



Portland State University

From the Selected Works of Eva Núñez-Méndez

2000

Juan Ramón Jiménez - Entry 2

Eva Núñez-Méndez, *Portland State University*



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Juan Ramón Jiménez 1881–1958

Spanish poet and prose writer

Biography

Born in Moguer (Huelva) in the south of Spain, 23 December 1881, and possessed from childhood a strong passion for poetry. He published his first poems in the newspapers and magazines of Seville and smaller towns and soon won local fame. The few early poems that have been preserved give no indication of what his mature work would be. From 1912 until 1936 Jiménez lived in Madrid, returning only occasionally to Moguer. In 1916 he married Zenobia Camprubi. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War forced them to go to America where he lectured in different universities. In 1956 he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature and this brought wide attention to his poetry. Zenobia died only two days after word came from Stockholm. Jiménez did not long survive his loyal companion of 40 years; he died two years later in Puerto Rico, 29 May 1958.

His literary production extends over a period of more than 50 years: *Rimas* [Poems] (1902), *Arias tristes* [Sad Airs] (1903), *Jardines lejanos* [Distant Gardens] (1904), *Pastorales* [Pastorals] (1905), *Sonetos espirituales* [Spiritual Sonnets] (1917), *Platero y yo* (1914, complete edition 1917) (*Platero and I*, 1956), *Diario de un poeta recién casado* [Diary of a Newly-Married Poet] (1917), *Eternidades* [Eternities] (1918), *Piedra y cielo* [Rock and Sky] (1919), *Belleza* [Beauty] (1923), *Poesía* [Poetry] (1923), *Song* [Song] (1936), *Espanoles de tres mundos* [Spaniards of Three Worlds] (1942), *La estación total* [The Total Season] (1946), *Romances de Coral Gables* [Coral Gables Ballads] (1948), *Dios deseado y deseante* (1948–49) (*God Desired and Desiring*, 1987), *Animal de fondo* [Enduring Animal] (1949), *Tercera antología poética* [Third Poetry Anthology] (1957)

Edition

The Spanish text used by translators is basically that of the *Tercera antología poética* (1898–1953) (1957), which was revised by the author and his wife

Translations

Prose Poems and Sketches

Platero y yo, 1914; complete edition 1917

Nicolás, Antonio T. de, *Platero and I*, Boulder, Colorado:

Shambhala, 1978

Roach, Eloïse, *Platero and I*, Austin: University of Texas Press,

1957

Roberts, William and Mary Roberts, *Platero and I*, Oxford:

Dolphin, and New York: Dushnesr, 1956

Selections and Anthologies of Poetry

Burnshaw, Stanley, *The Poem Itself: 45 Modern Poets in a New Presentation*, New York: Holt, 1960 (4 poems by Jiménez)

Hays, H.R., *Selected Writings of Juan Ramón Jiménez*, with an introduction by Eugenio Florit, New York: Farrar Straus, 1957

Kemp, Lysander, Willis Barnstone and Kate Flores, in *An Anthology of Spanish Poetry*, edited by Angel Flores, New York: Anchor, 1961, pp. 273–86

Merwin, W.S., Rachel Frank and Julia Howe, *Poetry*, 82/4 (1953) pp. 184–224

Nicolás, Antonio T. de, *Stories of Life and Death*, New York: Paragon House, 1986 Nicolás, Antonio T. de, *God Desired and Desiring* (bilingual edition), New York: Paragon House, 1987

Nicolás, Antonio T. de, *Invisible Reality* (bilingual edition), New York: Paragon House, 1987

Nicolás, Antonio T. de, *Time and Space: A Poetic Biography*, New York: Paragon House, 1988

Roach, Eloïse, *Three Hundred Poems, 1903–1953*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962

Trend, J.B., *Juan Ramón Jiménez: Fifty Spanish Poems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951

Turnbull, Eleanor, in her *Ten Centuries of Spanish Poetry* (bilingual edition), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955, pp. 426–47

What is exceptional about Juan Ramón Jiménez's long career is that there is no decline in the poet's creative enthusiasm, nor in his capacity for renovation. He conceded that literature might attain relative beauty but held that poetry aspires to the attainment of absolute beauty. His devotion to poetry, to beauty, was not so much an aesthetic posture as an ardent religious cult. He saw beauty in nature and he came to identify it with poetry and with God. This sentiment gives his work its unity, gaining intensity as the poet advances in age. Although Jiménez showed a marked preference for free verse, he reverted from time to time to fixed forms, particularly the octosyllabic verse.

After Jiménez received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1956, English translations of his work began to appear. While his volumes of poetry were published in rapid succession from 1900 to 1923, his prose pieces were not collected and printed in volumes but remained dispersed through magazines, newspapers and notebooks. Not until after his death were most of them made accessible to the public.

The popularity of *Platero and I*, first published in 1914, has been enormous, not only in Spanish-speaking countries but throughout the western world. The many translations into other languages – including French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Basque, Hebrew and English (various translations) – attest to the universality of its appeal.

Platero is a collection of prose poems and sketches, each of which can be read independently, but which taken together form a unified work. There is no narrative continuity; the unity of the book is achieved through the setting – Moguer and its surroundings – recreated with remarkable concision and sensitivity and through the two characters: the author himself and his donkey, Platero, who appear in nearly all of the prose poems.

ROACH's translation (1957) is the most widely known. She has been one of Jiménez's most devoted translators; her version

of *Platero* was very well received when it appeared in 1957. The ROBERTS translation (1956) is a more sensitive and accurate piece of work; it is illustrated by Baltasar Lobo. This version is the one used by Fogelquist for his quotations in *Juan Ramón Jiménez* (1976). NICOLÁS's *Platero* (1978) remains close to the Spanish text, with some very good passages.

Jiménez received more attention for his poetic works than for his prose, and this is reflected in the number of translations. Most of these translations are to be found in anthologies, journals, articles and dissertations; only a few books contain exclusively translations of Jiménez's poetry.

HAYS's (1957) translations reveal occasional inaccuracies. The selection is thoroughly representative, however, and the introduction by Eugenio Florit, one of Jiménez's confidants, provides useful information. The work no doubt suffered from the demand for quick publication created by the award of the Nobel prize.

ROACH's translation of *Three Hundred Poems* (1962) is a representative selection of Jiménez's poems competently translated. Hers is a personal selection from 50 years of Jiménez's poetry; she is certainly sensitive to the poet's purpose but she often overtranslates, and there are occasions when she does not seem to grasp the meaning. The selection also contains occasional lapses. This version has been used by H.T. Young for his quotations of Jiménez in *The Victorious Expression*, and by P.R. Olson in *Circles of Paradox*.

J.B. TREND (1950) offers highly controversial translations of 50 of Jiménez's poems in which many liberties are taken in an attempt to re-create the subtle sensibility of the poetry and the

grace of his Spanish. The results are dubious, presenting many deviations from the original.

NICOLÁS's translations (1986-88) are convincingly close to the original Spanish selection of Jiménez's poems; his work is accurate and respects the Spanish text. He is clearly a devoted translator of Jiménez's poetry.

Other translations of Jiménez's poetry in mixed collections are: BURNSHAW's in *The Poem Itself* (1960), which contains four literal translations and commentary by Eugenio Florit; KEMP, BARNSTONE & KATE FLORES's in Angel Flores's *Anthology* (1961), which is too brief but contains some good translating; MERWIN, FRANK & HOWE's *Poetry* (1953), devoted to Jiménez, with very good translations; and TURNBULL's (1955), with various translations in her usual old-fashioned tone.

EVA NÚÑEZ MÉNDEZ

Further Reading

- Cardwell, Richard A., *Juan R. Jiménez: The Modernist Apprenticeship 1895-1900*, Berlin: Colloquium, 1977
- Fogelquist, Donald F., *Juan Ramón Jiménez*, Boston: Twayne, 1976
- Olson, Paul R., *Circles of Paradox: Time and Essence in the Poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967
- Young, Howard T., *The Victorious Expression: A Study of Four Contemporary Spanish Poets*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966, pp. 75-136
- Young, Howard T., *Juan Ramón Jiménez*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967

Jin Ping Mei 16th century

The *Jin Ping Mei* is a novel of 100 chapters with its title derived from the names of three of the protagonist's mistresses. Generally regarded as one of the "Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel", it was of controversial authorship (it passed under the pseudonym of a "Smiling Scholar of Lanling"); it was probably written during the last two decades of the 16th century. Further revisions of the manuscript continued into the early 17th century. From among the several surviving versions of the novel scholars have focused their attention on three texts.

(1) The earliest extant edition, entitled the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, dates from the last years of the Wanli reign (1573-1619) (with a preface dated in 1618) and is hence known as the "Wanli edition". Extensively interspersed with poems, popular songs, song sequences, fragments of dramatic dialogue, and various types of literary cross-references, which either enrich the description of the action or reveal the state of mind of the main characters, it is generally considered a superior text, though it remained in obscurity for centuries and was rediscovered only in 1932.

(2) The text that dates from the Chungzhen reign (1628-44) and is hence known as the "Chungzhen edition" is considered an inferior version on account of incompetent editorial tampering. This text has not only deleted many of those poems, songs and other quotations and ineptly rewritten the first chapter, but also made numerous tactless alterations throughout the book.

(3) The *Zhang Zhupo ping Jin Ping Mei*, with a preface dated in 1695, does not differ textually in any substantial way from the Chungzhen edition, but it contains the ingenious commentary of an important critic, Zhang Zhupo (1670-98).

Despite its notoriety as pornography - it contains numerous explicit descriptions of sex - the novel, which involves the relationship between the wealthy young merchant Ximen Qing (Hsi-men Ch'ing) and his many wives and mistresses, is primarily a novel of social criticism and, to some extent, may also be regarded as a novel of manners. As Hanan (1961) has observed, the novel is saturated with two issues: money and