

# Three Images of Juan García Ponce

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Juan García Ponce was never an author of popular fiction. Rather, he liked being a secret, cult writer, subversive and provocative. His themes, always obsessive and reiterative, revolve around love. But more than concerning itself with a psychological or emotional description of love, most of his work concentrates on the physical, the carnal and the erotic, and it frequently culminates in the “perverse,” that adjective that is so difficult to define because, in the long run, who does not end up perverse? Nevertheless, in all of Juan García Ponce’s narrative, a nexus can be perceived between the erotic and the other, rather undefinable religious element that borders on the sacred. “To teach is to pervert,” he wrote in *El libro* (The Book), one of his short novels. And it is true: literature is a way of twisting the world to reveal its dark, unknown aspects.

Now, in homage, three stories from his early period come to mind that deal with the recreation of love and discovery in the world of children and young people. The first of them, “Feria al anochecer” (Fair at Dusk), is a story with a classic theme which, in many ways, has been dealt with by many authors in discovering their intimate “selves”. It tells the story of the transition from childhood to adolescence, from innocence to experience. Andrés, the protagonist, lives in a provincial town with his grandmother and an aunt. Full of fears and doubts, at the same time he is fascinated by the beauty that the world has begun to unfold before his eyes. A fair near his neighborhood gives him the chance to discover the possibilities of love and of ridding himself of his fears to assume his manhood and his new life as a man.

“La gaviota” (The Seagull) is a more complete work. It is a longer story with more ambitious psy-

chological and symbolic penetration. It takes place in the idyllic setting of a beach during the vacations of a pair of adolescents, Luis and Katina. Both characters, a little older than Andrés in “Fair at Dusk,” somehow continue in the vein that Andrés portrayed in the first story. Now Luis—or “Dwig,” as Katina calls him—is faced with a clear, identified object of his love. Both Luis and Katina are pure, avid, but inexperienced in the conflicts of love and passion. The story centers on discovering how the different activities of this pair of adolescents over a few days of sun and sea will bring them face to face with a series of attractions and contradictions, which are nothing less than the mysteries of love and desire. In that sense, the presence of the seagull is very significant because it makes the story jump from a merely realist level to a symbolic one. And it is important the young readers peruse this story with special care to relate what happens between Katina and Luis to the constant presence of the seagull.

“Después de la cita” (After the Appointment), the third story, is about imminence and the real theme is purposely hidden to concentrate on the sensations and feelings of the characters. It is a story in which nothing extraordinary seems to happen, or, rather, in which everything happens without reality changing much. Without saying so, “After the Appointment” evokes a young girl’s mood after a disappointment. The title is the key, and the reader’s imagination will determine what happened at that appointment.

These, then, are three images of what goes on in young people’s hearts when they start off down the dark labyrinths of love. The first is a prelude; the second a realization; and the third deals with the first disappointments. Three stories that open the door for young people to a world they will not be able to do without. ■■■

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