

The literary in Amanda Labarca: a philosophical-political project

*Lo literario en Amanda Labarca:
un proyecto filosófico-político*

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Abstract

Two literary works of the outstanding Chilean intellectual Amanda Labarca are analyzed from a philosophical and political point of view. The first work, *Impressions of Youth*, positions Labarca as a critical reader of Spanish-American authors and makes visible her interest in Emilia Pardo Bazán, whose feminism she adheres to. In *Unveilings at Dawn*, her Nietzscheanism is revealed, through which she demands a kind of resistance to the nihilism produced by war and the absolute relativity of values. Both works allow us to recognize the keys of her new philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Amanda Labarca, literature, philosophy, politics, Chile, Nietzsche..

Resumen

Se analizan dos obras literarias de la destacada intelectual chilena Amanda Labarca desde un punto de vista filosófico y político. La primera obra, *Impresiones de juventud* posiciona a Labarca como lectora crítica de autores hispanoamericanos y visibiliza su interés en Emilia Pardo Bazán sobre quien adhiere a su feminismo. Por otra parte, en *Desvelos en el Alba*, se releva su *nietzscheanismo* mediante el cual exige una suerte de resistencia frente al nihilismo producido por la guerra y la relatividad absoluta de valores. Ambas obras permiten reconocer las claves de su nueva filosofía en la primera mitad del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: Labarca, literatura, filosofía, política, Chile, Nietzsche.

1. Introduction

The work of Amanda Labarca Hubertson (1886–1975), a prominent Chilean intellectual, has been studied from various angles; however, little is known about her literary work and its link with other disciplines. This article analyzes two of the four literary works she published in the first half of the twentieth century in Chile. These works, which represent the genres of criticism and the short essay, were analyzed by scrutinizing a part of the philosophical-political project that is hidden in them.

Labarca, a pioneer woman in every sense, developed her studies of pedagogy in Spanish at the famous Pedagogical Institute of the *Universidad de Chile* (see Peralta, 2021; Salas et al., 2014; Salas, 2021; Stuvén, 2019). She had first strolled through the corridors of the Faculty of Medicine, but it did not suit her, and she desisted early to continue with that self-imposed challenge. At the Pedagogical School, she met Guillermo¹, her husband, from whom she took her two surnames, since her birth name is Amanda Pinto Sepúlveda (Salas, 1996).

Although it is not the purpose of this work to provide a biographical sketch of the author, it is important to comment that in the course of her studies she became a member of the *Asociación de Educación Nacional*, where she established herself and made her first political and academic connections. She was one of the most relevant leaders in the struggle for women's rights in Chile (Cortés & Fuentes, 1967) and developed her postgraduate studies at the Teacher's College of *Columbia University* in New York and at *La Sorbonne* in Paris (Salas, 1996).

Labarca was the first woman to obtain an academic position at the *Universidad de Chile*, which is recorded in the 1922 decree that established her as Extraordinary Professor of Psychology. Emilia Pardo Bazán had done the same a few years earlier, in 1916, as the chair of Neolatin Language and Literature at the *Universidad Cen-*

¹ About her husband, she comments: “My husband is the one who has encouraged me to write, the one who has made me work on many occasions and the one who has given me encouragement. Surely I owe many of the ideas I have to him and even some of his clear, precise, logical way of thinking must have influenced my thinking and my style” (Labarca, 10 de Abril 1927). This is relevant, given that Guillermo Labarca belonged to the Radical Party and was three times Minister of State. The *Political Dictionary of Chile* mentions that he was appointed Minister of Justice (1924) in the government of Arturo Alessandri Palma, and Minister of National Defense and Minister of the Interior in the same years (1939–1940), which shows President Pedro Aguirre Cerda's confidence in him. The ideas of radicalism are characterized by the dissemination of a secular, rationalist and democratic doctrine, which was motivated by the philosophical idealism of the Enlightenment (Cortés & Fuentes, 1967).

tral in Spain. Labarca would analyze a part of Pardo Bazán's work in her first book, published in 1909, which is discussed below.

Labarca's work can be grouped along at least three axes. The first is centred on literature (Labarca, 1909, 1915, 1921, 1945); the second on women's issues and feminism (Labarca, 1914, 1934, 1947); and the third on education (Labarca, 1919, 1927, 1938, 1939, 1943, 1953).

These are the main works of our author, although her work was also published in several magazines, such as *Revista Pedagógica*, *Cultura*, *Selva Lírica*, and *Atenea*, and international magazines such as *Repertorio Americano* of Costa Rica, *Nuestra América* of Argentina, and *Nueva Democracia* of the United States. These magazines are only some of those in which she published constantly; it is possible to find works she authored in most of the educational or literary magazines of the first half of the twentieth century in Chile. Finally, we cannot forget her role in *Editorial Letras*, a product of her creation in which, in addition to publishing hundreds of books of national and international prominence, she edited the magazine *Lecturas*, an organ for the dissemination of culture, society and literary life.

This article focuses mainly on *Impressions of Youth* (Labarca, 1909), which consists of two parts – ‘Spanish novel of today’² and ‘Spanish poetry today’ – two lectures read at the University of Chile [August 28, 1907] and the Ateneo de Santiago [September 23 the same year] (Hurtado, 2022). She read with great detail and judgment the main Spanish writers, analysing their works as if she were already twenty years into her career. Her youth was not an obstacle for the accomplishment of serious work, which was very well received by the critics, among whom Omer Emeth (Emilio Vaise) stands out. We will also deal with the *Unveilings at Dawn* (Labarca, 1945), short essays and opinions that lead us to a more intimate sphere, written in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In addition to these works, Labarca published a series of other texts in magazines, book compilations and also some newspapers. This allows us to account for her literary concerns and links with philosophy and politics.

Before going into the aforementioned works, it is important to use the expression “epistemic injustice” (Jovanović, 2021) to refer to the partial reception of her work, which has generated a series of omissions in the reception of her thought. In contrast, the use of Amanda Labarca's name is used reiteratively to endorse and justify the role of the intellectual woman who abandons pre-established roles, or to situate the current agenda of the feminist movement in Chile. All of this is

² This lecture was given as part of the Conferencias de Extensión de la Universidad de Chile and was partially published in the journal *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*. 1909. Volume N°124, January-June. pp.1035-1092. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5354/anuc.v0i0.24138>.

effective; however, it goes hand in hand with obscuring the real knowledge and scope of her theories.

2. Labarca reader in *Impressions of youth*

The two lectures published in *Impressions...* are texts of literary criticism in which Labarca stresses that the Castilian novel had, in the past, influences of “romanticism, naturalism and psychologism”. In contrast, her appraisals of the twentieth-century novel indicate an evolution in aesthetics and complexity. For her, “psychologism” was the transition to modernity, since it removed heroes and cataclysms from the field of the novel in order to consider processes linked to everyday life. In addition, she defined modernism as a literature of ideas essentially “morbid and sick”, possessing the supreme attraction of the soul that beats within the human being. In the case of Hispanic poetry, she argues that the ideals are in opposition to the sentimentalism of the insensitive and impenetrable poets influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner. In the case of Chile, she emphasizes that the influence of Rubén Darío was undeniable on a series of young Chilean poets such as Max Jara, Carlos Pezoa Véliz or Carlos Mondaca.

In order to get into *Impressions...* we must think and rethink about reading as a social and individual practice. We will focus on the latter. Reading as an individual practice generates a self-evident interaction between the reader and the text. This theoretical assumption is understood in the different interpretations that readers make of the same text; that is, “the meaning given to a text does not depend so much on the signs on paper as on the meaning that the reader brings to it” (Goodman, 2006:17).

In this sense, the reader brings data to the text from their previous knowledge, from their knowledge of the world—reading is also an act of reading the world—and this exercise is done with “the intention of giving coherence and making sense of what is said and what is written. In addition, it is used for comprehension, what the immediate context provides and is related to the linguistic statement” (Cassany, 2006:21).

The readings done by Labarca and those she writes about in the text show a relationship—subject and object—which helps us understand her reading process; for example, the development of specific cognitive skills: to contribute previous knowledge, to make inferences, to formulate hypotheses and to know how to verify or reformulate them. At first, it would seem that they were static entities, in the sense that nothing happens in them—only reader and text are interrelated—but

this hypothesis is rectified with the same text *Impressions...* as proof that Labarca sees reading as transaction or transactional reading.

This can be explained by following Goodman (2006). The written text, although it seems fixed and inactive, is a living entity; a writer uses the systems of their language to present ideas, experiences, social relations, and also personal and social understandings and beliefs within a sociocultural context. In turn, the reader can make transactions with the writer's text at various levels because they have knowledge, characteristics, forms and systems in common with the author. Thus, there is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship that gives rise to the work: "the term transactional emphasizes each reading as a particular event involving a particular reader and a particular text that reciprocally and recurrently influence each other in particular circumstances" (Rosenblatt, 2002:326).

Moving to *Impressions...*, the reader approaches the texts of the authors she writes about with a certain purpose, certain expectations or hypotheses that guide her choices from the residue of past experiences. The meaning she gives them emerges from a continuum. Ultimately, the reading subject can reach an enjoyment of reading, a personal experience; that is to say, neither the text over the reader, nor the reader over the text, are superimposed.

At the beginning of the book, Labarca speaks directly to the reader. She especially emphasises the motives for writing and the passion shown for the new Hispanic literature to which she will refer through her authors, recognizing that all interpretation is an event that occurs at a particular moment and for a particular interest, such as the call of youth, a young reader who reads other young authors. These motivations are subjective in each reader, but they are valid motives to make the reading an interpretation that is not *ad libitum*; that is to say, any interpretation but one starting from the assumptions that are in the text and from the personal perspectives already socially constructed.

In *Impressions...*, a continuum of reading elements converge. The continuum is called efferent-aesthetic, or scientific and artistic. The efferent position pays more attention to the cognitive, referential, factual, analytical, logical and quantitative aspects of meaning; the aesthetic position pays more attention to the qualitative aspects, motives, affective, and sensuous. Labarca's reading links both an efferent and aesthetic stance. The efferent-aesthetic continuum is central to a consideration of reading from a transactional point of view.

Continuing with the reading processes that it is possible to identify in the author, the paratextual reading of the epigraphs found at the beginning of the book guides us towards a conception of reading as a social construction or sociocultural conception; that is, of reading and writing as processes open to all. Hence, it is

possible to identify throughout the work a lexicon understandable to the less expert reader in literary fields. This language and these ways of writing will not be found in the rest of the writings that Labarca develops later. The same is reflected in the motivation for titling the work *Impressions of Youth*, a title that undoubtedly brings the reader closer³.

Gustavo Gómez (2017) elaborates a definition of reading that allows summarizing the processes analyzed above and that configure Labarca's readings and from which her writings will be born: reading is to reconstruct meanings from a written text produced in a cultural context by a reader who interacts with the culture of their time, using comprehension strategies learned in their trajectory as a reading subject. Furthermore, in this interrelation between culturally intertwined subject and text, the purpose of reading is to obtain and produce knowledge that modifies and stimulates the attitude of the reader.

A clear example is Labarca's reading of Emilia Pardo Bazán's writings. She begins by praising the author's ability to remain current; specifically, to remain at the forefront of the Spanish novel genre despite her long career in literature. However, an edge emerges and does not go unnoticed. Labarca performs a literary analysis that considers the representation of gender. And in this sense, as Vivero (2016) points out, its representation has concrete or real implications, both social and subjective, for the lives of individuals.

Labarca's reading is that of a woman reading another woman and, therefore, reveals certain keys that will allow a better understanding of her analysis of the work. The main key is the recognition of the feminism to which Pardo Bazán adheres and which is evident in her writings, from the construction of the stories to the way she shapes her characters. About the work *Quimera*, the author states: "These complexities imprint in the work of Mrs. Pardo Bazán a stamp of exquisite [sic] feminism in which I believe lies its greatest charm" (Labarca, 1909:31).

What fascinates Labarca in Pardo Bazán's writing is the latter's ability to make decisions that proved to be correct with respect to her literary work, especially in relation to the literary current of naturalism, so prevalent and important for the writing of the Castilian novel. This decision making is exposed by the author as a benefit of her condition as a woman of letters. She herself points out that one can appreciate an "instinctive tact at the service of the literary cause" (Labarca, 1909:30). Far from bringing her closer to sentimentalism as women's writing could be thought at the time to be, a prejudice that remains, she does not superimpose

³ This can be observed in the book's prologue: "Do not seek, then, in my words a frowning gesture, nor academic rigorism; I can only offer you a little love for all the authors whose books have sweetened my hours and nourished my scant youth with ideals" (Labarca, 1909, p. 10).

sentiment over the intellectual. In this sense, Labarca points out that the author is enlightened, reasoning and thinking as her novels turn out to be.

She will say the same in her analysis of the works *The Black Siren* and *In the Land of Saints*. They are novelistic structures far from sentimentalism, but she does recognize that there is an appreciation for tradition. Pardo Bazán is traditionalist in several aspects. In the text, she is even called a “guardian of history”; she is Catholic but also a feminist, which means—and Labarca understands well—that she does not allow all that affects her individuality and is a subtraction from her interests and purposes, mainly in the field of literature.

This is what feminism allows in the letters of this writer, the independence of creation and the exploration of forms in the production processes of her writings, seen mainly in the construction of complete and complex characters. Labarca does a reading that allows us to see the trace of the writer, the human and historical specificity of the writer, the network of relationships in which that person lives submerged. In this way, the limits of that world can be glimpsed. It is not a literary criticism condescending to its own congeners; it is rather an outline for a methodology of genre.

And a methodology thus constructed “allows not separating the aesthetic level of the literary text from the social context to which, in many ways, it is responding from the fictionalization” (Vivero, 2016:131). The proposal of genre methodology that Labarca sustains implies elements, given by rhetoric and stylistics from the figures and tropes, which are a substantial part of the analysis focused on genre. Therefore, the aim is to approach the literary text from the genre approach in order to link it to the social—starting from language—structures and representations.

3. *Unveilings in the dawn: the Nietzscheanism of labarquism*

The diverse texts that compose *Unveilings...*, were written between 1922 and 1936 and apparently were not intended to be published. José Santos González Vera relates that he managed to convince Labarca to publish these texts for Cruz del Sur and that, as stated in the prologue, they were among the jumble of her unpublished papers. This work is her only book that has directly autobiographical material, as she relates her thoughts, her feelings and her opinions about a series of events in Chile and the world (Millán et al., 2022). Seven literary essays were included in the text: ‘Opinions’, ‘Culture and tradition’, ‘The world shrinks’, ‘Of courage’, ‘Description of Chile’, ‘In Spain’ and ‘On personal pages’.

Indeed, the journal *Atenea* generated a particular intellectual and philosophical climate. The editor and director of the journal, philosopher Enrique Molina Garmendia, published one of the first interpretations in Chile of the works of philosophers such as Jean-Marie Guyau and Henri Bergson (Salas et al., 2018), which would not go unnoticed by Labarca, who by that time had written most of the texts of *Unveilings*⁴ (see Molina, 1924a; 1924b). Just as Molina's reception of Bergson and Guyau was not very orthodox and was more linked to the poetic and aesthetic aspect (Sánchez, 1957), in Labarca it can be affirmed that the interpretation of philosophers such as Guyau or Bergson had political and philosophical overtones. That is to say, the work of both philosophers served Labarca to read the uneasiness and the "daily tragedy" that humanity lived through after the First World War (Labarca, 1945:27). However, little has been noticed of the influence of Nietzsche that permeates these writings and that can be verified in the use of concepts such as transmutation, values, and superman, among others.

Labarca demands a kind of resistance to the nihilism produced by war and the absolute relativity of values. The texts written by Labarca in the 1920s were later published in *Unveilings* as "Opinions", and the small writings that follow, which lack a title, also have the philosophical thesis that moral relativism and the hegemony of ephemeral values and the cult of reason that lavished the West in recent centuries led only to barbarism, individualism and ignorance.

"But if this mystical sense, this constant transmutation of ephemeral values into eternal values, of material acts into ideal longings, is missing, we cannot imagine our life and our self except on the plane of things that are born, live and die like the flowers of the fields and the birds of the sky, without any rationality" (Labarca, 1945:28).

On moral relativism, Labarca laments how human beings increasingly lack a faculty of "Justify"; that is, an inability to give themselves a common ethical framework or an "ethical universalism" that not only tells them how to act, but also how to act well according to values such as love, virtue or wisdom (Gabriel, 2021).

Labarca makes her own the method of philosophizing with Nietzsche's hammer that he exposed in books such as *The Fall of the Idols*, in which he examines the new idols that are erected before the death of the old ones; in this case, the new idol was Reason and positivism as a replacement for religion. Indeed, Labarca declares

⁴ According to Gilda Luongo (2002), Labarca may have read Bergson during her time at the *Sorbonne*. On the other hand, Inés Echeverría Bello (Iris), also a contemporary writer of Labarca and a companion in the *Círculo de Lectura*, did have classes with Bergson, which makes early knowledge of his philosophical work increasingly possible.

reason as insufficient to fulfil the will of transcendence of the human being, which she calls the instinct of understanding.

“For many educated men today, the Catholic religion presents straggling symbols. The implacable god who judges and takes account of sins to quote them in a solemn judgment without appeal [...] are dogmas that they are reluctant to accept” (Labarca, 1945:38).

In this sense, Labarca affirms that the tragedy of humanity is that it lives in the impossibility of “adapting the old symbols to the new ideals, nor of creating for itself or for its people a new religion” (Labarca, 1945:39). One of those straggling symbols to which Labarca precisely refers is guilt; better yet, the sense of guilt, and, in the words of Roberto Bolaño, to live without guilt is to abolish memory and perpetuate cowardice (Kane, 2009). The small texts of May 23, 1922 and January 31, 1924 can be felt to take the form of a confession, the weight of ignorance, the deep disbelief in ideals and hopes,

“We ignore if we are fallen angels in sin of imperfection or demons that are ascending towards God. We do not know the deep reason for our instincts, our impulses and even our hopes [...] We know nothing” (Labarca, 1945:44).

Indeed, this feeling of guilt is fundamental to the exercise of a kind of responsibility with the other, a principle that Labarca explores briefly from Leibniz’s philosophy; namely, the concept of “extensionis exigentia”. It refers to the gregarious condition of the human being (see Labarca, 1945:40). Indeed, Labarca considers that in the face of the situation of barbarism and inhumanity, what can help is the recovery of a new sentiment or new philosophy that exceeds the rationalism advocated by the “educated men”, as Labarca calls them.

Another of the profoundly Nietzschean elements witnessed in Labarca’s work is the tragic feeling of men. According to Georges Steiner (1961), this exists when the sphere of reason, the order of justice, is limited for man, like a character in a Greek tragedy who is destroyed by forces that cannot be fully understood; for example, Oedipus, Agamemnon or Shakespeare’s Hamlet himself:

“Let us look at the truth as much as possible, with courage and without arrogance. Let us humbly admit that we participate in the infinite variety of good and evil; that within us, in a fecund mixture, all our perversions and all our virtues struggle” (Labarca, 1945:62).

Labarca had previously published two novels: *In Foreign Lands* in 1915, and *The Marvelous Land* in 1921. Indeed, Labarca expressed in *Desvelos...* that, during the years of publication of her second novel, she suffered from an “apathy” that preven-

ted her from working on them again. She also commented in some interviews that she had other novels written, but they never saw the light of day.

In fact, her fiction literature published in books is restricted to those texts. Labarca kept her personal aspects very hidden from the public sphere, separating the most intimate aspects of her life from her work. However, it is possible to glimpse her inner world and tribulations in her texts, as in “And why are we in the world? Why live? Why does intelligence enlighten this species of ours? Why, if in the end there is no divine goal in which the sum of perfections that we have longed for since we were born are realized?” (Labarca, 1945:51).

All these questions were influenced by the populist dictatorship headed by the military man Carlos Ibáñez del Campo and, in general, by the capture of the cultural environment by verbiage and the acephalous mobilization of the masses, a sort of “military boots populism”; in short, a climate not at all favourable for her work, which always aspired to be public, to be heard as it had been up to that moment. In 1927, her husband Guillermo was deported to Argentina for his links with the Alessandri government, and the following year Amanda was stripped of her position as director of the Liceo and her university professorship⁵. Labarca’s melancholy can be understood, as stated by Peter Sloterdijk (2004), as the pathology of exile in all its purity, and implies an impoverishment of the inner world by the deprivation of the territory that animates it.

Her explicit philosophy regarding the human being is mentioned in *Unveiling...*, in a text written in Alta Mar in 1925: “We must discover a New Philosophy, which respects the human being equally in its two expressions: spiritual and material, or which conceives both in the manner of William James: as the obverse and reverse of the same essence” (Labarca, 1945:45). This is relevant, since the author would develop these ideas also in her educational texts. Given her commitment to the active school movement, she points out very emphatically the relevance of respect for people, starting with respect for children and their nature. Convinced of their individuality and their special way of being, she longs for a school in which they can express themselves freely, not as automatons with labels. In these matters she was very influenced by James, but also by philosophers such as John Dewey and

⁵ In a 1928 letter addressed to her Panamanian feminist friend Esther Neira de Calvo, Labarca relates the following: “Chilean political events took many Alessandrists in their swell and although Guillermo had not taken part in any movement and, on the contrary, had kept a most reserved behavior, he was deported in October last year to Argentina. You can imagine how much I suffered and, above all, my indignation before such an injustice (...) In the first days of March of this year, the government believed itself to be threatened again and several professors, supposedly Alessandrists, were forced to abandon their posts. Among them, me. I was dismissed both from the Lyceum and from my university professorship, as unreasonably and unjustly as they had proceeded with Guillermo” (Labarca, 1928).

educators such as Maria Montessori, Georg Kerschenteiner, and Ovide Decroly (Labarca, 1927), among others, who, despite their differences, were very much in agreement over respecting the distinct and unique organizations of each human being. This philosophy even finds its basis in a conciliation between the Epicurean and the Stoic, where both intelligence and instinct, or mind and feeling, should be valued. Therefore, it is possible to see in Labarca a vision of the human being that follows the Leibnizian perspective of a harmony between oneself and all others, to ensure the broadest individual development within the most just social harmony (Labarca, 1945).

In order to dive more deeply into this *New Philosophy*, raised by Labarca, it is important to mention her appreciation of the lack of mystical sense in the West and the monopoly of reason. Secondly, she defends the “will to believe” and opposes scepticism. These concerns were born at a decisive moment in the process of overcoming positivism that had been developed since the end of the nineteenth century by Enrique Molina, Valentín Letelier⁶ and later by Pedro León Loyola (Vidal-Muñoz, 2012). These small reflections are encrypted from a perspective of critical thinking and show; in addition, a constant dialogue with continental philosophy, but mainly with two contemporary figures of late nineteenth-century philosophy: the aforementioned William James and Henri Bergson.

Regarding the latter, Bergsonian philosopher Enrique Molina argues that in order to be close to mysticism, one must prioritize feeling over thinking, since feeling is a privileged way of knowing an object. Taking into account the panorama of Latin American and world academic philosophy, Labarca’s thesis on the inheritance of the lack of mystical instinct from the Greeks to the Hispanic Americans bears many similarities to Bergson’s philosophy, especially his appreciation of mysticism in the West. For Bergson, the mysticism of the Greeks was rational in character; that is to say, although Hellenic thought had a Dionysian impulse and was marked by the search for transcendent knowledge with mystical overtones, it was always faithful to rationalism. For Bergson, there was another kind of mysticism that merges with practice and leads to a practice that can be found in Eastern philosophy such as Buddhism, Brahmanism or Hindu thought.

Thus, when Labarca speaks of a lack of mystical instinct in the West, she refers to the lack of practical mysticism and, on the other hand, she uses these arguments to criticize the advance of positivism and the rise of reason in culture as a symptom

⁶ Valentín Letelier led the pedagogical discussion in Chile at the end of the nineteenth century and, following John Dewey, Amanda Labarca, together with Francisco Antonio Encina, and Luis Galdames, among others, disputed his positivist educational proposal, promoting an “economic education”, oriented to solve practical aspects of everyday life (Sehlinger Jr., 1969).

of its own decadence, “its philosophy from Aristotle onwards is an architecture of reason [...] Epicureans and Stoics were positivists of ancient decadence. Twenty-three centuries before Comte they proclaimed their religion of humanity” (Labarca, 1945:34-5). These preoccupations show a critical and conscious reading of the history of the development of Hispano-American philosophy.

In many of Labarca’s writings, one detects this drift to mysticism, which also confirms a will to believe, a need to constitute a spiritual and transcendent link beyond what reason could offer at the time she was writing her *Unveilings...* For example, in *Alta Mar* of 1925, she writes “we ignore if we are fallen angels in sins of imperfection or demons that we are ascending towards God”, which demonstrates the intimate restlessness that Chile was experiencing in the years of political instability between 1924 and 1927, which led to her exile (Figueroa-Quinteros, 2017). Immediately after this fragment, Labarca quotes: “We ignore the deep why of our instincts, of our impulses, and even of our hopes! We do not even know if, in truth, it is worth living” (Labarca, 1945:44).

The texts that appeared in *Unveilings...* show a drama, a struggle between hope and despair. Despair is palpable in the first part of the writings of the sections “Opinions” and “Culture and Tradition”, which dealt with the spiritual, cultural and political situation in Chile during the dictatorship, which Labarca pointed out was “as full of experiences as was the past, ungrateful of me” (Labarca, 1945:26). Labarca’s opinion was not restricted to the situation only in Chile. In fact, she foreshadowed the fragility of the League of Nations, and, in that sense, she predicted the return of the world war and a sort of “moral nihilism” that manifests itself in “such a great relaxation of customs”, as she stated in an interview to the newspaper *El Mercurio* in 1927. It is striking how in the prologue Labarca states, “I read them and many of them do not seem mine; I had almost forgotten them”. It would be worth asking if, by the time she wrote the prologue almost twenty years later, she no longer agreed with what she had said.

The reflexivity present in *Unveilings...* contrasts with her book *The improvement of rural life*. Published in 1936, in a more stable political context and already being a government representative before the University Council of the *Universidad de Chile*, Labarca deploys a sharp sociological and historical analysis of the Chilean reality of the time and generates pedagogical proposals for rural education (Scholten et al., 2022). Her political project is also marked on the one hand by the idea of social evolution as a way of improving the quality of life as opposed to the immobility of the national elite and the revolution, and, on the other hand, by cooperativism as a political system that would overcome individualism and communism (Labarca, 1936).

The political question of her feminist ideology also appears naturally in the present text “Of Courage”, in which Labarca comments that a friend told her about a very suggestive scene between two young ladies after an argument with a traffic officer. One says to the other while yielding to the voice of authority, “But woman, defend yourself with more courage. It seems that you have the blood of horchata! I thought you were brave, but I see that you are as cowardly as a man” (Labarca, 1945:82). About this scene, Labarca believes that she is one of those who believe that male courage is relative and that there are two kinds of courage: the first is needed for mundane life issues, and the second is of a moral character and only women have it, since men in such circumstances are cowards.

This is important, since Labarca fought a great part of her life for the feminist question. Early in her novel *In foreign lands*, which shows the dialogues between Chileans and “Americans”, she refers to the suffragette movement, which was very active and militant in those years⁷. The female characters explicitly state their diverse opinions on the subject, without subtracting strong arguments from what they say about this political issue. Explicit and comparative references are also made to the way in which “Saxon” women behave in society and in front of men—freer and more self-determined—which differs in many aspects from Chilean customs and habits, anchored in a certain colonial conservatism.

In synthesis, *Unveilings...* reveals fragments of Labarca’s most intimate facet, since it delivers attractive details not only of her thought but also outlines some edges of the personality and subjectivity or intimate side of our distinguished author. “I review in my mind my years of bitterness, interrupted by light waves of forgetfulness and happiness” (Labarca, 1945:108).

4. Conclusion

The idea of thinking and constructing the labarquist ideology in our time is to go a step beyond the merely descriptive; therefore, it is a task still in its infancy. Entering into criticism and essays allows us to know a more intimate part of her writing, which makes it possible to know what she thought, how she developed, what readings she made or even to know her positions or her feelings about the events

⁷ Recalling his first trip to the United States in 1910, Labarca describes his impression of American women: “Collectively, women there were already a force, and individually they enjoyed a respect due not just to genteel masculine gallantry but to confidence in their own merits. One felt them to be conscious of themselves as liberated personalities and masters of their destinies, free of their prejudices and timidities that still shackled their South American sisters” (Labarca, 1959:311).

she lived through. This inevitably links us to the philosophy and politics at the basis of her proposals. In a recent publication, we proposed that in order to know her project in depth, it is inevitable to go beyond her emblematic texts such as *Basis for an Educational Policy* (Labarca, 1943) or *Contemporary Feminism* (Labarca, 1947), and to enter into her unexplored writings, to survey her contributions in magazines, in the press and even her two published novels (Salas, 2022).

So far, it is important to note that Labarca was an assiduous reader who went through different readings, which can be reflected in the two quotations with which she begins *Impressions...*; that is, in her epigraphs. She begins with a quote from Leopoldo Alas: “Just as there are writers who devote part of their attention and work to popularize the technicality of the arts or to disseminate in a clear and accessible way to all, the principles, the results of the main sciences, one can also, and I believe that one should, popularize literature” (Labarca, 1909:5). Secondly, Emerson’s quote: “Say in energetic terms what you think today and do the same tomorrow, although you may contradict yourselves from one day to the next” (Labarca, 1909:5). These ideas show us two very relevant issues: firstly, the relevance of bringing literature not only to the experts but also to the common people; and secondly, giving oneself the permission to mutate, to change one’s mind, to adjust the work.

Labarca was a follower of William James and John Dewey, but in no case was she short-sighted enough to follow their doctrines to the letter. Nor did she want her ideas to be applied to the letter in the national context, since for her no knowledge is absolute or definitive, and she did not foreignize what was not necessary for national soil. On the contrary, she tried to state emphatically that each theory should be used in accordance with the broad framework of the local culture. In antinomy to the harsh criticism made by Tancredo Pinochet (1944), she did read the Russians, which is clear in *Impressions...*, when she mentions that the Russians with “Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Turgueneff, Tolstoy and later Tchessoff and Gorki, have taught the Latins the intensity of the feelings, the rudeness of the primitive soul that the constant action of what is vulgarly called progress, has worn out in us” (Labarca, 1909:24).

The book of *Unveilings...* exposes in a brief, confessional, intimate, and in some moments poetic way some referents of philosophy that Labarca read. This article examined the influence of Nietzsche, Bergson and Guyau in some of her text passages. The reception of these philosophers cannot be verified by way of citations made by Labarca but were deduced by the use of certain concepts – in the case of Nietzsche, the transmutation of values, the superman and mainly his criticism of reason as the main way to the barbarism of Western society. Another interesting

element in *Unveilings...* is her constant citation of the Greeks, precisely because it was they who developed a reflection on the tragic feeling of man's life. This was reiterated by Labarca; namely, "Where does perfection reside? In the atom or in man? And if God created us, why did he make us so impotent, so miserable, so ridiculously small before the greatness of the unleashed forces, before the wonders of the mechanical world, before the prodigy of the animal?" (Labarca, 1945:53).

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