



## The Aristocratic Poet: Juan Ramón Jiménez's Reading of Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The essay analyses Juan Ramón Jiménez's reading of Walt Whitman as an aristocrat. For Jiménez, aristocracy is not a term associated with nobility. Instead, it is related to the intellectual effort that a poet – or any person – makes to improve himself, while at the same time maintaining ties with the folk. Jiménez wrote on Whitman in *Alerta* and *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* and mentioned him in other essays and lectures. For Jiménez who used the American poet to foreground his own poetics, Whitman stood as one of the precursors of Spanish and Spanish American *modernismo*. Jiménez's preference for the folk, led him to assert that he preferred Whitman's brief poems to his big epic poetry which was then and continues to be the readers' favourite.

**Keywords:** Walt Whitman; *Modernismo*; Juan Ramón Jiménez; Aristocracy.

### [es] El poeta aristocrático: Juan Ramón Jiménez lee a Walt Whitman

**Resumen.** El artículo analiza la lectura que Juan Ramón Jiménez hace de Walt Whitman como aristócrata. Ha de notarse que en Jiménez el término aristocracia no va asociado al de nobleza. Por el contrario, lo une al esfuerzo intelectual del poeta. La aristocracia obliga a una mejora continua al tiempo que lo liga a lo popular. Jiménez escribió sobre Whitman en *Alerta* y en *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso*, además de mencionarlo en otros ensayos y conferencias. Jiménez utilizó al poeta americano como modelo para su poesía y lo considera como uno de los precursores del modernismo español e hispanoamericano. El interés del poeta español por lo popular lo lleva a preferir las composiciones breves de Whitman y dejar de lado sus poemas 'épicos', que, sin embargo, han sido y siguen siendo los favoritos de los lectores.

**Palabras clave:** Walt Whitman; Modernismo; Juan Ramón Jiménez; aristocracia.

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### 1. Introduction

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) has been called a democratic poet. His *Leaves of Grass*, and particularly the "Preface" to the 1855 edition, are the poetic expression of the

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democratic impulse that drove the poet all through his life: “[T]he genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in the newspapers or inventors... but always most in the common people.” (*Whitman, Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* 6).<sup>3</sup> Introduced at the beginning of the preface, this was the idea that, variously expressed, was at the core of his poetics. He was the American poet in the early stages of his career and the wound-dresser during the Civil War. Both personas point to the fact that as a poet he was “the equable man” (*CPP* 8), the man who was one of the common people all through his life and who healed the rank and file soldiers during the war.

Though Whitman never left the slightest room for doubt about his democratic ideals, in Spain he has been interpreted diversely and contradictorily. I propose to analyse the way Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958) read and interpreted Whitman’s writings. Jiménez wrote some articles on Whitman that he later published, or were collected in *Alerta* posthumously. He also mentioned the American poet repeatedly in *El modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* (1953), a book that was also edited posthumously by Ricardo Gullón. In both books Juan Ramón sketches a theory of Spanish and Spanish American *modernismo*<sup>4</sup> and labels Whitman a precursor along with Edgar A. Poe and Emily Dickinson. More in particular, I intend to examine Jiménez’s argument on Whitman as an aristocratic poet. For that purpose I will first consider Jiménez’s definition of Modernism and in the ways in which Whitman is instrumental in Jiménez’s characterization of the literary movement. Jiménez was a highly self-conscious poet who theorized on *modernismo* with the clear aim of including himself as a member of the movement. By mentioning some poets and silencing other, by indicating the origins and the major influences, Jiménez would create a genealogy of *modernismo* that would explain his literary models and would justify his place in it. To accomplish this I will survey Jiménez’s concern for American poetry and I will briefly examine his poetics in the period when he was about to read Whitman. Thus, my essay will also help to partly understand the reception of American culture in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Whitman’s reception in Spanish-speaking countries has been studied by Fernando Alegría in his groundbreaking book *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (1954). Gay Allen also edited a book in which he compiled the appreciation of some Spanish authors on Whitman (1955). More recently, Blasco Pascual has mentioned him in relation to Jiménez in *La poética de Juan Ramón Jiménez. Desarrollo, contexto y sistema* (1982) and in his introduction to *Alerta* (1983). In the field of Translation Studies, Soledad González Ródenas has compiled Jiménez’s translations (2006) and has also studied his library to explore Juan Ramón’s life as a reader (2005) in order to substantiate the importance of English and American poets, Whitman among them, in Jiménez’s life and work. Yet, despite these seminal books and articles, it is my view that more detailed analyses of particular cases are still needed.

<sup>3</sup> Cited thereon as *CPP*.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the graphical similarities, *modernismo* and modernism do not cover the same period or refer to the same literary movements. *Modernismo* is a literary movement that started in Spanish America at the end of the nineteenth century and spread towards Spain. Its heyday was the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the Hispano-American adaptation of the fin-de-siècle movements, namely Symbolism, that took place in Europe, mainly in France.

By discussing Whitman as an aristocratic poet who prefigured *modernismo*, Juan Ramón is giving clues about his idea of the movement. I am both interested in examining what *modernismo* and aristocracy meant for Jiménez and the role that Whitman played in shaping his poetry. As I have indicated above, Jiménez was a highly self-conscious poet who always wrote essays with the clear aim of theorizing on his own poetry. This implies that his reading of Whitman is neither objective nor neutral. Instead, he intended to create an image of himself as a poet and a member of the *modernismo* movement.

My reading of Jiménez's essays is informed by the work of Paul Giles's on Transatlantic Studies (2001; 2002) and, more in particular by Alejandro Mejías-López *The Inverted Conquest* (2009). Though I disagree with Mejías-López on some points, there is little doubt that his book sheds new light on the origins and development of *modernismo*.

There are some important essays that analyze how English and American writers helped the Spanish poet shape his poetics. Among the bulk of this writing stand Howard Young's varied essays on the poet. Young discusses the role that Zenobia Camprubí, Jiménez's wife, played in the translations of Anglo-American poets that Juan Ramón undertook (1974: 469-486; 1976: 1-26; 1980; 1985: 42-52; 1996: 486-493), his interest in American poetry (1981a: 171-179), in Robert Frost (1981b: 27; 1981c: 289-309), or his agreement and disagreement with T.S. Eliot (1981d: 155-165; 1983: 625-631), as well as his reading of D.G. Rossetti (1982: 181-188) or William Shakespeare (2000: 71-78). John C. Wilcox has also written essays on Jiménez and Yeats (1978: 5-12; 1979; 1981: 8; 1983: 511-521) and Jiménez and Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay (1984: 186-200), whereas Carmen Pérez Romero's essays center on Jiménez and Poe (1979: 212-229; 1981a: 14-20; 1981b: 69-77) and Jiménez and Shakespeare (1987; 1992; 1999). There is no doubt that all this research has been ground-breaking scholarship. Nevertheless, it is my view that Juan Ramón's critical appreciation of Whitman has not been sufficiently explored and that in some cases, Whitman's work has only been briefly mentioned by scholars or given a cursory analysis. This is understandable since the main aim of their research was not Whitman but Jiménez's poetics. My view is that Juan Ramón's reading of Whitman's poetry helped him shape his concept of democratic poetry and the aristocratic poet that he would develop all through his life.

## 2. Juan Ramón Jiménez And Angloamerican Poetry

Juan Ramón did not simply read Whitman. During their stay in New York Juan Ramón and Zenobia went to visit Whitman's house on May 8 as Zenobia wrote in her journal (1986: 68). On their return to Spain, Jiménez wrote one of the poems of *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (CCXXXII) about the experience of visiting the house and finding that it was inhabited by a Pole who knew nothing of Whitman (Jiménez 2005: 216-217). Later on, in the early thirties, Juan Ramón was already giving the final shape to his library. According to Guerrero, he was choosing and placing the books he was really interested in, such as William Shakespeare's works, the Bible, Stéphane Mallarmé or the Greek authors (Guerrero 1998: 230-231). Whitman was one of the authors Jiménez included in a draft of authors he did not want to dispense with, González Ródenas points out. He kept a copy of *Leaves of Grass* dated in 1921, with an introduction by Carl Sandburg (2005: 49, 148, 276).

Between 1903 and 1904 a group of writers, Juan Ramón among them, edited *Helios*, a short-lived literary magazine that stood outside the mainstream of the Spanish literary world. *Helios* was particularly interested in publishing foreign literature that was modern and went beyond any type of late romanticism. Its aim was, as Juan Ramón pointed out in a review, to break away from Spanish moral and intellectual isolation (Blasco Pascual 1982: 91). Authors such as John Ruskin, Edgar A. Poe, Ralph W. Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche or Thomas Carlyle were reviewed, translated or discussed in *Helios* issues. For instance, in issue 13 (1904), Jiménez mentions Woodward's essay on Whitman as a theosophist that was originally published in *The Theosophical Review*. The review focuses on Whitman's mysticism and he is mentioned alongside Emerson and Carlyle, Richard Jefferies and Maurice Maeterlink (Jiménez 1904: 469-474).

Between 1906 and 1913, Jiménez read William Blake, Alfred Tennyson, Francis Thompson, P. B. Shelley, Poe, William B. Yeats, Walter Pater Lord Byron, J.M. Synge, John Keats or Whitman among other writers. His marriage to Zenobia Camprubí only intensified his concern for American literature. Young's essays show that Zenobia Camprubí played a fundamental role in Jiménez's acquaintance with American poetry. She could read English and taught Juan Ramón some of the language so that both could read poetry in English and translate it (Young 1974: 469; 1976: 1-26). Alongside her, Juan Ramón read Emily Dickinson, Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Edwin A. Robinson, Edgar L. Masters or Vachel Lindsay, who would be instrumental in the shift in his literary poetics that had already begun on their voyage to America. Their marriage there can be appreciated in his *Diario de un poeta recién casado*. As González Ródenas points out, not only did they read these American authors, but the number of translations also multiplied as a result of their collaborative work, since Juan Ramón was never so fluent in English as to accomplish the task on his own (2005: 65).

This reading of American poets helped him to move beyond his Symbolist style. As he declared in the essay "A Luis Cernuda" he regarded the Anglo American poets' verses as more direct, freer and more modern (Jiménez 1981: 110). There remains the suspicion that Jiménez might have not read all the poets that he mentions in the essay, stated by Doce "(2005: 228-229), though there is little doubt that, as he acknowledged himself, there was an important shift in his writing around 1914 even if he never completely rid himself of Symbolism, something Doce also claims (Doce 208).

### 3. Jiménez, *Modernismo* and Whitman

Jiménez regarded Whitman as one of the best American poets, precursor of *modernismo*, as he acknowledged in the first pages of *El Modernismo* (2015: 35-38) and in the general prologue of *Alerta* (1983: 56; 58). Both *El Modernismo* and *Alerta* are books on Spanish and Spanish American *modernismo* that he never published and that were edited posthumously. This accounts for the repetitions and the draftlike appearance in some passages. However, Jiménez was never inconsistent in his opinions about *modernismo* and about the poets that he included within the movement. Whitman remains one of the precursors of the new movement, *modernismo*, along with Edgar A. Poe and Emily Dickinson. They are the first generation of American

poets, followed by Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg (Jiménez 1983: 56). It is to be noted that Jiménez does not make any distinction between the poets of the early twentieth century that were grouped around Masters and those who were modernists properly speaking, Lowell. Frost stood somewhere in between both groups. This acknowledgement that he is relying on what he has read about American poetry rather than on his actual reading, and he did read Spanish and Spanish American poetry (Jiménez 1983: 85-86), reads like an implicit apology for his lack of critical distinction between poetical movements.

In any case what he did attempt was to sketch out the common points and the role that Spanish, Spanish American and the poetry of the United States played at the beginning of the twentieth century when *modernismo* started. Juan Ramón perceived a triangular relation between these three regions when he wrote he about its origins (Jiménez 1983: 55). It might be argued that Jiménez's long stay in the United States was the reason why he included the United States in his reflection on *modernismo*. The relationship between Spain and Spanish America had been long acknowledged, even by Jiménez himself when he wrote about Rubén Darío, Antonio Machado or Miguel de Unamuno. The reasons why he included the United States may lie in his residence there during the last period of his life. However, I would rather point to the fact that he searched for a renewal in Spanish poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century and found it partially in American poetry, as his editorship in *Helios* demonstrates (Blasco Pascual 1982: 91). In *Alerta* he presents the central argument that the United States were always the most modern nation in the world: "Cuando yo miro a Estados Unidos desde España, lo considero el país más moderno del mundo" (Jiménez 1983: 53). He also adds an autobiographical note by stating that despite his having lived in several nations, only the United States had given him a second opportunity. He then recounts his life when he traveled to the United States to marry Zenobia Camprubí and wrote *Diario de un poeta recién casado*. Jiménez remarks that the distance between him and the United States is simply linguistic: "Allos, más lejanos de mí solo por la lengua" (Jiménez 1983: 52), a statement that is explained by the fact that he never wanted to be fluent in English due to his fear of the corruption of his Spanish. To a certain extent he regarded his life in the United States as an encounter, not so different from that of Columbus in 1492:

Desde aquí, tierra nueva siempre para mí (esto lo he dicho con frecuencia), he visto siempre "de otro modo" a España, a Europa, a la misma América y al mundo en general, y también la poesía, mi poesía, la crítica y mi crítica (Jiménez 1983: 53).

This is coherent with his idea about the beginnings of *modernismo*. In *Alerta* he writes, "Ya entonces se oye hablar del modernismo y, como modernistas, nos llegaban los nombres de algunos poetas hispanoamericanos" (Jiménez 1983: 69). Mejías-López argues soundly that *modernismo* was a Spanish American movement that moved to Spain in the early twentieth century. Despite the resistance that *modernismo* encountered in Spain in the criticism of Juan Valera or Leopoldo Alas Clarín (Mejías-López 2009: 85-96), in the end it was regarded also as a part of Spanish literature with the naturalization of Rubén Darío as a Spanish author (Mejías-López 2009: 207). Jiménez shared this view of Darío as a writer who had come from America and had become a Spanish writer in his own right: "Los poemas españoles de Darío, que son tantos, influyen en nosotros, mi generación, por españoles, y son in-

termediarios entre dos Españas” (Jiménez 1983: 67). Juan Ramón always held Darío in great esteem, to the point that he wrote a number of essays in which he praised and paid homage to the Nicaraguan poet, starting in 1903 with a review of *Peregrinaciones* in the first issue of *Helios* and continuing in 1907 with an essay on Darío’s work in *Renacimiento*. Three essays on the poet were published in *España* in 1923 and others probably written in 1954 and 1967.<sup>5</sup> In these essays the core idea is the centrality of Darío to modern poetry in Spanish. In one of the essays that he wrote on Darío, he recounts their encounters and what Darío meant to him. He saw the Nicaraguan poet as a multi-faceted poet he liked in his entirety and concluded, “todos aquellos Rubenes Daríos, con el aspecto que tuviesen, tenían el corazón palpitante y rubí en el relicario de oro de España” (Jiménez 2012a: 46).

Despite his acquaintance with Darío and his acknowledgement of the central role of Darío in creating *modernismo*, Juan Ramón shows some anxiety about the origins of the movement. In the brief talk included in *Alerta*, “El siglo modernista es auténticamente español”, Jiménez vindicates the Spanish origins of modernismo and locates them in the art and literature of the Middle Ages and of the Spanish Golden Age (Jiménez 1983: 66-67). These Spanish origins are then linked to the poetry of the nineteenth century in the United States: “pasada la influencia francesa en España e Hispanoamérica, el desarrollo natural de lo de esta época viene de los Estados Unidos, cuya poesía, desde Emily Dickinson y Whitman, aparte de Poe, es la más natural de su época” (Jiménez 1983: 69). This idea is repeated in the essay “Con Rubén Darío hoy en Savannah”, of uncertain date of composition but published in 1967, Juan Ramón remembers that when he was a young poet he frequented the company of Darío, then a famous writer. Jiménez also mentions that Whitman and Poe are two of Darío’s most important literary influences (Jiménez 2012a: 98). It matters little how well acquainted Darío was with Whitman’s work, which according to Alegría, was not much (Alegría 1954: 82-83). Also of little importance is the influence on Jiménez of Darío’s essay on Whitman. Suffice it to say that Jiménez was able to trace a relationship between Whitman and *modernismo* by means of Darío and that he made Whitman one of the core poets that preceded *modernismo*. Jiménez’s anxiety on the origins of *modernismo* seems to be left aside when writing on Whitman as a precursor. In any case, Jiménez had a distinct view of Whitman’s role in the literary movement that he would sketch out in *El Modernismo* to the point of calling him an aristocratic poet. Despite all his assertions in the prologue to *Alerta* that his lectures would not be political propaganda (Jiménez 1983: 52), when writing on Whitman, Jiménez had to deal with politics, particularly with the term democrat, a word that in Spain was completely debased in the 1940s.

#### 4. The Democratic and the Aristocratic Whitman

There is little doubt that Whitman is the poet of democracy as he himself declared in the 1855 preface and scholars such as Betsy Erkkilä have reminded us (Erkkilä 1989). Though Jiménez wrote his essays on Whitman fifty years before Erkkilä wrote his influential book, he was not unaware of the type of poetry Whitman wrote. I wish to explore the arguments that Juan Ramón Jiménez gave to support his asser-

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed information, see Blasco Pascual (1982: 22-31).

tion that Whitman was an aristocratic poet. For that purpose I will analyze the two brief essays that Jiménez wrote on Whitman and that he intended to appear in *Alerta*.

Jiménez's concern for Whitman was driven by *modernismo*. As he remarked both in *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso* and in *Alerta* Whitman was a precursor of this literary movement. However this did not seem to be enough for the Spanish poet, who needed a more stable foundation for his politics. He was looking for something else, particularly in *Alerta*, in which he argues that the idea that has accompanied him throughout his life has been that of open aristocracy (Jiménez 1983: 53). In this sense the poets that he included in the talks must be, in one way or another, related to Jiménez's concept of aristocracy. The first difficulty Jiménez finds is the lack of folk culture in America, as he claims in *El Modernismo*: "Pero en Estados Unidos no hay pueblo [...] (Hay) burguesía modesta y más rica" (Jiménez 2015: 37-38). Despite the lack of folk culture, Jiménez could describe Whitman as a poet rooted in folk culture because Whitman himself is the folk: "Él es el pueblo" (Jiménez 2015: 37). Thus, Jiménez recognizes Whitman's attempts to be the spokesperson of American society. Rather than quoting any particular verse or poem by Whitman, Juan Ramón simply acknowledges that despite being read only by the *literati*, Whitman is the poet of the folk. However, Juan Ramón sees the lack of correspondence between the poet and his readers, a fact granted by Ezra Greenspan (Greenspan 1990: 139-213) and even Whitman himself, that led him to a literary crisis as Bauerlein points out (Bauerlein 1991).

#### 4.1. Democratic Whitman

In a brief piece of criticism on ethics and aesthetics that he published in 1932, "Estética y ética estética", Juan Ramón argues that if someone looks at Whitman from Europe, the American poet appears the perfect democrat, but if Whitman is seen from America he is regarded as an aristocrat and precursor of Masters, Frost and Sandburg (Jiménez 2013: 170). Juan Ramón is not original when he describes Whitman as a democrat since this is a fact that has been acknowledged by all the American poet's critics and biographers. It is much more surprising that he labels Whitman an aristocrat. This image of the American poet does not refer to his origins in his youth as a dandy. It is well documented that for a brief period of his life, Whitman cultivated a persona that would represent the dandyish artist who attended operatic and theatrical performances and used to meet other artists and bohemians in cafés in New Orleans and in New York. An image of this can be appreciated in his earliest daguerreotype of 1840 (Loving 1999: 125-ff). Jiménez valued this image and mentions it in his essay "El hábito hace al monje" [Clothes make the man] (1983: 133-134). He argues that, while Whitman was posing as a dandy, his poetry was unimportant because such a pose could not nurture any poem. Whitman's poetry only started to bloom when he adopted the posture of the average American of the working class, or one of the 'roughs' as Whitman put it. Jiménez notices Whitman's decision to wear only a shirt and a red vest to meet coachmen and black women (Jiménez 1983: 133). The importance that Juan Ramón gives to Whitman's clothing and to the people he frequented is related to the idea of democracy. Whitman is the American commoner described by American politicians in the period of the Early Republic, as Gordon S. Wood analyses in *Empire of Liberty* (2011: 22-28). This role that Whitman adopted was consistent with his youth as a radical politician and editor, though not with his

outlook in the first years of his career as a journalist. Similarly, the dandy Whitman posed as was not consistent with the poetry he would later write, as Jiménez pointed out in his essay. Whitman's poetry was not that of an aesthete and, consequently, he could not pose as such. The inconsistency between his public figure and his poetry resulted in a literary work of minor reach and importance for Jiménez.

#### 4.2. Aristocratic Whitman

Walt Whitman could be termed 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. He is the spokesperson of America who addresses his contemporaries, as he declares in the preface of the 1855 edition: "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" (*CPP* 10), and a few lines later he adds: "folks 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" (*CPP* 10). Whitman saw an interrelation between poets and readers at the beginning of his career that would vivify the poet's work. The poet would pay attention to the people's demands and in turn would show the people what they could not see. Whitman's task is rooted in Shelley's view of the poet as theorized in *A Defence of Poetry*. This idea that the poet was the representative of the people, standing apart but not absolutely isolated from society was shared by Juan Ramón (González and Rodríguez 2008: 103-104). Nonetheless, Juan Ramón never mentions Shelley when he is writing about Whitman. In the context of establishing the foundations of *modernismo*, he discarded any association with Shelley to favor the term that was commonly associated with Whitman, i.e., democracy, to this he added his interpretation of aristocracy, when he wrote about Whitman and the role of the poet in society in his comments on Whitman's writing about the American people and on his addressing that people.

Jiménez was concerned with the social role of the poet since this is the link to folk culture. In his two essays on Whitman, "Walt Whitman. Aristócrata de intemperie" and "El hábito hace al monje",<sup>6</sup> Juan Ramón points out some characteristics of Whitman as a social poet who might not be totally original. However, his interpretation throws a new light on them when linked to Jiménez's concept of aristocracy. Whitman is not regarded as a folk poet because he expresses the feelings and ideas of a people or because he addresses a people. He is a folk poet because he has the vision of a people. That is the reason why he is directed towards the future. This vision of the people makes him a real democrat, and, as a real democrat, he is also a real aristocrat:

Para mí Whitman no es popular porque exprese los sentimientos o las ideas de un pueblo más o menos verídico, ni porque se dirija en versos mayores o menores a un pueblo, sino porque tiene la visión de un pueblo: Whitman es popular hacia el futuro. Por eso es un demócrata auténtico y, por serio, un verdadero aristócrata, un aristócrata de intemperie, que son los verdaderos aristócratas. (Jiménez 1983: 132)

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the idea of the costume conforming the personality of the individual was also expressed in Jiménez's notes on Whitman in *El Modernismo* (Jiménez 2015: 37-38).

This excerpt provides the idea Juan Ramón had of Whitman. Jiménez was not concerned with Whitman's role as an American poet, as Darío or José Martí were. For Jiménez, Whitman was an important poet because he had a vision that comprised that of the folk. He was the spokesperson and a seer, no doubt, but more importantly he could identify the essence of the American people and write about it in *Leaves of Grass*. Linked to this vision is Whitman's language. He is a democrat and an aristocrat because he has written poems in which he uses the language of the people (Jiménez 1983: 132). Juan Ramón makes a distinction between those poems in which Whitman has a hollow voice and those in which his voice reproduces faithfully the American idiom (Jiménez 1983: 133). Jiménez's assertions put the emphasis on the importance of the folk idiom in writing a poetry that is based on folk culture but transcends that stage and moves towards a cultivated poetry, which in his words is the aristocratic poetry. His preference for Whitman's brief poems over the epic ones must be understood on the basis of his understanding of folk poetry as brief compositions. The Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer surfaces again as the model. The romantic poet published a prologue to Augusto Ferrán's book of poems, in which he makes the distinction between two types of poetry: the high-strung, pathetic poetry, in which epic poems may be included and the natural, brief poetry of subtle sounds and feelings that comes directly from the soul (Bécquer 1969: 9). Jiménez devoted an essay, "Dos aspectos de Bécquer (poeta y crítico)" to Bécquer (Jiménez 1983: 98-105). In the essay Jiménez makes clear the importance that Bécquer had in the development of Spanish poetry at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. For Jiménez, Bécquer is at the root of Spanish modern poetry because his poetry expresses the folk culture in a plain style. He contrasts the idealist and plain poetry that Ferrán had written with the literary poetry that was common in his age. Both Bécquer's and Ferrán's poems are brief, which explains Jiménez's biased appreciation of Whitman's poems. It should be noted also that in the general prologue to *Alerta*, he commented on the importance of folk culture in the development of Spanish poetry, and emphasized the union of *modernismo* in Spain, Spanish America and the United States (Jiménez 1983: 52).

That Jiménez labeled Whitman an aristocrat must have come as a surprise to any reader familiar with Whitman's life and work. First of all, as Reynolds (1995: 111-153), Loving (1999: 82-113) or Erkkilä (1989: 25-67) have pointed out, Whitman had been a radical democrat in his youth and maintained that stance during his life. Secondly, the United States of America was founded on the rejection of European aristocracy and the significance of the average man. Though it took some time, Wood argues, the aristocratic principle decayed gradually and was replaced by the middle class (Wood 209-238).

Jiménez theorized a very personal notion of aristocracy that was not opposed to the concept of democracy. He argues that Whitman is an aristocrat because he is a true democrat (Jiménez 1983: 132). That is the reason why he labels Whitman an open aristocrat, the only true aristocrat for Juan Ramón. To understand the meaning of open aristocracy it is necessary to discuss "Aristocracia inmanente", a talk that he delivered at the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of Puerto Rico during his stay as a Visiting Professor. Jiménez admits that there were other tentative titles such as "Aristocracia de intemperie" or "Democracia y aristocracia". He acknowledges at the beginning of his talk that it is easier for him to explain the concepts of democracy and aristocracy in the United States because this nation does not have the burden of

the past that determines the connotative sense of the terms (Jiménez 2012b: 53-54). For Juan Ramón aristocracy is the state in which a deep concern for the inner self and natural easy living are linked, concepts which in other terms he describes as ideality and economy. Democracy means the dominion of the people, but for the people to dominate, this must be cultivated spiritually and bodily, which is, there is little doubt, a return to the krausist ideas of his early manhood (Jiménez 2012b: 54).<sup>7</sup> Juan Ramón does not wish to define democracy since he regards it only as the path that leads to aristocracy. It is a negative concept that can be suppressed while the term aristocracy is, on the contrary, positive and perennial. Democracy, in short, is that which is not yet aristocracy (Jiménez 2012b: 54-55). An aristocrat is the person who blends both aristocracy and democracy. While for most people, aristocracy is a number of inherited privileges that a minority holds and the government of the few, for Juan Ramón Jiménez, it is the conscious effort that every person makes to create a superior self (Jiménez 2012b: 58). In fact, democracy and aristocracy are two sides of the same coin. Democracy is a term that belongs to the past since it has its origin in the injustice of the past, whereas aristocracy belongs to the future since it is directed towards the final justice of the future (Jiménez 2012b: 57). Aristocrats are neither a minority nor a select group. The people can be that aristocracy; in fact, the Spanish people are aristocrats for Juan Ramón. The people are the immanent aristocrats or the open aristocrats as Juan Ramón also describes them. The term “open aristocracy” expresses the idea that the aristocracy is not the select group that rules or dominates society; rather, it is the group of people who have bettered themselves by means of culture (Jiménez 2012b: 57-71). At the end of the lecture Juan Ramón considers democracy and aristocracy in the United States. He argues that democracy is fully established and can be properly termed so because there does not exist an ancient and false people or aristocracy. That is the reason, he adds, why Spanish people feel at home in the United States (Jiménez 2012b: 82). Despite the dictatorship that dominated Spain in the years when Juan Ramón was an exile, he always claimed, as he does in the lecture, that the Spanish people are democratic and aristocratic because of the popular culture they have developed. It is interesting to note that, despite the krausist thought that was present in Jiménez’s ideas about popular culture and its consequences for democracy and aristocracy, he was also familiar with the ideas about democracy that had shaped American thought since its inception, in particular the notion of the progress of history that he reinterprets as the shift from democracy to aristocracy.

Jason Frank discusses the aesthetics of democracy that Whitman created and developed in his work. He argues that Whitman unites the spheres of aesthetics and democratic politics in his aesthetics of democracy (Frank 2007: 403). He then adds, and this is important to my argument, “he aimed to enact the required reconfiguration of popular sensibility through the poetic description of the people as themselves a sublimely poetic, world-making power” (403). Juan Ramón pursued a similar path at the beginning of the twentieth century as a consequence of his krausismo. He theorized, albeit imprecisely, on folk culture as one of the roots of poetry. There is little doubt that his concept of folk culture is mediated by *krausismo*, as he himself ex-

<sup>7</sup> *Krausismo* is a German idealist philosophy that enjoyed an important influence among Spanish liberal intellectuals in the midnineteenth century. It was essentially theoretical and idealist, and stressed the role of the individual. Its emphasis was on the spiritual and moral recovery. It exerted a considerable influence in Jiménez’s aesthetic principles. Richard A. Cardwell, *Juan R. Jiménez: The Modernist Apprenticeship 1895-1900*. (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1977), 26-36; 44.

plains in the essay on *modernismo* (Jiménez 1983: 63). In “El Modernismo poético en España y en Hispanoamérica”, Juan Ramón explains that it was in the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, an educative center created by Francisco Giner de los Ríos, that the conceptual union of the folk and the aristocracy started (Jiménez 1983:71-83).

The notion of the folk came into theoretical existence at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in Spain. While at the end of the nineteenth century the concept of folk culture was linked to a critical vision of essentialist Spanish culture, at the beginning of the twentieth, folk culture was viewed simplistically and superficially. It was called *casticismo*, which can be described as the superficial and acritical rendition of Spanish customs. This *casticismo* had been despised by intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but adopted in most of the twentieth century, even by those with a leftist stance. This new vision of folk culture included *flamenco*, mudejarist architecture and the oriental stereotype of Andalucía, which appealed to writers such as Gerald Brennan, Waldo Frank, Robert Graves or Havelock Ellis (Álvarez Junco 2016: 180-181).

Juan Ramón, however, never showed any kind of affection or acceptance of that specific understanding of the folk. Rather, his opinion on the issue, directly shaped by *krausismo*, was opposed to such understanding of the folk. For Juan Ramón the folk keeps alive the representative values of a given culture stripped of any essentialism and typicality. His approach to folk culture is dominated by his attempt to fight ruralism, picturesqueness, and uncultivated spontaneity (Blasco Pascual 1982: 138-39). The folk is not opposed to the aristocracy. In fact, the folk is the point of departure while aristocracy is the point of arrival. The folk provides art with the irrational element, while at the same time it is the keeper of the eternal essence that art must develop. Any artistic movement that does not have the folk at its core, loses its center and is limited to the accidental. The folk is everything that is not yet aristocracy, which is its goal. The aristocracy, then, is the naturally cultivated folk. Consequently, an aristocratic art is merely the art that has cultivated the folk sources of a culture. It is not an art that complicates its expression either aesthetically, culturally or rhetorically (Blasco Pascual 1982: 320-21). It is then no surprise that *Alerta* is the general title of the series that Juan Ramón sketched, while *Aristocracia de intemperie* is the subtitle (Jiménez 1983: 59).

## 5. Conclusion

Juan Ramón Jiménez, though friend and literary colleague of Rubén Darío, managed to propose a new understanding of Whitman as an aristocrat whose work was based on folk culture. By paying attention to a poet who had already been chosen and reviewed by Darío, Jiménez was unconsciously accepting that *modernismo* had started in Spanish America and was then transplanted to Spain. This is in accordance with Jiménez’s anxiety about the origins of *modernismo* and with his choice of Whitman, along with Poe and Dickinson, as precursors of the movement.

Both in *Alerta* and *El Modernismo. Apuntes de un curso*, he attempted to define *modernismo*, its antecedents and its actual realization. For that purpose he needed to put forward a vision of Whitman that was coherent with his own poetics. He read Whitman against his concepts of aristocracy and the folk with the result that he created a new Whitman not totally uncoincidental with Whitman’s own view of

himself. The aristocracy may well be interpreted in terms of the poet as a seer or as the spokesperson of the people. It was of secondary importance to Jiménez that Whitman had never regarded himself as an aristocrat or had even described himself as one of the roughs. The Spanish poet saw the many possibilities of Whitman's poetry and he decided to use him for his work on *modernismo* though he had to change the way Whitman's work had been read. However, he never departed too far away from the most accepted conception of Whitman's writings and simply provided a new twist to that reading.

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