

THE POETRY OF JOSÉ ALFREDO JIMÉNEZ

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— Abstract—

This work aims to show the popular elements and literary values present in the songs written by the iconic Guanajuato composer José Alfredo Jiménez, including the moral, religious, philosophical, and symbolic aspects that have allowed them to settle in the likes not only of contemporary Mexicans of the author of "El Rey" but also of current generations.

Keywords:

Song; culture; popular; tradition; composition.

José Alfredo Jiménez composed his songs based on the feelings of his marginalized countrymen, which he achieved largely through knowledge of popular culture. The themes of his songs are based on his identification with the lower classes; in "La que se fue" and in "El hijo del pueblo", as well as in "Gracias", his farewell song, there is an emotional bond with Mexicans who have traveled the paths of poverty. In the prologue to the *Cancionero* by José Alfredo Jiménez (2007), Carlos Monsiváis said "that he was the ideologist of the masses" (16).

Interestingly, Rock & Roll and the songs of the Guanajuato author march along parallel tracks; while the first was inspired by the young people of the middle class, in his idea of less conventional and stagnant society, freer, in the case of José Alfredo, the *humus* from which his song sprang was the vindication of the humble, full of hardships and, nevertheless, heirs of a heroic past, descendants of Cuauhtémoc; heroism worthy of being vindicated and even revered. It is an urban art of rural inspiration¹. It was the beginning of television. José Alfredo maintained the charro attire and the air of stoicism characteristic of the films of the Mexican Gold Cinema cycle, such as the inaugural *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, while another era intersected with films such as *Rebelde sin causa* and the mambo, el cha-cha, the *Big Bands* and Bill Haley and His Comets, which started *Rock & Roll*. There was public for everything².

City versus province, wealth versus poverty, the composer of Dolores Hidalgo leans towards the peasants and the proletarians: vileness does not live within the humble, but in the high social spheres where the corrupting power of money turns its members into hypocrites, agreeable and, finally, unhappy, surrounded by women whose "bought affection does not know how to love us nor can it be faithful." On the contrary, the dispossessed show themselves without falsehoods, full of illusions. José Alfredo shares with them the pain, the misfortunes, and the shortages, he assumes poverty as his origin, a space from which he was exiled: "Yo conocí la pobreza / y

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- 1 In the mid-fifties, at the height of their songs, interpreters appeared dressed in stylized country outfits of charro and Adelita, in strange coexistence with the musical avant-garde that began in those years, enthroned by Elvis Presley, his leather jackets and his Vaseline glittering fringe. It is agreed that Rock in Mexico began in 1956, in curious contrast to the image of José Alfredo Jiménez, and it was not only the appearance: on the one hand there was the conservatism of traditional values and folklore; on the other, the youth in search of a horizon that found its model in North American culture. Cfr. "El proceso de las artes (1910-1970)", *Historia general de México*, by Jorge Alberto Manrique (2000:945), and also *Estremécete y rueda: loco por el Rock & Roll. Un relato de la historia del rock en México correspondiente al periodo 1956-1976* de Federico Rubli (2007).
 - 2 It was the six-year term of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) with his sober, conservative bias, in opposition to the German excesses of modernization, corruption, and frivolity.

allá entre los pobres jamás lloré” (2002: 175)³. His songs were born essentially dedicated to the people, in homage to their original homeland⁴:

Es por eso que es mi orgullo
 ser del barrio más humilde,
 alejado del bullicio
 de la falsa sociedad.
 Yo compongo mis canciones
 pa’ que el pueblo me las cante,
 y el día que el pueblo me falle,
 ese día voy a llorar. (121)

The people did not fail him, of course; its torn and drunken heart sing his lyrics since they shaped what pierces the depths of his soul; they are protest songs, therapeutic because when the disturbing does not go through the word, it is expressed in the most violent way⁵. José Alfredo becomes a catharsis. In "Gracias" he bowed to the faithfulness of the people; he was sure that his art was already embedded in the soul of his countrymen; hence his gratefulness; the Mexican scene was the ideal place for his pieces to set the emotions on fire:

Yo no quiero saber
 qué se siente tener
 millones y millones;
 si tuviera con qué,
 compraría para mí
 otros dos corazones
 para hacerlos vibrar
 y llenar otra vez
 sus almas de ilusiones
 y poderles pagar
 que me quieran a mí
 y a todas mis canciones. (148)

3 The quotes referring to the lyrics of José Alfredo's songs are taken from the book *Cancionero Completo* (2002), published under the Ocean / Turner publishing label, with a foreword by Carlos Monsiváis and an epilogue by Manuel Arroyo-Stephen.

4 On the contrary, the rock boom arose from the middle class in an eminently urban and North American context.

5 Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1999: 261) points out that “The delay in external manifestation is the distinctive feature of an artistic emotion and the reason for its extraordinary power. We can show that art is a central emotion, an emotion in the cerebral cortex. The emotions that art arouses are intelligent. Instead of attacks or trembling fists, they tend to release themselves in images of fantasy.”

José Alfredo wished at the end of his life two hearts that would let him compose and make those who listen to him vibrate. In the light of this reflection, his famous – and enigmatic, although it may not seem so – song “El rey” makes sense: he knew that he was about to be “left out” of life, but he was also the one who had left so many lights on. His compositions are traces dormant in the depths of Mexicans, such as the thought of the Nahuatl Tlamatinimes, the Marian cult, and other original elements that structure the syncretism of our history.

Among the elements that make up the extraordinary congruence of José Alfredo's art is combining the norm with slang. In other words, it is built with traditional molds but using rural and popular speech, which gives greater credibility to its themes and environments: some voices and speeches that appear repeatedly are, among others, “*rumbo*” in the place of direction, “*montón*” instead of a lot, “*ora*” instead of now, “*aluego*” instead of later, “*a ver*” to indicate disbelief or challenge; “*al cabo*” indicating an end. Expressions such as “*mero*” are also found to qualify a place or a precise moment: “El mero día de la boda / más de la cuenta tomó” (277); “de plano” para afirmar seguridad: “pa’ quitarme de plano la vida / sólo falta que tú me abandones” (275). There are a lot *pa’*, *pos*, *nomás*; expressions such as “*ya no hay remedio*”, “*estar parejos*”, “*me dio la corazonada*”, “*me lleva la tristeza*”, “*no voltiés pa’ atrás*”, “*tú trais la baraja*”; as well as a large number of diminutives: “*orita*”, “*juntitos*”, “*cositas*”, “*grandecita*”, “*despacito*”, “*cariñitos*”.

Likewise, the exaggeration of events is another of the distinctive features of these compositions. The lover claims to reach, driven by the power of love, beyond his human limits: “Y yo te buscaré / por cielos y por mares” (225); “Me sentí superior a cualquiera / y un puño de estrellas te quise bajar” (224). The feelings appear overwhelmed, expressed at their highest levels; to the lyrical subject, love does not fit in the body.

A STRANGE WORLD

Mexicans lack certainty about their origins; they usually identify with the defeated but glorious pre-Hispanic world. The ancients believed they came from wonderful places located in inaccessible regions and beyond history: Aztlán (Place of the white herons), Chicomoztoc (Seven caves) Vucub Zuyua (Seven caves or Seven ravines), paradisiacal places, free of uncertainties and regrets. Memories of these mythical spaces are found in certain towns whose hills with caves are considered ancient depositories of lost goods.

The indigenous past is so enigmatic that it continues to cause perplexities in current Mexicans, descendants of ancient cultures that they almost completely ignore, but to which they attribute great traits: they believe

they come from "a strange world", mythical, from which they were expelled and have had to travel through ungrateful paths; they think they are linked to a past that still grants dignity and comfort. For example, "De un mundo raro", an emblematic song of popular Hispanic poetry, is stained of that mythical and heroic sphere, taken away by the European presence:

Y si quieren saber de mi pasado,
es preciso decir otra mentira:
les diré que llegué de un mundo raro,
que no sé del dolor, que triunfé en el amor,
y que nunca he llorado. (101)

The songs of José Alfredo Jiménez are structured on a background of orphanhood, human penalties, and expiration; the protagonists are presented in the transit towards their disappearance, marked by the catastrophe. The destiny of men is to lose life, love, youth. Actions are carried out within a path of impairment. Men are endangered torches or love birds, but their transience is often a spur for action:

Y como alguien me dijo
que la vida es muy corta,
esta vez para siempre
ha venido por ti" (291).

The pre-Hispanic people knew that they had borrowed the land they walked on, where no one had to stay for a long time, the man was like a flower that briefly opened the petals and then surrendered to oblivion and mist; life like a painting fades; his place, his true home, was perhaps in the region of the dead; the land was the place of the orphan and a path of hardships as seen in a song from Tlaxcala:

¿Es quizá nuestra casa en la tierra?
¡Sólo lugar de pena, lugar de congoja es donde vivimos!
[...]
¿Mi madre y mi padre vendrán a darme
su canto y su palabra que busco?
Nadie yace allí: nos dejaron huérfanos en la tierra (Garibay, 1987:199).

However, for the Nahua poets, there were palliatives such as song and friendship⁶; the song was a garment of the soul, beautiful and true; it also meant a way to transcend, to fix the being in the memory of those who are to come, as can be seen in the following verses recorded and translated by Ángel María Garibay (1987):

¿Se irá tan solo mi corazón
 como las flores que fueron pereciendo?
 ¿Nada de mi nombre será algún día?
 ¿Nada será mi fama será en la tierra?
 ¡Al menos flores, al menos cantos!
 ¿Cómo lo hará mi corazón?
 ¡Hay, en vano pasamos por la tierra! (176)

José Alfredo's songs are born from the pain of existing; but also of the need to alleviate sorrows, to clear the abyss to which great loves and great losses condemn. "Ella", "La noche de mi mal", "A los quince o veinte tragos", "Haz de pagar", "Soy el arrepentido", "Amor de pobre", among others, express this tear. The protagonists of his songs walk on a path that leads to death. The Mexican easily ends his life "due to a misunderstanding", he gambles his life for a married woman, on the street, in the cantina, or on the line with his rooster.

THE CERRO DEL CUBILETE

In José Alfredo's songs, there are allusions to Christ and the cross, to the rites and various elements of Catholic orthodoxy, mixed with pagan aspects. Christ and the cross, symbols of love and martyrdom, appear close to men. The cross is metaphorically represented as a burden and shelter in "La cruz del amor" and "La cruz del cielo". In "Caminos de Guanajuato", the sacred and the profane meet: Christ has his place on a hill whose name symbolizes an object seen as evil by Catholicism: the hazardous cup. The song picks up an aspect of the life of Guanajuato, their intense passion for the temple at the top and for the fair where "life is wagered and the winner is respected."

God appears as the supreme force that dictates the limits of the human; his will is beyond all comprehension and imposes a destiny on each man,

6 Singing as a consolation in the face of human tragedies is a topic that also appears in Martín Fierro by José Hernández (1983: 29): "Aquí me pongo a cantar / al compás de la vigüela; / que al hombre que lo desvela / una pena extraordinaria, / como la ave solitaria / con el cantar se consuela", as well as in many other compositions that are rooted in popular tradition.

“but God is the one who marks paths”, even if the poet does not understand his purposes and experiences them as misfortunes: “quién sabe Dios / por qué te puso en mi camino” (200). Sometimes they are gifts that balance the scale: “sólo Dios que me vio en mi amargura / supo darme consuelo en tu amor” (102).

The patron saints that are worshiped in the towns, such as the Virgin of Zapopan, emerge as icons of relief; the hermitage, the church, prayers, the priest, Christmas, glory, sin, guilt, the soul, and hell are central aspects of the Catholic man and run through the lyrics of José Alfredo.

WHEN THE AFTERNOON DIES

Love ends even if you have loved each other deeply; his birth contains the germ of destruction; sunrise and sunset; the lyrical subject usually relates the love affair and its inner drama with the passing of the day.

Si encuentras un amor que te comprenda
y sientes que te quiere más que nadie,
entonces yo daré la media vuelta
y me iré con el sol cuando muera la tarde. (168)

The happiness of lovers ends in a painful farewell. The songs are organized from the emotional destruction caused by "the withdrawal"; the protagonists try to delay the outcome: “Ella quiso quedarse / cuando vio mi tristeza” (136), or to speed it up: “Acaba de una vez, de un solo golpe” (50).

To love is to lose the ground, to walk on quicksand, to live in risk, to place oneself in the hands of the other, who is equally unstable. Affection presents itself as heaven and hell at the same time: it saves and condemns, delights, and hurts. José Alfredo sings the erotic offense, the frustrated illusion. The unbearable truth of heartbreak is lived as an exile; it means descending to the underworld and settling, as Saint John of the Cross said, in the "dark night of the soul":

No quiero ni volver a oír tu nombre;
no quiero ni saber a dónde vas,
así me lo dijiste aquella noche,
aquella negra noche de mi mal. (173)

The fear of being forgotten, of being out of the heart of the other, forces us to appeal to the memory: “Te dije adiós y pediste que nunca, / que nunca te olvidara” (183). However, love saves when it fills the road with wine and

roses, buries the past, clarifies the vision of things, consoles, calms pain, and puts lovers "close to God"; then it becomes a source of new worlds:

Y te voy a enseñar a querer,
 porque tú no has querido:
 ya verás lo que vas a aprender
 cuando vivas conmigo. (87)

Lovers take root in life through the realization of passion and pass from one state to another: "Si algo en mí cambió / te lo debo a ti" (237); at that moment, even tears spring from so much happiness: "Poco a poco me voy acercando a ti, / poco a poco se me llenan los ojos de llanto" (287).

Men's fragility, with their drama on their backs, is contrasted by the grandeur and beauty of the celestial vault; in "La noche de mi mal", the poetic subject claims to have walked "under a sky more than blue"; the protagonist of "El jinete" rides singing "under the light of the stars" and, "although the night is very beautiful", he is inhabited by the wound of hopelessly lost love. Nature is not only the setting for the actions, it usually participates in the adventures of the protagonists: to the white horse, "the Yaqui Valley gave its tenderness"; the sea dialogues with the Seven Seas: "Y las olas me contestan / ya no llores, marinero" (129); a stone on the road reveals the destiny of the poet.

FOUR ROADS

Canteens, drinks, bottles, glasses, liquor, become allegorical keys when moving to other areas. Drunkenness is not exclusive to those who get drunk with liquor, but rather it becomes a condition of love ecstasy:

Nadie sabe ni puede decir
 las cosas de amores
 porque todos se entregan
 borrachos de amor en el mundo. (166)

The liquor settles on the lips of the beloved. Love becomes alcoholic and alcohol becomes erotic: "me emborraché de verte" (58), it is said in "Bola negra"; there the protagonist receives "tequila kisses" and "glasses of kisses" and walks drunk with so much love. Love is communion, although fleeting: "Tómame esta botella conmigo/ y en el último trago nos vamos" (139), or as it is said in "Cuatro copas":

Quién sabe cuántos años han pasado,
la vida nos dejó las almas rotas,
y estamos recordando nuestra historia
nomás mientras tomamos cuatro copas. (92)

There is not a single way for everyone; each one walks on his own, predetermined and random at the same time. Destiny and chance come together in the songs of José Alfredo. Life is a gamble like playing cards, but the cards are marked. Luck was cast from the beginning:

No cabe duda,
yo nací con el santo de espaldas,
no cabe duda,
la pobreza la traigo en el alma. (44)

The roads intersect for a few moments; later, each one "takes his course"; on the way there are brief intersections that diminish loneliness; however, the fullness of lovers remains on the threshold:

Y estuve a punto, y estuve a punto
de cambiar tu mundo,
de cambiar tu mundo
por el mundo mío. (183)

The trails are not linear, they fork. Options appear on the horizon, some more uncertain than others, and you can choose "the worst road." The choice brings insecurity, unease; the protagonist finds himself at a crossroads faced with the obligation to choose: "Cuatro caminos hay en mi vida, / ¿cuál de los cuatro será el mejor?" (91).

Paul Westheim (1985), referring to Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec god of misfortunes, says that "crossroads [are] the place of uncertainty, where the traveler doubts which way to go; [for this] stone seats were erected [...] so that he could rest from wandering" (14).

The protagonists twins of the Popol Vuh (1984), a sacred book of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala, travel to the underworld and take the path of the talking black road, which tells them: "Yo soy el que debéis tomar porque yo soy el camino del Señor" (121). And also in the novel by Juan Rulfo (2004), Pedro Páramo, Juan Preciado says that he had "run into" the muleteer Abundio in "The encounters, where several roads cross," they went down one of them "after upsetting the hills. "Habíamos dejado el aire caliente allá arriba y nos íbamos hundiendo en el puro calor sin aire" (67).

In José Alfredo's songs, the best path is not always chosen; frequently, the characters take the one that offers deadly pleasures: "Que se me acabe la vida / frente a una copa de vino" (241).

EVERYWHERE I GO, I SEE YOU

Reason is not the instrument that supports decisions; irrational forces dominate, dark impulses; the heart speaks, whose language challenges those who "are in their right mind" and confronts the world of conventions: "Si ando en mi juicio, no estoy contento, / si ando borracho, pa' qué te cuento" (91).

Love is beyond comprehension, it moves along the abyss; there lies the source of the best songs by José Alfredo; language has a magical value because it connects and energizes with experiences that do not fit into words: "No te puedo decir lo que siento" (258); "y me querías decir no sé qué cosas" (49); "Despacito, muy despacito, / me dijo cosas que nunca oí" (102); "Nadie sabe ni puede decir / las cosas de amores" (166). Love is "the strange force" that imposes itself:

"Te vi llegar y sentí la presencia
de un ser desconocido;
te vi llegar y sentí lo que nunca
jamás había sentido" (183).

The language of love and heartbreak is not always verbal, the eyes are its main means of expression:

Este adiós, corazón,
te lo exijo mirando tu cara
y si ya no hay amor en tus ojos
me voy de tu vida. (210)

Sometimes the message is sent by intuition: "No creas que alguien me lo dijo: / me dio la corazonada" (265). Love is not a matter of the will, it is governed by laws in which even the criminal can, with justice, plead innocent. There is no relationship between the laws of love and the conventional ones, they are different territories. The seat of passion has no name:

Sucedió lejos de aquí
en una tierra sin nombre,
donde la ley nada puede
contra el cariño de un hombre. (276)

Certain moral imperatives disappear in these pieces, such as male fidelity, since for men fidelity to women is an interior matter: “por donde quiera que voy te miro; / y ando con otra y por ti suspiro” (91).

José Alfredo abhorred the barriers imposed by social classes: “Si nos dejan, / nos vamos a vivir a un mundo nuevo” (259); the protagonists are the marginalized, the usual losers, the persecuted, dipsomaniacs, prostitutes, incarcerated, poor peasants, men who overshadow themselves without a trace, removed from the modernizing development they experience in the form of prisons, far from a satisfactory life; they yearn to be outside those laws, to achieve, even in the imaginary plane, security and rest:

Vámonos, donde nadie nos juzgue,
 donde nadie nos diga que hacemos mal;
 vámonos, alejados del mundo, donde no haya justicia
 ni leyes ni nada, nomás nuestro amor. (291)

The humble and impoverished Mexican gives what he does not have; his life is worth nothing, he begins crying "and thus crying ends", it is a passion that is drawn in the sand. The actions of the characters are generally carried out in twilight and foggy environments, or at night, because the world of shadows is conducive to the revelation of men's deep side.

WHITE HORSE

An ethical base is observed in the compositions of José Alfredo; Christian, chivalric, enlightened, and indigenous morals appear here, conjugated or in a certain state of purity. Freedom is a central value and appears suggested; it is the base of "The white horse." From the philological perspective, it does not matter that to create that corrido José Alfredo has based himself on a trip in his car during a long party: the white horse is the protagonist who represents aspects of men; his trip is an act of freedom, of decision, even though his life depends on it: “y no quiso echarse hasta ver Ensenada” (107). During the trip, he suffers injuries and bruises. His career is slowing down, to such a degree that "near Mexicali he felt he was dying." Finally, he lay down when he saw Ensenada. It represents the passing from youth to old age. White horse's river of life, like that of all of us, flowed into the sea of death. Jorge Manrique (2016:48) wrote “Nuestras vidas son los ríos / que van a dar en la mar, / que es el morir”.

The songs of José Alfredo raise respect for the will of others. The union of a couple, for example, must correspond to a free choice: “Pero quiero que sepas que no te obligo / que si vienes conmigo es por amor” (291). The white horse decided to leave and the rider respected his decision: “Su noble

jinete, le quitó la rienda, / le quitó la silla y se fue a puro pelo” (107). Even in songs of accentuated machismo, freedom is respected when she decides to leave because the lack of love is not claimed but betrayal, deception, bad faith.

Beyond money and power, José Alfredo privileged feelings; the value of a man lies in his authenticity, in his promise, in the quality of his friendship. Having a heart means being true and this is not related to power or the possession of material wealth: “Yo no entiendo esas cosas de las clases sociales, / sólo sé que me quieres y que te quiero yo” (291).

PLAYING FAIR

For Mijail Bajtin (1999), the carnival offers a vision of the world, of men, and human relationships deliberately outside the norm; it implies the transitory liberation based on the flight from the ordinary life with which one is sorely governed. The carnival also carries with it the idea that human beings are not separated from the world, but entangled with it, confused with animals and things.

Certain carnival elements are present in José Alfredo's songs, for example, the union of the new with the old: “Cuando vivas conmigo”; from birth to death: “Caminos de Guanajuato”; human qualities with those of animals: “El coyote”, “La araña”, “Los gavilanes”, “El tigre”, “El borrego”, and others who participate in the fairs and “their plays” with drunkenness, chance, excesses.

ACROSS THE BRIDGE

José Alfredo uses different tropes and figures for the elaboration of his compositions; feelings come into analogy with nature; the plants, the animals, the clouds, the stars are in the process of a sentimental relationship: “Nuestro amor es lo mismo que el mar / cristalino y profundo” (166). There are times when the elements compared lie within the subject:

yo sentí que mi vida
perdía en un abismo
profundo y negro
como mi suerte. (135)

Or the comparison occurs at the level of intertextuality, that is, the song quotes what happens in another song:

Como al caballo blanco
le solté la rienda,
a ti también te suelto
y te me vas ahorita. (273)

As for the metaphors, the substitutes are usually elements taken from nature: the woman is a dove, a flower, and a star, while scratching, but also a prison; her lips are glasses of liquor; her kisses, syrup or poison; the eyes, stars; love, thorn, prison, sweet bond.

In the game of synecdoche and synesthesia, fortunate literary effects are achieved: the light of the moon becomes the light of the sky; the night bathes with the moon and enters into communion with the couple, thereby intensifying the fullness of love. The cantina extends to the world, the roads of Guanajuato to the roads of life, the woman's smile on her lips: "a ver si al cabo del tiempo / tus labios se siguen riendo" (241).

On the other hand, the irony is not so frequent, but some pieces are structured based on this figure, as in several moments of "El perro negro", "La media vuelta", and "Cuatro copas", which on the other hand is symbolically united to "Cuatro caminos", and where the opposite of what is going to happen is said: to reach the fourth cup is to arrive at lost borders:

Me invitas una copa o te la invito,
tenemos que brindar por nuestras cosas,
no vamos a llegar a emborracharnos,
nomás nos tomaremos cuatro copas. (92)

The poetry of José Alfredo Jiménez especially dominates the technique of suggestion, which consists in approaching a fact without mentioning it; perhaps it is self-censorship regarding the naming of erotic pleasure, or perhaps it is the restrictive elegance imposed by the time. The point is that sex does not usually appear explicitly, only the situations are outlined; for example, in "Amanecí en tus brazos", the lovers' nakedness is not mentioned, but it is implicit.

Now, to observe the workmanship of José Alfredo we must refer to the structure of Castilian verse. The symmetry of these songs, their impeccable rhythmic scaffolding, in which verses and traditional forms⁷ abound, have been seen in the parts cited.

José Alfredo Jiménez made simple songs; its lexicon is limited; the images are scarce, but with few resources, it drags remote echoes that move the most intimate fibers of the listener. One of the secrets of his aesthetic fortune consists in mastering the technique, in the timing and harmonization

7 José Alfredo's songs frequently combine verses of 7 and 11 syllables, as in the lyre, whose rhyming structure in a B ab B, mixes short and long periods that achieve a singular harmonization and musicality. It was devised by the Italian Bernardo Tasso (1534) and introduced in Spain by Garcilaso de la Vega in the famous "Canción a la flor de Guido", from whose first verse the term *lira* was taken: "si de mi baja lira". Cfr. Fernando Lázaro Carreter (1984).

of his rhymes, in the appropriate combination of short and long lines, as seen in "Amarga Navidad", where he gathers periods of seven and eleven syllables, this time in a single stanza and with single imperfect assonance in the words "fear" and "remedy" that makes it more subtle:

Y ya después que pasen muchas cosas,
que estés arrepentida,
que tengas mucho miedo,
vas a saber que aquello que dejaste
fue lo que más quisiste
pero ya no hay remedio. (50)

It is not unintentional that some of José Alfredo's emblematic songs have the structure of traditional romance. Before citing an example and its variants, typical of the Mexican corrido, we must define this tradition. The romance is a more or less broad poem, without stanzas, or with a single stanza – most likely that is where it got its name: "corrido" –, composed of eight syllables whose even verses have assonance rhymes, and the odd ones do not rhyme. Its remote origin and typology have been widely studied⁸; these poems constitute the most recurrent literary genre in Hispanic culture, both in popular and bookish art since romances have been composed, sung, and recast in the most different places and times. One of the reasons for this breadth and durability is its clarity and simplicity since it is enough to pay attention and let yourself be enveloped by that almost natural form of the language⁹.

It must be said that this adaptation of the romance that we call corrido presents some peculiarities, such as the incorporation of verses in consonance and not maintaining the same rhyme throughout the text, while it is twinned with its predecessor due to its scarce adjectives and its narrative nature, which even includes dialogues in the actions, using an always emotional, indiscreet, disturbing and dramatic tone, as seen in José Alfredo Jiménez's corrido "El perro negro", wherein fifty-two octosyllables the tragic story of

8 For example, in the classic books of Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1983): *Flor nueva de romances viejos*, and from Manuel Alvar (1979): *Romancero Viejo y tradicional*. In Mexico, the studies on the subject by Mercedes Díaz Roig (1987): *El romancero viejo*, and by Margit Frenk Alatorre (1984): *Entre folclor y literatura* are very important.

9 "A song is a multimedial form of discourse that transmits, in words and music, contents whose meanings, classes, and ways of saying, are just beginning to be systematically studied. The content of a song can represent the ideology of a society, so its written dimension is of interest to the theory of literature, since it has features that make its aesthetic analysis impossible, such as resonance, tone or melody, intensity or rhythm, to which is added the style and theme, a system of signs and their respective meaning, which represent a specific genre and which, as Robert Hodge points out, constitute what Barthes calls the soul of the song, a quality of singing that is not necessarily individual, but can belong to a whole culture" (Altúzar Constantino, 2009. "Vigencia del corrido en Chiapas", *Crates. Revista de estudios literarios*, No. 5. pp. 11-26.

a dispute or love triangle. The predominant rhyme is consonant and occurs in sharp words:

Al otro lado del puente
de La Piedad, Michoacán,
vivía Gilberto, el valiente,
nacido en Apatzingán,
siempre con un perro negro
que era su noble guardián. (126)

From the beginning, rhymes are incorporated into the odd verses: “puente”, “valiente”, thereby breaking a rule mentioned above: even verses rhyme and odd verses are loose; likewise, at the end of the corrido another one appears: “dueño”, “negro”, to close with the rhyme that runs through the entire text:

Así murió el perro negro,
aquel enorme guardián,
que quiso mucho a Gilberto
y dio muerte a don Julián.

The most hidden essence and grace of the old romancero are present here, as when it is said with sarcasm: Gilberto estaba dormido, / ya no volvió a despertar”; the hero of the story must pay with his life for his wish, because

Quería vivir con la Lupe
la novia de don Julián,
hombre de mucho dinero
acostumbrado a mandar.

Tables remain: Don Julián kills Gilberto, and the black dog kills Don Julián; Lupe becomes Lupita and is doubly widowed; she chooses the most beautiful flowers “as to make an altar” and at the end, she resignedly goes “hasta una tumba / del panteón municipal”.

In general, the popular song has several artistic merits that literary studies cannot ignore. José Alfredo Jiménez is in communion with the depths of the language. The daily scenes, the drama, the heroism, and the realism that his songs show are the manifestation of the social and cultural context in which they arose, they constitute a testimony of popular sentiment, not only because of the complexity of symbols that his language evokes but also for the brilliant simplicity of the contents and forms.

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