

Little did I suspect that four decades later I would not only still be “into” Chilean poetry, but that I would be taking a group of UT students to study Chile’s grand tradition of world-class poets *in situ*. But thanks to the three-year-old “Maymester” program, in which students from UT-Austin travel abroad with a UT professor, I was able to help another group of Texas students come to know this long, thin land, to read its epic poets—including two Nobel Prize winners, Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda—and actually to meet the revolutionary Nicanor Parra, former physics professor and winner of international renown for his “anti-poetry,” published in translation in New York by New Directions Press.

After my first trip to Chile, I returned the following year and formed a deep and abiding relationship with the country when I married my Chilean wife, María. Over the years we have returned to Chile numerous times, and I met with Parra several times. It was my special wish that the students who accompanied me to Chile on my most recent trip would have the unique experience of visiting the anti-poet, who on September 5 turned 92. Happily, they were able to visit Parra’s home on the Pacific Coast, listening to him as he recited from memory a Mexican border corrido and as he spoke of his great love of Shakespeare, whose *King Lear* he has translated into Chilean Spanish.

While we were reading Chile’s poets, the country’s secondary students were engaged in a nationwide protest over the conditions under which they are being educated. Paralyzing parts of the capital, Santiago, students marched with banners proclaiming their discontent with everything from bus fares needed to navigate the far-flung city, which exceeds New York City in area, to the inequality among schools that do not receive the same level of funding—reminiscent of our own Robin Hood controversy. Some of our group found the protest the most exciting part of the trip, though they soon decided that it wasn’t so safe to be in the line of fire of the so-called *guanacos*, water-spouting police vehicles named for the Chilean animal that spits at its opponent. It was clear to our group that Chile’s form of democracy allows for such protests, in which students take over a school and close it, under the protection of Chilean law. University students also shut down their campuses in symbolic solidarity with their high school fellows, which meant we were unable to visit classes at the Universidad Metropolitana.