

Looking for Gabriela

Gary Geddes

Mistral: the "master-wind", northerly, cold. —OED

Travelling north from Santiago
into spring. Mountains, fields of mustard,
blue-green onion. Water in furrows. Grapevines
drenched anticipate the sun. *Animatas*
dot the perilous curves,
welded into rock. Leaving behind
Don Pollo, traffic, rain,
the dead.

Anabuco. Runque. Til-Til.
Uay-Uay. Women bent from the waste
administer with such finesse the enthusiastic
seed. How strange this is, getting warmer
the farther north I go.

Mirar al paisaje con sus ojos,
not just to look at with your eyes,
but actually to *see* the land.

At *Longotama* a beached freighter
rusts in the tepid surf. So much
for our petty enterprises. The dunes
are mere extensions of the beach.
Shrub pines, cacti the shape of pipe-cleaners.
A mother and five children
clamber up the hillside
followed by pigs.
A solitary mule holds back the sea.

Forget the reference books, official histories.
It's 6:00 p.m., August 31, 1992;
this month that promises renewal
speaks the name *Augusto*.

Bristly shrubs and cacti
snag the scudding clouds.
While some of my countrymen
wring sweat and copper
from this land, others
construct giant screens in the coastal
deserts to extract moisture
from fog.

Vicuña. Too late, Gabriela's home-place
closed. Home.
The words
she left, the master-
song vibrating in the throat,
the patience of a chestnut mare
tethered among the rows
of eucalyptus.

A teenaged girl, seated on an ornamental
bench in the *Plaza de Armas*
at *La Serena*, reads a letter, seasons
of desire inscribed in her face.
A warm breeze caresses grapevines
in the *Valle de Elqui*, parenting hills
attend. *Tierra, sangre*, red soil
shoring up the roots.

*The continental hug has not yet relaxed. Gary Geddes was recently awarded the Gabriela Mistral Prize in Chile, an award created in that sister country to commemorate the first Chilean to win a Nobel Prize for literature, a half century earlier. Geddes has travelled widely in Chile and has written about it and about a variety of political, social, and personal issues in Canada, Chile, and around the globe. Cormorant Books, a publishing company he founded, has been responsible for the publication and distribution in Canada of a variety of books, by Canadians and by writers from a variety of other nations, on themes related to such matters. Cormorant titles on Latin themes include the anthology he edited with Hugh Hazelton *Compañeros: Canadian Writings about Latin America* (1990—it includes a selection by Raging Grannie Alison Acker), *Exile Home / Exilio en lat patria* by Lake Sagaris (1986), and José Leandro Urbina's *Lost Causes* (1987).*