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*Emily Dickinson, poets' poet: first versions in Spanish*

*(Juan Ramón Jiménez, Gilberto Owen, Ernestina de Champourcin)*

Emily Dickinson is a poets' poet. This conclusion becomes clear when reviewing the history of her translation and reception in the Spanish-speaking world. Long before she entered the canon and scholarly translations and studies of her work appeared, Dickinson was devoutly translated by poets who found her an unflinching model of fulfillment to resort to when they felt their own vocations wavering or being desecrated; an example of freedom of language, tone, rhythm, and imagery; and in the case of women, a poetic mother on whom to scaffold the construction of female poetic genealogies. From the very beginning of the twentieth century, when her reputation was still beset by doubt and prejudice, Dickinson's work was an inspiring formal and conceptual challenge due to its density, its concision, and its power to open nature and everyday experience to mystery, opening flows between circumstance and transcendence. In the years in which literatures in Spanish were being configured at the conflicted crossroads between modernism, postmodernism, and the avant-garde, she was at the zenith of modern poetry in combining the mystical impulse of the first, the transcendent irony of the second, and the experimental daring of the third. Free from the rhetoric and artifice that dominated literary struggles within the cultural battlefield from the end of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth, her poetry incarnated for those few poets the uncontaminated essence of the modern artistic spirit.

In this paper, I will concentrate on the first three Spanish versions of Dickinson's poetry. They were linked from the start, as the cult of the poet was passed on by word of mouth in the

Spanish-speaking world, like a secret sap that brought together those who fed on it. Dickinson's first translator was the Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, who included versions of three of her poems in his *Diario de un poeta recién casado [The Diary of a Newlywed Poet]* (Madrid 1917). It was through Jiménez, as will be seen, that Dickinson became known to the Mexican poet Gilberto Owen--who would publish his own translations in 1934 in the cultural supplement of the newspaper *El Tiempo*, in Bogotá--and to the Spanish poet Ernestina de Champourcin, the author of the first selection of Dickinson's poems published as an independent volume (*Obra escogida [Selected Works]*, México 1945), in collaboration with Juan José Domenchina.<sup>1</sup> These translations are marked by the fact that their three authors are poets; rather than being a professional exercise, they are the result of an intimate dialogue, an homage, or even a strategy by means of which Jiménez, Owen, and Champourcin attempted to revive in their own voices the singular emotion aroused by such a different poet. As would happen later with the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos or the Uruguayan author Amanda Berenguer, these are cases where the boundary between version and translation is blurred; this essay uses both terms interchangeably. Yet although this personal approach to the original text (as tribute, link, apprenticeship, appropriation, or lyrical enquiry) may raise doubts about the result from the viewpoint of professional translation, it is also true that it confers a meaning that goes beyond translation itself. This meaning speaks of a transnational poetic dialogue, rising above national languages and literary traditions and aiming at a shared space wherein resides the very essence of poetic creation in modernity. As Cajero Vázquez affirms, bringing to mind the cases of Baudelaire and Poe, Rilke and Valery, or Gide and Whitman, it is most interesting to approach these privileged intermediaries due to their key role in introducing other literatures to the national sphere, as their translations "pueden muchas veces contribuir a establecer deudas, angustias, antecedentes, intertextualidades con otros escritores, en fin, vías inéditas de análisis" ("Traducción" 27).<sup>2</sup>

Juan Ramón Jiménez, Gilberto Owen, and Ernestina de Champourcin translated Dickinson before Dickinson—before Thomas H. Johnson’s canonical edition restored a corpus that up till then had been partial, manipulated, and interfered with, which serves as additional proof of their intuition and of the intense communication they established with the United States poet. Juan Ramón Jiménez read her in *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime*, the selection published by Martha D. Bianchi in 1914, even before the poet Conrad Aiken would at last exalt her relevance in the preface to his edition of *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924), and before the publication of *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* had increased interest in a poet who had become by this time something of a myth.<sup>3</sup> We are indebted to Juan Ramón Jiménez, a central figure in twentieth century poetry, with his extraordinary sensitivity and his freedom in his literary judgements and preferences, for the first introduction of Dickinson’s poetic language into Spanish and the beginning of a devotion that, particularly among women poets, has continued to increase in our own time.

### **Juan Ramón Jiménez: Emily Dickinson and “the secret of the world”**

In 1916, Juan Ramón Jiménez travelled to New York City to marry Zenobia Camprubí. An outcome of the journey was *Diario de un poeta recién casado*, a collection central to modern poetry in Spanish that had a significant impact on the young poetic generations in Spain and Latin America. Section VI, entitled “Recuerdos de América del Este escritos en España” (“Memories of the East of America written in Spain”), opens with the heading “De Emily Dickinson” and is composed of three translations by himself that are, as has been indicated, the first to be published in Spanish.<sup>4</sup> As he himself states, he read Dickinson in a copy of *The Single Hound* that he must have had access to during his New York months.<sup>5</sup> It is most significant that Jiménez should include poems by another poet in such a personal collection, and in such

a preferential location—at the beginning of a section in which he records the perdurable elements of his journey. In this *Diario*, where he chose to chronicle in detail a key moment of vital and poetic transformation, Jiménez acknowledges with this intimate gesture how far Dickinson was decisive in conforming what he himself named his second poetic moment.

In one of the documents kept at the Sala Zenobia-JRJ in Puerto Rico, the poet wrote: “Únicamente debe traducirse cuando lo que uno lee de otro le sea tan íntimo, tan propio a uno, que sintamos a un tiempo que es de uno y no lo es, casi una duda, que se conmuevan las flores del abismo de nuestra alma; que lamentemos que no sea aquello expresión nuestra. Entonces le damos –debemos darle- forma propia en nuestra lengua, para que sea aquello un poco de uno” (qtd. in Young XXI).<sup>6</sup> Such a conviction dominates Jiménez as a translator: even his translations of Rabindranath Tagore’s work, where he collaborated with Zenobia Camprubí, were born of his empathy with the Bengali Nobel Prize winner, although they became an editorial commitment that husband and wife worked on for years.<sup>7</sup> As an intimate and personal act, as fusion, conversation and apprenticeship, also as an homage and for his own delight, Jiménez translated, among others, Charles Baudelaire, William Blake, Robert Browning, Rosalía de Castro, Stéphane Mallarmé, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Shakespeare, W. B. Yeats, Albert Samain and Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>8</sup> So much did Jiménez value the relevance of translations in the construction of his poetic self that he reserved them a space in the design of his work: “¿no es lógico que lo traducido de otros ocupe el lugar preferente de nuestras colecciones? Estos otros son nuestros huéspedes y nuestros bienhechores,” he wrote in one of the drafts of the project (qtd. in González Ródenas, *biblioteca* 49).<sup>9</sup> However, the direct inclusion of three Dickinson poems in *Diario de un poeta recién casado* confers on her a singular and preeminent place as “huésped” (“host”) and “bienhechora” (“benefactor”).

As was usual in Spanish poets of his generation, Jiménez’s literary education was based on French poetry: first Verlaine or Baudelaire, Samain or Jammes afterwards. His first

important contact with poetry in English was the fruit of his relationship with Luisa Grimm between 1906 and 1913. Through her he was introduced to William Blake, Alfred Tennyson, Francis Thompson, Percy Shelley, Whitman, Poe, Alice Meynell, Walter Pater, J. M. Synge, and John Keats. This interest in English-language poetry increased when he met Zenobia Camprubí, whose mother was Puerto Rican and who had been educated in New York, and they began a relationship in which joint translations played an important role. Together they translated Shelley's "Mutability," a poem that, in English, opens *Estío*, the 1915 collection that anticipates the change towards the second period of Jiménez's writing, in which he sought to leave behind the melancholy and decadent tone of his first books of poetry to seek what he would term expressive "bareness" or "exactitude, a change later to be ratified in the *Diario*.<sup>10</sup> Together they embarked on the translation of Tagore's work; and they also delved together into Shakespeare (see Pérez Romero, *Shakespeare*). A new step forward in his acquaintance with literature in English took place during his stay in New York City in 1916, both before and after the wedding. This was very likely through the understanding and guidance offered by Pedro Henríquez Ureña, thoroughly familiar with the new poetry of the United States and instrumental in its dissemination in Latin America, whom Jiménez met in New York (García Gutiérrez, "Simpatías"). The Spanish poet was taken by surprise by this new generation clustering around *Poetry* and the imagist movement, which he experienced as akin to the poetic transformation of his own that he both forged and meta-poetically reflected on in *Diario de un poeta recién casado*. In New York City, sometimes with Zenobia's help, he read Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Vachel Lindsay, Edgars Lee Masters, or Edwin A. Robinson. And in that city he became fascinated by Emily Dickinson, of whom no one—not even Henríquez Ureña, who excluded her from his laudatory essays on modern United States poetry—had ever spoken to him before. "Yo estaba por aquellos años demasiado *nuancé* en formas cerradas, compuestas, demasiado bien compuestas," he would write years later in his well-known "Carta abierta" to

Luis Cernuda, “y los versos de Edwin Arlington Robinson, de William Butler Yeats, de Robert Frost, de Francis Thompson, unidos a los anteriores de Whitman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Robert Browning me parecieron más directos, más libres, más modernos, unos en su sencillez y otros en su complicación” (Jiménez, *Cartas* 235).<sup>11</sup> In the years following his return to Spain, Jiménez translated some of these newly discovered poets perhaps due to this “deseo de Jiménez de aprender aspectos de la poesía de expresión inglesa que le tenían deslumbrado,” as an “ejercicio de entrenamiento y disciplina para avanzar en un proceso de cambio que ya se había iniciado en él desde 1915” (Pérez Romero, *Ecos y traducciones* 294).<sup>12</sup> But before this, witnessing an encounter that moved him and that happened almost “against the tide,” he included his highly emphatic reading of Dickinson in the *Diario*, when Dickinson—this must be insisted on—was not yet Dickinson and would still take some years to be hailed as the teacher of new poetic generations.

One of the singularities of *Diario de un poeta recién casado* in the Spanish speaking sphere was the bridge it built with modern North American poetry that was unknown and even underestimated in Spain. In that sense, in the *Diario* Jiménez established his personal pantheon, his altar, composed by Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, whom he considers the origin or matrix of the poetic tendency into which he flows, and which reinforces and accompanies his own evolution. In the *Diario*, his homage to all three is constant and categorical: they are living poetry even if forgotten in the modern world as incarnated by New York City, three white roses in the midst of speed, the machine, pretense, and dehumanization.<sup>13</sup> They also are the opposite of ornamental culture, of the cultural apparatus that the poet became unwillingly familiar with in New York, embodied in receptions and pretentious and hollow literary events organized by bodies similar to the Spanish Academies and Atheneums that he always hated. In contrast with the snobbish atmosphere at the Author's Club, crammed with imitators of true artists, which he describes disdainfully, Poe, Whitman

and Dickinson shine out, untouched in the midst of the cultural farce and the material, technical, and mechanical values of the spiritless modern world (Jiménez, *Diario* 292-293). The *Diario* gathers Jimenez's pilgrimages to the houses where Poe and Whitman lived, invisible sanctuaries in the midst of the comings and goings of the sightless crowd, forgotten homes where the poet, only the poet, perceives the light of their ancient dwellers.<sup>14</sup> Yet the encounter with Dickinson goes even further in materializing in the translations of the three poems that Jiménez, in an enormously significant gesture, makes his own. This desire to clothe himself in her verses, to incorporate in the collection his intimate encounter with Dickinson's words, his revealing fusion, confirms how crucial this experience was in his journey. She is the first of the memories that, once in Spain, Jiménez evokes of his weeks in "East America," before the overwhelming architecture or the surprising technological advances that impact him but above all make him feel unsettled. If anything saved the poet from his alienating experience in New York, it was these pilgrimages to the forgotten homes of his brother and sister poets that make up his family in the midst of estrangement, loneliness and vertigo.

Considering that Jiménez occasionally translated together with Zenobia or other friends, one may ask how far the Dickinson versions included in the *Diario* are exclusively the poet's own work. In this respect, like in many others, Jiménez was always honest: he acknowledged his wife's contribution to his English language readings, and in the drafts of his projected, but ultimately frustrated, book of translations he indicates those in which he received help and from whom: "Aunque muchas de las traducciones las hice yo solo, otras las hice con mi mujer y con amigos españoles y extranjeros y los nombres de estos amigos figuran al pie de los poemas traducidos" (qtd. in González Ródenas, *Biblioteca* 49).<sup>15</sup> Much has been said about Jiménez's reluctance to speak in English, but everything suggests that even though he had no verbal fluency, he could read with certain ease. In any case, he always understood that as a translator, his mission was to express what he called the translated poet's "accent": "al traducir, lo que

hay que conservar es el acento” (*Ideología*, 1990 430), keeping “fiel de idea y sentimiento, y libre de forma con acento interior” (Jiménez, *Alerta* 130).<sup>16</sup> To capture that personal touch, he even resorted to prose to prevent his own intrinsic rhythm, or the rhythms inherent to Spanish, from distorting the “accent” of the original.

If in some of his translations Jiménez took as a starting point Zenobia’s previous literal rendering into prose, we believe, following González Ródenas, that this was not the case in his versions of Dickinson, an intimate act that he wanted to embark on alone (*Música de otros* 34-5). Although they have been criticized and even discredited, they must be valued as evidence of his arduous and reverential attempt to translate to his own poetic language a different accent that stirred him. Departing from his general practice, and except in the case of “I send Two Sunsets,” Jiménez reproduces in the *Diario* versions that are “very close to the original” (Fagundo 9, 12). We know Jiménez intended to continue translating Dickinson and above all to publish these translations. González Ródenas tells of an editorial project that he set up around 1920 but was very soon interrupted: this is *El jirafol y la espada* [*The Sunflower and the Sword*], a collection in which he wanted to “iniciar la publicación periódica, con carácter mensual, de una sucesión abierta de textos universales ‘de todos los tiempos’” linked by their convergence on “Beauty” (González Ródenas, *biblioteca* 75).<sup>17</sup> The drafts of the project show that Jiménez considered that some of these periodical publications should be his own translations of selections of poetry, and one of the names that figures insistently in the lists he elaborated, among the consecrated ones of Mallarmé, Yeats, Shakespeare, Petrarch, and Goethe, was that of Emily Dickinson, still unknown in Spain, sometimes through *Poesías escojidas* [*Selected Poems*] and on another occasion through *El mastín solo* [*The Single Hound*] (González Ródenas, *Biblioteca* 77-78).

Jiménez preserved a lifelong veneration for Dickinson. This admiration, together with critical judgments, marks the references that he made to the poet in a collection of texts on

United States literature that he prepared in the early 1940s, originally for a series of readings for the radio that was to be entitled *Alerta* and that finally came to nothing.<sup>18</sup> In these texts, he insists on considering her at the epicentre of North American poetry together with Poe and Whitman: one of the “grandes poetas difíciles--los interiores: Esquilo, Shakespeare, Góngora, Goethe, Shelley, los Browning, Dickinson, Mallarmé, Rimbaud,” as he would write to Azorín (Jiménez, *Epistolario II* 320).<sup>19</sup> In “Precedentes de la poesía moderna en los Estados Unidos” [“Precedents of Modern Poetry in the United States”] and “Calidad poética moderna de los Estados Unidos” [“Modern Poetic Quality in the United States”], two of the texts that he prepared for *Alerta*, Jiménez insists on the role of Poe, Whitman and Dickinson as representatives of a germ of “heroicidad, idealidad y espíritu” (“heroism, the ideal, and the spirit”) (85) threatened by the forgetting of a real, pure, and incorruptible poetic consciousness, that after years of decadence, “de desconsideración y desorientación” (“of disregard and disorientation”) (88) would have been replaced by the generation of “Frost, Sandburg, Masters, Edna St. Vincent Millais, Robinson, Lindsay, y mirando hacia fuera Amy Lowell y los imaginistas” (“... and, looking outward, Amy Lowell and the imagists”)(86). In the drafts for *Alerta*, their editor Javier Blasco found an incomplete text wholly devoted to Dickinson which reads:

Una Santa Teresa laica presumida y coqueta de alma, que se jacta para la posteridad de demasiada confianza con Dios y se lleva a la tierra el secreto de esa confianza.

Parece que tiene estrellas y piedras dentro de la calabacita de su frente soberana, estrellas y piedras que dan chispas de luz y sombra, chispas de sombra a veces más bellas que las de luz.

(...)

Es frecuente, casi constante, suponer que el poeta mejor es el más estenso. Pero un poeta es un ser lleno de gracia que da destellos y permanece lleno de su secreto, que nace, vive, muere y permanece como un tesoro del que regalará joyas menores, que lleva su reserva mayor a la nada para enriquecerla: esto es, un poeta es un enriquecedor, un abolidor verdadero, de la nada ... E.

D. fue eso, una mujer en gracia, que se llevó el secreto del mundo a la eternidad, por si estaba vacía ...

Cada vez que E. D. vuelve a la presencia poética, después de los olvidos, vuelve para dar ejemplo vital y estético a una jeneración nueva que encuentra en sus metáforas, sus escapes, y sus paradojas, todo trascendente, una perpetua renovación de ella y de ellos. Siempre está viva y nueva; mejor, siempre está resucitada (Jiménez *Alerta* 134)<sup>20</sup>

### **Gilberto Owen and Emily Dickinson: “Toda la noche bailáramos un viento que pensaba” (“All night we would dance a thinking wind”)**

Jiménez was one of young Gilberto Owen’s favorite writers. Although all the members of the *Contemporáneos* group had read the poet from Moguer and knew his *Diario de un poeta recién casado*, Owen was the most faithful to his teachings and to his poetic sensibility.<sup>21</sup> He admitted that he had written his first collection, *Desvelo* (1925) “a la sombra de Juan Ramón” (“in Juan Ramon’s shadow”), and in other texts he insisted that he never renounced the older poet’s influence, not even when the companions in his own generation tempted him with other literary or intellectual formulas: “para que substituya a tu Juan Ramón, ten Gide” (“take Gide to substitute for your Juan Ramón”) Villaurrutia would say when he gave him *Morceaux Choisis* (Owen, *Obras* 198, 247).

Perhaps Owen read Emily Dickinson’s name for the first time in *Diario de un poeta recién casado*, although Jiménez was not his only link to modern United States poetry. Imagism reached Mexico at the beginning of the twenties through Henríquez Ureña, whose friendship with Juan Ramón has already been mentioned. Henríquez Ureña joined José Vasconcelos’s team as Secretary of Public Education in 1921, and he strongly influenced some of the young *Contemporáneos*. He soon attempted to convert them to the new United States poetry with which he had been in close contact. In this task he was aided by Nicaraguan poet Salomón de la Selva, his closest friend in New York, who had close connections with the group centering

around *Poetry* and had written *El soldado desconocido* (México, Cvltvra, 1922), a collection clearly influenced by imagist poetics. Under Henríquez Ureña's guidance, Salvador Novo, a member of the *Contemporáneos* prepared, translated, and annotated the anthology *La poesía norteamericana moderna*, published by *El Universal Ilustrado* in 1924.<sup>22</sup> This anthology includes poets belonging to the so-called *new poetry* or to imagism (Edna St. Vincent Millay, Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, Sara Teasdale, Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, or Robert Frost, among others) all to the taste of the Henríquez Ureña-De la Selva circle, but Dickinson's name is nowhere mentioned, and she would not be present either in the "Guía de poetas norteamericanos" published in *Contemporáneos* (4th September 1928). Could then the vivid evocation of Dickinson in *Diario de un poeta recién casado* have been Owen's first step towards the poet? So it seems, if we take into account that in "Emily Dickinson (datos biográficos)," the brief essay that was to precede his published translation of eight Dickinson poems, he explicitly mentions Juan Ramón Jiménez's versions (Cajero, "Traducción" 32).<sup>23</sup> We know from his letters that Owen was involved in a project to translate recent United States poetry, coordinated by Alfonso Reyes, that was meant to be published in Cuadernos del Plata in 1930. Had this project been fulfilled, perhaps Dickinson's name would have slipped into this book at Owen's insistence, even if only on the presentation pages.<sup>24</sup>

Owen settled in New York in July 1928 to occupy a minor bureaucratic post in the Mexican diplomatic service. It is not too unreasonable to surmise that he might have taken the chance to return to Jiménez's *Diario*, the only poetry collection up to then that described the hallucinatory and alienated experience of the poet in the epitome of the modern city. The Mexican writer refers to the poet from Moguer in a letter written to Villaurrutia, dated 29 November 1929, in which he speaks of his attempts to enlighten a young United States poet about poetry in Spanish, and he will do so again, as has been mentioned above, in his presentation of his translations of Dickinson, published in Colombia in 1934 but composed in

the United States between 1928 and 1930 (Owen, *Obras* 266). Owen's New York experience was not very different from Jimenez's, who served him as a point of reference when he described his own state of mind, nor from that of Federico Garcia Lorca, whom he met in 1929.<sup>25</sup> In Anthony Stanton's words, "el encuentro con la metrópolis de la modernidad significa una sacudida de la sensibilidad del poeta y una transformación radical de sus recursos expresivos" ("Un poeta mexicano" 742).<sup>26</sup> If Jimenez's *Diario* described the impact of technical and mechanical modernity on the poet, who presents himself as dejected and alienated in the face of overwhelming scale or speed as symptoms of dehumanization and the loss of spirituality, Owen will write in a letter to Villaurrutia: "la prisa es lo que mata a los ángeles" ("speed is what kills the angels") (Owen, *Obras* 259). A motive central to the *Diario* appears in Owen's scarce writings from the two years he spent in the United States: that is the subway, that terrible dark mouth that swallows up the inhabitants of the city and drags them to the underworld on which the surface stands. This is the subject of his "Autorretrato o del subway," ["Self-portrait, or on the subway,"] a text which reflects his awareness of avant-garde experimentation.<sup>27</sup> The subway is, as he writes his beloved Clementina Otero, "lo más monstruoso, lo más duro, lo más bestial"; he is even more explicit in a letter to Celestino Gorostiza: "A Nueva York se la empieza a ver desde el subway. Acaba allí la perspectiva plana, horizontal. Empieza el paisaje de bulto ahí, con la doble profundidad, o eso que llaman cuarta dimensión, del tiempo" (*Obras* 167, 270).<sup>28</sup> If during his months in New York Jiménez sought refuge in his pilgrimages to the homes of Poe or Whitman, his brothers in the midst of alienation, Owen will do something similar by visiting Amherst, the refuge of the poet that he translated so devoutly during that difficult time.

Like Jiménez, Owen was familiarized with translation from a very early age, understanding it as an intimate poetical exercise not initially meant for publication. He himself mentions in different texts his versions of Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Valéry,

although he only made them public sporadically. On his arrival to New York, after the publication of *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* and the selection of poems with Conrad Aiken's preface, Dickinson's canonization was very gradually beginning, although she was still located in an ex-centric space. Owen mentions this in "Emily Dickinson (datos biográficos)," that opens with a reference to Aiken and his—to Owen—still timid vindication of the poet, as being, nevertheless, the starting point for her "recognition" (qtd. in Cajero Vázquez, "Traducción" 31, 32). Soon a new compilation of her poems would appear: *Further Poems* (1929), edited by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. However, if in the United States there was an aesthetic sensibility favorable to the revival of the poet, the same was not true of Europe, where the avant-garde was in vogue, nor of Latin America: "para estas fechas son pocos los lectores hispanohablantes que conocen el nombre de Emily Dickinson ... y menos aún los que han podido leer fragmentos de su obra, ya sea en lengua inglesa o en traducción al español" (Calvillo, "La medida exacta" 238).<sup>29</sup> In spite of her experimentation with language and versification, her irony, her ambiguity of meaning, her hermetic nature behind her unadorned expression, and her daring imagery, the avant-garde movements would hardly have directed their attention at a nineteenth-century "poetess" pursued by the legend that viewed her as a virginal hermit whose hobby was collecting plants. They would have assumed her to have a romantic temperament, which was the very enemy they were combatting, and not recognized her as the extremely original poet that Owen, on his part, did understand her to be, conceiving her as the germ of a modernity that held all the potency of the avant-garde without the encumbrance of the adoration of the modern that transformed its anti-hegemonic spirit into formal rhetoric.

Little is known of Owen's years in New York, and, except for a few references in his letters, not much is known either of the exact moment when he began translating Dickinson. In spite of the uninspiring title, that maybe was not his own, the most important document to

understand the impact of Dickinson's work on Owen is the abovementioned “Emily Dickinson (datos biográficos).” A large part of the brief text centers on his visit to Amherst, a “peregrinación” (“pilgrimage”)—he says—that “decididamente” (“decidedly”) marked his life and drove him to translate almost compulsively a poet that up to that moment he had read but not translated. Owen started on his versions as an intimate journey towards the poet’s psyche, trying to discover “amorosamente los litorales de su mundo,” “mundo extraño e inesperado” that “desconcertaba” her admirer by enclosing “entre las cuatro tapias del convento familiar” an “odisea” fit to reenact, “con sus líneas pueriles y simples,” a deep journey “a los terrenos más sobrenaturales y blasfemos de Blake” (qtd. in Cajero Vázquez, “Traducción” 31-32).<sup>30</sup> No doubt Owen saw in Dickinson’s measureless inner life the fulfilment of one of the tenets of the *Contemporáneos* group, the “viaje alrededor de la alcoba” not so different to the idea expressed at the beginning of *Diario de un poeta recién casado*: “La que viaja, siempre que viajo, es mi alma entre almas.”<sup>31</sup> The encounter had a liberating effect on Owen’s poetry, described by himself as a beneficial loss of “preciosity,” a liberation from the captivity of form, and the adoption of a freedom that for him meant transcending both his first bedazzlement with Valéry and the most experimental rhetoric of the avant-garde (*Obras* 198). “Pasmado” (“stunned”) by the validity and the purity of her voice, in 1930 he would announce to Reyes: “Quiero escribirle una carta muy larga sobre Emily Dickinson” (“I would like to write you a very long letter on Emily Dickinson”) and he advanced: “Yo tengo algunas traducciones y notas, que no he podido ordenar” (“I have a few translations and notes that I haven't been able to put in order”)(Cajero, “Traducción” 32). The centennial of the poet's birth was approaching, and, fearing that it would go unnoticed, he wondered: “¿cómo podría yo celebrarlo?” (“how could I celebrate it?”) (*Obras* 276). In the end, his desire to take advantage of the event to organize his notes and translations would come to nothing.

After a few months in Lima, Owen arrived at Colombia on a diplomatic mission at the beginning of 1932; in this country where he lived for a decade, he finally published eight of the two hundred translations that, according to him, he had made of Dickinson's poetry, which, if they ever existed, have not been preserved. Soon after he settled in, he joined the editorial department of the Bogotá newspaper *El Tiempo* to write in the Sunday supplement but also to translate telegrams from English and French and to write all kinds of articles for the paper (Cajero Vázquez, "Gilberto Owen" 102). Maybe among so much professional but mechanical translation he wanted to compensate by publishing some of the New York versions of Dickinson that had been his solace, his refuge, and his company in those difficult years, and were again to him an instrument of personal reconstruction, of a reencounter with himself and with the poet he once was, in another stormy period of his life. They appeared as "Poemas de Emily Dickinson. Versiones a ojo de Gilberto Owen" ("Poems by Emily Dickinson. Versions by eye by Gilberto Owen")—here the title is deliberately chosen—on 29 April 1934 in volume 536 of *El Tiempo*.<sup>32</sup>

As Cajero Vázquez has pointed out, the designation as "versiones a ojo" is most significant. Owen himself declares he named them thus "para expresar la actitud de improvisación y descuido que, cuidadosa y trabajosamente" he was forced to adopt, "eludiendo con cautela el léxico solemne y la retórica convencional que Emily Dickinson rechazaba y violaba inexorablemente" (qtd. in Cajero Vázquez, "Traducción" 32).<sup>33</sup> This way of referring to Dickinson's poetry evidences, apart from his keen perception of it, "una seria reflexión sobre el papel del traductor de poesía, cuya función consistiría en acercarse tanto como sea posible al espíritu del texto original" "(Cajero Vázquez, "Traducción" 31).<sup>34</sup> In Dickinson's case, this is an essentially visionary spirit that gives language an expressive capacity beyond the bounds of literal meaning. Yet not only is the translated poet visionary, Owen himself claims the role of an equally visionary translator—"a ojo"—suggesting, as in Jiménez's case, a deep dialogue

between the translator and the translated, a fusion, or even a confusion or a symbiosis, between both, that “sleeping with” Dickinson that he referred to in the already quoted letter to Villaurrutia. Alfredo Rosas is right to affirm that when Owen read her, translated her and wrote about her it is as if he “se pusiera frente a un espejo y contemplara su propio rostro” (“stood before a mirror and gazed on his own face”), a face that the Mexican, drawn at that moment into a tempestuous life and an excessive fondness for liquor, emotionally reencounters (“Emily Dickinson” 28-29). In Dickinson, he sees his own lack of interest in publication, his consciousness of secretly hoarding the gift of poetry, his heterodox mystical temperament that can glide with ease between heaven and hell, the angel’s lesson and the lesson of the devil, the skill in inscribing in the poem unrepeatably daily personal circumstance and universal myth, the alchemical and hermetic capacity of a language that is only transparent in appearance. In addition, even though imagery is the key of Owen’s translations, the Mexican poet does not forget sound, achieving versions that respect the special music of Dickinson’s syntax and stand out for their “sonoridad” (“sonority”), “su prosodia discreta y minuciosa” (“their discreet and meticulous prosody”) (Calvillo 244).

In one of his theoretical approaches to poetry, Owen coined the expression “full poetry.” This was in the article entitled “Poesía—¿Pura?—Plena. Ejemplo y sugestión” (“Pure?—Full-Poetry—. Example and suggestion”), that he published in volume nine (February 1927) of the journal *Sagitario* (*Obras* 225-229). In this paper, he reviewed the polemics on pure poetry between the Abbé Brémond and Valéry and alluded later to Poe and Baudelaire, to Juan Ramón Jiménez, to Rimbaud and Mallarmé, in order to conclude by denouncing the risks of dehumanization and purism—abstraction and hypercriticism—and claiming for a recovery of sensation and inspiration, of human experience, whether understandable or ineffable, as key to a true and full poetry. His ideal of full poetry is an “obra sensual purificada, con inteligencia y desinterés,” a poem that preserves its enigmatic condition and in which precision of language

does not work against an open signification, more intuitive than mental. “Siempre he sabido leer—y escribir entre líneas. . . ; pero es todavía más fascinante que leer sentir entre líneas,” Owen would write in 1948 (*Obras* 228, 281).<sup>35</sup> The sentence refers to his desire to be a secret explorer of what is hidden and full of omens but also of the luminous and the sublime that he acknowledged in Dickinson. “Poesía—¿Pura?—Plena. Ejemplo y sugestión” concludes by referring to Valéry’s analogy between poetry and dance, in which he identified prose with walking and poetry with dancing, an analogy Owen appropriated and repeated on several occasions. “Emily Dickinson (datos biográficos)” ends by announcing a long elegy that Owen was supposedly composing in Dickinson’s honor, only the first verses of which have been preserved. These verses include a desire and a prophecy: the desire to dance with Dickinson through an eternal shared night, and the prophecy that in 2030 her light would still be a lodestar to guide wandering, lost, treacherous poets back to her, who Owen sets up as poetic mother and home.

Toda la noche bailáramos un viento que pensaba.

Pongamos la lámpara bajo el almud

Sepamos la medida exacta de su luz

Que si en tanto a ninguno alumbraba

Ya guiará a los pródigos de 2030 en su busca (qtd. Cajero Vázquez “Traducción” 32)<sup>36</sup>

### **Ernestina de Champourcin: traducción y estrategia**

In 1946, *Obra escogida* appeared in Mexico, in the “Poesía mejor” (“Better poetry”) collection published by Centauro; this was the first selection of Emily Dickinson’s poetry to be edited in Spanish as an independent book. As can be read in the title page, the authors of the translation of the forty-seven poems chosen were the poets Ernestina de Champourcin and Juan José Domenchina, the latter being also the author of the “Prólogo, apunte biográfico y nota bibliográfica.” (“Prologue, biographical sketch and bibliographic notes”). Champourcin and

Domenchina, who were husband and wife, had arrived in Mexico in June 1939 on the invitation of Alfonso Reyes, the director of La Casa de España, the institution that took in an important number of the Spanish intellectuals who had abandoned the country as a consequence of the civil war. They thus joined the community of republican cultural exiles who found in Mexico a warm and generous welcome. In 1946 Domenchina was editor in chief for Centauro's "Poesía mejor" collection—a name that evoked Juan Ramón Jiménez, that up to that date had published Rilke's *Las elegías del Duino* and two other volumes of selected works: one by Fray Luis de León and another by Miguel de Unamuno. As the back page of these volumes lists, selected works by Francisco de Quevedo, Antonio and Manuel Machado, and Luis de Góngora were forthcoming.

Even though the translation is attributed to Champourcin and Domenchina, there is a striking detail on the cover: Domenchina's name appears after Champourcin's, and only as initials—J.J.D., while as author of the "Prólogo, apunte biográfico y nota bibliográfica" his complete name appears capitals. This curious paratextual circumstance reinforces the suspicions aroused by a careful reading of the prologue: everything suggests that Champourcin was the true translator of the poems and Domenchina, perhaps, only supervised the translation and even that he did reluctantly. He himself seems to admit it when after repeatedly showing his lack of appreciation for a poetry that he says he cannot understand and that he even terms "pueril", "fallida" y "deficiente" (Domenchina 13, 18), he adds that if there is anything genuine in the translation "se debe en absoluto, y no es cumplido galante, a la noble voluntad de sacrificio y aun de anonadamiento generoso en que se entercó mi mujer. Yo no hubiera podido nunca situarme en el lugar sin sitio de la abstracta escritora" (Domenchina 25).<sup>37</sup> It was, then, the inveterate stubbornness of Champourcin, who did place herself with fluency, conviction, and fascination in Dickinson's emotional place of articulation, that made it possible to insert her name in a collection that aspired to publish selections of unquestionably classical poets,

among whom Domenchina certainly did not intend to include the Amherst poet. The final result was certainly peculiar. In the publication, Champourcin's splendid translations, that are a witness to her admiration, understanding, and affinity with Dickinson, were preceded by saw the light undermined by a prologue whose author—who, moreover, was the editor in chief of the collection—exerts himself to make clear his minimal consideration for a poet that not only does not seem to him “mejor” but is the object of his harshest judgments: “su mundo es únicamente un remoto concepto en nebulosa, como la idea sin cuajar,” her poetic language a “balbuceo sordo y vegetal,” “un conato, también enteramente vegetal, de palabra” (Domenchina 12,13).<sup>38</sup> It seems clear that we owe to Champourcin's perseverance not only the appearance of this first volume of versions of Dickinson, but also the fact that it was included in a collection through which she strategically placed Dickinson at the zenith of Parnassus, on the roster of “best” poets in which she was only tentatively, and only in scholarly spheres in the United States, beginning to be enrolled. In any case, this *Obra escogida* is the origin in the Spanish speaking world of one of the most important and significant lines of recovery and vindication of Dickinson, the one undertaken by women who saw in her a founding mother—the matrix of modern women's poetry—and a mirror in which to observe, analyze and share the patriarchal dynamics that governed the reception, assessment and interpretation of poetry written by women: attitudes such as underestimating, infantilizing, patronizing, substituting the woman for the poet as the object of interest, or displacing her work to the outskirts of the canon. Champourcin saw in Dickinson a tutelary figure for her own lyrics, clean and spiritual, humble only in appearance and permeated by the daring of the avant-garde, but also a paradigmatic instance of the lack of understanding and the patronizing gaze of which women poets were victims. Her obstinate insistence on publishing her translations was strongly motivated by her desire to perform an intimate homage, to reestablish and affirm a poetic category—that of

women writers—despised by a cultural and literary establishment saturated with male chauvinist prejudice.

Ernestina de Champourcin had been born in Vitoria, Spain, in 1905, in a cultivated, liberal, cosmopolitan, and well-situated family. At a time of great intellectual effervescence, she completed her secondary studies in Madrid, where she had the opportunity to develop a mostly self-taught literary education benefited by her early knowledge of French and English. Her vocation as a poet was marked by her early readings of the romantics and the French symbolists, Spanish mystical writings (particularly St. Teresa de Jesús and St. Juan de la Cruz), and the “los maravillosos místicos alemanes” that caused in her “un deslumbramiento vago, sin impresiones concretas todavía, sin comprender. No. Más bien intuir, adivinar. Presentir que ahí se ocultaba algo importante, cuya trascendencia iría apareciendo al discurrir de los años a través de innumerables y alucinadas lecturas” (Antón Remírez 252).<sup>39</sup> In 1926 she became a member of the Lyceum Club Femenino, created that same year by María de Maeztu, María Baeza, and Pilar de Zubiarre, and participated in the feminist consciousness of this institution that was closely in touch with the Residencia de Estudiantes and the literary and intellectual avant-garde. To the innate tendency to mystery, spirituality, and transcendence that characterized her poetry, Champourcin soon added her interest in poetry written by women, which had been favored by her early access through her Uruguayan mother to the great poets of the South Cone (Delmira Agustini, Alfonsina Storni, Juana de Ibarbourou, Gabriela Mistral), and further stimulated by the friendships she established in Madrid with women who were activists in the public sphere, such as Concha Méndez. She soon developed a lucid and original perception of the singularities of female poetic vocation, always threatened by social, moral, and literary prejudices, and confronted by mistrust, ridicule, and contempt.

Through the mediation of Zenobia Camprubí, one of the most active and distinguished members of the Lyceum Club, Champourcin sent Juan Ramon Jiménez her first collection of

poems, *En silencio... (In Silence...)*, published in 1926. Jiménez responded by praising the book—“tan romántico y tembloroso, de limpias aspiraciones jenerosas” (“so romantic and tremulous, full of generous and clean aspirations”)—and making it the start of a relationship based on friendship and literary guidance that lasted through exile, and which Champourcin gathered in her book *La ardilla y la rosa (Juan Ramón Jiménez en mi memoria) (The squirrel and the rose: Juan Ramón Jiménez in my memory)* (Jiménez, *Epistolario II* 428). From that time, she was a frequent presence at Jiménez’s home. She was surprised by his “enormemente afectuosa” welcome, the generosity with which he put her in touch with the young poets of the period (Alberti, García Lorca, Cernuda, Salinas, Guillén), his conception of poetry that reinforced and supported her own intuitions, and the suggestions for new readings, among them “la poesía inglesa moderna con Keats, Shelley, Blake, A. E. Yeats, etc, y en cada uno de esos nombres un lúcido comentario ya perdido en mi memoria.” (*La ardilla* 30, 31, 33).<sup>40</sup> As had already happened with Gilberto Owen, Jiménez made possible her first contact with Dickinson: “Y fue también la tarde de los poetas norteamericanos, cuando creíamos ingenuamente que en ese país no se cultivaba poesía ... salí ... con un grupo de nuevos nombres, desconocidos en España en esa época .... Y yo corrí de nuevo a la librería de León Sánchez Cueta a encargar los libros de Frost, Emily Dickinson, Robinson, Lee Masters, etc” (*La ardilla* 34-35).<sup>41</sup> Jiménez became her referent and her teacher, always supporting her poetic aspirations and reinforcing her vocation and her way of conceiving poetry.<sup>42</sup> In the map of poetic trends at the end of the twenties, Champourcin opted to follow in Jiménez’s footsteps: “la concepción del poema tal y como la expresaba J. R. era algo que rayaba en lo sublime y me sacaba de quicio” (*La ardilla* 21).<sup>43</sup> This last expression, “sacar de quicio” (“to drive someone out of their mind”) points to Champourcin’s site of enunciation, not too different to Dickinson’s: a liminal space open to intuition, the irrational, the sensitive, the mysterious and the ineffable. Her conversations with Jiménez oriented her vocation and left a trace on her second collection of poems, *Ahora (Now)*

(1928), where she moves towards a personal mysticism that would be neither orthodox nor dogmatic and seeks bareness of expression without renouncing the achievements of the avant-garde “-isms.” In those years, in an interview with César Arconada for *La Gaceta Literaria*, she declares: “creo en el verso puro, escueto, despojado, sin ropaje inútil de una retórica ya pasada. Yo aspiro a desnudar mi poema, reduciendo e intensificando su área emocional” (Rey Baliña 46-7).<sup>44</sup>

But if Champourcin’s poetic temperament seemed destined to meet Dickinson’s, this was not only due to her search for a verse that should be bare but intense, or rather especially intense because of its bareness and its concentrated experimental reminiscences. In Champourcin’s mysticism there are dark, ironical, heterodox notes, which respond to her particularly courageous approach to exploring the intimate, an approach that Jiménez succeeded in seeing and appreciating. He did so in the lyrical caricature he composed for Champourcin and sent her in a letter dated 9 November 1930, with this warning: “Yo la veo a usted así, demoníaca, excelente, buena demoníaca, no del tipo morboso antipático. Y en esta presencia suya está, para mí, su principal valor y atractivo vital y poético” (*Epistolario* II 516-7).<sup>45</sup> The splendid portrayal of the young poet, proving that Jiménez never assumed the topics and commonplaces that denied women intellectual daring and depth, was included as a preface in *La voz en el viento* (*Voice in the wind*), Champourcin’s third collection published in 1931.

Una nube fogueante, silenciosa chamarasca de agujas al rojoblanco, un alto laberinto de enredo cegador, un diademador enjambre de espinas de alas, viene tras ella, sobre ella. ¿En qué peligrosa zarza ardiendo de lo extraño se ha metido Ernestina? (...) ¿Qué boca de lobo hay al fondo del bosque de Ernestina y adónde largamente dará? Porque parece que sale peleada con los perros infernales: achicharrada con signos, con evidentes sangres mezcladas, dientes decompuestos de haber mordido su defensa, ojos en audaz extravío.

Y este misterio repetido le va dejando, no sé en qué dónde de su cuerpo o de su alma, un resto retorcido, ahumado, resplandoroso, cabalístico. (Champourcin, *La ardilla* 15)<sup>46</sup>

The idea of the demonic as untamed courageous spirituality, neither coy nor naïve, and kindred to the lineage of the rebel angel, on one hand, and the awareness, on the other hand, of a deep katabasis, capable of making the poet navigate between lights and shadows, between brightness and smoke, between the wounded body and the dazzled soul, are reminiscent of Jiménez's reading of Dickinson, and they anticipate the complexity and singularity of *Cántico inútil* (*Useless Canticle*), which Champourcin published in 1936. In that book of poems, the mystical mingles with the carnal and eroticism is diversified as a theme beyond sexual desire; it is above all the discovery, exploration, and conquest of the body, and, by means of it, of a freedom full of revelations and fears. Champourcin's Eros symbolizes the struggle for "una definición moderna y abierta de la condición humana hacia una metafísica que liquide todo tipo de yugos clericales y morales" but also "una recuperación del lenguaje y las formas que implican una libre formulación del mundo," that, not by chance, would flow into mysticism as a register to express a new ontology of the human being and of her body (Salaün 46).<sup>47</sup> From such a poetic I, there is nothing strange about the convergence between Champourcin and Dickinson, who had much earlier explored similar paths and similar apparently antithetical and even heretical confluences.

As the wife of Domenchina, who was the secretary of President Manuel Azaña's diplomatic cabinet and the director of the Information Service at the Ministry of Propaganda, exile was inevitable; after passing through Valencia, Barcelona, and France, the marriage arrived in Mexico, as has been mentioned, in June 1939. During the Mexican years professional translation was the main source of income for both. It was so above all for Champourcin, and in two professional aspects: as simultaneous interpreter in international congresses and conferences and as translator of books of all kinds (history, sociology, ethnology, myth

criticism, etc.) for different publishing houses.<sup>48</sup> Between 1936 and 1952, she published no collections of poems, but when she could she devoted her translating skills to her personal tastes, and she practiced translation as dialogue, apprenticeship, homage, and rewriting. Following that need and her activist will to support female authorship, in 1942 she published a selection in Spanish of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in the journal *Rueca*, and most relevantly, Dickinson's *Obra escogida*.<sup>49</sup>

As was noted above, we owe Champourcin's stubbornness the publication of this first anthology of Dickinson in Spanish, in spite of Domenchina's explicit reticence. The epithets he uses to refer to the poet in the prologue or the biographical note leave no room for doubt: "puritana egoísta" ("selfish Puritan"), "puritana virgen" ("Puritan maiden"), "la improvisadora de Massachusetts" ("the Massachusetts improviser") "puritana excéntrica" ("eccentric Puritan"), "solterona de Massachusetts" ("old maid of Massachusetts"), "descaminada pueblerina" ("errant provincial"), "musa infinitesimal" ("infinitesimal muse"), "huraña mujer de efusiones nunca compartidas" ("unsociable woman whose effusions were never shared") (Domenchina 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 16, 17, 123). But if there is no trace of sympathy for the woman, there is no more for the poet, whose work he would derive from the "complejo de fealdad" that embittered her life, her "solterona" condition that drove her to seclude herself "en sus habitaciones y que se consagrara en absoluto a sus versos, a la penosa rumia de su complejo de fealdad velada y al cultivo de una copiosa y vergonzante literatura epistolar" (125).<sup>50</sup> Domenchina's ineptitude makes him respond fiercely to the defense of the poet that was already being articulated formulated by Carl Van Doren, Lewis Gannet, and Louis Untermeyer, whose praise he describes as "descomedido" ("immoderate"), "intolerable" and "ridículo" ("ridiculous") respectively (20, 21). His aggressive contempt for Dickinson's poetry is so manifest that one wonders at the reasons that led Champourcin to accept such a singular final product: the publication of a work boycotted by the writer of the preface and editor in

chief of the collection.<sup>51</sup> I would dare to suggest that she did not consider her husband's prologue simply as a lesser evil or the price to pay for getting him to accept the inclusion of Dickinson in Centauro, but, instead, that she saw the book as a whole, as a final product, as an opportunity to make evident something of which she was very conscious. The struggle between the writer of the prologue and the poet encoded a centuries-long muted battle that she herself was fighting together with many other women poets. Without explicitly challenging the preface, , Champourcin trusted that merely reading Dickinson's poems would be enough to delegitimize a judgment of her poetry based on all the typical male chauvinist resistances: literary vocation as a consequence of imposed spinsterhood and failure as a woman, the intellectual inconsistency of her poetical world, the vague babbling of her voice, the lack of depth, self-awareness, and formal control as a writer. Once we overcome the perplexity generated by this prologue, the book, conceived in its entirety, not only offered the Spanish reading public one of the best translations into Spanish that has been made of Dickinson's poetry, elevated by the emotional sympathy, the intelligence, the talent, and the devotion of the translator, but also a testimony of the prejudices and resistance that female poetry still generated even in supposedly advanced literary and cultural circles.

That for Champourcin the publication of Dickinson's *Obra escogida* was a personal gesture that has to be related to her feminist consciousness is reinforced by another of her activities during those first years of exile in Mexico: her participation in the journal *Rueca* (*The Spinning Wheel*) whose board of editors was formed only by women.<sup>52</sup> *Rueca* was created in 1941 by a group of female students from the Faculty of Arts—including Carmen Toscano or María del Carmen Millán—as a complementary journal to *Tierra Nueva*, founded by the male students of their class: “hartas de quedarse al margen de los equipos editores de las publicaciones del México de los años cuarenta ... decidieron publicar su propia revista” (González Neira 194).<sup>53</sup> They invited the participation of exiled writers like Champourcin

herself, who as a member of the editorial board obtained contributions from Concha Méndez, Carmen Conde, María Zambrano, and Mada Carreño, among others. “De lo que estoy segura,” explained María Ramona Rey, one of the founders, “es de que si en *Tierra Nueva* se nos hubiera permitido participar activamente y considerarla también nuestra obra, *Rueca* no se habría editado,” insisting that the attitude of *Tierra Nueva* only reflected “el prejuicio de los escritores mismos hacia la literatura femenina” (González Neira 194).<sup>54</sup> Already in 1929, in volume fifty of the Buenos Aires journal *Síntesis*, Champourcin had published a paper called “Tres proyecciones” [“Three Projections”] in which she defined her place in the field of poetry as a member of the “novísima generación femenina” (also including Rosa Chacel, Josefina de la Torre, Carmen Conde, Concha Méndez).<sup>55</sup> She also vindicated the task of their predecessors (Gómez de Avellaneda, Storni, Ibarbourou) and exhorted her companions to persevere in conquering place they deserved in the poetry of the period: “nuestras escritoras más jóvenes llegan adscritas, por afinidad de ideas y temperamento, al grupo de las vanguardistas. Son tan audaces y tan entusiastas como sus compañeros. Volante en mano, sin faldas que recojan el polvo del camino, sin imitar a nadie, lograrán conquistar ‘su poesía’” (Rey Baliña 39).<sup>56</sup> By placing Dickinson's name on the roster of indisputable classics in the “Poesía mejor” collection, Champourcin conquered for the Amherst poet the place she deserved, deconstructing with her translations the arguments of the misguided author of the prologue.

Towards the end of the forties, after her revealing reading of Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Champourcin experienced a profound spiritual crisis that led her in 1952 to join Opus Dei in Mexico and to turn to the unequivocally religious poetry—a poetry of “divine love” in her own words—that characterized her production after *Presencia a oscuras* (*Presence in the dark*), published also in 1952. Despite this, her religious poetry, even when pervaded with biblical references, always continued to be a poetry in which body and soul not only are not mutually exclusive but exist in a dialogue; her concern with poetic language—with its

magic as well as with its fallibility—did not disappear, and neither does the poet’s struggle to express the ineffable. In “Antipoética” (“Antipoetics”), the text she reluctantly wrote for *Poesía a través del tiempo* (*Poetry through time*) (1991), that collects almost all her poetical work, she wrote: “Yo ignoro la técnica de Dante, de Byron, etc, me siento muy lejos de tan grandes genios, aunque sí un poco más cerca de Emily Dickinson, de Bécquer y sobre todo, de Juan Ramón” (Champourcin, *Poesía* 3).<sup>57</sup>

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### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Until very recently, the only work available on Dickinson’s translations into Spanish was Juan Carlos Calvillo Reyes’s excellent monograph. In 2022, Teresa Blanco de Saracho defended her PhD Thesis on the subject, dealing exclusively with Spain. I have not included in this paper the Spanish poet León Felipe’s translations of five Dickinson poems, written while he taught at the Cornell University (1925-1929), as he did not publish them in his lifetime and therefore they cannot have influenced Dickinson’s reception and circulation in Spanish. Four of these translations, that are part of Leon Felipe’s legacy held at the Archivo Histórico Provincial at Zamora, were published by Alejandro Finisterre on December 31, 1998 in *ABC Cultural* (Blanco de Saracho 169).

<sup>2</sup> “can often contribute to establishing debts, anxieties, precedents, intertextualities with other writers, all in all, original routes for analysis.” All translations from secondary sources are also by the translator of this paper.

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<sup>3</sup> The poet Conrad Aiken played an especially decisive role in Dickinson's canonization and in the vindication of her relevance when he included her in his influential anthology *Modern American Poets*. As Calvillo Reyes explains, six years would pass until Amy Lowell defined her as a "protoimagist" poet and her consecration began, even though still limited to a minority of poetic circles (*Emily Dickinson* 54).

<sup>4</sup> Jiménez translated "The Soul that hath a Guest" (Fr592, M 270), "The gleam of an heroic act" (Fr1686, M662) and "I send Two Sunsets -" (Fr557, M 284).

<sup>5</sup> In the poet's library located at the Casa Museo Zenobia-Juan Ramón Jiménez de Moguer, there are three works by Dickinson. Two of them, *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime* and *Poems*, include 1919 *ex libris*, though they were in Jimenez's possession before this date. *Poems*, in addition, has John Dos Passos's *ex libris* for 1916. From one of Dos Passos's memoirs, *Unforgettable Years*, we know that he arrived at Madrid in November 1916, so his visits to the Jimenez home "for tea," that he refers to without mentioning the day or the month, must have been later than Jimenez's voyage to the United States. One or another of these encounters must have converged on Dickinson and motivated the gift. The Moguer library also holds *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* with a 1924 *ex libris*.

<sup>6</sup> "one must only translate when what one reads by someone else is as intimate to us, so much our own, that we feel at once that it is and is not ours, almost a doubt that stirs the flowers in the abyss of our soul; that we regret that that is not our own expression. Then we give it shape—we have to give it shape—in our own tongue, to make that a little ours." Jimenez's characteristic spelling will be preserved in quotations from his work.

<sup>7</sup> The initiative came from Zenobia Camprubí, who introduced him to Tagore, but Jiménez would not have contributed to the project of joint translation had he not found strong affinities with the Bengali author's thought. On this and other joint projects by the married couple, see Young, "In Loving Translation," and González Ródenas, "Mío y de Zenobia."

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<sup>8</sup> On this subject, the crucial work is González Ródenas' *Juan Ramón Jiménez a través de su biblioteca* and his bilingual edition of Jiménez's translations in the volume *Música de otros*, that collects more than fifty different authors. Carmen Perez Romero's studies continue to be useful, and above all Howard Young's, some of which are included in the bibliography. I cannot refer here to specific studies on individual translations by the poet.

<sup>9</sup> "Isn't it logical that what we translate from others should occupy a place of honor in our collections? These others are our hosts and our benefactors."

<sup>10</sup> The translation of "Mutability," however, was not published until 1932 (González Ródenas and Jiménez, *Biblioteca* 64).

<sup>11</sup> The "Open Letter" was published in 1943 in the Mexican journal *El Hijo Pródigo*, responding to an article by Cernuda on the poet previously published in the same journal. "I was in those years too *nuancé* in closed forms, composed forms, too carefully composed . . . and the verses of Edwin Arlington Robinson, of William Butler Yeats, of Robert Frost, of Francis Thompson, together with the earlier ones by Whitman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Robert Browning seemed to me more direct, freer, more modern, some in their simplicity and others in their complexity."

<sup>12</sup> "desire to learn aspects of English poetic expression that had dazzled him". . . "exercise in training and discipline to advance in a process of change that had already started within him in 1915"

<sup>13</sup> Flowers in general, and white roses in particular, represent in the *Diario* the fragile survival of spirit and beauty in the midst of the polluted, mechanized and dehumanized city. Thus it is formulated in prose LXXXIX, "La negra y la rosa," where a white rose in the hand of a female traveler in the subway emanates "una bella presencia inmaterial que se va adueñando de todo, hasta que el hierro, el carbón, los periódicos, todo, huele un punto a rosa blanca, a primavera mejor, a eternidad . . ." ("a beautiful immaterial presence that gradually takes over everything,

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till iron, coal, newspapers, everything, smells slightly of white rose, of spring rather, of eternity . . .”) (Jiménez 176).

<sup>14</sup> Jiménez recounts his visit to Whitman’s house in Prose CCXXXII: “—Pero, ¿de veras quiere usted ver la casa de Whitman mejor que la de Roosevelt? ¡Nadie me ha pedido nunca tal cosa . . . !” (“But you really want to see Whitman’s house rather than Roosevelt’s? Nobody ever asked me such a thing!”), blurts out the driver who takes him there, but even worse, the new tenant does not even know who Whitman is and refuses to show him the house.

Outside, the great poet’s voice has been usurped by the unpleasant croaking of toads: “Soledad y frío. Pasa un tren, contra el viento. El sol, grana un instante, se muere tras el bosque bajo, y en la charca verde y un poco sangrienta que bordeamos, silban, en el silencio enorme, innumerables sapos” (“Loneliness and cold. A train goes by against the wind. The sun, crimson for an instant, dies behind the undergrowth, and in the green, slightly bloody pond we walk past, in the enormous silence, we hear the whistling of innumerable toads.”) (Jiménez, *Diario* 294-295).

Prose CCXLI narrates the search for Poe’s house. No one can answer the poet’s queries: “Los jóvenes se encogen de hombros. Alguna viejecita amable me susurra: -Sí; una casa chiquita, blanca; sí, sí, he oído de ella. Y quiere decirme donde está, pero su memoria arruinada no acierta a caminar derecho” (“Young people shrug. Some kind little old lady whispers: ‘Yes, a small white house, yes, yes, I have heard of it.’ And she wants to tell me where it is, but her ruined memory cannot walk straight.”) (Jiménez, *Diario* 303).

The forgotten house, evicted from the map, alludes to a deeper loss, to the faint beating of a dislocated home that Jimenez is, nevertheless, able to feel; though no one knows where it is and hardly anyone remembers it: “sin embargo, existe en Nueva York, como en la memoria el recuerdo menudo de una estrella o un jazmín, que no podemos situar más que en un jazminero o en un cielo de antevida, de infancia, de pesadilla, de ensueño o de convalecencia

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// Y sin embargo, yo la veo, yo la he visto en una calle, la luna en la fachadita de madera blanca, una enredadera de nieve en la puertecilla cerrada ante la que yacen los muertos, con una nieve sin pisadas, igual que tres almohadas puras, tres escalones que un día subieron a ella” (“And yet it exists in New York, like the minute memory of a star or a jasmine flower exists in the mind, a memory we can only locate in a jasmine plant or a sky in a pre-life, in childhood, in a nightmare, a dream or a convalescence. And still I see it, I have seen it in a street, the moon on the little white wooden façade, a vine of snow on the closed little door before which lie the dead, covered in trackless snow, like three pure pillows, three steps that once led to it”) (Jiménez, *Diario* 303). Many years later, in his exile in Washington, Jiménez would remember that failed quest, so loaded with involuntary symbolism, in his prose “En casa de Poe” (Jiménez, *Alerta* 127-132).

<sup>15</sup> “although I made many of the translations on my own, others were done with my wife and with Spanish and foreign friends, and the names of these friends appear at the end of the poems translated”

<sup>16</sup> “in translating what has to be kept is the accent” . . . “faithful to the idea and sentiment and free in form with an inner accent”

<sup>17</sup> “start publishing periodically, on a monthly basis, an open succession of universal texts ‘from every period’”

<sup>18</sup> Later, Jiménez would rework those texts to publish them in literary journals, but again the project came to nothing. Javier Blasco published an edition of what *Alerta* might have been in 1983.

<sup>19</sup> “great difficult poets--the interior ones: . . . ”

<sup>20</sup> “A lay Santa Teresa, with a flirtatious soul, bragging before posterity of her excessive familiarity with God, and taking the secret of that familiarity to the grave. It is as if she had stars and stones within the little pumpkin of her sovereign brow, stars and stones that throw

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sparks of light and darkness, sparks of darkness sometimes more beautiful than the sparks of light” . . .

“It is frequently, almost constantly, assumed that the best poet is the most extensive one. But a poet is a being full of grace, that glitters and remains full of his secret, who is born, lives, dies, and remains like a treasure out of which he will gift us with minor jewels, and takes his greatest hoard to the void to enrich it: that is, a poet is an enricher, a true abolisher, of the void . . . Emily Dickinson was this, a woman in a state of grace, who took the secret of the world to eternity, in case it was empty . . .”

“Every time Emily Dickinson returns to poetic presence, after each oblivion, she returns to set a vital and aesthetic example to a new generation that finds in her metaphors, her escapes, and her paradoxes, all of them transcendent, a perpetual renewal for herself and for them. She is always alive and new; rather, she is always resurrected.”

<sup>21</sup> Sheridan traces Jiménez’s impact on the *Contemporáneos* in his classic book on the group (*Los Contemporáneos ayer* 158-160); see also García Rodríguez (*Contemporáneos* 61-65) and more recently Stanton (“Juan Ramón Jiménez en México”).

<sup>22</sup> The only precedent in Mexico had been “la mínima antología prologada por Rafael Lozano, con tres traducciones suyas, dos de Novo y una de Antonio Dodero” (“the minimal anthology with a prologue by Rafael Lozano, including three of his translations, two by Novo, and one by Antonio Dodero”) published in *La Falange* in 1923 (Stanton, *Inventores* 152).

<sup>23</sup> “Emily Dickinson no es casi conocida en español; Juan Ramón Jiménez tradujo un poema suyo, en el viaje del poeta recién casado a Nueva York” (“Emily Dickinson is almost unknown in Spanish; Jiménez translated one of her poems during the newlywed poet’s trip to New York”) (Cajero, “Traducción” 32). This text, not included in Owen’s works, was rescued and published in its entirety by Cajero (“Traducción” 32). As has been seen, Jiménez in fact translated three poems.

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<sup>24</sup> What Cuadernos del Plata, the publishing house sponsored by Reyes, eventually published in 1930 was *Línea*, one of Owen's most hermetic, experimental, and singular books. References to the anthology in his letters can be found in Owen, *Obras* 268, 272-3.

<sup>25</sup> In New York, both shared the friendship of Antonieta Rivas Mercado, a Mexican patron of the *Contemporáneos* and Owen's acting partner in some of the performances of the Teatro Ulises, who enjoyed a lively relation of mutual understanding with Lorca. Sheridan has written on a possible coincidence of both in a shared project with Armero (*Señales* 193-210).

<sup>26</sup> "the encounter with the metropolis of modernity was a jolt to the poet's sensibility and a radical transformation of his expressive resources"

<sup>27</sup> On its origin, see Stanton, "Un poeta mexicano" 741-750.

<sup>28</sup> "whatever is most monstrous, harshest, most beast-like" . . . "one begins to see New York from the subway. This is where the flat, horizontal perspective ends. The depth of the landscape starts here, with the double depth, or what they call the fourth dimension, of time"

<sup>29</sup> "at that time few Spanish-speaking readers knew the name of Emily Dickinson . . . and far fewer would have been able to read fragments of her work, whether in English or in Spanish translation"

<sup>30</sup> "lovingly the shores of her world," "a strange and unexpected world" . . . "disconcerted" . . . "within the four walls of the family convent" . . . "odyssey" . . . "with her simple and childlike lines" . . . "into Blake's most supernatural and blasphemous territories"

<sup>31</sup> "voyage around the chamber," . . . "The one traveling whenever I travel is my soul among souls."

<sup>32</sup> The eight translations are collected in Rosas 35-36.

<sup>33</sup> "to express the attitude of improvisation and ease that he carefully and painstakingly" . . . "cautiously eluding the solemn lexicon and the conventional rhetoric that Emily Dickinson inexorably rejected and transgressed."

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<sup>34</sup> “a serious reflection on the role of the poetry translator, whose function would consist in approximating the spirit of the original text as far as possible.”

<sup>35</sup> “a sensual work that is purified, with intelligence and selflessness” . . . “I have always known how to read—and write—between the lines, . . . but even more fascinating than reading is feeling between the lines,”

<sup>36</sup> “All night we would dance a thinking wind / Let us put the lamp on the balance / Let us know the exact measure of its light, / For if it lights the way for no one now, / It will guide the prodigals of 2030 in their quest.”

<sup>37</sup> “it is entirely, and this is no gallant compliment, due to the noble sacrifice and even the generous stubbornness that my wife devoted to it. I could never have put myself in the placeless place of this abstract writer.”

<sup>38</sup> “Her world is only a remote nebulous concept, like an unformed idea” . . . “a muffled vegetable babbling” “a wholly vegetable attempt at words.” In 1989, Torremozas brought out a new edition of the translation but without including Domenchina’s prologue. In its place, a few brief “Palabras para esta edición” (“Words for this edition”) appear, written by Champourcin and dated February 1989.

<sup>39</sup> “the marvelous German mystics” . . . “a vague bedazzlement, still without specific impressions, without understanding. No. It was rather a question of intuiting and guessing. Sensing that something important was hidden there, something whose transcendence would appear as years went by in innumerable ecstatic readings.”

<sup>40</sup> “enormously fond” . . . “modern English poetry with Keats, Shelley, Blake, A. E. Yeats, etc., and with each of these names a lucid commentary that is now lost to my memory”

<sup>41</sup> “And it was also the afternoon of North American poets, when we had candidly thought that no poetry was cultivated in that land . . . I left with a group of new names unknown in Spain at

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the time, . . . And I ran again to León Sánchez Cueta's bookshop to order books by Frost, Emily Dickinson, Robinson, Lee Masters, etc."

<sup>42</sup> One must underline here Jiménez's constant support to women poets, encouraging their vocations, writing prefaces for their books, or consecrating them as authors in his reviews, both in Spain and in his years of exile in the Americas. Such an early and commendatory approach to Dickinson as Jimenez's must be understood, in fact, as one more instance of his lack of sexist prejudices in relation to poetry and thought. In this too he was more singular and more advanced than younger poetic generations supposedly more representative of modernity.

<sup>43</sup> "The concept of the poem as J.R. expressed it was something on the edge of the sublime and it drove me out of my mind"

<sup>44</sup> "I believe in a verse that is pure, concise, bare, free from the useless adornments of a rhetoric from the past. My aspiration is to bare my poem, reducing and intensifying its emotional area"

<sup>45</sup> "I see you like this: demonic, an excellent, good demonic, not the morbid disagreeable type. And in this presence of yours lies, in my opinion, your main vital and poetic value and appeal." Jiménez's lyrical caricatures were much sought after but also feared by the poets of the twenties and thirties because they constituted a highly valued consecration when they were positive. Champourcin's, which was very favorable, was also published in 1930 in *El Heraldo de Madrid*, and contributed greatly to her recognition as a poet.

<sup>46</sup> A firefull cloud, a silent kindling of red-white-hot needles, a tall labyrinth of blinding snarls, a crowning hive of winged thorns, comes after her, over her. What perilous burning bush of strangeness has Ernestina gone into? . . . What pitch-black wolfish mouth lies in the depths of Ernestina's wood, and where would it lead to? Because it seems as if she's been fighting with the hounds of hell, frazzled with signs, with obvious mixed bloods, her teeth torn to pieces from biting her defense, her eyes boldly astray. And this repeated mystery leaves in her, I don't know where in her body or her soul, a twisted, charred, cabalistic, flaring remainder.

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<sup>47</sup> “a modern and open definition of the human condition towards a metaphysics that will eliminate all clerical and moral yokes” . . . “a recovery of the language and the forms that involve a free formulation of the world.”

<sup>48</sup> Julio César Santoyo laments that Champourcin’s translation work has not been acknowledged, in spite of its volume and relevance (255). Santoyo collects the complete list of her translations for Centauro, Rueca y Nuevo Mundo, but above all for FCE. On her return to Spain, she continued working as a translator for Spanish publishing houses. On the very relevant function of Spanish exiles as translators in Mexico, see Zavala Mondragón 2017.

<sup>49</sup> To compose the volume, Champourcin and Domenchina traced Dickinson’s publication history with special thoroughness. This is apparent in the bibliographical note included in the anthology that proves that they had access to most of the editions of her poetry and her letters and to different critical appreciations of the poet published in books or in the press. The note even includes Millicent Todd Bingham’s *The Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson*, published just one year before, in 1945, by Harper & Brothers.

<sup>50</sup> “ugliness complex” . . . “an old maid” . . . “in her rooms, consecrating herself entirely to her verses, to pathetically ruminating her ugliness complex, and to cultivating a copious and embarrassing epistolary literature.”

<sup>51</sup> The word boycott is not excessive if these other expressions by Domenchina in his prologue are taken into account “el candor un poco marrullero de la puritana egoísta” (11); “este idioma tierno, que solo dispone de vagidos o briznas de expresión” (12); “la elementalísima clave en la que Dickinson cifra sus intuiciones sin norma” (13); “lo inefable, que no convence, más que poesía difícil es sociología confusionaria o farragismo sociológico” (17); “Emily yerra—no puede atinar— por falta de alcance” (17); “la sorprendente poquedad lírica de Emily Dickinson” (18), “voz trémula y sin cuajar . . . sin consolidarse nunca en expresión radiante, a lo largo de una obra confidencialmente opaca” (24); “la escasez retórica y la desmaña no intencional de

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un verbo casi alocuo” (25). (“the slightly glib candor of the selfish puritan” “this tender language, speaking only in babyish cries or snippets” “the thoroughly elementary key in which Dickinson cyphers her unruly intuitions” “the unconvincing ineffable, rather than difficult poetry, is confusion-making sociology or sociological hodgepodge” “Emily fails--she cannot succeed--for lack of power” “the surprising lyrical scarcity of Emily Dickinson” “her tremulous unformed voice . . . never consolidating in radiant expression throughout a confidentially opaque work” “the rhetorical scarcity and the unintentional clumsiness of a nearly inarticulate word”)

<sup>52</sup> Thanks to Champourcin, *Rueca* opened with the poem “Pobre verdad” (“Poor truth”) by Jiménez, who collaborated by contributing other later pieces: the prose “Lost Spanish (How strange!)” in number 7; in number 14 with the famous poem “Distinto” (“Different”) that she always identified with: “¿A cuántos se nos ha clavado en el alma este título, porque expresaba lacónico e hiriente algo que sentíamos y no sabíamos decir? Lo querían matar / los iguales/ porque era distinto” (*La ardilla y la rosa* 144. (“How many of us have this title riveted in our soul because it piercingly expressed something we felt and did not know how to say: ‘The same/ wanted to kill him/ because he was different’”). To number 15, he contributed “Las tres presencias,” (“The three presences”), formed by three brief compositions: “Dos siglos” (“Two centuries”), “Cama de rosa” (“Bed of roses”), and “En las raíces frescas” (“In the fresh roots”). In those years, Champourcin had seen Jiménez and Camprubí in Washington, taking advantage of her trips to the capital of the United States as an interpreter in international congresses and conferences.

<sup>53</sup> “tired of being excluded from the editorial boards of Mexican publications in the forties. . . they decided to create their own journal.”

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<sup>54</sup> “What I am certain of” . . . “is that if in *Tierra Nueva* we had been allowed to participate actively and to consider it our own work too, *Rueca* would not have been edited” . . . “The prejudice of the writers themselves towards women's literature”

<sup>55</sup> “the newest female generation”

<sup>56</sup> “Our youngest female writers ascribe to the avant-garde group, that is congenial to them by ideas and temperament. They are as daring and enthusiastic as their male companions. Steering wheel in hand, no long skirts to trail in the dust, without imitating anyone, they will manage to conquer ‘their poetry.’”

<sup>57</sup> “I am ignorant of the technique of Dante, Byron, etc., I feel very far from such great geniuses, but I do feel a little closer to Emily Dickinson, to Bécquer, and above all to Juan Ramón.”

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