

## De mujer a mujer showcases Gabriela Mistral's sisterly embrace of Spanish women in exile

- In Cuadernos de Obra Fundamental, Fundación Banco Santander brings to light the unpublished correspondence of ten Spanish intellectuals with the Chilean Nobel Prize winner between 1942 and 1956.

Gabriela Mistral was not only one of the great Spanish-language poets who defended justice, equality and fraternity in her writings, she also exemplified this in her actions, as demonstrated by her correspondence with numerous intellectuals in exile, such as Zenobia Camprubi, Maruja Mallo, Teresa Diez Canedo, Maria de Unamuno, Maria Zambrano, Margarita Nelken and Victoria Kent, among others.

The unpublished letters that make up *De mujer a mujer*, are a collection of women's feelings, sorrows and affections that reflect their vision of a tumultuous period and illustrate Mistral's deep commitment to women and to Spanish exile, as well as the intellectual and human richness of a generation of women lost to their own land.

A generosity and industriousness that generated a great network of solidarity for the Spanish intellectuals in exile after the Civil War.

**"De mujer a mujer. Cartas a Gabriela Mistral desde el exilio (1942-1956)"** is a new release as part of the ***Colección Cuadernos de Obra Fundamental*** edited by **Fundación Banco Santander** [www.fundacionbancosantander.com](http://www.fundacionbancosantander.com), with an **anthology and prologue by Francisca Montiel**, Professor at the University of Barcelona, expert on Mistral and the intellectuals of the Spanish exile.

Thirty missives - most of them unpublished - have been collected, written by Teresa Diez-Canedo (6), Maruja Mallo (1), Ana Maria Martinez Sagi (1), Margarita Nelken (4), Victoria Kent (1), Francisca Prat (1), Zenobia Camprubi (4), Maria Zambrano (1), Maria Enciso (4) and Maria de Unamuno (1,) to Gabriela Mistral, which were stored in her personal archive, and which came from all the

destinations of the Spanish exile; with some of the women she had a personal relationship, and with others, she hardly knew them or met them. All these letters reveal, in the opinion of **Francisca Montiel**, "a sense of sisterhood, friendship and solidarity that was fostered by the Chilean writer's character and trajectory.". From woman to woman, they spoke to her about their profession, their daily lives and their intimacy, asked her for support, and expressed their admiration. Mistral was "an emotional balm that provided them, at times, with the emotional relief they needed", as noted by **Francisca Montiel**, something that is also reflected in the commitment and human solidarity of the fifteen unpublished letters written by the great Chilean poet which we have rescued, and which responses to Teresa Diez Canedo, Margarita Nelken, Maria Zambrano and Maria de Unamuno. They all speak to us of the noble and generous spirit of Mistral who "from the very first moment was interested in the fate of those who might find themselves in danger", says Montiel.

For **Francisco Javier Expósito**, Literary Director of Fundacion Banco Santander, "this volume is important as a testimony and a call, because it enlightens us in an intimate and collective manner regarding the hardships of many women during the exile and the efforts of certain relevant characters, such as Gabriela Mistral, who committed themselves to helping others by putting their name and prestige at the service of those who suffered". In addition to being "a group of very intellectually valuable women, they left us this fresh view of their lives in times of distress and reveal to us the solidarity network that was generated in Latin America, which improved the living conditions of thousands of people". A book that "gives us a gigantic example of solidarity for these times of crisis", he added.

These were not just words, but deeds, many deeds in the form of donations and funds that Gabriela Mistral managed to raise thanks to measures such as the transfer of income from her book *Tala*, which she gave to Victoria Kent, her support for the birth of *La Casa de Espana* (Mexico), not to mention the endless list of beneficiaries including Antonio Machado, Eugenio Imaz, Maria de Maeztu,

Enrique Diez Canedo, Jose Moreno Villa, Joaquin Xirau, Carles Riba, Josep Carnero and Juan Larrea himself, among others. Not forgetting her efforts towards securing the Nobel Prize Award for Juan Ramón Ramón Jimenez, whom she considered her master, as demonstrated in a copious correspondence, and which he was awarded in 1956, the year of the death of Gabriela, who received hers in 1945, and whom many exiles considered "the representation of the hospitality and generosity of that New World which had welcomed them after being expelled from Spain".

### **From woman to woman: exiled women and their letters**

Mistral had first-hand knowledge of the Spanish reality from 1933 to 1935 as the Consul of Chile in Madrid, gaining the respect of intellectuals such as Unamuno, Juan Ramon or Diez Canedo, as well as their families and women such as Victoria Kent, Maria de Maeztu, Ernestina de Champourdn or Zenobia Camprubi, beyond political or religious ideas or her indigenist ideas. After the war began, she fraternised with the republican cause, despite her distrust of atheism and the communists. The fruit of that relationship were these letters written to her after the end of her exile, invoking her influence.

**Teresa Diez Canedo** (1942-1955), the wife of Enrique Diez Canedo, a good friend of Gabriela's, exiled in Mexico with her help, invokes her for a walk in the mountains of Vermont after Enrique's death. "We have been remembering her a lot, all this time, because we imagine what she is going through with this state of affairs, of humanity, of the world, of men, of passions turned into an atrocious whirlwind; arrogance, wickedness, unique hoarding of consciences, lives and riches".

"In reality, uneasiness reigns all over the Earth, it's a bad time, one that touches us old people, and one that touches the young and the little creatures, who only give joy with their wise innocence". /"I loved you so much (Enrique Diez Canedo), and understood you so well that, by reflection, I loved you just the same, because it is truly an immense kindness of God to identify with a person out of blind affection, and to see only for and through him. (...) This can only be said to you and, surely, only to you I say it, because always, from the first

moment, I loved you very much..." / "I always say that what more would I want than to talk to you [sic], to look you in the eyes, to talk to you [sic], to sit in the chair next to you, and to hear you!

**Maria Enciso** author of *Lagar*, a talented writer in the making, and a teacher in Catalonia who worked for the integration of women into the labour market, wrote (1943-1947) six letters to Gabriela after meeting her at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Catalonia, which she narrated in *Raíz al viento*, included in the appendix to this book. Enciso, in her exile in Colombia, asked for approval for her texts, and kept the hope that she would be their validator, and even asked her for a job and considered the possibility of working for her. "Thanks to my exile, two things have been decisive: to really get to know America, which is worthwhile, and to have managed to crystallise through pain my emotions, all the things that I wanted to do at the time and which were gradually becoming a reality. How I thank you for your words. Coming from you they are of priceless spiritual value " / "(...) because a sensitive spirit like yours, a superior and free mentality cannot sympathise with Franco, who represents all that is spiritually and materially obscure and backward." / "(...) you are such a profound friend and dear to so many of us who knew you and have become attached to your impressive personality, like myself." / "You have no idea, Gabriela, what encouragement your words give me to keep on writing and fighting". She would die shortly afterwards, prematurely, with all her projects.

**Maruja Mallo** (1943-1954), met Gabriela in New York in 1948, although they had exchanged correspondence in these letters years before, where she thanked her for her help in Lisbon years before, and for the help she had given her on her arrival in Buenos Aires, from afar. "I work intensely on the creation and improvement of my work, which is... bettering myself. It is, I think, the justification of myself or the justification of my life".

**Margarita Nelken** (1946-1949) met Gabriela in Mexico, from where she wrote to her, telling her of her profound grief after the death of her son, which she connected with that of Mistral's godson, Yin Yin, whom she had raised. Words of condolence and encouragement. "Perhaps you know to what extent misfortune and grief make us sisters. (...) But I have been left with my cross on my shoulders – doubled up – for whatever is left of my life"/" You do not know, you cannot imagine, what it will mean to me, in terms of comfort and encouragement, to spend a few days, however few, with you... (...) Well, I repeat: you cannot imagine what those days will mean to me. THANK YOU in advance!

**Zenobia Camprubi** (1951-1953) and her relationship with Mistral dates from many years, to visits to Spain in the 1920s and her admiration for the poet from Moguer. These letters begin with Juan Ramon's stay in Puerto Rico, and Zenobia often writes to her about JRJ, who was a major part of her life and days. "and, even when J. R. tells us that we are killing him, he has gained 4 pounds in 2 weeks. (...) He has started to have a tanned complexion and, even if much less frequently than as usual, his ironic smiles have begun to appear. (...) When J. R. comes out of his obsession with death, he charms us with his usual wit"/" Now he doesn't even want to sign things because he says his handwriting is shaky, although it is actually untrained because he has been on strike for a year. I tell him nothing of the injection of optimism that the N.P. [Nobel Prize] will give him. (...) J.R.J., with his nervous depression, he had an awful hunger to hear his own language, and in all the hospitals and sanatoriums he imagined that he heard Spanish being spoken in the next room".

**Maria Zambrano** and the letter we reproduce (1953) from the Spanish philosopher was the conclusion of the conversation after they met on a trip to Havana in 1953, although Mistral had already sent her a letter in 1940 which we reproduce in the volume. "And when I left for Spain, a group of women brought me a wheat bouquet which I had with me in Valencia, in Barcelona. And when I

had to leave among the half a million that could do so, I left it buried there, close to the French border, in Catalan lands, maybe it then germinated and some grain of wheat from your land sprouted in the my land, which is in so much pain!..."/ "I would like to tell her that God keep her. But He has always kept you. (...) Take me for someone who will always love you, even if I don't see you".

**Maria de Unamuno** (1956), the youngest of Unamuno's daughters, devoted herself to the teaching of upper-level literature in the USA, and worked with her through her admiration for her, towards the beloved old Unamuno, of whom "she came to confess after his death that she missed him, and needed him in her life", says Francisca Montiel. "I can imagine what you must be suffering with this cold and these snowfalls, they make me cringe, I spend the hours in my room in the company of my books, but these are not enough, we need real people to communicate with, even if only to laugh with sometimes, this is finally human and preferable to a loneliness that ends up being exasperating".

**Ana Maria Martinez Sagi and Francesca Prat i Barri** (1946) two young Catalan poets who sent Mistral two letters. Sagi met Mistral at the Pedralbes Residence and wanted an interview. Prat i Barri, a primary school teacher, had published a poem without Gabriela's permission, and she readily accepted her apology.

**LETTERS BY GABRIELA MISTRAL:** the poetess supported those who wrote to her whenever she could, and unreservedly supported many without even being asked to do so, Montiel recounts in this preface that she asked many of her contemporaries to allow many of these intellectuals to collaborate in the magazines of the time or to grant them support to start others or to create cultural projects.

Nine letters to **Teresa Diez Canedo** (1939-1948) in which she expresses the recognition of Kent, Ocampo, etc. who have supported many Spaniards. "Week by week, I take care of the people on this side of the Pyrenees. My book has earned until now about thirty thousand francs, which Victoria Kent has distributed among the children who left at the last minute, and among some teachers. There is still a quarter of the edition to be sold. Victoria Ocampo, the Argentinian, has behaved very

nobly: she edited the book herself and has taken care and continues to take care of some Spanish writers and teachers."/ "Our America, on the one hand, has been selfish and foolish; on the other hand, it is lucid, and will continue to fight, even if it is to attend to individual tragedies. The other tragedy, the national one, my Teresa, has a remedy, in the long run, but eventually, there will be a remedy: the pain has reached rock bottom: it can go no further." "Here, every week I have some Spanish affair on my hands. I do not write to you, but you're on my mind because of this never-ending tragedy. Now my soul is on a string, for V. [Victoria] Kent, who they say has been taken prisoner"/ "Whatever the reds and maroons say, whatever you may hear over there, the reality is that they have boiled the perverse cauldron of class hatred (...) And our people are living an oriental hunger and nakedness. Parades come and go, and the foolish and illiterate demagoguery of the leaders, howling nonsense. (...) You measure and weigh. It is frightening. But it is also disgusting. Now it turns out that we are all reactionaries, all of us who keep our souls free, the anti-Czech, the anti-Gestapo, the anti-Masons and anti-Jesuits".

**To Maria Zambrano** (7940)

"Unfortunately, the acceptance of Spaniards does not yet seem to understand, in the minds of my people, their establishment. They are not fixed in trade or soil, as far as I know. This is a big mistake."/ "It fills me with pleasure that you bring to our America the example of a woman who has true philosophical culture and who knows how to deliver it in such a noble way as yours. You lift us all up with yourself and will do more good for the American woman than you yourself are aware of."/ "Today, when I see Europe more damaged than ever, more torn in its vital viscera, I feel that the virtue and virtues of the Creoles are greatly magnified. We are less foolish than has been said and much more humane than we think we are. There is a lack of discipline in everything, both socially and intellectually. The confusion is dreadful; the disorder of our reading is fantastic".

**To Margarita Nelken**(1946-1949)

"I have read your magnificent articles. You are in your "prime" time of written

expression. Work, take advantage of what little peace there is left in the world to work. I am happy to know you like this, healthy, creative, young!"

"It seems that the world is changing for the better and we do not even know about the near future. For this very reason, dear Margarita, you need to toughen up a bit."

### About Fundación Banco Santander

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With this objective in mind, we develop initiatives grouped into three lines of action: the promotion of culture as a tool for understanding the world around us, social action to facilitate the progress of vulnerable groups and care for the environment to protect our natural heritage.

In all our programmes we strive to create collaborative networks with the third sector in order to tackle major global challenges together.