

JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ: OF NAKED POETRY AND THE MASTER POET (1916-1936)¹

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The phrase *naked poetry*, symbolic of Jiménez' newly found style which made him the master of Spanish poetry in the twenties, was coined shortly after his marriage to Zenobia Camprubí in 1916. The new technique helped to establish him as the leader of a brilliant generation of poets in twentieth century Spain and it appears in *Eternidades*, a collection written after the couple's return from their wedding trip. To understand the full meaning of Jiménez' symbolic phrase is to understand him not only as a poet but as a man. The concept of nakedness represents a stylistic phenomenon, a unifying force in his life and works, and it also embodies a personal and artistic goal.

The poem in which the symbol first appeared has yet to find its exact echo in English translation. It consists of six stanzas of three lines each, except for the fourth stanza which has only two lines, and a final four-line stanza. Most lines are of seven syllables, with a few intervening verses of nine or eleven. It has rhythm and harmony without the help of rhyme or meter and it is devoid of ornamental expressions. There are only four adjectives in the entire poem and only two uncommon words—*fastuosa* and *iracundia*—the others represent everyday diction:

She first appeared, pure,
clothed in innocence.
And I loved her like a child.

Then slowly she began donning
odd and unknown dresses.
And I began unconsciously to hate her.

She turned into a queen,
pompous among her treasures . . .
What an icy and senseless anger!

But gradually she began to disrobe.
And I began to smile at her.

She was left with the tunic
of her former innocence.
I believed in her once more.

She took off the tunic
and appeared completely naked . . .
My lifelong passion, naked
poetry, mine for always.

“Vino, primero, pura, / vestida de inocencia. / Y la amé como un niño. // Luego se fue vistiendo / de no sé qué ropajes. / Y la fui odiando, sin saberlo. // Llegó a ser una reina, / fastuosa de tesoros . . . / ¡Qué iracundia de yel y sin sentido! // . . . Mas se fue desnudando. / Y lo le sonreía. // Se quedó con la túnica, / de su inocencia antigua. / Creí de nuevo en ella. // Y se quitó la túnica, / y apareció desnuda toda... / ¡Oh pasión de mi vida, poesía / desnuda, mía para siempre!” Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Libros de poesía*, (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959), p. 555. Hereafter abbreviated LP.

The poem functions as a metaphor. It is about the robing and disrobing of a woman loved by the speaker and finally identified with poetry. The first stanza speaks of the arrival of a pure female entity who came to him dressed in her innocence. He loved her like a child. Then she began to dress in strange clothes and unknowingly he hated her (second stanza). She became a queen gaudily dressed in priceless garments. This was an ironic, bitter and senseless thing in the eyes of the speaker (third stanza). But as she began to disrobe, he began to smile upon her (fourth stanza). She was left with the tunic of her old innocence and he again believed in her (fifth stanza). She then took off her tunic and appeared totally naked. Until this point, the action has been in the past; the speaker then turns to the present tense and addresses this female object directly, calling her “my lifelong passion, naked poetry, mine for always.”

Most critics have read literally the phrase *naked poetry*, but it

can also be applied, metaphorically, to the beloved woman. Studying the life and works of Jiménez, I have found a parallel between the evolution of his poetic style and the sentimental episodes of his life. In the poem on naked poetry, each stanza corresponds in correct chronological order and duration to an episode in his sentimental life. The love of his adolescent years, best exemplified by the fair and chaste girl from his native town, Blanca Hernández-Pinzón, coincided with his first poetic works, sweet, romantic and simple. Thus woman and poetry could be said to have been dressed *in innocence*. Under the spell of the Spanish-American modernist writer Rubén Darío, the elegant Parnassian and Symbolist poet who influenced Hispanic letters at the beginning of the twentieth century, Jiménez, who had gone to Madrid to meet him, wrote over-sentimental, over-adorned, morbid poetry, which was collected and published in 1900 in two volumes, *Ninfeas* and *Almas de violeta*. He succeeded in regaining some of the simplicity of his first works in the exquisite ballads of *Arias tristes* and *Jardines lejanos*, of 1903-1904, written when he was in a Catholic clinic in Madrid recovering from a nervous breakdown and in love with one of his nurses, a Sister of Charity. But shortly thereafter he followed again the modernistic trend of creating elaborate, perfect rhythms and verses of fourteen syllables in the French manner. Upon his departure from the capital and his return to his native town, deprived of the select, chaste female companionship for which his romantic sensibility yearned (e.g., Blanca, the adolescent girl friend; Sor Amalia Murillo, the Sister of Charity), he became obsessed with women and sex and he wrote erotic love poems sublimating past affairs and friendships. The theme of love lost was told and retold in a hundred ways and the music became monotonous.

There was another short period after 1909 when he was enamored of Louise Grimm, a refined and sensitive American woman whom he had met in Madrid and who had recently terminated her marriage because of her husband's misconduct. Louise found comfort in Jiménez' friendship and he in hers. At this time his poetry oscillated between eroticism and religiosity. Poetic thoughts of Louise were noble, akin to the pious thoughts reflected in his religious poetry, but an elaborate style was the predominant note from 1900 to 1913. The two stanzas in the poem on naked poetry which speak of the beloved dressing in strange clothes and becoming a gaudily-clad queen parallel these two periods of his writings in Madrid and Moguer, as well as his obsession with women. The short two-verse stanza speaking of the beloved disrobing is representative not only of his

more simple style but of his attachment for a spiritual type of woman, such as Louise Grimm.

In 1913 Jiménez returned to Madrid and met Zenobia Camprubí, whom he would finally marry and who, in his opinion, embodied all the virtues he had sought in women and in poetry. She was completely natural, plain in manner and speech and a lady of quality. She was fair, cultivated, chaste but not prudish; she was child-like in disposition, without being childish; there was an open, sunny quality in her demeanor and she was completely at ease in her social relations with members of the opposite sex. She had been brought up as an American and had spent her formative years in the United States.

Zenobia disliked the erotic tone of Jiménez's works, especially in the collections of his recent period, books like *Melancolía* and *Laberinto*, published in 1912 and 1913. Her favorite poets were Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Calderón, writers whose poetry spoke of national character and of national morality. Out of love for her, Jiménez purified the tone of his lyre. She became his inspiration and his verses reflected the range of his love for her, but he did not dare show them to her because writing mere love poetry did not seem to her to be a useful occupation.

Through his love of Zenobia, Jiménez regained a new sense of purity in his life and works. After a three-year courtship during which she tested his love and his patience to the limit, they were married and remained married for the rest of their lives. The last stanza of the poem on *naked poetry*, with four lines, as opposed to the shorter two- and three-line stanzas, indicates completion. It is the most naked stanza structurally; the lines are of seven, nine and eleven syllables. It speaks of the disrobing of the beloved who then appeared completely naked. The poem ends in a note of exultation, the speaker proclaims himself the possessor of the object of his love. The preceding stanza, in which the beloved wears the tunic of her old innocence, making him believe in her once more, is representative of his poetic career, of his return to his early, simple style. It also represents his new-found, ideal love, which has the simplicity and pureness of his adolescent years.

As a biographer, I have found that the poetry of Jiménez is a chronicle of his inner life, a passionate inner life in which love reigns supreme. All women in his poetry had a double in real life. The recent biographical findings of Ignacio Prat on the two-year period that Jiménez spent in France (1900–1902) confirm this fact.²

Nakedness per se is not the basis of a concept of *naked poetry*. Disrobing is, *desnudar*, a verb with a mystical connotation in the

literature of Spain.³ The verb is rooted in a personal attitude and psychology, and there are many indications in the works of Jiménez with reference to the meaning of the word in his particular case. Among his papers deposited in the Archivo Histórico of Madrid, this small verse becomes an amplified anecdotal prose fragment:

No, no, no! I am worth nothing!
I disrobed her
underneath her tears.
She was worth
nothing . . .

“—¡No, no, no! ¡Si no valgo nada! / La desnudé / bajo sus
lágrimas. / No valia nada . . .”

The unworthiness of the disrobed woman may refer to her lack of charms as well as to her lack of virtue. At any rate, it represents the speaker's contempt for the illegitimate action of disrobing an unworthy subject. But nakedness means something else when applied to the spouse, as in the poem “Naked” published posthumously. In the manuscript I saw in the Archivo Histórico, in the handwriting of Juan Ramón, the original title has been crossed out by him and the poem has been retitled, progressively: “Naked Love,” “Love's Wait,” and “The Spouse.” This last title remains:

With what trust you sleep
by my candle, absent
in soul, in your demure
beauty, but present
by my meshless body
which instinct turns over.

(You yield like death.)

You are tender orange blossoms
to celestial fields
happily transplanted
by solemn sleep,
that makes you now a powerful
reclining strong sword.

“¡Qué confiada duermes / ante mi vela, ausente / de mi alma, en tu débil / hermosura, y presente / a mi cuerpo sin redes, / que el instinto revuelve! // (—Te entregas cual la muerte)—.// Tierna azucena eres, / a tu campo celeste / transplantada y alegre / por el sueño solemne, / que te hace, aquí, imponente tendida espada fuerte.”⁴

Nakedness in this poem has nothing to do with dress. It refers to an essential state of being which persists even in sleep. The subject is obviously the spouse, the only one who can sleep trustingly under the husband's gaze, and the speaker, who is that husband, endows the spouse with the tender attributes of a white flower and the strength of a sword.

One more argument in favor of the thesis that the symbol *naked poetry* is rooted in a sublimated concept of the essential, naked woman loved and possessed by the poet, who is always the speaker in his verses, is found in another manuscript entitled “La mujer desnuda” (“Naked woman”), in which she is said to give, above all things, light, a light that is his guide to death:

How you light up, naked woman,
like the full moon at its zenith in my arms,
me on the shadow's floor!

What I most possess of you
is light, total vivid light,
naked woman, death's guide.

“¡Cómo alumbras, mujer desnuda / como la luna llena en el cenit / entre mis brazos, yo en el suelo de la sombra! // ¡Cómo lo que más tengo / de ti es luz, luz total y viva, / mujer desnuda, guía de la muerte!”

Much has been written about the possible sources of and influences on Jiménez' concept of *naked poetry*. The latter has been attributed to poem VII of *Gitanjali*, the work of Tagore translated, like many others, by Zenobia Camprubi in collaboration with Jiménez, her husband. But in Tagore's poem, disrobing does not play a role, he speaks of taking off the adornments of his song; nor is “A Coat” by Yeats, the other source more often pointed out, a poem about *disrobing*, but about going naked as an option preferred by the speaker, who would rather see his song naked than in the robe everyone has appropriated.⁵ Another important element in Jiménez' poem, not found in these works to which it is attributed, is the

underlying concept of *purity*. Howard T. Young covers this subject at length in his well-documented work *The Line in the Margin: Juan Ramón Jiménez and his Readings in Blake, Shelley and Yeats* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). He shows the Spanish poet's response to certain concepts of these English poets which are latent in him and the greater affinity which exists between his poetic ideals and theirs, greater, that is, in relation to that of the French symbolists from whom he learned the music of his poems and the shading of his imagery, and in relation to the ideas prevalent among the Spanish writers of his times. However, the aspect of the symbol *naked poetry* that relates to *desnudarse* or disrobing is rooted in the culture of Spain and signifies "to give up," "to deprive oneself," "to renounce." In his studies on Spanish mysticism, Helmut Hatzfeld points out that nakedness is one of the aspects of St. John's dark night of the soul and that as a mystic symbol it means renunciation of externals, living in solitude for the sake of pure and bare contact with the Divinity.⁶ Jiménez' *naked poetry* is the result of a life of solitude, of renunciation of all external distractions. It also signifies a personal purge to rid himself of his obsession with the flesh. These attainments were made possible by his wife.

Zenobia Camprubi was not a passionate woman. As recorded by Juan Guerrero Ruiz, Jiménez' loyal friend, who kept a diary about him, Juan Ramón admired Zenobia, not only because she was refined, joyful, intelligent and gracious in a cultivated manner and had traveled and read a great deal, but also because she had not allowed sexuality to interfere with their friendship. In Jiménez' words: "Among us Southern people, things happen, for example, in matters of sex. This is always a problem facing us which we can never leave behind, one is always thinking of it and thus it is impossible for a boy and a girl to be together without risking a slip or without facing a dangerous situation. But it is different with the people educated in the United States. Sex is just one more thing to them, not everything. Since they work, read, and study together they think of sex like just another thing. Sex is not so important. Thus they can be together like pals, the same as children play, without making a transcendental thing of details that are not so important."⁷

Attributing to Zenobia's companionship the quality of a child's play is equivalent to thinking of her in terms of her innocence and purity, as in the stanza of the poem on naked poetry. Jiménez is reflecting in real life a concern with purity in his relation with the beloved. Spaniards are notorious for their sublimation of feminine purity, and they consider chastity its attribute. On the other hand, the

Don Quixote-Sancho Panza equation applies to their psychology in all matters. The more preoccupied they are with sexuality, the greater their desire to find purity in their mates. Catholic education stresses purity. Their ideal representation of the mother of God is that of the Immaculate Conception, such as portrayed by Murillo. Murillo, an Andalusian, like Jiménez, seemed obsessed with this vision of the Virgin Mary. The other favorite interpretation is that of the Virgin as the Sorrowful Mother. It is hard to find a middle ground between these two views.

Jiménez, a sensual individual, who as a child enjoyed all of the pleasures that his beautiful native Southern region provided and who grew up alert to the charms of the female population of his small town, suffered a trauma during the four years he spent as a boarder in the Jesuit School of the Puerto de Santa María near Jerez and Cádiz. His natural disposition towards love and women became a cause for concern and soul searching. There are many stories concerning his sexual habits and preoccupations during the years spent in France and Madrid, from age nineteen on, recovering from a nervous breakdown caused by the death of his father. The conflict of the flesh is apparent in his first two books. In *Ninfeas*, of 1900, there is a "Canción de la carne" ("Song of the flesh") which describes flesh as sublime, as a mitigator of all life's suffering, as a consolation, a balm which absorbs spilled blood, heals wounds, and wipes away tears. The greatest day in a mournful life is the wedding day, when the pure virgin deliriously enjoys lustful, languid well-being. The lover is portrayed as a noble being who opens, enervated, the closed gate of the garden of pleasures, who tears apart the frozen innocence of the virgin. Then, dawn smiles in heaven and life smiles and sings. Of the same date is another poem entitled "Raja" and dedicated "To my soul" which appears in *Almas de violeta*, the other first collection of 1900, whose tone is the opposite of *Ninfeas*. In this poem the speaker asks for spirit above flesh and claims that when he seeks pleasure in "unclean" bosoms, as he yields his body he sadly closes his eyes, his thoughts are uplifted and he becomes lost in dreams of love.

This transcendence through the flesh and in spite of it is a forecast of the sensuous mystic transcendence described in *Animal de fondo*, of 1949, the last complete collection of poems by Jiménez and the culmination of his poetic search for a transcendence of body and soul which the speaker attains through pure and naked contact with a deity. It is a compendium of his ideas of nakedness as applied to poetry, woman and death.

Several book-length studies have been written about the poetic mysticism of Jiménez and his oriental affinity with Tagore. But a better model is his countryman St. John of the Cross. In an unpublished work entitled "Tiempo," written in 1941 and conceived as part of his long poem "Espacio," Jiménez says: "St. John of the Cross succeeded like no other before him in exchanging the two zones of love, idealizing to the point of impossibility, with his poetic ineffability, material love; he brought to light the ineffable aspects of sensual enjoyment."⁸ Jiménez' *naked poetry* has the same function, but while St. John of the Cross is using the symbolic language of the mystics to describe an experience of the spirit, Jiménez spiritualizes the experience of the body. In the same unpublished work he says: "When we kiss our wife on the mouth we are kissing the mouth of God, the visible and invisible universe, and love is eternity's and God's only road. I truly believe there is no other eternity than love and if we feel death is a flaw, it is because we are deprived of the action of love, because our mouth can no longer be in voluntary and dynamic contact with the mouth of the world."

After Jiménez' marriage, the word "nakedness" appears and reappears as a possible title for his collected works. Toward the end of his life he was still thinking of publishing a work in three volumes entitled "La mujer desnuda," "La obra desnuda" and "La muerte" under the general title, "Las tres presencias desnudas."⁹ A collection entitled *La obra desnuda* was published posthumously.¹⁰ Most of the poems in this volume are from the decade of the twenties, the years of his mastery. It was during these years that Jiménez sought to attain poetic perfection through poetic realization. The poetic expression is perforce narcissistic, because Jiménez wanted to arrive at the essence of creation through an inner process. He did not succeed then, and his isolation cost him dearly; in 1932 he was being purposely ignored by the very writers who had earlier recognized him as their model, but he nevertheless initiated and completed the two stages of the mystic way peculiar to Spanish culture, the *via purgativa* and the *via iluminativa*, that is, penance and enlightenment. The *via unitiva* or union with his divinity awaited him and would be realized in America many years later, in the poetic vision of *Animal de fondo*. Jiménez' process was neo-mystic because the purging, the isolation and austerity of the mystic is for pure and naked contact with God. In addition, woman played a most important role in this period and her presence was a necessity. His wife, Zenobia, was the contributing factor to the success of Jiménez' search.

I have always thought that Zenobia's maidenhood was a period of preparation for her successful marriage to Juan Ramón Jiménez. Her upbringing was different from that of the young women of Spain in her economic and social position.¹¹ Although she was born in Malgrat, a summer resort not far from Barcelona, her mother broke with custom and did not send her to a Catholic school to be instructed in the faith. Mrs. Camprubi was appalled by the fear of God Spanish religious institutions instilled in the children. Zenobia was confirmed in her faith at age twenty-one, in New York City, when she found an enlightened Jesuit who indoctrinated her without reprimands for her procrastination. She was not a *devout* Catholic; she was a practitioner of the religious commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, and she went to church on Sundays and holy days.

Zenobia never had any conflicts of a religious nor of a personal nature. She was given responsibilities at an early age. At fourteen she became the mistress of a household full of servants while her mother was quarantined with a sickly last-born child. During her teens, while she resided in New York (in Newburg, Flushing, Manhattan), she often assumed total responsibility for running the household during her mother's trips or illnesses. She was also taught to be useful, to keep busy and to find distraction in wholesome pursuits. She was never deprived and she was always trusted. Life in Spain, where she returned when she was nineteen after a residence of five years in the United States, was an unwelcome change. She despised being chaperoned, not being able to move or to function freely as a single woman, but she soon became a member of group of liberal but respected Spanish intellectuals such as the wife of the great Bartolomé Cossío, the moving spirit of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, the Martos family whose musical and literary *tertulias* were influential, and the Díez Lassaletta family, who were well-travelled and of noble lineage. Accustomed to live a life of purpose, she soon found a pleasant occupation in Madrid. In her travels in Spain, she became acquainted with Spanish craftsmanship and the popular arts. In her travels to the United States, she noticed that there was a market for these products and that the artifacts sold even at the best stores were of inferior quality. She decided to act as an intermediary between buyer and salespeople in order to export genuinely artistic objects. She studied Spanish art and history, enrolled in the lecture series offered by the International Institute for Women in conjunction with the famous Residencia de Estudiantes (it was there that she met Jiménez) and made contacts abroad for the exportation of Spanish

wares. When Zenobia married Juan Ramón, she had made a name for herself in the export business. With the aid of her Spanish friends, relatives and in-laws, she established a chain of contacts with factories, workshops, convents, and independent craftsmen who provided Americans and other foreign buyers with the best and the finest in the lines of embroidery, weaving, ceramics, metal work and other handicrafts. Through her "agents," some crafts which had been almost extinct were given new life.

By 1923 she had a store in Philadelphia called Jiménez and Muñoz. Her partner, Inés Muñoz, was an enterprising friend of Spanish and American descent, like herself, who sold the artifacts sent by Zenobia. In 1928 Zenobia opened Arte Popular, her own store in Madrid, which functioned as a permanent exhibit for Spanish handicraft. The same type of store exists today in Madrid and is called Artesanía Española. Zenobia's shop became a social center where the ladies of the aristocracy met for tea and organized expositions on a large scale. Jiménez, who had been a student of painting before he became a poet, did the lay-outs, the advertisements and the illustrations for the shop.

Zenobia's interest in handicrafts and the popular arts provided a joyous occupation and a life independent of her husband's. She was a social creature, not fond of solitude. On the other hand, her useful pursuits allowed her husband the solitude he craved to devote himself solely to writing. At the end of a day of intense labor, there was his wife, back from her own busy day to keep him company and give him contentment. By the twenties they had overcome the many financial difficulties of the early years of marriage. Both of them had spent their savings in their three-month stay in New York after the wedding and in furnishing their first home in Madrid. The speed with which they translated the works of Rabindranath Tagore, who gained popularity after the Nobel Prize was awarded to him in 1913, was in part a result of their need to receive royalties. Zenobia accepted Jiménez' proposal of marriage, in spite of the fact that he had no "useful" occupation, when they began to collaborate in the translation of Tagore's *The Crescent Moon*, a work which appeared before their marriage in 1915. It was published because of the poet's familiarity with the publishing world. Zenobia was an aspiring writer, who submitted articles regularly to North American reviews. She was bilingual and wrote with style, but her husband polished her work and gave the lyric Hindu writer the fitting tone in Spanish. Between 1916 and 1922 the Jiménez couple published twenty-one translations of Tagore. By the

end of that period, they became editors of their own works, the poet's collections were selling well and the income derived from Zenobia's trust fund, established by her American grandparents, had been supplemented by the generous legacy of an American aunt.

The poet and his wife lived well. They resided in Madrid in the elegant Barrio de Salamanca; they employed a maid and a cook, attended concerts, lectures and expositions and traveled. It became a privilege to be received by the Jiménez couple. Uniformed doormen jealously protected their privacy. The poet José Moreno Villa, who had known Jiménez since his bachelor days and had dined with the couple on their return from their honeymoon in 1916, complained in a letter of 1917 that the doorman had denied him access to their apartment and had not even allowed him to place a call. He was, instead, informed that the master was expecting only one person and that he was not that person.¹²

This protective custody that their economic situation afforded—the pleasing solitude provided by his wife's endeavours (while Zenobia went out and traveled in search of handicrafts the poet stayed at home writing), the even disposition of their daily lives, (at times, Zenobia received and met friends at her mother's house, to avoid disturbing her husband), the harmony of their surroundings (their apartment was tastefully decorated with new acquisitions and family heirlooms)—provided the perfect setting for the disrobing of the poet's poems. Jiménez became unique in his art, and since his main concern was to purify poetry by purifying himself as a poet he also became a perennial renovator of his own art.

To understand how Jiménez disrobed his poetry one need only read the reviews of the works he published after his marriage. The phrase *naked poetry* was not used then, perhaps because *desnudar* is so well ingrained in the culture of Spain. His new style was not named, it was explained. Shortly after his marriage, Jiménez published four books, *Estío*, written in 1915, *Sonetos espirituales*, of 1914–1915, the first complete edition of *Platero y yo*, which had appeared in abridged form in 1914 and *Diario de un poeta recién casado*, of 1916. In addition, the Hispanic Society of America published his first anthology, *Poesías escojidas* (1899–1917), in a special edition not for sale. With the exception of *Platero and I* these works belong to the courtship period when Jiménez began to disrobe his poetry. The anthology included the less adorned of his early poems, many of them revised. Alejandro Plana, one of the best early reviewers of these works, wrote in *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona, of June 27, 1917: "In

the trees of the river, in the stars of the night, in the infinite solitary fields, in the rebellious and changeable sea, the poet discovers the same thing that is in his spirit, beyond the image grasped by the eyes; there is a force in its depth; there are all the years that the tree became bare in October and green again in April, there is the immense distance of the stars, there is the sensation of immobility found in the tilled soil and the opposite sensation of the eternal movement of the sea.”¹³ And he adds: “The poet is not looking for transcendence in earthly things or in the spirit but for the sensation of depth, of an ideal projection in the air and on the earth, something that without being precise and defined, without having known boundaries is as well not limited and mortal to our instinct.” To indicate the uniqueness of Jiménez’ art, Plana contrasts him with Antonio Machado, the other recognized master of the poetry of the period: “This poetry is not equal to any other. This style cannot be compared with another. In other poets, like Antonio Machado, words point out a furrow, they outline with a knife a silhouette that nothing can erase. His is a plastic style that retains reality in the images. But in Jiménez, words are like a swarm drawing circles and curves in the sky or close to the ground without ever becoming fixed, without ever becoming the prisoners of a crude, perishable reality. . . . And yet . . . an inner cohesion joins the words and distributes the images in simple order”

The following year, Gabriel Alomar, one of the reviewers of the *Antología poética* published by the Hispanic Society, wrote in the newspaper *El Imparcial*, “Jiménez’ poetry tends to a new form of conceptualism. He does not turn ideas into images, he turns sensations into concepts. At times he arrives at a violent and dark parallelism between the emotive vibration and its ideological expression.”¹⁴ And referring to the selections of the most recent book of Jiménez, *Eternidades*, he said that it marked the furthestmost limit of the spirituality of the poetic concept in its struggle to shed the material nature of words. This spirituality was already noticeable in *Diario de un poeta recién casado*, the book of his marriage and his honeymoon. In 1918, in the newspaper *A B C*, Julio Casares referred to “a fervent yearning for spirituality, a concentration of all human potential dedicated to discover the most intimate and personal traits of a particular frame of mind and above all, an almost painful exaltation of his sensual and emotional capacity, always in search of rhythms, shades and images with which to express the fleeting moment, the indefinite, the subconscious, in a word, all which in nature is incapable of a concrete realization.”¹⁵

Five years later, when Jiménez published his *Segunda antología poética* dedicated “to the immense minority,” Antonio Espina, a well-known author and newspaperman, wrote that regarding its essentiality, integrity and transcendence, there was nothing in the literature of Spain of that period or in all of its art superior to the work of Jiménez.¹⁶ He explained that its essential quality derived from its intimate nature, its pure lyricism of a kind seldom found in Spain, and that this lyricism had been Provençal, Italian, French but not Spanish. Espina believed that it was this quality which made Jiménez’ poetry so modern, so far ahead of those writers of his generation, earning him the respect of the artists of the new schools, even of the most advanced among them. He celebrated the integrity of Jiménez as a poet because his anthology included selections from his complete works, which made it possible for the reader to notice how the external rhythm became internal and profound, free from any type of sensorial effect. And aside from the transcendence that time and history may concede to his work, it was already transcendental, Antonio Espina thought, since it was the only work which the young poets were placing before their eyes and their spirits, enjoying its intense intellectual precision and the subtle greatness of the image. The young poets, Espina said, understood that Jiménez’ way was the only possible way to follow without attempting impossible imitation, that poetry would either collapse into the trite molds of the past or in their hands continue the struggle with its accompanying torments and victories.

This was written in 1922. By then Jiménez had been adjudged a master of Spanish poetry and had led the way and given his blessing to an outstanding generation of poets, prose writers and artists, among them Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Dámaso Alonso, Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, Gerardo Diego, Manuel Altolaguirre, León Felipe, Emilio Prados, José Moreno Villa, José Bergamín, Fernando Villalón, Ernestina de Champourcin, Rosa Chacel, Carmen Conde, Juan José Domenchina, not to mention numerous Spanish-American writers also guided by him. In 1934, when Jiménez’ direct influence was believed to have passed, the Spanish critic Angel Valbuena Prat, remembering that an entire literary period owed its poetic orientation to him, concluded that Jiménez presented to a new generation all that was worthy of imitation from a great style, that he foresaw the lyric poets who were to follow, and he directed and guided them.¹⁷ In the opinion of this critic, a powerful school of followers is one of the great attainments of

a master, but this should be a school original enough to free itself from the point of departure. Since Jiménez' school was of this type, he concluded that he was a master of poets, not a master of followers.

Jiménez brought forth the elite among the young poets of Spain. As the editor and director of *Índice*, a short-lived but remarkable literary review, in its four issues, three from 1921 and a fourth from 1922, he published the works of the most brilliant among his followers: Salinas, Guillén, García Lorca, Moreno Villa, Gerardo Diego, Dámaso Alonso. *Índice* was sent to every region of Spain and to Paris, Brussels, London, Berlin, Geneva, Mexico City, Tokyo, New York, Buenos Aires, Stockholm, and Dublin. Foreign critics recognized Jiménez' supremacy. When Jean Cassou reviewed the *Segunda antología poética* in the *Mercure de France* in 1924, he proclaimed him a master and celebrated the calm exemplary spirit of his life. In the opinion of Cassou, Jiménez played the same role in Spain as Mallarmé in France. He had found a form of pure poetry that could satisfy the newest among poets: "Always brief, Jiménez' poems are essentially effusion, interrogation, and mystery. Rarely is the phrasing orderly and complete; however, an unusually sensuous and musical line joins contradictory and uncertain emotions that it would be useless to specify. . . . A similar journey, a vast delirium blends the diverse elements of poetic objects: gardens, women, the sea, God—the poet murmurs these divine words, inflated with a general meaning; however, a secret order structures them in a succession of brief harmonious enigmas which one dare not reproach."¹⁸

Two years later, in his celebrated book *Virgin Spain: Scenes from the Spiritual Drama of a Great People*, Waldo Frank devoted a chapter to the two Andalusians who, in his opinion, "voice so clearly the spirit of the land, that they speak again for the world . . . Pablo Picasso and Juan Ramón Jiménez."¹⁹ Frank did not seem to approve of Jiménez' constant renovation. Of the poet's continuous disrobing of his verse he says: "He has sloughed off cleverness and minor sentiment. His work has become stark and stripped. He has gone from exquisite grace to a virtuosic clumsiness and uncouthness, which brings astoundingly close the face of truth, and turns it into a strange, impersonal thing. He has become a recluse. Yet his seclusion has not divorced him from contact on his own terms with his generation. No poet serves youth more sedulously than he. He is the master and friend of the young poets of Castilian, not alone in Spain but in the greater Spain across the sea. He is in touch with Paris, with Germany and Austria. And he has read the work of Whitman, of Emily

Dickinson, of Frost, of Robinson and Sandburg . . ." (p. 290). Waldo Frank explains the poetry of Jiménez with the same travail of other critics: "Not the least magic of Jiménez' work is its perpetual counterpoint of meaning and substance. The meaning is cosmic, the stuff is light and casual. Often a seeming haphazard expression fringes the ineffable; a drop of water miraculously turns into a universe. No tinge of cosmic rhetoric mars the body of his words. The universe is implicit. The ultimate gift of Jiménez is a song of life, liquid and gemmed, within whose moment silence is an inner flame. The flame is simple and constant . . . The flame is One. Life's mystery is its becoming form, its creating for itself out of a single depth numberless facets, out of whiteness many tints, out of silence, song. This is the process of life: and this is the process of Jiménez' writing" (p. 291). And regarding the naked quality of the rhyme and the rhythm of his poetry, he again explains in detail, reiterating the character of that naked substance which he took such pains to describe: "Jiménez' work is a sort of *comédie mystique*. Singly, the poems have a variety of notes. Yet there is a cryptic quality in them, and a subtle allusiveness to something not explicit . . . His poems have prosodic value. Yet their chiefest value is that they create aesthetically a sense of incompleteness. Aesthetically, they are whole because they contain this lack—this positive surge toward an apocalyptic sense which lives in them only by the imprint of its absence. Each of his poems is at once a sensory form, and a spiritual inchoation. Like the atom, it is complete, yet holds in the whirlwind of electrons an infinitude and a contingency with infinitude: it is appearance forever tending to disappear into the Real. One might say that a poem of Jiménez is like an instant in a human life: full-limned, full-equipped with thought, emotion, will; and yet this fullness is but the passing function of an implicit unity which transcends and subscends it" (p. 291).

Passing through Spain in 1933, Gabriela Mistral, one of the great poets of Spanish America, who years later was to be awarded the Nobel Prize, spoke for the writers of the New World by choosing Jiménez and his school above all other contemporary poets. "This does not mean," she said, "that one has forgotten the other great poets, like the Machado brothers and so many others whose personality left furrows in modern lyric. . . . But I feel a greater kinship with these renovators than with those who shed so many romantic tears in their books. What I appreciate the most of the new school is its renovation of the metaphor and the image. I myself had the

opportunity to verify that children like and understand these images and metaphors which are called *absurd* by some writers.”²⁰ Mistral is therefore speaking of the simplicity of Jiménez and his school, simplicity which is the essential character of *naked poetry*. But it was a new kind of simplicity not found in Spanish poetry before, and it was leading to what twentieth century critics would call *obra abierta* or open work for everyone to read, to interpret, to recreate, to finish at will.

Mathilde Pomès, observer and critic of the literature of Spain, wrote about Jiménez’ newness and this milestone in Hispanic letters in her book, *Poètes espagnoles d’aujourd’hui*, of 1934: “With an essentially new vision and sensibility, he appears as a keystone of modern poetry. Not only because he created a school by imposing his forms and his methods, but because the totality of his emotion, language, and form signifies a turning point of prime importance in the history of Spanish literature.”²¹

The book that definitely set the new style was *Eternidades*, Jiménez’ blissful song written during the first year of his married life and dedicated to his wife. The first poem announces a certain indecision, a fear that he will not be able to give form to his poetic thought:

Action

Goethe

I don’t know what to say it with,
because as yet my words
are not done (*LP*, 551).

“No sé con qué decirlo, / porque aún no está hecha / mi palabra.”

The remarkable feature in this brief poem is the realization by the speaker that he will need new elements for his artistic creation, he does not say “I don’t know *how* to say it” but “I don’t know *with what* to say it.” And yet, once he has *said it*, he knew that he had recreated his language, as expressed in the last poem of *Eternidades*,

Eternal word of mine!
What a supreme way of life
—my mouth’s tongue touching nothingness—,

what a divine way of life
a rootless flower without stem,
nourished from light and my memory,
apart and fresh in life's air (LP, 688).

“¡Palabra mía eterna! / Oh, qué vivir supremo / —ya en la nada
la lengua de mi boca—, / oh, qué vivir divino / de flor sin tallo y
sin raíz, / nutrida, por la luz, con mi memoria, / sola y fresca en
el aire de la vida!”

His word is eternal, his life is supreme, his language is at the zero point, and he compares living to the life of a flower without stem or root. For Jiménez the words *life* and *living* indicate poetic creation. In *Eternidades*, the beatific expressions about his marital status alternate with other expressions regarding his poetic goals and sentiments. The earth had become his paradise, he says in the poem entitled “Love”:

I climbed to the pure sky
and lit my candle from the stars,
high above every dream.

Earth opened like a rose. I saw it! (LP, 596).

“Me subí al cielo puro / y encendí mi velar en las estrellas, /
sobre todos los sueños. // La tierra era una rosa abierta, ¡yo lo vi!”

And in the poem about *his* house:

Now I walk my house,
with the calm that used to accompany
the flight of sweet dreams.

Yes, now I live above the sky
on the wings of my childhood. (LP, 582).

“Piso, ahora, la casa, / con la paz con que antes / la volaba en
mis sueños dulces. // Sí, ¡vivo sobre el cielo / de mis alas de
niño!”

This heaven on earth is associated with a pure, innocent state, as in the last stanza of this poem in which the speaker places his dwelling

“above the sky/of the wings of my childhood.” In both poems, reality is greater than illusion. In an “Epitaph” (“Epitafio de mí, vivo”), of *Eternidades* which Jiménez wrote to “himself, alive” he reiterated the belief in a reality that had surpassed his dreams:

I died in dreams.
I revived in life (*LP*, 569).

“Morí en el sueño. / Resucité en la vida.”

In the years of his ascendancy the prestige of Jiménez was superior to that of any other contemporary writer in Spain. All sectors competed for his support and his opinion. He was asked to answer a questionnaire on modern architecture, to give an opinion of the business world, to collaborate in a publication of the *Centro de Estudios Históricos*, to allow his name to be entered for a position as Conservator of the Alhambra and other Andalusian monuments, to read for *Unión Radio Sociedad Anónima*. In 1924 nineteen political prisoners wrote him asking for his books which they could not afford to purchase, and they also pleaded for his intercession: “We dare to bring to your attention that there is a need for those who have the high tribune of the daily press at their bid to remember that in the jails of Spain hundreds of persons are imprisoned for expressing their opinion and for social matters. No pardons or amnesty have been granted since 1919 and an effort on your part and on the part of others like you would be sufficient so that those who have lost their freedom, because they believed that thinking is not a delinquency, might be able to recover it.”²²

Expressions of recognition from all countries abounded. From Montevideo he was asked to respond to a written interview, from Brussels to collaborate in a new review, from Paris to support a project to found an Académie Internationale des Lettres, from Lausanne to become a patron of the new revue *Prométhée*; Valéry wrote him a poem and sent him flowers, Kazantzakis went to see him and addressed him as *Master*; several persons in the United States asked his permission to include him in anthologies; Henry Grattan Doyle asked for the rights to make a school edition of *Platero*, and others in the United States and in France wanted to translate this famous book. He was the subject of literary cartoons, poems were written in his honor, manuscripts were sent for his reaction, and the street where he was born was named after him. When his mother,

Doña Pura Mantecón de Jiménez, died in 1928, indulgences were given her by the Archbishop of Burgos and Valencia, Patriarch of the Indies; by the Bishops of Almería, Cádiz, Granada, Jaén, Salamanca, Madrid, Málaga, Barcelona and the Archbishop of Seville and Lepanto.

In the midst of all this adulation, Jiménez remained a simple, austere man who shunned honors, social life and personal appearances. Women were as devoted to him as the most devoted of his followers but he was never unfaithful to his wife. He needed and enjoyed their presence, especially if they were talented and different. This type of woman sought him out, and Zenobia was wise enough to allow him the enjoyment of their company. He wrote lyric portraits of the women writers who were his friends, Ernestina de Champourcin, Rosa Chacel and Concha Méndez (Mrs. Manuel Altolaguirre), and they appear in *Espanoles de tres mundos*. He enjoyed the company of other artists not included in this gallery, such as Parmenia Miguel Monroe, a beautiful painter, musician and writer of English poems, of Chilean and English ancestry. He was also fond of Ania Dorfmann, a pianist, and he was attentive to other performers who passed through Madrid: Dalia Iñiguez, Momy Hermelo, Pura Lago, Carlita Muters, Conchita Powers, Aurea de Sarrá, María del Carmen Huergo. Most of these women were *recitadoras* or interpreters of poems, an art form which became fashionable in the twenties. One of them inspired in him a strong romantic attraction; she was the most famous and elegant of the *recitadoras* and a married woman, Bertha Singermann, a naturalized Argentinian, born in Russia. She performed in Spain repeatedly and always interpreted a great number of selections from Jiménez' works.

The last book which Jiménez published in Spain before his departure at the outbreak of the Civil War, was *Canción*, a collection beautiful in both content and appearance, with a picture of a sculpture of Zenobia's head done by Marga Gil Röesset, a young artist who with her sister Consuelo, a painter, was among the select friends of the couple in Madrid. There is no doubt that Zenobia was a source and inspiration for the concept *naked poetry*. Jiménez had placed her above all women for her beautiful simplicity, her chastity, her integrity, and he transferred to her and from her to his art the essential attributes of an idealized concept of feminine beauty and purity.

NOTES

1. The author acknowledges the support of the General Research Board of the University of Maryland in the form of a Faculty Grant which enabled her to complete this study.

2. "J.R.J. en Burdeos (1901-1902). Nuevos datos," *Insula*, 385, (Dec. 1978), pp. 1, 12.

3. Helmut Hatzfeld, *Estudios literarios sobre mística española* (Madrid: Gredos, 1955), pp. 99-104.

4. This poem appears under the title "Desnuda" and with slight variations in the posthumous collection *Libros inéditos de poesía*, 2., ed. F. Garfias (Madrid: Aguilar, 1964), p. 381.

5. Here are poem VII of Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Yeats' "A Coat": "My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers." (Tagore).

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
in walking naked.

(Yeats, "A Coat")

6. Hatzfeld, p. 107.

7. *Juan Ramón de viva voz* (Madrid: Insula, 1961), p. 36.

8. I express my appreciation to Francisco Hernández Pinzón Jiménez, of Madrid, the poet's nephew, for allowing me to consult this manuscript and other unpublished material in his possession, to which I refer in this article and which I translated.

9. Howard Young refers to these projects in *The Line in the Margin*, pp. 225-230.

10. Ed. Arturo del Villar (Sevilla: Alderbarán, 1976).

11. The following information is the result of my investigations of the life and works of Zenobia and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Some of this data appears in *Vida y obra de Juan Ramón Jiménez. La poesía desnuda*, 2nd ed., rev. 2 vols. (Madrid: Gredos, 1974). New data are from "Legajo Juan Ramón Jiménez" in the Archivo Histórico, in Madrid.

12. A letter in the Archivo Histórico.
13. "Las ideas y el libro. Juan Ramón Jiménez. 'Sonetos espirituales,' 'Estio,' 'Platero y yo,' 'Diario de un poeta recién casado,' Casa Editorial Calleja, Madrid, 1917." I have translated this and other reviews quoted in English, which are found in the Archivo Juan Guerrero, Sala Zenobia y Juan Ramón Jiménez, University of Puerto Rico. I wish to express my appreciation to Raquel Sárraga for her assistance during my recent investigations of this archive, (abbreviated in future references to Archivo J.G.)
14. "Divagación sobre la poesía. (Leyendo a Juan Ramón Jiménez)," Madrid, (8 April 1918), Archivo J.G.
15. "Guía de Lectores. 'Diario de un poeta recién casado,' por J.R. Jiménez." Archivo J.G.
16. "Libros y Revistas. 'Segunda antología poética (1898-1918),' Ramón Jiménez, Colección Calpe, Madrid, 1922," *España*, 30 (Dec. 1922), Archivo J.G.
17. "Juan Ramón o la introducción al novecentismo," *Frente Literario*, (May 1934). Archivo J.G.
18. "Lettres Espagnoles. Juan Ramón Jiménez: 'Segunda antología poética,' Calpe," n.d., Archivo J.G.
19. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), p. 287.
20. Xesus Nieto Pena, "Conversando con Gabriela Mistral," *La Libertad*, (July 21, 1933), Archivo J.G.
21. (Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1934), pp. IX-X.
22. Letter in the Archivo Histórico (Madrid).