Poetic politics in Juan Ramón Jiménez

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A política poética em Juan Ramón Jiménez

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Abstract

The fact that all of Juan Ramón Jiménez's prose remained unpublished during the poet's lifetime, and that some of it still is, has allowed the image forged by his enemies -that of the poet locked in his ivory tower- to persist with relative vitality to this day. As is to be expected, the management of his work influenced the public perception of the author. It was virtually impossible for the global audience to see the committed and passionate poet behind the facade. Let us attempt, through the following lines, to shed light on this matter.

Keywords: Literature didactics, Juan Ramón Jiménez, critical literature, critical thought, poetic politics, prose, Zenobia Camprubí.

Resumen

El hecho de que toda la prosa de Juan Ramón Jiménez permaneciera inédita en vida del poeta, y que aún permanezca inédita en parte, ha permitido que la imagen que fraguaron sus enemigos de él, la del poeta encerrado en su torre de marfil, se haya mantenido con relativa vitalidad hasta el día de hoy. Como es hasta cierto punto lógico, la gestión de su obra influyó en la percepción pública del autor. El público general era prácticamente imposible que viera al poeta comprometido y apasionado que había detrás de la pose. Tratemos, a través de las siguientes líneas, de aportar luz a la cuestión objeto de estudio.

Palabras clave: Didáctica de la literatura, Juan Ramón Jiménez, literatura crítica, pensamiento crítico, política poética, prosa, Zenobia Camprubí.

Resumo

O facto de toda a prosa de Juan Ramón Jiménez ter permanecido inédita durante a vida do poeta, e de parte dela permanecer ainda inédita, permitiu que a imagem forjada pelos seus inimigos -a do poeta enclausurado na sua torre de marfim- persistisse com relativa vitalidade até aos dias de hoje. Como era de esperar, a gestão da sua obra influenciou a perceção pública do autor. Era praticamente

impossível para o público em geral ver o poeta empenhado e apaixonado por detrás da fachada. Tentaremos, através das linhas seguintes, lançar luz sobre esta questão.

Palavras-chave: Didática da literatura, Juan Ramón Jiménez, literatura crítica, pensamento crítico, política poética, prosa, Zenobia Camprubí.

Open prose

As can be seen in his prose writings, in Zenobia Camprubí's own diaries, and in the reports written by journalists who interviewed him in exile (González, 2014), Juan Ramón Jiménez never lived detached from what was happening around him. Even before the war, his commitment to democracy and the Republic was evident, although, as he himself noted in a lecture delivered in Cuba in 1937: "I have never wanted to chain myself to any political party, though I may have my logical preference, because parties tend to impose complication and fickleness, whereas I wish to remain a clear and consistent idealist" (Jiménez, 1985, p. 52).

Far removed from the rigid apolitical corset in which many have sought to confine him, Juan Ramón was always deeply engaged with his own time. As a student in Cádiz, he protested against the conscription of soldiers being sent to the Cuban War and declared himself in favor of the island's independence. As an adult, he expressed his repudiation of the Bourbon monarchy, wrote against the government's conduct during the events of Barcelona's Tragic Week and the absurd colonial war in Morocco, and advocated pacifism during the First World War, even at a time when the Spanish intelligentsia itself was divided between Germanophiles and Anglophiles. He declined offers to occupy vacant embassies under the new Republican regime.

In 1934, he signed the appeal to the Supreme Court requesting a review of the repression in Asturias and publicly protested the murder of journalist Luis Sirval during those same events, a killing attributed to the military. He publicly supported Manuel Azaña, imprisoned because of the Catalonian events of that same year, and, on the eve of the coup, in order to clarify his position regarding criticism from figures such as Bergamín, Lorca, Neruda, and others concerning pure poetry, he announced the lecture "Poetic Politics," to be delivered at the Residencia de Estudiantes on June 15. The lecture generated such anticipation that two ministers attended -those of Public Instruction and Agriculture- long with the rector of the Central University, professors, poets, writers, artists, and many others. The only absent figure was Juan Ramón himself, who delegated the reading of the lecture to a trusted disciple, officially justifying his absence through an eye condition, although he had already informed Juan Guerrero Ruiz, his confidant in so many matters, that he had no intention of attending (Guerrero, 1961, p. 459).

Events soon accelerated: scarcely one month after the lecture at the Residencia de Estudiantes, the military uprising broke out. Juan Ramón offered his services to several minister friends, asking them to employ him wherever he might be most useful, but none paid any attention to him (1985, p. 183). At the same time, he declined the invitation to settle with Zenobia in the headquarters of the Alliance of

Anti-Fascist Intellectuals and assume its presidency, excusing himself on the grounds that half of those anti-fascists were themselves well-known fascists (p. 324).

A few days later, Jiménez signed -together with other renowned Spanish intellectuals- the Declaration of Intellectuals against the Military Uprising, published on 31 July 1936 in defense of Republican legality, alongside figures such as Marañón, Ortega, Pérez de Ayala, and others. Yet Juan Ramón would later reproach these same intellectuals in War in Spain (1985), arguing that their loyalty to the legitimate Republican government lasted only as long as the conflict itself, since all of them eventually returned from exile accepting the Franco dictatorship. Some, he wrote, had even passed directly "from corsets, silk stockings and embroidery, bracelets, powder, and a gold sickle and hammer on the tie (…) to turning the sickle and hammer into arrows, and the hypertrophied fist into a hypertrophied open hand, from exhibiting it so much" (p. 119). A decade later, when asked about his conduct during the Spanish Civil War, he would also insist that he had been the first intellectual to appeal for aid to the people resisting the armed uprising, speaking through the microphones of Unión Radio Madrid[1].

During the first two weeks of August, the couple sheltered around a dozen children who had been left homeless and without family in the opening days of the conflict. They did so in coordination with the Board for the Protection of Children, but entirely at their own expense, receiving no remuneration whatsoever from the Government and personally covering all related costs. Their reaction was not unprecedented: as many pages of Platero and I (2025) demonstrate, Juan Ramón possessed a particular sensitivity toward helpless and needy child, to whom he devoted attention and assistance throughout his life. He felt a similar compassion for humiliated, unfortunate, or physically and mentally afflicted individuals, as can be seen in chapters such as The Foolish Child, The Consumptive Girl, The Thorn, or Swallows. What he did feel aversion toward was noise, carnival festivities, bullfights, cockfights, flamenco taverns, card games, wine, tobacco, degrading spectacles, the military, local political bosses, the Civil Guard, priests, friars, and Masses.

On August 19, Juan Ramón Jiménez met with Azaña, who encouraged him to leave Spain, telling him that he could "be more useful to Spain outside than within" (González, 2014, p. 250). He departed Madrid for Valencia on August 20 carrying little more than 3,000 pesetas and two small suitcases containing scarcely more than Juan Ramón's medicines, a few changes of clothing, and their wedding rings. On August 22 they crossed the border at La Junquera, leaving behind all their possessions, convinced they would return within a few months once the uprising had been crushed. They spent several days in Paris, scandalized by the French public's limited interest in events in Spain, despite the fact that France too was then governed by a left-wing coalition under the name Popular Front. Juan Ramón's reflections on these circumstances were unequivocal: the same force that "is attacking us now (…) will very soon attack them as well, and again" (Jiménez, 1985, p. 122).

On August 26 they sailed for New York, arriving five days later to encounter an atmosphere very similar to that of France. The military coup in Spain scarcely interested the ultraconservative media

[1] Ibid., p. 281-2. The words of Juan Ramón Jiménez were published on August 27, 1936 in the first issue of El Mono Azul: Declarations of the great Juan Ramón Jiménez.

machinery led by Randolph Hearst (Lande, 2021), which was entirely committed to the cause of the insurgents. He spent a week in New York, which he found profoundly transformed. It bore no resemblance to the New York of twenty years earlier, when he had first traveled there to marry Zenobia. Juan Ramón perceived the city as a vast soulless machine, and from there he produced one of the earliest texts in Spanish with an ecological and anti-growth sensibility: Limit of Progress (González, 2018; Ramírez, 2022).

During those same days, Juan and Zenobia opened a subscription campaign in support of Madrid's "Protection of Minors" organization, with which they had collaborated while in Spain, and made a brief trip to Washington in the hope of gathering support for the Republic's struggle against fascism (Jiménez, 1985, p. 122). Roosevelt was preparing his reelection campaign, and among Democratic ranks there was little interest in anything else. In an interview for The New Republic, Juan Ramón predicted that unless the democracies reacted in time, a new world conflagration would follow, but nobody paid attention to him: "Everyone laughed at me," the poet later wrote. "And it was all so simple," he added. "Reading Mein Kampf, by Hitler, would have been enough" (Jiménez, 1985, pp. 191–195 and 282).

On September 18, he sent a statement to an event sponsored by the American Committee in Support of Spanish Democracy, once again insisting on the same point and criticizing the abandonment to which the Western democracies had consigned the Spanish Republic. Around that same time he learned of the assassination of Federico García Lorca, news he initially found difficult to believe.

On September 29, Jiménez and Zenobia arrived in Puerto Rico, where they would remain for two months. During that time, in interviews with the press, he repeatedly reaffirmed his support for the Republic while also attempting to counter the press campaigns that identified the Republic with disorder (Jiménez, 1985, p. 122).

At the end of November, the couple traveled to Cuba, where he had been invited to deliver several lectures and continue promoting his democratic and republican principles. In response to the slander spread by the conservative press, which accused him of having fled Madrid in the face of Republican chaos merely to save his own skin, he defended himself unequivocally: "I did not flee" (Jiménez, 1985, pp. 133, 140).

In Cuba, much to the displeasure of the Cuban government -itself sympathetic to the Spanish insurgents- he also participated in several tributes to fallen brigadists and in memorial events dedicated to Federico García Lorca, among others. His defense of Republican legitimacy admitted no ambiguity whatsoever; it is impossible to infer from his words that Juan Ramón might belong to the group of intellectuals associated with the construct some have called "the Third Spain" (Blanco, 2025):

> "I have never held remunerated public office, nor do I expect to hold any under the New Republic that today or tomorrow will become Spain's definitive reality, as I sincerely hope, regardless of the many apparent and temporary successes achieved by the feudalistic

> revolution; nor do I think it necessary to add that I expect nothing either from any possible triumph of the Right (…) I deeply regret many things that have occurred in Republican Spain, things impossible to avoid in any natural or social catastrophe, but I remain always in the same place, and because such things have happened on one side, I am not therefore going to move to the other, where the same or even worse things have also occurred. I shall always remain with myself and with democracy, with honorable democrats (…) Furthermore, nothing is more false than the rebels' claim to embody the spirituality of Spain. The Clergy and the Army, the backbone of the insurrection, possess nothing spiritual in Spain. The spiritual strength of Spain resides in the people." (González, 2014, pp. 252–253).
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> "What the army and the clergy are now defending in Spain, aided by the privileged classes, whatever they may say (…) is nothing more than a new feudalism." (p. 257).
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> "The Government of the Republic did everything within its power to contain the overflow of madness (…) We all heard broadcast (…) the speeches of La Pasionaria, of Indalecio Prieto (…) of Azaña (…) compare them (…) with those of certain rebel generals (…) Both sides committed atrocities, but while the Republican authorities attempted by every means to prevent them, the rebel authorities encouraged and even ordered them. That is the difference. While in Madrid, one night I heard over the radio the most moving address imaginable: an appeal by La Pasionaria directed to the Republican militias urging them to respect the lives of prisoners and to answer rebel atrocities with human compassion. How sharply this contrasts with the attitude of Queipo de Llano, preaching to his Moors and Foreign Legion troops a war without quarter against the so-called Reds, urging them not even to spare women or children." (p. 254).

Jiménez's (1985) views regarding the insurgent military officers did not change over time, and beneath a photograph of the dictator Franco together with other generals in Burgos, he wrote: "The defenders of Western Christian Civilization: swagger and tavern. Cheap bravado and the underworld. Chorus." Beneath another photograph of Hitler he noted: "Can this gorilla, pig, shark truly govern the world?"

In January 1939, after more than two years in Cuba, the Jiménez couple embarked once again for New York, where they spent two months before traveling on to Coral Gables, invited by the University of Miami to deliver lectures, remaining there for three years (Palau, 1957, p. 302). In April, the "civil war" came to an end, and in June Juan Ramón's apartment in Madrid was raided (Cadenas, 2009), from which three Falangists (apprentice poets Félix Ros, Carlos Martínez Barbeito, and Carlos Sentís) removed books, documents, letters, and even his typewriter. Zenobia's car, she being the second woman in Spain to obtain a driver's license, had long since been confiscated as well. Their home was absorbed into the National Heritage administration and, some years later, its contents transferred to Madrid's Romantic Museum.

Not even the end of the war interrupted the Jiménez couple's solidarity with Republicans. As late as March 5, Juan Ramón sent a telegram of support to Julián Besteiro. Likewise, they signed manifestos and opened fundraising subscriptions in La Prensa of New York in order to collect money for food

supplies destined for refugees in France, while also attempting to channel financial assistance to intellectuals confined in the improvised refugee camps established in southeastern France and Oran (Jiménez, 1985, p. 232). Upon hearing the false news of Rivas Cherif's execution, Zenobia recorded in her diary the terrible crisis into which Juan Ramón fell: "the night he learned of Rivas's sentence, after vomiting forty-three times, they had to carry him out on a stretcher, in the ambulance; he had suffered a total collapse" (Camprubí, 2006, p. 222).

Likewise, the end of the war -unlike what occurred with others, such as Ortega (Ramos, 2024)- did not lead Juan Ramón to compromise with the Franco regime. Just as he had already done on two previous occasions, in 1946 he again rejected José María Pemán's invitation to join the Royal Spanish Academy. In his incorruptible independence, he would also criticize the maneuvers of Indalecio Prieto and Negrín in the administration of Republican funds (González, 2025).

In 1942, immediately after the United States entered the Second World War, Juan Ramón offered his services to the American State Department in order to "help defend the great ideals of the spirit threatened by such dark abysses" (Garfias, 1973, p. 133). Hired by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in Washington, he was scheduled to begin, in September 1943, a series of radio broadcasts lasting between ten and fifteen minutes, twice weekly, devoted to literary topics intended to "elevate the human spirit through the insertion of poetry into the social meaning of life" (p. 133). For his first talk, Juan Ramón prepared a striking text in which he declared:

> "I am Spanish. Since 1939 I have lived in these United States, where moral and physical liberty are still respected. I like living in the country of Freedom, because I have been, I am, and I wish to remain until my end, a free man (…) I have never belonged to any political, social, or religious sect (…) nor have I ever received a single cent from any political party, monarchy, republic, or anarchy." (Jiménez, 2010, p. 21).

Juan Ramón's objective with these radio lectures was to sustain the argument that modernist literature had succeeded in forging bonds between Spaniards and Spanish Americans beyond wars, politics, or imperialisms, and that upon this foundation it would be possible to construct a spiritual and cultural harmony between the United States and the Hispanic world, enabling exchange and mutual enrichment, the first step toward the inter- and transcultural ethical-spiritual planetary community envisioned by the poet.

He became deeply enthusiastic about the project and drafted several texts while outlining others, but when informed that his talks would first have to pass through military censorship, he rejected the offer, renouncing a highly attractive salary, no small matter, given that the Jiménez couple were then living on the edge of financial precarity.

It is striking how Juan Ramón, after leaving Spain and partly driven by material necessity, devoted himself to activities he had previously rejected -namely, delivering lectures and teaching seminars at cultural institutions and universities- despite the difficulties this created for him from a research

perspective, since his entire library had remained in Madrid. Juan Ramón would lament this loss until the end of his life:

> “The materials I lacked at that time, and which I believed would be easy to obtain (…) I have still been unable to secure (…) Washington possesses a great library, but I am not a man of public libraries (…) My entire beautiful private library, so perfectly suited to my tastes and my own work, was stolen and dispersed through appropriation and sale (Madrid 1939), and I have never been able to rebuild another.” (Jiménez, 1983, p. 13).

Juan Ramón designed an extremely ambitious work plan, driven by the expectations he had invested in his radio lectures and later developed -once those broadcasts had been canceled- through seminars and conferences delivered in different forums. With almost no reference materials available, he wrote on Modernism, its antecedents, its presence in Spanish America, Spain, and the United States, as well as on San Juan de la Cruz, Bécquer, Poe, Martí, Whitman, Dickinson, Eliot, Frost, Democracy and Aristocracy, and many other topics.

In 1943, Zenobia obtained a position as a Spanish professor at the University of Maryland, and the couple settled in Riverdale. The following year Juan Ramón taught several seminars at the same university. In 1948, they traveled to Argentina, where Juan Ramón had been invited to deliver lectures that generated enormous anticipation, later frustrated when the poet focused instead on themes such as joyful labor, his poetic communism, and the limits of progress, in a social context -that of Peronism- largely unreceptive to such ideas. In 1951, they relocated to Puerto Rico, where Juan Ramón would teach a course on Modernism two years later.

One of Juan Ramón’s obsessions in exile was the gradual loss of freshness in spoken Spanish, and of his own Spanish within a predominantly English-speaking environment. He reflected constantly on the void into which his language had fallen, frozen in 1936 when he left Spain, while the Spanish spoken in Spain continued evolving without him, and while in the Americas he encountered forms of Spanish that were not truly his own, however much he tried to identify tonalities and chromatic nuances in Caribbean Spanish that reminded him of Andalusia: “With my wife I always speak Spanish, of course, but now we correct one another and even consult the dictionary” (1990, p. 707). “Today, uprooted and linguistically dispossessed, I believe that none of the Spaniards I know outside Spain speaks in Spanish, truly speaks Spanish, the Spanish that I myself am losing” (p. 532).

> “Very well then: ingratitude and slander, the honor of being blacklisted, the official loss of my citizenship, the theft of my life’s work (…) But at what a price! The exile from my language (…) Because in exile, without my own languages around me, I do nothing, I am nobody, I am more dead than dead, I am lost” (Jiménez, 1985, p. 48).

Hence his other great drama: uprootedness, the loss of Andalusian speech, the profound orphanhood produced by exile, which transformed him, as he himself said, into a man deprived of language. Near the end of his life, the constant memory of his hometown and its people would perhaps find its finest

expression in the letter he wrote to the servants of his childhood home, an attempt at literary redemption and repentance in which he apologized to them all (Concha the errand woman, José the steward, Josefito, Vito Villegas, Manuel de la Encina, caretaker of Fuentepiña, etc.), asking forgiveness for

> "my misguided youth, my absurd conduct, my youthful shame at being what deep down I truly was and would become… how much I learned… from all of you, whom at the time I believed to be of so little importance! I suffered greatly afterward remembering you, no longer able, unfortunately, to amend my past unconsciousness; perhaps through you I relived my false reality, my mistaken history." (Jiménez, 1973, p. 301),

already immortalized forever in the pages of Platero and I (Jiménez, 2025).

Only his trip to Argentina in 1948 briefly rescued him from this fundamental dispossession of language: "The miracle of my Spanish was performed by the Argentine Republic (…) That very night I spoke Spanish throughout my whole body with my soul" (Jiménez, 1973, p. 283)… and this revival kept him relatively active until 1954. That year Platero and I was translated into Swedish under the dreadful title Silver and I, much to Juan Ramón's displeasure. Nine years earlier, Gabriela Mistral, in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, had acknowledged Juan Ramón Jiménez's guiding influence upon Spanish-language poetry. In 1952, the poet's name appeared for the first time among the Nobel nominees. In 1954, Juan Ramón was nominated again, finishing in third place. On October 28, 1956, Zenobia died; three days earlier, Juan Ramón had received from her own lips the news that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize. "Now?" (Alegre, 2008, p. 187), the poet exclaimed bitterly. Two years later, he himself died at the age of seventy-seven.

Juan Ramón's political thought was deeply rooted in Krausism, the philosophical movement he had absorbed at the beginning of the century through his admired teacher Francisco Giner de los Ríos and other figures from Madrid's intellectual circles. Spanish Krausism was, in reality, a variant of late nineteenth-century republicanism, aimed at reforming and renewing Spain through a program that included:

- The construction of a constitutional State governed by the rule of law, capable of guaranteeing all citizens the full development of their potential and capacities, while defending positions situated between liberal individualism and socialism.

- Education as the essential driving force behind the progress, modernization, and moral improvement of Spanish society.

- The secularization of society, advocating a pantheistic and spiritual conception of religiosity.

All these aspects permeate his political conception of society and remain clearly visible within Juan Ramón's ethical worldview: in his search for everything noble and pure, in spiritual cultivation, in action guided exclusively by love and disinterested altruism, in respect for nature, artistic heritage, and

culture.

His firm commitment to the education of the people, his criticism of the material and spiritual misery in which they were kept, his love of nature, and his respect for all living things were likewise grounded in his contact with the intellectuals of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. It is under the broader influence of the Krausists that Juan Ramón's commitment to pacifism, hygienism, culture, and nature must be situated. Through them he came to know the Guadarrama mountain range, a landscape the poet would later pour into the book Pastorales (Jiménez, 2009), the product of the excursions and walks encouraged by his friends, who defended the healing power of contact with nature. It is also within this intellectual climate that Platero and I (Jiménez, 2025) was written, a work so highly praised by Francisco Giner and Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, both mentors and friends who helped Juan Ramón reformulate his appreciation for the popular -very present in chapters such as The May Cross, El Rocío, Corpus, etc.- as opposed to the merely plebeian. That is to say, a preference for what remained authentic and uncontaminated by cosmopolitanism, in line with the ideas of Ruskin, Thoreau, or William Morris: that natural and open-air aristocracy which, for Juan Ramón, survived in whatever remained within ordinary people that was natural and simple, just and delicate, a shared ideal patrimony that had to be elevated through cultivation and beauty.

The Spanish Civil War therefore represented a profound rupture, a break with everything that had come before: the loss of an entire intellectual environment, dead friends, professional and publishing doors abruptly closed to someone who had now become unacceptable to Franco's regime, an untouchable figure with no place in the new National Catholic Spain. In contrast to the dominant attitude among many exiles, Juan Ramón remained loyal to the democratic and legitimate government of the Spanish Republic and, despite repeated attempts by the Franco regime -and even pressure from within his own family- he never agreed to return.

Closed lyricism.

Juan Ramón Jiménez often spoke of how his work had gradually taken shape through three distinct processes, three transformations that each represented a kind of rebirth for the poet, to the point that he even specified that these had occurred in roughly twenty-year cycles. Beyond the anecdotal dimension, the question remains whether it is possible to trace within the overall evolution of his work these three periods, which, interestingly enough, also coincide with three wars.

While the Cuban insurrection that would culminate in the Spanish-American War unfolded, Juan Ramón began his modernist formation, rooted in feeling and color, a phase extending roughly from 1895/96 to 1916/17. During this period, alongside Rubén Darío and Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón participated actively in renewing, innovating, and elevating Spanish-language poetry to some of the highest achievements of literary modernity.

During the years of the First World War, now working alone and facing the incomprehension of his former allies, Juan Ramón entered his second phase, extending from 1916 to 1936. Marked by the

influence of contemporary Anglo-Saxon poetry, his own work became infused with nakedness, intellectuality, and conceptual essentialism, reaching perhaps its finest achievement in Diary of a Newlywed Poet (Jiménez, 2021). Together with works such as Stone and Sky (Jiménez, 2020) and the Second Poetic Anthology (Jiménez, 2000), these books became literary guidebooks for what would later be known as the Generation of '27[2]: a group of young poets formed under the guidance and protection of Juan Ramón Jiménez himself, among them García Lorca, Alberti, Salinas, Guillén, Cernuda, Altolaguirre, Prados, Aleixandre, Domenchina, and Bergamín. His influence spread throughout the Spanish-speaking world during the 1930s and 1940s, giving rise to groups such as the Contemporáneos in Mexico and the Piedracielistas in Colombia, while shaping the poetic formation of numerous writers in Cuba, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, and elsewhere. This influence would later stand in sharp contrast to the almost nonexistent impact he exerted on Latin American poetry during the second half of the twentieth century, partly because his most fundamental books remained scarcely known there.

Beginning in 1923, Juan Ramón ceased publishing and immersed himself in an idea that would never leave him: rewriting or "recreating," as he preferred to say, in order to refine his earlier work and organize and regroup the entirety of his poetry and prose. Into this task he poured the efforts of all those years. He himself confessed, in the spring of 1926, that he had discovered his living within poetry prevented him from thinking in terms of writing books of poetry. He had already stopped publishing several years earlier and would maintain this attitude until shortly before the war, when he was persuaded to publish his complete works. From that moment onward, Juan Ramón began speaking of Work in Progress (Cuevas, 1991) to define his ceaseless labor, joking that the ideal place to preserve his work would be the newspaper, where everything written each day could be poured directly into print and read by all, justifying this idea by claiming that

> "since poetry is life, it can and should exist among everything else commonly called life: crime, theft, death, birth, advertisements, beauty contests, announcements — all of them seeds of possible poetry. And what possibilities might emerge from that daily contact with science, art, poetry! How many people might return home, to their meals, to their beds, with a different vision of their lives, received in the moment of the streetcar, the walk, the office!" (Jiménez, 2013, p. 184).

This identification between poetry and life, which Juan Ramón intuitively sensed, may never have been fully realized in public, but it certainly was in the personal and intimate sphere, as he confessed in a July 1943 letter to Luis Cernuda: "My dream has been… to reach a day when I no longer write. Writing is merely a preparation for not writing, for the state of poetic grace, intellectual or sensuous. To be poetry oneself and not merely a poet" (Jiménez, 2013, p. 296). So far did this idea extend that he eventually imagined his ideal work as a book whose pages would all remain blank, entitled Unwritten

[2] From Rome, in 1969, Alberti wrote of Juan Ramón, already dead for more than a decade: "Antonio Espina, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Dámaso Alonso, García Lorca, Bergamín, and myself… and somewhat later Altolaguirre, Prados, Cernuda, Aleixandre… we were all being noticed, singled out by you as rising stars in the poetic sky of Spain… I believe there will never

Poetry.

In 1936, after thirteen years of editorial silence, Juan Ramón Jiménez published a new book, doing so as the opening gesture of a project through which he intended to bring into print everything he had written up to that point in twenty-one volumes under the collective title Unity (Jiménez, 1999). That same year, coinciding with the Madrid Book Fair, Song (Jiménez, 1993) appeared, but the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War completely destroyed these ambitions.

His third phase, extending from 1936 to 1954, comprised what Juan Ramón himself called his years of definition and conclusion, his final period. During these years he aspired both to continue writing and, simultaneously, to relive his earlier work in the light of the present. Books published during this period included The Total Station with the Songs of the New Light (Jiménez, 2006), which Juan Ramón claimed to have written between 1923 and 1939, though it was only published in 1946 in Buenos Aires by Losada; Romances of Coral Gables (Jiménez, 2011), published in 1948 by Editorial Stylo in Mexico City; and Animal at the Core (Jiménez, 1981), written during his journey to Argentina and published in Buenos Aires in 1949 by Editorial Pleamar. Left unpublished during the poet's lifetime were On the Other Shore (Jiménez, 1974), written between 1939 and 1942; A Meridian Hill (Jiménez, 2003), written between 1942 and 1952 in Washington and Riverdale; Desired and Desiring God and Of Rivers That Flow Away, written in Puerto Rico between 1952 and 1954[3]; as well as all his prose works (Alert, Memories, Time, Compassionate Wing, Golden Age, Island of Sympathy, etc.), many of which have only begun to appear in recent decades, and under editorial criteria highly disputed among scholars because of the immense difficulty involved in organizing the enormous body of unpublished material Juan Ramón left behind. As he himself remarked:

> "I never write a book. Out of my constant labor, they form themselves… before me I always have ten, twenty, forty books forming themselves on their own. Many people who meet me ask: 'What are you working on?' I never know how to answer. If I tell them: eighty books, they laugh and think it Andalusian exaggeration."[4]

In the final stage of his lyrical life, a new poetic writing consolidated itself: a complete summation, revived, recreated, and purified from all that had come before, driven by the illusory desire to reduce life and work onto the same plane, without center. This became the final poetic universe inhabited by Juan Ramón's poetic spirit, his last intimate revolution, shaped equally by dynamism, vertiginous rhythm, and inner musicality, as by meditative and static calm, what he himself called the poetic state, his successive consciousness of beauty. It was a revolution of simplicity, stripping away, and essential search, aspiring to achieve the identification of life and poetry: living within poetry as an intimate, civic,

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again exist another poet more listened to, more loved than you were in those years." Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, García Lorca. Poetic Anthology. Ediciones Nauta. Barcelona, 1970 (p. 184).

[3] On the Other Shore and Of Rivers That Flow Away were first published in 1974; Desired and Desiring God in 1964. A Meridian Hill fared even worse: in an almost unheard-of case for a Nobel Prize-winning author, it was not published for the first time until 2003.

[4] Juan Ramón Jiménez. Anthology of Critical Prose (Criticism and Evocation) I. Visor, 2013, pp. 145–146. In the book Juan Ramón Jiménez in His Own Voice by Juan Guerrero Ruiz, the poet from Moguer states that he had enough work to organize into 120 volumes. Ricardo Gullón, in his book Conversations with Juan Ramón Jiménez, records the poet himself saying that he possessed enough unpublished original work for some one hundred and fifty books.

and ascetic project simultaneously, his ethical-aesthetic vision governed by the highest existential and moral demands, always oriented toward that final ideal which was no longer simply to write poetry, but to have become poetry itself: to arrive at poetry without the need for writing it. Such was the ultimate ideal of the final blank book: the definitive transfiguration of all written work, superior in every respect to the work itself, the fulfilled destiny of the poet in his movement toward moral perfection.

The end of the Spanish Civil War also forced the poet to confront the personal catastrophe of learning that his Madrid apartment had been broken into and plundered at the close of the conflict by a group of aspiring fascist poets, and that the work carefully preserved during the war years by the servants of his household had been stolen, scattered, and destroyed.

> “Did Félix Ros and his people also steal the pages I wrote about my mother’s death? Written beneath the Madrid sunlight of those autumn days, after returning from Moguer, I could never write them again… What would I not give to have those pages here with me in this room in Coral Gables.” (Jiménez, 2012, p. 233).

Juan Ramón was fully aware of what had happened, to the point that throughout the remainder of his life he never ceased trying to recover what had been lost. Yet, once the conflict had passed, he also began to confront his new condition and the necessity of continuing the Work. Faced with the material impossibility of recovering everything left behind in Spain, the work now began to rebuild itself from a gaze turned simultaneously inward and outward, within the same space and time, shaping itself into a simple, clean, purified expression of an ultimate utterance forged from existential completion and mystical ascent. This expression recovered distinctly Spanish poetic forms such as the romance and the popular song, through which -despite often falling into the baroque vices of obscurity, digression, verbal games, and neologisms- the poet would pour forth his infinite memory, his god given and made and childlike all at once: mixed, remade, fluid, transparent.

The Total Station with the Songs of the New Light, published in 1946, together with Desired and Desiring God and Animal at the Core, which includes the Romances of Coral Gables, both from 1949, constitute the confirmation of this process of fulfillment, always dissatisfied, always searching with longing enthusiasm for a totality that continually escapes him through its own naming: eternity, god, the absolute, the infinite, transparency, beauty… a trans-reality that speaks clearly of this inward journey toward the depths of the self, sustained in mystical rapture; a state of grace from which the poet returns only to realize that the Work itself was nothing more than the means, the vehicle toward infinity, the pathway to dissolution within the Whole through the Beauty of pure naming.

One would have to go back, in Spanish literature, to Saint John of the Cross’s Spiritual Canticle to find a tone and rhythm comparable to that which Juan Ramón sustains in his final work: filled with repetitions, stammerings, exclamations… suggestive, incoherent, loose, impressionistic, intense, naked, mysterious. It is a language saturated with references to his earlier work, his memories, his obsessions; constructed upon a framework without temporal or spatial limits, an overflowing structure in which here and there, now and then, all and less, end and endlessness, inside and outside

interlock, overlap, and annul one another in a supreme exercise aimed at destroying rational and Cartesian logic as the manifest expression of the poet's final consciousness, his achieved immanence.

This idea had haunted Juan Ramón almost since his youth, when his contact with Symbolists and Parnassians, republicans, Krausists, and libertarians -together with his own negative personal experiences with Catholic religion and religious authorities- gradually shaped within him a vague pantheism defending the primacy of internal religious experience and the rejection of all transcendence, since everything is united by its essence and nothing created can be severed from the natural world.

All this creative process would culminate in Juan Ramón Jiménez's great poem, Space, the place where past and present, experience and memory, reality and imagination, obsessions and symbols all pour themselves into a single current of utterance that is simultaneously recapitulation, reckoning, expression, fusion, and erasure of a life: the stage upon which matter's painful aspiration to transcend its own contingency unfolds.

Building upon the technical foundations of interior monologue and the free association of ideas explored by the avant-gardes, Juan Ramón succeeded in producing a stream of text sustained by no argument other than its own unfolding meditation upon lived and imagined experience, its own succession and metamorphosis along a path of self-knowledge in which writing itself -as he would later confess to Luis Cernuda- is nothing more than a preparation for not writing, a vehicle enabling him to attain the poetic, intellectual, and sensuous state of grace where one is no longer poet but poetry itself. This became the objective of his poetic labor during his final years, and Space undoubtedly stands as the clearest and most complete testimony to his attempt to live within poetry, an expression of the drift of static contemplation, the trace of one who becomes a stream of full consciousness within it.

Within the poem one may detect the influence of James Joyce, whom Juan Ramón greatly admired, especially in the use of interior dialogue, as well as the technique of automatic writing so cherished by the Surrealists and which, in Juan Ramón's judgment -with greater or lesser success- could also be traced in Blake, Yeats, Eliot, or Pound. In any case, one should not dismiss the possibility that Space synthesizes many of the readings undertaken by the poet during those years, above all the Upanishads, Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius, Leibniz, Spinoza, Einstein, Huxley, and other scientific texts on quantum physics, Buddhism, Confucianism… all under the unavoidable presence of the mystics, fundamentally Saint John of the Cross, whose spirit permeates this modern mysticism, desolate and anguished by the annihilation of bodily form and the fate of consciousness. This is perceptible as the unconscious and musical murmur of language flowing not toward union with God, as in Saint John of the Cross, but from a desolate self, uncertain of what will become of its consciousness, seeking meaning in death… a search that will reach fuller articulation slightly later in the poems gathered in The Total Station, where the poet locates the divine within himself insofar as it is the universal consciousness of beauty existing simultaneously within and beyond him, integrated and fused with it through cultivation, love, and contemplation.

Space began to be written in verse around 1941. In Conversations with Juan Ramón, by the scholar Ricardo Gullón (1958, p. 15), the poet confessed:

> "all my life I have cherished the idea of a continuous poem (how many millimeters, meters, kilometers?) without any concrete subject, sustained solely by surprise, rhythm, discovery, light, successive illusion… Whatever this writing may be has come freely to my poetic consciousness and to my relative expression at its proper moment… without doubt it was in my final years that this answer was meant to arrive."

The technique itself was not new for the poet; in reality he had been experimenting with it for many years. Throughout his poetry one can trace Juan Ramón's fascination with dissolving the boundaries of logical thought, annulled through the confusion of times, the fragile frontier between reality and imagination, between the living and the dead, the overlapping of lived and dreamed experience, the confusion of temporalities and spaces, although never before had he achieved the forceful results embodied in this extensive prose poem, uninterrupted, without paragraphs, without beginning or end: Space.

In 1941, Juan Ramón submitted Space for publication in verse form and only partially complete; its final prose version, after numerous eliminations, additions, and reorganizations of materials, dates from the end of 1953, when the poet was seventy-two years old. Thereafter his health prevented any further return to the work. He had once declared that his dream was to bring the conclusion of his work into coincidence with the conclusion of his life, desiring to see everything united and compressed within a single embrace of time and space, closing life and writing simultaneously. Yet this desire collided with the harsh reality of Zenobia's grave illness and the worsening of his own health problems, which prevented him from surrendering once more to the joyful labor that had sustained him throughout his life.

Simultaneously with Space, Juan Ramón began writing Time, which explains why certain contemporary editions tend to associate it with Space, and why the two have even been published together, although Time was originally conceived as an independent book project. It grew through fragments before remaining unfinished around 1949. It was not published until 1986 and represents another exercise in interrupted memory and writing, whose greatest interest lies in the way it reveals both the techniques of Juan Ramón's poetic production during these years -interior monologue, magical realism, dream worlds- and the mystical experiences that he was undergoing with increasing frequency and intensity, or at least what Michel Hulin (1993) termed "wild mysticism" or "spontaneous mystical experience," occurring outside religious hierophany and elaborate systems of belief, even though it may identify with them. Such experiences arise through revelations generated within the individual when life and nature themselves become religion: a sudden sensation of spiritual communion with nature, entry into an atemporal reality triggered perhaps by an apparently insignificant childhood memory, the fleeting perception of a smell or a taste… diverse forms of unexpected confrontation with a numinous reality that produce the experience of an "oceanic feeling," detached from institutional religion and placing us beyond the habitual coordinates of everyday reality.

Juan Ramón Jiménez expressed it in these terms:

> "I remain motionless, fused with everything else, without any sensation of foreign or personal matter. Like water within water; a whole that does not alter. At this hour my being is like a solitary beach in darkness, and the total time of my life washes over me like a sea that has turned all my shipwrecks into serenity. Each memory breaks within me like a wave, an immense surge, reaching the furthest pore of my total being and saturating me with its condensed substance." (Jiménez, 2012, pp. 231–232).

Evidence of this state of grace, jubilation, and illumination can be found in the poetry collections Animal at the Core (1948) and Desired and Desiring God (1949), in which -as the poet himself acknowledged- pantheistic mysticism appears as the supreme form of beauty, the final experience of an immanent god that is matter fused within consciousness.

Juan Ramón Jiménez also left unpublished an immense body of prose work that has only begun to be edited for the first time in recent years. Among these texts is Island of Sympathy, begun in 1936 upon Juan Ramón's arrival in Puerto Rico, during what was to become his first stop in his wandering through the Americas and the Caribbean. When he returned in 1951 to settle permanently on the island, he would say of Puerto Rico that it was "a ship anchored with coral in the sea; I shall remain here forever… It seems to me that I am happy alive and shall be happy dead."[5]

Epilogue

Perhaps the myth of the "two Spains" is true, though not because one Spain is left-wing and the other right-wing, but because among Spaniards it is easy to distinguish between those eager for experience and experimentation, alive, original, different, with their gaze fixed upon the future, intent on testing new forms, relationships, combinations, revolutions, and inventions; and those who faithfully embody that backward, reactionary, cowardly, monochrome, exhausted, and somber Spain which, as Juan Ramón Jiménez so accurately described in his magnificent War in Spain, wallows in its ignorance while vainly invoking a cultural tradition to whose creation it would never have contributed, since its true tradition is made of renunciations and betrayals. It is that Spain which, though today it boasts of Miguel Servet in the sixteenth century, would never have hesitated to light the pyre upon which he was burned; or which, while today reciting García Lorca's poetry, would yesterday have willingly joined his firing squad.

Within this latter Spain, a figure such as Juan Ramón Jiménez could scarcely find a place. As he himself recalls in the aforementioned volume, since 1936 he had written more about war and peace, rights and duties, than about poetry itself. For Juan Ramón, poetic solitude and political society became communicating vessels of the same self, and as both a child of his time and a free and incorruptible conscience, he repeatedly reaffirmed his political position. Opposed to the false aristocracy -the idle aristocrats of lineage living off human blood- he defended a true aristocracy: that

[5] Juan Ramón Jiménez. *Isla de la simpatía*. Ed. Visor. 2011, pág. 78.

of those who, through their humble, daily, and joyful labor, also cultivated themselves in spirit and consciousness through simplicity and inner discipline. To elevate the people toward this natural aristocracy required, for the poet, removing the obstacles that prevented the establishment of an economic collectivism capable of bringing education and well-being to the people, food, hygiene, books, and so forth. In other words, a communism that would guarantee sufficient material conditions for the collective while respecting the infinite immaterial dimension of each individual: the spiritual freedom of every person as part of a collective consciousness open to the beauty of free invention. Through this ascending process, the people would gradually cast off the worst elements of nationalist localism, making way for continental federations as a prelude to a future world federation.

“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” Shelley declares in A Defence of Poetry (2020), because where there is no imagination, there is fascism. Where there is no empathy, there is fascism. Imagination is the great instrument of moral good, and the poet seeks to shape the world through the power of imagination, driven by the desire for beauty and governed by the law of love, which proclaims that the more one gives, the more one possesses.

Juan Ramón did not aspire for everyone to write poetry, but for everyone to become poetry -poetic living, vocational living- something now devalued by our productivist and mercantilist society, which reduces poetic language to a commodity in the service of advertising and consumption, and reduces the poet to a mere anecdote, in a country that possesses one of the greatest lyrical traditions in the world, despite the fact that its sole cultural program seems to consist in marginalizing its creators while sowing banality and triviality among its citizens. Thus, for Juan Ramón, more important than writing poetry was experiencing life within poetry, and it was this mode of living that had to be learned through inner cultivation, education, joyful and vocational labor, and attentiveness to what surrounds and constitutes us. Juan Ramón’s proposal is a great invitation to experience ourselves as awakened and unveiled consciousness, far removed from mechanical, programmed, shallow, ignorant, and ghostlike existence.

Whoever pursues poetic living, whoever disciplines and trains themselves in the poetic state, will experience the joyful savoring of entering into the mystery of the immanent and the transcendent; they will inhabit the dense instant, the plenary moment that tears away the veils of understanding and grants access to a qualitatively superior state of consciousness, the ancient ecstasy that has always found in song and poetry its firmest allies in apprehending the sacred, recognizing oneself as such, and acting accordingly.

Within Spain, only a few figures -Gerardo Diego among them- were capable of perceiving the fundamental impulse represented for poetry by Juan Ramón Jiménez’s late work, and they attempted to disseminate and make it known, though within an inhospitable climate. First, because of the very nature of the dictatorial regime, which in cultural matters advocated a return to the Golden Age and placed literature at the service of nostalgia for Catholic and imperial Spain, vigorously avoiding and censoring the work of authors who, like Juan Ramón, were considered politically suspect and anticlerical. At the same time, beginning in the 1950s, a literature of opposition to the regime gradually

emerged in Spain, a socially and civically oriented realist poetry that uncritically adopted the tendentious attacks spread during the 1930s by certain literary journals portraying Juan Ramón as isolated within an ivory tower.[6] This condemned his work to a highly secondary place within the Spanish literary panorama, a circumstance reinforced by editorial censorship, since in Spain only his most lyrical and least politically charged works were permitted publication.

As an example, it is enough to note that his War in Spain was not published in its entirety, uncensored, until as recently as 2009. This situation of neglect and lack of engagement with his work did not change with the arrival of democracy in Spain — neither during the initial culturalist reaction, which continued to misread Juan Ramón, nor later when the hegemony of so-called “poetry of experience” once again relegated broader interest in the work of the poet from Moguer. Despite everything, very few deny that, with poems such as Space, Juan Ramón attained one of the highest expressive achievements in all of Spanish poetry, fulfilling the youthful prophecy Rubén Darío once pronounced over him when, at the age of nineteen, he told him: “Juan Ramón, you move inward.”.

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[6] In *War in Spain*, the poet from Moguer defended himself in these terms: “I was considered an ivory-tower dweller by certain people because I did not frequent the café circles, the literary reviews, the casinos, the theater, the brothel. No, I did not go...” Numerous texts show him combating this kind of conspiracy directed against him: “I have wasted enough time helping them, only for them all to unite against me,” collected in Juan Guerrero Ruiz’s *Juan Ramón Jiménez in His Own Voice* (1961, p. 409); and likewise: “Although so much has been said about my ivory tower, I have always laughed at it, and a long time ago I already declared, as my own aesthetic definition: open rooftop terrace. Elevated and for everyone,” in *Parallel Criticism* (1975, p. 207); or again: “I am partially known, and always only in the same partial way,” in *Ideology* (1990).

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