

JESÚS ZÁRATE MORENO, LIFE STORY: 1915-1967

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JESÚS ZÁRATE MORENO, TRAYECTORIA VITAL: 1915-1967

RESUMEN

Jesús Zárate Moreno (Málaga 1915 – Bogotá 1967), periodista, diplomático y escritor colombiano, autor de varias colecciones de cuentos, entre los que se incluyen: *Un zapato en el jardín* (1948), *No todo es así* (1948), *El viento en el rostro* (1953), *El día de mi muerte* (1955) y gran cantidad de artículos y ensayos periodísticos; algunas de sus obras fueron publicadas póstumamente: *Tres piezas de teatro*¹, *El único habitante*, *Automóvil en una noche de luna*, y *Cuando pregunten por nosotros* en 2003; y dos novelas: *La cárcel* (1972), y *El cartero* (1973). *La cárcel*, con la cual ganó el Premio Planeta 1972 en España, es su obra más conocida. Jesús Zárate, brillante diplomático y considerado como uno de los grandes escritores colombianos, es hoy uno de los hombres más olvidados de nuestra geografía colombiana.

Palabras clave: Jesús Zárate Moreno, escritor colombiano, La cárcel, Premio Planeta 1972.

ABSTRACT

Jesús Zárate Moreno (Málaga 1915 - Bogotá 1967), Colombian diplomat, journalist, essayist and fiction writer, author of several collections of short stories, including *Un zapato en el jardín* (1948), *No todo es así* (1948), *El viento en el rostro* (1953), *El día de mi muerte* (1955) and numerous essays and newspaper articles; and some works posthumously published, *Tres piezas de teatro*² *El único habitante*, *Automóvil en una noche de luna* and *Cuando pregunten por nosotros* in 2003 and two novels *La cárcel* (1972) and *El cartero* (1973). *La cárcel*, which won the 1972 Premio Planeta in Spain, is his most famous work. Jesús Zárate, who was a brilliant diplomat and has been considered one of the great Colombian writers, is now one of the most forgotten men of our Colombian geography.

Key Words: Jesús Zárate Moreno, Colombian writer, Jail, Premio Planeta 1972.

1 También se deja como título, pues así se tituló el libro al que se hizo referencia. *Tres piezas de teatro* (Caro y Cuervo, 2003).

2 It is also left as a title because that is the title of the book that was referred to. *Tres piezas de teatro* (Caro y Cuervo, 2003).

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Recibido (versión en inglés): 6 de mayo 2019
Aprobado (versión en inglés): 28 de junio 2019

INTRODUCTION

The data presented in this article are part of the results of the research undertaken about the novel *La Cárcel* by Jesús Zárate Moreno, one of Santander's most representative authors of the 20th century, who attained great international acclaim with the 1972 Premio Planeta. The initial diagnosis of the research revealed just how little information was available about the life story of the novel's author. During the process, the need arose to organize and document fragments of biographical information obtained from various sources, necessary to understand and appreciate the literary importance of the author and his work.

Writer and work are largely forgotten today, which presents the risk of having both disappear due to a lack of dissemination and studies that promote awareness, discussion and reviews about them. Undoubtedly, this is a situation that underscores the academic and socio-cultural need for this project, which aspired to appraise the literary importance of the author and his work, and thus, contribute to its dissemination, discussion, promotion, new studies, and reinstatement to the literary and cultural heritage of the region and country.

METHODOLOGY

The procedures used to achieve the research objectives belong to the predominantly qualitative field, and adhered to a methodological strategy that encompassed two stages: the first, locating primary and secondary sources, endeavoring to compile most of literary production of writer Jesús Zárate Moreno, which is comprised of short stories, plays, and two novels: *La cárcel* and *El cartero*, published posthumously. At this stage, archives of articles and essays published by the author himself in newspapers and magazines of the time were compiled; additionally,

writings of different authors about the life of Zárate Moreno and his work were consulted.

The second stage, the most creative and therefore the most qualitative, included an analysis and interpretation of the content of his work, in order to respond to the lack of awareness and valuation posited in this research. This part helped draw conclusions and suggestions or recommendations aimed at disseminating information about the life and value of Jesús Zárate Moreno's work, the themes that bring this inquiry to a close.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Jesús Zárate Moreno, life story: 1915-1967

Colombian writer Jesús Zárate Moreno was born on September 20, 1915, in Málaga, a city of rural settlements, moors and rivers, with a rugged and daunting landscape that reflects the quiet and strong-willed nature of its people. The youngest son of a large Christian family, his parents were Isidoro Zárate and Lucía Moreno and his siblings were Saúl, Agustín, Isidoro, Ovidio, Álvaro, Alfredo, Lucía and Rebeca. Carlos Mauricio Serrano, an expert on Zárate's work as well as a relative, wrote a piece titled *Jesús Zárate Moreno, entre los mejores del siglo* (*Jesús Zárate Moreno, among the best of the century*) where he recalls some passages from the author's childhood, sheltered by the whispers and landscapes of the countryside:

In conversations with cousins, siblings and friends, they evoked an active and happy childhood, with weekly trips to Buenavista, the rural settlement where his maternal grandparents' farm was located. Life was simple and placid. They reminisced about

the trails, streams, meadows, wheat fields and trees, and the beauty of the flowers and fruits which sometimes grew wild, like calla lilies, naranjillas and blackberries. (Serrano, 2003, n. p.)

Jesús Zárate Moreno attended high school in Colegio San Jerónimo in his hometown. Serrano recounts that at gatherings with friends and family, they often told stories about provincial life: “they remembered the people: the rugged, honest and congenial peasants, the priest, doctor, apothecary, shopkeeper, provincial public official, the girls, everything, all the characters that he knew as a child and so accurately depicted in his stories” (Serrano, 2003, n. p.).

It was the stories of everyday life for the peasants and the small provincial towns, conjugating innocence and evil, humor and absurdity that fed the imagination of the young Zárate. In the prologue to the posthumous edition of short stories, *No todo es así* by our author, critic and essayist James J. Alstrum (1982) offers us this perspective: “The fictional world so accurately evoked by Zárate has the Santander countryside as its setting. There, the mundane absurdities and tragicomedies of the provincial dweller come to life with full authenticity and the tender longing of indelible memories” (p. 8).

Conversely, Hernando Pardo Ordoñez, a writer from Málaga who was a friend of Zárate, recounts in his *Crónicas y Anécdotas* (1997) some of the quotidian occurrences, both simple and mysterious, of our towns and villages: cases such as what happened to a famous doctor who came for a three-day visit and was so impressed by the taste of “*aguardiente pichón*” (a locally distilled spirit) that he ended up staying until he was surprised by death, by that point without a liver (p. 187); or of the first cataract surgery performed in Colombia in 1926 on Bernabé, a blind

water seller, who said “*it is like being in the kingdom of heaven*” upon seeing the color of flowers after fifty years (p. 499); the story of “madman” Meléndez, who dreamed of staging a theatrical spectacle in which he would burn down the town and then build a new, modern Málaga with money collected from the public (p. 247); or the story of that same madman, with his hands around the throat of a man who had evaded justice with impunity, forcing him to confess in front of all the churchgoers that he was the murderer of the town’s rich miser (p. 250); and similarly, numerous stories of promise-makers, swindlers, beer drinkers, thieves, usurers, misers, etc.

These are stories of the provincial bustle that conjugate humor, absurdity, irony in the day-to-day, and the arbitrary spirit that constituted the raw material for Jesús Zárate’s short stories. Renowned essayist and literary critic Hernando Téllez (1949), in his analysis *Los temas de la provincia* about the book of short stories by the same name written by our author, emphasized the enlightened treatment of the provincial theme as the literary merit of the work, and revealed to us his impression in a book about Zárate’s life testimony:

The best of your life experience and your intellectual experience comes from the province, from the indestructible communication you had in your childhood and early youth with things, creatures, animals, with the very atmosphere of the rugged Colombian terrain and its solitary, sad little towns. (p. 4)

These provincial tales, with a subtle touch of ironic humor, abound in the novel *La cárcel* (1972). The following passage is a good example that dilutes the

fine line between reason and madness, and intentionally leads to philosophy:

-In Málaga, where I was born, I met a philosopher once. He is the only philosopher I have ever seen face-to-face. His name was Donato Cruzado. Shortly before they took him to the asylum, I heard him say a phrase that is the best thing ever said about life. Donato Cruzado said: "If I wasn't crazy, I would go crazy." (Zárate, 1972, p. 284)

Contrary to his parents' wishes, at the age of 15 the youngest child of the Zárate Moreno family moved to Bucaramanga. Alstrum (1982) tells, "His parents wanted Jesús to stay at the farm, dedicated to the pastoral life" (p. 8). Bucaramanga, capital of the department of Santander, welcomes provincial men who converge there, attracted by the desire to succeed in business, politics or literature. Jesús Zárate registered in Colegio San Pedro Claver to finish his high school studies. In one of his first short stories, *Las bodas del bachiller*, he recalled this traditional school, sitting on the neighborhood park, a place to meet friends or study for finals:

It was the last day of finals. Gabriel Pinto and Mario Aldana, students in their sixth year of literature, were studying in the park. From the wooden benches where they sat they could see the old Colegio de San Pedro Claver building. The park looked like an abandoned lot. Trees extended their branches with a wild insolence over the walkways, and flowers languished in the fields, burning under the November sun (...) glazed white and yellow. On the outer

walls there were huge black streaks formed by the grime dragged by the rains. (Zárate, 1982, p. 105)

Zárate Moreno soon got his first job as a journalist for Gustavo Puyana's magazine *Aire Libre*. Around 1936 he joined *Vanguardia Liberal*, the main local newspaper, at that time under the direction of Tomás Vargas Osorio, an outstanding poet from Santander who was part of the *Piedra y Cielo* group. He was joined to Vargas Osorio by a mutual passion for journalism and literature, and a close friendship that was demonstrated in a letter written in 1939 in which Vargas Osorio revealed some intimate details of his latest literary project to Zárate Moreno:

I am working non-stop on a new book titled "La Familia de la Angustia". I am about halfway through it, and I am satisfied with the work. It is an anti-conceptualist, anti-literary, intuitive analysis of my favorite authors: Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Unamuno (...). It is turning out to be a violent attack on rationalism, humanism, and ultimately, on Western culture. (Zárate, 1942, p. 2)

His abilities as journalist and writer were quickly recognized by the owner of the newspaper *Vanguardia Liberal*, Alejandro Galvis Galvis, who shortly thereafter gave him an opportunity to become chief editor of his newspaper (Alstrum, 1982, p. 8). His journalistic stage began in 1940 leading national newspapers. Roberto García Peña (1967), recalled that "while a student in Bucaramanga, he performed his task as news correspondent for *El Tiempo* with unique effectiveness and brilliance, being bound since then to that spiritual house, which regarded him as one of their best of friends" (p. 4).

Like most intellectuals and businessmen, Jesús Zárate Moreno could not stay away from the traditional conventions of the time, and he gravitated towards politics. In his writing *La vida y obra de un grande escritor santandereano: Tomás Vargas Osorio* (Zárate, 1942) expressed a particular preoccupation for the intellectual's dilemma vis-a-vis political cliques:

The journalist ends up in politics. The writer also. This explains why our literature is languishing. Party struggles annihilated the best literary inclinations in Colombia. The evil will not be corrected as long as those spirits that are really apt at showcasing our national culture continue to endanger their intelligence in order to eat. (p. 2)

Carlos Mauricio Serrano in his writing: *Jesús Zárate Moreno, entre los mejores del siglo*, (2003) remembers a time of intense campaigning for representative to the provincial House by García Rovira, in Santander, from which Zárate returned defeated after three months of tours and speeches. Talking about the topic with his friend Gustavo Cote Uribe, he tells him: "Between politics without love and Alicia, I will definitely choose to stay with Alicia" (Serrano, 2003, n. p.). Meanwhile, Flor Romero de Nohra (1972, n. p.), in her writing *Gloria Literaria después de muerte* recounts: "He was from Málaga, and she is from Bucaramanga. They got married when Alicia was 18 years old, and she was his secretary. She helped him review and make corrections to his works and rewrite them." Three children were born from his marriage to Alicia Rey: Néstor Augusto, Eduardo and Alicia.

The year 1941 brought great sorrow to Jesús Zárate, according to Serrano (2003, n. p.): "That year, his mother Lucía Moreno de Zárate passed away, and he was deeply affected by it." Then on December 21, his

close friend, illustrious writer Tomás Vargas Osorio, also died. As Santander news correspondent for *El Tiempo*, he was charged with reporting the sad news the next day, which he did with a great deal of pain: "(...) his death constitutes a great loss for Colombian literature, for a thousand reasons, and for journalism (...), of which Vargas Osorio was one of the most brilliant representatives" (Zárate, 1941, p. 1). In a beautiful biographical sketch subsequently published in *El Tiempo* about the life and work of the poet, Zárate (1942) remembered the poetic dimension for which the *Piedra y Cielo* writer was best known: "Once he sang like Dante, what is beyond agony. He sang about death's return" (February 1, 1942, p. 2).

In remembering Vargas Osorio, he reflected on his own interests: "The two vices of intelligence are journalism and politics. The latter for what is inherently perverted therein. The other, because it is almost never served with disinterest and intellectual integrity" (February 1, 1942, p. 2). However, García Peña (1967) revealed that his disenchantment with politics would not last long. Zárate returned to the political arena to work as assistant secretary of government in Santander, "a position that was offered to Zárate by Mr. Gabriel Turbay, so he could work for him as his private secretary" (p. 26). He had met the prestigious diplomat and liberal leader while he worked at the *Vanguardia Liberal* newspaper, and they became fast friends. (Alstrum, 1982).

1943 marked the beginning of his brilliant diplomatic career. Alicia Rey recalls: "We came to Bogotá because Jesús was named chief correspondent of the Ministry of Foreign Relations" (In: Romero, 1972, n. p.). This appointment was gladly reported by his friend Roberto García Peña (January 10, 1943) in the *El Tiempo* newspaper: "He arrived in Bogotá yesterday, coming from Bucaramanga, with the purpose of assuming a high-ranking position with the Ministry of

Foreign Relations" (n. p.) highlighting his personal and intellectual qualities as follows: "One of the most dashing young characters of the Santander intellectuals. Writer of magnificent prose, and sage and combative debater, Zárate Moreno, despite his youth, already occupies a prestigious position in Santander's journalistic arena" (García Peña, January 10, 1943).

By that time, Jesús Zárate Moreno was writing his first short stories. Researcher Eduardo Pachón Padilla (1959), in his *Antología del Cuento Colombiano*, included the short story *La cabra de Nubia* (1949), and in a biographical-critical note about the author, Pachón said: "He got his start in the short-story genre in early 1944, with his work: *Fin del Mundo*, published in Bogotá's *El Tiempo* supplement" (p. 287); rejoining the newspaper to contribute notes, essays and short stories published in the special Sunday literary supplement. Pachón (1959) said: "Since then, his literary work has been disseminated in major Colombian magazines and newspapers, and some of his short stories have been translated into English" (p. 287).

In 1946 he continued his work at the chancellery and foreign service, with a "brief interruption during the time in which once again he was private secretary to Mr. Gabriel Turbay, in the course of the presidential campaign undertaken by the distinguished public figure", recalls Roberto García Peña (1967, n.p.). At that time, he worked full-time for the liberal party's official candidate. Jorge Padilla (1986), who worked with Zárate, remembered moments in the campaign:

It was 1946. We accompanied Gabriel Turbay, presidential candidate, in the resounding campaign that would end up in the loss of power. We were a procession of intellectuals and politicians in draft form. César Ordoñez Quintero, Jesús Zárate Moreno, Luis

Enrique Figueroa, Augusto Espinosa Valderrama and I, all disheveled, our shirts torn to pieces and our hair a mess, attempted to fix the republic, and with the lightness of youth, talked garrulously about everything human and divine (p. 4).

Gabriel Turbay, in intention and desire, faced autocratic strongman Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, both from the same political party. The divided party resulted in defeat for Liberalism on May 6, 1946, and facilitated victory for the conservative party, which rallied around candidate Mariano Ospina Pérez and led him to taste sweet victory, which they had longed for since 1930. Alstrum (1982) had this to say about it: "Colombia was already on the eve of one of the darkest periods of its history when Turbay, the defeated presidential candidate, procured a diplomatic post abroad for his former secretary" (p. 9). In 1946, he began his fruitful diplomatic endeavors. Jesús Zárate was named Chief Secretary of the Colombian Mission in Madrid, and in October, he assumed the post of Consul General for Colombia in Spain, with headquarters in Barcelona. On October 10, Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia Española* (1946) wrote about one of the last meetings between friends hosted by Consul Jesús Zárate for the illustrious former candidate Gabriel Turbay in Spain:

Yesterday afternoon, illustrious law specialist and former minister of foreign trade for Colombia Mr. Gabriel Turbay arrived in Madrid. Mr. Turbay is here on a tourist excursion to explore Europe (...). Before heading to France, he will stay in Madrid for a few days to discover our cultural institutions (...). He was received by the Colombian consul, Mr. Jesús Zárate. (p. 10)

The European reality looked far different from the image he had been sold. A few months after his arrival, he was reflecting on this with the most radical critic of Spain's decadence, writer Pío Baroja, whom he visited several times in his Madrid home. A few years later, Jesús Zárate would depict the impressions he had received first hand, in his writing *Pío Baroja: Hombre humilde y errante*, stating:

Baroja is very much concerned with Hispanic decadence, and to explain it, he uses the same aesthetic resources that he employs in his novels. Absurdity, always absurdity, is his best philosophical tool. Baroja analyzed the Spanish religion, race, language, music and customs, and came to a bleak conclusion. (Zárate, 1949, p. 4)

Baroja's perspective on Spain's devastation, which was free of hypocrisy, realist and profound, added to his own sharp observations on the "frequent glances at neighboring countries, convinced him that Europe, contemporary Europe, was not how it had been depicted", commented Roberto García Peña (1947). Zárate turned that disenchantment into an insightful essay, *El hombre de Europa*, which was published in *Revista de América* in June 1947.

Zárate's first book of short stories, *Un zapato en el jardín* (1948), came out while he lived in Spain. It was a collection of thirteen short stories, published in Madrid with the auspices of publishing house Afrodisio Aguado, which wrote in the book:

His experience with daily newspapers gave him the alacrity and certainty of focus for events and men that inhabit the pages of "Un zapato en el jardín". Moreover, it gave

him the light tinge of humor reflected in the easy and transparent prose. In addition, to the many readings, the copious information from contemporary British and American literature, the sure talent of one who is proficient in both the issue and instruments of expression, all of these things coalesced to make Zárate Moreno one of the leading short-story tellers in Colombia. (Zárate, 1948, p. 1)

That same year, Jesús Zárate Moreno published a second book, *No todo es así* (1948) in Colombia with publishing house Imprenta Departamental. The book was a collection of ten short stories. Zárate (1948) explained the origin of the title in the note, which as a sort of prologue introduced the book (dated in Bogotá, February 1946):

Every afternoon my friends and I would discuss literature and politics on a balcony overlooking Avenida de la República. (...) One day Carlos Prados told me: "Your short stories may be good or bad, but they are short stories. As such, they have an essential characteristic, based on the discreet combination of the common and the mysterious. Upon reading them, anyone might say that our little story lacks these surprises and that in life, NO TODO ES ASÍ (NOT EVERYTHING IS LIKE THAT). (Zárate, p. 25)

Upon his return to Colombia, Jesús Zárate was named assistant director of the chancellery's diplomatic department from 1948 to 1949, and he continued to write his special reports for *El Tiempo* newspaper with regularity. In a letter addressed to Jesús Zárate published in *El Tiempo's* literary supplement

regarding a reading of his first book of short stories, Hernando Telléz (1949) expressed a clear admiration for Zárate's literary style and universality of themes:

There is in your book, universally legible, a splendid recovery of the provincial themes, so vague, so weak, so insubstantial in other hands (...). It matters not that one day you find yourself in Paris or in Barcelona, in Madrid or in London, or that as now; you pass your days in the halls of the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Colombia (...). Your book shows that the best of your life experience and your intellectual experience comes from the province, from the indestructible communication you had in your childhood and early youth with things, creatures, with the very atmosphere of the rugged Colombian terrain and its solitary, sad little towns, where tedium is the true dimension of life. (p. 4)

Jesús Zárate Moreno worked as director of information and press at the chancellery in 1949. That same year he joined the *El Espectador* newspaper, becoming one of its most dedicated contributors, with notes for the *Sunday edition* titled: *Pabellón del Reposo* using the pseudonym Zalacaín (Romero, 1972). Notes based on stories taken from real life, recounted with a refined literary treatment in the form of short stories that were published weekly and continuously until 1954. Journalist and writer Flor Romero de Nohra (1972, n. p.), reminisces about that time:

I remember him coming to the El Espectador building on Avenida Jiménez with the poise of a lord, umbrella and leather gloves, with a half-teasing smile, and the pages of

the Pabellón del Reposo in hand, "which I want to correct when it is already printed, because sometimes they make mistakes during the printing process that could affect the meaning of my words..."

In a complete analysis by critic and writer Germán Arciniegas, *Gatopardo a la colombiana* (1982), about *La cárcel*, he calls it "one of the best Spanish-language novels" and brings us closer to the elegance of Zárate's style, which has an "immaculate cleanliness." The critic described Jesús Zárate with these words:

After five years the dead man escaped - I am a free man! - And with the same wit, the same vivacity - the sparks from his divining eyes! - He returns to tell us stories from jail. Again the audacity of his laughter, which was never boisterous but rather astute (...). Zárate, a prince from the mountains of Colombia, so communicative, had a fat, olive-skinned face; his eyes almost closed when he laughed. And his butterfly bow tie, a symbol of provincial vivacity. (p. 298)

From 1950 to 1953, Jesús Zárate worked as chief of the Europe, Africa and East section of the Chancellery's diplomatic department. That last year, his book of short stories *El viento en el rostro, relatos de Zalacaín* (1953) was published in Bogotá by Ediciones Espiral. It was a selection of the best newspaper short stories written for *El Espectador's Sunday edition*. The quarterly journal of the National University of Colombia (1953) pointed to that book as one of the best published in recent years:

These are essentially journalistic objectives, and the works included in Zárate's

book show, despite their brevity, high architectural qualities of composition. On the other hand, in those short stories there is to be found a great variety of issues, to the point that there is no connection between one and the other, just the author's clear and precise style, which together with the qualities noted herein, make this one of the best books published in Colombia in recent years. (p. 212)

Jesús Zárate Moreno was promoted to Director of Foreign Policy and of the Diplomatic Department from 1953 to 1954. He carried on with his diplomatic activities as advisor to the Colombian Embassy in Mexico from 1953 to 1955. That last year, Jesús Zárate published his third book, comprised of thirteen short stories, which he called *El día de mi muerte*, with the seal of Bogotá's publishing house Iqueima, and the auspices of the Ministry of National Education. James Alstrum (1982) rated Zárate's book as follows:

"His most accomplished collection of short stories reveals that Zárate had taken Téllez's ideas seriously. The stories from Santander found in this book, similar to the stories from Antioquia written by Tomás Carrasquilla (1858-1940), transcend mushy Costumbrism and attain a true universal interest." (p. 11)

Some short stories are testimonies of the violent atmosphere that prevailed after the regrettable events of April 9, 1948, which marked a thematic turn in Colombian literature from Costumbrism to a literature of violence Sebastián Pineda Buitrago (2012) in the *Breve historia de la narrativa colombiana. Siglos XVI-XX* (2012), pointed out how Jesús Zárate handled

the topic in his short stories, and in turn, recognized that "the violence is not gruesome or macabre; instead it is *aesthetic*, loaded with psychological nuances" (p. 239).

The next step in diplomacy for Jesús Zárate was as counsel for the Colombian delegation at the OAS, a position he would hold until 1956. From 1956 to 1958, Jesús Zárate worked as advisor counselor for the Colombian delegation at the UN. Colombia had been chosen a third time as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. After that, he was assistant secretary for the Foreign Service, available at the chancellery from 1958 to 1959, and continued his diplomatic ascent as assistant secretary of diplomatic affairs at the chancellery from 1959 to 1960.

Jesús Zárate was named director of the Ministry of Foreign Relations and alternate delegate of Colombia as minister plenipotentiary before the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations from 1960 to 1961.

After a brilliant performance in diplomacy, Jesús Zárate was entrusted with the difficult task of managing the first Embassy of Colombia in Cuba, during a time of transition from the government of dictator Batista to Castro's revolutionary regime. Roberto García Peña (1967, n. p.) remarked on the ambassador's outstanding performance by stating: "He was brilliant, because his task was at all times not only underscored by the decorum of his conduct, but also by the patriotic devotion with which he engaged in the missions that were charged to him." From that experience of intense pressure in handling diplomatic relations with Havana came the idea to write his first novel, revealed his wife Alicia:

I remember that Jesús would tell me about the four months that he was locked up in a

hotel, where the embassy operated at that time. Because there were political refugees, the hotel doors were guarded by bearded men. What my husband feared the most was that a machine gun held by one of the novice sentinels would go off. That is why he conceived the idea of writing "La cárcel" (The Jail), a sort of 230-page diary typed in three copies which he left with the pseudonym of Pablo Lepanto. (Romero, 1972, n. p.)

After that, in 1962 Jesús Zárte was named Colombian ambassador to the Dominican Republic. One year later he would "act with firmness and integrity and extraordinary ability", in an arduous task to be the intermediary, at the request of the government of the Dominican Republic, at the embassy in Port Au Prince, and be in charge of representing Dominican interests in Haiti, and the people who took refuge in the Dominican embassy during the time of crisis generated by the rupture in relations between these two fraternal countries (García, 1967).

With the same bravery, Jesús Zárte Moreno knew how to sort the situation during the difficult events of the 1965 revolution, which led to a violent civil war in the Dominican Republic. Journalist Carlos J. Villar Borda, who stayed on the island for six months during the time of the US invasion of the Dominican Republic after the murder of dictator Trujillo, remembers some visits to the house of his friend Jesús Zárte:

The ambassador was Jesús Zárte Moreno, a writer, novelist and short-story teller who was my good friend. He used to meet for dinner with other ambassadors and men of letters from Latin America and the Dominican Republic, those who could or dared to

leave their neighborhood for the embassy. (...) These nightly gatherings served to obtain and give information, and then we went on to talk about literature or art. (p. 331)

Ambassador Jesús Zárte was responsible for carrying out commendable and extraordinary work regarding the serious internal events that took place during that period in the Dominican Republic, disclosed García Peña (1967).

(...) there, supported by the moral strength of his incomparable wife Alicia Rey de Zárte, he was forced to live through the bitterest of times during the violent and bloody civil war that struck that unfortunate country and resulted in very harsh living conditions for those who had to face the consequences of the anarchic emergency. (p. 4)

Zárte Moreno received the "highest compliments for his conduct" because of his work as ambassador of Colombia in the Dominican Republic. Upon his return to democracy, Zárte was honored by the government to speak on behalf of his country, demonstrating his literary talent in a lucid essay called *Así es Colombia: Lección en mil palabras* (1966).

In his diplomatic work, Zárte Moreno always maintained the elegance of the discreet and his modesty and authentic style, recalls Roberto García Peña (1967), and he mused "those days were intense and exhausting, and maybe from them came the serious illness that would destroy the vigor of his youth" (p. 4). His long stay as ambassador to the Dominican Republic allowed Jesús Zárte to write his first novel, *La cárcel*, which remained unpublished in his briefcase until five years after his death.

The illness had advanced silently, and during his stay in Santo Domingo, the first symptoms appeared. “Jesús never complained about anything, he was very healthy” remembers his wife Alicia, and she recalled that “when the high fever and malaise started, we thought it was just a cold, but after 8 days without improvement”, he felt the seriousness of his illness and thought about getting help. Flor Romero (1972) said that Jesús attempted to calm her by appealing to his sense of humor: “I know I’ll get well in Bogotá. The problem is I’m tired of this Caribbean with all the things I’ve had to go through.” In Bogotá, he was assisted, and they attempted to operate on him at the Military Hospital, but the doctors said there was nothing they could do.

Clinging to hope, the Zárates decided to go to New York. “At the Park Institute they gave us some hope, and they began the cobalt treatment, but I saw him worsen day after day. He would try to encourage me, to tell me that we had to live. It was a dramatic situation, both of us knowing and trying to ignore it”, recalls his wife. Jesús Zárate Moreno maintained his sense of humor despite the inner struggle, Alicia said that he hated mourning, and seeing her so concerned about his illness, one day he said: “We are in summertime, why don’t you go and buy a red dress, you look good in red”. She looked for one everywhere to please him, but did not find one. The efforts to recover from his prolonged illness were useless: “It feels like it was a month ago that he started to lose weight, to become pale, to feel dizzy in the afternoons, and stopped being the strong, energetic man who was my mate for over 20 years” Alicia remembered. (Romero, 1972).

With pain and resignation, they decided to return to Bogotá. There, Zárate wrote his second novel: *El cartero*. Alicia recalls that he “dedicated himself totally to writing, day and night. ‘I don’t want anyone to bother me’ he said, and locked himself away to type”

a work full of suspense and black humor, which he completed in three months. She added that “he was a very organized man, and he left the work completed with corrections on the margins, the same as the two theater pieces” (Romero, 1972).

In 1967, Zárate received a last diplomatic mission, the Colombian embassy in Switzerland, but his illness and the imminence of his death prevented him from assuming the task. Jesús Zárate Moreno died in Bogotá on December 12, 1967. Roberto García Peña (1967), friend and director of the *El Tiempo* newspaper, bid him farewell from this world with these moving words:

It does not matter that for months we, his friends and relatives, have witnessed with growing bitterness the imminence of his death. The fact that it came as a release from the sufferings of Jesús Zárate Moreno does not diminish our afflictions due to this dreadful reality. Because the disappearance of this exemplary Colombian, of this forever-unforgettable friend, took place at a time when life could still have given him many things, because the gifts of his spirit were very clear, and they showed that much could be expected from his intelligence and diligence, over the five long years enshrined to the service of his country. (p. 4)

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