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*Speaking in Tongues:
Celebrating Walt Whitman
in Translation*

Miguel de Unamuno and Juan Ramón Jiménez's Creative Translations of Walt Whitman

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ABSTRACT. *The article analyses Miguel de Unamuno's and Juan Ramón Jiménez's translations of two of Whitman's poems. (1864-1936) Unamuno was familiar with the American poet. He was particularly attracted to Whitman's poem "So Long!" that he partially translated in a poem of Cancionero (1928-1936). Unamuno does not mean to attempt a literal translation of those lines which he includes them in a poem of four lines. Neither the poem nor the essays in which he quotes the verses from "So Long!" show any reference to homosexuality. Unamuno was not aware of the subtle meaning of those verses, partly due to his relying on Balzard's biography, and that he blended them with some spiritual aspiration that he found in Whitman that matched his own spiritual endeavor. Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958) was also interested in Whitman's poetry. In his essays, *Alerta* and *El Modernismo*, *Apuntes de un curso* (1953), he wrote extensively on the poet. In *Tiempo* (Time) (1941) he translates some lines of "Song of Myself." His translation is in prose and has what Jiménez called 'internal rhythm', as suited a translation that is not literal but rather intends to recreate the spirit and the atmosphere of the poem.*

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article analyse les traductions des poèmes de Whitman effectuées par Miguel de Unamuno et Juan Ramón Jiménez. Les différentes références faites à Whitman par Unamuno (1864-1936) au fil de ses œuvres en prose démontrent sa familiarité avec le poète américain. Il y affiche une prédilection pour les vers de "So Long!": "Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this, touches a man", qu'il traduisit partiellement dans un poème de *Cancionero* (1928-1936). Mais, que ce soit dans ses essais ou dans ses poèmes, Unamuno ne relève chez Whitman aucune allusion à l'homosexualité. Il reste ainsi fidèle à la biographie de Balzard et, dans le même temps, trouve dans les vers de Whitman un écho à sa propre quête spirituelle. Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), quant à lui, consacra de nombreuses pages au poète dans des essais et des cours rassemblés dans *Alerta* (*Alerte*) et *El Modernismo*. *Apuntes de un curso* (1953). Dans *Tiempo* (*Temps*), il traduit en prose les vers 684 à 691 de "Song of Myself", en trouvant un rythme "interne" propre à recréer l'esprit et l'atmosphère du poème.

MOTS CLÉS : Walt Whitman, Miguel de Unamuno, Juan Ramón Jiménez, traduction

KEYWORDS: *Walt Whitman, Miguel de Unamuno, Juan Ramón Jiménez, translation*

Introduction

In the early 20th century, a number of Spanish poets were drawn to Walt Whitman's poetry, an attraction noted by Fernando Alegría in his book *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (1954), which was soon followed by Gay Wilson Allen's *Walt Whitman Abroad* (1955), a collection of studies on Whitman by a number of international authors. These two books, plus a few articles on the same topic, most of them focusing primarily on Miguel de Unamuno, such as John Englekirk's "Whitman en castellano" (1956), Claire Paxton's "Unamuno's Indebtedness to Whitman" (1963), M. Thomas Inge's "Unamuno's Reading in American Literature," García Blanco's "Walt Whitman y Unamuno" (1956), Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan's "'El que toca esto, no toca un libro: toca un hombre': The Whitmanian Roots of Unamuno's Poetics" (2018) and "The Aristocratic Poet: Juan Ramón Jiménez's Reading of Walt Whitman" (2019), illustrate how far Whitman's popularity continued among Spanish writers. We might add that this popularity was echoed by León Felipe and Federico García Lorca, the former translating *Leaves of Grass* and the latter reflecting on Whitman's persona.

That such a variety of poets turned their attention to Whitman suggests not only that his work was popular in Spain, but also sheds light on how he was read and translated, as well as on how he was interpreted. In order to explore such reception and interpretation, I propose to analyse translations of Whitman by two poets, Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) and Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), contemporaries who enjoyed a lifelong friendship and shared ideas about literature. I will seek to understand why each poet felt attracted to Whitman's work, before turning my attention to their translations, arguing that since their translations are creative ones, they say as much about their own poetics as they do about Whitman.

Both Unamuno and Jiménez belong to the *modernismo* movement which appeared in Spain early in the twentieth century. This was the Hispano American version of Parnassianism and Symbolism that had emerged in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Both writers shared some of the movement's basic assumptions, such as the importance of art in a secularized world, or the role of the poet as a prophet, but they also diverged about fundamental ideas. Unamuno underwent a spiritual crisis which led him to produce religious poetry, in an attempt to address God with his theological concerns, while Jiménez moved towards *krausismo*, the Spanish version of German Idealism which arose at the end of the nineteenth century as an answer to social decline and the necessity to find meaning in this world. Interestingly enough, both writers were concerned with literature written abroad. However, Unamuno always favored a style that was in tune with the Spanish literary tradition while Jiménez chose a diction that might recall Emily Dickinson or the poetry of the Imagists. This does not mean that Jiménez felt alien in Spanish literature. His concern was rather to renew Spanish poetry, as he acknowledges in *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* (1953), for which purpose he attempted to naturalize some poetic trends into the Spanish tradition. Unamuno was determined

to revive Spanish poetry, and for that purpose he looked to the prosaic diction used by the British Romantics.¹

While it is quite probable that Jiménez was led to Whitman through Rubén Darío,² Unamuno's first contact was more direct, in the form of a 1900 edition of *Leaves of Grass* given to him by Everett W. Olmstead, as well as through Léon Bazalgette's biography (1908) and Bazalgette's French translation of Whitman's poetry (1909).

Both poets viewed Whitman through the lens of their own poetics. Unamuno valued Whitman for the naturalness of his poetic diction while Jiménez regarded him as a precursor of Spanish *modernismo*, and as a poet in which the popular and the aristocratic were blended. As regards poetics, Unamuno considered that Whitman wrote meditative verse resembling what he regarded as religious poetry. This is a type of poetry which Unamuno was much concerned with, as can be seen in his *El Cristo de Velázquez* [Velázquez's Christ] (1920). For Jiménez, Whitman is democratic because his poetry springs from the society he lives in, while at the same time he is aristocratic because he strives to educate the people by means of his poetry. Jiménez regarded Whitman as a poet-prophet, much like the model he had found in Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*. My thesis is that these two views help explain the choice of the poems that each author translated, and why they used verse or prose in their translations. In this article, I aim to analyse the way each poet adapts the poem he chooses in line with his own poetics. I will focus on the choices made by each one as my hope is that an analysis of the translation might reveal the particularities of the translators' personalities as well as of the poetics underlying their versions.

Unamuno's Whitman

Manuel García Blanco focuses on Unamuno's poetics in order to explain the latter's interest in Whitman. He discusses quotations from "So Long!" in two of Unamuno's essays, "Pensar con la pluma" [Thinking with the Pen] (1915), and "Sintaxis mecánica" [Mechanical Syntax] (1921). In the first of these, Unamuno wrote: "Y comprendo aquella arrogancia de Walt Whitman cuando al publicar uno

¹ Their attempts to revive Spanish literature is a rather interesting topic. Both writers shared the same concerns but their poetics differed in substantial ways as may be observed in their choice of foreign writers. For Unamuno, Wordsworth and Coleridge were the models. Jiménez chose Shelley, Whitman, Poe, Dickinson and William Butler Yeats. The articles by Cristina Flores, Eugenia Perojo, and Santiago Rodríguez may serve as a first approach to the topic.

² Rubén Darío (1867-1916) was a Nicaraguan poet and the leader of the modernismo movement in Spanish and Spanish American literatures. While he is rightly credited as one of the introducers of Symbolism and Parnassianism into poetry in Spanish, it should be noticed that he renewed Spanish poetic diction by looking back to the Spanish poetic tradition as well. He worked as a journalist in Spain in 1898 before becoming, a few years later, the Nicaraguan ambassador to Spain. While in Spain, he published his third book, *Cantos de vida y esperanza, los cisnes y otros poemas* (Songs of Life and Hope, the Swans and Other Poems) (1905). Jiménez's and Darío's life-long friendship may be explored in *Mi Rubén Darío* (My Rubén Darío) (2012), a collection of texts written by Jiménez that provides an overall view of the fascination that Darío exerted on Jiménez.

de sus libros decía: ‘el que toca esto, no toca un libro: toca un hombre’³ (1966: 872) and in the latter: “‘Esto que tocas no es un libro, es un hombre’, dijo en estas o parecidas palabras, una vez Walt Whitman” (Unamuno 1966: 879).⁴ For García Blanco, Unamuno indeed felt a kinship with Whitman, one which was clearly apparent in the essays. As García Blanco argued: “es el caso su preferencia por los libros que hablan como hombres y su desdén por lo contrario, que es lo común: los hombres que hablan como libros” (García Blanco 1964: 387).⁵ Unamuno, in a letter to Antonio Machado, wrote: “Tengo tanta aversión a los personajes de teatro como a los hombres que hablan como un libro, pues el hombre que habla como un libro es incapaz de hacer un libro que hable como un hombre” (qtd. in García Blanco 1956: 47).⁶ This preference for a natural-sounding diction points to Unamuno’s interest in Whitman’s linguistic experiment. What Whitman said of his poetry: “the qualities which characterize “Leaves of Grass” are not the qualities of a fine book or poem or any work of art but the qualities of a living and full-blooded man” (Whitman 1973, 766), is what attracted Unamuno. Whitman regarded himself as a poet whose unadorned language was an unmediated expression of feeling (Bauerlein 17). This is precisely Unamuno’s poetics, expressed in his poem “Credo poético” [Poetic creed]. In the sixth stanza, Unamuno attacks rhetorical poetic language:

De las fórmulas la broza es lo que hace
 que nos vele la verdad, torpe, la ciencia;
 la desnudas con tus manos y tus ojos
 gozarán de su belleza. (Unamuno 1999, 13).⁷

Unamuno’s interest in Whitman’s poetry is consistent with his poetics. The Spanish writer always showed a preference for English poetry, as Eugenia Perojo Arronte (2007) and Cristina Flores Moreno (2008; 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2013) have argued. In a letter to his friend Federico Urales entitled “Principales influencias extranjeras en mi obra” [Major Foreign Influences on my Work], he mentions Wordsworth, Coleridge and Burns (Unamuno 1971, 816-818). Moreover, in an essay which can be seen as central to his career, “The English [sic]-speaking folk”, he also refers to this influence. Unamuno praises British poetry for its concrete dimension

³ “And I understand Whitman’s arrogance when, on the publication of one of his books, he said ‘he who touches this does not touch a book: he touches a man.’” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ “What you are touching is not a book, it is man’ Whitman once said with these or similar words.”

⁵ “In his case he prefers books that speak like men and disdains the opposite, which is the most common: men who speak like books.”

⁶ “My aversion to drama characters is as great as the one I have to men who talk like books, since the man who talks like a book cannot make a book talk like a man”.

⁷ “Of the formulae the brushwood is what makes

That truth be veiled, awkwardly, by science;
 Leave it naked with your hands and your eyes
 Will enjoy its beauty.” (*my translation*)

and the graphic and precise sense which he thinks to be evident in such poems (Unamuno 1971, 775). He repeatedly complained about the artificial musicality of Spanish poetry, while describing British poetry as meditative (Perojo 168-173). Thus, Unamuno favored poetry written in a less lofty language which could serve as a meditative medium. Cristina Flores reveals other facets of Unamuno's interest in British Romantic poetry when she explores Unamuno's reading of the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. These poetical experiments were appealing because they drew from "natural" conversational language and were simple in their structure (Flores Moreno 2008, 84-85), aspects put forward by Wordsworth himself. Unamuno seems to have felt a special interest in those poems which would later be termed "conversation poems," and which, as Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan has argued, he deemed similar to some of Whitman's (Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan 2018, 273-288).

It was Whitman's diction that Unamuno regarded as the essence of meditative poetry. He understood the confessional tone in terms similar to those used by Killingsworth in *Whitman's Poetry of the Body*: "[It] involves a sense of evil and darkness" (49), which would suit Unamuno's religious concerns, another facet of literature central to Unamuno's meaning of life, as can be seen in his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913) [*Tragic Sense of life*. Trans. by J.E. Crawford Fritch. New York: Dover Publications, 1954]. Influenced by his reading of British Romantic poets, Unamuno identified Whitman's confessional poetry as a sort of religious confession and equated it with religious poetry. It is difficult to select the particular poems which Unamuno considered to be religious in *Leaves of Grass*. Nevertheless, he regarded Whitman's poetry as religious and reformative, and this suited his political and religious interests.

Jiménez's Whitman

Juan Ramón Jiménez's interest in Whitman is somewhat different to that of Unamuno. In spite of their literary friendship and their sharing similar concerns and poetics, which Ricardo Gullón has described in his book *Directrices del modernismo* (1990), their approaches to Whitman are radically different. For Jiménez, Whitman is one of the forefathers of *modernismo*, as he argues in *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* (1953) [Modernismo. Course Notes (1953)] and *Alerta* [Alert]. *El Modernismo* is a compilation of the lectures he gave on Modernism and *modernismo* at the University of Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, in 1953. It contains Jiménez's opinions on modern poetry in the United States, Spanish America, and Spain. In the first chapters, he identifies Whitman, Dickinson and Poe as forefathers of *modernismo* (Jiménez 2015, 35-38). Similarly, in the general prologue to *Alerta*, a compilation of Jiménez's broadcasts from the late 1930s and early 1940s, plus other essays (Blasco Pascual 1983, 11-16), he states that Whitman was fundamental to the development of *modernismo* (Jiménez 1983, 56; 58). Both books were written at the end of his career and were only published posthumously. They illustrate his concern to bring about a reevaluation of his own career. In those years Jiménez attempted to include

modernismo within Modernism. These books trace a personal genealogy of *modernismo*, which stretches from the Spanish Renaissance to America in the nineteenth century, embracing Whitman, Poe and Dickinson, spreading to Spanish America in the early twentieth century, with Rubén Darío, and finally to Spain, not much later, with Jiménez, Unamuno and several others.

This genealogy is linked to a central poetic shift in Jiménez's life between 1903 and 1916, when he met his future wife Zenobia Camprubí, and began reading English and American poets such as John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Edgar A. Poe, and Walt Whitman as well as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. In his library, Jiménez kept a copy of *Leaves of Grass* printed in 1921 with a prologue by Carl Sandburg. Whitman was instrumental in Jiménez's shift from Symbolism towards a poetry that was more personal and closer to everyday speech, as can be seen in *Diario de un poeta recién casado* [Journal of a Newly Wed Poet] (1916), in which he describes going to Whitman's place of birth, which at that time was occupied by a Polish man who knew nothing about the poet (Jiménez 2005, 216-217). By reading poetry in English Jiménez became familiar with English prosody, and he would subsequently use this in his own poetry. In his essay "A Luis Cernuda," he regarded Anglo-American verse as more direct, freer and more modern (Jiménez 1981: 110). He may not have read all the poets he includes in the essay, and he never fully avoided Symbolist poetics, as Doce argues (Doce 2005, 208). However, there is little doubt that his early readings of poetry in English marked a turning point in his poetics.

Jiménez's reading of Whitman, as set out in *El Modernismo* and *Alerta*, went against the grain of Whitman's reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both in Spain and in the United States. If Whitman regarded himself as the poet of democracy, as indeed he declared in the 1855 preface, and which scholars such as Betsy Erkkila have sought to confirm (Erkkila 1989), Jiménez labeled him aristocratic. His argument is rather convoluted. He recognizes Whitman's attempts to be the spokesperson of American society. Rather than quoting any particular line or poem, Jiménez simply acknowledges that, despite being read only by the *literati*, Whitman is the poet of the people. Jiménez sees a lack of correspondence between the poet and his readers (Jiménez 2015, 37-38), something also recognized by Ezra Greenspan (Greenspan 1990, 139-213). Whitman himself saw this contradiction, one that led him to a literary crisis, as Bauerlein (1991) points out. In a brief piece of criticism on ethics and aesthetics that Jiménez published in 1932, "Estética y ética estética," he argues that if someone views Whitman from a European perspective, he appears to be the perfect democrat, but if seen from an American viewpoint he can be regarded as an aristocrat (Jiménez 2013, 170). As Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan claims, Jiménez regarded Whitman as a democrat and "an aristocrat because his poetry is rooted in the American people while at the same time it is an attempt to educate people through poetry" (Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan 2019, 324). He is the spokesperson of America who asserts to his contemporaries: "the greatest poet [...] is a seer... he is individual... he is complete in himself... The others are as good as he, only he sees and they do not... He is not one of the chorus [...]. [F]olk expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty

and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects.... they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls” (Whitman 1982, 10). For Jiménez, an aristocrat is that person able to blend both aristocracy and democracy in a conscious effort to create a superior self (Jiménez 2012, 58), as he wrote in “Aristocracia inmanente,” a talk delivered at the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of Puerto Rico during his stay as a Visiting Professor. Aristocracy, then, can be seen as comprising naturally cultivated people, and aristocratic art, consequently, as merely having cultivated the folk sources of a culture (Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan 2019, 325-326).

Unamuno’s translation

These two differing readings of Whitman’s poetry influence the choices Unamuno and Jimenez made as to which poems to translate. There is little surprise that Unamuno preferred “So Long!”. Yet, though he had written about it, he had grasped neither the homoerotic sense of the lines that he chose to discuss, probably because his knowledge of Whitman was guided by Leon Bazalgette’s sanitized biography, nor the social meaning that Kenneth Price discusses in “Whitman’s Sign of Parting: “So Long!! As L’Envoi” (Price 1991, 65-76). Jiménez chose the first eight lines of section 32 from “Song of Myself,” which stress Whitman’s view of the natural world as essentially democratic.

Unamuno included his translation of Whitman in *Cancionero* [Songbook], written between 1928 and 1936, and published posthumously in 1953. *Cancionero* is a poetic diary that the writer began during his exile in the French Basque town of Hendaya, and would continue to write until his death. In his book, Unamuno expresses his spiritual yearnings and thoughts in poems of varying length, though none exceeds 50 lines in length. What is important for my present purpose is that among these poems we can find translations or paraphrases of poems by American authors. Inge has explored this as part of his translation of Unamuno’s *Cancionero* and has found that the American writers who inspired Unamuno were Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Sidney Lanier, William Vaughn Moody, Carl Sandburg, and Langston Hughes, with Whitman the most important, in Inge’s opinion (Inge 236). Unamuno’s version reads:

Walt Whitman, tú que dijiste:
esto no es libro, es un hombre;
esto no es hombre, es el mundo
de Dios a que pongo nombre⁸

⁸ Thomas M. Inge translated into English:

Walt Whitman, you who said:
this is no book, it is a man;
this is no man, it is the world
of God to which I give a name. (Inge 237)

The lines written by Whitman, and which serve as an excuse for the poem, are: “Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man,” (Whitman 1982, 611). Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan has studied the importance of these lines in Unamuno’s poetics (2018). Unamuno himself interpreted them in terms of the identification of the reader and the poet, as well as an explicit poetic statement against a rhetorical and overornamented use of poetic language. As important as these two ideas are for Unamuno’s interpretation of Whitman’s poetry as meditative, imbued with a sense of spiritual meditation, as Paxton pointed out (Paxton 17), Debra Harper has gone on to argue that both authors thought that language would save them from mortality: “language assures a form of ‘general immortality’ for the souls of men in the collective memory of mankind” (Harper 68). This is the symbolic context in which Unamuno’s translation must be read.

As for the translation itself, the poem is a song [canción] in which the lines are octosyllabics and the rhyme (-a-a), by tradition the most common meter and rhyme of folk poetry in Spain, and which came to be the most important poetic pattern in Spanish poetry. It must first be noted that the only line that comes from the original poem is not a literal translation but rather an altered poetic paraphrase. The reader cannot find any line that has been translated literally, with the probable exception of the second. Both the original and the Spanish version begin with an address. In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman is speaking to the average American when he writes: “Camerado” (Whitman 1982, 611). Unamuno addresses Whitman in his translation: “Walt Whitman, tú que dijiste” (Unamuno 237). Unamuno changes the focus from the universality of Whitman’s address to the author of the poem. Unamuno’s poem refers to the poem by Whitman, which raises the issue of Unamuno’s familiarity with the American and his poetry. Despite never having met Whitman, Unamuno shows a familiarity with the poet that indicates the rhetorical strategy of the poem, illustrated by his choice of Whitman as a literary colleague. The poem is both a translation and an intimate talk to Whitman, as the use of “tú,” the informal second person pronoun in Spanish, indicates. Unamuno seems to grasp the intimate aspect of “So Long!” present in “(Is it night? are we here together alone?) / It is I you hold and who holds you” (Whitman 1982, 611). However, this impression of intimacy is discarded in the following line, which is an adaptation of the most recognizable lines of the poem: “this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man,” which Unamuno translates as “esto no es libro, es un hombre.” He has stripped the Spanish version from the physical element present in the verb “touch.” Any sort of physical or sensual communication, clearly present in Whitman’s poem with the use of “touch” but also with the general notion of adhesiveness that permeates that section of the poem, is absent in the translation. The condensation of the two lines into a single one, by means of two simple sentences separated by a comma to signal the caesura of the line, helps to create an impression of abstraction and oracularity. After these two lines, Unamuno changes the meaning radically by introducing a religious element absent from the original poem: “esto no es hombre, es el mundo / de Dios a que pongo nombre.” He denies that the poem can be a man. It is rather a divine

creation named by man. As Harper points out, the poet establishes a link with the world by naming it (Harper 66-67). Words create the reality, Unamuno wrote in *Tragic Sense of Life*: “El lenguaje es el que nos da la realidad, y no como un mero vehículo de ella, sino como su verdadera carne, de que todo lo otro, la representación muda o inarticulada, no es sino esqueleto” (Unamuno 518-519)⁹. When discussing “Camerado, this is no book / [...] de cease calls me forth,” Harper argues that the poem and the poet are one, and that their spirits exist as long as the words exist. For Harper there is an evident religious meaning in Whitman’s lines which Unamuno perceived and recreated, emphasizing the religious element of the excerpt and stripping away Whitman’s original intentions.

There is another dimension yet involved in Unamuno’s creative translation. Whitman suggests that his book is an expression of his own self. The impersonality of the book is, thus, dissipated due to the poet’s self that permeates the poems. He goes beyond the authorial identification that is always present on the cover of a book through the name of its author. Whitman says that the poem is himself. The relation between words and self is one of total identification. Unamuno provides a twist to this identification, in keeping with his emphasis on the religious element. Thus, the book is given reality by the divine act of creation performed by him who names it, that is, the poet. In the *Book of Genesis*, God creates the world by naming it, whereas in Unamuno’s poem, it is the poet who names the world created by God. The poet’s role is thus to give existence to reality by naming it. The multifarious provinces of literature exist insofar as the poet names them and presents them to us.

Jiménez’s translation

Juan Ramón Jiménez’s translation of Whitman’s poetry was included in *Tiempo* [Time] (1941), in this case a long poem in prose. *Tiempo* is a poem involving a blend of autobiography and critical readings of poems written by authors who had appealed to Jiménez during his life. This is not simply the lyrical expression of the self, as it would have been if it were a mere autobiographical record. The inclusion of other voices creates a dialogue within the poem that gives more depth and amplitude to the piece. *Tiempo* is one of Jiménez’s late works, in which he intended to summarize his life and career, and along with *Alerta* and *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* (1953), it was intended to place him among the Modernists. There is a mention of Whitman in the second fragment of the poem, one that binds him to the Spanish poet León Felipe (also a translator of Whitman), although the gap between the two poets in terms of poetic quality is made clear (Jiménez 2005, 1333).

Jiménez translates the first eight lines of section 32 of “Song of Myself” and includes them in the third fragment of the poem, which reads:

⁹ “Language is that which gives us reality, and not as a mere vehicle for reality, but as its true flesh, of which all the rest, dumb or inarticulate representation, is merely the skeleton.” (Unamuno 1954, 154).

Recuerdo que Whitman dijo que “él podía volver a los animales y vivir con ellos, tan plácidos y contenidos; que ninguno de ellos está descontento nunca ni se arrodilla nunca ante los otros; que ninguno es industrioso ni respectable en toda la tierra.” (Jiménez 2005, 1346)¹⁰

Jiménez never aimed at a literal translation of any poem. For him translations were part of his poetical work, as Rivas Cheriff has suggested (Rivas Cheriff 1921, 185). It was quite common for his translations to be in prose, since he always intended to translate foreign poetry into the prose of his own speech. He chose that model of poetic translation in prose because he aimed at an ideal of naturalness and rhetorical simplification in language (González Ródenas 90). His aim when translating was to be loyal to the idea and the sentiment, and to use freely what he called the internal accent of the poem, defined as a particular feature that the poet imprints on his work as a mark of personal style (González Ródenas 90). Rather than adapting phonetic, syntactic, or semantic features to Spanish, Jiménez seeks to adapt the source language into the target language and to create a particular poetic constitution, that is, a particular attribute characteristic of the translation (González Ródenas 90), since he always strives to recreate the spirit of the foreign poem.

His translation of the excerpt from Whitman is characterized by being a condensed summary of the original eight lines, reducing three sentences to a single one. It is closer to a paraphrase than to a translation per se. Curiously, Jiménez uses inverted commas to signal that what he is writing are the literal words used by Whitman. However, they were not. To begin with, Whitman's lines begin with the personal pronoun “I” while Jiménez begins with “he,” thereby indicating that another person, not himself, wrote the words that follow. It is a sort of indirect style that has the appearance of being direct. In fact, his use of inverted commas here makes little sense, unless he wants to indicate that those are not his own words, which is not the case. Rather, Jiménez is implying that those words are a translation, despite his use of the indirect speech: “Whitman dijo que ‘él podía volver con los animales [...]’” (Jiménez 2005: 1346)

Apart from the paraphrastic aspect of the prose translation, which Jiménez said to have preferred, there is another issue that deserves discussion. Jiménez translated and summarized the poem to a point of such condensation that it becomes impossible to attribute it to Whitman other than through his mention in the poem. In the short essay “El hábito hace al monje” [Clothes make the monk] which he wrote about Whitman, Jiménez expresses his appreciation of Whitman's last short poems: “Yo no puedo soportar los poemas retóricos de Whitman, pero considero muchos de los breves como ejemplos de los más futuro que se haya escrito nunca

¹⁰ “I remember that Whitman said that ‘he could come back with the animals and live with them, so placid and equable; that not one of them is ever sad or ever kneels before the others; that none of them is industrious or respectable in the whole world.’”

en poesía” (Jiménez 1983, 133).¹¹ In the previous paragraph Jiménez had described those rhetorical poems as stentorian, discursive and drumming,¹² while the poems he preferred were brief, witty and unadorned, in which a single element triggers an immeasurable spiritual cry.¹³

Jiménez regarded Whitman as a precursor of *modernismo*, which is the reason why he includes the American poet in his canon. For him, Whitman prefigures the poetry that a few decades later Rubén Darío and Jiménez himself would be writing. However, there seems to be little poetical concordance between Whitman and Jiménez, since the Spanish poet goes through a process of stripping the American’s poetry of everything that is deemed unnecessary. He had left behind the period of adorned Symbolist poetry some decades before, in the 1910s, and could not agree with some of the features of Whitman’s long poems, such as syntactic repetitions and a large number of adjectives, which would sound too bombastic to an ear accustomed to *Diario de un poeta recién casado* [Journal of a Newly Wed Poet] (1917) and *La estación total* [The Absolute Season] (1945).¹⁴ So, in accordance with his poetics of brevity and unadorned poetry, Jiménez would point to the short poems by Whitman – poems which have not always been properly appreciated – as the most engaging and likely to open up the path for future poetry.

It makes sense that Jiménez translated Whitman’s excerpt without aiming to be close to its original form, but rather creatively, in the sense that he recreated the poem as a piece of the poetry that he valued most. What is more, the translation would be consistent with the tone and atmosphere of *Tiempo*, in which he included it. Rather than adapting his translation to the poetic form of the original, he appropriated the poem to provide his own critical reading of Whitman’s poetry and to show the possibilities that the poetry of the American could offer to new poets in the 20th century.

Conclusion

Both Unamuno and Jiménez made Whitman a central figure in their respective poetics, but they focused on different aspects of the American poet as a means to adapt Whitman’s poetry to their own poetic viewpoints. Unamuno interpreted the American poet in terms of spiritual yearning. Whitman’s poetry, for Unamuno, was concerned with a religious longing expressed through literature. Unamuno translated the poem discussed in order to adapt it to the pattern of the Spanish folk song, and included it in his *Cancionero*, a book that was a personal diary of the final years of his life. The Spanish writer changed both the form and the content of the poem. In

¹¹ “I cannot stand Whitman’s rhetorical poems but I regard many of his brief ones as models of the most future/modern poetry ever written.”

¹² The Spanish version reads: “Los estentóreos, discursivos, tamboreantes” (Jiménez 1983, 133).

¹³ The Spanish version reads: “Los breves, los agudos, [...] los escuetos, donde una célula cargada de dinamita explota [sic] de pronto en un grito espiritual de alcance incalculable” (Jiménez 1983, 133).

¹⁴ Although not published in book form until 1945, Jiménez had been working on the poems since 1923. Some of those poems were published in magazines before 1945.

Whitman's hands it was a poem of long lines – part of a linguistic experiment – with political undertones, while Unamuno's translation was an intimate song written in the form of folk poetry.

For Jiménez, Whitman was one of the precursors of *modernismo*. His aim, when translating an excerpt from “Song of Myself” for inclusion in *Tiempo*, along with others from poets such as Eliot and Pound, was to read it critically against his own poetics and, consequently, to adapt it to his own poetic prosody. Jiménez believed that he would thus shed light on Whitman's poetic possibilities for late twentieth century readers.

By translating Whitman's poems creatively, in fact by recreating them freely, Unamuno and Jiménez acknowledged the importance that Whitman had in Spanish literature as well as his role as an example for poets beyond the United States.

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