

THE PATHS OF DREAMS

A REREADING OF ANTONIO MACHADO'S *GALLERIES*

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ABSTRACT

Poetic creation and encounter with God are two concepts that the Spanish poet Antonio Machado relates to dreams and childhood. He thus recovers the dream as a sphere of contact with God, overcoming in a certain way the faith/reason dialectic that modernity takes pleasure in emphasising. The dream is beyond reason, and there comes the divine inspiration which can then be translated into “a few true words”. Poetic language thus acquires a status far superior to that of delight: it is the key that allows us to touch the mystery. The relationship between dream and childhood also allows Machado to explore a lost innocence to which one always aspires to return.

KEYWORDS

Antonio Machado. God. Dream. Childhood. Inspiration.

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The Spanish poet Antonio Machado, one of the most conspicuous representatives of 20th century Hispanic lyric poetry, wrote, “perhaps the hand, in dreams, of the sower of stars” (God, in anthropomorphic figure), “made the forgotten music sound like a note of the immense lyre, and the humble wave to our lips came from a few true words.”¹ If this is the case, then it is admitted as a possibility that the poetic word – a few true words – is inspired by the sower of stars: the Creator of the cosmos and of beauty, by sounding the universal music that ends up coming in a humble way to the poet’s mind. The way is indeed humble, that is: non-invasive, non-coercive, non-imposing (which evokes the doctrine of biblical inspiration: God does not dictate, he inspires, respecting the ways of thinking and writing of the hagiographers). And what reaches the poet is a forgotten music. Inspiration consists, then, of bringing

1 All Antonio Machado’s texts in English are translated by Armand F. Baker (2006).

back the memory of a music, a harmony, a beauty that was known or known and forgotten at birth? At awakening? When growing up? At the dawn of reason?

The dream realm is mysterious, and it is there that divine communication takes place. The dream, therefore, is an image, a figure of the mystical experience, of the relationship with God. But the dream is not only a figure: it can also be taken literally. Since the Bible and Greco-Latin literature, the dream has been a channel for divine messages. Machado's poem suggests that God takes advantage of dream to send us his words which, deposited in that state, emerge in wakefulness.

It is difficult to express in fewer words, more beautifully and more clearly, what poetic inspiration could be. It can take the form of a dream, music, or insinuation. Dreams as a state of transition between consciousness and subconsciousness; music as art perceptible by the ears; insinuation (humble wave) as a method, a way. God does not speak loudly, imposingly, but softly, which is the way of love. What God emits is a musical note (beauty) which is transformed in a humble way (goodness) into true words (truth), bringing into play the three transcendentals of being. The sower of stars communicates with us through these transcendentals, which are nothing but beams of his own being.

Antonio Machado's verses recall the ode to Salinas by the master Luis de León, one of the main poets of the Spanish Renaissance:

El aire se serena
y viste de hermosura y luz no usada,
Salinas, cuando suena
la música estremada
por vuestra sabia mano gobernada.

The air becomes serene²
and is clothed in beauty and strange radiance,
Salinas, when there sounds
the incomparable music
governed by your skilled hand.

A cuyo son divino
el alma, que en olvido está sumida,
torna a cobrar el tino
y memoria perdida
de su origen primera esclarecida.

At that heavenly sound
my soul, that is sunk in forgetfulness,
recovers its judgement
and the lost memory
of its first, exalted origin.

[...] Traspasa el aire todo
hasta llegar a la más alta esfera,
y oye allí otro modo
de no precedera
música, que es la fuente y la primera.

[...] It traverses the ether
until it reaches the highest sphere,
and there it hears another mode
of imperishable
music, the first, the source of all.

Ve cómo el gran Maestro,
aquesta inmensa cítara aplicado,
con movimiento diestro
produce el son sagrado,
con que este eterno templo es sustentado.

It sees how the Great Master,
playing this immense cither,
with skilled movement
produces the sacred sound
by which this eternal temple is sustained.

Y como está compuesta
de números concordes, luego envía
consonante respuesta;
y entrambas a porfía
se mezcla una dulcísima armonía.

And as it is composed
of concordant numbers, it emits
a consonant response,
and from their vying
is mingled the sweetest harmony.

Aquí el alma navega
por un mar de dulzura, y finalmente,
en él así se anega,
que ningún accidente
extraño y peregrino oye o siente.

Here the soul steers
through a sea of sweetness, and at last
sinks so deep within,
that it hears or feels
no strange or rare event.

[...] ¡Oh, suene de contino,
Salinas, vuestro son en mis oídos,
por quien al bien divino
despiertan los sentidos,
quedando a lo demás amortecidos!

[...] Oh, may your music,
Salinas, sound everlastingly in my ears;
hearing it, my senses
awaken to God's goodness,
and to all else remain oblivious!

In the light of the lines of poem 28 of *Galleries* we can interpret several of the series. The first is a journey from the poem to its origin, from effect to cause:

Leyendo un claro día
mis bien amados versos,
he visto en el profundo
espejo de mis sueños

On a bright day while Reading
my dearly beloved poems,
I realized that in the deep
mirror of my dreams

que una verdad divina
temblando está de miedo,
y es una flor que quiere
echar su aroma al viento.

a divine truth was
trembling fearfully like
a flower that wants
to cast its aroma on the wind.

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.

The soul of the poet
is focused on mystery.
Only the poet is able
to see what is deep
within the soul, wrapped in
a blurred and mysterious light.

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
el laborar eterno
mirar de las doradas
abejas de los sueños.

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.

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.

In these bottomless
galleries of our memory,
where the poor souls
hung up their old

moth-eaten festival cape
like a trophy,
there the poet is able
to watch the eternal labor
of the golden bees
of our dreams.

Poets, with our soul
attuned to the depths of heaven,
in the cruel battle
or the quiet garden,

we make new honey
from our old sorrows;
we patiently create
our pure white cloak,
and under the sun we polish
our strong armor of steel.

For the soul who does not dream
the enemy mirror
projects our image
with a grotesque outline.

We feel a wave
of blood pass through
our breast..., then we smile
and begin our task again.

When he rereads his verses, which are a “deep mirror” of his dreams, the poet discovers a “divine truth”, which “is trembling with fear”, which is fragile. The divine truth, the word of God, comes in dreams to the soul of the poet who translates it in turn into verse. Poetry originates in God during sleep.

That divine truth “is a flower that wants to throw its fragrance to the wind”, something beautiful but fragile, beautiful to the eye and pleasant to the smell, which aspires to spread.

God tries to spread beauty throughout the world through the word of the poet, who has received it in dreams.

In this poem, which is written under the heading Introduction, the poet explains his principles. "The poet's soul is oriented towards mystery." The mystery of receiving that "humble wave" that reaches his "lips". The mystery that the immense God puts the macrocosm at the service of the human microcosm, that he builds a machine of beauty that distills its honey in the poet's soul.

"Only the poet is able to look at what is far away inside the soul, in cloudy and magician sun wrapped." Only the poet can penetrate the mystery and know what is far away (he comes from afar) and at the same time remains within the soul. Only the poet can, in short, know himself. The poet identifies himself with the Platonic sage and, why not, with the Christian saint, insofar as the latter, in the words of Saint Augustine, knows that God is more intimate, more interior to him, than he himself is.

"In those galleries" (uncovered or stained-glass corridors that give light to the interior rooms of the houses), "bottomless, of memory, where the poor people hung as a trophy the old and moth-eaten costume of a feast, there the poet knows the eternal gaze of the golden bees of dreams".

Where ordinary mortals keep outdated things, the poet knows how to contemplate the eternal work of the golden bees of dreams. Because the dream is a honeycomb full of honey, which God has deposited there. And only the poet knows how to extract this nectar: "a few true words" and transform it into poetry. The Machadian verses also fit in here: "Your truth? No, the truth. And come with me to look for it. Yours, keep it." It is the truth with a capital "T" that the poet finds in his soul and brings it to light, and verbalises it to update a memory. To verbalise something that has been perceived in dreams is to remember, to bring it to the surface.

It is written that, "the soul attentive to the deep sky". This is a beautiful metaphor of poetic contemplation, which is an introversion towards one's own soul, where God is. Again, as the Augustinian phrase goes, "do not go outside, God is within", and the evangelical: "the kingdom of God is within you". The poet, hero, must contemplate in tribulation as well as in tranquillity, and to cultivate a new honey from that which God had deposited in the soul. That is why the poet is a maker, a creator, a recreator, because he makes new honey from the divine honey. Hence the poet's particular status in relation to God. Rubén Darío writes:

¡Torres de Dios! ¡Poetas!
¡Pararrayos celestes,
que resistís las duras tempestades,
como crestas escuetas,
como picos agrestes,
rompeolas de las eternidades!

Poets! Towers of God³
Made to resist the fury of the storms
Like cliffs beside the ocean
Or clouded, savage peaks!
Masters of lightning!
Breakwaters of eternity!

Poetic creation is like childbirth (we remember the metaphor of childbirth in Socrates and St. Paul's "The whole creation groans in travail"), which implies pain. A "new honey" is made, a "white and pure garment" (the new man of which St. Paul also speaks), and under the sun, in the vigil, we burnish the strong iron harness. What harness? Perhaps Rubén Darío will also answer us in his sonnet *Atrio*, dedicated to Juan Ramón Jiménez:

¿Tienes, joven amigo, ceñida la
coraza⁴
para empezar, valiente, la divina pelea?
¿Has visto si resiste el metal de tu
idea
la furia del mandoble y el peso
de la maza?

Have you, young friend, girded up your
breastplate
To begin, brave man, the divine fight?
Hast thou seen if the metal of thine idea
withstands
the fury of the greatsword and the weight of
the mace?

[...] ¿Tu corazón las voces ocultas
interpreta?
Sigue, entonces, tu rumbo de amor. Eres
poeta.
La belleza te cubra de luz, y Dios
te guarde.

[...] Does thy heart interpret the hidden
voices?
Follow, then, your course of love. You are a
poet.
May beauty cover you with light, and God
keep you.

Let us continue with the same poem. The soul that does not dream does not discover God, nor his word, but itself. And it becomes a Narcissus: its own image with a grotesque profile. "A wave of blood" that contrasts with the "humble wave" that "the sower of stars" leaves in our soul. In poem LXIV of *Galleries* we read:

Desde el umbral de un sueño me
llamaron...⁵
Era la buena voz, la voz querida.

From the threshold of a dream they called
to me... It was the good voice, the beloved
voice.

–Dime: ¿vendrás conmigo a ver el alma?...
Llegó a mi corazón una caricia.

"Tell me: will you come with me to see the
soul?..." A caress touched my heart.

–Contigo siempre... Y avancé en mi sueño
por una larga, escueta galería,
sintiendo el roce de la veste pura
y el palpitar suave de la mano amiga.

"With you forever..." And I advanced in my
dream through a long, empty gallery,
feeling the touch of her pure cloak
and the soft pulse of her friendly hand.

At the threshold of a dream, at the beginning, a good voice arrives, a beloved voice, which proposes to visit the soul: Know thyself. Meanwhile, a caress comes to the

4 Rubén Darío (2015)

5 All Antonio Machado's texts are from Machado (1955).

poet's heart, who advances through a long and brief gallery "feeling the touch of the pure garment and the soft palpitation of the friendly hand". We do not know the end of this journey. The LXX:

Y nada importa ya que el vino de oro
rebose de tu copa cristalina,
o el agrio zumo enturbie el puro vaso...

And it does not matter if the golden wine
spills out of your crystal cup,
or if bitter juice clouds your pure vessel...

Tú sabes las secretas galerías
del alma, los caminos de los sueños,
y la tarde tranquila
donde van a morir... Allí te aguardan

You know the secret galleries
of the soul, the pathways of dreams,
and the calm afternoon
where they go to die... That is where

las hadas silenciosas de la vida,
y hacia un jardín de eterna primavera
te llevarán un día.

the silent fairies of life wait for you,
and one day they will carry you to
a garden of eternal springtime.

The poet knows the secret galleries of the soul, the paths of dreams, which go to die one quiet evening. There the silent fairies of life will lead you to a garden of eternal spring. The pleasures and sorrows of life are accidental. The important thing is the end of the road. The quiet evening reappears in poem LXXIV:

Tarde tranquila, casi
con placidez de alma,
para ser joven, para haberlo sido
cuando Dios quiso, para
tener algunas alegrías... lejos,
y poder dulcemente recordarlas.

A calm afternoon like
the peacefulness of a soul;
to be young, to have been like that when God
willed it, to have
a bit of happiness... long ago,
and to be able to recall it gladly.

The memory of lost youth brings consolation. Once again, the evening, the prelude to night, allows this joy (LXXVII):

Es una tarde cenicienta y mustia,
destartalada, como el alma mía;
y es esta vieja angustia
que habita mi usual hipocondría.

It is a grey and gloomy afternoon,
out of sorts, like my soul;
and it is that old anxiety
that fills my usual hypochondria.

La causa de esta angustia no consigo
ni vagamente comprender siquiera;
pero recuerdo y, recordando, digo:
—Sí, yo era niño, y tú, mi compañera.

As for the cause of this anxiety, I do not
have even the vaguest understanding;
but I remember, and as I remember, I say:
Yes, I was a child, and you companion.

Y no es verdad, dolor, yo te conozco,
tú eres nostalgia de la vida buena
y soledad de corazón sombrío,
de barco sin naufragio y sin estrella.

And that is not true, sorrow, I know you:
you are the longing for a good life,
and the loneliness of a somber heart,
of a boat without a shipwreck or a guiding star.

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

Like an abandoned dog who has no trail
to follow and wanders
along the road, without direction, like
the child on the night of a carnival

se pierde entre el gentío
y el aire polvoriento y las candelas
chispeantes, atónito, y asombra
su corazón de música y de pena,

who is lost among the crowds
and the dusty air and the sparkling
antennas, terrified, his heart
startled by music and by sorrow,

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

That's what I am, a melancholy drunkard,
a mad guitarist, a poet,
a poor creature lost in dreams,
always searching for God in the fog.

Friendly nature alternates with hostile nature. Now the afternoon is “ashen and mournful, shabby, like my soul”; the anguish, the hypochondria, which settled on the poet when he was a child, is present. And now come some stanzas which are key to understanding the whole series of *Galleries* and even Antonio Machado's search for God. The poet reveals what this pain, which he has just said he is unaware of, consists of: “you are nostalgia for the good life and the loneliness of a sombre heart, of a ship without a shipwreck and without a star”. The poet feels “like a forgotten dog that has neither track nor scent and wanders along the roads, without a path, like a child who on the night of a party gets lost in the crowd and the dusty air and the sparkling candles, stunned, and his heart is amazed by music and sorrow”; and concludes: “that's how I go, melancholic drunkard, lunatic guitarist, poet, and poor man in dreams, always looking for God in the fog”. I interpret “poor man 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 will look for God in the fog, the fog of wakefulness, the fog of a reason immersed in a rationalist culture. It is interesting to note the adverb always. And in the following poem, LXXVIII, we find the adjective magician again:

¿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,

Will the mysterious world die with you,
and with it the memory
of the purest breath of life,
the white shadow of your first love,

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?

the voice that spoke to your heart,
the hand you tried to hold in dreams,
and all the loves
that touched your soul at the deepest level?

¿Y ha de morir contigo el mundo tuyo,
la vieja vida en orden tuyo y nuevo?
¿Los yunques y crisoles de tu alma
trabajan para el polvo y para el viento?

And will your world die with you,
the old life to which you gave new form?
Do the anvils and the crucibles of your soul
produce only dust blown away by the wind?

Machado continues to unveil enigmas. Following on from the previous one, the poet asks himself: "Will the mysterious world die with you, / and with it the memory / of the purest breath of life, / the white shadow of your first love, // the voice that spoke to your heart, / the hand you tried to hold in dreams, / and all the loves / that touched your soul at the deepest level?"

The wizard world, the world of the dream that keeps, like a treasure the purest breaths of life, the inspiration, the engine; the white shadow of the first love – that of the mother? That of those eyes that did not want to look back? The young fairy who carried him in her arms and kissed him? Was that voice the voice of God, and the hand, his hand? Poem LXXXVII has the suggestive title "Renaissance":

Galerías del alma... ¡El alma niña!
Su clara luz risueña;
y la pequeña historia,
y la alegría de la vida nueva...

Galleries of the soul... the young soul!
Its bright smiling light,
the short history,
and the happiness of a new life...

¡Ah, volver a nacer, y andar camino,
ya recobrada la perdida senda!

Ah, to be born again, and to travel
once more on the path that was lost!

Y volver a sentir en nuestra mano,
aquel latido de la mano buena
de nuestra madre... Y caminar en sueños
por amor de la mano que nos lleva.

And to feel again in our hand
the pulse of the good hand
of our mother... And to travel in dreams
for love of the hand that guides us.

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En nuestras almas todo
por misteriosa mano se gobierna.
Incomprensibles, mudas,
nada sabemos de las almas nuestras.

Everything in our souls
is governed by a mysterious hand.
Incomprehensible, mute,
we know nothing of our souls.

Las más hondas palabras
del sabio nos enseñan,
lo que el silbar del viento cuando sopla,
o el sonar de las aguas cuando ruedan.

The most profound words
of the wise man teach us
what the wind whistles when it blows,
or the water murmurs as it flows.

Pathetic evocation of childhood, of motherly love. Longing to be born again. Would he remember Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? Declaration of scepticism. "In our souls everything is governed by a mysterious hand. Incomprehensible, dumb, we know nothing of our souls." Then comes the first poem discussed in this paper, and then LXXXIX:

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

And you will know yourself by remembering
the clouded canvases of old dreams,
on this sad day when you walk
with your eyes wide open.

De toda la memoria, sólo vale
el don preclaro de evocar los sueños.

Of all your memory, only the supreme gift
of evoking your dreams is worthwhile.

And those few true words will make possible the Socratic aspiration to know oneself and the evangelical aspiration to be free, in spite of the sadness of the journey in wakefulness, in vigil. To evoke dreams is an enlightened gift. Memory, memory. And the last poem of *Galleries* XCI:

Húmedo está, bajo el laurel, el banco
de verdinosa piedra;

Under the laurel tree, the bench
of greenish stone is damp;

lavó la lluvia, sobre el muro blanco,
las empolvadas hojas de la hiedra.

the rain has washed the dusty leaves
of ivy on the white stone wall.

Del viento del otoño el tibio aliento
los céspedes undula, y la alameda
conversa con el viento...
¡el viento de la tarde en la arboleda!

The warm breath of the autumn wind
undulates the grass, and the poplar grove
converses with the wind...
the afternoon wind in the grove of trees!

Mientras el sol en el ocaso esplende
que los racimos de la vid oreá,
y el buen burgués, en su balcón enciende
la estoica pipa en que el tabaco humea,

While the light from the sunset glows
on the clusters that hang on the grape vine,
and the good citizen on his balcony lights
his stoic pipe in which the tobacco smokes,

voy recordando versos juveniles...
 ¿Qué fue de aquel mi corazón sonoro?
 ¿Será cierto que os vais, sombras gentiles,
 huyendo entre los árboles de oro?

I am thinking of my childhood poems...
 Whatever happened to my melodious heart?
 Can it be true, beautiful shadows, that you
 are fleeing through the trees of gold?

The collection of poems ends as it began: recalling youthful verses, perhaps the purest, the ones that best capture those poor true words that the sower of stars brought to our lips. And everything is contemplated in an afternoon. The afternoon of paradise, of paradise lost.

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