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R E V I E W

Howard T. Young, *The Line in the Margin: Juan Ramón Jiménez and His Readings in Blake, Shelley, and Yeats*

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standing that there was to be no dancing on point ("which made him feel ill"). The idea was then offered to Diaghilev, who turned it down as "too English and too old-fashioned." In the end, the work was brilliantly choreographed by Ninette de Valois and performed by the Camargo Society in 1931. Thence it passed into the repertoire of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, now the Royal Ballet. A revival of this ballet, so splendidly true to Blake's vision, is long overdue (hopefully with the restoration of the original Raverat sets rather than the rather inappropriate ones by John Piper that were later substituted for them).

Space does not permit more than the mere mention of Geoffrey Keynes' other bibliographies: those of John Donne (1915, 4th ed. 1974), the works published by William Pickering (1924), Jane Austen (1929), William Hazlitt (1931), John Evelyn (1937), and Bishop George Berkeley (1977). His achievement as a book collector is indicated by the catalogue of his library, comprising over 4,000 titles, published in 1964. His remarkable life is symbolized for me by one of the many fascinating photographs in this book, showing G.L.K. aged ninety-two in front of the enormous tulip tree at Lammas House. When he died three years later, many a scholar half a century younger felt the loss of one who was at the same time a founder of our discipline and an invigorating contemporary presence—"a friend with whom he liv'd benevolent."<sup>2</sup>

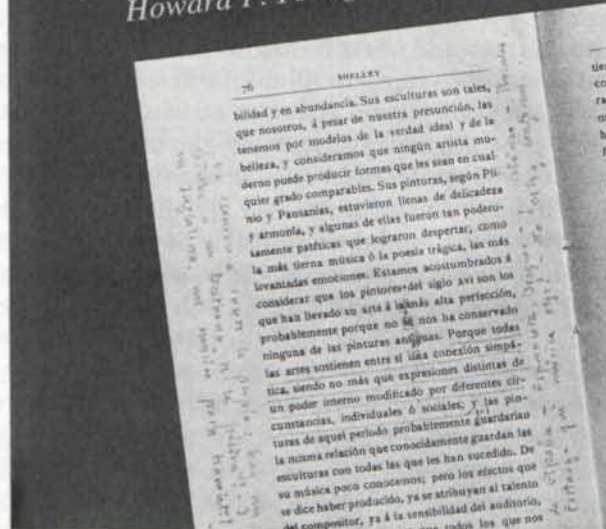
#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Fons et Origo" by G. E. Bentley, Jr., in *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. M. D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 349-76.

<sup>2</sup> Milton, 15:27, *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 497.



### *The Line in the Margin* Juan Ramón Jiménez and His Readings in Blake, Shelley, and Yeats Howard T. Young



Howard T. Young. *The Line in the Margin: Juan Ramon Jimenez and His Readings in Blake, Shelley, and Yeats*. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1980. Pp. 384. \$22.50.

Reviewed by John Wilcox

Hispanists consider Juan Ramón Jiménez—the centenary of whose birth on 23 December 1881 has just been celebrated—as a major "modern" European poet. For English readers of poetry, however, his cannot be a familiar name, and the appearance of a full-length study of his readings in Shelley, Yeats, and Blake must come as something of a surprise.

The author, Howard Young, explored this aspect of Jiménez in earlier research,<sup>1</sup> but here for the first time he presents a host of hitherto unknown—and inaccessible—details concerning Jiménez's readings in the English poets as well as his attempts to translate them into Spanish. The new information Young painstakingly gathered from the Jiménez archives (in Puerto Rico and in Spain) is used, in effect, to re-read Juan Ramón's poetry. We glimpse a Juan Ramón filtered through the gaze of three English poets. The result is

of indisputable value for Hispanists, especially those with comparatist leanings. The result should also intrigue scholars who study the English poets themselves, and they will certainly interest those of us who believe that insufficient recognition has been given to the contribution made by English Romanticism in the rise of "modern" European poetry.

Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881–1958) is perhaps better known to English readers as a prose-writer. He is the author of *Platero and I*, — a lyrical novel centering around the friendship that develops between a lonely and impressionable young poet and his donkey on their trips in and around the tiny Andalusian village of Moguer (where Jiménez was born and where he resided until 1912). Though this book has been translated into numerous languages, Jiménez's reception abroad as a poet is undoubtedly handicapped by the originality of his style, the unique subtlety of which can be appreciated only in Spanish (despite excellent English translations<sup>2</sup>). Nor did Jiménez possess the ability — of a Neruda or a Borges — to project himself onto an international audience. He tended to withdraw to concentrate on his work (*Obra*, he called it). He moved to Madrid in 1912, and in 1916 (in New York) married Zenobia Camprubí Aymar, who was fluent in English and who always assisted him with his English readings. Even in Madrid, the couple's life was quiet. Jiménez knew he wrote for a small audience, and in fact dedicated his work "To the Immense Minority." At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, they left Spain to live in North America, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, where Jiménez concentrated on his spiritual and aesthetic concerns. Though he won the Nobel Prize in 1956, his wife's death deprived him of the ability to enjoy it, and he himself died two years later, a pathetic figure in exile in Puerto Rico.

Howard Young is able to show that Jiménez was reading Shelley, Yeats, and Blake throughout these phases in his life. In fact, each move brought with it renewed interest in English (and American) poetry. Young sees Jiménez's reading as an "attachment" and a "lure" and claims that it moved him "beyond the horizon of his Spanish and French literary inheritance to discover confirmation of some of his basic ideas and to delight in a new tone and different perspectives for evoking the ideals and mysteries that beguiled symbolist poets." To appreciate that claim, we need to know something about Jiménez's poetry and its historical situation.

Juan Ramón's first poems are termed *modernista* by Hispanic literary critics. *Modernismo* is not at all what *Modernism* is in the Anglo-American world. In general it is taken to be the style of the latter part of the nineteenth century, a form of Art Nouveau (as Young implies). It has certain similarities with "Aestheticism" and "Pre-Raphaelitism" in England, and "Parnassianism" and "Symbolism" in France. Jiménez's *modernista* poetry appeared in 1900, in two small volumes, *Ninfeas* (*Water-lilies*) and *Almas de violeta* (*Violet-souls*); the former

were printed in green and the latter in purple ink. Here is a stanza from the "Water-lilies' Symphony": "On the lake of blood of my grieving soul, / from the melancholy garden of my weeping soul; / on the lake of blood of a suspiring Love, / on which a most sad swan entones a dying wail. . . ." <sup>3</sup> It must come as little surprise to be told that Jiménez repudiated and systematically destroyed these volumes in later life. The artificiality he rejected, but the aesthetic idealism he internalized. His dominant style, until around 1913, is that of a minor symbolist and impressionist. He is a pantheistic lover of nature, a sentimental sensualist; he is self-absorbed and withdrawn, and at times a bitterly disillusioned idealist. Toward the end of this first period in his work, he wrote: "Even as we return the golden moon is shining on the ramparts . . . / a breath of flowers-cum-moon invades the countryside . . . / the heart becomes melodious and romantic . . . / Even the love complete has a tragic meaning; / in the gaze of impassioned eyes / the dream of life floats, immense and nostalgic . . . / we find slow hands in our hands . . . / we find breasts brushing against our arms, / we find mute lips on our lips . . ." (PLP 1406). This poem is part of the section on *Melancolía* (*Melancholy*, published in 1912) dedicated to Louise Grimm de Muriedas, a cultivated North American who, as Howard Young discovered, introduced Juan Ramón to the work of various English poets.

Jiménez's exposure to English (and American) poetry is certainly one of the contributing factors to the stunning change that overcomes his work after 1913. The dreamy sentimentalism and self-indulgent pessimism are gone, replaced by precision, deliberate control and cerebral rigor. "Intelligence, give me / the exact name of things!" <sup>4</sup> is one of his more famous poems of this time. It is as though Juan Ramón reacted utterly against his former poetic personae. Instead of failure, he now encounters (in the figure of his wife Zenobia) a love that is ideal: "All roses are the same rose; / love!, the unique rose; / and all's contained in it, / brief image of the world, / love, the unique rose" (LP 909). He now sees in the real what was before considered eternally elusive.

Jiménez acquired a reputation for the metaphysical (existential) reach of his poetry. His *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (*Diary of a poet newlywed*, 1916) introduced into Hispanic poetry a poetic subject struggling with the chaos and absurdity of contemporary life who nevertheless quests for integration and harmony. We read the sea symbol in his *Diary* as indicative of poetic thought at the beginning of this "modern" age experiencing the disintegration of all cherished values and ideals: "It seems, sea, that you're struggling / — oh endless disorder, unceasing iron! — / to find yourself, or for me to find you" (LP 259).

Jiménez acquired the reputation for being a fastidious elitist in matters poetic. He is a "high-modern," in the

manner of Valéry (and Mallarmé) and Yeats. In this persona, Juan Ramón sees himself as living only for his poetry: "Poetry; dew / of each dawn, child / of each night" (LP 881). He becomes an entity that creates, oblivious to temporal flow: "To create myself, to recreate myself, to empty myself, until / he who goes dead, from me, one day, / to earth, will not be me" (LP 1003).

Related to this ideal is Jiménez's struggle to overcome his fear of death (a frequent topic in the early poetry and one that brought him much attention). Juan Ramón achieved renown by claiming "To die is only to look within" (LP 899) and that "Death is an ancient mother of ours, / our first mother, who loves us through all others, century in, century out / and never, never forgets us." (LP 1088). The poet, in this second phase of his work, appears to be in complete control of all he touches, the master of his universe, and that, in general, is Jiménez's reputation as a poet today.

There is, however, a third Jiménez, one that emerges more clearly in the poetry written in exile after 1936. In this period, we hear, as Yeats might have remarked, the voices of an ecstatic "saint" alternating with those of a sceptic "hunchback." The ecstatic and visionary poetry is encountered in, for example, *Animal de Fondo* (*Animal of depth*, 1949). The vision in the poem "Soy animal de fondo" ("I'm an animal of depth")—an image Ezra Pound used in the *Cantos*—is one of transcendence linked to temporal flow, an immanent transcendence, of the beyond flourishing with the here and now. These two "realities" fuse because the poet has cultivated both throughout his lifetime. The poem begins: "In the depth of air' (I said) 'I am', / (I said) 'I'm an animal with depth of air' (on land), / now on sea; shot through, like air, by a sun / that's a coal up there, my outside, and lights up for me / with its coal my second destined ambit" (LP 1339).

In competition with this ecstatic visionary is the sceptic, the doubter, who in "Río-mar-desierto" ("River-sea-desert"), after Shelley and Yeats, contemplates with equanimity the "detaining of his wave" ("la ola detenida"), who experiences the river of his life changing into desert sand. But such philosophical resignation is absent in 1954, in the "Third Fragment" of a long prose poem called *Espacio* (*Space*); the poetic voice here cries to its consciousness: "Doesn't it pain you to leave me? . . . Didn't you like my life? I searched and found your essence for you. What substance can the gods give to your essence that I couldn't give you? I have already told you: 'The gods had no more substance than what I had.'"<sup>5</sup>

The reader must surely hear Blake in these lines, and indeed this is one of the topics Howard Young discusses in "The Substance of the Gods," one of the seven sections he devotes to his study of Blake in Juan Ramón. Young is able to demonstrate that Blake's impact is still felt by what we termed the "third" Jiménez. Shelley is more important in the first period of his work; then Yeats

takes over (Jiménez read Yeats' essays on Shelley). Though Yeats is present in the third phase, Young amply demonstrates the parallels with Blake.

Young's study begins with Shelley because, as Young discovered, Shelley was the first of the three that Juan Ramón read. He read him in a Spanish translation, published by "the British hispanophile Leonard Williams" in 1904, which contained *A Defence of Poetry*, "On Love," and "A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients Relative to the Subject of Love." Young analyzes the passages marked off by Juan Ramón, and he also discusses his subsequent attempts to translate a few poems (e.g. "Mutability" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"). Young's thesis is that the Platonism of the *Defence*, together with the Platonic idealism prevalent in contemporary schools of Spanish philosophy, encouraged Jiménez to overcome his *modernista* heritage. Shelley is read as helping to convince Juan Ramón that poetry is unquestionably the form "Beauty" chooses to take in this world, and moreover, that the poet, in the moment of the poem, sees "Beauty," and therefore "Good," more clearly than any other sentient being. Jiménez was dimly aware of these ideals when he first began writing, as the "Water-lilies' Symphony" (the first quatrain of which is cited above) implies in the image of a poet suffering to create Beauty and Love. Later, the idealism becomes clearer to him and he expresses it more subtly, as a poem from *Laberinto* (published 1913) reveals: "Like a quiet river, on the paper, the brow / reflects, sadly, the words, / that vibrate in its heavens, like the golden notes / of a labyrinth of bells. . . ." Words have become musical notes that form a vague piece of architecture that contains "something from the beyond, that reaches life / along a path of nostalgia" (PLP 1273). The style here more befits a symbolist, and the idealism is recognizably Platonic.

Howard Young shows that Shelley's thoughts on love also impressed Jiménez. He goes on to note that the Spanish poet shared Shelley's ideals about woman, and he proposes the fascinating interpretation that the Spanish poet's numerous maidens be read as ideal projections of the elusive antitype. There is indeed an array of "beloveds" in Juan Ramón's early phase, and to read them as a desire to fill the vacuum within, to suggest that they are part of the narcissistic search for the "other," is to stimulate future readings of the poet's work.

In addition, Young maintains that Shelley's transcendental attitude toward love, in a "Discourse on the Manner . . .," would have helped free Jiménez from the "unadulterated sensuality" that was part of his poetic patrimony (through the Nicaraguan, Rubén Darío) but with which Jiménez never felt at ease. Young also suggests that in Jiménez's poetry there is a development of the "veiled maiden" symbol; the veils are removed and "ideal nakedness," not disillusion, is experienced. At the end of one of his famous poems "Vino, primero, pura, /

vestida de inocencia" ("She came, first, pure, / dressed in innocence"), whose parallels with Yeats's "A Coat" are taken up later by Young, the poet exclaims: "And she took off her tunic, / and appeared completely naked . . . / O passion of my life, naked / poetry, mine forever!" (LP 555). This "lifelong quest for the spirit of beauty," Young notes, reaches a "joyous conclusion" in *Animal of depth*.

If Juan Ramón's interest in Shelley faded around 1920, his fascination with Yeats and Blake increased. Yeats, of course, was more or less a contemporary, and Jiménez certainly considered him, with reverence, as a peer whose interests were compatible (witness their enthusiasm for Tagore). Jiménez bought and read Yeats's dramas, his essays and his poems. He read them in English with the help of his wife, who translated Yeats's early plays into Spanish with Yeats's permission. (Nothing was ever published, but *The Countess Cathleen* survives.) Jiménez himself translated about a dozen poems, some of which were published (in the 1940s). Juan Ramón liked a little known "Preface" Yeats wrote for three of his plays, and adapted from it the notion of "spontaneous simplicity" when he was trying to explain his own "naked poetry." For Jiménez, "spontaneous simplicity" is captured in art only after prolonged and intensive reworking.

Like Yeats, Jiménez was fascinated by the "rose" and its connotative power. Young shows that he knew "The Rose of All the World" and Yeats' essay on "Magic." Jiménez used the rose much more extensively than Yeats but was never as committed to the occult (despite, as Young has discovered, being a sensitive medium when he was a student). In later life Jiménez would refer to "Destiny," and Young shows that Yeats discussed this in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, a work the Spanish poet knew. Jiménez must in fact have read more of Yeats than we can know (that is, more than his libraries hold today). He cites from "Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop," for instance, in *Space*, but we have no record of his having read this poem. "Love in the palace of excrement" is how he recalled the lines, as though they had been transfixed in his mind for some time. My own suspicion is that the impact Yeats made was stronger than Young would allow in his study.

But with Blake, Young's perspective broadens—he sees Jiménez as bringing to a conclusion, in the 1950s, the tradition of the poet as visionary humanist, which Blake began at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Young writes that "Blake is the Modern prophet of the imagination divine, who also worshipped *lo desnudo* (the naked)," and adds that "Just as Blake signals the opening of modern phase of this tradition of the poet qua divinity, so the *dios deseado y deseante* (god desired and desiring) announces its conclusion. For as Pablo Neruda said in Stockholm some twenty years after the publication of *Animal of depth*, 'El poeta no es un 'pequeño dios.' ["Poets are not 'little gods.'] For this reason, Young offers in his final sixty pages a comparison of parallel concerns in Jiménez and Blake.

Young acknowledges that Jiménez would have been a naive reader of Blake, as he could not have deciphered the symbolism. Despite this, he "carefully read nearly all the lyrical canon of Blake," beginning around 1916 with Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book*, and continuing in 1927 when the Cambridge Hispanist J. B. Trend gave him Blake's collected poetry and prose. Young shows that Juan Ramón translated "The Tyger," "To the Muses," "A Poison Tree," "The Sick Rose," and "The Little Black Boy," as well as intending to translate two dozen or more (including nothing less than *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*). We also learn that Juan Ramón valued Blake's "bold nudes" and that on a copy of "The Temptation of Eve" he wrote "Influencia de Blake" ("Influence of Blake").<sup>6</sup> Jiménez himself drew nude figures and found in the naked woman a symbol of complete fulfillment.

For Hispanists, all of this information is novel. It was known that Jiménez translated a few poems and made a few references to Blake, but the extent of his interest is astounding. It confirms, at least for this reader, a point that Howard Young is tacitly making: that Jiménez was far too original a poet to remain satisfied with his own "latin" poetic tradition (Jiménez's word). His passion for exploring this alien tradition—Young is more circumspect, for, as we noted, he calls it an "attachment"—was dictated by his need to survive as a poet. His Spanish and French literary inheritance stifled him, and he discovered in the "northern" lyric (his word) sufficient inspiration to keep him alive poetically. The "anxiety of influence" begins to take on strange proportions. We mention only the poets, but there are the real individuals from this alien tradition who also contributed in their incidental ways: Leonard Williams, Louise Grimm, and J. B. Trend we have mentioned; and there was also Lennox Robinson (the director of the Abbey Theatre after Yeats).

Literary history must yield to literary criticism, and that is how the book ends. Young compares Blake and Jiménez, to show, I think, that Jiménez is unjustly underrated as a European "modern." Juan Ramón shared with Blake the belief that "imagination is all." He held this idealism until the last years of his life. He shared with Blake, especially in his later work, "God desired and desiring," the experience of Eternity in the here and now, not in some "indefinite heaven of Platonic abstraction." As in Blake, Young notes, in Jiménez the "childlike" forms an integral part of his final vision, into which, notes Young, Juan Ramón incorporates the "innocence, freshness, and suspicion of divinity . . . that clings to children." As far as nakedness is concerned, Young argues that though the naked human body is put to similar symbolic use by Jiménez, the Spanish poet was never as comfortable with it as Blake was. And finally, in discussing Blake's conviction that the human mind itself creates that which is divine, Young refers to Juan Ramón's cry

that "The gods had no more substance than what I have" and argues that in his later work Jiménez is struggling to integrate such apocalyptic humanism with his earlier and deeply entrenched Platonism. Though we at times see him as "shoring fragments against his ruins," we also see, with Young, Juan Ramón bringing to a successful conclusion Blake's prophecies that art is a religion, that the artist's is a divine calling, that the human form be glorified and life deified, and that man encounter paradise, discover immanent and transcendent gods, within the human mind.

Juan Ramón Jiménez was perhaps the first European in this century to discover Blake's importance. The Spanish surrealists in the 1920s saw Blake as a surrealist, and Jiménez argued against this view. Students of Blake today might be intrigued by what they see as Jiménez's "misreading" of their poet, but students of Jiménez, especially those who see him as much more than a "Peninsular" poet, will be long in debt to Howard Young for this challenging reassessment of a poet who deserves to be read with the major European "moderns" of this century.

<sup>1</sup> "Anglo-American Poetry in the Correspondence of Luisa and Juan Ramón Jiménez," *Hispanic Review*, 44 (1976), 1-26. See also, by Howard Young, *Juan Ramón*

*Jiménez*, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers No. 28 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), and *The Victorious Expression: A Study of Four Contemporary Spanish Poets* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> H. R. Hays, *Selected Writings of Juan Ramón Jiménez* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1957); Eloise Roach, *J. R. J. Three Hundred Poems, 1903-1953* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Primeros Libros de Poesía*, ed. Francisco Garfias, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 1467. Further references are included in text and abbreviated as PLP followed by page. Translations from Spanish are mine throughout the text.

<sup>4</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Libros de Poesía*, ed. Agustín Caballero, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 553. Further references are included in text and abbreviated as LP followed by page.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez, *En el otro costado*, ed. Aurora de Albornoz (Madrid: Júcar, 1974), pp. 82-83.

<sup>6</sup> Jiménez's "Temptation of Eve" was a black and white reproduction of this water color, which he cut from *The New York Times Book Review*, 20 Nov. 1927, p. 2. In his discussion of the nude figure, Young refers to "Glad Day," "Urizen Creating" and "Albion Adoring the Crucified Christ" (pp. 220-30). He also notes that Jiménez had a copy of Philippe Soupault's 1928 study *William Blake*, which contains "fifty plates with a wide range of samples from Blake's production."

