

We did, however, meet with a group of Chilean students from the Universidad de Desarrollo who were intrigued by the fact that we were studying their national poets. They felt that their own countrymen did not recognize fully the value of their own literature. This, I pointed out, is perhaps the case universally, even though it does seem that Chileans are quite aware of their country's impressive poetry tradition—even taxi drivers know who Parra is. It is perhaps ironic that Chile has produced so many fine poets with international reputations by denigrating the traditional view of poetry as beautiful, if useless, language. As Parra has written, “poetry for the older generation was a luxury, for us it’s an absolute necessity,” even if he terms it “anti-poetry.”

After two weeks in Santiago, we moved our base of operations to the coastal community of Reñaca, a popular beach area during the summer season, but pleasantly relaxed in late fall. Nearby, our classes were held at the Universidad Marítima, where professor German Vogel and a number of his law students welcomed us warmly. As they listened to the sound of crashing waves, the students worked on their poetry papers and began to look forward to their visit with Parra. As many Chileans told them, they were in for a special treat. (Two teachers, who gave my students classes in Chilean slang, told them that they were envious and wished they could come along and meet the famous anti-poet.) Before the visit, we read some of his typical poems, like one that says “Let the poets come down from Olympus,” meaning that they need to deal with the real world. Parra is concerned about ecological destruction, and has declared, in the voice of God, “If you destroy the Earth, don’t think I’ll create it again.”

At nine in the morning on June 9, we and our wonderful guide, Paula Olguín, departed in a van for Las Cruces, a small fishing village located next to a spectacular bay. To escape the polluted capital, that’s where Parra lives. After we arrived, the anti-poet took us to a grassy area on the side of his house and began to talk about *The Taming of the Shrew*, comparing it with a work by a Spanish writer of the 15th century. From time to time, with gusto, he would quote Shakespeare in English, but when he noted that all but one of the students were Mexican-American, he launched into a long corrido about a Mexican who crosses the border and finds a tragic end. The students were duly impressed; one, Karen Villarreal, told Parra it was her father’s favorite song. Parra then commented on the current Chilean students’ protest movement, suggesting that the name “penguins”—as the students were referred to in