicits *saudade* from the reader.

Conclusion

In the examined poems, Elizabeth Bishop and Gabriela Mistral invoke yearning for the homeland while distancing themselves from any concrete sense of home, rendering performances of their own states of self-exile from these homelands and the crises of identity and culture resulting from the emotional impact of their respective exiles. The strongest invocations of *saudade* can be found in Bishop's "One Art" and Mistral's "País de la ausencia", which are both dominated by loss and alienation. By examining Bishop and Mistral's understanding of the concept of *saudade* as well as its significance in their correspondence and work, one gains a greater understanding of the poets' cultural and poetic influences. It would be simplifying to merely label either poet as great within the traditions of English or Spanish literature. This is due to the fact that, in many ways, their work is a continuation of their Portuguese and Brazilian predecessors and contemporaries. Bishop and Mistral, through their exploration of *saudade* in their writings, came to terms with an array of losses, including the landscapes they abandoned as exiles and the unhomeliness they experienced. Ultimately, the writers found freedom in the foreign and alien as they came to terms with losing their childhood innocence and their homelands while embracing their own notions of womanhood, citizenship, and sexuality. In the cases of Mistral's "País de la ausencia" as well as Bishop's "One Art", the poets' writing takes on a performative quality as they ruminate on their losses by listing them and compounding these losses with each refrain, as well as through the formal decisions made in the poems and assembling the volumes containing them. The effect that the poets create reflects the richness of *saudade*—its persistence, its vague alienating force, its pain and its potential. For both writers, the richness of this concept became a means for understanding the loss and alienation that they experienced while recuperating the memories of the homes and cultures that they lost.

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