

Patagonia, Land of Nomads: A Glance at a Territory Shaped by Displacement

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Once upon a Voyage

In the year 1878, an English Lady named Florence Dixie decided to flee the busy comforts of London for a strange, nearly deserted place at the southernmost corner of the world. Patagonia was back then a broad, untouched landscape, barely inhabited by nomad peoples as rough and wild as their territory. For Victorian society, it must have seemed extremely odd that a refined Lady should wish to venture into such inhospitably cold regions. Perhaps this is the reason why Florence Dixie felt the need to respond to these questionings on her book about her journeys *Across Patagonia* (1881):

What was the attraction in going to an outlandish place so many miles away? [...] Precisely because it was an outlandish place and so far away, I chose it. Palled for the moment with civilization and its surroundings, I wanted to escape somewhere, where I might be as far removed from them as possible.¹

This was, in fact, a time when technological development had made travelling fairly safe and was becoming increasingly frequent, even popular. These explorations engendered a great volume of writings which were later comprehended under a literary genre devoted specifically to the detailed narration of such world-wanderings. Travel literature of the nineteenth century constitutes, in this sense, a sort of evidence of a world suddenly set in movement. Of course, the transformation of the world map had initiated more than four centuries ago with the discovery of newer continents. The discovery of the Americas produced the opening up of a whole new world through which to wander. This was both the subject matter of early travel writings, and the triggering of the dusk and extinguishment of more than 10,000 years of native nomad cultures: the first great bouleversements of trans-oceanic displacements and cultural collisions.² Yet it was not till the very end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century that these voyages begun to evolve into global movements.

Lady Florence Dixie's travels across Patagonia portray and foreshadow the coming of an era of great world displacements that were to be intensified throughout the twentieth century and into contemporary times. This modern condition has been described and interpreted by literary theory not merely as a group of phenomena that have facilitated physical displacements across the globe, but as a generalised *social acceleration*, a *nomadic* way-of-being and thinking, a *geo-poetic*³ turn brought about by the virtual dissolution of frontiers. It follows that, together with the

¹ Florence Dixie, *Across Patagonia* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1880) 2.

² Anne Chapman, *Fin de un Mundo. Los Sel'knam de Tierra del Fuego* (Valdivia, Ch.: Taller Experimental Cuerpos Pintados Ltda., 2008).

³ Kenneth White, 'Elements of Geopoetics', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 88, 1992.

movement of bodies and vessels, modern technologies have made it possible for cultural objects to move and be accessed from distant points of the earth, thus blurring away the boundaries of disciplines and intellectual fields.

Patagonia is a place shaped by movement. ‘This outlandish place so far away’⁴ is not merely a young wilderness, isolated from modernity: it is an abyss at the southernmost limit of the world; beyond it, there is but a void of sea and ice. This place is at once young and ancient, ineffable and evocative, a land of local nomads like the *kawéskar*, *selk’nam* and *yaganes* and foreign travellers; both a physical territory and an imaginary space, open and unlimited. The *nomads*, local and foreign, who have wandered this landscape have produced imaginaries to represent and create a territory. This essay will attempt to look into these images and the displacements that have shaped Patagonia as an imaginary and physical space. This exploration will reveal the interweaving of the local and foreign images in an attempt to make sense of a land pushed into instability by a peculiar convergence of phenomena: the vanishing of local peoples, the arrival of passing travellers, and the decline in geopolitical relevance of a location that was, for many centuries, the only bridge between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Indeed, a land of nomads and dis-located identities.

Making sense of a world in movement

The map of the world ceases to be a blank; it becomes a picture full of the most varied and animated figures.⁵

- Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*

If one were to map out the beginning of these queries about cartographies and displacements in literary theory, the first use of the term *Weltliteratur* would probably constitute a good initial touchstone. It was during a conversation with his fellow poet and friend Johan Peter Eckermann that Goethe first used the concept. These conversations were recorded by Eckermann in a series of notes which were later published in the form of a book entitled *Conversations with Goethe*. One of them, dated Wednesday 31 January 1827, speaks of a Chinese novel by which Goethe was captivated at the time. Amongst other deliberations about this reading, Eckermann recalls this audacious, almost prophetic, statement pronounced by his friend: ‘National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature (*Weltliteratur*) is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach.’⁶

⁴ Dixie 2.

⁵ Charles Darwin, *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe. Journal and remarks. 1832-1836 [The Voyage of the Beagle]* (London: Henry Colburn, 1839) 607.

⁶ Johann Peter Eckermann, ‘Wednesday, January 31, 1827’, *Conversations of Goethe*, translated by John Oexenford. Digital production by Harrison Ainsworth: <http://www.hxa.name/books/ecog/Eckermann-ConversationsOfGoethe.html#contents> (2006)

Goethe's oracular words reflect an intensely lucid interpretation of his contemporary world, which was on the verge of becoming an open global territory. They describe, with urgency, the coming to an end of a long tradition of National literatures within which people identified the spirit of its own folk: a common territory of images, the voice of its elders. As localities begun to crumble and texts begun to travel, the very experience of literature underwent a profound transformation. More and more, individuals from any nations and cultures would find themselves – like Goethe – reading books from strange and foreign lands and encountering the feeling that poetry must be 'the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men'.⁷ With the emergence of a new world-order, human beings across cultures begin to identify with imaginaries beyond national boundaries. Identities are thus re-shaped to the image of this moving cartography.

However, the concept of *Weltliteratur* contains in itself a sense of hastiness and vertigo that is not without a taint of contradiction. In his essay 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*' (1952), Erich Auerbach unravels the deeper conflict underlying the comforting idea of universal identification with humankind that the term *Weltliteratur* seems to signify. In fact, the word translates literally as *World-literature*, which does more than to point out 'what is generally common and human; it rather considers humanity to be the product of fruitful intercourse between its members'.⁸ In this sense, *Weltliteratur* presupposes 'mankind's division into many cultures'.⁹

Auerbach's interpretation of the historical conditions that shape the notion of *Weltliteratur* suggest that a dissolution of cultural divisions is at hand. Hence, there is an imminent tendency towards assimilation between cultures. The inherent danger of this tendency is that, if it should come to be fulfilled, no cultural exchange could possibly take place, for there would arrive a state of cultural homogenisation, such that there would be nothing to share or exchange: 'herewith the notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed'.¹⁰ In a way, the discovery and conquest of the Americas entailed such a destructive encounter, which very seldom produced any culture out of exchange. Specifically in the southern part of Chile, it seems assimilation never took place. A proof of this is the fact that bilingualism never occurred; moreover, the few native languages that still persist, have battled their way back into cultural life through actions of recovery.¹¹

Whether Auerbach's bad omen has come to be realised or not may be the matter of a different essay. But there is yet another scope to this idea that deserves consideration here. The concept of World-literature reflects what may be called a geographical or spatial turn in humanities. Consistently, the fading of stable limits between nations, national identities and countries, and the disintegration or reconfiguration of literary and cultural boundaries, are all space-alluding

⁷ Eckermann.

⁸ Erich Auerbach. 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', translated by Maire and Edward Said, *The Centennial Review* 8.1 (1969) 2.

⁹ Auerbach 2.

¹⁰ Auerbach 3.

¹¹ María Catrileo, 'Revitalización de la lengua mapuche en Chile', *Documentos lingüísticos y Literarios* 28 (2005) 10-17. Retrieved: www.humanidades.uach.cl/documentos_linguisticos/document.php?id=86

metaphors, which describe a phenomenon taking place as physical world-displacements as much as theoretical phenomena. It seems the very language of humanities has adopted a vocabulary that speaks of space. In this sense, it is quite telling that Auerbach chose to write a philology about literature's digression about the world: a philology of literature and its spatial relations. At the same time, it is quite shocking that his writing could almost foretell the final violent outcome of these global displacements, virtual dissolution of frontiers and nomadic European travelling, which theory would, later, try to conceptualise through somewhat obscure notions such as *hybridisation*.¹²

The spatial turn is a turn away from linear, chronological approaches to philology, and towards the open world, 'a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.'¹³ This is, in fact, the cultural project put forward by Kenneth White through the concepts of *Geopoetics* and *cosmoaesthetics*. White imagines a new kind of intellectual activity, one that would undertake the very worldly task of wandering, with fresh eyes, and experiencing the *new world sensation*¹⁴ that global phenomena present: 'To leave the ranks for a promenade, to abandon disciplines for a diversion, to become open to the texture of the world implies a renewal of the notion of text.'¹⁵ Nineteenth-century travellers across the steppes of Patagonia incarnate this kind of spirit and aesthetic disposition. Darwin's work, for instance, speaks of a craving for the new: new creatures and new names. This very gesture implies the tracing of connecting lines and ramifications in the taxonomic tree of species. Darwin theory draws a map in which every new individual re-interprets an ancient line of ancestry. There emerges a landmark, a recognisable being, both similar and different from others which are suddenly recognised as *his kind*. Darwin's story of species does not just trace a line across time, but draws a web between beings across the globe.

Geopoetics is an aesthetic vision of the world made whole. The broad vision of distant texts and territories being pulled together by movement. Perhaps not so much the assimilation that Auerbach feared in the realisation of World-literature, but a sort of dance. For sure, an acceleration of planetary displacements that makes it difficult to set eyes upon a single local reality; as localities overlap and interweave in the global order. It follows that, understanding this *chaosmos*¹⁶ consists in the unveiling of the hidden harmonies that relate distant texts and

¹² Homi K. Bhabha, 'How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and Trials of Cultural Translation,' *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 36.

¹⁴ White, 'Elements of Geopoetics' 165.

¹⁵ Our translation. The original quotation reads, 'Quitter les rangs pour une randonnée, abandonner les disciplines pour une dissipation, s'ouvrir à la texture du monde implique un renouvellement de la notion de texte.' Kenneth White, *L'Esprit nomade* (Paris: Grasset, 2008) 82.

¹⁶ The term is used by James Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake* to describe a fragile order, at the very verge of chaos: 'every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobblydumped turkery was moving and changing every part of the time: the travelling inkhorn (possibly pot), the hare and turtle pen and paper, the continually more and less intermisunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators.' James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) 118.

locations. This supposes the construction of a referential network: somewhat like the fabrication of a map. Hence, ‘The quest will be successful if it results in something that could be called a poem of the world (in the field of scattered forces that is the matter here, the only possible convergence is of poetical order), maybe ... a sort of music.’¹⁷ Here emerges an intellectual unconstrained by rigid chronologies, whose meditation is itinerant and multidirectional; one Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari would have called a *Nomadic thinker*.

Wai Chee Dimock’s proposal for a literary framework understands literature as such an object: a nomadic ground of cultural exchange and vagrant displacement of texts. In her book *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (2006), she explores how literary and intellectual influences make their way through and across space and timelines. Thus, effacing the traditional notion of national literatures.

Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time. Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation.¹⁸

What her investigation unveils is that there are profound relations taking place outside the time-frames within which contemporary humanities usually work; her undertaking is to look into *deep time* for the remnants of thought-traces unfolding into discourses. In this sense, Patagonia is a location where time and space fold, European images crush into and overlap with the wild, arid rock, and great empires such as the Spanish and the English push their borderlines into the primitive land of nomads. Here, oral tradition battles with writing – and loses – while native ecologies are rattled even by the tender bleating of sheep. A place with no riches, but still a passage between two worlds: exotic, remote and coveted. A land of permanent migrancy.

The rise of the nomadic intellectual implies – as White points out – a ‘renewal of the notion of text’¹⁹ that calls for a new way of understanding literature, literate activity and literary identities. Nomadic activity develops on a territory that is twofold, at once physical and intellectual or imaginary. Both of these planes are boundless and unstable, desert grounds with no borderlines nor landmarks. ‘The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited.’²⁰ Suddenly, with the setting-in motion of texts and bodies all across the planet’s surface, interpretation of the local is no longer possible within the limits of national territories: all reading requires a deep gaze into the distance. In the open landscape,

¹⁷ Our translation. The original quotation reads, ‘La recherche sera réussie s’il en résultait quelque chose qu’on pourrait appeler un poème du monde (dans le champ de forces éparses dont il est question ici, le seul rassemblement possible est d’ordre poétique), peut-être, [...] une espèce de musique.’ Kenneth White, *L’Esprit* 14.

¹⁸ Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 4.

¹⁹ White, *L’Esprit* 82.

²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari 382.

nomads wander about, they leave trails and pathways which weave a network in space and create a territory. Similarly, humanist interpretation consists in projecting an orientation and creating a theoretical space in movement. This violent world is not merely the nomadic thinker's milieu, but also the model – the architecture – and the product of nomadic activity.

Imagining from afar

Patagonia is just such a territory of nomads; a location visited and shaped by the wandering of travellers. It is a cold desert at the very end of the world, where the land is lashed by the raging Pacific Ocean and bone-like rocks are hammered by a constant, sharp wind. A century after Dixie explored this strange location, by the end of the twentieth century, a traveller named Bruce Chatwin once found himself trying to fix his eyes upon something that could recall, if vaguely, a human gesture.

In one place the rocks were alternately lilac, rose-pink and lime-green. There was a bright-yellow gorge bristling with the bones of extinct mammals. It led into a dried lake bed, ringed with purple rocks where cow skulls stuck out of a crust of flaky orange mud.

The unnatural colors gave me a headache, but I cheered up on seeing a green tree – a Lombardy poplar, the punctuation mark of man.²¹

There, amongst the hostile beauties of this land located at the farthest edge of the planet, Chatwin distinguishes a landmark. The Lombardy poplar is an element strange to this landscape, it murmurs in the language of tamer lands and it speaks of trans-oceanic journeys (its seeds dream dreams of nostalgia). Placed there by some traveller – perhaps in an attempt to trace an orientation – the tree is a pristine vestige of the path of modern displacements through Patagonia. Moreover, it suggests the manner in which this blank land is endowed with meanings transplanted here from abroad.

The fact that Florence Dixie had read Darwin's writings before embarking on her own adventure in Patagonia makes her enthusiasm for choosing this destination even more obscure. On the last pages of his *Voyage of the Beagle* Charles Darwin attempts to recapitulate the most outstanding episodes of his four-year journey across the globe. Amongst these, he recalls Patagonia. Surprisingly, he seems incapable of verbally articulating any positive feature to describe this location. His discourse is, on the contrary, a string of negative phrases:

I find that the plains of Patagonia frequently cross before my eyes; yet these plains are pronounced by all wretched and useless. *They can be described only by negative characters; without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains,* they support merely a few dwarf plants. Why, then, and the case is not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory?²²

It seems as if, despite his experienced naturalist observation skills, which enabled him to be an

²¹ Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (New York: Summit Books, 1977) 41.

²² Darwin 605. (The emphasis is ours).

acute note-taker and an accurate taxonomist, he found himself deprived of images with which to grasp the elements that composed his awe before this arid wasteland. Dazzled by the open blank geography, he failed to find anything that could suggest ‘the punctuation mark of a man’; no expressive signs, no allusive gestures. Perhaps when the Beagle docked by the shores of Patagonia, roughly a century before Bruce Chatwin’s visit, there was, in fact, no such a mark to find.

Eventually, as time passed by, and other travellers wandered these steppes, the territory begun to acquire images through which to appear, positively, in language. A set of landmarks, a rhythmic pattern, that can be read by the nomad traveller and provide an orientation. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, ‘There is a territory when the rhythm has expressiveness. What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression (qualities).’²³ The writings by Lady Florence Dixie contain, indeed, a fuller pallet of signs and gestures. One reference, in particular, provides an interesting description of *Torres del Paine*, three very characteristic mountain peaks of the Chilean Patagonia: ‘The background was formed by thickly-wooded hills, behind which again towered the Cordilleras, – three tall peaks of a reddish hue, and in shape exact facsimiles of Cleopatra’s Needle, being a conspicuous feature in the landscape.’²⁴ This passage illustrates how, amid this desert of negative qualities, Dixie places a gesture, a recognisable *punctuation mark* that echoes and resonates with an image from a far-away location on the globe.

The obelisk is an image transplanted to the steppes of Patagonia from the streets of London. It traces an orientation line back to England, where it was already an echo of a distant land of arid sun and radiant sands. With this very simple gesture – the assimilation of *Torres del Paine* to Cleopatra’s obelisk – Dixie unfolds a web across the surface of the globe which relates these very different and distant locations in a *geopoetical order*.²⁵ Harmut Rosa’s theory of social acceleration suggests that this gesture ought to be read as a sign of the enhanced pace of contemporary cultural exchanges. ‘Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: it pours (sic) us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal.’²⁶ Hence, as territorial divides collapse, images reflect the overlapping of referential marks in literature. In this way, reading itself becomes a nomadic activity: a wandering across vast landscapes, tracing pathways and placing landmarks. This transposition reflects, too, the paradoxes of nomadic activity. Dixie travels away from London, to the most remote location, only to find a replica of piece of London standing as an exotic slender Lady amid the harsh Andes.

The simile of Cleopatra’s Needle puts forward a crucial question about the experience of the traveler that will be examined hereafter. When embarking towards remote locations, one would expect the most stirring and thought-provoking sights to be those which are altogether new and unfamiliar. Still, Darwin’s and Chatwin’s notes on the Patagonian landscape prove otherwise.

²³ Deleuze and Guattari 315.

²⁴ Dixie 164.

²⁵ White, *L’Esprit* 14.

²⁶ Berman in Rosa 35.

That which is radically novel proves to be very difficult to apprehend with language, what results of this attempt is a stunned dizziness, a collection of ‘negative characters’.²⁷ When sense and orientation finally occur is when the voyager’s eye meets something (anything) that might wake in him the echo of a mental picture, a memory kept in some corner of the spirit. What Dixie finds in *Torres del Paine* is the reflection of an image from her own imaginary, more so, an image of her homeland. It is through this projection that she can have a vision of the desert and create a mental territory.

In this way the nomad sets forth on ‘a voyage of recognition from territory to territory’²⁸: from the mental territory of imagination to the imagination of the landscape, from homeland to foreign lands and back again. As Gaston Bachelard explains in his *Poetics of Space*, ‘one never lives the image directly. All great image has an unfathomable oneiric background, and it is on this oneiric background that personal past meddles its particular colors’.²⁹ All in all, ‘One can, thus, travel not to flee from oneself, which is impossible, but to find oneself.’³⁰ Attaining location ultimately translates into finding oneself through the emergence of echoes or gestures in open space. These landmarks are nothing but the re-cognition of a personal memoir; the apparition of a particle of homeland amid the exotic. In this sense, travelling is always an act of nostalgia – which in Greek means the pain (*algia*) for home (nost[os]).³¹ Nomadic wandering thus goes back over its trails and landmarks, repeatedly, searching for marks that might trigger remembrance. In order to shape his territory and create an orientation, the nomad travels back home in every expressive sign of the landscape that sounds an echo in his imagination. In every gesture found on the territory he longs for home and thereupon the very territory is transformed by his longing.

Darwin, Dixie and Chatwin travelled across Patagonia in a nomadic, *geopoetic*, journey of discovery and rediscovery. As they imagine this landscape and populate the desert with images, a territory emerges. Their pathways trace a network on the surface of the globe. Of course, that which for one culture appears as a clear web of lines that draw the map of its expansion, constitutes the traces of other culture’s extinction. Thus, the literature produced by European travellers is evidence of a world in movement. For local peoples, though, this literature is the semiotic, aestheticised materialisation of the violent effects of migration and occupation. The images evoked in these works reflect the displacement of imaginary territories, from the Old

²⁷ Darwin 605.

²⁸ Grenier in White, *L’Esprit* 39. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘une voyage de reconnaissance de territoire en territoire’.

²⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace* (Paris: PUF, 2011) 47. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘On ne vit jamais l’image en première instance. Toute grande image a un fond onirique insondable et c’est sur ce fond onirique que le passé personnel met des couleurs particulières’.

³⁰ White, *L’Esprit* 39. Our translation. The original quotation reads, ‘On peut donc voyager non pour se fuir, chose impossible, mais pour se trouver.’

³¹ Defined as: (1) a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one's life, to one's home or homeland, or to one's family and friends; a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time: a nostalgia for his college days. *Word Origin*: 1770-80; < New Latin < Greek *nóst (os)* a return home + -algia. [algia < Greek *algos* pain.]

World to this novel land. Paradoxically, in this very strange land, nostalgia takes travellers back home in their imagination and the voyage becomes as much an act of recognition and return as one of discovery; as much a longing for home as a transplanting of that home to this novel land. The consequence of these dis-placements for Patagonia itself is a sort of invasion: suddenly amid the barren steppe there stood a green-foliaged foreigner, and the wild, rough Cordilleras were dreamt to be the slender sisters of a distant icon that stood, sadly sand-longing, in the middle of a noisy metropolis.

Lost nomads, found landscapes

Of course, it is inconceivable to speak of nomads in Patagonia without at least mentioning the native, local nomads who once inhabited this region. It seems this essay arrives at this consideration almost too late. But such is the story of the native inhabitants of Patagonia who first had contact with Occidental men and women in the nineteenth century, and were fully acknowledged only by the twentieth century. By that time, they were already at the verge of extinction. Alas, the task of accounting for these nomads and their culture might be now as challenging as the attempt to paint a clear picture of a body fading in the mist. The indigenous peoples of these steppes were indeed already near both cultural and physical extinction in the 1920s, when the Austrian priest and anthropologist Martin Gusinde begun his studies on their culture and way of life. In his writings, these peoples – whom Darwin found so distant from the civilised man, he ventured a comparison between this difference and the one existing amongst domesticated and wild animals³² – are described as a group of tribes with very simple, Stone-Age economies, but a complex and rich spiritual culture, and a deep sense of morality.

Over the decade or so that Gusinde spent between field notes and extended visits to these communities, he seems to have been moved by the innocence of their ways, the simple purity of their customs and their pious pantheism. In between the lines of his very scientific documentary prose there is, in fact, a bitter tone of grief and regret for the imminent extinction of this naïve, profoundly spiritual peoples. While conducting his investigations, he witnessed as ‘The vital flow of ideas between the generation that departs and the generation that arrives has been interrupted.’³³ The arrival of European travellers, objects, habits and images was not guiltless in the disappearing of the peoples of Patagonia. As Gusinde points out: ‘It has been proved that from colonists and white land owners, from merchants and travelers, laborers and gold-seekers never arose a useful influence for the preservation of the good old ways. Those strangers, as a whole, came out to be a destructive force.’³⁴

³² Darwin 228.

³³ Martín Gusinde, *El mundo espiritual de los Selk'nam* (Valdivia, Ch.: Serindígena Ediciones, 2008) 70. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘La vital corriente de ideas entre la generación que se va y la generación que llega se ha interrumpido. ¿Cómo puede entonces seguir fluyendo la información acerca de lo ancestral?’

³⁴ Gusinde 71. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘Está demostrado que de los colonos y estancieros blancos, de los comerciantes y viajeros, de los jornaleros y buscadores de oro nunca partió una influencia útil para el mantenimiento de las buenas costumbres antiguas. Aquellos extraños, en su conjunto, resultaron ser una fuerza destructora.’

The emergence of foreign images and gestures in the cold desert is, in this way, inevitably accompanied by the occupation of the landscape by strange settlers. In Patagonia, the creation of territories by wandering and displacement is not a mere metaphor to describe the emergence of poetical imaginaries and literary products, but a concrete historical fact. Hence, with the dissolution of national borders and the opening of a global space of wandering, it was the local nomads of Patagonia who experienced an evil never conceived before in the shape of borders, fences and barbed wires. So, in the construction of new territories, foreign nomads displace local nomads – sometimes into the abyss. On this matter, the work of the Franco-American anthropologist, Anne Chapman is quite revealing. Her work collects the testimonies of the last Selk'nam peoples of *Tierra del Fuego*. Amongst these is an interview with Garibaldi, a Selk'nam descendant, which captures the lucid impressions of this Patagonian native regarding this turbulent era:

It was a thing of Our Lord that this race had to end, so other races come. [...] Ever since the world is made the situation of races has always been changed, coming other races. Then this one also had to end, it has been over the earth for many years, it must be finished [*he laughs*].³⁵

Given that neither the Selk'nam, nor any of the other native inhabitants of Patagonia, possessed a written literature, their culture was forever silenced once they were extinguished. So, there were no local voices to speak the images of this landscape. Yet there are literatures about this place which are not foreign nor local, not travel literature or *Weltliteratur*, but not exactly national literatures either. Patagonia is not a national territory, it was first the land of three nomads cultures and then a geopolitical territory shared by Argentina and Chile. This is the literature produced by Chilean poets in an attempt to make sense of and shape an imaginary of Patagonia.

Gabriela Mistral devotes the tenth section of her *Poem of Chile* (1967) to Patagonia. In these verses, the same land that was once described as a hostile wasteland appears as a vast, serene Mother and mother-land. In fact, the enunciating voice seems to react to the injurious evil tongues that dare say that God never loved this land, and for that he made her infertile and remote:

They speak too much who never
Had a Mother so white
And never the green Gaia
Was this angelic and white
Nor this nurturing

³⁵ Chapman 84. Our translation. The original quotation reads: 'Ya era cosa de Nuestro Señor, que hay que terminar esta raza, para que surjan otras razas. [...] Desde que está hecho el mundo se ha ido siempre cambiando la situación de las razas, volviendo otras generaciones. Entonces esta también tenía que terminar, ya lleva muchos años sobre la tierra, hay que terminar con ella [ríe].'

And mysterious and quiet.³⁶

Again, in the poem 'Austral Islands', there are feminine images assimilated to the landscape. This time, the verses speak not about the Mother-steppe, but of the playful archipelago into which the land breaks at the southernmost part of Chile:

What will the pilgrim do,
The globetrotter looking
at the dance of the hundred islands
that laugh or are singing?
A sharp fragrance comes,
an incitation, of a Bacchic choir of girls
thrown to the open sea,
virgin but intoxicated.³⁷

In this fragment, the scattered islands are compared to a choir of young maenads. The frenetic turmoil of the waves and the howling of the wind are herein transmuted into the wild dance and sweet singing of this choir. It is this feminine exuberance that drives travellers mad, as if enchanted by a parade of nymphs or mermaids. In this manner, all that was hostile and deserted in the imaginaries of foreign travellers is imagined anew. The vast void of the steppe is in the poetic imaginary of Mistral a broad motherly bosom. The icy cold of the south is displaced by an image of virginal purity and sublime serenity. Mother and virgins oppose both the hostility of the arid waste and the violence of the male invasion. These images are, nonetheless foreign. Through those, Mistral turns towards Greco-Latin mythology; that is, the most foundational of Western texts and imaginaries. This necessity for classical images suggests that, before Chilean poetry could elaborate an aesthetic of its own territory, this space was already intensely populated by poetical images conceived far offshore, in remote time-spaces. Such is the obelisk Dixie installs as a parallel of Torres del Paine and such is the Lombard tree in which Chatwin finds a piece of green home.

On a different note, the narrative poem *The Sword in Flames* by Pablo Neruda narrates the story of a great destruction: the collapse of an Eden-like world that resulted in the death of all human kind, save the one hero of this poetic fiction: king Rhodo. After the cataclysm, Neruda's hero sets forth in a long vagrancy across the world. Having accepted his absolute loneliness, he searches for a new land where to found a new realm. At last, he arrives at the southern end of the world, the cold Patagonia. In that glacial, majestic landscape, he discovers that he is not alone in the world after all: he finds Rosía, and falls in love.

³⁶ Gabriela Mistral, 'Patagonia la Lejana' in *Poesías Completas* (Santiago, Ch.: Editorial Andrés Bello, 2009) 724. Our translation. The original quotation reads: 'Hablan demás los que nunca / tuvieron Madre tan blanca, / y nunca la verde Gea / fue así de angélica y blanca / ni así de sustentadora / y misteriosa y callada.'

³⁷ Gabriela Mistral, 'Islas Australes' in *Poesías Completas* (Santiago, Ch.: Editorial Andrés Bello, 2009) 714. Our translation. The original quotation reads: '¿Qué va a hacer el peregrino, / el trotamundos mirando / la danza de las cien islas / que ríen o están cantando? / Viene una aguda fragancia, / una incitación, de coro báquico de niñas / tiradas a la mar libre, / vírgenes pero embriagadas.'

In the extreme south of Chile the planet breaks:
the sea and the fire, the science of the waves,
the strikes of the volcano, the hammer of the wind,
the hard rush with its furious blade,
cut land and water, they split them: there grew
phosphorous islands, green stars, invited streams,
jungles as clusters, hoarse gorges:
in that world of cold fragrance
Rhodo founded his realm.³⁸

This is a harsh new Eden, ‘The last Eden, the one of pains.’³⁹ It is so remote that God never visited it, in the sky above it – says the poem – there was nobody looking down. This is the virgin ground where Rhodo chose to start a new kingdom. It is not the motherly landscape that Mistral imagined, but a magnificent chaos, all the forces of nature unleashed.

Surprisingly enough, despite the contrasts between the Chilean approach to the Patagonian territory and that of foreign travellers, all of these poetic imaginaries are populated by images that come from other times and spaces. The obelisk and the Lombard tree, are, of course, foreign elements, but so are the Bacchic choir and the Biblical tale of the expulsion from Paradise. These are examples of images dislocated, displaced, and re-signified in this new physical and imaginary territory. Chilean poetic imaginary does not itself constitute World-literature; still, the classic and biblical allusions which are recurrent recourses in its construction are signs of the World taking place in this locality.

This phenomenon might very well be interpreted under Homi Bhabha’s concept of *hybridity*. This notion explains cultural contact as a dynamic interaction towards identity. Hybridity, somehow, relates to this deep sense of common belonging to humanity which is implied in the idea of *Weltliteratur*, yet it takes a step further. It proposes that this sense of what is common and what different between cultures – the shaping of the boundaries that define identity – is in fact constructed through contact:

What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a ‘singular’ or autonomous sign of difference.⁴⁰

These signs are the manner in which the global expresses itself in the particular, or as John Tomlinson would word it, the way global space and its displacement shape cultural identities. As

³⁸ Pablo Neruda, ‘La Espada Encendida’ in *La Espada Encendida* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1970) IV. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘En el extremo de Chile se rompe el planeta: / el mar y el fuego, la ciencia de las olas, / los golpes del volcán, el martillo del viento, / la racha dura con su filo furioso, / cortaron tierras y aguas, las separaron: crecieron / islas de fósforo, estrellas verdes, canales invitados, / selvas como racimos, roncós desfiladeros: / en aquel mundo de fragancia fría / Rhodo fundó su reino.’

³⁹ Neruda IV. Our translation. The original quotation reads: ‘en el último Edén, el de los dolores’.

⁴⁰ Bhabha 219.

this author asserts, ‘cultural identity, properly understood, is much more the product of globalization than its victim.’⁴¹ Such a conceptualisation, however, obscures a cruel and certain historical fact behind the idea of human friendship and cultural *mélange*. The truth is *kawéskar*, *selk’nam* and *yagan* cultures were effaced from the land by European displacements, and left no traces. Herewith Patagonia’s poetical identity is dis-located, constructed through violent migration, synthesised through local appropriations of strange, foreign images.

In Patagonia, contact was seldom smooth or friendly. Beneath the rich flow of displacements and images which operate a re-shaping of the territory in the imaginary and poetic spaces of literature, there is a physical displacement that takes place, which exerts physical, visible forces on the territory and its inhabitants. The transformation of this landscape which, at the end of the eighteenth century, suddenly opened to contact with the world often proved to be violent. For a fact, the vanishing of the oral imaginaries of the Selk’nam was not a merely poetical occupation of a virtual space, and certainly not a collaborative exchange and between cultures, but the extinction of a people and the brutal silencing of a culture. In this context, Tomlinson’s choice of words exceeds the limits of casual naivety. Globalisation may very well produce new identities, but the destructive power of its expansion cannot be disregarded; while contemporary digital globalisation appears milder and less violent, the silence of its displacement makes its effects on local cultures no less corrosive. Thereupon, concepts such as *globalisation*, *nomadic displacement* or *hybridity* create aesthetic categories that often obscure and facilitate the oblivion of the material events and conditions taking place just beneath the thick layer of theoretical discourse.

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⁴¹ John Tomlinson, ‘Globalization and Cultural Identity’, D. Held and A. McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) 269.

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