An afternoon with Mistral’s poems

The tower walls are striped
with long glass apertures of sky,
making it a catacomb of light.

That old crooner the wind -
her friend - is humming in interstices
where hills braid and where fig trees
shade the valley of her home.

Harsh gusts off the cordillera
abrade the stony surfaces
and marshal foliage that glints
like mica in the noonday sun.

In crevices and crannies, sound
is amplified, is carrying
incantation as from distant
monasteries or swarming bees.

For that parched land the poet pined,
her brown skirt billowing on paths
that led always to Elqui
and her village, Montegrande.

Around this tower now, her muse
is humming in the masonry -
hiving, like bee colonies,
half a million poems.

Jena Woodhouse

Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), a Chilean poet, educator, diplomat and feminist, was the first Latin American (and, so far, the only Latin American woman) to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1945.