

# JAIME GARCÍA TERRÉS

Untiring Cultural Promoter and Outstanding Poet

(1924 - 1996)

**F**or Mexico's cultural community, for men and women of letters and for Mexican magazine and literature readers, the death of Jaime García Terrés is an irreparable loss. Not only did he dedicate his life to promoting and organizing different cultural projects, but he was also a guide, promoter and friend of whole generations of young Mexican writers.

García Terrés was a generous man with the surprising ability to find time to become involved in different enterprises. He was a dynamic cultural promoter; a penetrating essayist on a broad spectrum of topics including literature, psychology and politics; an outstanding poet; an excellent translator, particularly of contemporary Greek poetry; and a scrupulous editor.

His link to literature and poetry began in childhood. In his *Introducción a mi Curriculum Vitae* (Introduction to My Resume), he writes, "When I was seven

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Imaginatina - Marco Antonio Cruz



or eight years old I tried writing a novel. I couldn't finish it because in the first chapter all the characters died one after another."

Although he studied law, his vocation for culture was stronger. Founder of many magazines, his time as editor of *Revista de la Universidad* (University Magazine) was surely one of the most vigorous in that publication's history. He also directed *La Gaceta* (The Bulletin) of the Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE) publishing house for 18 years; he directed it so well, in fact, that he won the Spanish government's Príncipe de Asturias prize and Mexico's National Journalism Prize. His column "Litoral" (Shoreline) in *La Gaceta* was famous; there he commented and discussed with elegance and good humor the main literary and cultural events of the moment. Toward the end of his life, his great ability as an editor was evidenced when he took charge of the *Biblioteca de México* (Library of Mexico) magazine, a periodical which became one of the most prestigious among the Spanish-speaking cultural community. He showed once again his sharp wit and instinct for good editorial ideas by publishing unknown or little-known texts by authors such as José Gorostiza, José Juan Tablada, Alfonso Reyes, Carlos Pellicer, Salvador Novo, Efraín Huerta and many more, all excellent exponents of Mexican poetry.

His career as a cultural promotor was marked by his ability to establish concrete initiatives. He applied that ability in all the institutions where he worked or that he directed: from when he began as the head of the UNAM's Cultural Department, through the Library and Archives of the Foreign Relations Secretariat, as assistant director of the National Institute of Fine Arts and at the Fondo de Cultura Económica publishing house, up until his last post as the director of the Mexico Library. It was under his direction that the FCE became one of the most important publishers of social sciences and literature in the Spanish-speaking

world. In collections like "Río de la luz" (River of Light), both new and established names from Latin American literature found a voice.

His generous spirit and jovial personality—marked by a fine sense of humor—were two of his most appreciated traits, in addition to his constant concern for making space in his publications for both established writers and young talent. One of Mexico's most important novelists and art critics, Juan García Ponce, said, "The greatest creator of cultural institutions is dead; above all, García Terrés convinced the UNAM to create culture for everyone."

But if García Terrés' life was distinguished by one thing, it was his love of poetry, which he was devoted to as author, translator, promotor and editor. This love pours out of books like *El correo nocturno* (The Night Post), *Los reinos combatientes* (Battling Kingdoms) and *Corre la voz* (Get the Word Around), in which he presents his clear, simple, yet refined and cultured poetry. Novelist Carlos Fuentes called it poetry "full of refinement, allusions, familiarity with universal poetry, linked to the landscape and the internal growth of men."

A friend to poets, both alive and dead, of all periods and languages, García Terrés put part of his creative effort into the translation of some of the great poets from other lands. We owe him what are probably the best Spanish versions of Trakl, e.e. cummings, Benn, Novalis, Lowell, Hölderlin and Hökermannsthal, but above all, the great poetry of contemporary Greek literature: Kavafis, Elytis and Giorgio Sékeris.

While García Terrés himself pointed to many influences—among them Villon, Dante, Rimbaud, Coebiere, half a dozen Spanish classics, Donne, Yeats, Ezra Pound and César Vallejo, who he adopted as "distant masters"—perhaps the main influences was Greece: the country itself, its culture, poetry and natural beauty. It was in Greece's wonderful islands that in 1960 he

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spent his honeymoon with Celia Chávez, the woman who is the explanation of the poet's passion for life. *Grecia 60* (Greece 60) dates from that period. He was also Mexico's ambassador to Greece from 1965 to 1967. His stay in the land of Homer would leave an indelible mark on his life: it was there that he met and befriended Giorgio Sékeris and Ezra Pound, two of this century's most profound poets.

A passionate and multifaceted man, García Terrés' active curiosity led him to sail the seven seas, seemingly distant but actually indissoluble from poetry. In politics, he became an active defender of the Cuban Revolution. Of his interest in psychoanalysis were born the essays for his book *Los infernos del pensamiento* (The Hells of Thought); and from his admiration for poet Gilberto Owen and his curiosity for understanding the keys to the esoteric was born *Poesía y alquimia en Gilberto Owen* (Poetry and Alchemy in Gilberto Owen). The critics considered both these works to be small classics on major themes.

Jaime García Terrés will be remembered by those who knew him for his human qualities: his tenderness, generosity and incredible capacity for work. For those who did not have the good fortune to know him personally, and for future generations, remains the force of his poetry: reflections on history together with trivial daily observations; humor and melancholy; the anxiety born of daily ups and downs and the sometimes tragic resignation with respect to what cannot be changed; and above all, precision in language and the skillful play of words. ❧

Diego I. Bugada Bernal  
Managing Editor

## A P O E M

### IDYLL

I suffer from futile affections  
coupled one to another.

I drink my coffee not without tenderness.

I keep chance portraits and pets.

Street rumors fascinate me,  
as do white walls at dawn,  
the rain, public gardens.

Old maps, new maps, fill my house.

The most frivolous of music pleases my ears.

Endless and light  
like the tresses of the stars,  
trifles and mysteries surround my destiny.

A net that life throws at me,  
seductive sea in whose landscape I sow myself.

*Jaime García Terrés*