

Miguel Hernández

*Recoged esta voz*  
*Gather This Voice*



Antología poética plurilingüe

A Multilingual Poetry Anthology



**MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ** (1910–1942) is one of the most authentic voices of the Spanish literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in Orihuela (Alicante), his literary beginnings were marked by the provincial religiosity predominant in his hometown and an auto-didactic literary formation based on the classics of the Spanish Golden Age. His

poetry book, *El rayo que no cesa* (1934) made him known to the poetic circles of Madrid, where he transferred residence in order to try his fortune as a poet. There, he met the poets of *Grupo del 27* like Lorca and Aleixandre. Under their influence, together with Pablo Neruda's, who was then living in Spain, Hernández's ideology and poetry made a significant turn. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) did not interrupt his poetic evolution, and during these years, he published *Viento del*

*pueblo* (1937) and *El hombre acecha* (1939). When the war ended, Miguel was imprisoned, a beginning of a chain of sentences that brought him to thirteen different prisons with sub-human conditions. He consequently died in 1942.

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### **BPE Orihuela**

Sig.: BMH 163 /

Tít.: Recoged esta voz = Gather this V

Aut.: Hernández, Miguel (1910–1942)

Cód.: 3855432

Reg.: 56626





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B.P. ORIHUELA
R.A. 56626
SIGNATURA
BMH
463

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Photos compliments by Fundación Miguel Hernández

Cover design and photography by Brian Michael Lim of EchoGrafika

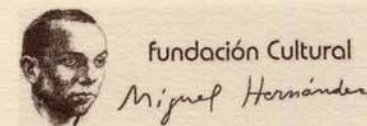
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NIPO 503-04-022-5

Printed in the Philippines by AEC Graphics, Inc.





## PREFACIO

La Fundación Cultural Miguel Hernández, fiel a sus objetivos estatutarios, pretende con esta publicación contribuir a la máxima difusión de la obra del poeta oriolano. Mediante la presente edición plurilingüe, y al amparo del convenio de colaboración firmado con el Instituto Cervantes de Manila, trata de universalizar todavía más la figura de Miguel Hernández y hacerla asequible al mayor número posible de personas interesadas en la literatura española. La presencia de la obra de nuestro poeta en Filipinas supone el inicio de una proyección exterior que esta Fundación tratará de intensificar en los próximos meses.

La singladura de Miguel Hernández en puerto filipino supone situar en uno de los confines del mundo al poeta oriolano. Miguel Hernández - carácter intuitivo, sensitivo, imposible de encerrar en pequeños mundos- rompe así fronteras y pone su pie en Asia, gracias a la colaboración entre el Instituto Cervantes de Manila y la Fundación que lleva el nombre del poeta oriolano. A bordo de esta nave cultural, impulsada por sus *Vientos del pueblo*, llega soñador a Filipinas el autor de *Perito en lunas* para ofrecer una muestra de su universal y siempre vigente poesía, seleccionada por el reconocido especialista Jesucristo Riquelme, en esta antología que pasará a los anales hernandianos por ser la primera que se publica en edición plurilingüe, justo cuando se cumple el 94 aniversario del nacimiento de una de las figuras más relevantes de la literatura hispana contemporánea.

Juan José Sánchez Balaguer

Presidente

Fundación Cultural Miguel Hernández

## PREFACIO

*¡Darle luz! –decía Neruda– ¡Dársela a golpes de recuerdo, a paletadas de claridad que lo revelen, arcángel de una gloria terrestre que cayó en la noche armado con la espada de la luz!*

Y siguiendo el mandato de Neruda, cuyo centenario celebramos este año, el Instituto Cervantes de Manila, con la colaboración imprescindible de la Fundación Miguel Hernández, quiere darle luz al poeta de Orihuela, y dársela en Filipinas, donde la luz es estacionalmente gris y bíblica o hirientemente cegadora; y dársela no en una sino en nueve lenguas; darle luz al poeta *generoso y luminoso*, con las lenguas de un archipiélago que también lo es: ¡generoso y luminoso!

*No tenía Miguel –prosigue Neruda– la luz cenital del Sur como los poetas rectilíneos de Andalucía sino una luz de tierra, de mañana pedregosa, luz espesa de panal despertando. Con esta materia dura como el oro, viva como la sangre, trazó su poesía duradera.*

Javier Galván

Director

Instituto Cervantes en Manila



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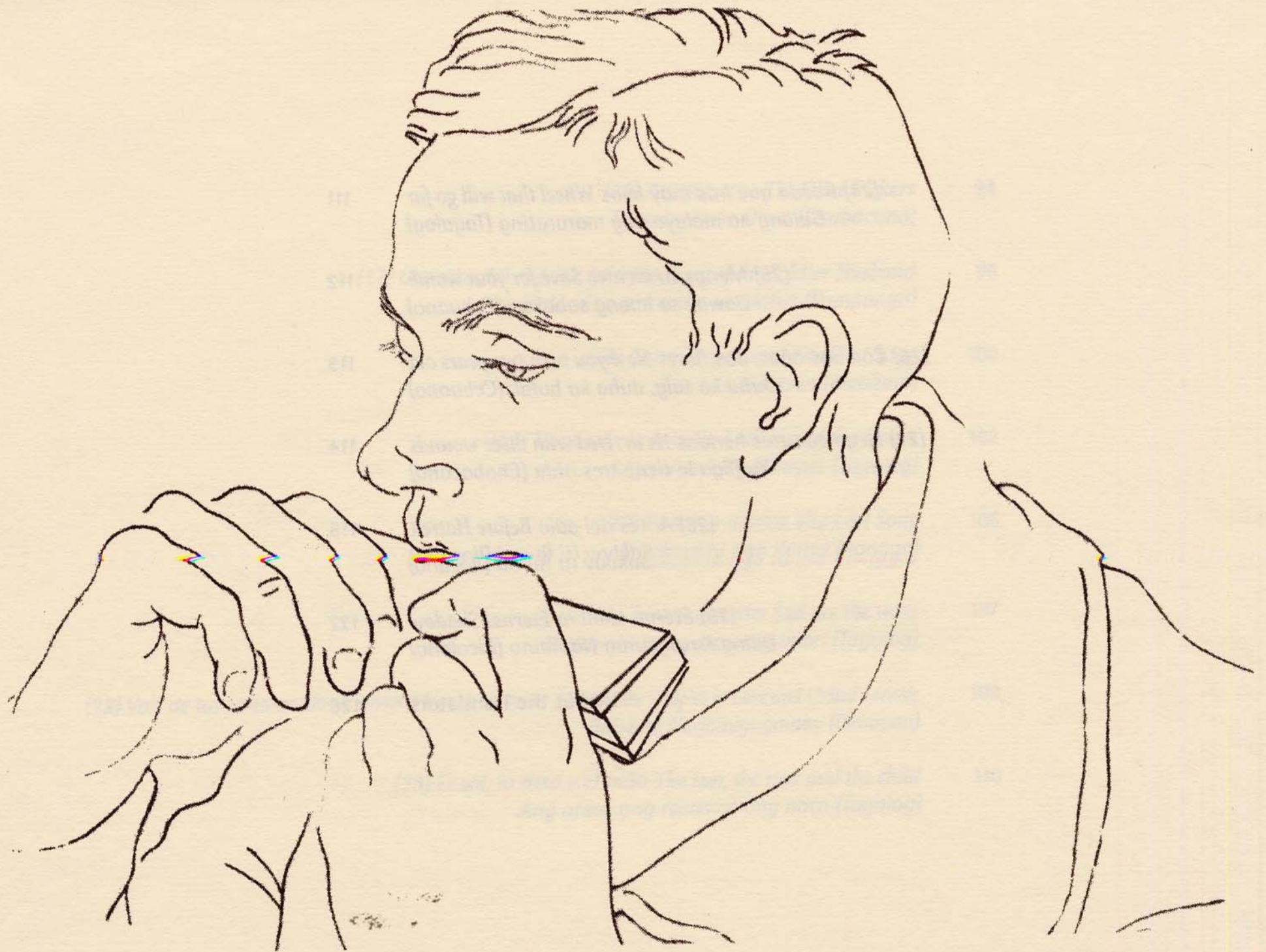
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# Miguel Hernández

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*Gather This Voice*

Introduction  
and  
Anthology  
by  
Jesucristo Riquelme





## INTRODUCTION

### MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ, POET OF THE IMMENSE MAJORITY

Jesucristo Riquelme

*"Justice is like a serpent. It only bites the barefooted."*

*(Monsignor Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, who was assassinated in 1980).*



*El joven Miguel Hernández, un poeta prometedor.*

*The young Miguel Hernández as a budding poet.*

#### MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ, PARADIGM OF AN EPOCH

Nowadays anybody, with an iota of humanity, cannot be insensitive in the face of the historical circumstances and the life of the Spanish poet Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), that youngster from Orihuela who, for posterity's sake, eventually wrote for the immense majority<sup>1</sup>.

Our poet -who was killed at the young age of 31 years and, therefore, hardly had a decade of literary output-lived during an epoch which was of critical importance, especially in Spain, to the evolution of the art of the twentieth century whose provenance was the so-called western world (USA, Europe). They were the "happy" 1920s. They were the years of the Charleston, when pure poetry (or art for art's sake: the attribution of aesthetics and, occasionally, of divinity to power) flourished and the vanguard movements (the "isms": which were quite elitist and likewise pro-minority) developed. Within the same wavelength of this intoxicating tide, the philosopher

Ortega y Gasset writes *La deshumanización del Arte* (1925) and proposes a thesis that will immediately prove to be an aberration: "Life is one thing, poetry is another... Let us not mix them together." However, the "stormy" decade that followed (the 1930's) brought about vertiginous and overwhelming changes which tended towards a more social and committed literature with the liberties and rights of the simple people. These changes were caused, on one hand, by the impact in Spain of the consequences of international events (the crash of the New York Stock Market in 1929, with its economic crisis and unemployment; and the echoes of the Russian Revolution of 1917). On the other hand and more importantly, said changes were due to Spain's internal situation, with the establishment of the Democratic Second Republic<sup>2</sup> (1931) and the rejection of the forms of totalitarianism. This was a response to the preceding military dictatorships. Ortega y Gasset, with characteristic lucidity, provided a glimpse of the future and published in 1930 *La rebelión de las masas*. In the face of economic precariousness, minimum wages, generalized

<sup>1</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), Noble laureate for Literature in 1956, chose quite the opposite as his epigraph: "to the immense minority".

<sup>2</sup> The Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) replaced the military dictatorships of Generals Primo de Rivera and Berenguer (1923-1931) during the end of the reign of Alfonso XIII.



lack of culture, and the isolation and decadence of the Spanish "Empire", a new hope for progress and reforms (particularly agrarian in nature and with reference to an *invertebrated Spain*<sup>3</sup>) emerged with the Second Republic. It was necessary that these reforms be completed with the challenges demanded by a non-sectarian State and a literacy campaign directed towards the common man. However, the hope fostered by the Republic had an early death given Spain's instability and the military uprising of 1936<sup>4</sup>.

M. Hernández's youth and the fact that he had to be self-taught, given his circumstances, prevented him from having contact with the vanguard movements then in vogue. His relations with the Group of 1927 commenced at a late date in his life. His literary journey had its beginnings under the protective shell of this group. Later on, he will break out of this shell with a very personal tone. What makes M. Hernández's poetry attractive is his ingenious use of traditional and modern elements, combined in a perfect symbiosis thus producing sheer delight. As such, its apparent simplicity combines pure aesthetics and human authenticity. This holds true from his first poems to the last verses he ever wrote. Miguel's works never lost a flash of the brilliant spark of the affective (which always involves us) and the telluric (or the deepest and most intimate dimensions of our earthly condition) dimensions which allow us to contemplate his poetic world. His metaphors and symbols are ever more familiar to us and apparently

they gain more simplicity as time passes, given their popular essence. Hernández is sentimental and sensitive at his best (not sentimentalist nor schmaltsy). His poetry reestablishes man as the poetic protagonist. This involves a process of aesthetic re-humanization. This process is based on a kind of poetry that constantly acquires more of the transcendence which humanity and the released passions of a "boundless heart" deserve.

M. Hernández was a man of the village and of the people, given his humble origins and his inclinations. Despite the fact that his roots and vocation were born within the popular level, that is, always grounded in the fertile and fertilized earth, we have to take into account that he never quite succeeded in his intent of "declassifying" himself through the sublimation of literature. In other words, Hernández aimed to overcome his own social and cultural class through the success of his poetry and plays. These were written with a view to the disappearance of a society of classes. From this presupposition we can derive his concept of poetry. On one hand, the poem has a redemptive function (for Hernández this means his personal redemption and salvation through his writings). On the other hand, it has a prophetic value. This signifies a prophetic poetry in its most transcendental sense, which presupposes first of all, a religious strain in Hernández's early career. Later on, it also implies a progressive social doctrine. This explains Hernández's previous adhesion to pure poetry and how he later on embraced impure poetry.

<sup>3</sup> This is precisely the title of a work of Ortega y Gasset published in 1921: *España Invertebrada*.

<sup>4</sup> This year marks a significant series of events in the History of twentieth-century Spain. It marked the start of a harsh civil war that lasted for three years (1936-1939). It ended with the victory of the rebels supported by fascist Germany and Italy. It also brought about the establishment of a ferocious reactionary dictatorship that lasted until 1975, upon the death of General F. Franco.



Moreover, above all, Hernández marks the re-humanization in poetry, overcoming the sleight of hand tricks involving words in his first poetic ramblings. To read Hernández is to fill oneself with emotion and sentiment, both from the perspective of the amorous and of the social concerns of man. These never fail to be so human and so authentic in their lyrical and epical magnitudes. In other words, they involve both the melancholy of solitude and the exhortation and courage of solidarity. Therefore, no reader will consider himself a stranger to or distant from Hernández's message after his liberation from the uselessness of the craft of literary sleight of hand, which he practiced during his beginnings as a writer.

Probably, M. Hernández is the writer who best fuses life and poetry without separating their trajectories. In each of his poems, his human preoccupations are forged, with a very personal sentiment and collective tone sounded in unison, which are valid for everybody or are addressed to everybody (and we are delighted because we can identify ourselves with its vehement and profound sincerity): "I, an animal of the family, with the blood of laborers, give you all the humanity of which my song has a foreboding". He confesses: "I have my tongue soaked in my heart... Because I take hold of my soul when I sing." Life and poetry are therefore united through his dramatic biography.

We can point out in his creative work four stages that express the process of interior assimilation of both reality

and human sentiment: I. The external world: Nature as something lived and as the object of observation (just like nature as it is or still life in paintings); II. The introspective and personalist interior world of love; III. The external world (understood as the committed "we"); IV. The interior world (or that of man as a species), which is transcendental and solidary only by love.

#### I. From Pastor To Poet (1929-1934)

Miguel Hernández was born in the bosom of a modest family which made its living as livestock dealers. He was born in Orihuela (Alicante), a small city of ancient origins, noble, placid, agricultural, catholic and characterized by a form of conservatism opposed to progress that greatly left a mark in its inhabitants. Since childhood, Miguel had been shepherding goats. He delivered milk to customers and was likewise familiar with all the secrets of mother nature. After around five years in school, his father forced him to abandon his studies. However, Miguel then was already an aficionado of reading and his attraction to this craft was already hopelessly incurable. The books he devoured and borrowed were either from his friends or from the library in Orihuela. The following letter (written in 1931) to the then patriarch of Spanish letters in the first half of the century, Juan Ramón Jiménez, is an occasion wherein the young M. Hernández expresses his complexes and anxieties:

*Venerable Poet:*



*I only know you through your Segunda Antología which I have read (please believe me) fifty times, learning by heart some of your compositions. You know where I have read your book so many times? In the best places: in solitude, in communion with nature and in the silent, mysterious and tearful twilight hour, travelling through ancient dusty and deserted roads amidst the sobbing of cowbells.*

*I hope that what I tell you, my dear admired master, will not sound strange to you. I am a shepherd, not quite as poetic like you, but only a bit of a poet. I have been a shepherd of goats since my childhood. And I am happy. My father could have given me another chore, given my birth into poverty in this house, and yet he gave me the task of the pagan gods and biblical heroes...*

*...Forcibly, I had to sing. I am uncultured and crude. I know that when I write poetry I am profaning the divine art...*

*You, who are so refined, so exquisite, upon reading this, what will you think? Look, I hate the poverty in which I was born. I don't know why... for many reasons. Particularly, for being the cause of the state of lack of culture in which I find myself and which does not allow me to express myself well, nor does it allow me to say the many things in my mind...*

His circumstances conditioned the shaky literary steps that M. Hernández took as a literary apprentice. He wrote on what he knew with fidelity and fervor. He wrote from a spirit that is shared by the rural surroundings (nature) and prayer (religion).

M. Hernández considers himself a part of nature. He exalts and dignifies it involving a range of scales: from the humble to the majestic and sublime. He does not have recourse to nature as a pretext or mental invention. With M. Hernández we can, at last, perceive Nature as the purest and most real of all presences. The "Canto exaltado de amor a la Naturaleza" is a clear exposition of how the young writer believes himself to be a poet who rescues all the aroma, flavors, colors, and scents of his garden:

Con la humildísima grandeza  
del santo Francisco de Asís,  
amemos a Naturaleza. (...)

en la abeja sonora y rica,  
-gota de oro melodiosa-,  
que la flor del romero pica;(...)

en el susurro de las mies;  
en el sutil ciprés eterno, (...)

en su raíz, en su corteza...  
¡Amemos todo lo que es  
parte de la Naturaleza! (...)"





Josefina Manresa, la novia oriolana de Miguel Hernández.  
Josefina Manresa, Miguel's provincial girlfriend from Orihuela.

This constant dialogue with nature, which is none other than the luxuriant and fertile plain in Orihuela by the banks of the Segura river, is full to the brim with pagan sensuality, which the poet inserts in mythological scenes and allusions. This use of mythology demonstrates that Miguel wishes to show off the knowledge he derived from his readings. However, his fusion with nature is produced by the sacred recognition of the divine work, enveloped by the religious and conservative atmosphere of his native city.

A month after reaching full legal age of 21, a very young Miguel Hernández leaves his paternal home and commences his adventure in Madrid, the Spanish capital of art (like Paris was for Europe). During his stay in Madrid, he becomes imbued with the baroque affected style of the recently recovered (and honored) poet Góngora<sup>5</sup>. The writing apprentice at this point wishes to prove, despite his humble origins and apparent lack of academic formation, his mastery of technique. In this light, he reduces the so-called "Neogongorism" into poetic juggling and play. His first book of poems *Perito en lunas* (1932) is a miniaturist opus. It is the overflowing result of a literary setting made up of metaphorical avoidance (in the sense of being daring, unforeseen and intricate) and the allusion to a daily and humble reality (which is given a literary sublimation) using

the eight lines of an *octava real*.

The common nexus which unites the book is the lunar metaphor (the "specialty" of a pastor who is "an expert [perito] on moons [lunas]"). All objects as if they were a painter's still life are described (in a plastic or visual manner) through their secret lunar forms, that is, in terms of their similarity with the moon and the lunar phases. The result is a book difficult to comprehend. Such riddles which are purely hermetic point out to one of the most original exponents of pure poetry, sustained in Neo-Gongoran elements, and are a cultured form of expression. The use of riddles also have its buttress in the literary use of enigmas as a traditional form of expression. Definitely, the book combines ingenuity, humor, affectation, and everydayness.

## II. Youth Without Love Isn't Youth At All (1934-1936)

The years that preceded the civil war covered M. Hernández's first critical experiences of great importance for his literary career. They were the years of his encounter with human beings (from this experience surged the themes of love and friendship). On the other hand, they were also the years of his encounter with History which brought about the awakening of his conscience and his commitment towards the freedom and equality of men.

<sup>5</sup> The studies of the poet Dámaso Alonso about Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561-1627) gave rise to the homage on the occasion of the tri-centennial of the death of Góngora and provided the basis for the commencement of the so-called "generation of 27" (1927) of which Miguel Hernández was considered a "brilliant epigone" by D. Alonso himself. It is worth taking into account at this point that the heritage of the Spanish Renaissance of the sixteenth century (from Garcilaso until the catholic poetry of the ascetic Fray Luis de León, 1527-1591, and the mystic St. John of the Cross, 1542-1591) was succeeded by the Baroque Literature of the seventeenth century -with two very different aesthetical models: *Culteranismo* or Gongorism (derived from the name of Góngora), a variation of an affected literary style; and *Conceptismo*, the conceptual style of Francisco de Quevedo, 1580-1645. The splendid Quevedo influenced -as in the case of all the mentioned authors of the Spanish Golden Age- M. Hernández.



If pressed to characterize or synthesize Hernandian poetry, we would qualify it as amorous poetry. No poem of M. Hernández is bereft of amorousness, whether it is directed towards nature, to women, to a son, to his friends, to his hometown, and to life. Moreover, this love adopts different formulations. There is a difference between the binomial of love-sorrow of the first period and that of love-hope that appears in his last poems, with only four years separating both periods.

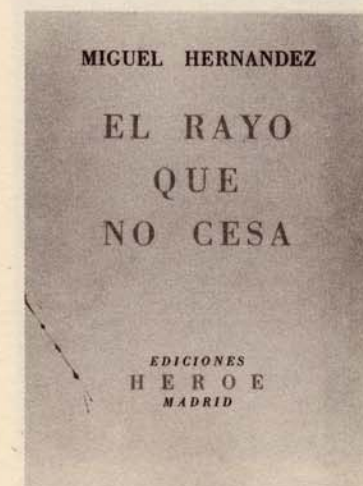
Miguel met a seventeen year-old dressmaker. She was almost seven years younger than himself. After having assimilated the rustic and vibrant dimensions of nature, Miguel starts to dream during his waking hours and his being burns with desire. He has fallen in love.

He was still indecisive. After freeing himself from the clamps of institutional religion, Hernández, the poet in love, was obliged to purify his language and search for a new expressive instrument. Until then he made use of the literary device of inhospitable love protected by nature or a model backed by a long tradition: the courteous love (of the 15th century) and the pastoral love poems. At this point, Miguel re-elaborates the religious poetry of St. John of the Cross's *Cántico espiritual* making use of eroticism ("Tú que juntaste Amado con Amada. El Amado en la Amada transformado"). Correspondingly, he opens himself to the influences of the trend of idealizing

love inspired by Petrarca<sup>6</sup> (through the mediation of Garcilaso and the pessimist and grief-stricken work of Quevedo at his existentialist best). With true love in sight, M. Hernández does not deny his feelings, although he allows the resonance of the past to be heard in his poetic voice. From the bosom of these two poetic traditions (the erotic-religious poetry of John of the Cross and the amorous Petrarcan current), *El rayo que no cesa* (1935), Hernández's first great and acclaimed book, was born. This work is composed of amorous sonnets<sup>7</sup>. M. Hernández's experience of love made him view it as a fatal threat and torture, not because it was unrequited, but because of his inability to sexually consummate this same love.

The personal crisis of 1935, which led Miguel to pagan and secular currents and towards socio-civic concerns, is funneled into his amorous poetry. The poet searches for himself and acknowledges his dependence on the other (the beloved) in order to safeguard his identity (he is nothing without her: hardly image of your vestige: "mud") His being, his personality is in need of the beloved, of her erotic assistance in order to live.

The vitalism of Hernandian poetry generates, because of impotency, the tragicism of this phase in his life. The desire to live, that has been transformed in loving, clashes with a narrow and provincial morality that rejects erotic enjoyment. This produces a tragic vein: the so-called



Portada de la 1ª edición de *El rayo que no cesa*, el segundo libro de poesía de Miguel Hernández.

"*El rayo que no cesa*" ("The Unending Lightning"), Miguel Hernández's second book of poetry consisting of 27 sonnets and 3 long poems.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco Petrarca, through his lyrical works, molded the ideal concept of platonic love. From Italy, this current spread to the rest of Europe (the Old World) and to the New World of the colonies.

<sup>7</sup> *El rayo que no cesa* is actually made up of 27 sonnets and 3 long poems.



"Hernandian sorrow" (*pena hernandiana*)<sup>8</sup>. Life, for our poet, is an amorous desire that he just cannot consummate. He engages himself in a constant debate, in a constant struggle between reality and desire. The first part of the book is replete with the symbols of "cuchillo" (knife) and "rayo" (lightning), from which the title is derived:

Un carnívoro cuchillo  
de ala dulce y homicida  
sostiene un vuelo y un brillo  
alrededor de mi vida

These lines express a pleasure-producing yearning and sharp reality. What was round and suave in *Perito en lunas* has metamorphosed into pointed and sharp knives, daggers, jackknives, and swords. Love is a constant wound ("y estoy tan a gusto en mi herida" confesses the writer himself). Life consists in living by dying (*muriéndose por amor*) [3]. In some poems, the poet summarizes his new worldview in which simple living is founded on the juxtaposition of love and work. And in order to magnify his love in nature, the poet identifies himself with one of the most illustrious symbols: the bull [4,5]. A bull, in its natural state of freedom, stands for genital impulse, force, virility, masculinity; while the bull in the ring possesses a tragic value that gives evidence to death and sorrow in the face of its lethal destiny. The beloved, in this light, does not allow herself to be reached and struggles given her puritanism. The sonnet "Te me mueres de casta y de

sencilla" [6] is a model of the lyrical process generated by the humorous "transcendentalization" of a trivial anecdote, given that it is habitual and repeated (give or "steal" a kiss from the girlfriend and the prudish rejection of the young lady). The strength of the life and the highly intimate love in M. Hernández is superimposed on the literary gravity of his verses: "Cuánto penar para morirse uno", as the poet writes in a memorable hendecasyllabic work. This signifies the appropriation of human destiny in all of its existential tragedy.

On the other hand, rather than aesthetical preference for the funeral song, it is perhaps more accurate to attribute Hernández's treatment of death to a new emotive reflection of an ambiance in which dying is viewed as something that is unfortunately not unusual. Three of Hernández's younger sisters died as children. The very attentive eyes of M. Hernández could not but help perceive and experience the profound sorrow within for the inexorable death of a loved one. This highlights premature life and death as the destiny of nature itself. One of the culminating moments of Hernández's poetic production is the famous "Elegía", the elegy to Ramón Sijé [7], who died at the age of twenty-two years. This work is a highly sentimental work. Perhaps, it is an elegy of remorse. When he wrote this work, Miguel, had just ideologically antagonized the God-centered Sijé, who was his great friend and benefactor in Orihuela. Another elegiac sample of doubtless value is the elegy dedicated

<sup>8</sup> Some of Hernández's poems seem to be dedicated to different love interests in the lifetime of our author from 1934 to 1935: 1) A slightly elder female writer who was Miguel's platonic love; and 2) a lady artist, with whom he had a passionate love affair abruptly ended by her. In the three amorous cases (his platonic relationship, his affair with his modest girlfriend from the village and the end of a sensual adventure), the poet laments the fact that he was not able to sexually consummate these relationships. However, there is no explicit, direct or indecorous mention of such in his works.



to Federico García Lorca, who was murdered by the rebels when the civil war broke out in 1936 [8].

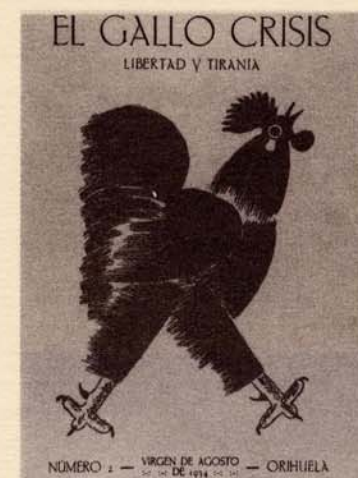
After settling in the Spanish capital at the end of 1934, the succession of political events (the unfortunate episodes which characterized the black biennial of a reactionary and involutional government especially the violent actions of the armed forces in the 1934 revolution in Asturias) and his new circle of friends, made M. Hernández abandon, in the middle of 1935, the useless ideology received from Orihuela. This year was important in Hernández's personal and aesthetical evolution. Neruda made fun of this useless ideology as the "soutanic"<sup>9</sup> -satanical foul odor" (*tufo sotánico-satánico*) of R. Sijé<sup>10</sup>. Gradually, M. Hernández took the side of the powerless, of the desolate worker. This started a new period at the side of a new social class that vindicates its rights (the working class). We are now faced with the first social protest of our poet as expressed in existential compositions founded on the soil and proletarian labor, giving way to the eruption of impure poetry<sup>11</sup>. This kind of poetry is defined as that form of verse stained by social impetus and its affinity with the "immense company", with liberty, and the defense of human values and its popular commitments. It is the antipode of the aestheticism and elitist minoritarianism of

the pure poetry which M. Hernández previously practiced. Pure poetry proved to be aseptic and alienating from Miguel's viewpoint.

M. Hernández commenced by freeing himself. His poems have become euphoric by denying his reactionary past and initiating a way of resistance to the established order. These poems were the first samples of social poetry, freed from religious values and prejudices. These came to light before the civil war erupted. The poet makes a euphoric and unrestrained cry in his poem "Sonreídme":

Vengo muy satisfecho de librarme  
De la serpiente de las múltiples cúpulas,  
La serpiente escamada de casullas y cálices: (...)  
Sonreídme, que voy  
adonde estáis vosotros los de siempre, (...)  
los que conmigo en surcos, andamios, fraguas, hornos,  
os arrancáis la corona del sudor a diario".

The amorous introspection of *El rayo que no cesa* is now an expression of song and jubilation. But Hernández's political commitment is founded not on abstract ideas but on everyday experiences, which he and his loved ones underwent and suffered:



*El gallo crisis*, revista dirigida por Ramón Sijé donde colaboraba M. Hernández. Pablo Neruda la criticaba por sus tendencias religiosas.

"El gallo crisis", the magazine of Ramón Sijé where M. Hernández was a contributor. The publication was critically mocked by Pablo Neruda for its strong adherence to the Catholic Church.

<sup>9</sup> "Soutanic" is derived from the word "soutane" or the cassock of the priests. It is clearly an anti-clerical pun.

<sup>10</sup> Neruda was referring to the journal *El gallo crisis* which Sijé published in Orihuela. The Chilean poet, as explained in the previous note, made fun of Sijé's influence by using a neologism derived from the word "soutane" (sotana) and Satán (the devil). This irony, which is an "antiphrasis", is quite evident and witty. 1935 was a year of dispute characterized by a difficult internal debate by M. Hernández who found himself between the useless ideology of Sijé and the oceanic and liberating force of Neruda. The balance favored the side of the then consul of Chile in Madrid.

<sup>11</sup> The prototype of impure poetry was the journal *Caballo verde para la poesía*, promoted by Manuel Altolaguirre and Concha Méndez. Its editor was the Chilean writer, Pablo Neruda, who was the consul of his county in republican Spain, and who eventually won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973.





Portada de la 1ª edición de *Viento del pueblo*. (1937).  
The book cover of the first edition of "Wind of the People", a war poetry published in 1937.

viendo a mi hermana helarse mientras lava la ropa,  
viendo a mi madre siempre en ayuno forzoso,  
viéndoos en este estado capaz de impacientar  
a los mismos corderos que jamás se impacientan.

The passage towards the civil war of 1936 and the new kind of poetry already have their solid foundations. The poet definitely identifies himself with the people, "the people who were fed from the same breasts as I was". This does not only involve a circumstantial kind of literature, but a sincere conviction that gives veracity to Hernández's words. These words are each time more and more relieved from emulations. The poet discovers his most intimate voice that opts for free verse (and the versicle), thus making him abandon metrical classicism.

### III. Poetry In Times of War: The Solider-Poet (1936-1938)

*"When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. But when I ask why the poor does not have any food, they call me a communist."*

(Helder Cámara, Brazilian Bishop).

After war was declared, M. Hernández took sides with the republicans, the loyal ones whom he identified with the poor and who were against the rebels or the invaders, and the rich. Realizing that poetry was his only weapon, in this period, Hernández developed a poetry of propaganda and of encouragement for the Republican soldiers fighting in the trenches. But the tone of his poetry during these times of war was not limited to the epic

harangue. Social concern (with a seasoning of lyricism) and hope in one's offspring (as a symbol of a successful tomorrow, of a tomorrow already won and within reach of our sorrows) also blossomed in his poems during this period. At this point, a full lyrical tone was always present in M. Hernández in his best moments.

The two books of poetry during this time of his life, *Viento del pueblo* and *El hombre acecha* are distinct from one another. *Viento del pueblo* (1937) presents us the optimistic side: encouraging, enthusiastic, and combative for the hope made concrete in victory. It moves along the lines of fraternity, liberty and the fertility of the blood shed. The poet presents himself as wind, as the breath of air that gives life through the word and communication. The "silbo vulnerado" (wounded whistle) of the beloved (a resonance of St. John of the Cross in the origins of *El rayo que no cesa*) has been transformed in the "viento libre" (free wind), an image impregnated with virility, heroism and love. It is poetry of emergencies and dire circumstances wherein the personal gives way to the collective and to the ethical considerations of solidarity with the needed (for his livelihood or for his loyalty in the war). It is a prophetic poetry that exalts the virtue of love for the country, that holds virility as fountain of liberty and heroism [9]. The poetic referent is now external: the poetic subject (epical/lyrical) has been definitely transformed in a "we", already bereft of the qualities of an alienated "I". His work has made a transition from external nature and religious motives towards the rebellious message against



iniquitous society and a revolutionary message against repressive society.

The style becomes clear, transparent, and direct with the finality of being comprehensible to the "simple" people (in their majority rural and illiterate folks). It is written in popular meter, like a popular romance, with a simplified metaphor—deeply rooted in the soil, in agriculture, and in the cosmos.

When the defeat of the republicans was imminent, and in the face of such a gloomy balance of events, M. Hernández let out a heartrending cry: *El hombre acecha* (1938). This work speaks about hate, the uselessness of being wounded, deaths, and prisons. It presents the pessimistic vision of the poet on the war in general, already without taking sides. It features a wider metric of sorrowful, almost prosaic, and slow verse.

During the war, Hernández "recovers" the poetic theme of "España". He speaks of incitement towards war by being loyal to the values of solidarity and political commitment [9, 10]. Given these themes, the author writes epical poetry in times of war. As a matter of fact, there is a resounding appearance of the epical tone directed towards a collective protagonist, without ever omitting the lyrical element given that Hernández sings from within his being. This exaltation, characterized by a deep analysis of what is human, constitutes the perdurable element of the work [11, 12]. And, furthermore, with a

magnified range, Miguel's harangue proves that he has withstood the test of time [13]:

Vientos del pueblo me llevan,  
vientos del pueblo me arrastran,  
me esparcen el corazón  
y me aventan la garganta.

M. Hernández's temper advances in his political commitment. One of the best-treated themes of this period is, in effect, his concern for the workplace, the exploitation of the salaried worker, poverty, and hunger. If we understand social poetry as that poetic form born from the commitment with the most unprotected people of society, we can, undoubtedly, state that the work of M. Hernández, together with its amorous vein, contains traces of social sediment that originates from the deep fidelity of the poet towards his own humble origins:

Si yo salí de la tierra,  
si yo he nacido de un vientre  
desdichado y con pobreza,  
no fue sino para hacerme  
ruiseñor de las desdichas,  
eco de la mala suerte,  
y cantar y repetir  
a quien escucharme debe  
cuanto a penas, cuanto a pobres,  
cuanto a tierra se refiere.



His social poetry is a synthesis of shared sorrow and of denouncing the injustice of capitalism and in defense of the exploited class (as can be seen in the incomparable sentimental tone of "El niño yuntero" [14]). These poems point out undying lyrical moments that run the risk of falling into epical rhetoricism. In "Las abarcas desiertas"<sup>12</sup> [15] he adds a greater dosage of gentleness, transformed in other poems into an indignant harangue, given the indifference of cities who were not in the vanguard, like Jaén, in "Aceituneros"[16].

And, together with his epical poetry, he never abandons his lyrical poetry, which is the tone in which Miguel expresses his personal feelings, which are situated in the center of the psychological discourse. Thus they are introspective, evocative or fantastic, with which the experience of the "I" is determined. This subjectivity is in like manner the essential note of human throbbing, characteristic of Hernandian poetry [17], effectively becoming a hybrid of epicism and lyricism, whose delimitation is complex and perhaps unnecessary.

In the final stretch of the war, combative glimmers, with social and political traits, still remain, but at this moment the heart-breaking poems that express an afflicted human tone are more transcendental. The poet is afforded the opportunity to clarify his vision and to have sensations of fear (vital fear) including of himself (literary fear). Man is a threat towards man. Hernández

is startled, searches for a new fountainhead in his wife and in his offspring (his future son). The feminine and maternal womb identifies and shelters men, nature, and the cosmos. The panic among men reaches to an extreme point involving all men, all belligerent parties. Nature herself, as a result, shrinks and disappears. Only the permanence of the terror of war remains and an aggravated hatred reigns, even victimizing the weak and gentle offspring. Man, who is capable of transforming himself in the germinating root and plant, mutates into an animal, wielding his claws and sharpening his fangs. War and hunger have generated hate. The landscape does not matter anymore. The bestiary of ferociousness and cowardice, which is attributed to the enemy in *Viento del pueblo*, is generalized in the uncontrolled threat of *homo homini lupus* without exception (as stated in "Canción primera"[18]).

This emotional battle appears later on in "Nanas de la cebolla" [19], wherein gentleness and violence are combined and wherein the wink and the momentary affection of the father to his child, and the bitter disenchantment of the personal experience of war -which by now is already permanent -are presented by making use of contradictions<sup>13</sup>.

The epical and social tone (blood, sweat or labor) that are present in this epoch find their "resolution" in the lyrical element. This makes the abandonment of the uproar

<sup>12</sup> An uncollected poem, which was not included in neither of the mentioned two books of this period.

<sup>13</sup> "Nanas de la cebolla" was written some time after the poems of the book *El hombre acecha*. In 1939, when Hernández was imprisoned for the first time, the poet received a letter from his wife (the provincial girl from Orihuela). She informs Miguel that she was only able to nourish herself with bread and onions (cebolla) during the lactation period of their second child. This took place a year after the death of the first child who was 10 months old.



of war possible, in fact allowing his poems to "return" to the everydayness of intimate living. This is the message which "Carta" whispers.

Cuando te voy a escribir  
se emocionan los tinteros:  
los negros tinteros fríos  
se ponen rojos y trémulos,  
y un claro calor humano  
sube desde el fondo negro.(...)

Mientras los colmillos crecen,  
cada vez más cerca siento  
la leve voz de tu carta  
igual que un clamor inmenso.  
La recibirá dormido,  
si no es posible despierto.

Y mis heridas serán  
los derramados tinteros,  
las bocas estremecidas  
de recordar tus besos,  
y con su inaudita voz  
han de repetir: te quiero.

In the face of the prisons, man vanishes. The poet closes his *El hombre acecha* with a petition of hope -the magnificent "Canción última" [20]. This expresses the defeat of the intimate plan (of intrahistory) because of

History, that is, the breakup of everyday life as a primary effect and consequence of the war.

#### IV. Prison Poetry: Intimist Poetry (1938-1941)

Peace came and the victorious military rebels make impositions. It was the first of April, 1939. The war had just hardly been concluded when M. Hernández was detained and thrown into prison. He was freed by a judicial lapsus, but immediately afterwards accused and brought again to prison and condemned to death. The poet lived through three years of torture with an unexpected end.

The last months of the war and his "tourism of prisons" (he will stay in thirteen prisons during the last three years of his life) and with his own vision of history destroyed, Hernández becomes more intimist. The result of this intimism is *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* (1938-1941), a splendid book of neo-popular poetry.

A brief text about the creation of Pedro, protagonist of the play *Pastor de la muerte* (1938), in relation to Don Quijote, explains to us the profound and meditated creative mechanism which leads us to the last poetic work of Hernández:

*The hero Don Quijote deforms reality so that it would fit into this condition as a hero, lest he stumble upon a small, vulgar reality, wherein the developing of the actions that his heroic heart dictates is made impossible.*



*Today's Don Quijote, Pedro the anti-tankist, deforms the tremendous reality that surrounds him and belittles it by being so brave and heroic. For Don Quijote the sheep form an army. For Pedro, the armies, the tanks are sheep. In their actions, both are the same hero.*

Both the confection of the dramatic persona and principally Hernández's prison poetry obtain their major utopian significance from this reflection on literary utopia: Reality becomes unbounded and menacing, such that, in order to remain a hero, the poet must reduce its magnitude and present it as something vulnerable.

Hernández accepts the sad reality and makes it his own. We only hear his voice and his condition. We can condense the grandeur of his last poetic work in the following terms: yearning for life before the multitude of deaths and lacerating misery. The ultimate key in understanding Hernández's work is the reaffirmation of his personal world, within the interior of a destroyed historical context. With *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* we immerse ourselves in an authentic poetic diary of the life of the writer. We see how a reality oppresses him personally, socially or historically. This highlights intimism as a relevant element of history, i.e., of the war. In effect, the radical importance of intrahistory is presented. Everydayness becomes the poetic object, but now as a brutal consequence of the current reality. The poet's use of his own personal experience is not so much due to the need to transmit the aspects of

the event in itself. It is more of a response to the intensity of his own sentiments with regards to the event (as a fatal consequence of the war and repression). Many of the images that appear are full of personal memories (more or less hidden, more or less manifest). In this manner, the images acquire a supplementary emotional potency with more advantage in terms of effect and power, compared to the mere representation of an event that took place during the war.

Technically, the poet condenses the composition to its essentials, thus making his work more dense. He finds the intimism of his definite and most personal voice. His verses are short, biting, wounding, felt, concise. On occasions, they are likewise solemn, dense, and grandiose. His poetry has become more directed towards popularism, finding its basis on parallelisms and correlations. Hardly is there any extension in the development, like in his famous "Llegó con tres heridas: la del amor, la de la muerte, la de la vida..." [27]

In this period, Hernández goes back to himself, to his interior and personal world. The intimism of the "I" becomes an amorous and social representation, with the destroyed history already contextualized. It is the definite phase of the re-humanization of poetry with traumatic personal experiences, with a background of the horrible consequences of the war, which hardly constitute the protagonist of the poems.



It is imperative to view *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* as a lyrical type of an emotional diary of life fatidically brought to its extinction with its sorrows, limitations, privations, absences. Absence, in effect, is the true constructive thematic base of the *Cancionero*. However, the dejection brought about by a life full of absences: the absence of justice (given the disloyal military uprising and defeat in war), the absence of love (because of the death of his eldest child and the absence of his wife and his second baby), and the absence of liberty (for being imprisoned). All these do not impede M. Hernández from overcoming his bitterness and culminate his work with a song of hope and of the victory of his ideals.

In many of his verses during this period -the end of the war and his subsequent imprisonment -the poet begins to foresee the defeat of the Republicans or to portray the sufferings of the postwar period. The memory of the present-past is indeed desolating. The description is rapid and impressionist, illustrating a world of fear, hate and sterility ("Bocas de ira/ Ojos de acecho/ Perros aullando/ Perros y perros"). Everything is viewed in terms of absence and even the corporeal disappears ("Ausencia en todo veo(...) Ausencia en todo escucho(...). Ausencia en todo siento...") Notwithstanding, the remembrance goes beyond and explores the future with a shimmer of hope [21]:

Tristes guerras  
Si no es amor la empresa.(...)

Tristes armas  
Si no son las palabras. (...)

Tristes hombres  
Si no mueren de amores.(...)

In this sense, the last of Hernández's production, as already stated, is destined towards love. It forms an already intimist and painfully realist conception of voluntary love and is understood idealistically as Love-Hope. The protagonists of these poems are his children and his wife, (as a spouse and mother) with an evident, though subtle, eroticism of his infinite love for her.

A very deep and sincere intimate love addressed to the absent spouse still perfumes the existence of the poet in his solitude:

Ropas con su olor,  
paños con su aroma.(...)  
Se ausentó en su cuerpo.  
Se quedó en sus ropas.

Un viento ceniciento  
clama en la habitación  
donde clamaba ella  
ciñéndose a mi voz. (...)  
En medio de la noche,  
la cenicienta cámara  
con viento y sin amores.



Nonetheless, this intimism is already distant from the personalist love of *El rayo que no cesa*. Now the poet seeks life's offspring in the figure of the woman. We can perceive a "fraternal" intimism (wherein all men converge together with the whole of nature and the plenitude of the cosmos). Similarly, we can detect a solidary intimism. On the other hand, *El rayo que no cesa* is more inclined towards a solitary type of intimism or love accompanied by the desire to end solitude and his being a *soltero* (single man).

A contextualized tragedy is present in the creative process behind *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias*. The semantic keys speak of what the poet was undergoing and within these experiences the sensation of an omnipresent death begins to enclose M. Hernández within its grasp. The poet feels that he is harassed and thus confections his keys of hope in spite of all what is happening. He has the hope of continuing to live. Most likely, the theme of persecuted lovers can serve as an example to clarify this vital context of M. Hernández. It is a splendid theme which proves to be helpful in detecting the profound meaning of the last of the Hernandian poetic production. The chronologically-related poems to the "Vals de los enamorados y unidos hasta siempre" [22] comprise this exquisite cycle in which the symbol of the wind undergoes an inversion in relation to the epic "Vientos del pueblo" (Winds of the People): now the wind is not expressed in a positive way, but it is presented as the disturbing and mitigating opposition to joyous loving union:

¿Qué quiere el viento de encono  
que baja por el barranco  
y violenta las ventanas  
mientras te visto de abrazos?

Derribarnos, arrastrarnos.

Derribadas, arrastradas,  
Las dos sangres se alejaron.  
¿Qué sigue queriendo el viento  
cada vez más enconado?

Separarnos.

In order to flee from the terror that stirs up ideas of death, there is a greater focus on life. The affirmation of life goes hand in hand with the affirmation of the space for love in the *Cancionero*. The literary symbol of the lovers harassed by the wind, who reaffirm their embrace, is a basic construction of the last Hernandian identity. The lovers (Miguel and his wife) are the consequences of the historical drama (contextualized by allusion-elusion) within a personal and, at the same time, collective terrain. And one's own identity becomes a symbol of the social identity of those who were defeated through the mediation of the desolate lovers.

However, the bloody fate of M. Hernández, i.e., his wretched existence, still is an imposing presence. The



inner sorrow produced by the death of his first son (at ten months of age), towards the end of 1938, generates a collection of poems characterized by a very affected paternal affection that feels orphaned [23].

Previously, with "Canción del esposo soldado" [17] the theme of the offspring -of capital importance in M. Hernández- commenced when he received the news of the birth of his first born. The exaltation of love and his life within a family provides sense to the struggles and gives meaning to the future, strongly represented by his child. Hernández envisioned in his son the seed for a just and democratic future.

Before the war ended in 1939, Hernández received the news of the birth of his second son. The poet opens a window and makes use of the symbols of the bird, its wings... and sings with a joyful and hopeful tone of the liberty that coincides with the coming of this son. This is what happens in "Nanas de la cebolla" [19]. It is a tragic lullaby in spite of the deceiving joyful metric of *seguidilla*<sup>14</sup> and *bordón*<sup>15</sup>. The same holds true with "Rueda que irás muy lejos" [24]. The poet puts his faith in the new generation and fights for a better world. His ideals and anxieties become obstinate and have a need for the maternal womb [25] and having descendants [26].

Despite all these, M. Hernández is simply perplexed: "Mirame aquí encadenado,/ escupido, sin calor/ a los pies de la tiniebla/ más súbita, más feroz,/ comiendo pan y cuchillo/ como buen trabajador/ y a veces a cuchillo sólo,/ sólo por amor." The poet struggles in order to leave behind negative spaces and his poetic testament teaches that man is his own becoming. Hope becomes overflowing in the last poem ever written by Hernández "Eterna sombra" [29]: "Yo que creí que la luz era mía/ precipitado en la sombra me veo". Hernández corrected the final two verses of his poem. Originally, the poet wrote: "Si por un rayo de sol nadie lucha/ nunca ha de verse la sombra vencida." In the definitive version, that is teeming with brilliant and triumphant optimism, Miguel writes: "Soy una abierta ventana que escucha, / por donde ver tenebrosa la vida". And he culminates with the correction of the previously cited text: "Pero hay un rayo de sol en la lucha/ que siempre deja la sombra vencida."<sup>16</sup>

Two months before his death, and already prostrate in his death bed, Hernández still had the strength of spirit in order to write a friend: "The most important matter consists in providing life with a beautiful solution". Shortly after his first imprisonment in 1939, he joyfully addressed the following words to some of his friends from Orihuela: "We will once again give a toast for all that is lost and will

<sup>14</sup> The *seguidilla* is a metrical composition that could be made up of four or seven verses. If made up of four verses, the first and the third verses are heptasyllabic and free, while the other two are made up of five syllables and assonant. When there are seven verses, the fifth and the seventh verses are made up of five syllables and are assonant with relation to each other, while the first and third syllables, together with the sixth, are heptasyllabic and free.

<sup>15</sup> A *bordón* is made up of three verses, normally one of them with only five syllables, while the two others are heptasyllabic. A *bordón* is added to a *seguidilla*.

<sup>16</sup> After making these corrections, the author should have corrected the title. Instead of "Eterna sombra", it would have been more appropriate to title the poem "Eterno rayo".



be found: freedom, chains, joy and the hidden affection that leads us to search for ourselves in all the earth." "Dejadme la esperanza..." "sólo por amor"... thus repeats the immortal echo of the voice of the poet to those who wish to listen: "Me sobra el corazón"... "sólo por amor".... "Sólo por amor"...

Already ill and without adequate medical attention, Hernández was pressured to contract canonical marriage in the prison hospital (within the month of his death) so as not to leave his wife and his little boy abandoned. After his death, his perpetual life sentence was commuted to thirty years in prison. Later on, it was commuted to twenty years. However, it was already too late for Hernández.

## CONCLUSION

*"In order to read and write poetry, just like working, love is necessary" (M. Hernández)*

The popularity of M. Hernández and his "necessary" poems can be attributed to the evolution and the adaptation of literary techniques and the mentioned elements. These factors have been helpful for his poetry in its task of extracting the best of human nature, without running the risk of iniquity. As such, we can conclude that: a) we take delight in his worship of imagination and the beauty of language: he makes use of language to sublimate reality; b) it is thrilling to see the constant

cohesion of this language that makes use of instincts and very elemental human memories, signifying an existential adhesion to reality; and c) we feel that we are the ones whom the poems speak of given the extensive treatment of individual problems within a collective context, i.e., Hernández makes use of language as an act, with reality as its object and venue.

Hernández's song to nature, his primordial religious devotion, the toast he makes to friendship and love, and his epical call finds its resolution in an intimate desolate melody that proclaims, with the greatest possible optimism, his social and artistic aspiration. This is the essence of what we call the Hernandian spirit. It is a spirit of the struggle of life, through literature, towards the hope of a better world for all.

M. Hernández combines aesthetic value and social relevance. Probably, the peculiar appeal of his literary production springs from the fact that we can always hear his voice, his poetic self, with which we can emphatically identify ourselves, even when his tone becomes epical and distances itself from its lyrical appearance. In *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* and in his last poems, he achieves the unity of the general and the individual, the collective and the personal. The poet assimilates his historical circumstances, condensing them, through an amorous expression, into what is intimate and its social dimension (in the sense of being applicable to all). Thus,



he speaks to us about society as a whole as a vivid reality, then and now.

If the language of M. Hernández has reached such a bench mark, it will be difficult that the changes in fashion would make him descend from this summit and would just be relegated in a corner and forgotten. M. Hernández is a classic because of his significance in the present. When we read him, he is free from the burden of his temporal contingency, and his imperishable humanity is what dominates the scene. He is a classic because he knew how to express universal sentiments about life, love and death that are still moving to us.

Whenever we look for or demand an amorous, social, lyrical or epic poem about human values, it would be difficult not to take into account the most genuine and popular, M. Hernández. He is truly a poet necessary to satisfy such a need!

Jesucristo Riquelme  
*Torre vieja, marzo de 2004*