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Norah Borges Illustrates Two Spanish Women Poets

Norah Borges ilustra a dos poetas españolas

Abstract

This article examines the illustrations that Argentine artist Norah Borges (1901-1998) provided for two volumes of poetry written by Concha Méndez and Carmen Conde in the 1930s, *Canciones de mar y tierra* (1930) and *Júbilos* (1934). Arguing that the artist's style and her penchant for the representation of children and angels is an ambiguous one, Quance suggests that the illustrations can accommodate both Méndez's spirited rebellion and Conde's nostalgic recreation of her own childhood. She suggests that the drawings interpret the texts, despite the artist's wish to remain unobtrusive.

Keywords

Book illustration, feminism, image of women

Resumen

En este artículo se examinan las ilustraciones que la artista argentina Norah Borges (1901-1998) preparó para dos libros de poesía: *Canciones de mar y tierra* (1930), de Concha Méndez, y *Júbilos* (1934), de Carmen Conde. Argumentando que el estilo de la artista y su preferencia por la representación de niños y ángeles son ambos ambiguos, Quance viene a sugerir que las ilustraciones pueden ajustarse a diferentes imágenes de lo femenino, ya consistan en la rebeldía y brío de que hace gala la protagonista de Méndez, o en la nostalgia y dulzura con que Carmen Conde recrea su propia niñez. Los dibujos interpretan los textos, por más que la artista cultivara la discreción y la reticencia al respecto.

Palabras clave

Ilustración de libros, feminismo, imagen femenina

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Preámbulo

El artículo siguiente —el segundo que dediqué al arte de Norah Borges, la hermana casi desconocida del famoso escritor— se publicó por primera vez en *Crossing Fields in Modern Spanish Culture*, en edición de Xon de Ros y Federico Bonaddio (Legenda, Oxford, 2003), a raíz de un encuentro que tuvo lugar en King's

College, Londres, en 2001 sobre el estudio de la literatura en conjunción con otras artes y disciplinas. Y, como verán, versa sobre la cuestión —que sigue sin estudiarse— de cómo las ilustraciones de un texto inciden en nuestra lectura del libro que ilustren. Cuando empecé a investigar a las mujeres del 27, hacia mediados de los ochenta, me topé varias veces con el nombre de Norah Borges en las páginas de *La Gaceta Literaria*, sin que la figura detrás del nombre saliera de la sombra.

Fue muy bienvenida, pues, la exposición *Fuera de orden. Mujeres de la vanguardia española* (Madrid, Mapfre, 1999) sobre la existencia de todo un grupo de mujeres pintoras activas en la península (María Blanchard, Norah Borges, Olga Sacharoff, Maruja Mallo, Ángeles Santos, Remedios Varo); así se hacía ver, al menos, que existía todo un grupo. Pero ¿qué peso tendrían como tal? Para mí quedaba claro que esas mujeres, adscritas a distintos *ismos*, no se habían constituido en grupo propiamente dicho —ni siquiera por la amistad que surgiera entre algunas de ellas a la sombra de los lazos que unían a los hombres—. Así que, cuando saqué una nota sobre Norah Borges con motivo del centenario de su nacimiento, abordé la cuestión de cómo esa mujer había interactuado dentro de un grupo dominado por hombres y, en ese caso concreto, encabezados por hombres que le eran muy próximos: su hermano Jorge Luis y su futuro marido, el crítico y poeta Guillermo de Torre.

En este segundo artículo que dediqué a la artista el enfoque era otro, evidentemente, ya que me había planteado elucidar cómo la ilustradora había interpretado los textos poéticos de dos coetáneas suyas. Descubrí que la artista —ya no como íntima amiga sino como compañera de generación— iba delineando lo que hoy seguramente se vería como una ingenua poética feminista de la diferencia. Consciente de todos los problemas teóricos que esta etiqueta plantea, me he limitado a tratar el tema históricamente. Es probable que ni Concha Méndez ni Carmen Conde hubieran entendido el feminismo tal y como lo he llegado a entender yo, como un pulso constante y fructífero entre la diferencia y la igualdad. No obstante, tanto el impulso andrógino de Méndez como la más recatada feminidad de Conde hallaron cabida en el mundo ideado por Norah Borges —un mundo neorromántico que exaltaba lo infantil como la «patria celeste» del ser humano.

Quede como asignatura pendiente abundar en cómo y hasta qué punto esa reivindicación de lo infantil será, como dice Gabriela Mistral al prologar el libro de Carmen Conde que se reseña aquí, misión especial de la mujer. Me consta, en todo caso, que en las fechas en que escriben toda la literatura y el arte de vanguardia, ya fuera masculina o femenina, daba muestras de esa misma pasión. No hay más que pensar en Rafael Barradas, Joaquín Torres-García, Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti o Joan Miró.

1. Strictly speaking, the Generation of 1927 is part of a post-avant-garde literature better understood as an international modernism (not to be confused with Hispanic modernism). Norah Borges's art arises within the historical avant-garde, as we shall see, but by 1923 she is already assuming the lessons of the return to order.

2. For a chronology of Norah Borges see Lorenzo Alcalá, M., *La vanguardia enmascarada*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 2009, pp. 191-201. See also Quance, R., «Norah Borges entre vírgenes y sirenas», in Quance, R. & Mackintosh, F. J. (eds.), *Norah Borges*, special issue of *Romance Studies*, 27, 1, 2009, pp. 1-10.

3. Giménez Caballero, E., «Itinerarios jóvenes de España: Guillermo de Torre», in *La Gaceta Literaria*, 44, 15 October 1928, p. 7.

4. For Méndez's own account see Ulacia Altolaquirre, P., *Concha Méndez. Memorias habladas, memorias armadas*, foreword by María Zambrano, Madrid, Mondadori, 1990, pp. 72-82. Also, Valender, J., «Concha Méndez en el Río de la Plata (1929-1930)», in Valender, J. (ed.), *Una mujer moderna. Concha Méndez en su mundo (1898-1986)*, Madrid, Publicaciones de la Residencia de Estudiantes, 2001, pp. 149-63.

5. According to Rojas, P. «Fieles al presente. Cartas intercambiadas entre Guillermo de Torre, Norah Borges, Carmen Conde y Antonio Oliver», in *Monteagudo*, 3, Epoca, 20, 2015, pp. 161-211, Antonio Oliver approached Guillermo de Torre about the possibility of Norah's doing the illustrations (p. 163). Eventually the women became friends and coincided in Madrid's Lyceum Club Femenino.

Quisiera expresar mi agradecimiento a Legenda por su permiso para reproducir el artículo, con leves retoques para ponerlo al día.

R.Q.

The illustrations that the Argentine artist Norah Borges (1901-1998) provided for two books of poetry by Spanish women associated with the Generation of 1927 are interesting as an example of how this artist's aesthetics could accommodate two different poetic stances on the part of women writers who were negotiating their way through the avant-garde and modernism.¹ The books in question are *Canciones de mar y tierra*, published in 1930 in Buenos Aires by Concha Méndez (1898-1986), already well-known in Madrid as one of the few women moving in 'advanced' circles, and *Júbilos*, published in Murcia in 1934 by Carmen Conde (1907-1996), a younger writer from Cartagena who had made her first publishing contacts through Juan Ramón Jiménez.

Norah Borges was Jorge Luis Borges's younger sister. Both were introduced into *ultraísta* circles in Spain shortly after their arrival in Seville in 1919, where they soon became major figures in the Spanish branch of the movement.² Unlike her brother, however, Norah, who had married the young Spanish critic and poet Guillermo de Torre in 1928, maintained strong ties with Spain. Although it was said that she had made her husband promise that they would live in Argentina. The young couple returned to Spain in 1932.³ And there they remained, at the centre of the young Republic's literary and artistic pursuits, until civil war broke out. By 1938, after having taken refuge in Paris, they were back in Buenos Aires.

Concha Méndez did not know Norah Borges in Spain but rather met her on a trip she made to Argentina in 1929, when she looked up Guillermo de Torre, whom she had met once in San Sebastian.⁴ Carmen Conde, on the other hand, made Norah's acquaintance in Madrid when Norah and Guillermo returned to Spain to live, in the heady days following the proclamation of the Second Republic. The link between the three women seems to have been Guillermo de Torre, and that is not strange, really, when one considers that he had acted as the *secretario de redacción* [deputy editor] for *La Gaceta Literaria* (1927-1932), to which both Concha Méndez and Carmen Conde had contributed poems, and that he had made a name for himself as a literary critic with the publication of his *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* in 1925.⁵

By 1929, in any case, Norah Borges was a much-sought-after illustrator of literary journals. In Spain, her work had appeared in several little magazines associated with *ultraísmo* (such as *Grecia* and *Ultra*), and when that movement waned her woodcuts, linoleum prints

and drawings were featured in *Alfar*. Her early friendship with Guillermo de Torre and her close relationship with her brother had led her to produce a woodcut for Guillermo's first book of poems *Hélices* (1923), and another that same year for the cover of her brother's *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. By the end of the decade Norah had also made her mark as a painter. In 1925 she participated in the Exposición de Artistas Ibéricos in Madrid, and the following year she had a one-woman show (comprising 75 works) at the Amigos del Arte in Buenos Aires.

Although *ultraísta* critics were struck originally by the way Norah's graphic work had assimilated the formal lessons of Expressionism and Cubism,⁶ as her work evolved and became more representational in the general post-war *retorno al orden* [return to order], her themes and what was seen as her poetic vision commanded more attention. According to Augusto Mario Delfino, who reviewed Norah's show at the Amigos del Arte, «De los setenta y cinco trabajos que expone, son sus ángeles la nota destacada.» [Of the seventy-five works that she is exhibiting, her angels are the most striking note.] In almost the same breath he observed that even more of her figures could be considered angels: «no solo las figuras que ella clasifica de tales, sino también esos niños que andan 'buscando ángeles'» [not only the figures she classifies as such but also those children who are «looking for angels»].⁷ Manuel Rojas Silveyra was even more emphatic: «En su pintura no hay sino niños y ángeles» [there is nothing but children and angels in her painting].⁸

The critical line extended to Spain, where Benjamín Jarnés, writing in *La Gaceta Literaria* in 1927, echoed the Argentines: «Los dibujos de Norah Borges representan preferentemente ángeles y niños» [Norah Borges's drawings show a preference for angels and children]. He saw a quality of innocence and lack of *gravitas* in the work, which suggested to him that the world Norah's art projected was a prelapsarian one with a humankind still full of grace. Jarnés believed that these themes and the treatment of them were signs of the painter's femininity: «Pocos casos de tan exquisita feminidad como el de Norah Borges. Por eso prefiere luchar con la materia más leve, más dócil» [There are few cases of such exquisite femininity as that of Norah Borges. That is why she prefers to grapple with the lightest, most docile of materials].⁹ Although Norah's graphic work and painting were more varied than these judgements suggest, later critics tended to enlarge upon the qualities these men had defined. The Argentine Córdova Iturburu, for example, some three years later, described the artist's world view thus:

Los personajes de Norah Borges [...] están separados del mundo por una defensa de pudor. [...] Por eso dan esa sensación de meditación recogida, de dulce defenderse, de tímida afirmación de una personalidad definida y frágil, en cuyos ojos brilla la llama de una intimidad que se defiende extendiendo las manos, como un niño, para que nadie se

6. As Norah maintained in an interview with Manuel Bonet, J., «Hora y media con Norah Borges», in *Renacimiento*, 8, Seville, 1992, pp. 5-6 (p. 6).

7. See, for example, De Torre, G., «El renacimiento xilográfico, Tres grabadores ultraístas», in *Nosotros* [Buenos Aires], 161, 1924, pp. 274-76. Norah's excellent training in Switzerland earned her the respect of other young *ultraístas* as well. According to Carmona, E., «Bores ultraísta, clásico, nuevo, 1921-1925», in *Francisco Bores: el ultraísmo y el ambiente literario madrileño*, Madrid, Publicaciones de la Residencia de Estudiantes, 1999, pp. 13-51, it was she who probably taught Francisco Bores the expressionist technique in woodcuts (p. 23).

8. Mario Delfino, A., «La exposición de Norah Borges en 'Los Amigos del Arte'», in *El Diario* [Buenos Aires], 23 October 1926, repr. in Artundo, P., *La obra gráfica de Norah Borges*, Buenos Aires, n. p., 1993, p. 164.

9. Jarnés, B., «Los ángeles de Norah Borges», in *La Gaceta Literaria* 7, 1 April 1927, p. 2.

10. Iturburu, C., «Definición de Norah Borges de Torre», in *La Gaceta Literaria* 73, 1 January 1930, p. 5.

11. Borges, N., «Nueve dibujos y una confesión: Lista de las obras de arte que prefiero», in *La Nación* [Buenos Aires], 12 August 1928, repr. in Artundo, *La obra gráfica*, p.157; Gómez de la Serna, R., *Norah Borges*, Buenos Aires, Losada, 1945, pp. 25-26; and Quance, R. & Mackintosh, F. J. (eds.), *Norah Borges*, pp. 91-92.

12. See Quance, R., «Un espejo vacío: sobre una ilustración de Norah Borges para el ultraísmo», in *Revista de Occidente*, 239, March 2001, pp. 134-47. Quance suggests that Borges's work could be studied in light of Joan Riviere's theory of femininity as a masquerade, revealing a defensiveness about her incursion into a masculine public sphere.

aproxime. Extranjeros serían entre los hombres, tan extranjeros como los ángeles del Beato Angélico, nostálgico de la patria celeste [...] ¿No es este el destino del espíritu? ¿Y no es así, justamente, la personalidad de Norah Borges, delicada y feliz con la felicidad triste de los frágiles?

[Norah Borges's characters are separated from the world by a barrier of modesty. That's why they give the impression of meditative withdrawal from the world, of sweet defensiveness, of timidly affirming a definite and fragile personality, in whose eyes shines the flame of a private world that defends itself by putting up its hands like a child so that no one will come near. They would be foreigners among men, as foreign as the angels of Fra Angelico, homesick for their celestial birthplace. Is this not the destiny of the spirit? And is this not precisely what Norah Borges's personality is like, delicate and happy with the sad happiness of the fragile?]¹⁰

Although the critical strategy here might seem arbitrary inasmuch as it identifies the object(s) represented with the artist's own subjectivity, Norah herself seemed to encourage this approach. In 1928 she published a text entitled «Nueve dibujos y una confesión: Lista de las obras de arte que prefiero» [Nine drawings and a confession: A list of my preferred works of art], which could be taken as a poetics, for in it she enumerated many of the objects that filled her paintings and drawings.¹¹ This suggested that in her work she was building up an ideal personal world, a world that was better and perhaps happier than the one she knew. As for her person, some of the photographs taken of Norah at the time showed her to be ill-at-ease with publicity, as if she preferred to work from the sidelines.¹²

Norah Borges's children and angels would prove to be ambiguous signs. To begin with, as Jarnés pointed out, one could not be sure that the angels were not really children or the children angels (angels are children with wings, and children are angels without wings, he said). On closer inspection, one might be tempted to think that her adults also were both child-like and angelic. So, a basically Romantic hierarchy suggests itself: adults, children, angels, in ascending order. To the extent that the figure one step below participates in the qualities of the figure immediately above, that figure is promoted — one step closer to perfection. But sex and gender, too, must be factors in this discussion. Norah Borges's figures all have something androgynous about them (to resurrect this word in the sense in which it has been analysed by feminists, as that which is male or masculine overlaid with the female or the feminine). Her angels and men may be boys, but they are boys who bear a delicate expression that makes them seem like the twins of the girls that she portrays. Consider, for example, the portraits of lovers: *Pablo y Virginia* (1927), *Urbano y Simona* (woodcut 1924; oil painting, 1930), or her own oil portrait with Guillermo, *El herbario* (1928). As her figures rise on the spiritual ladder, transcending the human, they become ever-more androgynous. By the time they are angels, sporting wings, they are entitled to wear a skirt and long

hair, as we see from the illustrations for Jarnés's article on her work.¹³

This sort of androgyny — however suspect it might seem to us now — was at the time a retreat from the ideology of the avant-garde which Ortega had analysed in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925). In that essay (and elsewhere) Ortega declared that the modern movement was stamped with a masculine character. And that it had specifically repudiated the values of a feminine past, by which he seemed to mean anything that smacked of nineteenth-century Romanticism.¹⁴ Ortega certainly had no women in mind when he wrote.

Nonetheless, Norah Borges's androgynous angels, angelic children and child-like adults, because they keep a toehold in the world of youth and play, do not altogether elude Ortega's account of avant-garde values. And it is only on a *spiritual* plane that femininity reasserts itself.¹⁵ Perhaps we can consider Norah's child-like, celestial androgyny a way of resolving the contradictory values women artists associated with the avant-garde were presented with, caught as they were between the *juvenile* (youthful) and the *deportivo* [sporting] — to follow Ortega — and the wish to build on the values of their own upbringing as girls.

Norah's work as an illustrator could and did look both ways in this respect. It was at once tactful and suggestive. Although not everyone Norah illustrated was pleased with her penchant for children, very early on, as May Lorenzo has noted, out of deference to the text she was illustrating, the artist developed a style that featured clear, simple lines and a flat perspective against a white background.¹⁶ Thus, she could address the work of a poet who represented the avant-garde ideals of which Ortega had spoken (Concha Méndez) and then turn to the work of another poet who sought her models in a more traditionally feminine world (Carmen Conde).

Concha Méndez's *Canciones de mar y tierra* (1930) has been analyzed as an effort on the part of a woman poet to embody the ludic and sporting ideal of an avant-garde aesthetic forged by men. But what is most striking in this collection of neo-popular verse is the speaker's heartfelt desire for emancipation, for which the sea and sailing serve as metaphors. We see this in the very first poem, «Navegar» (*CMT* 23-24):¹⁷

Que me ponga en la frente
una condecoración.
Y me nombren capitana
de una nave sin timón.

Por las mares quiero ir
corriendo entre Sur y Norte,

13. Mayr-Harting, H., *Perception of Angels in History*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp.17-18, speculates that with the «celestization of angels» in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there came a «sex change», and the angels formerly thought of as male became androgynous. As a well-travelled young woman with a strong preparation in the fine arts, Norah would certainly have absorbed this idea and made it her own. In Ramón Pérez de Ayala's *Los trabajos de Urbano y Simona* (1924), a novel which Norah admired, according to Artundo, and which inspired a woodcut and at least one oil painting, we read: «Tengo leído en Santo Tomás de Aquino, si no me equivoco, que los ángeles no se casan porque son andróginos, como las azucenas.» See Pérez de Ayala, R., *Obras completas*, García Mercadal, J. (ed.), Madrid, Aguilar, 1963, iv, p. 387.

14. See Ortega y Gasset, J., *La deshumanización del arte y otros ensayos*, Madrid, Alianza, 1998, pp. 51-52. For more on this see Quance, «Un espejo vacío».

15. Interestingly, Díaz-Plaja, G., «Tres discos románticos», in *La Gaceta Literaria*, 96, 15 December 1930, p. 7, who saw signs around 1930 (the centenary of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*) of a return to a Romantic sensibility in literature and fashion, bantered that one would not achieve «una vitalización total de esta conmemoración romántica hasta que el ángel de luz [for example, Espronceda's *Teresa*] vuelva a ser la mujer».

16. Alfonso Reyes confides in his *Diario* (3 March 1929) that the six drawings of children which Norah had done for his *Fuga de Navidad* (1929), were not right for the book's subject. This is cited in *Discreta efusión. Alfonso Reyes/Jorge Luis Borges. Epistolario (1923-1959) y crónica de una amistad*, García, C. (ed.), Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2010, p. 38. (Thanks to C. G. for this reference.) On Norah's style see Lorenzo Alcalá, M., «Norah Borges, ilustradora», in *La Nación* [Buenos Aires], Cultura, 18 February 2001, pp. 1, 8. By implication the drawings «no debían apropiarse de la página; por respeto al autor, dejaban blancos para que la imaginación los llenara con el texto». Available at www.lanacion.com.ar/215752-norah-borges-ilustradora

17. All quotations are from the first edition of Méndez Cuesta, C., *Canciones de mar y tierra*, Buenos Aires, n. p., 1930, abbreviated as *CMT* in the text.

18. As noted by Sánchez Rodríguez, A., «Concha Méndez y la vanguardia. Apuntes para un retrato de mujer moderna», in *Una mujer moderna*, Valender, J. (ed.), pp. 115-33 (p. 130).

que quiero vivir, vivir,
sin leyes ni pasaporte.

Perdida por los azules
navegar y navegar.
Si he nacido tierra adentro,
me muero por ver el mar.

[Let them place a decoration
Upon my brow.
And name me the captain
of a vessel without helm.

Over the sea I would go
running North and South,
for my only wish is to live
without passport or law.

Lost amid the blue,
sailing and sailing along.
Though I was inland born,
I'm dying to catch sight of the sea.]

There is no fixed destination here — and hence no need for a rudder or helm (as we also read in «Barca de luna», *CMT* 76). The point is that the speaker — whom Norah imagines to be a girl still — wishes to live freely, like a female version of a Romantic hero, on the margins of society («sin leyes ni pasaporte» [without laws or passport]). As Alfonso Sánchez Rodríguez has pointed out, this is not just (Romantic) literature but an exact expression of the motives which in real life led Concha Méndez to set sail for London and Buenos Aires against her family's wishes and in violation of the standards of decorum for a young woman of the upper class.¹⁸ In one simple poem where the poet makes the case for the importance of travel for the sense of self. She asserts that to go — to sail — is to be (*CMT* 75):

Mi vida en el mar. Yo voy
saltando de puerto a puerto.
Y en mi aventura soy
como un corazón despierto.

[My life on the sea. I go
skipping from port to port.
And in my adventures I am
like a heart now woken.]

The rhymes in lines 1 and 3, «voy» and «soy», which because of the enjambment are actually more visual than aural in character, encourage us to «see» an almost philosophical affirmation in the celebration of sailing. According to Catherine Bellver, the poet is flouting the age-old association of women with passivity and immanence, qualities which find symbolic expression in fixity and horizontality. Thus,

she argues that poems such as «Escalas» [Ladders] stake out a masculine, symbolic space.¹⁹ Women writers of the twenties and thirties, she asserts, adopted the theories and values men were promoting. Certainly the «verticality» in some of the poems suggests that Méndez had internalized the symbolism that was prevalent in two important *ultraísta* texts from 1920, one by Guillermo de Torre, «Manifiesto Vertical», which appeared as a supplement of *Grecia* (1 Nov. 1920) and a rejoinder by Jorge Luis Borges, «Vertical», which appeared in the first and only issue of *Reflector* (Dec. 1920).²⁰

There is nothing in Norah Borges's illustrations of the book to buttress such «faloforia» [phallophoria], as her brother called it. But to the extent that they evoke the sea and the seashore and a solitary young female protagonist, her drawings do lend support to the idea of female emancipation. They do this by bringing out the less obvious strains in the book, having to do with female sexuality and a dream of unobserved and unfettered being, which the sea induces in the would-be sailor. Norah envisages the female voyager as a young girl in her sailor shirt, catching the echo of the sea in her ear as if it were a seashell (Méndez's metaphor),²¹ or leaning in a reverie against the ship's rail. By opening the text with the drawing of a compass and closing it with a drawing of an armillary sphere, Borges suggests the book itself is the boat taking the writer on a voyage.²² Thus her drawings place the accent on interiority — a dimension that only gradually comes into view in the book — and shifts attention away from the many senses in which the protagonist of the verse, in seeking adventure on the seas, could be said to emulate masculine ideals or models. The decontextualization of the drawings — their lack of reference to a specific time and place, their assertion of a lyric present and their isolation on a sea of white paper — encourages us to read the protagonist's actions and aspirations as a fantasy that will ultimately unfold on an island or happen to an island-self (*CMT* 184):

Recuerdo: era nadadora en el Cantábrico. El Cantábrico tenía —tiene— una isla pequeñita: mi primer puerto de broma. Y todos los días yendo a mi puerto por los caminos del mar, soñaba yo con las velas que a la isla debieran nacerle para irse —irnos— a navegar por el mundo.

[I remember: I was a swimmer in the Cantabrian Sea. The Cantabrian Sea had — has — a tiny little island: my first toy seaport. And every day on the way to my port over the sea-roads, I dreamt of the sails that the island would have to grow in order for it — for us — to sail about the world.]

Through metonymy, the island destination becomes a metaphor for the female self, who in turn becomes again, metonymically, a boat that has set sail.

Norah's drawings also imply a celebration of physicality. Consider her sunbather, for example, or her bare-breasted young woman. The

19. Bellver, C., *Absence and Presence: Spanish Women Poets of the Twenties and Thirties*, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, Bucknell University Press, 2001, pp. 63-66.

20. Both are reproduced in the catalogue *El ultraísmo y las artes plásticas*, Manuel Bonet, J. (ed.), Valencia, IVAM, 1996, pp. 140-41 (Torre); p. 150 (Borges). The latter says of Torre's manifesto, «posee ante la democracia borrosa del medio ambiente todo el prestigio audaz de una desorbitada faloforia en un pueblo jesuítico».

21. As the poet herself recalls (*CMT* 184): «Todo tiene sabor de músicas lejanas —que yo llevo en el caracol de mis oídos y en los oídos de mi alma» [Everything has the savour of distant music—which I carry in the conch-shell of my ears and in the ears of my soul].

22. As Candelas Gala remarks, these «instruments of navigation» suggest «a journey of the creative process» (170). See *Poetry, Physics, and Painting in Twentieth-Century Spain*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

23. Wilcox, J. C., *Women Poets of Spain* 1860-1990, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1997, p. 104.

24. See the poems «A la isla» (CMT 99) and «Coplilla» (CMT 105). In «A todas las albas» (CMT 30), however, a lover is associated with a landlocked existence which the lyrical subject vows to leave behind: «Y no me quedaré en tierra, / no me quedaré no, amante» [And I will not stay on land, / no, I will not, my lover].

heroine she imagined for the book is a sturdy athlete (the strong swimmer that we know the author in fact was) but at the same time one who embraces the sensuous pull of the sea, and the lack of restraint in a seaside existence. Wishing, perhaps, to feel what a mermaid might feel in the ocean depths, such a character could give voice to the poem entitled «Verdes», a poem which John Wilcox (104) has said calls for the inner voyage of rebirth (CMT 66):²³

¡Ay, jardines submarinos,
quién pudiera pasear
por vuestros verdes caminos

hondos de líquenes y olas,
radiantes, y estremecidos
de peces y caracolas.

Y volver a la ribera:
verdes ojos, verdes el alma
y verde la cabellera!

[Oh gardens beneath the sea
if only I could tour
your deep green roads

of lichens and waves,
radiant and quivering
with conch-shells and fish

and return to the shore:
green eyes, green soul
and green mane of hair!]

Méndez's poems exalt liberty and a proud unconcern for love, as is clear from «Mi soledad» (CMT 141), which frankly equates «soledad» [solitude] with «alegría» [delight] or «A todas las albas» (CMT 29-30), which suggests that to take a lover implies a landbound existence. Yet Norah chose to give the speaker a male counterpart: an athletic young bather with a dreamy expression, who is seemingly content to live off the fruits of the sea and ruminates verse. (As if to underline that he is the soulmate or twin for the female bather, the artist portrays him in an identical pose.) In her defense, Norah Borges could surely have pointed out that, even though the heroine declares herself «novia del mar, o su amante» [sweetheart of the sea, or his lover] («Canal de Bristol», CMT 49), or a «barca sin dueño» [boat without an owner] («Nocturno», CMT 143), some of her poems do allude to a possible male accomplice.²⁴

Making only the slightest concession to contemporary details (that is, the heroine's stylish bathing suit, a design probably inspired in Chanel), Norah understands this girl-woman to be so far ahead of her time that one would have to look backward to classical sources to trace her physical type. This sort of futuristic nostalgia, as we

know, permeated other artists' works from the period as well, such as Picasso's bathers from the early twenties, which may have inspired Norah's.

The illustrations Norah did for Carmen Conde's *Júbilos* [Jubilations] (1934) all centre on children, even though this collection of prose-poems, written predominantly in the first person and autobiographical in nature, is not exclusively about children, as its subtitle indicates: *Poemas de niños, rosas, animales, máquinas y vientos* [Poems about children, roses, animals, machines and winds]. In her prologue, however, Gabriela Mistral offered unstinting praise for the texts about children, noting that while the author did not use a child's language («el libro es mejor *sobre* niños que *para* niños» [The book is better on the subject of children than it is for children], she had indeed captured a child's perspective. Conde had tapped most convincingly memories of her own childhood in Melilla and Murcia. As she welcomed Carmen Conde into the poetic fold, Mistral voiced the opinion that this was particularly a woman's gift:²⁵

Nosotras, Carmen, estaríamos destinadas —y subraye fuerte el *destinadas* porque sería un destino pleno— a conservar, a celar y a doblar la infancia de los hombres, las corrientes de frescura y de ingenuidad que arrancan de la infancia en ellos, y que después, muy pronto, se encenan, se paran, o se secan en su entraña.

[We women, Carmen, may very well be destined — and underline *destined* because it is no doubt a full destiny — to preserve, watch over and duplicate the childhood of men, those streams of freshness and ingenuity which well up in them from their childhood and which later, very soon, grow muddy, stop flowing, or dry up in their insides.]

One might very well ask why this should be the case. Although Mistral does not go into reasons, her own work evidenced the belief that women had privileged access to the world of childhood because they were mothers.²⁶ Thus, in seeking support from Gabriela Mistral, who was famous for her poems inspired in motherhood, Carmen Conde was beginning to formulate a poetics of sexual difference that departed from what some saw as a norm of masculinity imposed by the avant-garde.

Of the six illustrations that Norah did for this book, five refer to specific poems, incorporating a phrase or sentence from each as a caption beneath the drawing, as if she were illustrating a primer for children. They do not, however, sit strictly beside the texts. Thus, «Escuela» (*J* 21) is illustrated on p. 29 with a drawing of ABCs. The text «Freja» (*J* 31) from a sequence entitled «Niñas moras» is illustrated on p. 77, with a drawing of little girls with their hair in tight plaits resembling cornrows, hair that had been treated according to a traditional Moroccan recipe of egg yolk and honey. Another of the texts from the same series, «Pies desnudos» (*J* 33), in which the

25. Gabriela Mistral, foreword to Conde, C., *Júbilos. Poemas de niños, rosas, animales, máquinas y vientos*, Murcia, Sudeste, 1934, p. 13. All quotations refer to this edition, abbreviated *J* in the text.

26. See Mistral's early works *Desolación* (1921) and *Ternura* (1923). Teresa León, M., «La narradora», in *La Gaceta Literaria* 85 (1 July 1930), p. 8, whose first collection of stories was for children, laments the fact that women of her day, in order to «hombrearse», or place themselves on a par with men, lose touch with their childhood.

27. «Tenía la dirección de Guillermo de Torre, a quien años antes había conocido en San Sebastián. Norah Borges, su mujer, era muy graciosa. Recuerdo su voz de niña una de las veces que comí con ellos. 'Mira, Guillermo, Concha tiene carita de Goya; sus ojos son completamente de personaje goyesco'. Norah hacía unos dibujos ingenuos, preciosos, y, además, sabía muchísimo de pintura. Otra tarde recibí de sus manos un ramito pequeñito de violetas, envuelto en un papel de china: 'Toma'». See Ulacia Altolaquirre, *Memorias habladas*, p 73.

young Carmen learns to go barefoot like the Moroccans, has a corresponding illustration on p. 47. «Masanto» (J 38), a text about a little Jewish girl («una hebreílla») is illustrated on p. 89 with a drawing of the cookies one got in her house; and «El niño limpio» (J 54) finds illustration on p. 125 in a drawing of an exercise book. Only one drawing (p. 129) of two little peasant girls at play, one somewhat older than the other and so the leader in the game, is not geared to a specific text. It seems, in fact, to be a simplified version of a painting Norah had done in 1933 entitled *Tres niñas españolas*. In both the painting and the drawing the girls are rendered in the simple geometrical shapes and with the wide eyes and timid expression that had become Norah's personal style.

Since three of the drawings refer to the author's North African playmates, it is fair to say that these are the texts that Norah Borges found most suggestive. She went unerringly to a phrase or a passage in each that appealed not only to the sense of sight but to the other senses as well — taste, smell, touch — which had been stirred by the young girl's exposure to an exotic household. She also focused on texts that recorded Conde's experience in the schoolroom teaching youngsters their ABCs. She does not adopt the adult perspective of the writer, however: it is a little girl's hand, for example (not the teacher's), which is seen tracing the letters of the alphabet. The enlarged size and child-like simplicity of the drawings suggests that quite possibly, like Gabriela Mistral, the illustrator had envisaged children as potential readers of at least some of these texts and that she sought to engage them through reference to their own action of reading and, in the case of the little boy filling his exercise- book, writing, too.

When Concha Méndez published her book of poetry, as her memoirs reveal, she hardly knew who Norah Borges was.²⁷ Carmen Conde, on the other hand, had no doubt read Méndez's book, and in view of the several articles that had appeared on Norah's work in the Spanish press, as we have seen, it seems likely that she was well aware of the artist's reputation. An unsigned review of Concha Méndez's book, which appeared in the journal *Sudeste*, edited by Conde's husband and mentor Antonio Oliver Belmás, had mixed praise for the poetry but unqualified admiration for the artwork:

Todo el ímpetu viajero de Concha Méndez Cuesta no ha bastado a apartarla de las fuentes líricas donde primeramente bebió. Sin embargo, sería interesante verla romper estas últimas amarras y acercarse más a sí misma, como ya consigue en muchos poemas. Norah Borges de Torre, ha prestado a este libro la belleza de unos finos dibujos, poemas ellos también alusivos al mar.

[Not all of Concha Méndez's passion for travel has been enough to lure her away from the sources where she first drank of poetry. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see her cut loose from those last moorings

and move closer to herself, as she already does in many of her poems. Norah Borges de Torre has added a touch of beauty to the book with her fine drawings, which are themselves poems about the sea.]

Perhaps it was upon seeing Méndez's book (which included a poem dedicated to her) that Conde conceived a desire to see her own work illustrated by this artist. After all that had been written about Norah Borges's angels and children and her femininity, she may very well have thought that here was an artist who would feel a special sympathy for her writing. (There could have been an element of rivalry with Concha, too.)

Be that as it may, Norah Borges's art came to illustrate two very different images of the woman poet. In Concha Méndez it served as a counterpoint to the image of the freewheeling spirit who had arrogated to herself the male prerogative of travel and autonomy. In Carmen Conde it reinforced the bonds with a traditional woman's world that some women thought could and should be exploited literarily.



Ilustración de Norah Borges para *Júbilos* de Carmen Conde (1934), p. 77. Con el permiso de los herederos. Reproducida de los fondos de la Biblioteca Nacional de España.