

The expression of the ineffable: Fire and dream in Antonio Machado's "Soledades, Galerías y otros poemas"

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Poetry is a permanent construction and transfiguration. The poet builds a poetic self every time he writes, based on experience and imagination and transcending time. In transfiguring reality through symbols, metaphors, and images, he is also transcending mortality. In this sense, a symbol reveals the special in the individual, the general in the special, or the universal in the general, as for Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his 1816 "Lay Sermon": "it is characterized by a translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (Coleridge 1993, 30).

One of the most recognized poetic voices in 20th-century Spanish poetry is Antonio Machado. Belonging to the Generation of '98, a group of authors from the first third of the past century who inquired about the being and regeneration of Spain, he had a deep philosophical concern. Although he was born in Seville, the capital of the southern region of Spain called Andalusia, he is considered the poet of Castile, the central land of the Iberian Peninsula where he lived much of his life and on which he meditated assiduously. A poet of the immediate, he transcends it continuously, often manifesting a search for God, which he expresses through symbols such as fire or dream, among other things.¹

As the surrealists knew well, to express the ineffable, the symbol, in turn, must also reach its maximum height. This complexity addresses the need to be able to capture the fleeting, open the gap in the continuum, and transcend space and time, as in Ramón María Valle-Inclán's *La Lámpara maravillosa* (1916; *The Lamp of Marvels*, 1986):

What a base, awkward, and difficult stammer occurs when we would express that enjoyment of the ineffable which reposes in all things with the grace of a sleeping child! [...] No cry of mouth, no gesture of hand can encompass that remote sensation of which we are hardly aware yet which suffuses us with religious emotion (14).

Thus he defines the difficulty the human being has to give testimony to the incapable beauty residing in the essence of all things, the deepest voice, which only the most finely tuned sensitivity can hear, in the poetic trance towards the sublime. As Valle-Inclán reminds us, both the poet and the mystic must have perceptions beyond the limits that the senses perceive, glimpsing eternity in the course of linear time (1986, 25). The language of analogy (in which metaphors and images are framed) establishes relationships among the different planes of the real: "the metaphysical is thus implicit in the very forms of symbolic discourse" (Raine 2015, 16).²

The Spanish poet Dámaso Alonso said that all poetry, directly or indirectly, seeks God, that is, each author's individual perception of God, perhaps just in the same way as fire seeks light (1969). The symbolism of fire thus joins the poet's longing to transcend space and time and transmit the ineffable. Many mystical poets from Rumi to Tagore, and modern authors from Novalis to Julio Cortázar, have used fire as a metaphor for love, for the yearning for the ineffable, for the desire of transcendence of the material, and of that constant transformation and definition towards the divine. In Mircea Eliade's words, "passing through fire is a metaphor of transcending the human condition" (1955, 20). As Gaston Bachelard points out in *La psychanalyse du feu* (1938; *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1964), fire is present in multiple fields which sometimes converge and open horizons for exploration, as an element that acts at the center of all things as a factor of unification and fixation.

In the poet's search for meaning and for the self, dreams also play an essential role, especially in the language derived from the revelations of the dream experience. Surrealists explore the dream as a plane of experience different from conscious life; for André Breton, they seek the harmonization of the two states: sleep and wakefulness (2002, 24). The dream, as an extension of the real, opens a kind of passage that contributes to the search driven by the longing "to end time" (115), and going towards the realms of the "immortal" (141). The image, understood as pure creation of the spirit, is incorporated, from the dream into the material of poetic creation, going back to the sources of the poetic imagination (Breton 2002). In this regard, Bachelard argues that, together with the psychoanalysis of dreams, both a psychophysics and a psychochemistry of dreams would have to be included (2003, 12). From his perspective, it would be important to study the dream state that precedes contemplation, since "before being a conscious spectacle every landscape is a dreamlike experience" (12).

Antonio Machado, one of the most representative lyric voices of modern Spanish poetry, has used a constellation of symbols to express the ineffable in the early 20th-century cultural context, which was not very benevolent towards the supernatural. Underneath the apparent simplicity of his diction, both fire and dream stand out for their expressive virtues, particularly in his work *Soledades* (Solitudes, 1903) published with the collection *Galerías* (Galleries) as *Soledades. Galerías. Otros poemas* ([1907] 1993; *Solitudes, Galleries and Other Poems*, 1987). In these verses, Machado's use of poetic language, and of the symbols of fire and dreams, is remarkably different from his other texts, since the use of metaphors and images is much more abundant, the poetic language is purer and less prone to prose than in some of his other creations. Fire represents a purification, a longing for the expansion of consciousness and an experience of the divine. The world of dreams is linked to the nature of the landscape, to the symbolism of elements such as fire and water, and, on the other hand, to the lyre. Only the poet is able to penetrate the mystery to know what is far away and at the same time found within the soul. The area of dream and that of the elements of nature, understood in a symbolic way, are connected in Machado in order to allow him to transcend time and space in his poetry, tracing the poet's trajectory towards the ineffable.

THE METAPHOR OF FIRE

Fire and other elements suggest secret confidences and show revealing images. Each of them is, in some way, a “system of poetic fidelity,” as they refer us to a first organic reality, to a “fundamental oneiric temperament” (Bachelard 2003, 13). Rafael Lapesa shows “the constant presence of symbols” (1976, 431), common in Machado, such as “the Pythagorean lyre” and “the Heraclitan fire”, which represent “the immutability of being”, the “harmony of the universe” and, on the other hand, “the incessant change, the transformation that vivifies and consumes” (417). Both in *Galleries* and in *Solitudes*, we find the “sun of fire” (Machado 1955, 13), the “sun magician” (76), or the “burning sun” (74) in the poet’s heart. For example, Machado frequently and directly alludes to fire in his composition “Twilight”, which appears exclusively in the first edition of *Solitudes*:

Caminé hacia la tarde de verano
para quemar, tras el azul del monte,
la mirra amarga de un amor lejano
en el ancho flamígero horizonte.
(Machado 1903, 31)

I traveled towards a summer afternoon
to kindle, beyond the blue of the mountain,
the poignant myrrh of a distant love
in the wide, flaming horizon.
(Baker 2014, 9)

As Christian Manso points out, an ascensional stage in the itinerary which begins with fire and continues with the sign of the color blue, and at the end of which the self-accedes to the flaming zone (2011, 742), is verified in the poem:

Roja nostalgia el corazón sentía,
sueños bermejos, que en el alma brotan
de lo inmenso inconsciente,
cual de región caótica y sombría
donde ígneos astros, como nubes, flotan,
informes, en un cielo lactescente.

[...]

Y muda caminaba
en polvo y sol envuelta, sobre el llano,
y en confuso tropel, mientras quemaba
sus inciensos de púrpura el verano.
(Machado 1903, 31–32)

Red nostalgia filled my heart with
vermillion dreams that burst into my soul
out of the immense unconscious,
as from a chaotic and somber region
where igneous stars floated
like formless clouds in a milky sky.

[...]

And moving silently over the plain
enveloped in sun and dust
in a confused jumble, the summer
burned its purple incense.
(Baker 2014, 9)

In this way, the human being inscribed in finitude seeks the divine presence in the mysterious infinite. For Armand Baker, the “nostalgic red” is the nostalgia of paradise, of divine love reflected in the fire, and “the immense unconscious”, it is “the unmanifested God of pantheistic metaphysics” (1986, 186–187).

Just as a psychoanalytic interpretation of fire is possible, so is that of water, which plays a role in the yearning for expression of the ineffable in Machado. Most of the time, he conceives it as a way of satisfying the existential anguish or “calming the anguish of human life” (Lapesa 1976, 391):

¡Ay del que llega sediento
a ver el agua correr,
y dice: la sed que siento
no me la calma el beber!

Woe to him who thirsty comes
to see the water run,
and says: the thirst I feel
is not by drinking quenched!

¡Ay de quien bebe y, saciada
la sed, desprecia la vida:
moneda al tahúr prestada,
que sea al azar rendida!
(Machado 1955, 49)

Woe to him who drinks and,
when his thirst is slaked, despises life:
a coin to the gambler lent,
let it be to chance returned!
(Machado 1987, 127)

At other times, water is a companion to melancholy and sadness: “The fountain is silent / the garden is withered” (Machado 1973, “Solitude” LXIX) or a symbol of the flow of time, an allusion to the search for truth and to the idea that life is a dream:

¿Cuál es la verdad? ¿El río
que fluye y pasa
donde el barco y el barquero
son también ondas del agua?
¿O este soñar del marino
siempre con ribera y ancla?
(Machado 1955, 300)

What is truth? The river
that flows and passes
where the boat and the boatsman
are also waves of the water?
Or this dreaming of the sailor
always of shore and anchor?
(Machado – Craige 1978, 95)

But it can also be a comfort, a carrier of life, a spring of purity, and associate itself with the joy of spring (Lapesa 1976, 392–394):

La vida hoy tiene ritmo
de ondas que pasan,
de olitas temblorosas
que fluyen y se alcanzan.
La vida hoy tiene el ritmo de los ríos,
la risa de las aguas
que entre los verdes junquerales corren,
y entre las verdes cañas.
(Machado 1955, 54)

Life today has the rhythm
of waves that are passing
and tremulous ripples
ebbing and flowing.
Life today has the rhythm of rivers,
the laughter of waters
that run through green reeds
and through the green rushes.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 43).

Bachelard points out that the water has indirect voices: “nature resonates with ontological echoes” (2003, 287), because once the imagination discovers the “dynamic correspondences”, the images speak of truth and we will understand the “correspondence of the images with the sounds” (290).

This correspondence with sound leads us to another of Machado’s symbols, the lyre, which already appears in poem 28 from *Solitudes* and *Galleries* of 1907:

Tal vez la mano, en sueños,
del sembrador de estrellas,
hizo sonar la música olvidada
como una nota de la lira inmensa,
y la ola humilde a nuestros labios vino
de unas pocas palabras verdaderas.
(Machado 1955, 97)

Perhaps, in dreams, the hand
of the sower of the stars
made the forgotten music sound
as a note from the great lyre,
and to our lips came the humble wave
of a few true words.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 59)

In this way, the lyre is the harmony which sometimes opposes the continuous flow of time, the Heraclitan fire:

En el silencio sigue
la lira pitagórica vibrando,

The harp of Pythagoras goes on
resonating in the silence,

el iris en la luz, la luz que llena
mi estereoscopio vano.
Han cegado mis ojos las cenizas
del fuego heraclitano.
El mundo es, un momento,
transparente, vacío, ciego, alado.
(Machado 1955, 264)

the rainbow resonates in the sunlight, the same
light that enters
the stereoscope I can't quite master.
The ashes left from Heraclitus'
fire have put out my eyes.
The whole world this instant
is transparent, empty, blind, flying.
(Machado 1983, 131)

This note of the immense lyre is, moreover, the “music of the universe” (Lapesa 1976, 417), a lyre plucked by God, which alludes to the “secret of consciences” and which can only be revealed in the “musical miracle” of the words about which Valle-Inclán speaks to us (1986, 36). The poet must entrust to the musical evocation of the words the secret of those illusions that are beyond the human senses, for the language of the poets, like that of the saints, does not need to be deciphered through grammar to reach the depths of the soul: “the essence which letters extracts belongs to music” (1986, 54).³ The verse rises towards the numen of the essences through that secret harmony. In fact, in the words of Valle-Inclán: “Dance is the highest form of aesthetic expression”, as “[o]nly in dance are the two tenuous paths to – sound and light – joined in supreme synthesis beauty” (1986, 54).⁴

As the poet has expressed his principles: “El alma del poeta se orienta hacia el misterio” (Machado 1955, 76); “The soul of the poet / turns towards the mystery” (Machado – Craige 1978, 51). The mystery of receiving that *humble wave* that comes to his *lips*, of the immense God putting the macrocosm at the service of the human microcosm, the location of dialogue with God in the poet's dream, and the poet's design as an interpreter, underline this ineffable character of the divine. It is the same mystery, accessible only from the poetic “state of grace”, as Valle-Inclán would call it (13), which Machado refers to:

El alma del poeta
se orienta hacia el misterio.
Sólo el poeta puede
mirar lo que está lejos
dentro del alma, en turbio
y mago sol envuelto.
(Machado 1955, 76)

The soul of the poet
towards turns the mystery.
Only the poet can see
what lies in the cloudy depths of the soul
hidden in magic sun.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 51)

Machado looks beyond the appearance of things to reach the world of evocations where “only poets penetrate” because for their eyes “all things have a religious significance”; therefore, “the poets discover the luminous connections of an occult harmony” (Valle-Inclán 1986, 24), and are able to glimpse, within the fragmentation, allusions to divine unity.

THE SYMBOLISM OF DREAMS

Romanticism had already vindicated the dream against the state of wakefulness, not only as a space for imagination and fantasy, but also as a refuge from rationalism. Rejecting reason is irrational, but opposing rationalism, that hyperbole of rea-

son, is a necessity of freedom. Rationalism paired with experimentalism is coercive, limited, suffocating. The dream is a space free of such constraints, because in dreams, man occupies not a starring role, but one which corresponds to him, of one among the many. The dream links with the oracle and also the subconscious. As previously mentioned, oneiric revelations are a recurring theme in Machado, and this is a sphere in which he tends to locate his eagerly-awaited relationship with God. The following short poems illustrate his hope “to talk with God someday”⁵ (Machado 2007, 3):

Ayer soñé que veía
a Dios y que a Dios hablaba;
y soñé que Dios me oía...
Después soñé que soñaba.
(Machado 1955, 210)

Yesterday I dreamt I saw
God and spoke to God.
And I dreamt God heard me...
Then I dreamt I was dreaming.
(Alegant 2010, 24)

Anoche soñé que oía
a Dios, gritándome: ¡Alerta!
Luego era Dios quien dormía,
y yo gritaba: ¡Despierta!
(Machado 1955, 218)

Last night I dreamt that I heard
God shouting to me: Alert!
Then it was God who was asleep,
And I was shouting: “Wake up!”
(Machado 2007, 156)

What role does Antonio Machado attribute to dreams? The clearest answer is offered by poem number 28 of *Galleries* quoted above, which is one of the last of this set of poems and starts: “Perhaps, in dreams, the hand”⁶ (Machado – Craige 1978, 59). If “perhaps, in dreams, the hand of the sower of the stars” (God, in an anthropomorphic figure), “made the forgotten music sound as a note from the great lyre, and to our lips came the humble wave of a few true words”; then it is accepted as a possibility that the poetic word (or words) can be inspired by the Creator of the cosmos and beauty, by sounding the universal music that ends up humbly reaching the poet’s mind. This non-invasive, non-coercive, non-imposing dream evokes the doctrine of biblical inspiration: God does not dictate, he inspires, respecting the hagiographers’ ways of thinking and writing. The first poem of *Galleries*, with the label “Introduction”, proposes a journey from the poem to its origin, of the effect to the cause. If dreaming is an alternative to wakefulness, if it poses a knowledge that goes beyond reason, then it is an appropriate area for God, due to its being located beyond human logic and rational lucidity.

The poet identifies himself with the Socratic sage and with the Christian, to the extent that he, in the words of St. Augustine “[y]ou were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest” (Augustine [1955], III, 6, 11). He may be aware that God is more intimate within him than he himself:

En esas galerías,
sin fondo, del recuerdo,
donde las pobres gentes
colgaron cual trofeo
el traje de una fiesta
apolillado y viejo,
allí el poeta sabe

In those bottomless galleries
of the memory
where poor people
hung like a trophy
the dress of a festival
moth-eaten and old,
there the poet knows

el laborar eterno
mirar de las doradas
abejas de los sueños.
(Machado 1955, 76–77)

the eternal labor
of the golden bees
of his dreams.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 51)

Where the majority of mortals keep obsolete objects, the poet knows how to contemplate the eternal labor of the golden bees of dreams. Because the dream becomes a honeycomb full of honey, which God has deposited there, “a few true words” which only the poet is able to extract and transform into poetry. The other Machadian verses also fit here:

¿Tu verdad? No, la Verdad,
y ven conmigo a buscarla.
La tuya, guárdatela.
(Machado 1955, 298)

Your truth? No, the Truth,
so come and seek it with me.
As for yours, you can keep it.
(Machado 1973, “New Songs, Proverbs
and songs,” part two, LXXXV)

It is the capitalized truth that the poet can find in his soul and bring it to light, verbalize it, in an act that would be a memory. Verbalizing something that has been perceived in dreams is remembering thus making it appear:

Poetas, con el alma
atenta al hondo cielo,
en la cruel batalla
o en el tranquilo huerto,
la nueva miel labramos
con los dolores viejos,
la veste blanca y pura
pacientemente hacemos,
y bajo el sol bruñimos
el fuerte arnés de hierro.
(Machado 1955, 77)

Poets, with the soul
attentive to the deepest sky,
in the cruel battle
or in the orchard in peace,
produces the new honey
with ancient pains,
patiently make
the pure White gown,
and polish the iron harness
in the burning sun.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 51)

“The soul attentive to the deepest sky”, a beautiful metaphor of poetic contemplation, which is an introversion to one’s own soul, where God can be found. Again, the Augustinian “Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas” (Augustine, *De vera religione* 39, 72) and the evangelical “ecce enim regnum Dei intra vos est” (Lukas 17,21). Poetic creation is like childbirth (let us remember the metaphor of childbirth in Socrates and Saint Paul’s “The whole creation groans as in the pains of childbirth”):

El alma que no sueña,
el enemigo espejo,
proyecta nuestra imagen
con un perfil grotesco.
Sentimos una ola
de sangre, en nuestro pecho,
que pasa... y sonreímos,
y a laborar volvemos.
(Machado 1955, 77)

The soul that won’t dream,
the enemy mirror,
projects our image
a grotesque form.
In our breast we feel
a wave of blood
that passes... we smile
and return to work.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 53)

“The soul that won’t dream” does not discover God, nor his word, but itself. It becomes a Narcissus: the image itself with a grotesque profile. The “wave of blood” opposes the “humble wave” that “the sower of the stars” leaves in our soul.

The second poem of *Galleries* contrasts the state of dreaming and wakefulness. Metaphors of poetic creation, of knowledge, of life. What are the magical crystals of dreams, those mirrors that reverberate the divine light that the sower has sown? On waking up, one forgets what has been perceived in the dream, and that interruption gives way to the scenario of a beautiful nature. Is nature beautiful per se or is it so because it is contemplated by someone *newly* awakened, someone who was among those magical crystals? The macrocosm: the snow, the sky, the sun... and the microcosm: the lemon tree, the cypress, the meadow... until we arrive at man. It seems as if the harmony of the dream has moved into the cosmos. However, it cannot be known, for when we wake up, we forget our dreams. Hence knowledge is a memory. We are faced with an indirect access to God, mediated by dreams, envisioned in the beauty of the cosmos.

Y era el demonio de mi sueño, el ángel
más hermoso. Brillaban
como aceros los ojos victoriosos,
y las sangrientas llamas
de su antorcha alumbraron
la honda cripta del alma.
-¿Vendrás conmigo? -No, jamás; las
tumbas
y los muertos me espantan.
Pero la férrea mano
mi diestra atenazaba.
Vendrás conmigo... Y avancé
en mi sueño,
cegado por la roja luminaria.
Y en la cripta sentí sonar cadenas,
y rebullir de fieras enjauladas.
(Machado 1955, 78–79)

And it was the demon of my dream, the most
beautiful angel. His victorious
eyes were glittering like steel,
and the bloody flames
of his torch illuminated
the deep crypt of my soul.
‘Will you come with me?’ ‘No, never; tombs
and the dead frighten me.’
But his iron fist
seized my right hand.
‘You’re coming with me...’ And I advanced
in my dream
blinded by the red glow.
And in the crypt I heard the sound of chains
and the stirring of caged beasts.
(Machado 1973, *Solitude* LXIII)

Dreaming is also a descent into hell (poem 3). Here one does not find the Greco-Latin Hades, but Christian hell, the headquarters of the devil and his henchmen and the most beautiful angel, Lucifer perhaps? An angel whose torch fires bloody flames that allow the deep crypt of the soul to be seen, forces the poet to reach this space, where chains, a symbol of slavery, sound, and there are caged beasts. The poet’s refusal, which is pushed by the devil, proves that in dreams, in the depths of the human soul and body, freedom does not disappear. The world of instinctive impulse does not precede freedom; it is hybridized from it.

The dream is not only a space of encounter with the divine: it is also with evil. The fourth poem is set as a contrast with the previous poem: on the threshold of a dream, at the beginning comes a beloved voice, which proposes visiting the soul. Meanwhile, a caress reaches the heart of the poet, who advances through a long, plain gallery “feeling the swish of the pure gown and the gentle pulse of the friendly hand”⁷ (Machado – Craige 1978, 53). We do not know the end of this journey.

In the fifth poem we contemplate a clear, festive, joyful night: “night of my dreams”⁸ (Machado 1973, *Solitude* LXV). The protagonist of this scenario is love: the arms of the fairy, the weaving love of dances, the kiss of the fairy, her beautiful hand, love opening all its loves. The youngest fairy carries him in her arms and kisses him, a memory of happiness, that is now lost, for “was light in my soul now is filled with fog”⁹ (Machado 1973). Who is this mysterious fairy, the youngest fairy? A servant of love? The night, the dreams, childhood, light, happiness, love: everything becomes one.

In the sixth poem there is another idyllic scenario related to dreams: children carrying candles, and beautiful sunset in which the sun gives way to the moon, when an evil character appears: a pirate. They are idyllic scenes of a happy childhood, where some negative elements: the pirate, a bumblebee, a grandfather’s growl, fail to muddy happiness. However, the black note of anguish, present but not yet acting, is already lurking.

The ninth poem continues the plot, but there is no comfort to that heart that bleeds. The fairies have taken the linen of dreams, the pure white dress. The fountain is mute, the orchard is withered. The fairies are perhaps the personification of fate: the “fatum”, from which the term “hada” (fairy) derives in the Castilian language.

However, poem 10 shows that there is hope. The poet knows the secret galleries of the soul, the ways of dreams, which will die a quiet evening (note that the cited text uses the word “afternoon”, though we feel “evening” to be a better translation). There the silent fairies of life will lead the poet to a garden of eternal spring. The pleasures and troubles of life are accidental. The important thing is the end of the road.

In poem 14 the memory of lost youth brings comfort. Again, the evening, before the night, allows for that joy. In the 17th poem, the friendly nature alternates with the hostile one. Now the afternoon is a “grey and gloomy afternoon, out of sorts, like my soul”¹⁰ (Machado 1973, *Solitude* LXXVII). The anguish and hypochondria which settled upon the poet as a child appear in those stanzas, that are key to understanding the collection. The poet reveals what that pain he has just claimed he ignores really is:

...tú eres nostalgia de la vida buena
y soledad de corazón sombrío,
de barco sin naufragio y sin estrella.

(Machado 1955, 88)

...you are the nostalgia for a good life
and the aloneness of the soul in shadow
the sailing ship without wreck and without
guide.

(Machado 1983, 65)

The poet feels:

Como perro olvidado que no tiene
huella ni olfato y yerra
por los caminos, sin camino, como
el niño que en la noche de una fiesta
se pierde entre el gentío
y el aire polvoriento y las candelas
chispeantes, atónito, y asombra
su corazón de música y de pena
(Machado 1955, 88–89)

Like an abandoned dog who cannot find
a smell or a track and roams
along the roads, with no road, like
the child who in a night of the fair
gets among lost the crowd,
and the air is dusty, and the candles
fluttering, -astounded, his heart
weighed down by music and pain.
(Machado 1983, 65)

and concludes with the significant adverb “constantly”:

...así voy yo, borracho melancólico,
guitarrista lunático, poeta,
y pobre hombre en sueños,
siempre buscando a Dios entre la niebla.
(Machado 1955, 89)

...that's how I am, drunk, sad by nature,
a mad and lunar guitarist, a poet,
and an ordinary man lost in dreams,
searching constantly for God among the mists.
(Machado 1983, 65)

We understand the "man lost in dreams" as a man devoid of dreams. He has lost the inspiration of the dream where he will soon say that God speaks and he will seek God among the fog of wakefulness, of a reason immersed in a rationalist culture.

In poem 18, Machado continues to unveil riddles and wonders:

¿Y ha de morir contigo el mundo mago
donde guarda el recuerdo
los hálitos más puros de la vida,
la blanca sombra del amor primero,
la voz que fue a tu corazón, la mano
que tú querías retener en sueños,
y todos los amores
que llegaron al alma, al hondo cielo?
(Machado 1955, 89)

And it will die with you, the magic world
where memory holds
the purest breaths of life,
the white shadow of the first love,
the hand you longed to keep in dreams,
the voice that went to your heart and mind,
and all the loves
that reached the soul and the deepest sky?
(Machado – Craige 1978, 57)

The magical world, the world of the dream that keeps, like a treasure, the purest breaths of life, inspiration, driving force, the white shadow of the first love, is it perhaps of the mother? Or that of those eyes that didn't want to look back? Or the young fairy who took him in her arms and kissed him? Was that voice God's voice, and the hand, his hand?

In poem 22 the fairies are unmasked: they are the Parcae, the *Morai*, the owners of fate. As we read in poem 25:

¡Juventud nunca vivida,
quién te volviera a soñar!
(Machado 1955, 94)

Youth I never enjoyed,
if only I could dream you again!
(Machado 1973, *Solitude* LXXXV)

Loveless youth, its great pain, is intensified by the resurgence of spring.

Poem 27 presents a pathetic evocation of childhood, maternal love, and a yearning to be born again. It is possible that the poet remembers here Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in his statement of skepticism:

En nuestras almas todo
por misteriosa mano se gobierna.
Incomprensibles, mudas,
nada sabemos de las almas nuestras.
(Machado 1955, 96)

In our souls everything
moves guided by a mysterious hand.
We know nothing of our own souls
that are ununderstandable and say nothing.
(Machado 1983, 69)

In poem 29, those few true words will make possible not only the Socratic aspiration to know oneself, but also the evangelical one to be free, despite the sadness of the path to wakefulness:

Y podrás conocerte recordando
del pasado soñar los turbios lienzos,
en este día triste en que caminas

And you will know when you recall
the cloudy canvasses you used to dream
on this sad day when you walk

con los ojos abiertos.
De toda la memoria, sólo vale
el don preclaro de evocar los sueños.
(Machado 1955, 97)

with open eyes.
Of all that is in your memory, only the gift
of evoking dreams is worth anything.
(Machado – Craige 1978, 61)

The collection of poems ends (in poem 31) as it began: remembering youthful verses, perhaps the purest, those that best collect those poor true words that the star sower has made reach our lips. All is contemplated in one evening, the evening of paradise, paradise lost.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the poet Antonio Machado pursues the ineffable through a dance in which are involved poetic images, the transfiguration of reality through metaphors, the dream as a passage towards the timeless and the recesses of the human soul, the natural elements such as symbols of that search for meaning, the condensation that takes place when the poet enters the poetic trance and accesses the nostalgic revelation in which fleetingly touches the ineffable, that which is so within reach but is ungraspable, since it does not belong to the domain of the tangible, as if it was a lost paradise, the paradise of access to fullness (the power to be fully beyond space and time) that only in fleeting accesses we are allowed to enjoy.

Regarding symbols, as the critic Ricardo Gullón asserts, in Machado, “the clearest, most penetrating and richest symbol is that of the galleries of the soul, alluding to a mood only translatable in poetry, only understandable through the suggestion implicit in its images” (1967, 53). The same critic has noted the connection of this symbol with divinity: “Antonio Machado knew that *only the poet can look at what is far away*, in inaccessible remoteness: within the soul; in that *murky and sun-magical* world, both close and at the same time remote, encouraging the life-giving spirit, the mysterious self of the Creator” (82). Thus, by gaining access to the passage that the trance fosters in him, the poet leaves the world by the path of dreams, in a dance that gathers images, metaphors, and that addresses the languages of fire, water, music, transfiguring reality through them.

NOTES

¹ See Ros 2015; Johnston 2002.

² The essence of the image is to make visible and the metaphor participates in that faculty, since it “makes an image” (Oliveras 2007, 49). The author also reminds us that, although the metaphor shares with the symbol the referential plane that frames them in the allegorical along with the image, both present differences, for example in relation to the signifier–signified relationship (80–100).

³ “Milagro musical” (Valle-Inclán 2017, 24).

⁴ “La más alta expresión estética” (Valle-Inclán 2017, 33).

⁵ “solo espera hablar a Dios un día” (Machado 1955, 104).

⁶ “Tal vez la mano, en sueños...” (Machado 1955, 97). See presentation by Javier García Gibert: “El ‘sembrador de estrellas’ que soñó Antonio Machado.” (I Congress “Dios en la literatura contemporánea”) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py_wwHY-NKU&t=2656s. See also García Gibert (2004).

⁷ “sintiendo el roce de la veste pura y el palpar suave de la mano amiga” (Machado 1955, 79).

⁸ “noche de mis sueños” (Machado 1955, 80).

⁹ “era luz mi alma, que hoy es bruma toda” (Machado 1955, 80).

¹⁰ “cenicienta y mustia, destartallada, como el alma mía” (Machado 1955, 88).

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The expression of the ineffable: Fire and dream in Antonio Machado's "Soledades, Galerías y otros poemas"

Ineffable. Dream. Fire. "Solitudes, Galleries and Other Poems." Antonio Machado.

The journey we make through dreams is a way of deepening our understanding of our surroundings, our ideas and concepts, our subconscious, and also of transcending space and time and getting to the bottom of things, finding ourselves, and therefore, God. The transfiguration of reality has much to do with what the world of dreams reveals to us, since it allows us to see a timeless perspective translated into symbols (fire, water and lyre, in Antonio Machado's poetry), as so happens in the poetic trance. Establishing a link with surrealists, Machado explores the terrain of the dream with a desire to express the ineffable in the dialogue with God, a dialogue made possible through poetry.

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