

## CHAPTER VII: In Search of a "Middle Path"

In the first six chapters of this book I have examined some of the different ideas which constitute the religious and philosophical thought of the poet, Antonio Machado. But these ideas would have little value if they were not part of a system of values, or a mode of conduct, which can guide a person on his or her path through life. Of special importance for Machado's thought, then, is the idea of the journey which a soul takes when it aspires to reach a state of spiritual perfection.

The concept of a religious pilgrimage has often been used to symbolize the effort a person makes in order to purify the self so that it can achieve a state of union with God. Many writers have described the arduous journey of the religious pilgrim, but what is the path which is recommended by our poet?<sup>1</sup> In a poem from *Fields of Castile* Machado seems to give an answer to this question when he writes:

It is the very best person  
who realizes that in this life  
it is all a question of measure:  
a little more, a little less...<sup>2</sup>

Here the poet expresses the idea that one can reach a state of perfection by following a well-balanced life which avoids the extremes.<sup>3</sup> In order to understand the importance of this idea, then, it will help to examine the concept of the "middle path" and its relation to the idea of a spiritual pilgrimage.

### THE MIDDLE PATH

The person who wants to live a well-balanced life must avoid the extremes of self-gratification and total abstinence. It is only by following this "middle path" that we can achieve a state of equilibrium between the two opposite vices of excess and denial. And the best way to enter this narrow path is to cultivate an attitude of detachment with regard to the things of this life. The person who wishes to accomplish this goal must therefore renounce his desires without reaching a state of indifference. As he suppresses his desires, he must be filled with love for all things; he must have an attitude of loving detachment that allows his individual will to be in harmony with that of the Divinity.

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<sup>1</sup> In his study of this topic in Machado's early poetry Michael P. Predmore tells us: "The journey of the Christian pilgrim is the model imitated by Machado's traveler as he tries to retake his lost path and recover a state of paradise within his soul"; "The Nostalgia for Paradise and the Dilemma of Solipsism in the Early Poetry of Antonio Machado," *Revista hispánica moderna*, XXXVIII, 1-2 (1974), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Machado, *Obras: Poesía y Prosa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1973), CXXXVI, xiii, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> José Machado confirms this interpretation when he writes: "In this '...a little more, a little less...' [the Poet] defines the norm of all our efforts for perfection"; *Últimas soledades del poeta Antonio Machado (Recuerdos de su hermano José)* (Santiago de Chile: multigrafiado, 1958), p. 67.

The idea of following the middle path can be traced back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C., to the teachings of the Buddha. According to historical accounts, the young Hindu prince Siddhartha Gautama decided to renounce the pleasures of his comfortable life so that he could achieve a state of spiritual perfection. In order to do this he began to follow an ascetic life of deprivation and self-mortification, but by the end of six years he found himself about to die from hunger, without being able to reach his spiritual goal. He then decided to relax his restrictions, and he vowed to meditate under a Bodhi tree until he achieved a state of enlightenment; finally, after 49 days he was bathed in the ecstasy of profound spiritual awakening. In this way the Buddha—the "enlightened one"—learned that the only way to achieve this goal is to follow a "middle path" which not only avoids the submission to worldly desires, but also rejects the self-centered attitude of one who tries to lead a life of denial. Our desires, whether they are for sensory pleasures or for total deprivation, will keep us from achieving a balanced state of spiritual perfection. For this reason, the followers of the Buddha have tried to triumph over their desires while cultivating an attitude of benevolence, gentleness, patience and forgiveness, as they also avoid anger and physical violence.

The need to avoid the extremes of a life governed by desire has also appeared in Western culture. For example, Homer and Plato both mention the importance of following a balanced life, and Aristotle's doctrine of the "mean" is similar to the Buddha's "middle path." The conduct of Jesus the Christ offers an example of a life governed by an attitude of loving detachment and, during the Middle Ages, it was taught that the best form of conduct was that of "moderation" in all forms of life.<sup>4</sup> In the following pages we will see how the idea of the middle path or, as he put it "a question of measure," has influenced the spiritual pilgrimage of Antonio Machado.

## 1. AN ASCETIC LIFE

### A REJECTION OF THE BACCHANALIA OF LIFE

Like all human beings, Antonio Machado has felt the desire for self-indulgence; for this reason he has written:

How difficult it is,  
when everything is lowered,  
not to lower yourself... (OPP, p. 765).

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<sup>4</sup> A good example of this Medieval attitude is found in the commentary of Ramón Menéndez de Pidal on *The Cid*; there one reads that the concept of moderation "was a virtue that was greatly esteemed in a gentleman... moderation is necessary in all things of life, the most important characteristic that must not be lacking, during the Middle Ages, in the nobleman, the courtier, and the lover"; *El Poema de Mío Cid* (Madrid: Clásicos Castellanos, 1960), p. 104. During this same historical period St. Benito de Nursia also preached about the importance of the "mean" when he decreed that all monks must avoid the extremes of rigorous asceticism and spiritual weakness; see Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 143 and p. 149.

And because he knew the pleasures of a sensual life, he recognized that he must always "pull the reins in tight" around himself, which he admits with admirable frankness in an autobiographical document published by Francisco Vega Díaz; in it Machado confesses, "I led a disorderly life during my youth and I drank a little too much, without becoming an alcoholic. Four years ago I made a radical break with all my vices."<sup>5</sup> The date which Vega Díaz ascribes to this document is 1913 which means that Machado's effort to reject this type of conduct must have occurred in 1909 when he was 34 years old. Nevertheless, his rejection can not have been complete, since, in another autobiographical document from 1912, he returns to this same topic and then admits: "Unfortunately, I have still not been able to escape from the limbo of my sensuality."<sup>6</sup>

A negative description of these worldly pleasures also appears from time to time in Machado's poetry. For example, in poem XXVIII he has written:

We thought that we could  
make our love a grand festival,  
igniting new aromas  
in untrodden fields  
and hide the secret  
of our pallid faces,  
because in the Bacchanalia of life  
our cups are always empty...

Those who try to satisfy their need for love with new experiences of sensual life only increase their loss by trying to deny the reality of their hollow existence. Far from being satisfied, the soul feels even more intensely its longing to recover the "lost garden" of its paradisiacal innocence where its thirst could always be quenched by water from the divine fountain of life.<sup>7</sup> His nostalgia for the pure waters of the soul's primordial origin is implied once again in the concluding lines of this early poem:

And something that is earth in our flesh feels  
the moisture of the garden like a caress (OPP, pp. 83-84).

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<sup>5</sup> Francisco Vega Díaz, "A propósito de unos documentos autobiográficos inéditos de Antonio Machado," *Papeles de Son Armadáns*, LIV (1969), p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Vega Díaz, *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> When he refers to the "garden" in *Solitude, Galleries and Other Poems*, Predmore demonstrates that this becomes something more than the garden which the poet remembered from his infancy in Seville: "The image of the garden acquires, little by little, a definite symbolic significance. This 'enchanted garden of yesterday' (poem XVIII) is not only the memory of the pilgrim's infancy; it is also identified with man's first residence on earth. With the accumulation of Edenic associations (those of the fountain are the most important), Machado's garden becomes the symbol of a lost paradise, a symbol of the loss of youth and innocence. The garden then is a sacred territory which is the goal of the pilgrim—a journey that becomes like the search for the lost origin, a return to the beginning"; *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

## THE REJECTION OF TOTAL ABSTINENCE

It is this feeling of his loss of innocence—"Soul, what have you done with your poor garden?"—that seems to cause the poet's longing to renew the purity of his spirit. However, as he explains in poem XXVII, this goal will only be possible if he avoids the desire for heroic adventures and chooses a simple life:

The afternoon will still  
give a golden response to your prayer,  
and perhaps the zenith of a new day  
will diminish your solitary shadow.  
Your goal is not a remote foreign country,  
but a humble refuge near the gentle river;  
your sandal will not tread the sleepy plains  
nor the distant sands of boredom.  
Very close by, wanderer, is the  
green and fertile holy land  
of your dreams; very nearby, pilgrim  
who scorns the shady path  
and the water of the inn on his way (OPP, p. 83).

In Machado's poetry the "afternoon"—the end of the day—also represents the end of life. So in this poem he tells the pilgrim that at the conclusion of this life, or perhaps in another life—"the zenith of a new day"—the soul will emerge from the shadows of its imperfect existence and reach its goal of spiritual fulfillment. But this ideal state—"the / green and fertile holy land"—will not be found at the end of a lengthy journey through exotic lands, but in the nearby environment of a normal life. The pilgrim is told that he will never reach his goal by choosing an extreme form of life—not on the "sleepy plains" nor the "distant sands of boredom"—but only when he accepts the simple comforts like "the shady path / and the water of the inn on his way."

As others have discovered before him, Machado recognizes that a state of purity will only be achieved after a balanced existence. This is what he affirms in poem XLI when he describes the steps that must be taken to make progress on the "fertile path" to spiritual perfection:

A springtime afternoon  
said to me:  
if you are looking for  
paths in flower on the earth  
kill your words  
and listen to your old soul.  
Let the same snow-white linen  
that you wear  
be your mourning dress,  
and your festival clothes.  
Cherish your happiness  
and cherish your sadness  
if you search for paths  
in flower on the earth.

I gave my answer  
to the springtime afternoon:  
you have revealed the secret  
that resides within my soul:  
I hate happiness  
because I hate sorrow.  
But before I tread  
your flowery path  
I would like to show you  
the death of my old soul (OPP, p. 94).

The springtime afternoon tells the poet he must abandon his egotism and recover the innocence of his primordial self, if he wants to reach his spiritual goal: "kill your words / and listen to your old soul." This original purity—"the same snow-white linen"—must be his clothing, in moments of happiness and of sorrow; he must accept both happiness and sadness if he wishes to enter the "flowery path" that leads to a purer existence. The poet answers that he has still not been able to resist the power of his desires, but before he reaches the end of this life he hopes to destroy the imperfections of his former egotistical self: "I would like to show you / the death of my old soul."<sup>8</sup>

#### THE STRUGGLE WITH DESIRE

Machado has expressed many of these same ideas in another early poem that was never included in his *Complete Works*. This poem has five parts, all of which I have placed on the following page so that they can be seen together. In it the poet repeats the wish to destroy his former self, and it is interesting that he also mentions the idea that life is a dream, after which he will awaken, which is then repeated in a later poem from "Proverbs and Songs":

After the living and the dreaming  
comes what is most important:  
waking up (CLXI, liii, OPP, p. 280):

Here are the five parts of this early poem:

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<sup>8</sup> Sánchez Barbudo feels that his poem is "rather enigmatic" because of the way it describes the poet's soul. As he explains: "What he says about his 'old soul' is strange, since it disobeys the 'afternoon.' What the former advised him to do was: 'kill your words / and listen to your old soul.' Does this mean, contrary to what he thinks the afternoon told him, that he believes what he must kill is really his 'old soul,' since he has been such a solitary person?"; Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, *Los poemas de Antonio Machado* (Barcelona: Lumen, 1969), pp. 160-161. I agree that the two references to Machado's soul seem to be contradictory, but I have tried to explain this apparent contradiction in the following way: it seems to me that the first mention of his "old soul" must be a reference to his original self that is part of the absolute being which is God, while the "old soul" which he wants to kill is a reference to his ego, the selfish personality that he has created during his past life. In both cases Machado uses the Spanish word "*viejo*" to describe the soul; *viejo* means "old," but it can also be translated as "former," which is the way I have interpreted the second reference to the "old soul."

I.

Oh, if I could only assassinate  
in my soul, when I awaken, that person  
who made my world while I was sleeping.

II.

If only love would take me  
where I might cry...  
Far away from my pride  
and alone with my sorrow.

III.

And if love gives me the fire and the aroma  
to ignite my soul,  
wouldn't the blaze be extinguished by the bitter juice  
contained in the murky glass of my dream?

IV.

Fly, fly toward the afternoon  
and press the bitter juice  
out of your heart, poet,  
and toss the murky glass into the shadowy air...

V.

Your soul will be a beacon  
in the blue chill of winter  
as it waits for the beloved springtime (OPP, pp. 33-34).

As he often does, in this poem the poet engages in a dialogue with himself. He speaks first of the "person"—the personality, or the "mask"—who dreams his existence in the world of matter. He knows he will someday awaken from the dream of life and, as in the previous poem he longs to destroy that part of his self which is full of imperfections. Or, if this is not possible, in the second part of the poem he describes his hope that love will help him shed his egotism and accept this painful destiny with tranquility. However, in the third part he expresses a doubt: he hopes that his soul will be purified in the flames of love, but he fears that the fire will be extinguished by the contents of the "murky glass" of his dream. Finally, in the last two parts of the poem he hears the voice of his intuitive consciousness, that part of his poetic self which belongs to the divine consciousness and which sometimes communicates to him "a few true words" (LXXXVIII, OPP, p. 129). This voice tells him to continue his journey toward the "afternoon" which is the end of life, and to renounce his desires—"and toss the murky glass into the shadowy air"—which have filled his life with suffering.<sup>9</sup> Then, when this is finally done, he will enter

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<sup>9</sup> As I have said in Chapter III, I do not believe that Machado's desire for death is one of total annihilation, but the desire to escape the imperfections that have plagued him in this life by allowing him to awaken at the start of a new one. Due to the fact that he sometimes expressed a rather melancholy attitude toward this life, most writers have not noticed the attitude of hope that he often associates with the idea of death. Remember, once again his short poem which states: "After the living and the dreaming / comes what is most important: / waking up" (OPP, 280).

"the blue chill of winter," which is a state of pure consciousness that transcends the world of the senses. There he can wait for "the beloved springtime" which represents the start of a new life.

The need to avoid an ascetic life is not a topic that often appears in Machado's later poems. Perhaps this is because he no longer needs to make a rigorous effort to control his desires because he has now reached the state of equilibrium that he tried in vain to reach during his youth. One indication of this change can be seen if we examine what the poet says about the "thirst" which represents his desires. In poem XXXIX from *Solitude, Galleries and Other Poems*, Machado says:

Pity the thirsty one  
who sees the water flow  
and says: the thirst which I feel  
is not calmed by drinking!... (OPP, p. 91).

Here Machado expresses a fundamental truth that is one of the important teachings of Buddhism, that our desire for things which we cannot retain, because of the transitory nature of life, is the true cause of our suffering.<sup>10</sup> But in *New Songs* it is evident that the poet has triumphed over desire when he speaks of his "mouth / that no longer feels thirst" (CLXIV, OPP, p. 290); and in another poem where he describes his bust that was sculptured by Emiliano Barral and he refers to "my mouth without thirst" (OPP, p. 298).

The renunciation of desire that is associated with the quest for spiritual perfection is also described in Machado's poem, "This Was My Dream":

...during his long journey the pilgrim  
pulled the reins in tight around his heart,  
so he could wait for the diamantine verse  
that was growing in the depths of his soul... (OPP, p. 292).

As I demonstrated in Chapter V, when I spoke of Machado's wish for a superior form of love, here the poet declares that he has controlled his desires so that he may achieve a purer existence—"the diamantine verse"—that had evolved within his soul.

Thus, we have seen that, although he has felt the attraction of an ascetic life, Machado has controlled his desires without reaching the extreme of total renunciation. In this way he endeavors to reach a state of equilibrium that permits him to cultivate an attitude of humility, which is the next step which the pilgrim must take as he follows the "middle path" that leads to spiritual perfection.

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<sup>10</sup> What Machado says here is in complete agreement with the teaching of the Buddha regarding what has been called "The Four Noble Truths," which are briefly stated below:

- 1) Life is full of suffering.
- 2) Suffering is caused by the desire for the things of this life which are basically impermanent.
- 3) To avoid suffering we must free ourselves from desire through a state of detachment which leads to Nirvana.
- 4) Nirvana is achieved by following the Eight-Fold Path: eight modes of conduct which lead to enlightenment.

## 2. A HUMBLE LIFE

### EGOTISM

One of the main obstacles to the soul's purification is egotism, the tendency of the self act only within the narrow confines of its own selfish will. How can the soul participate in the divine unity if it is controlled by self-centered desires? We have already seen that both extreme sensuality and rigorous abstinence are too self-centered. The only way to combat this defect, then, is to live a life of gentle humility. But to be humble does not mean, as many have mistakenly thought, to despise the ego, which exaggerates the importance of our self. According to the pantheistic view of reality, each individual self is part of God and should be cherished for its divine nature; it is neither more nor less important than any other aspect of the divine being. That is why we have heard the Christ say: "Love God above all things, and love your neighbor as yourself." To love God is to love all things, and humility allows us to avoid egotism and open ourselves to love, all of which has been affirmed by our poet.

In "Proverbs and Songs," for example, there are several poems where Machado gives advice to those who have an exaggerated opinion of their self-importance:

All narcissism  
is an ugly vice  
and an old one at that (OPP, p. 271).

Don't try to trace your outline  
or worry about your profile;  
those things are only on the outside (OPP, p. 273).

Singer, leave  
the applause and the cheers  
for others (OPP, p. 275).

And while he advises against excessive pride, Machado also reveals his own modesty when he describes himself as "this humble teacher / of a rural institute" (OPP, p. 198)<sup>11</sup> and when he insists that he is not affected by the flattery of others:

I never strived for glory  
nor wished to leave in others  
the memory of my song... (CXXXVI, 1, OPP, p. 212).

José Machado tells us that his brother always tried to avoid all forms of public approval because "he felt a profound aversion for these frequent enthusiastic manifestations. He felt that in reality they were only a way, perhaps subconscious, of burying little by little all true values."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Francisco Vega Díaz quotes the poet Gerardo Diego who says that Machado was "humility itself, to a touching degree"; Op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> José Machado, Op. cit., p. 13.



The poet himself expressed this same disdain for public approval in a poem from *The Complementary Ones*:

Cheer-leaders, Polacks, keep  
your applause, tobacco and honors  
for your own gladiators,  
and leave me my solitude.  
Don't applaud me. When the echo  
of your applause resounds  
I begin to feel so hollow  
that only your applause... fills me.<sup>13</sup>

#### HUMILITY WHICH IS STRENGTH

Another poem that reveals Machado's sense of modest humility is poem LXXXIII in which he personifies a guitar so that it can represent the soul of every man:

Guitar of the inn that today plays a dance,  
tomorrow a love song,  
depending on whoever comes to pluck  
the dusty strings.  
Guitar of the road-side inn,  
you were never, and never will be a poet.  
You are a soul who shares its harmony  
with other passing souls...  
And the traveler who hears you  
always dreams of a song from his own land (OPP126).

This old musical instrument can also be seen as an externalization of the poet himself, a generous singer who offers his simple music to all those he encounters on his path through life. And because he does not present himself as a grand virtuoso who wraps himself in his egotism, all those who hear him can easily identify with his profoundly human song.

However, the fact that Machado was modest and humble does not mean that his character was weak, nor that others could easily impose their will upon him. In order to maintain the "mean" of a well-balanced life, this humility must be compensated by strength of will. José Machado has also described this aspect of his brother's character: "Although he may have seemed on many occasions to have a weak character, this was only apparent, since in the things that mattered he never ceased to accomplish what he proposed by making whatever effort was necessary. In fact, there were times when he showed such an extraordinary effort that it was astounding. He was never dominated by anything, or by anyone. On the contrary, he constantly influenced his intimate acquaintances—without intending to—who naturally listened to him like an oracle" (José Machado, p. 20). This is the same modest strength which the poet admires in the Castilian oak trees:

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<sup>13</sup> *Los complementarios*, edited by Manuel Alvar (Madrid: Cátedra, 1980), p. 301.

What is it about you,  
rural oak tree,  
.....  
without elegant stature or pride,  
with your effortless vigor  
and your humility which is strength?..." (OPP, p. 146).

As he explains in one of his letters to Unamuno, Machado feels that a humble life, like an ascetic one, has a religious purpose: "Humility is a Christian sentiment, because the love which Christ taught is a love without pride and without pleasure in ourselves nor in our work" (OPP, p. 1025). For this reason, humility which is neither weakness nor an extreme renunciation can also be a "middle path" which leads to spiritual purification, as he describes it in poem XXVI:

O figures in the churchyard, every day  
more humble and remote:  
ragged beggars  
on the marble steps;  
unfortunates anointed  
with sacred eternities,  
hands extended from old cloaks  
and from torn capes!  
Did an obscure vision  
of a luminous and cold morning  
come to you  
during the more peaceful hours?...  
Against the black tunic, the hand  
was a white rose... (OPP, pp. 82-83).

Like the grotesque figure of the quixotic idealist in the previous chapter, these ragged supplicants also dream of a luminous new beginning. The white hand of the humble beggar stands out against the black tunic like a pure flower that emerges from the dark earth, or a white butterfly that is reborn from the dark cocoon of its former suffering.

### **3. A LIFE OF SOLITUDE**

An important part of the humble and ascetic life of our poet is his desire for solitude. Machado's tendency to isolate himself during his solitary meditations was witnessed by his brother José who said that "he would become deeply absorbed, looking into a distance that was no longer of this world. Then, only the presence of his body would show that he was actually there." His brother also said that during these "frequent moments of abstraction" the poet would often "murmur" in a low voice, and he added that "in these moments he lacked only the image of a halo to make it seem that he was a saint who was praying" (José Machado, p. 32).

And what was it that led Machado to take refuge in this solitary world? Rosario Rexach has stated that "it was apparently the tragic destiny that seemed to preside over the life of the poet, and which condemned him to a life of solitude that was more than one

might normally expect."<sup>14</sup> This is undoubtedly true in some respects; however, Machado was not *always* attracted to a solitary life, as we will see in what follows. And when this does occur, the poet is not trying to flee from a tragic destiny, because it was in moments of solitude when he listened to the voice of his intuition which sometimes helped him understand the mystery of life and death. He has described this experience on more than one occasion: for example, in his poem "Twilight" from the first edition of *Solitude*, he refers to this when he writes: "Solitude, the muse that reveals to my soul, / in beautiful syllables, the mystery, / like the notes from a hidden psalter..." (OPP, p. 39); and, then, in the fourth sonnet from "Dream Dialogues," he writes again: "Oh, solitude, my only companion, / oh, muse of the miracle that gave words / to my voice which I never asked for!..." (OPP, 306). And it is also during a moment of solitude when Machado listens "at the edge of a great silence" (OPP, p. 112) which is not really silent, since it tells him things that only his inner awareness can perceive.

As those who have experienced a state of mystical consciousness have told us, in these moments one can receive certain intuitive impressions that give us an answer to our fundamental questions about the meaning of life. This is undoubtedly what Machado means when he writes the following words from his "Prologue" to the 1917 edition of *Solitude*: "I thought that man is able to distinguish some words of an intimate monologue by listening to the living voice of the inert echoes; and that looking within he can also discover vital concepts, or universal sentiments" (OPP, p. 51). With this he seems to refer to an experience like the one he describes in poem XXIII when he writes about the sensations that appear in his consciousness during a moment of solitary meditation:

In the stark landscape of my path  
the beautiful hour blossoms,  
a solitary hawthorn tree  
in the shady hollow of the humble valley.  
The true psalm  
of delicate voice that today repeats  
in my heart and on my lips  
the fragile and trembling word.  
My old seas are dormant;  
the sonorous foam has subsided  
on the sterile beach. The storm  
moves far away in the darkening cloud.  
The sky is peaceful once again;  
a warm breeze spreads aromas  
again over the earth, and there,  
in the blessed solitude, is your shadow (OPP, p. 81).

As he stops to meditate in the intimacy of his lonely path, the poet feels an alteration in his consciousness: "the beautiful hour blossoms." Then, in this state of inner peace he experiences a recurrence of the divine presence, an experience that calms the storm of his sterile existence and lets his trembling voice repeat the delicate words of a "true psalm." Here we have an example of what José Machado describes when he tells us that he often heard the voice of his brother "murmur" during his frequent abstractions. And, as his

brother reiterates when he comments on the poem we have just quoted, the words which the poet murmurs are "words that are heard in the silence of the most intimate solitude in which God appears, and to which could also be applied the words which say: 'And in the blessed solitude your shadow appears'" (José Machado, p. 44).

#### 4. A LIFE OF LOVE

##### THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

The fact that Machado was attracted by moments of solitude does not mean that he was indifferent to other people, as these words from his autobiography clearly show: "I am not very sociable, but I feel great affection for other people."<sup>14</sup> In order to follow the "middle path" which leads to a purer form of existence, he recognized that one must balance these moments of solitude with others of human companionship, and if in these moments of solitary contemplation he was able to achieve some understanding of the enigma of life, he must also share the results of this experience with others. This is the idea which he expresses in one of his early letters to Unamuno:

But today, after meditating on it for a long time, I have arrived at an affirmation: all our efforts must be directed toward the light, toward consciousness. This is the idea which ought to unite us all... We must not create a separate world in which we enjoy a false and egotistical contemplation of ourselves; we must not run away from things in order to create a better life for ourselves that is sterile for others.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that this was important for the poet because he repeated this same concept in the *Apocryphal Songbook* when he declared that isolation does not permit man to carry out his most important task in life:

Abel Martín does not believe that spirit progresses one iota on the road to its perfection nor does it achieve what is essential through isolation or elimination of the world of the senses (OPP, p. 331).

And he goes on to echo the words of the Buddha when he affirms the need to balance a life of asceticism with an attitude of love for others:

for Abel Martín an ascetic life which tries to achieve moral perfection in a vacuum, or by removing vital representations, is not a path that leads anywhere. The *ethos* is not purified, but rather impoverished by the elimination of the *pathos*, and although a poet must know how to distinguish between them, his mission is to reintegrate both in that zone of consciousness where they are inseparable (OPP, p. 331).

The need to share ourselves with others is also expressed in Machado's poetry. In *Solitude, Galleries and Other Poems* he has written:

The coin you hold in your hand  
perhaps should be kept;  
the coin of your soul  
is lost, if it is not given away (LVI, ii, OPP, p. 110).

And in "Proverbs and Songs" from *New Songs* he repeats the same idea:

Pay attention:  
a solitary heart  
is not a heart (CLXI, lxvi, OPP, p. 282).

## LOVING DETACHMENT

Asceticism which is not total abstinence, humility which is strength, a solitary life which is balanced by love—these are the steps which Machado has taken in order to achieve the attitude of loving detachment which is expressed in the following poem:

Harvest the mallow,  
and don't eat it,  
said Pythagoras.  
Respond to a hatchet blow  
—said the Buddha, and the Christ!—  
with your aroma, like sandalwood.  
It's good to remember  
the old sayings,  
that will be heard again (OPP, lxv, OPP, p. 282).

Help nature to complete its creative task, but do it without personal gain; respond to violence with peace and beauty and, if wounded, turn the other cheek with love; be a loving person, in short, and don't let yourself be carried away by passions—all this is suggested by this beautiful little poem.

The previous poem is from *New Songs*, but in order to show that the attitude of loving detachment has always been present in Machado's thought, we can also mention poem XVIII, entitled "The Poet," in which Machado seems to be speaking of himself. The poem begins with a description of a person who fears that death may be the end of his identity as an individual:

He knows that a powerful God  
is playing games of death with the immortal substance  
like a barbarous child. He thinks  
that he must fall like a branch that floats in the water,  
only to disappear, a drop  
of the sea, in the immense sea... (OPP, p. 77).

We know that Machado does not doubt the permanence of the soul—it is composed of an "immortal substance"—but he fears that a wrathful God may condemn him to an impersonal eternity. So he searches for consolation in his intuitive consciousness where he finds a "divine truth" that calms his fears:

In dreams he heard the sound of a divine word;  
in dreams he was shown the crude diamantine law,  
without hate or love, and the cold  
breath of forgetfulness over the sands of tedium.  
Under the palms of the oasis he saw the  
good water flow from the sand;  
and he drank among the sweet gazelles  
and the fierce carnivorous animals...

As I have said earlier, Machado's dreaming is often synonymous with the use of intuition, and here the poet's non-rational consciousness rises above the limits of the physical world and is illuminated by the revelation of the divine *logos*. Feeling the cold light of this extra-personal Truth helps him "forget" his human passions—"without love or hate"—and this pure awareness becomes a paradisiacal "oasis" where he participates in the harmony linking the "sweet gazelles" with the "fierce carnivorous animals." As he drinks the pristine waters from the fountain of life—"the good water"—he identifies with the pain of all those who suffer:

And he knew all the thirst and pain that is life.  
And he felt compassion for the deer and for the hunter,  
for the robber and the victim,  
for the frantic bird  
and the bloodthirsty falcon...

Because he understands the secret of universal harmony, and because he has renounced all egotism, the poet is able to experience a state of loving detachment which helps him feel compassion for all living things, for the weak as well as the strong. He understands with Ecclesiastes—and with Buddha—that life is an illusion which causes suffering for the person who clings to things that do not last:

With the bitter sage he said: Vanity of vanities,  
all is black vanity;...

But beyond the illusory world of physical existence is a "spiritual reality" whose secret is revealed in moments of solitude:

and he heard another voice exclaim: soul of my solitudes,  
only you, light shining in my heart, are true (OPP, p. 77).

## FORGETFULNESS

In Chapter III, we saw how Machado used the concept of forgetfulness to describe the attitude of a person who, like Abel Martín in the moment before his death, was able to renounce his desires. We have now seen that, many years before the creation of his apocryphal philosophers, Machado expressed this same concept in poem XVIII. Because of this, I want to reexamine the concept of "forgetfulness" in order to see its relationship to the attitude of loving detachment which we have just examined in this chapter.

In the *Apocryphal Songbook*, and in his later poems, Machado describes an attitude of "forgetfulness" that allows him to discard the feeling of sensual attraction in order to experience a superior form of love. This is the explanation for the paradoxical lines of "Other Songs to Guiomar": "In order to love you, I forget you" and "in love, forgetfulness adds the spice." Because of his renunciation of worldly things, the poet is able to feel an attitude of loving detachment which helps him advance more quickly on the path of his spiritual evolution.

And now we can compare what Machado says about "forgetfulness" in poem XVIII with what he said in the final lines of "Other Songs to Guiomar." As I repeat these

lines from the earlier poem, I will remind the reader once again that "dreaming" is used to represent a state of intuitive consciousness:

In dreams he heard the sound of a divine word;  
in dreams he was shown the unfinished diamantine law,  
without hate or love, and the cold  
breath of forgetfulness over the sands of tedium.  
Under the palms of the oasis he saw the  
good water flow from the sand... (OPP, p. 77).

Then, in "Other Songs to Guiomar" Machado has written:

Under the blue forgetfulness the sacred waters  
chant neither your name nor mine.  
The clear metal has no trace of  
the murky slag; the poet's verse  
holds the desire for love that engendered it,  
like a diamond with no memory  
—a cold diamond—holds the earth's fire  
transformed into light, into a bright jewel... (OPP, pp. 373-374.)

In both poems the poet uses the word "cold," not to mean an absence of life, but rather an absence of passion and desire. The image of flowing water which appears in both poems suggests that in a moment of intuitive consciousness the poet recalls his origin in the divine fountain of life. In each poem there is also a reference to a diamond—in poem XVIII it is the "diamantine law" and in "Other Songs..." it is the "cold diamond"—whose brilliance indicates the existence of a purer form of life. Finally, the poet describes a feeling of detachment which helps him renew his contact with the divine consciousness; in poem XVIII he listens to "the sound of a divine word" and in "Other Songs..." his soul has been "transformed into light, into a bright jewel." As Machado affirms in the final section of "Other Songs to Guiomar," it is "the creative hand of forgetfulness"—the capacity to cleanse his consciousness of all egotistical desires—which allows him to feel a love that is pure.

And these are not the only poems of Machado where the idea of forgetfulness is associated with an absence of desire. In "Abel Martín's Final Lamentations" (CLXIX), the poet also asks for strength to "forget" the desires that have made him suffer:

Oh, to rest in the blue light of day  
like the eagle rests in the wind,  
far above the cold earth,  
sure of his wings and of his breath!  
From you, nature, I ask for  
august confidence and peace,  
my release from fear and from hope,  
a grain of happiness, a sea of forgetfulness... (OPP, p. 358)

Once again forgetfulness is associated with a feeling of coldness and then with the color blue, which has also appeared in several other poems we have discussed in this chapter. For example, in "Oh, if I could only assassinate..." which we have examined in an earlier

section of the present chapter, there is no mention of forgetfulness, but after the poet expresses the wish to eliminate his emotions, a similar state of consciousness is described when both the color blue and a sensation of coldness are mentioned in the final section of the poem:

Your soul will be a beacon  
in the blue chill of winter... (OPP, pp. 33).

In the first part of "Other Songs to Guiomar," the "cold diamond" of divine love appears "under the blue forgetfulness," and in the final part of this same poem the purified soul is described as a "blue dragonfly." Then, in "Abel Martín's Final Lamentations" the poet hopes to "rest in the blue light of day" like the eagle that flies over the "cold earth," before his soul is lost in "a sea of forgetfulness."

Finally, in the poem, "The Death of Abel Martín" (CLXXV), the poet hopes to reach a state of nothingness—in this context, a synonym of forgetfulness—when he asks God to free him from all his desires:

Before I reach—if I reach it—the Day,  
the uncreated light which sees,  
choke out my selfish whining,  
Lord, with the essence of your Nothingness... (OPP, p. 376).

Abel Martín has not yet arrived at the beginning of the new Day, but Juan de Mairena predicts that this will happen since his teacher seemed to die with the calm tranquility of one who has purged himself of all human passions, or as he puts it: "he must have finally been saved, judging by his final gesture, which was that of a person who accepts death calmly without whining or bellyaching" (OPP, p. 494).

\* \* \* \* \*

So this is what Machado says that we must do in order to follow the "middle path" and live in harmony with the divine will: reject desire without denying human needs; adopt an attitude of humility which is also one of strength; search for truth in a state of solitude which does not isolate us from other human beings; and feel love for others without clinging to selfish passions. In this way we are able to triumph over the limits of our human condition and be faithful not only to the precepts of Buddhism, but also to the teaching of Christ, who has told us: "He who sacrifices his self for my sake, will find it" (Matthew X, 39).

#### THE "EIGHT-FOLD PATH" OF JUAN DE MAIRENA

After considering all these ideas of Machado, a skeptical reader may still ask: but what value do these things have for my struggle with the complexities of every-day life? In conclusion, then, I offer these excerpts from an essay on pacifism by Juan de Mairena which can serve as an answer to this question from our skeptical reader. In them Mairena



offers eight pieces of advice to his students about the way they should try to live. He begins by saying:

I am teaching you, or I am trying to teach you, to contemplate. "But what?" you ask me. The heavens, the stars, the sea and the country, the ideas themselves, and the actions of men...

And in order to benefit from a contemplative life, one must also learn to meditate:

I am teaching you, or trying to teach you, to meditate on all things you have contemplated, and on your meditations themselves...

Then, since he doesn't want his students to become isolated during their contemplation or their meditation, he urges them to live a life of balanced activity:

I am teaching you, or trying to teach you, to work without shirking at the most difficult jobs, and to avoid the worker's boasting, or the superstitions about work...

While speaking about Greek and Oriental philosophy, Mairena gives us a hint about the reason these things had a very important place in Machado's thought:

I am teaching, or trying to teach you, a dear friends, a love for the philosophy of the ancient Greeks who were men of mental agility which we seldom see today, and the respect for Oriental wisdom, which is much more profound and has a much broader metaphysical scope than ours...

In a poem from *Solitude* we have seen that Machado wanted to "assassinate" that part of his self that wants to participate in what he has called "the Bacchanalia of life." In a later poem, he speaks of his "mouth / that no longer feels thirst." Now Mairena urges them to follow the same "middle path" when he tells his students that they should renounce unnecessary things without reaching an extreme of self-deprivation:

I am teaching you, or trying to teach you, to renounce three quarters of the things you consider necessary. And not for the pleasure of submitting yourselves to ascetic activities or to privations for which you will be rewarded in some future paradise, but so that you will learn for yourselves how much more limited is the scope of what is necessary than what we have thought, and how much broader, therefore, is that of human freedom, and in what sense it can be affirmed that the greatness of man can be measured by his capacity for renunciation...

And to the skeptics who cannot accept as an article of faith the validity of transcendental concepts, he advocates another "middle path" which is to doubt their own doubts, by using what he calls an "integral doubt":

I am teaching you, or trying to teach you, to doubt everything: what is human and what is divine, without leaving out your own existence as an object of doubt... I am teaching you a sincere doubt that is not methodical, therefore, because if I had a method I would have a path that leads to the truth and my doubt would be pure simulation. I am teaching you an integral doubt that cannot exclude itself or avoid being converted into an object of doubt, with which I am indicating to you the only possible way of escaping the blind alley of your skepticism...

Then, so that renunciation and doubt will not lead to a state of indifference, and to create in them an attitude of loving detachment, he urges his students to love all things:

I am teaching you, or trying to teach you—finally—to love your neighbor and the distant person, the similar and the different, with a love that is a little greater than the one you feel for yourselves, which might be insufficient...

And similar to the Eight-fold Path that the Buddha gave those who aspire to reach a state of Nirvana, these seven points—contemplative life, meditation, a work-ethic, respect for Greek philosophy and Oriental wisdom, renunciation, integral doubt, and love—all help prepare us for the eighth, which is peace:

Contrary to the well-known Latin axiom, I am teaching you: *if you wish for peace, prepare yourself to live in peace with everyone* (OPP, pp. 607-609).

In this way our spiritual pilgrimage leads us to a state of peace, the inner peace that the "very best person" experiences when he finally resolves the "question of measure." And as we conclude this study of Machado's religious and philosophical thought, I want to say with Juan de Mairena:

Peace to the men of good will! (OPP, p. 607).

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