

APOCRYPHAL SONGBOOK

CLXVIII

JUAN DE MAIRENA

Poet, philosopher, rhetorician and inventor of a *Singing Machine*. He was born in Seville (1865). He died in Casariego de Tapia in 1909. He is the author of *Life of Abel Martin*, *Poetic Art*, a collection of poems called *Mechanical Verses*, and a metaphysical treatise, *The Seven Inversions*.

MAIRENA TO MARTIN, DEC EASED

Teacher, you lie in your bed,
at peace with Her or with Him
(Who knows about these last rites,
Don Abel?)

If with Her, in full
measure, he says,
your noble head sunken
into the pillow is silent.
If with Him, may everything be
—wherever it may be—motionless and vital,
the all-seeing eye
that sees, marvels and is seen.

May the celebrated ideology
of the thoughtful clown remain
for the dawn that still does not laugh;
May the strange doll
from the puppet show challenge
the inclusive sun with its gesture.

Ivy and grapevine. The walls
of the gardens are white.
On streets of Escape-If-You-Can
all the balconies are shining.

The afternoon bells
—oh, Abel!--still
are ringing, and Rosa Maria
has a carnation for you.

Your steps
are still heard among
the cypresses of your garden
and the labyrinth of your streets
—following the scattered drops
of red wine—and the hammer sounds
so that in the forging of an instinct
calm reason may be achieved.

From your colorful words,
there is
still an anchor in water and wind,
a good foundation
for your lyrical palace.

And the lover's fire
congealed in stone
(cross-eyed Love and blind Eros)
shines in the sun like a diamond.

The poem is rather convoluted and difficult, with an artificial complexity which is similar to that of baroque concepts which Mairena criticizes in his *Poetic Art*. In the final stanzas, the feeling of compassion for his teacher seems to be tinged with a bit of irony that borders on sarcasm. The fact is that every new generation loves, and hates the previous one. His unconditional praise is hardly ever completely sincere. His reference to *colorful words* is certainly not a fortuitous way to describe the creative faculty of the *universal attributes* that Martin was studying. And more than just misunderstanding, it seems to indicate a certain malevolence in Mairena that threatens to sabotage the ideas of his teacher. The phrase *cross-eyed Love* has a four-fold meaning: anecdote, logic, esthetics, and metaphysics. A further explanation can be found in his *Life of Abel Martin*.

THE *POETIC ART* OF JUAN DE MAIRENA

Juan de Mairena calls himself the *poet of time*. Mairena maintained that poetry is a temporal art—something that many before him had already observed—and that the temporal aspect of poetry has been fully expressed only in his own poems. Such rather provincial boasting is common in the novice who comes to the world of letters ready to write about others—not *for* others—and ultimately, *against* others. In his *Poetic Art* there is no shortage of violent passages in which Mairena does not hesitate to point out the stupidity of those who have tried to advance a thesis different from his own. Because of their poor taste, we will omit them and go on to reproduce some passages that are more modest and more substantial.

“All the arts,” Mairena says in the first lesson of his *Poetic Art*—try to create something permanent from something that is actually only temporary. The so-called temporal arts, like music and poetry, are no exception. The poet tries, in fact, to make a work that will transcend the psychological moment in which it was produced. And let us not forget that it is time itself (the poet's vital time with its own vibration) which the poet hopes to prolong indefinitely; or to put it more pompously: to eternalize. Any poem which does not have an obvious temporal aspect is actually closer to logic than to poetry.

“All the tools which a poet uses: musicality, rhythm, stress, pauses, rhyme, the images themselves are, by their enumeration in series, temporal elements. The temporality needed to make a stanza have a definite poetic feeling is available to everyone and is something that is easily accomplished. But an intense and profound sense of time is found only in the work of certain poets. In Spain, for instance, we find it in Jorge Manrique, in the Romancero, in Bécquer and, very rarely, in Golden Age poets.

“Let us first consider,” Mairena says, “this short poem of Jorge Manrique:

What ever became of the ladies,
their coiffures, their dresses,
their odors?

What ever became of the flames
from the burning fires
of lovers?

What ever became of that harmony,
the tuneful melodies
they used to strum?

What ever became of that dancing,
and the old-fashioned clothing
they used to wear?

“If we compare this poem of the great Spanish lyricist,” Mairena adds, “with one of our baroque literature in which an effort is made to express a similar view of time and the ephemeral aspect of human life—for example, the sonnet *For the flowers* that Calderon has Prince Constante recite—we will see very clearly the difference between poetry and rhymed logic.

Let us recall this sonnet of Calderon:

The ones that were proud and happy
as they awakened with the dawn,
by evening will be objects of pity
sleeping in the cold arms of night.

This color which challenges heaven,
a rainbow of gold, white and red,
will provide a lesson for human life:
so much is learned in just one day.

The roses flourished when dawn broke,
but they flourished only to grow old.
They found cradle and grave in one bud.

This is how all men saw their fortunes:
they were born and died on the same day;
and the passing centuries were like hours.

“Here we see that in order to achieve the effect of temporal art Calderon has followed a path which is far too obvious: the use of his own eternal elements. Concepts, and conceptual images which were thought and not intuited, are outside of the poet’s psychic time, the flow of his own consciousness. Logical thought is the only possible exception to the *panta rhei* of Heraclitus. Concepts, and images that function as concepts—nouns modified by adjectives that define rather than expressing a feeling or judgement—have this assumption: that of being yesterday and tomorrow what they are today. *The beginning of the morning* is suitable to describe every dawn; for the poet’s purpose, *the cold hours of darkness* fits any night. Between these notions are logical

relations which are as timeless as these expressions are themselves. All the charm of Calderon's sonnet—if indeed there is any—depends on his syllogistic deductions. Here poetry does not sing, it reasons; it reflects on a certain group of definitions. It is the same as almost all of our baroque literature, a left-over example of scholasticism.

In the poem of Manrique we find ourselves in a very different spiritual climate, although a superficial analysis by what is referred to as literary criticism will not always notice the difference. Here the poet does not begin by stating notions which he converts into analytical judgments and then rationalizes. The poet does not presume to know anything; he asks about ladies, coiffures, dresses, odors, flames, lovers... The "what ever became of" is a question of becoming which individualizes these general notions by placing them in time, in a vital past where the poet tries to intuit them as unique objects which he remembers or recalls. They are no longer just any ladies, coiffures, fragrances, and dresses, but those that are stamped on the fabric of time and are still able to touch the poet's heart. And *that harmony* and *that dancing*—those and no others—what became of them? The poet wants to know. And then he comes to that marvelous stanza: *and the old-fashioned clothing* that is seen in the circle of dancers and is brought from Aragon—or from somewhere—and now appears in our memory as though from a dream, actualizing or materializing the past with an ordinary display of apparel. Once the poem ends, it still vibrates in our memory like a unique melody that could not be repeated or imitated, because for that one would have to relive it. The feeling of time is everything in the poem of Don Jorge; there is nothing, or almost nothing like it in the sonnet of Calderon. And the difference is even more profound than it seems at first. That alone explains why with Don Jorge poetry still has a future, while with Calderon—our grand baroque writer—it is only a forgotten past which is completely dead."

After this, Mairena continues with his commentary on baroque literature in Spain. One must recognize that for Mairena the idea of baroque art differs greatly from the one made popular by the German critics of today and which—by the way—may well be mistaken, although our own critics have accepted it without criticism, like they do everything that comes from outside of Spain.

"In baroque poetry," says Mairena, "one can see how a change from what is alive to what is artificial, from the intuitive to the conceptual, from psychic time to the timeless zone of logic, how a *piétinement sur place* of thought which cannot be based on intuitions—or on any of the usual meanings of this word—twists back upon itself, turns and circles around what has been defined, creating complex verbal labyrinths and conceptual metaphors, a pedantic and superfluous exercise of thought and feeling that attempts to amaze with its difficulty, and which simpletons never even notice."

This paragraph is rather violent and perhaps unfair. However, it does contain some truth. Because Mairena saw clearly how the professed dynamism of the baroque was more apparent than real, and more than an active force, it was an exaggerated gesture that has outlived an effort that was already extinguished.

It might perhaps be argued that when he criticizes baroque literature Mairena does not pay attention to the difference between what, in Spanish, is called *culturalismo* and *conceptismo*. However, he did not confuse them; he only attacked their common root. Faithful to his teacher Abel Martin, Mairena saw nothing more in literary forms than the momentary outline of a material that was perpetually changing, and he felt that it was this material or this content which should first be analyzed. In what part of the poet's spirit

was the poem born, and what was its principal content? In this he is following a criterion that is opposite from that of the criticism of his time which only saw literary forms as rigid molds to be filled with any sort of mishmash, and whose content was therefore of little interest. *Culturalismo* and *conceptismo* are for Mairena, then, two expressions of the same foolishness whose concomitance can only be explained by the growing impoverishment of the Spanish soul. A lack of intuitions that were capable of reaching the level of ideas is found in *conceptismo*, and from its complicated word games were created the metaphors of *culturalismo* which are no less conceptual than a concept from *conceptismo*: the dry and arid tropology of Góngora, an arduous disruption of basic images, in reality pure definitions, a mere logical exercise which only an inept criticism or a depraved sense of taste can possibly confuse with poetry.

“It is clear,” Mairena says, anticipating the facile objections which would follow, “that the poetic talent of Góngora, the robust genius of Quevedo, Gracian or Calderon is just as obvious as the esthetic absurdity of *culturalismo* and *conceptismo*.”

According to Mairena, then, Spanish baroque literature is characterized:

1) *By a notable lack of intuition.* In what sense? In the sense of external experience or direct contact with the world of the senses; in the sense of internal or immediate psychic experience, unique states of consciousness; in a theoretical sense of an encounter with ideas, essences, laws, and values as objects of mental vision; and in all the other meanings of this word. “Baroque images express, disguise or embellish concepts, but they do not contain intuitions.” “With them,” Mairena says, “one speaks or reasons, although superficially and mechanically, but these images do not ever *sing*. Because when you use the act of reasoning to rationalize with concepts that seem to be more or less logical, with mathematical concepts (numbers and figures) or by means of images, that which is defined never ceases to be exactly the same: a homogenizing function of understanding which creates only identities (real or imaginary) that eliminate all differences. This more or less brilliant use of images can never change a function which is essentially logical into one of esthetic sensibility. If baroque poetry were to follow its own course and arrive at a perfect realization, it would become something like an algebra of images that could easily be contained in a treatise for scholars, and which would have the same aesthetic value as algebra, that is, a value that is esthetically nil.”

2) *For its use of artifice and its disdain for what is natural:* “In periods that are truly creative,” says Mairena, “art never turns its back on nature, and it considers as nature everything that still is not art, including the heart of the poet himself. If the artist is going to create, and not be like God in the Bible, he needs to have some material he can form, or transform, that is not art itself. Because in fact there is a type of esthetic apathy which tries to substitute art for nature, a type of art which decides, with great ignorance, that an artist can create without nature. The bee that drinks from honey instead of flowers is more distant from true creative activity than a humble collector of documents or a simple mirror that reflects reality, like someone who attempts to offer us as art a superfluous replica of all that it is not.”

3) *For its lack of temporality:* In his analysis of baroque verse Mairena points to the predominance of the noun and its defining adjective over the temporal forms of the verb, and to the use of rhyme which is more ornamental than musical, and to the total neglect of its mnemonic value.

“Rhyme,” says Mairena, “is the reiterated meeting of one sound with the memory of another. Its monotony is more apparent than real, because the different sensations and the memories joined in rhyme are usually heterogeneous; with them we are both inside and outside of ourselves. Rhyme is a good device although not the only way to place a word in time. But when rhyme becomes complicated with multiple combinations that are so remote they no longer connect sensation with memory (because memory is erased when the sensation is repeated) rhyme becomes an artificial device. And those who use the latest invention of poetic art to eliminate rhyme entirely, feeling it is not necessary, tend to forget how important its temporal function is, and that its absence obliges them to look for something to substitute for it. For many centuries poetry has been created with assonant rhyme or consonant rhyme, not by some caprice of medieval culture, but because the feeling of time (which some incorrectly refer to as the sensation of time) contains only those elements indicated by the rhyme: sensation and memory. But in baroque verse rhyme is only ornamental. Its primitive mission of combining sensation and memory to create the feeling of time is forgotten. And baroque verse, be it *culterano* or *conceptista*, has no temporal elements since its concepts and conceptual images are always—Mairena insists—essentially atemporal.”

4) *For its use of artificial difficulties and its neglect of real difficulties:* “There is no esthetic value, or any other value, in difficulty per se,” Mairena says. It is correct to applaud the act of attacking and then conquering difficulty; but it is not legitimate to create it artificially and then boast of overcoming it. The classical approach would be to conquer difficulty and then eliminate it; the baroque approach is to display it. For baroque thought which is essentially commonplace, what is difficult is always precious: a sonnet has more value than a poem with assonant rhyme, and the act of giving birth, less than that of breaking a paving stone with your teeth.”

5) *For the use of indirect, periphrastic expression as if it had some esthetic value:* According to Mairena, because there is no perfect commensurability between feeling and speaking, the poet has always used indirect forms of expression which try give direct expression to what is ineffable. This is the simplest, the most literal and immediate way of rendering what the poet feels intuitively, since there are adequate ways of expressing everything else with ordinary language. For this he makes use of particular or unique images, that is, images which do not contain concepts, but intuitions; he establishes relations between them which are then capable of creating new concepts. The baroque poet, who has seen the problem in precisely the opposite way, uses images to adorn and disguise concepts; he confuses metaphors which are poetic with euphemisms of the sham intellectual. References to *gray gold*, *the square pine*, *the winged arrow*, *the asp of metal* are in fact rather stupid ways to refer to the color silver, a table, a bird and a pistol.

6) *For the lack of grace:* “Baroque tension,” says Mairena, “with its cold rhetoric, its artificial use of force or false dynamism, its arbitrary confusion and exaggeration—its twisted syntax and imaginary hyperbole—with its insistence on disfiguring a living language by adapting it to the complicated patterns of a dead language, with its pompous mannerisms and superficial devices, might at times of exhaustion or perversion of good taste, produce an effect (when it is poorly analyzed) that would seem like an esthetic emotion. But there is something that baroque writers have had to sacrifice, because the mere appearance of it would be something they could not falsify: the quality of *grace* that

can only be achieved when art reaches the level of true mastery, and forgets its necessary separation from nature.”

7) *For its irrational worship of what is aristocratic:* Speaking of Góngora, Mairena says: “Everything in his writing which is based on *folklore*, instead of what is popular—which Lope captures so well—tends to be presumptuous and coarse. Nevertheless, what is truly mediocre in Góngora is his *Gongorism*. Compared to Lope, who is as completely Spanish as any man of the court, Góngora will always be a poor provincial priest.” And it is a fact that the “obsession with things that are distinguished and aristocratic has produced nothing more than artistic drivel.” “The common person in art, that is the one the artist normally refers to, is usually a pedantic invention; or better, a creature of fiction that the pedant makes up out of his own substance.” “No creative spirit in his truly creative moments,” Mairena adds, “could think of more than *the man*, the man he sees in himself and expects to see in his neighbor. The artist never forgets the fact that there is a group of people who are heedless, incomprehensible, ignorant and rude. But either one or the other: either the artist reaches and penetrates, to a greater or lesser degree, that same crude mass of people which then ceases to be common, *ipso facto* to become the artistic public; or he finds it to be completely unreachable, completely indifferent. In this case, the common person does not have any relation whatsoever with the work of art and cannot be a subject of interest for the artist. But the common person of the typical baroque artist, who tends to be pedantic or overly affected, is a simpleton to whom he assigns a positive function: that of rendering to the artist a tribute of amazement and incomprehensible admiration.”

In short, Mairena does not pull any punches in his criticism of baroque literature. Later, in anticipation of the objections he will hear, he adds that he is not ignorant of the fact that in every period of excellence or decadence, either ascending or declining, that which is produced is the only thing that *could* be produced and that, even with the most obvious perversion of good taste, soon after it occurs there will be a subtle current of support that defends the greatest idiocies. And in reality, this support will not really defend either perversions or idiocies, but only minds that are incapable of producing anything different. The most inept support of *culteranismo* came from Quevedo when he published the poetry of Fray Luis de León. Fray Luis de León still was a poet but the mystical feeling, which in him reached such an admirable level of tranquility, was as far from Góngora as it was from Quevedo, and it was something which died and could no longer sing in the hands of our ruling Jesuit.

THE METAPHYSICS OF JUAN DE MAIRENA

“All poetry, says Juan de Mairena, presupposes the existence of a metaphysics; perhaps every poem should have its own—implicit, and never explicit—and the poet has the duty to explain it separately in a way that is clear. The ability to do that distinguishes the true poet from the amateur versifier who writes only doggerel” (*The seven Inversions*, p. 192). Now let us say a few words about the metaphysics of Juan de Mairena.

His point of departure is the thought of his teacher, Abel Martín. God is not the creator of the world, but the one real, absolute being, outside of which there is nothing. There is no generative problem with what is. The world is only an aspect of the divine,

and in no way a divine creation. Since the world is real, all-encompassing and divine, to speak of creation would be equivalent to saying that God created himself. And the divine being is also not a metaphysical problem. All that is appears; and all that appears is. The work of science, which Mairena admires and venerates, is to discover new appearances; that is, new aspects of being. But science never gives us any basis on which to distinguish the difference between what is real and what is apparent. If the work of science is infinite and can never reach a conclusion, it is not because it seeks a reality which hides behind the appearances, but because reality is an infinity of appearances, a constant and unending possibility of appearing.

Therefore, there is no problem with being, with all that appears. Only that which is not, which does not appear, can constitute a problem. But this problem doesn't interest the poet as much as the philosopher. For the poet *non-being* is the divine creation, the miracle of *being that is itself*, the *fiat umbra* to which Martin alludes in his immortal sonnet, *To the Great Zero*, the divine Word which astounds the poet, and whose meaning the philosopher must explain.

You erased being; pure nothingness remained.
Show me, oh God, the magnificent hand
that made the shadow; the dark slate
on which human thought is written.

Or as Mairena said later, paraphrasing Martin:

God said: Let nothingness appear.
And he raised his right hand
until it hid his gaze.
And nothingness was created.

So following Martin, Mairena symbolizes the divine creation as a negative act of the divinity, as a voluntary blinding of *the great eye that sees all as it sees itself*.

One might ask, if there is no problem with what is, since what is apparent and what is real are one and the same thing, or putting it another way, reality is the sum of all the appearances of being... how could there be a metaphysics? To this objection Mairena replies: "The precise solution to the problem of being places *ipso facto* on the table the problem of *non-being*, and this is the main theme of all future metaphysics." That means that the metaphysics of Mairena will be the science of non-being, of the absolute *unreality*, or as Martin has said, of the various forms of zero. This metaphysics is the *science of that which is created*, of the divine work, of pure nothingness which one achieves through the analysis of concepts. Like traditional metaphysics, it only contains pure thought; but it differs from it in that it does not try to define being. Therefore it is not ontology, but the opposite. And the name metaphysics suits it in fact; the science of that which is *beyond* being, that is to say, *beyond* physics.

The Seven Inversions is the philosophical treatise in which Mairena tries to show us the seven paths by which man may arrive at an understanding of the divine creation, pure nothingness. Beginning with the magical thought of Abel Martin, *of the essential heterogeneity of being, of the immanent otherness of being that is itself, of one substance which is immobile and is constantly changing, of integral consciousness, the great eye...*, etc., etc., that is, with poetic thought which accepts as evident all that is conscious,

Mairena looks for the genesis of logical thought, of the homogeneous forms of thinking: pure substance, pure space, pure time, pure movement, pure immobility, the pure *being which is not, and pure nothingness*.

The book is extensive, containing almost 500 large size pages. It was not read during its time. Menendez Pelayo doesn't even mention it in his *Expurgatory Index* of Spanish thought. Nevertheless, it should be recommended reading for all scholars. A detailed analysis would take us away from our consideration of the poet. So let's leave that for another occasion and return to our discussion of the poetry of Juan de Mairena.

Mairena claimed that his book of *Mechanical Verses* was actually not written by himself, but was the product of the *Verse Making Machine* of Jorge Meneses. In other words, Mairena imagined a poet who invented the apparatus which produced the verses that were published.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN JUAN DE MAIRENA AND JORGE MENESES

Mairena: So, Meneses my friend, what do you foresee for the future of poetry?

Meneses: Soon the poet will have no other choice but to put away his lyre and devote himself to other things.

Mairena: You think so?...

Meneses: I am talking about the lyrical poet. Individual feeling, or better, the individual pole of feeling in the heart of every man is starting to lose interest and it will continue to be less every day. Since the advent of romanticism until our time (the symbolist period) lyric poetry has become an exaggerated luxury of the Manchesterian man, of bourgeois individualism based on private property. Now the poet flaunts his feelings with the boldness of a rich bourgeois who brags about his palaces, his coaches, his horses and his mistresses. The heart of the poet, so rich in sonorities, is almost an insult to the tone-deaf ear of the masses who are enslaved by mechanical tasks. Lyrical poetry originates in the central zone of the psyche where feelings are located; there is no true poetry without feeling. But feeling must be individual as well as general; even though there is no such thing as a generic heart that feels for everyone, since every individual feels only his own heart, all feeling is directed toward values that are universal, or strive to be. When the radius of feeling is cut short so that it does not reach beyond the isolated self and is not felt by others, it becomes impoverished and only sings in falsetto. This is bourgeois feeling which for me seems to be tasteless; it is the final result of romantic sentimentalism. In the final analysis, there is no true feeling without sympathy; mere sentiment does not have a heartfelt function, or an esthetic one. A solitary heart—like someone has said—is not a heart; because no one feels anything if he does not feel it with another, with others... so why not with everyone?

Mairena: With everyone! Careful, Meneses!

Meneses: Yes, I understand. Like a good bourgeois you believe in the myth of the elite, which is the most plebian myth of all. You are a snob.

Mairena: Thanks.

Meneses: You seem to think that if you feel like everyone you will be swallowed by the crowd, by the anonymous masses. It is precisely the opposite. But let's not get lost here. There is a crisis of sentiment that will affect poetry, and its causes are complex.

The poet tries to *sing* about himself because he finds no themes of universal communion, of true feeling. With the loss of the romantic ideology, the entire pattern of feeling has been destroyed. It is unlikely that the new generation will continue to listen to our songs. Because what happens in the part of your self where you feel is no longer communicable; what you feel will eventually end up being nothing. A new form of poetry must have a new type of feeling, and also, a new set of values. A patriotic hymn will move us provided that our homeland is something we value; if this is not the case, the hymn will seem empty, false, trivial or vulgar. We began to think that those declamatory romantics were insincere, that they pretended to feel things they had not experienced. But this is unfair. It isn't that they did not feel these things, but that we cannot feel along with them. I don't know if this is something you can understand, friend Mairena.

Mairena: Yes, I understand. But even if we can not feel, don't you believe some form of intellectual poetry is possible?

Meneses: For me that seems as absurd as talking about sentimental geometry, or emotional algebra. Maybe that will become the accomplishment of those illustrious French symbolists. Mallarmé already had within himself a pseudo intellectual who could attempt it. But this is not getting us anywhere.

Mairena: So what to do, Meneses?

Meneses: We must wait for the new values. And in the meantime, as a way to pass the time, I will put in action my new invention, my *poetry machine*. The purpose of my modest apparatus is not to be a substitute for the poet (although it could easily replace the teacher of rhetoric) but to make an objective measurement of the emotional or the effective state of a group of healthy human beings, just like a thermometer registers their temperature, or a barometer registers atmospheric pressure.

Mairena: You mean quantitatively?

Meneses: No. My device does not use numbers or translate a poetic context into quantities. It gives it a completely non-personal, objective expression in the form of a sonnet, a madrigal, a ballad or a verse which the machine then recites for the astonishment and the applause of all who hear it. The song which the machine produces will sound familiar to all who are listening, but in fact, none would have been capable of composing it. It will be the song of any human group before whom the machine is functioning. For example, in a group of drunks who are aficionados of the *cante hondo* and are like those serious Andalusian males when they are out on a spree, the apparatus will register the dominant emotion and translate it into several essential lines that are the poetic equivalent. With a group of politicians, or soldiers, or usurers, or professors, or *sportsmen* it will produce a different song, one that is equally essential. However, one thing the apparatus will never do is give us the song of a specific individual, although the individual may be characterized very vividly, for example: *The Song of the Executioner*. Nevertheless, if it is desired, it will give us the song about those who like to watch capital executions, etc.

Mairena: And how does the mechanism of this poetic apparatus or musical device actually work?

Meneses: It is really quite complicated, and without graphic illustrations it would be difficult to explain. Besides, that is my secret. For now, it's enough for you to know what it does.

Mairena: And the controls?

Meneses: The controls are even simpler than those of a typewriter. This sort of piano-phonograph has a keyboard divided into three sections: positive, negative and hypothetical. Its phonograms are not letters, but words. The group before whom the device is functioning chooses, by majority vote, the noun which at that moment it considers to be most essential; for example: *man* and his logical, biological emotional correlative: for example, *woman*. The verb used in all of the three sections, except when a substitution is chosen by the operator, is always *to be* in its three forms: *to be, not to be, to be able to be*, or rather: *it is, it is not, it could be*. That is, the verb in these three different forms: positive or ontological; negative or divine; hypothetical or human. So we see that the device already has the fundamental elements for creating a line of poetry: *it is a man; it is not a man; it could be a man, it is a woman*, etc. The vowels that rhyme most logically (in Spanish) are *hombre y mujer* which rhymes with *puede ser*. Only the word *hombre* (man) remains without a matching rhyme. So the operator chooses a phonogram which has which has the closest sound to *hombre*, which is *nombre* (name). Using these methods the operator tries one or more stanzas by trial and error, using the help of his audience. It starts out like this:

They say (the subject is usually impersonal) a man is not a man.

This contradictory statement about a man causes the mechanism to switch to the second section of the keyboard. My device is not a thinking machine like that of Lulio; it registers vital experiences, desires, feelings, etc. and contradictions cannot be resolved logically, only psychologically. For this reason the person who operates the machine must work with the only means at his disposal: man and woman. And it is now that the noun *name* comes into play. The operator must place it in the most essential relation to *man* and *woman* which could be one of the following: *the name of a man* pronounced by *a woman*; or *the name of a woman* pronounced by *a man*. We now have the outline of two possible couplets to express a very basic feeling in a masculine gathering: the absence of the woman which gives us the psychological cause of the contradiction in the initial line of the poem. Man is not a man (that is, he is insufficient) for a group that defines masculinity in terms of sexual function, whether for lack of woman's name—that of the beloved that each man can pronounce—or because the woman on whose lips the man's name is heard is absent.

To make it clearer, let's imagine that the machine gives us this stanza:

(In Spanish)

Dicen que el hombre no es un hombre
mientras que no oye su nombre
de labios de una mujer.
Puede ser.

(In English)

They say a man is not a man
unless he hears his name
from the lips of a woman.
It could be.

The words *it could be* are not mere padding, or useless verbiage to end the stanza. This comes from the third section of the keyboard. The operator could have omitted this phrase, but he includes it at the urging of those present who, after a moment of introspection, find that it expresses an important element of their own feeling. Once the stanza is produced, it can be sung in unison.

In the prologue of his *Mechanical Verses*, Mairena heaps praises on Meneses' device. According to Mairena, the poetry machine is one way, among others, to rationalize poetry without reaching the level of baroque conceptualism. The sayings, reflections, aphorisms which his verses contain are necessarily linked to human emotion. The poet, inventor and operator of this mechanical device is an investigator, a collector of basic feelings, a *folklorist* if you like, an impassive creator of popular songs without ever making a *pastiche* of what is popular. He sets aside his own feelings and takes into account those of others. Then, once he sees it on his apparatus, he recognizes in himself the same human feeling which is the precise expression of the emotional climate that surrounds him. His machine produces neither doggerel nor pedantry, and at times it is capable of surprising us with strange, emotional phenomena. It goes without saying that its value, like that of other mechanical inventions, is more didactic or educational than esthetic. The *poetry making machine*, in short, can entertain the masses and teach them how to express their own feelings while new poets are arriving who can sing to us with a new form of sensibility.

(Translator's note: This part of the *Apocryphal Songbook* continues with more poems: *The Final Laments of Abel Martin*, *Siesta*, *Notes for an Emotive Geography of Spain*, *Memories of Dreams*, *Fever and Dozing*, and the *Songs for Guiomar* which are posted on another part of this web site.)