

## The Friendship between Cecília Meireles and Gabriela Mistral: Education, Journalism and Folklore

### La amistad entre Cecília Meireles y Gabriela Mistral: educación, periodismo y folklore

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#### Abstract

This article examines the surviving letters from the Brazilian writer Cecília Meireles (1901-1964) to Gabriela Mistral in the 1940s, now collected in the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile. It begins by reconstructing Mistral's and Meireles' friendship, especially in earlier years, and proceeds to discuss the information these letters provide to understand both Meireles' career in journalism and Mistral's contributions to the Brazilian press during the period.

**Keywords:** Cecília Meireles, Gabriela Mistral, friendship, journalism, education, folklore, Estado Novo.

#### Resumen

Este artículo examina las cartas enviadas a Gabriela Mistral por la escritora brasileña Cecília Meireles (1901-1964) en los años 40 y que están en la colección de la Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile. Empieza reconstruyendo la amistad entre Mistral y Meireles, especialmente en el principio, y sigue examinando la información que las cartas ofrecen acerca de la carrera de Meireles en el periodismo y las contribuciones de Mistral a la prensa brasileña en el período.

**Palabras clave:** Cecília Meireles, Gabriela Mistral, amistad, periodismo, educación, folklore, Estado Novo.

#### Introduction

A series of letters to Gabriela Mistral from the Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles (1901-1964) are available through the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile. Most are dated from 1943 and 1944, a period when Mistral was living in Brazil, shortly before she was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1945; only three letters are dated a few years later, in 1946 and 1947. The correspondence between the two writers is likely to be much more extensive, but it is not yet available in print or even in archives. This article takes as its starting point the surviving letters of the 1940s. It begins by

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reconstructing Mistral's and Meireles' friendship, especially in earlier years, and proceeds to discuss the information the letters provide about Meireles' career in journalism and Mistral's contributions to the Brazilian press during the period.

Mistral and Meireles had an enduring friendship that started in the 1930s. Both were committed letter writers who shared numerous intellectual interests. There are significant parallels in their trajectories. Like Mistral, Meireles had a background in education and a strong interest in folklore. By the 1940s, both were well-established poets. However, as Marta Peixoto (1988) has stressed, their careers had developed in a period when women's access to poetry was difficult.<sup>3</sup> Writing for newspapers was central to their careers, since it enabled both women to reach broad audiences and establish impressive reputations as intellectuals.

### Meireles and Mistral's friendship

Mistral's first visit to Brazil took place from August to December 1937. She had traveled to Brazil from Portugal at the behest of Gustavo Ross, a wealthy banker who served as the head of Chile's Treasure Secretary under the second presidency of Arturo Alessandri. Ross was then widely regarded as the leading candidate for the Chilean Presidency in 1938, in an election that he eventually lost to Mistral's long-time friend and political ally, Pedro Aguirre Cerda. As Mistral indicated in a letter to her lawyer, the great Spanish jurist Victoria Kent, Ross had paid her a surprise visit to Lisbon in March of 1936. He had spoken candidly of his great dismay with Chile's poor representation in Brazil, a crucial ally.<sup>4</sup> Mistral understood the subtext, as she accepted the task, but managed to postpone her travel to Brazil by arranging for what would become the longest, most ambitious and consequential of her numerous lecture tours, which she launched from Paris in July of 1937. She was accompanied in her travels by the Puerto Rican teacher Consuelo Saleva, who acted as her secretary, traveling companion and personal assistant. The two women left France in July 1937, returning in February 1939. They visited nine countries in fifteen months. Mistral addressed enormous crowds, from school groups and industry associations to diplomatic summits.

In the eyes of the Chilean government, the goal of Mistral's lectures in Brazil in her 1937-1938 tour was to promote knowledge of Chile in Brazil and vice-versa. Germán Vergara, then serving as Chile's Foreign Minister, stressed education when he approved Mistral's proposal to present on Chilean poets and prose writers of her choice, along with geography, and specifically southern Chile. In effect, this plan meant that Mistral would be presenting again talks that she had already given, successfully, in Málaga, Spain (April 1934), and in Hamburg and Bonn, Germany (January 1937). The Minister added that her talks could also involve "public education and national folklore" and that Mistral should speak on primary school instruction in Chile, a topic in which the acclaimed poet, journalist and diplomat, had minimal (if any) recent expertise. The Minister was undeterred by any concerns: "with regard to the information on Public Education and the reforms implemented over the past ten years, I am pleased to send you various documents that will be useful in developing this important topic, in a concise and modern way, especially with regard to

<sup>3</sup> Sadlier (1983) provides biographic information on Meireles, an insightful discussion of her poetry, and translations of selected poems. Alcides (2022) reads Meireles' *Romanceiro da Inconfidência* as a poem at once mystic and skeptic.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriela Mistral (1936) letter to Victoria Kent, in Horan, Urioste-Azcorra & Tompkins (2019), pp. 251-258.

Primary Education."<sup>5</sup> On arriving in Rio, Mistral answered the Minister in general terms. Overlooking his stress on primary education, she confirmed that she'd come to Brazil to present on cultural and educational topics related to Chile (Mistral, 1937). Writing privately to her friend Alfonso Reyes, the Chilean noted that she was being careful: "in Portugal I learned to speak in pure abbreviations." (Mistral and Reyes, 1991)

To prepare for her talks on folklore, in November of 1936 Mistral met with and convinced her colleagues on the Publications Committee of the Paris-based Institute for International Intellectual Cooperation to publish an anthology on the topic, translated into French. They agreed, likely swayed by her support from the noted French linguist and anthropologist Paul Rivet, who was to found the Musée d'Homme in 1937. The resulting anthology, *Folklore chilien* (Soustelle & Soustelle, 1938), draws heavily from Mapuche oral tradition by way of the work of several early 20<sup>th</sup> century folklorists, most notably Sperata R de Sauniere (Sauniere, 1919-1918.), along with Lenz, Cavada and others. One of Meireles' letters to Mistral, from 1944, expresses strong interest in this French-language anthology.<sup>6</sup> Meireles likely recognized *Folklore chilien* as a major source for the presentations that Mistral had delivered to massive crowds in Montevideo (January 1938), followed by somewhat smaller but substantial ones in Buenos Aires (May 1938) and Lima (July 1938) during her lecture tour.

During her 1937 tour, Brazil's government officials convened several gatherings in Mistral's honor. As Meireles was a poet and very well-connected member of the press, it would be surprising if she had not participated in one of those events. Perhaps the two women first met at the cocktail party that José Carlos Macedo de Soares, the Brazilian Minister of Justice, held in Mistral's honor, featuring popular music, national songs and samba (*Diário de Notícias* 12 September 1937).<sup>7</sup> Brazil's Ministries of Justice and of Foreign Relations organized dozens of such events, lunches, botanical garden visits, visits to Tijuca and Petrópolis, all of them amply reported in the press, as Mistral tells Carmela Echeñique, in a 1937 letter (Mistral & Vargas Saavedra, 1995).

The friendship between Meireles and Mistral was no doubt encouraged by several close mutual friends. Surviving letters and the two women's publications point to the Mexican poet-diplomat Alfonso Reyes as the most significant of these connections. Mistral worked closely with Reyes, who served as Mexico's Ambassador to France from 1926 to 1929. He became, in effect, her unofficial diplomatic mentor as she began working at the Paris-based Institute for International Intellectual Cooperation (IICI). As the highest-ranking diplomat with the greatest seniority in service, Reyes used his status as the "Dean" or doyen of the Latin American diplomats in Paris to present Mistral (and her colleague, Palma Guillén) to numerous colleagues. Mistral and Guillén were frequent guests at Reyes' family home, located on a cul-de-sac off the Boulevard Haussman.

<sup>5</sup> "Con respecto a las informaciones sobre Educación Pública y las reformas en ella reproducidas en los últimos diez años, me es grato enviar a US. diversas informaciones que le serán de utilidad para desarrollar ese importante tema, en forma sintética y moderna, especialmente en los que se refiere a Instrucción Primaria." (Vergara, 1936)

<sup>6</sup> On January 29, 1944, Meireles writes: "I was preparing to write an article about Chilean folklore when I realized I had mistakenly sent you the Soustelles' book. I've already asked Connie to arrange for the book to be returned from the bookbinder. It's possible that I could use Cifuentes' book first." (Preparava-me para escrever um artigo sobre o folclore do Chile, quando verifiquei ter-lhe mandado, por engano, o livro de Soustelles. Já pedi a Connie que providencie, para ter o livro, de volta do encadernador. É possível que utilize primeiro o de Cifuentes.) Meireles (1943-1947).

In all, Reyes and Mistral remained close friends for the rest of their lives, as is evidenced by their rich, mutual correspondence and by their many friends in common (Mistral & Reyes, 1991).

Reyes met Meireles in Rio de Janeiro in July 1930, shortly after his transfer from Paris to Rio de Janeiro. While serving as Mexico's Ambassador to Brazil (1930-1934), Reyes often loaned books to Meireles on the educational system in Mexico, a system that Mistral had helped shape and promote (Pimenta, 2022). The theme of Mexico appears throughout Meireles's "Página de Educação" in Rio de Janeiro's *Diário de Notícias*, which she published between 1930 and 1933. Meireles regarded Mexico's educational reform as a possible model for Brazil (Pimenta, 2022).<sup>8</sup> Meireles's first article about the Chilean poet appeared in her column in *Diário de Notícias* (1932, September 3). It focused on Mistral's early lullabies, poems that were drawn from the volume *Desolación* (1922, 1923).

The Portuguese poet and playwright Fernanda de Castro was another warm mutual friendship linking Meireles and Mistral, even before they met in 1937. Castro's memoirs, *A fim de memória*, indicate that the Brazilian and the Chilean, not yet known to one another, each traveled to Portugal (separately) in 1934 (Meireles) and 1935 (Mistral). Each woman received an invitation from Castro's husband, António Ferro, Portugal's Minister of Propaganda in the newly-formed government of António de Oliveira Salazar. Castro was especially interested in Meireles, who shared her commitment to the development of child-inclusive playgrounds in parks. Castro, who was to live three decades longer than Meireles, pays tribute to her friend's memory, character and devotion to letters in quotes from their correspondence. She quotes from a letter from Meireles: "You know that I make an extraordinary effort to be who I am within the possibilities I have. It's a constant redoubling of courage, a continuous vigilance against faltering. The rest is a consequence of my natural disposition to accept life. So much submission, moreover disinterested submission, wouldn't it end up making life sympathize with me a little too? What the hell, I'm not so bad after all!" Castro comments: "Outbursts like this were frequent in her letters...."<sup>9</sup>

Castro's relationship with Mistral was less extensive yet still significant. Mistral came to Portugal when Ferro developed the "Embaixada Cultural," an innovative cultural exchange program that brought together small groups of leading intellectuals, on the theory that their synergy would result in greater impact (Castro, 1986). It turns out that Mistral made a deep impression on her fellow intellectuals, a group that included Nobel Literature laureates Maurice Maeterlinck and François Mauriac, along with the writers Georges Duhamel (and his wife, the actress Blanche Albane), the theologian Jacques Maritain and the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. Maeterlinck and Duhamel were among those who signed a collective letter urging Chilean President Arturo Alessandri to regularize Mistral's then precarious, purely honorary (unpaid) consul position in Spain. Mistral in turn indicated her gratitude to Castro and Ferro in a letter that she sent from Nice, with a copy of *Tala* that included the superb lullaby, "Niño chiquito," dedicated to Fernanda de Castro (Fundação António Quadros). The poet develops an affectionate game of naming and re-

<sup>8</sup> Meireles and Reyes first met in July 1930; Reyes not only loaned books to Meireles: he also very actively encouraged her work on the children's library (Pimenta, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Meireles: "Tu sabes que eu faço um esforço extraordinário para ser o que sou dentro das possibilidades que tenho. É um redobrar constante de coragem, uma vigilância contínua contra o desfalecimento. O resto é consequência das minhas disposições naturais para aceitar a vida. Tanta submissão, aliás desinteressada, não terminará por fazer a vida simpatizar também um bocadinho comigo? Que diabo, eu não sou tão ruim assim!" Castro: "Desabafos como este eram frequentes nas suas cartas...." (Castro, 1986).

naming the beloved, which playfully reflects the continuously shifting, ever-changing identity, around which the poet weaves a protective spell.

A third and final mutual friendship that Mistral and Meireles shared prior to their first meeting involves the Brazilian poet-diplomat and journalist, Rui Ribeiro Couto (1898-1963). Mistral's relationship with Ribeiro Couto begins in 1928, during his honorary consul service in Marseilles. Mistral lived nearby at the time, in Bedarrides, outside of Avignon (Horan, 2015). The poet looks back on this year in her poem "País de ausencia," in *Tala*, which she dedicated to Ribeiro Couto, meditating on her feeling of absolute foreignness and disconnection, soon after she had moved to the French village. Ribeiro Couto later translated and published this poem in *A Manhã* to welcome Mistral back to Brazil in 1940.

Shortly after Meireles met Mistral, she writes a letter, dated November 22, 1937, introducing her to the influential Modernist intellectual Mario de Andrade (1893-1945). Her warm, eloquent description of her new friend deserves to be quoted in full:

[...] the great Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral must have arrived yesterday evening in São Paulo. She is a truly remarkable poet, not so much because of the poems that are best known and widely celebrated - *Desolación* dates from 15 years ago - but rather because of her striking unpublished poetry that, as of now, are about to become a new book.

You are among those that I most insisted she should see in São Paulo. I think that the two of you will understand each other. She likes to talk about literature, theology, Indianism (she is something of a lyrical missionary...), and other things that you will soon guess. Don't accept an initial impression; try to understand her with patience and empathy. She is truly surprising. Besides, she is a great friend of children - she will be charmed by the Parks [for children].<sup>10</sup> Poet, consul, representative of Chile in the League of Nations, woman with a generous heart that has known considerable pain - I believe that you will be pleased to meet her.<sup>11</sup>

Meireles does not simply list Mistral's literary and professional accomplishments in her letter; rather, she takes care to sketch her friend's personality in a way that she expects will appeal to Mário de Andrade. She goes so far as to encourage him to develop a relationship with Mistral over time: "*tente compreendê-la com paciência e carinho.*" In São Paulo, Mistral and Saleva stayed

<sup>10</sup> On Mario de Andrade's project of "parques infantis" see Itaú Cultural (2013). There are parallels between these *parques infantis* and Meireles's successful effort to found one of the first children's public library in Rio de Janeiro, at the Morisco Pavillion in 1934. (See: Ferreira, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> [...] deve ter chegado ontem à noite, a São Paulo, a grande poetisa chilena Gabriela Mistral. Ela é uma poetisa de veras notável, não pelo que mais se conhece e celebra - o *Desolación*, que já conta uns 15 anos, - mas pelos belíssimos inéditos que, neste momento, já são quase livro.

Entre as pessoas que lhe recomendei visitar em S. Paulo figura V. logo na primeira linha. Creio que V.V. se entenderiam bem. Ela gosta de conversar literatura, teologia, indianismo (é uma espécie de missionária lírica...), e outras coisas que V. logo perceberá. Não se deixe levar pela primeira impressão: procure compreendê-la com paciência e carinho. Ela é bastante surpreendente. Ademais, é uma grande amiga das crianças - ficara encantada com os Parques [infantis].

Poetisa, professora, cônsul, representante do Chile na S.D.N. e mulher de um grande coração já bem sofrido, creio ser para V. agradável conhecê-la.



at the Hotel Terminus, Rua Brigadeiro Tobias 98. This choice doubtless followed a suggestion from Meireles: she routinely stayed at this hotel when visiting Mario de Andrade and others (Ellison, 2000).

In all, Mistral's and Meireles' mutual assistance in 1937 led to a happily productive year for both women in 1938. Mistral published her first poetry collection in 16 years: *Tala*, her most Americanist volume. And in 1938, Cecília Meireles accepted the annual poetry prize from the Brazilian Academy of Letters for *Viagem* (1939), her first collection in 14 years. Meireles' 1937 letter to Mário de Andrade establishes that she had read in manuscript poems from *Tala*, which were soon to appear in print. Perhaps Meireles also showed to Mistral manuscripts of the poems of *Viagem*. In addition, as Mistral prepared to leave from Brazil to Uruguay, she informed her consular supervisor that she had drafted a volume of translations into Spanish of work by twenty Brazilian poets, featuring four to six poems by each (Mistral, December 1937). Mistral is likely to have consulted with both Meireles and Mario de Andrade. Even at this early stage of their friendship, the two women enabled one another to access national and international venues.

Mistral's initial exploratory trip to Brazil in 1937 proved fruitful when she and her household had to flee France in March of 1940. The great success of the first trip was evident in the enthusiasm with which Mistral was greeted when she returned to Rio de Janeiro in April of 1940, this time accompanied by both Consuelo Saleva and Juan Miguel (Yin Yin) Godoy, the adolescent that Mistral described as her nephew, and whom she and Palma Guillén had raised from infancy. A month before her arrival, on March 17, 1940, Mário de Andrade published a very favorable essay about Mistral in *O Estado de São Paulo*. He stressed that she had been nominated for the Nobel Prize and added that he and other Brazilian readers admired her poetry's gravity and felt its beauty, which featured topics that ranged from her schools across Chile to her experiences in México and Cataluña. (Pizarro, 2005)

Meireles helped Mistral find housing in Rio de Janeiro in 1940. The solution the two women arrived at greatly benefited both their families. Meireles had been widowed since 1935, following the suicide of her first husband, the Portuguese artist Fernando Correia Dias and had been supporting their three children entirely on her own. In 1940, however, Meireles became engaged to and married Heitor Vinícius da Silveira Grilo, an agronomist. Mistral's presence in Rio de Janeiro, accompanied by Connie Saleva and Juan Miguel "Yin Yin" Godoy, enabled Meireles to accept an invitation to give summer school lectures at the University of Texas at Austin. (It is possible that this invitation was filtered through one or another of Mistral's contacts in the United States.) On the occasion of Meireles' trip, Mistral gave her a letter to present to Federico de Onís, Director of the Instituto de las Españas in New York. This was the second time that Mistral tried, unsuccessfully, to convince de Onís to include Portuguese-language poets in the *Revista Hispánica Moderna* (Arrigoitia, 1985).

From May to November 1940, while Meireles and her husband were traveling to the United States, Mistral rented a house at Avenida de Tijuca, 1505, in Rio de Janeiro. Meireles' three daughters attended school close by. The young women received postcards and letters from their mother in this very same address. Clearly, Mistral and Saleva served as the immediate contacts between Meireles, her three daughters, and the school that they attended. Mistral was thrilled to exchange her consulate in France for this sublime location in Rio de Janeiro. In a letter to Victoria Ocampo dated May 19, 1940 Mistral writes: "I've had some days of ecstasy in this house, in a state of bewilderment, with my two thick walls of wooded mountain on either side. I wondered,

with a hot lump in my throat, what I had been doing in Europe for 14 years! Then, Votoya, came the news of what happened in Holland, in Belgium, and in France, and now my spirits are agitated, heated, and furious. The Furies are in the air... We live on one of the highest hills in the city, right by Corcovado" (Horan and Meyer, 2007).<sup>12</sup> During the months of Mistral's "idyll of Tijuca" and likely through Meireles, the Chilean met the poet Henriqueta Lisboa (1901-1985), who would become another of her closest friends and greatest admirers in Brazil. Mistral recollects this first meeting in "La poesía de Henriqueta Lisboa," an article published in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *A Manhã* on March 26, 1944: "I then lived in a wooded belt and was very happy. Joy makes me much more fraternal than grief. I talked to [Henriqueta Lisboa] for a few hours, feeling something like euphoria."

### Meireles' Letters of the 1940s: Education, Journalism, and Discouragement

Meireles' letters to Mistral in the 1940s are warm and occasionally gossipy, but on the whole circumspect. At times the writer explicitly distinguishes between topics that are suitable for letters and those that are best discussed in conversation: "These are things I can't tell you in writing. We'll talk about it later." (27 June 1943).<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, for the most part the letters focus on intellectual or professional matters. There are few references to family life and certainly no personal revelations. During her World War 2-era residence in Brazil, and especially in 1942-1943, Mistral frequently warned her correspondents about the insecurity of her mail and persistent problems with missing letters, patterns that the surviving archives support.

Roughly during the same time when these letters were written, Meireles and Mistral overlapped in their contributions to *A Manhã*. Meireles edited the newspaper's column on education, "Professores e estudantes" in the first half of the 1940s. She periodically published *crônicas* - short, signed prose pieces - in this section.<sup>14</sup> Meireles used simply the initial of her first name, C. as her signature. (In Brazil, Cecília Meireles' name is customarily shortened to "Cecília," a practice that is not necessarily gendered.) Mistral, who lived in Brazil from May 1940 to November 1945, was a constant presence in the newspaper as well. Throughout 1941 and 1942, her work often appeared in the section *Pensamento da América*, edited by Ribeiro Couto and Manuel Bandeira.<sup>15</sup> From 1944 on, Mistral also sent contributions that appeared in the body of *A Manhã*. Meireles' letters from 1943 and 1944 show that the Brazilian writer played a key role in persuading Mistral to become a contributor of *A Manhã*; those same letters further show that Mistral regularly sent her copy in Spanish for Meireles to translate.

In one of Meireles' later letters, dated February 19, 1947, and so written ten years after they had first met, the Brazilian reflects with some candor on her career as a journalist:

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<sup>12</sup> "He tenido unos días de éxtasis en esta casa, de aldelamiento, con mis dos muros vegetales de montaña espesa a cada lado. Me he preguntado, con un llanto caliente en la garganta, ¡que he hecho yo 14 años en Europa! Luego, Votoya, vino lo de Holanda, lo de Bélgica y lo de Francia, y el ánimo ahora anda encrespado, caliente y furioso. Las Eumenides van en el aire... Vivimos en una de las colinas más altas de la ciudad, al lado del Corcovado."

<sup>13</sup> "São coisas que não lhe posso contar por escrito. Conversaremos depois."

<sup>14</sup> In the Brazilian press, a *crônica* is short prose piece that may focus on any topic of interest to the writer. However, it is reasonable to expect that the *crônicas* Meireles contributed to *A Manhã* would serve as mini editorials for her column, which focused on education.

<sup>15</sup> On the newspaper *A Manhã* and its supplement "Pensamento da América", see Moreira 2001, Beraba 2008; on the relation between Brazilian leftist writers and the *Estado Novo* see Moreira 2010a and 2010b.

but in truth I am more and more convinced that my tendency is towards fiction rather than the essay or objective articles. Maybe that's because I believe only in Education, and Education is such a neglected subject that discussing it in newspapers is not worth it... (Meireles, 1943-1947)<sup>16</sup>

Meireles is writing to Mistral here from a ground of shared experience. At the same time as she reiterates her commitment to education, she confides that she is moving away from writing about it in the press because of the neglect into which she believes education has fallen.

The shift away from discussing education in her journalism represents a remarkable change of direction for Meireles. Valéria Lamego's pioneering work on Meireles' journalism provides a crucial perspective on the poet's disillusionment of the late 1940s. Lamego focuses on an earlier period, from 1930 to 1933, when Meireles was the editor of the "Página de educação" in the *Diário de notícias*. The critic reconstructs the figure of a polemical and fearless journalist, tirelessly advocating for lay education, co-education, and pedagogical renewal. (See also: Niskier, 2003) For Lamego, Meireles' gender contributed to the independence of her political opinions, since the nationalist projects that held power at the time marginalized and often excluded women. Meireles' page was at the center of debates on education in the 1930s. In March 1932, she gave space in the page to a landmark manifesto on pedagogy, *Manifesto dos pioneiros da educação nova*, which was also published on other major newspapers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Meireles was one of the signatories. One of the *crônicas* quoted by Lamego is sufficient to illustrate the direct and combative tone of her journalism in the early 30s:

But it seems Francisco Campos [Minister of Education] decided to demonstrate ever more convincingly that he truly understands nothing, absolutely nothing about pedagogy. That his pedagogy is a *minister's pedagogy*, that is, *political manipulation*. (cited in Lamego, 1996, p. 83)<sup>17</sup>

In little more than 15 years, then, from the early 30s to 1947, Meireles had moved away from a journalism of passionate commitment to educational reform to discouragement and silence.

In-between the discouragement of the late 1940s and the polemics of the early 1930s, we find Meireles' work for the Rio de Janeiro daily *A Manhã* from 1941 to 1945. She again serves as the editor of a section on education, *Professores e estudantes*. Roughly once a week, Meireles publishes a *crônica* in this column.

A selection of Meireles' journalism of the period is collected in the volume *Crônicas de educação 5*, edited by Azevedo Filho. Although the volume is nearly 400 pages long, a comparison with the newspaper, available in the archives of Brazil's Biblioteca Nacional, shows that Azevedo Filho collected only a small portion of the *crônicas* that Meireles published in *A Manhã*. In a

<sup>16</sup> "[...] mas na verdade cada vez me convenço mais de que todos meus impulsos são para a literatura de ficção, não para ensaios ou artigos objetivos. Talvez porque só creio em Educação, e a Educação é assunto tão abandonado que não vale a pena discuti-lo em jornais..."

<sup>17</sup> Mas o Sr. Francisco Campos [Ministro da Educação] parece que resolveu dar cada dia prova mais convincente de que não entende mesmo nada, absolutamente, de pedagogia. Que a sua pedagogia é uma pedagogia de ministro, isto é, politicagem.



footnote at the opening of the volume, Azevedo Filho indicates that the book reprints only the *crônicas* from *A Manhã* that focused on education. His subsequent remark sheds light on the overall trajectory of Meireles' journalism in the first half of the 1940s: "As time went by, especially from 1942 on, the writer slowly began to shift her focus towards questions related to folklore." (*Crônicas de educação* 5, 1.) The editor's comment makes it clear, then, that Meireles had already begun to take her distance from discussions of education in the press, years before her 1947 letter in which she confides her disillusionment to Mistral.

Meireles' change of focus in 1942 is better understood in the context of the early 40s in Brazil, in particular in the context of the newspaper *A Manhã* during Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship, the *Estado Novo*.<sup>18</sup> The front page of *A Manhã* specified that the newspaper was "the official organ of the *Estado Novo*." Historian A. Castro Gomes describes the newspaper as follows: "*A Manhã*, a morning newspaper from Rio de Janeiro, begins to circulate in August [1941], taking a frankly doctrinaire position and didactically explaining the president's ideas and the achievements of the regime" (Gomes, 1996).

A state-owned company, *A Manhã* was under the immediate control of the government. Administratively, it was part of the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* and, as such, was integral to the sophisticated propaganda apparatus of the Vargas regime. (See also: Capelato, 1988; Levine, 1998; Williams, 2001). At the same time, *A Manhã* offers a vivid illustration of the claim that the dictatorship took a "complex and contradictory" approach to culture and art (Fausto, 2006). The newspaper attracted contributions from the most prestigious intellectuals, who, in turn, represented a wide political spectrum. Beyond that, the literary supplements of *A Manhã* were recognized as excellent at the time.

In its front pages and editorials, *A Manhã* makes its concern with the propaganda of the *Estado Novo* and the cult of personality of the President very clear. The front page often features a photo of Vargas and dedicates a headline to him. Every day, at least one of the editorials on page 4 stresses the achievements of the *Estado Novo*. A relevant example is the editorial "O Intelectual brasileiro e o poder público," published on August 14, 1941.

The impetus given, by the Ministry of Education, through assistance and the most opportune favors to cultural associations, the direct support given to many of our writers, now honored with positions of the greatest importance in the sphere of public life, and the active role that the centers of intellectual activity organized in the country have been taking in all the ceremonies that the state sponsors, all of that demonstrates how strong the ties that bind the Brazilian public power to the national intelligence are now.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Getúlio Vargas held dictatorial powers from 1937 to 1945, a period known as the *Estado Novo*. However, he was Brazil's chief executive for longer, from 1930 to 1945, and again from 1951 to 1954. Scholars usually refer to the entire period from 1930 to 1954 as the "Vargas years."

<sup>19</sup> O influxo dado, pelo Ministério da Educação, com auxílios e favores dos mais oportunos às associações culturais, o amparo direto prestado a muitos de nossos escritores, hoje investidos de funções de maior relevo, na esfera da vida pública, e a parte ativa que os centros de atividades intelectuais instalados no país veem tomando em todas as solenidades a que o Estado se associa, comprovam quanto se estreitaram os vínculos que prendem agora o poder público à inteligência nacional.

This editorial articulates a transparent project of state control of intellectual activity: *auxílios* and *favores* are meant to strengthen the "ties that bind" the national intelligence to the "public power."

Nevertheless, we often see the contributors to the newspaper pushing against the regime and its ideologies, both on the pages of the paper and, perhaps more clearly, in its literary supplements. *Pensamento da América*, a page devoted to the literature of the Americas, published writers who had been supportive of the Spanish Republic - among them Gabriela Mistral - quite often in 1941 and 1942. Carlos Drummond de Andrade's celebrated poems, "E agora, José?" [What now, José?] and "A mão suja" [Dirty hand] appeared on the first page of the literary supplement *Autores e livros*. For their part, the *crônicas* that Meireles wrote for the column *Professores e estudantes* are at times implicitly critical of the government, even if they are no longer openly polemical.

Most of the letters from Meireles collected in the Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile date from the period when she was the editor of the column *Professores e estudantes* (1943 and 1944). In May 1944, she writes to Mistral inviting her to become a regular contributor to the newspaper. She writes two letters: the first on the 23rd, and the second a week later, on the 30th. The letters are brief and businesslike; the second one is a quick handwritten note. (Meireles was about to leave Rio de Janeiro to travel to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, a trip that was to last from early June to mid-July 1944.) Meireles serves as intermediary between Mistral and the director of the newspaper, Cassiano Ricardo (also a poet). In the first letter, she seconds the director's earlier invitation for Mistral to contribute a piece on "Latin American or even simply Chilean writers" about twice a month. Apparently, Mistral had not responded to the invitation, so Ricardo asked Meireles to intervene. After conveying the invitation, Meireles adds: "I am not less of a friend to you than to him: I believe you should decide for yourself." Mistral must have agreed quickly. The handwritten note that Meireles sends her one week later confirms that she will be a contributor to *A Manhã*. This note further suggests that there had been some verbal discussion of possible topics for Mistral's contributions in the meantime. Meireles now states that, "It is not necessary that the theme should be criticism or literary information. However, [your contribution] must be weekly." [The underlining is Meireles'.]

Months later, in a letter dated August 28, 1944, Meireles discusses translations of Mistral's copy. Apparently, Mistral wrote in Spanish. Meireles was her preferred translator, but other journalists were eager to try their hand at translating Mistral. Meireles, perhaps because she was already very busy, suggests a change in approach:

I feel, Gabriela, that your articles should be published in Spanish here. There's no reason to translate something that everybody understands -- everybody who deserves to understand.<sup>20</sup>

Meireles' letters further shed light on the situation of the newspaper in 1944. In her May 23 letter, when Meireles first invites Mistral to contribute to *A Manhã*, she refers to difficulties that the newspaper and its directors were experiencing at the time. Using the red ribbon in her typewriter for emphasis, Meireles states that Ricardo had shared that he was in a "provisional

<sup>20</sup> "Eu creio, Gabriela, que os seus artigos deviam ser publicados aqui em espanhol. Não há razão para traduzir-se uma coisa que todos entendem -- todos que merecem entender."

situation," which should be clarified by the end of June. He could still count on contributions from some friends, among them, he hoped, Mistral. Meireles adds, again using the red ribbon, that she understands that Ricardo "wishes to maintain the contributions at a high level, for as long as he can."

The picture Meireles paints of the unstable situation of *A Manhã* in 1944 confirms the account we find in Ricardo's memoirs, *Viagem no tempo e no espaço*. Ricardo recalls that the newspaper began to lose contributors from late 1943 onward, a period when the Vargas dictatorship was itself growing increasingly weaker. A turning point for the newspaper, he believed, was the *Manifesto dos Mineiros*, an open letter that called for democracy and was signed by intellectuals of the liberal elite, which was printed and distributed clandestinely in October 1943. In addition, the loss of some of the resources of the newspaper had led Ricardo to offer his resignation, which in the event was not accepted (Ricardo, 1970).

Ricardo remembers with gratitude the way Meireles responded to the changed, weakened situation of the newspaper:

[In March 1945] Cecília Meireles offered to write commentaries for other columns beyond the one which she had long been responsible for. Her gesture of solidarity, in such a difficult moment, moved me.<sup>21</sup> (Ricardo, 1970)

It will be useful to add here some biographical information about Meireles' friendship with Cassiano Ricardo, who served as the director of *A Manhã* when both she and Mistral were contributors. Meireles and Ricardo had become acquainted a few years before he invited her to work as the editor of the educational column of *A Manhã*. Two years earlier, in 1938, Ricardo had served on the committee that awarded a poetry prize of the Academia Brasileira de Letras, the *Prêmio Olavo Bilac*. Ricardo had supported Meireles' submission, *Viagem*, which had faced strong opposition; the acrimonious debate even reached the press (Ricardo, 1970). In the event, Meireles won the prize, and was the first woman to do so. Meireles and Ricardo met only after she had been awarded the prize. Sadlier notes that this prize was a turning point in Meireles' career as poet: "As a result of her having won the prize, critics and scholars throughout Brazil turned their attention to Cecilia Meireles." (Sadlier, 1983) Perhaps because she felt personally indebted to Ricardo, Meireles remained committed to working for the newspaper he directed, even after it had lost many of its early contributors.

### Meireles and Education in *A Manhã*

By 1944, when Mistral becomes a contributor of *A Manhã*, Meireles was already writing about folklore - and not education - in her column, even as she remained the editor responsible for *Professores e estudantes*. The texts that Azevedo Filho included in *Crônicas de Educação 5* date from the earliest period of *A Manhã* under Ricardo's direction: they range from August 9, 1941 (the first issue in which Ricardo appears as Director) to January 29, 1942. Among them, we find a series of three pieces that Meireles published in 1941, in which she comments on the *Primeira*

<sup>21</sup> "[Em março de 1945] Cecília Meireles se ofereceu para redigir os tópicos de outras seções além da que já assinava há tanto tempo. Seu gesto de solidariedade, naquele instante tão difícil, comoveu-me."

*Conferência Nacional de Educação*, organized by the Ministério da Educação e Saúde under the *Estado Novo*. (On the Ministério de Educação e Saúde under Vargas, see Schwartzman et al., 1984.) A discussion of these three *crônicas* will bring to light the nuances of the position that Meireles strives to define for herself within the complex cultural and political currents that play out in *A Manhã*. Her effort to find space for voicing independent opinions is very clear, as is her courage; the brilliance of her prose remains intact. Yet we will also see that there are evident limitations to what can be discussed in the articles that she writes and has printed in *A Manhã*.

The Ministry of Education's *Primeira Conferência Nacional de Educação* convened in Rio de Janeiro from November 3 to 8, 1941, bringing together delegates from various regions of the country. In preparation for the meeting, the federal government had circulated detailed informational questionnaires to educators and administrators at the state level. While there had been earlier meetings to discuss education in Brazil, especially during the 1920s, the 1941 conference came to be referred to as "*Primeira Conferência Nacional de Educação*" because it was the first time that the federal government itself organized a national conference on education (Hoeller and Daros, 2021). Meireles devotes three *crônicas* to the 1941 *Conferência*: "Resultados das Conferências de Educação" (on October 17, 1941, before the meeting took place); "Os delegados" (during the conference, on November 6, 1941), and "Para um Plano Nacional de Educação" (after the conference, on November 8, 1941).

Meireles' effort to shape her position as an independent journalist commenting on education - a *cronista de educação*, as she puts it - is especially evident in her October 1941 piece. She looks back retrospectively to the reputation for *impertinência* (insolence) that her earlier journalism had earned her and seeks to define a new perspective in the changed political context of the *Estado Novo*. On the one hand, Meireles strives to present herself as a Quixotic idealist: she ends the *crônica* with a promise to *escrever contra* - write against - if necessary. At the same time, she is quite indirect in this self-presentation. Further, she defines the object of her promise to "write against" very narrowly.

At the beginning of the *crônica*, Meireles seems to side with the regime and call attention to its value:

[...] since the meaning of the *Estado Novo* is that of a unified Brazil - and how can a nationality be unified, except for the harmonious, proportionate, coherent education of its representatives? (Meireles, 2001)<sup>22</sup>

Despite the initial reference to harmony and unity under the *Estado Novo*, Meireles concludes the *crônica* with a cutting assertion of her own independence: "I am very sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but I'll write against."<sup>23</sup> (p. 142) How does the writer move from her position at the beginning, when she seems to accept the *Estado Novo* and its centralizing discourse, to her promise of independence at the end of the *crônica*?

Although the *cronista* seeks to take a position of critical distance, the steps of her self-presentation are difficult to follow. Meireles begins by addressing the reputation for *impertinências* [insolence], which -- implicitly -- she had earned by her previous commentaries on education in

<sup>22</sup> [...] pois o sentido do Estado Novo é o de um Brasil unificado - e como se pode unificar uma nacionalidade a não ser basicamente, isto é, pela educação harmoniosa, proporcionada, coerente, de seus representantes?

<sup>23</sup> "sinto muito, meus senhores, mas escrevo contra".

the press. This good-humored, self-deprecating admission soon turns into assertiveness: if the *cronista* seems insolent, Meireles proceeds, it is because there still are "Quixotic creatures who dream dreams of a better life for others" and she has chosen to "put herself at [their] service." However, initially she claims for herself only the position of one who serves the idealists, without going so far as to present herself as idealistic or Quixotic directly. In effect, Meireles' writing is remarkably indirect here: the reference to "Quixotic creatures" appears in the middle of a paragraph, but we have to wait for the beginning of the following paragraph to learn that the *cronista* has decided to serve "such creatures." We have to wait even longer -- until the last few paragraphs of the *crônica* -- to find Meireles describing herself directly as "a Quijote." When we consider the *crônica* as a whole, we see that, instead of apologizing, Meireles justifies her insolence by taking the high moral ground and reaffirming her commitment to dreaming of a better life -- and education -- for others. On the other hand, her prose here is so indirect and allusive that it becomes nearly obscure.

Beyond that, the terms under which Meireles asserts her independence of opinion as an idealist effectively set aside politics. In the last few paragraphs of this *crônica* Meireles specifies what she would find so objectionable in a conference on education that she would write against it. Her prose is at its most lively here, as she satirizes the empty rhetoric of speeches that she had witnessed in earlier meetings:

I was in such poor luck that the orator that stood before me, taking on messianic and apocalyptic airs, spoke of waterfalls making bridal veils sparkle; of superb constellations gushing forth multicolored lights; of rivers galloping, frothing silver and gold; of emerald forests oscillating worlds of flowers and birds...

I was approaching a state of poetic delirium. It was all so pretty... Waters, leaves, music, rhythms, aromas... - all that I love in this world was rising brightly before me, with the copious pomp of a baroque construction.

When the waterfalls went silent, the constellations said good-bye, and the forests calmed down, and the rivers went back to their usual courses, I asked myself: "But where are the schools that this Conference was supposed to build? And what happened to school doctors? And reading methods? And art in the schools? And the teaching of divergent children? And planning for the deficient? And this and that... - all that was on my list of the immediate needs of educational planning?" (Meireles, 2001) <sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Tive tão pouca sorte que o orador que se elevou na minha frente, com ares messiânicos e apocalípticos, falou de cachoeiras fazendo cintilar véus de noiva; de soberbas constelações jorrando luzes de todas as cores; de rios cavalgando, espumando ouro e prata; de florestas esmeraldinas oscilando mundos de flores e pássaros...

Eu fui ficando em estado de delírio poético. Tão bonito aquilo tudo... Águas, folhas, músicas, ritmos, aromas... - tudo que eu adoro nesse mundo se erguia luminosamente na minha frente, com a planturosa pompa de uma edificação barroca.

Quando as cachoeiras emudeceram, e as constelações se despediram, e as florestas se tranquilizaram, e os rios voltaram ao curso normal, perguntei aos meus botões: "Mas onde estão as escolinhas que esta Conferência ia construir? E onde está a medicina escolar? E os métodos de leitura? E a arte infantil? E os cursos para anormais? E os planos para débeis? E mais isto e mais aquilo... - tudo que estava na minha lista de necessidades imediatas do programa de educação?"



Meireles makes it clear that the 1941 conference will be objectionable if the discussions do not go beyond empty rhetoric. The *crônica*, then, concludes with mock formality in a sharp line, in between promise and threat: "I am sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but I'll write against."<sup>25</sup> The irony of the *crônica's* title -- "Resultados das Conferências em Educação" -- becomes apparent in retrospect: the *cronista* wonders if the 1941 conference on education will lead to any "results." In contrast to her journalism of the 1930s, Meireles now significantly narrows her scope as *cronista de educação*. She calls for pragmatic solutions to on-the-ground problems she knows well and she does not seem concerned with ambitious plans for education in Brazil or even with the Vargas dictatorship.

The next two *crônicas* continue to move in the space between accepting the *Estado Novo* and pushing against it. The second *crônica*, dated November 6, 1941, and published during the conference, brings to the foreground the writer's admiration for the hardworking delegates and stresses the opportunities for dialogue that the meeting affords. Yet Meireles also calls attention to the limits of their conversations. She includes two anecdotes about delegates who sought her advice on whether to speak. Although she encouraged both, neither succeed: one delegate did not find an opportune moment, while the other was "lucky enough" to have someone else present his argument. Notably, the two delegates who seek Meireles' advice base their proposed arguments on "the Constitution" -- that is, on Brazil's 1937 Constitution, which had legitimated the *Estado Novo*, after Vargas had seized power through a coup d'etat.

In her third *crônica*, dated on the last day of the conference, Meireles gives most of the space to excerpts from two documents that resulted from the meeting, addressed to the *Ministro da Educação* and to the President. She unequivocally praises both documents. One calls for a second *Conferência Nacional de Educação* to elaborate an educational plan for Brazil. The other document proposes specific mechanisms to create a *Fundo Nacional de Educação* that would fund public education through tax revenue. (Azevedo Filho adds a footnote to his edition of the *crônicas*: "And here we ask why such measures, derived from a National Plan on Education, have not as yet fully been put into practice.")

Meireles uses her space in *A Manhã*, then, to help put into circulation documents written by educators that seek to influence national policy. In the context of the *Estado Novo*, the two proposals represent an effort to open space for a broader dialogue. However, although Meireles praises the two documents, she does not extend this positive assessment to the conference as a whole. She offers at best qualified praise: "Because of these two documents, the Nacional Conference that ends today is saved to an extent."<sup>26</sup> She does not seem to have found much to praise in the conference as a whole.

Like many of the writers who contributed to *A Manhã*, Meireles sought to maintain intellectual independence within the regime's official newspaper and its widespread propaganda discourse. Yet there were clear limits on what could be printed in *A Manhã*: the *Estado Novo* was of course never directly criticized. In the *crônicas* we have discussed, Meireles meets the problem of balancing independence of opinion and official discourse by assuming the persona of an idealist, focusing narrowly on pedagogical matters and steering clear of politics. Later, after January 1942, she stopped writing commentaries on education altogether, perhaps because of disillusion, perhaps

<sup>25</sup> Sinto muito, meus senhores, mas escrevo contra.

<sup>26</sup> "Com esses dois documentos acha-se de certo modo salva a Conferência Nacional que hoje se encerra."

due to self-censorship, or more likely for both reasons. It is encouraging to note that Meireles found an engaging new topic for her contributions to *A Manhã* in folklore, an interest that Meireles and Mistral had long shared.<sup>27</sup>

The timing of Meireles' shift in focus from education to folklore -- January 1942 -- coincides with a change in the editorial direction of the column *Pensamento da América*, in which Mistral's work had often featured. *Pensamento da América* had previously appeared as a page in the body of the newspaper, which focused predominantly on literature. After January 1942, *Pensamento da América* grew to become a substantial supplement of the newspaper, which explored a wide range of cultural, historical, and geographic matters; at the same time, the official discourse of the *Estado Novo* began to weigh more heavily on its pages.

The change in editorial focus of "*Pensamento da América*" coincides with the Third Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the American Republics, which was held in Rio de Janeiro from January 15 to 28, 1942. This consequential meeting resulted in Brazil and most other Latin American nations severing diplomatic relations with the Axis and becoming more closely aligned to the United States. In the case of *Pensamento da América*, the connection between the Third Meeting and the change in editorial direction is evident, since the supplement devotes significant space to reporting on the meeting. It is intriguing to note that the shift in editorial line of the supplement coincides in time with the shift from education to folklore in Cecilia's *crônicas*. Was there a broader change in the editorial direction of *A Manhã* after January 1942?

Over the course of Mistral's career, writing about folklore likewise overshadowed and effectively replaced educational topics. Folklore and Chilean geography were the announced topics of the extensively publicized lecture tour that Mistral started from Brazil in August 1937, and that extended over Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Cuba, before concluding with her third formal speech to the Panamerican Union (now the OAS) in Washington, in February 1939. When Mistral planned out her tour, she pre-cleared these topics with Carlos Errázuriz, her consular supervisor, observing that she had delivered versions of these in Málaga, in 1934, and in Hamburg, Germany, 1937.

Central to Mistral's tour of the Americas was the publication of *Tala* by Victoria Ocampo's Editorial Sur in Buenos Aires, in June of 1938, as Ocampo agreed to devote the revenue of the sales of this volume to the relief of children and families who'd become refugees due to the Spanish Civil War. These were the same poems that Mistral had shared with Meireles in the early days of their friendship. *Belísimos inéditos*, Meireles had called them, in the letter that introduced Mistral to Mário de Andrade. The Chilean writer had been polishing the poems of this collection during her pivotal years in Spain and Portugal (1933-1937). In the same period, she had been systematically exploring her interests in folklore and geography, which had begun during the years when she had worked as an educator, but had opened into many other directions thanks to her extensive contacts with other writers, artists and folklorists during her near-constant travels -- including, most notably, the years of her friendship and correspondence with Cecilia Meireles in Brazil.

Mistral's years in Brazil had significant consequences for her future as well. The support of Brazilian poets and especially of Brazil's two national academies of letters was crucial to her eventually successful candidacy for the Nobel Prize. Among Mistral's visitors in the house in

<sup>27</sup> Orlandi (2020) notes recent scholarly interest in all aspects of Meireles' career. Lamego and Alcides are working with the *crônicas* on folklore that she wrote for *A Manhã*, and which have not as yet been collected in a book.

Tijuca was Celso Vieira (1878-1954), who in 1940 served as President of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. In an interview given to the *Diário de Notícias*, Vieira discusses Panamerican exchange, prizes for poetry and theater, and new candidates for the Academy's "immortality". He then indicates the support of the Academia Brasileira de Letras for Mistral's candidacy for the Nobel. (May 29, 1940)

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