

JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ AND NIETZSCHE

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It would be surprising if one were not able to detect in the poetry and prose writings of Juan Ramón Jiménez the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, for the ideas expounded by the German philosopher of the will to power and eternal recurrence form part of the intellectual and aesthetic patrimony of the twentieth century. Historians of literature and ideas have recognized his profound, if not always benign influence. Conor Cruise O'Brien, who has viewed with evident concern efforts to restore Nietzsche's reputation as a constructive thinker rather than as an apologist for totalitarian ideology, has remarked that there was hardly an important mind in Europe in the first half of this century that was not deeply marked by Nietzsche. O'Brien is not alone in deploring the scholarly endeavours of those who, in his opinion, would transform Nietzsche into "an essentially benign schoolmaster, whose astringent and sometimes frightening quips conceal a heart of gold and a strenuous urge to improve the spiritual and moral condition of his pupils."¹ J. P. Stern has also seen a danger in the critical approach which would deny or overlook Nietzsche's contribution to the development of totalitarianism and treat him instead as "a cool, systematic philosopher or a poet needing his symbols counted and his images classified."² Nietzsche himself is closer to the truth when, on the brink of madness, he proclaims that "I am not a man I am dynamite."³ Europe has witnessed the explosive effects of Nietzsche's works ever since the Danish scholar, Georg Brandes, first brought them to the attention of a non-German audience in his lectures at the University of Copenhagen in 1888. In the closing years of the nineteenth century Nietzsche was transformed into a cult-figure, defended and attacked by the most prominent intellectuals of his age, with his thought disseminated through a multitude of inexpensive editions in every major European tongue. Yet the man himself had retreated into madness in January 1889, leaving to an increasingly uncertain future the task of making sense of his speculations. Europe responded to this task with a degree of enthusiasm that generated much heat but little genuine illumination. In hindsight, the response appears unedifying, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Spain. There Nietzsche's reception, and the sundry

interpretations to which his thought was subjected, tell us more about the political, ethical and aesthetic preoccupations of modern Spanish writers than they do about Nietzsche's work itself.⁴

If, as O'Brien and Stern have argued, the influence of Nietzsche on the writers of this century is universal in character, it is perhaps appropriate to question, at the outset, whether his contribution to the development of Jiménez' poetry and thought is of sufficient significance to justify detailed examination. Wherein does the evidence for such influence lie? Juan Ramón Jiménez' earliest writings indicate his sensitivity to the new intellectual currents that were sweeping *fin-de-siècle* Spain. By his own account, the influence of Ibsen on his poetry preceded that of Nietzsche.⁵ The Norwegian's "anarchistic" aesthetics motivated such poems as "Las amantes del miserable," one of Juan Ramón's many contributions to *Vida Nueva*, the magazine which between 1898 and 1900 published work by those young writers who were soon to make up the ranks of *modernismo* and the Generation of 1898.⁶ Though Juan Ramón was sufficiently impressed by Ibsen to make a number of translations of his poems from the French, this influence on the young poet was short-lived, giving way to that of Nietzsche as the reputation of the German philosopher in Spanish literary circles grew.

According to Gonzalo Sobejano, the influence of Nietzsche on the history of ideas is twofold: firstly, the "negative" influence of his profound criticism of man, and secondly the positive one of the first affirmation of the overman.⁷ Though it is apparent that early interpretations of Nietzsche tended to reduce his influence to similarly broad categories, I would argue that Jiménez' lifelong interest in Nietzsche's work is indicative of a much more profound understanding of him as a philosopher and poet. Sobejano observes that young *noventayochistas* such as Maeztu embraced the *Übermensch* ideal with a youthful passion that was scarcely critical, while writers of earlier generations, such as Sanz y Escartín, stressed the harmful effects of Nietzsche's criticism of morality. The positions adopted by *viejos* and *jóvenes* alike tended to be extreme and unenlightened, and the quality of Nietzschean criticism in the first decade of the twentieth century was poor. Beginning in 1898, writes Sobejano, "The commentaries on Nietzsche will be inspired to a greater or lesser degree by one of two attitudes: a repudiation of Nietzsche in order to defend the evolution of the nineteenth century, or, in honor of the revolutionary modality, an acceptance of Nietzsche as the inspiration and forerunner of a new era" (p. 61).

By 1910, translations of all Nietzsche's works, with the exception of *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Thoughts out of Season) and *Der Wille zur Macht* (The Will to Power), had been published by firms in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. Though these editions were cheap and abundant, the quality of the translations left much to be desired. Jiménez' recollections of these editions coincide with the opinion expressed by Sobejano that "the translators' work does not appear to stem from a personal attraction to the philosopher's thought (they treat him with indifference if not disdain) but rather it no doubt is due to the assignments created by an intense public demand" (p. 81). Juan Ramón recalls, in conversation with Ricardo Gullón, that during the period in question, "translations of Nietzsche, bad translations, circulated in Spain in popular editions. Unamuno read him, and more than anyone else Maeztu. Azorín also talked about him."⁸

It is probable that Jiménez' introduction to Nietzsche was through these translations, though the editions which appear in his library in Moguer are mostly of later French origin.⁹ The young poet may have owned copies of Nietzsche in Spanish translation, but no record of these exists. We do know, on the other hand, that he read Nietzsche extensively in the library of Dr. Luis Simarro, with whom he lodged between autumn 1904 and summer 1905, and whom he visited constantly from 1902 onwards. It was another close companion of Simarro, Dr. Nicholas Achúcarro, a man who shared his *Krausista* views, who stocked Simarro's library in Madrid with the works of Nietzsche which Juan Ramón devoured.¹⁰ On the other hand, the members of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, with which both Simarro and Achúcarro were closely associated, and to which Jiménez was a frequent visitor, did not share this taste for the German philosopher. Jiménez recalls that they found him rather less than serious.

Given the fact that, during the period 1904 to 1905, Jiménez was on intimate terms with some of the most cultivated men and women in the Spanish capital, it is likely that he soon read Nietzsche in the better French translations. Before his return to Moguer in the summer of 1905, he would have had a thorough grounding in Nietzsche's writings, and a firm basis on which to judge the steady trickle of Nietzschean criticism which appeared in ephemeral Spanish reviews during the first decade of the new century. The earliest of these articles appeared in *La España Moderna*, *La Revista Blanca* and *Electra*. In the Catalan magazine *Juventut* articles by the Nietzschephile Pompeyo Gener were numerous. It is no surprise, therefore, that there

should be frequent references to Nietzsche in the pages of *Helios*, the principal organ of the *modernista* movement which, during a brief existence that extended from April 1903 to February 1904, was edited by Jiménez with the assistance of Gregorio Martínez Sierra, Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Carlos Navarro Lamarca, and Pedro González Blanco. The last named was a particularly fervent admirer of Nietzsche, and was later to produce translations of most of his works for the popular editions published by Sempère in Valencia between 1906 and 1910.

Yet, extensive studies of Nietzsche during the first decade of the century were few. Sobejano summarizes the situation with the words "information always limited and generally second hand, scanty originality, prejudice, superficial reflection" (p. 105). Split along generational lines, with older conservatives repelled by his anti-bourgeois immoralism and younger progressive writers attracted to his elitist doctrines, the critical reaction during the first phase of the Nietzschean vogue reveals little real depth of understanding. The *modernistas* admired the German's flamboyant literary style and what they considered to be his exceptional poetic gifts. Thus, though it is probable that Juan Ramón was familiar with most of Nietzsche's works before his return to Moguer in 1905, his appraisal of the German's philosophy may have been no less limited than that of his contemporary. As Sanz y Escartín was quick to observe in a lecture delivered to the Ateneo in Madrid in 1898, and Ferrari no less ready to denounce some seven years later, Nietzsche's aristocratic view of the artist appealed to the aestheticist tendencies of *modernista* writers. Yet this image of the alienated poet would hardly have differed, to the *modernista* mind, from that which he derived from Baudelaire and the Symbolists. It should be borne in mind that Nietzsche's popularity in Spain coincided roughly with the dissemination of Symbolist theory and the revival of Romantic idealism. There is every likelihood that Nietzsche's radical aesthetic elitism became indistinguishable from the modernist's "turrís ebúrnea." If the *modernistas* themselves were not responsible for this confusion, their enemies certainly contributed to it. The decade 1900 to 1910 saw the popularization of these Nietzschean ideals which Spaniards equated, favorably or with alarm, with the most advanced European ideas: an exaggerated view of the artist's role in shaping individual men's lives, contempt for democratic procedures and institutions, and the strenuous dedication to a personal ideal unhindered by political, ethical or religious considerations. Serious study of Nietzsche as a

philosopher in his own right had to wait until the conceptual fog which pervaded the initial phase had dissipated. Sobejano quotes from the first Spanish doctoral thesis on the work of Nietzsche, presented at the University of Valladolid in 1907. Its author, Hilario Andrés Torre Ruiz, stresses the superficial understanding of Nietzsche on the part of Spanish intellectuals and dilettantes, for whom he was merely "one of numerous *modernistas*" (p. 24).

Thus, when Jiménez returned to Moguer in 1905, his knowledge of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche may have been broad, but there is no reason to suppose that it was any deeper than that of most of his contemporaries. Paul R. Olson has commented in his study of time and essence in the work of Jiménez on the possibility of a direct influence of the concept of eternal recurrence on the evolution of the poet's view of change within permanence and permanence within change, the process which Jiménez named *sucesión* or *éxtasis dinámico*. Olson refers to a manuscript in the poet's archives in Puerto Rico in which, under the heading of "Fuentes de mi poesía," he lists those writers who exerted a significant influence on his early work.¹¹ The list includes Nietzsche, beside whose name Juan Ramón adds, in parenthesis, *mucho*. Are we dealing with a youthful enthusiasm with but faint echoes in the work of the mature poet, or with an influence of a more abiding nature which developed as Jiménez' style and thought evolved? The evidence suggests the latter.

This evidence is drawn from three sources. Firstly from the poet's manuscripts, extracts from which were published posthumously. Secondly from those prose writings in which Juan Ramón discusses aesthetic, ethical and ideological questions. Thirdly from the collections of his library now housed in Moguer. With regard to the last of these considerations, it is significant that the poet acquired the greater part of his collection of works by or about Nietzsche on or after 1919, considerably later than the period of the initial Nietzschean vogue, which lasted roughly until 1910. The library includes all of Nietzsche's published works, with the exception of *Morgenröte* (1881), *Der Antichrist* (1895) and, curiously, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-5). In addition, the poet received or purchased editions of the philosopher's correspondence, anthologies of his poetry and aphorisms, as well as biographical works.

A note in Jiménez' archives in Madrid indicates the high regard in which he held Nietzsche during the 1920s, the period which was, arguably, the most productive in the poet's long literary career. The note bears the rubric "Estante de favoritos en mi cuarto de depura-

ción.”¹² Although the note is undated, the reference to *depuración* suggests that it was composed after 1917. By the 1920s, the poet's determination to revise or *depurar* his earlier poetry had developed into an obsession. As might be expected, the list includes the major Symbolist poets, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, along with Baudelaire. The “estante de favoritos” also has a place for four authors from the world of English and Irish literature in which Jiménez was becoming increasingly interested, namely Yeats, A.E. (George Russell), Blake and Thompson. Significantly, it admits only one writer who is not primarily a poet: Nietzsche. Why should Jiménez have decided to keep Nietzsche close at hand in his *cuarto de depuración*? To be admitted into the *sanctum sanctorum* of Jiménez' poetic universe was a rare privilege, indicating a recognition of close spiritual kinship. Given such a predisposition to exclusiveness, we should weigh carefully the implications of the inclusion of Nietzsche in such chosen company.

Three aphorisms, posthumously published by Francisco Garfías, demonstrate the high esteem in which Jiménez held Nietzsche during this period. Garfías ascribes to each of them the date 1921.¹³ Together they constitute a eulogy of the philosopher's style, praising above all the quality of completeness that is to be found in Nietzsche's writings. The first one tells us that “Nietzsche's poetry seems to me to be the high point in the synthesis of German poetry and one of the world summits. It unites passion and idea in a perfect synthesis. It is a full-fledged forerunner of French symbolism.” [*sic*] The second aphorism offers an interpretation of Nietzsche's critique of contemporary values which rejects the cruder versions of the *Übermensch* ideology: “The weapons which Nietzsche and all really great men have used to bring down so much in their countries are not catapults nor cannons; they are stilettos and filaments (slender threads), subtle offspring of light, water, air, plants.” This is scarcely faint praise, and the third aphorism from this series goes even further, by attributing to Nietzsche a degree of completeness greater than that characteristic of the genius of Goethe or Shakespeare:

Goethe, for example, is all river bed with little force to channel. Shakespeare, for example, is all current and has no wish to channel his spirit. Nietzsche, for example—and how few these examples—runs with deep water fully channeled. I think he is the perfect, complete example of an inner man.

As Paul R. Olson's study has convincingly argued, it is this balance between energy and form that is the abiding aspiration of Jiménez' mature verse and prose-writings, that search for "a sensual balance between the dynamic and the static" (1929-1930; *EEE*, p. 318). In Nietzsche, Juan Ramón found support for his dedication to the arduous task of making aesthetic activity the justification of existence. Had not Nietzsche, in his prologue to the 1886 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, asserted that "the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon,"¹⁴ going on to paint a picture of the artist of the future who would realize his full potential in a sustained aesthetic interpretation of life nourished by a sense of fullness. *The Birth of Tragedy*, he proclaims, "knows only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events—a god, if you please, but certainly only an entirely reckless and amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good and the bad, his own joy and glory" (*BT*, p. 22). Nietzsche helped to liberate Jiménez' creative imagination, encouraging his heroic endeavour to make of poetic consciousness a sufficient justification of life. Self-realization through poetic labor is one of the constant themes of the aphorisms which Jiménez composed in increasing abundance during the 1920s and 1930s. "These anxieties of mine for what is universal," he wrote in 1920, "can it not be that the I's of my daily deaths, become different I's—beings, things in the world are passionately beckoning me to construct a total I?" (*EEE*, p. 277). Another undated aphorism informs us that "I have contempt for only one kind of a person: he who is consciously inferior to himself" (*EEE*, p. 254). And the poet's consciousness is directed towards the goal of self-realization through the poetic word: "For me, not to write is to be consciously dead" (1921; *EEE*, p. 301). Moreover, such an enterprise should not be directed towards the development of aesthetic taste in isolation from the bodily faculties. Jiménez envisages poetic consciousness as a broadly enriching state of being whose aim is to produce, in each individual, the complete man: "Yes, culture is not only care of intelligence and feeling. It must penetrate: cultivate the skin, the musculature, the viscera, the bones, the marrow. Only with this impregnation is another being (another thing) a man" (1935; *EEE*, p. 333).

Yet Nietzsche also helped to encourage Juan Ramón's latent messianic tendency to overestimate the importance of his poetic mission. A self-confessed "tyrant of poetry," he was singularly

intolerant of new departures in Spanish poetry in the 1920s and 1930s. Both Nietzsche and Juan Ramón Jiménez advocated as an exemplary individual the complete, solitary, creative individual who would reach a state of self-perfection through a life of constant self-overcoming. J. P. Stern suggests that Nietzsche believed in the power of ideas, above all else, to change the world. An atheist who saw an alternative to theism in a philosophy of "self-reliance and self-assertion" (p. 14), his writings present a dynamic view of knowledge as opposed to the systematic exposition of truths. However, although Nietzsche's avowed aim was to go beyond morality and advocate an aesthetic interpretation of existence based on the fictions of a powerful, yet self-controlled mind, his concern as a writer and thinker was a profoundly moral one, which Stern describes as "anguish at the fragmentation of men's lives and a moral care for the future of mankind" (p. 17). According to Stern, Nietzsche impresses us most with his energy, directed towards the investigation of the nature of truth. The formulation of this vision is correspondingly fragmentary, note-like. Static being is unmasked to reveal the eternal becoming of truth created and imposed upon chaos. Jiménez echoes such a view when he writes: "There are those who believe that in the world everything is already done; that there are norms to which we are fatally bound. I think the contrary; I believe that in each new instant everything is contained in abstract beauty ready to be made again. Thus the source of my faith: my only faith" (1920; *EEE*, pp. 277-78).

The idea of the "overman-artist" is one which many critics have accepted as being an important factor in the development of avant-garde aesthetics in the first quarter of this century. The artist is seen as an aggressive destroyer of the old and creator of the new, a megalomaniac whose aim is to impose *his* view of the world on the rest of humanity. The early theorists of Cubism, the painters Gleizes and Metzinger, write in an essay published in 1912:

The artist, having discerned a form which presents a certain intensity of analogy with his pre-existing idea, prefers it to other forms, and consequently—for we like to force our preferences on others—he endeavours to enclose the quality of this form . . . in a symbol likely to affect others. When he succeeds he forces the crowd, confronted by his integrated plastic consciousness, to adopt the same relationship he established with nature. But while the painter, eager to create, rejects the natural image as soon as he has made use of it, the crowd long remains the slave

of the painted image, and persists in seeing the world only through the adopted sign. That is why any new form seems monstrous, and why the most slavish imitations are admired.¹⁵

Underlying this analysis of the artistic process of creation and representation, is the Nietzschean discrimination between two classes of being. The superman-artist who invents a relationship between image and reality, and the herd, presumably a sophisticated one, for whom these images are created. Gleizes and Metzinger go further. In exhorting the artist to preserve his visions of reality from the comprehension of the crowd, they hope to prevent the truth which they contain, their "truth," from becoming common currency. Their analysis of the sociology of artistic communication and hermeticism anticipated much of what Ortega was to say about the "dehumanization" of art some twelve years later. They see a danger in the work of art becoming a "unit of measurement indefinitely applicable to several categories, both natural and artistic. We concede nothing to the past: why then should we favor the future by facilitating the task of the vulgarizer" (p. 6). Their argument develops along Nietzschean lines. If through weakness of spirit or intellect, the artist gives in to convention, if he "remains enslaved to the forms in common use, his work will delight the crowd—his work? the crowd's work—and will sadden the individual" (p. 14).

If these artists concede that it is the aim of art to address itself to the public, it is not in the language of the masses that it must speak, but in its own ever-changing forms, created anew by each artist. The purpose of art is not to be understood immediately, but rather to "move, to dominate, to direct" (p. 18). Observing Nietzsche's assertion that "there is only *one* world, and this is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning,"¹⁶ and, moreover, that "*We have need of lies* in order to conquer this reality, this 'truth,' that is, in order to live" (p. 18), they affirm that the artist is a realist, in that he cannot aspire to an ideal world. His statements relate to experience of the real world. However, though a realist, "he will fashion the real in the image of his mind, for there is only one truth, ours, when we impose it on everyone" (p. 18).

This argument suggests that the artist is a higher being, the elusive arbiter of taste and sensibility for the rest of society. Much of the poetry written by Juan Ramón Jiménez after 1916 seems to respond to such a view of the artist's mission. The frequently quoted poem from *Eternidades* (Madrid, 1918), in which the poet addresses

his intellect with new-found confidence and authority, articulates an ambition to express the exact nature of reality in his terms, yet for the greater illumination of mankind as a whole.

Intelligence, give me
 the exact name of things!
 . . . Let my word be
 the thing itself,
 created anew by my soul.
 Have go through me
 all who do not know them;
 have go through me
 all who have forgotten them;
 have go through me
 all who love them . . .
 Intelligence, give me
 the exact name—yours,
 theirs and mine—of all things! (LP, p. 553)

¡Intelijencia, dame / el nombre exacto de las cosas! / . . . Que mi
 palabra sea / la cosa misma, / creada por mi alma nuevamente. /
 Que por mí vayan todos / los que no las conocen, a las cosas; /
 que por mí vayan todos / los que ya las olvidan, a las cosas; / que
 por mí vayan todos / los mismos que las aman, a las cosas . . . /
 Intelijencia, dame / el nombre exacto, y tuyo, / y suyo, y mío, de
 las cosas!

The desire expressed in this poem is paradoxical, for not only does Jiménez wish for an exact correspondence between the word and the object to which it refers, but he also wishes for this definitive word to be his personal creation: “. . . Let my word be / the thing itself, / created anew by my soul.” How can the poet create the meaning of the thing itself? If the object has its own intrinsic meaning, then the writer cannot create what already exists. The key to our understanding of this poem is the adverb “anew,” *nuevamente*. Juan Ramón is engaged, or wishes to engage in, an endeavor to discover those qualities of the real world which have become atrophied or forgotten through convention. Hence he repeats the fervent desire to direct humanity towards the real world which he has rediscovered in, and recreated through poetry. He claims the right to intervene directly in the reader's perception of the real world.

This famous poem is usually interpreted along with "Vino, primero, pura," (1918, *Eternidades*, LP, 555) as the clearest articulation of Juan Ramón's determination to "purify the work" in search of the "exact name" and the "thing itself." Yet the brief poem contains fundamental contradictions. The paradoxical nature of Jiménez' new aesthetic outlook is expressed most succinctly in the last three lines: "Intelligence, give me / the exact name—yours, / theirs and mine—of all things!" Here Jiménez is excessively ambitious or confused. He is certainly confusing. On the one hand, he longs to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. On the other, he wishes the articulation of this naked truth to be his own unique expression. He desires, furthermore, that this "exact name of things" should be a revelation to everyone else about the nature of reality. The inconsistency inherent in this poem, that of the "superman-artist" who accepts the real world but seeks to impose his particular interpretation of it on the rest of society, is one which, as the extract from Gleizes' and Metzinger's essay on Cubism indicates, is at the root of the *avant-garde* mentality. The tension between the reality of the object contemplated and the assertive intelligence which contemplates and interprets it for its own delight and that of others was an abiding preoccupation which Jiménez could articulate but not resolve. "I want to see," he writes in 1924, "at the same time and with the same eye—what difficulty, what martyrdom!—limitless and without obstacle the thought that I contemplate and the limited opaque object that I look at" (*EEE*, p. 290). Juan Ramón was aware that the self-consciousness of the creative eye is both an instrument of illumination and an obstacle to true insight. The business of poetry is, for Jiménez, truth, but truth of a private and particular nature. "We are not obliged to be immortal for others, but for ourselves" (*EEE*, p. 272), an undated aphorism tells us. The primary objective of the creation of the world in poetry is the constant creation and re-creation of the creator. The world which continues on its course after the death of the poet is the real, unjust, indifferent world. For Jiménez, the greater, more abiding, more heroic and more dignifying truth is that of the artist whose strenuous efforts to create, exhaust, and re-create his existential being survive death as a heroic gesture of self-assertive will and imagination:

Create and recreate, pour out myself
until the dead man who one day leaves me
for the ground will not be I; burlesque honorably,

fully, willfully
 the crime, and bequeath to it this black puppet
 of my body on my behalf!
 And I to hide
 smiling, immortal, on the pure banks
 of the eternal river, a tree
 —in an endless sunset—
 of the divine and magic imagination! (1923, *LP*, p. 1003).

¡Crearne, recrearme, vaciarme, hasta / que el que se vaya
 muerto, de mí, un día, / a la tierra, no sea yo; burlar
 honradamente, / plenamente, con voluntad abierta, / el crimen,
 y dejarle este pelele negro / de mi cuerpo, por mí! / Y yo,
 esconderme / sonriendo inmortal, en las orillas puras / del río
 eterno, árbol / —en un poniente, inmarcesible— / de la divina y
 mágica imaginación!

Ortega's famous dictum, set out in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925), that "the poet begins where man ends," is apposite in this context. "The destiny of man," Ortega continues, "is to live his human itinerary; the mission of the poet is to invent what does not exist. In this way is the poet's task justified. The poet augments the world, adding an unreal continent to what is real and already there of its own accord."¹⁷ Many have followed the advice of Zarathustra: "The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Superman *shall* be the meaning of the earth" (*Z*, 43).¹⁸

In numerous poems written after 1916, the relationship which Juan Ramón establishes between himself and the world is of this nature. Often he ascends beyond the view of the common man. In *Piedra y cielo* (1919) a work which was dedicated to Ortega y Gasset with the inscription "To José Ortega y Gasset, vobis in his permanence" (*LP*, p. 691), he dreams of transcending the real world, transforming it into the plaything of some higher form of reality, in which he, like the hero of Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914), is also "an obscure, sad plaything."

an obscure, sad plaything, I go on dreaming
 elevated thoughts
 for which the toys are
 the sea, the earth, the stars . . . (*LP*, p. 769).

juguete oscuro y triste, voy soñando / en unas cosas altas, / de las que son juguetes / el mar, la tierra, las estrellas. . . .

Seen through the eyes of the recently married author of *Eternidades*, the real world opens up into an infinity of beautiful possibilities. Thus Juan Ramón tells us that "I climbed to the pure heaven / and lit my candle in the stars, above every dream. / Earth was an open rose. I saw it!" (*LP*, p. 596). One is reminded here that the initial inspiration for the writing of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, arguably the most mystical of all Nietzsche's works, came to the philosopher while he was on a visit to the Alps in August 1881. Writing about the conception of this work in *Ecce Homo* (1908), Nietzsche tells us that the central theme of the work, namely the concept of eternal recurrence, was jotted down with the heading: "6000 feet beyond man and time" (*EH*, p. 99). Indeed, throughout most of *Zarathustra*, the prophet dwells in the lofty seclusion of his mountain cave, isolated from the vulgar gaze.

In a similar way, Jiménez experiences not only insight into the nature of reality. Once such an experience has occurred, he imagines that he contains that reality within him: "Standing on my own rock, / I immensely gazed at the golden afternoon. / The gilded horizons came / into my eyes, in order to see the infinite" (*LP*, p. 627). Here infinity expands and is encapsulated by the consciousness. The expansion of the imagination fills the poet with a sense of total power:

Suddenly, my idea
dilates me,
and makes me greater than the universe.

Then, everything
holds within. Hard
stars, deep seas,
others' ideas, virgin
lands, become my soul.

Everywhere I command,
while uncomprehendingly
everything thinks in me (1923, *LP*, p. 810).

De pronto, me dilata / mi idea, / y me hace mayor que el universo. / Entonces, todo / se me queda dentro. Estrellas /

duras, hondos mares, / ideas de otros, tierras / vírgenes, son mi alma. / Y en todo mando yo, / mientras sin comprenderme, / todo en mí piensa.

Jiménez is not prepared to concede to any external reality that would limit his total control over his universe, the universe that is coming into being in his poetry. He will define the limits of the real. Like Zarathustra, he is the meaning of the earth, albeit an earth which orbits within the strictly indefinable limits of fantasy.

As Zarathustra reminds those who have followed him to the Blissful Islands, "you yourselves should create what you have hitherto called the world: the world should be formed in your image by your reason, your will and your love!" (Z, p. 110). In a poem from *Eternidades*, Juan Ramón alludes to a "new willpower" which inspires him to become his own creator and thereby inherit the function of the Christian Trinity: "I my own God and father and mother, / am making myself anew day and night / to my own liking" (LP, p. 647). The theme of the artist as his own god engaged in a process of self-creation which differentiates him from the rest of mankind is given emphatic expression in a poem written in 1930:

Teach god to be you.
Always be alone with everyone,
with everything, as you know how to be.

(If your will be done,
one day you'll be able to reign
alone in the midst of your world.)

Alone and with yourself, greater,
more alone than the god one day
you believed as a child (LP, p. 1182).

Enseña a dios a ser tú. / Sé solo siempre con todos, / con todo,
que puedes serlo. / (Si sigues tu voluntad, / un día podrás
reinarte / solo en medio de tu mundo.) / Solo y contigo, más
grande, / más solo que el dios que un día / creiste dios cuando
niño.

One of the consistent themes of *Eternidades* and *Piedra y cielo* is that beauty is not merely intrinsic to Nature, but must be created by the poet. In a brief poem from *Poesía* (1923), entitled simply "La verdad," Juan Ramón states his conviction that the external world and his own poetic creations are one and the same. What was

previously outside the poet now fills the hermetic world of his verses. Since the world has no other meaning than that which he gives it, to impose meaning upon it is to possess it. Hence he may triumphantly proclaim that "I have won from the world / my world. Immensity / alien before is today / my immensity" (*LP*, p. 895).

There is of course a danger that the writer, through an increasing sense of imaginative power and control bred in splendid isolation, will cease to be self-critical and succumb to illusions of grandeur. He may come to believe that his images have the status of absolute truth. Nietzsche was sensitive to this peril, warning, in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), that while there is much to be said in favor of the exception, this is only true provided that it never wishes to become the rule. In the modern, obsessively introspective and self-critical age, values are held to be provisional. The artist who is convinced that he has discovered the truth is destined to lose hold on an unstable medium. His words are only "truthful" insofar as they convey an original perspective on some hitherto unsung aspect of reality. While the history of Juan Ramón Jiménez' verse is one of periodic, unpredictable change, it is nonetheless apparent that he could easily become seduced by his own creations and, Pygmalion-like, gaze lovingly at the *Obra* as though it could supplant the reality of which it is an ambiguous image. What results is an enraptured complacency which conveys only a sense of power. The world is no longer something to be transformed by the creative eye. Instead it has been reduced to something comfortable. Often it appears to gratify a mere sense of order and routine:

How gratifying
 this returning to our home, our soul, our history
 in our body, our street, our life;
 we find seated sweetly there,
 like proper ladies,
 ideas in the morning's light (*LP*, p. 787).

Qué grato / este volver a nuestra casa, a nuestra alma, a nuestra
 historia, / de nuestro cuerpo, de la calle, de la vida; /
 encontramos aquí sentadas, dulces, / como mujeres propias, /
 las ideas de la luz de la mañana.

While such images have a certain homely charm, they suggest a writer with a propensity to enjoy the pleasures of a world created for his exclusive delight, rather than one willing to undertake the task of

seeking out new themes. At frequent periods during his life, Jiménez failed to live up to the challenge which he set himself early in his poetic career: "O rinnovarsi o morire." All too often he sat back when he found a comfortable style. Much of his most interesting verse comes from those works which mark periods of stylistic innovation: *Ninfeas* (1900), *Almas de violeta* (1900), *Arias tristes* (1903), *Sonetos espirituales* and the *Diario* (1917), *Espacio* (1943-54). Between each of these new departures extend long periods of relaxed tension during which, rather than search for new styles, the poet spends his time polishing old ones. His *Obra* is a world in which he reigns supreme; there is nothing to disturb its serenity. He states in a poem from *Poesía* that

Through clear October air, I live
 the universe in myself.
 All destinies leave
 for the mansion of my books;
 all cities, intimate
 suburbs are of my spirit (*LP*, p. 992).

Por octubre claro, vivo / el universo en mí mismo. / Salen todos
 los destinos / al gran solar de mis libros; / todas las ciudades,
 íntimos / suburbios son de mi espíritu.

There is, therefore, in Juan Ramón Jiménez more than a hint of the artistic megalomania that characterizes many of Zarathustra's pronouncements. Even when the prophet expresses the desire to speak to inferior men, it is not through need but rather through an excess of wisdom which needs to be disseminated to a captive audience. This explains the refusal of the prophet to speak to the mob which believes in the God-given principle of equality. For Zarathustra, as for Juan Ramón in such moments, the public consists of a chosen few who understand the nature of the task which he has undertaken.

Yet Nietzsche also exerted influence of a more positive nature, in that he offered Jiménez an image of the complete, revitalized individual emerging from a period of decadence. In the poetry and prose written by Juan Ramón after 1916, the theme of vitality displaces the weariness and *abulia* that affected much of the verse composed during his last years in Moguer. In the *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (1917), the long encounter with the Atlantic Ocean

provided him with the spectacle of restless energy which, though incalculable, was yet contained within the rhythmic motion of the waves. In one poem, the sea is an "endless disorder, ceaseless iron" ("Mar", *LP*, p. 259), but the poet interprets this disorder as an image of the sea's struggle to discover itself or be discovered by him. Hence this spectacle is a metaphor for the poet's own consciousness. The poem begins, "It seems, sea, you struggle / —oh endless disorder, ceaseless iron— / to find yourself or so that I may find you." In another poem written during the journey back to Cádiz, the sea is presented in the guise of a playful Titan who is too busy enjoying the display of his own strength to take any notice of the spectator. It is at such moments that Jiménez becomes convinced that Nature contains no intrinsic beauty, meaning or truth for man, who is only the beholder of its untamed and gratuitous energy. The affective relationship between man and nature will always be a unilateral one. It is a stubborn Romantic fallacy to believe that nature can reciprocate man's feelings towards it. And so, rejecting the Romantic heritage, Juan Ramón observes, "I am an unknown to it. It passes like an idiot / before me" (*LP*, p. 431). The sea is an inhuman force without any intrinsic order. The poet makes an ironic comment on the unconscious force of the ocean when, in order to interpret the violent energy of the waves as a symbol of animosity towards the sea-voyagers, it is necessary to give the sea almost human qualities with the remark, "On all sides / it appears and frightens us; at every instant / the sea becomes almost human in order to hate me" (*LP*, p. 432).

The experience of the Atlantic during his voyage to and from New York in 1916 provided Juan Ramón with an insight into the essential meaninglessness of nature that was particularly fruitful. It reinforced the poet's determination to create his own explanation of the world, but in terms not of flight into reverie, as in the early period of his career, but rather immersion in its ineluctable and concrete reality. Thus the dynamic energy of the sea corresponds to the poet's consciousness, then in a state of ferment, bombarded during the weary weeks at sea and the hectic months in North America by a host of unfamiliar stimuli. The task which Jiménez assumed was to order these life-enhancing stimuli into some interpretation of existence according to which man would assume dignity above and independence from the realm of pure matter. Without a God to do this for him, he must labour alone. In *The Joyous Wisdom*, Nietzsche calls for a type of art which will give man this independence. "We need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art, lest

we lose the freedom above things that our ideal demands of us" (*JW*, 164).¹⁹

In another poem written during the return journey to Spain, Juan Ramón offers us an example of this type of art. In the following poem, he returns to the theme of the blind, chaotic force of the ocean, which is totally oblivious to the poet who is attempting to make human sense of it. "You keep murmuring / in a strange shapeless language / about me; you don't have to have anything to do / with me" (*LP*, p. 437). The meaningless language which the sea babbles serves as a challenge to the poet. It is he who must try to understand it. The sea communicates no fixed meaning, and Jiménez must project a meaning unto it. Between the poet and the ocean lies a threatening void, the vacuum left when the traditional belief that nature is the creation of a benevolent deity ceased to satisfy Western man. The poet addresses the sea, "between your going / and my coming / rests the immense indifference / of an eternal nostalgia." The enigmatic nature of the sea evades the poet's enquiring mind, and leaves in its wake an infinite absence. What distinguishes the insight expressed in this poem from the verse of the early period is the admission that, though ultimate truth is unknowable, the poet cannot escape from the real world that defies his understanding. The sea returns to challenge him, to mock his attempts to understand it, to silence him.

Suddenly, you grow
 motionless, vacillating,
 a colossal drunkard and, scarlet colored,
 you look at me with rage
 and unknowing
 and you frighten me by shouting in my face
 until I am deaf, mute, and blind . . . (*LP*, pp. 437-38).

De repente, te vuelves / parado, vacilante, / borracho colosal y,
 grana, / me miras con encono / y desconocimiento / y me
 asustas gritándome en mi cara / hasta dejarme sordo, mudo y
 ciego. . . .

The sea is depicted in this series of images as a colossal brute of titanic strength, whose movements are unpredictable, whose moods are fickle and gratuitous. The sea seems to be demanding that the poet repent for the long years in Moguer when he secluded himself from the brute energy of life, a period in which he endeavored to escape from

life through art. Yet, reciprocally, the sea is indebted to the poet who observes it in order that it may be given a human meaning and saved from its own meaningless and self-destructive chaos. After his reconciliation with the ocean, it appears to scamper off like a happy child at play.

Then smiling, and singing
that you pardon me,
off you go, muttering silly things,
imitating the grunts of wild beasts,
the capers of dolphins,
and the chirping of birds . . . (LP, p. 438).

Luego, te ríes, y cantando / que me perdonas, / te vas, diciendo
disparates, / imitando gruñidos de fieras / y saltos de delfines / y
piadas de pájaros. . . .

The idea of nature as energy transformed into play corresponds to Juan Ramón's conception of poetry as effort transformed into song. Hence in the poem from *Belleza* above, he sings of life as a process of "Create, recreate, and pour myself out" (LP, p.1003). Here the poet puns on the double meaning of *recreate*: the constant process of self-creation is likened to the self-sufficient joy of play (*recreo*).

In the first of Zarathustra's discourses, the prophet describes the three metamorphoses which the human spirit must undergo on the road to perfection that leads to the superman. Firstly, it imagines itself to be a camel conceiving of its existence as a weight which must be carried on its back. This might be termed the heroic phase of spiritual development. The weight-bearing spirit asks for the heaviest burden so that it might rejoice in its strength. The strength which is the hallmark of the hero is the ability to overcome one's own pride, to mock one's victories, to refuse to turn away in horror from the unpalatable truth. The hero is required to "love those who despise us and to offer our hand to the ghost when it wants to frighten us" (Z, p. 54), in a gesture not of weakness or Christian forgiveness, but of superior strength. In the *Diario* the frightening spectre is the sea, yet the poet is prepared to extend to it the hand of friendship. The hostile titan is transformed into a benign St. Christopher who rescues the poet from his fear.

Zarathustra tells us that the second metamorphosis of the spirit occurs in the deserts of solitude into which the hero is driven by his impossible demands upon himself. Now the spirit becomes a lion,

anxious to "capture freedom and be lord in its own desert." In the desert, the lion does battle with the great dragon, symbolizing God, who demands absolute subservience. The lion thus represents the rebellious spirit of those who, like the camel, have undertaken to seek out new values and struggle against the tyranny of hollow idols. Out of the camel and the lion emerges a third and final form, namely the child: "The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes." The affirmation of earthly values is necessary, Zarathustra tells his followers, for "the sport of creation: the spirit now wills its *own* will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins its own world" (Z, p. 55). The last part of this quotation calls to mind Jiménez' exultant statement noted above, "I have won from the world / my world" (LP, p. 895).

A poem from *Poesía*, first published in 1921, articulates in a most successful manner the essence of the Nietzschean doctrine of childlike joy achieved through a process of exertion.

I threw you, obstinate stone,
into the abyss.

—Time

—lost?—rock of my pure work,
to conquer your ugly bulk.

Standing before me now, still breathless,
once again evident in everything. Above the sky
in the pacific west, like a pink rose,
from whence I came forth, pure,
sweating pale stars.

Between my chest and aching arms,
the divine sensation of a gigantic rose,
that once was—when?—of stone (LP, p. 843).

Ya te rodé, canto obstinado, / en el abismo. / —¡Tiempo / ¿perdido?, piedra, de mi obra pura, / para vencer tu fealdad grosera!— / Ahora, de pie, jadeante aún, / otra vez en lo todo llano. Arriba, el cielo / del ocaso pacífico, como un agua rosada, / de donde me he salido, puro, / sudando estrellas pálidas. / Y entre el pecho y los brazos doloridos, / la sensación divina de una gigante rosa, / que fue—¿cuándo?—de piedra.

The poem makes felicitous use of the double meaning of *canto*, both a song and a boulder. The labour of smoothing the rough edges of a poem takes the poet from the depths of solitude (*abismo*) to the serenity of well-earned success “en lo todo llano.” The poet’s Sisyphean determination to overcome both the ravages of time (¡Tiempo / ¿perdido?) and the ugliness of brute matter transforms the initial burden of the amorphous proto-poem into a “jigante rosa” indistinguishable from the sunset whose “agua rosada” might sooth the aching arms of the perspiring poet. The camel’s load has become a weightless object of delight.

Such a metamorphosis of Jiménez’ view of poetic labor gives rise in the mature verse to a series of images in which the poet is presented as the wielder of heroic yet disciplined strength. Hence he announces in a terse poem from *Eternidades*, “forgers of swords; here is the word!” (*LP*, p. 598). This little poem, sharp as a blade, presents the poetic word as a potent instrument of spiritual strength, capable of exercising authority over others. In a poem from *Belleza* Juan Ramón rejoices in the perfectly formed beauty of the poetic artifact as it emerges from his forge. The victory which Jiménez refers to in this poem is not, however, at the expense of anything outside the creative process itself.

How pure the fire in action
—heart, iron, Work!—
How clear the flames leap
from the red and black labor!
With what happy beauty
its spirit tongues preen
the air it turns transparent
—heart, Work, iron!—
after the struggle and the victory (*LP*, p. 1011).

¡Qué puro el fuego cuando se ejercita / —corazón, hierro,
Obra!— / ¡Cómo salen de claras / sus llamas del trabajo rojo y
negro! / Con qué alegre belleza se relame / con sus lenguas de
espíritu, / en el aire por él trasparenteado / —¡corazón, Obra,
hierro!— / después de la pelea y la victoria.

Gone are the images of faded, anaemic beauty, of the crepuscular melancholy and the images of death and slow decay which provided the youthful poet with a degree of solace. Here, instead, is a world coming into the fullness of being, a world created.

It must be apparent now why Juan Ramón Jiménez should have selected Nietzsche for inclusion in the list of authors given pride of place on the "book shelf of his favorites." Though Jiménez might quibble with Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch* on the grounds that "the hero in life does not need to be a superman but rather achieve as much as a man can," I have argued that the poet's abiding interest in the German philosopher is based on deep affinity. Thus when Jiménez came to expound his controversial theory of *modernismo*, he singled out Nietzsche as a formative influence. Modernism for Juan Ramón in 1936 was, and continued to be, "a fundamental reencounter of human form and content, or more than human (already Nietzsche, universal and contemporary through his writing, universal because his writing and spirit was 'modernist' in his native Germany)." ²⁰ I have outlined where the broad area of thematic affinity lies. It is my contention that Jiménez' philosophical and ideological orientation is partly to be accounted for in terms of the type of secular, vitalistic and obsessively aesthetic interpretation of individual existence exemplified by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Indeed, Juan Ramón might almost have been paraphrasing Nietzsche when he affirmed in the notes that accompanied *Animal de fondo* (1949):

My three vocational norms throughout life—woman, work, death—resolved into an awareness, an understanding of up to what divine point the human side of man's grace could climb; that what was divine could be had by cultivation; that man could be an ultimate man with the gifts we have supposed formed in the shape of divinity" (*LP*, pp. 1343–44).

For Nietzsche, the mission of the artist—his own mission—was to bring into being the *Übermensch* whose example would lead humanity towards the reintegration of its fragmented world-view. For Juan Ramón Jiménez the goal was a God-Poet who was "the one, at last, god now only for my oneness, / in the world that through you and for you I have created" (*LP*, p. 1290). The similarity of these ideals is hardly fortuitous.

NOTES

1. Conor Cruise O'Brien, "The Gentle Nietzscheans" in *The New York Review of Books*, 15, No. 8 (November 5, 1970) 12.
2. J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978), p. 22.
3. *Ecce Homo* (1908). Translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 126. Hereafter *EH*.
4. See Paul Ilie, "Nietzsche in Spain: 1890-1910," *PMLA*, 79 (1964), 80-96. Also Gonzalo Sobejano, *Nietzsche en España* (Madrid: Gredos, 1967), which includes a rather superficial examination of Jiménez' interest in Nietzsche. Sobejano's study is comprehensive but uneven.
5. See Ricardo Gullón, *Conversaciones con Juan Ramón Jiménez* (Madrid: Taurus, 1958), p. 78.
6. See Domingo Paniagua, *Revistas culturales contemporáneas* (Madrid: "Punta Europa," 1964), pp. 53-55.
7. Sobejano, *Nietzsche en España*, p. 60.
8. Gullón, *Conversaciones*, p. 78.
9. The works on or by Nietzsche now held in the poet's library in Moguer are as follows. Unless otherwise stated, they were published in Paris by the Société du *Mercure de France*: *Aforismos y sentencias*, selección y traducción de Ricardo Baeza (Madrid, Atenea, 1918); *Le Cas Wagner* suivi de *Nietzsche contre Wagner* (1914); *Considérations Inactuelles*, 2 vols., (1907, 1922); *Le Crépuscule des Idoles* (1914); *Ecce Homo* suivi de *Poésies* (1916); *Epistolario inédito* (Madrid: Pueyo, 1919); *Le Gai Savoir* (1917); *La Généalogie de la Morale* (1913); *Humain, Trop Humain* (1916); *L'Origine de la Tragédie* (n.d.); *Pages Choisies* (1918); *Par Delà le Bien et le Mal* (1917); *La volonté de Puissance*, 2 vols., (1918); *Le Voyageur et son Ombre* (1915); Charles Andler, *Nietzsche, sa Vie et sa Pensée*, (Paris: Bossard, 1920-31): vol. 1, *Les Précurseurs de Nietzsche* (1920); vol. 2, *La Jeunesse de Nietzsche* (1921); vol. 3, *Le Pessimisme Esthétique de Nietzsche* (1921); vol. 5, *Nietzsche et le Transformisme Intellectualiste* (1922); Pierre Lasserre, *Les Idées de Nietzsche sur la Musique. La Période Wagnérienne, 1871-1876* (1907); Francisco de Icaza, *Nietzsche, poeta* (Madrid: publisher unknown, 1921); Moisés Vincenzi, *El caso Nietzsche. Apuntes para un estudio del método filosófico de Nietzsche* (San José de Costa Rica: Imp. Gutenberg, 1930).
10. Gullón, *Conversaciones*, p. 78.
11. Paul R. Olson, *Circle of Paradox* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967), p. 199.
12. The manuscript is in the Archivo Histórico Nacional, and is numbered Caja 11, 59/77.

13. *Estética y ética estética* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), pp. 280–81. Hereafter *EEE*.
14. *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Vintage, 1967). Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Hereafter *BT*.
15. "On Cubism." Originally published as *Du Cubisme* (Paris: E. Figuière, 1912). Translated unabridged in *Modern Artists on Art*, edited by R.L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964).
16. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).
17. José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, VI (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1947), p. 227.
18. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin Classics, 1969). Hereafter *Z*.
19. *The Joyous Wisdom*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann as *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974). Hereafter *JW*.
20. *El modernismo* (Mexico: Aguilar, 1962), p. 181.