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Summary

The present study intends to deepen our view of the relationship between esotericism and *modernismo* in the work of two of the most representative writers of that movement, a relationship that former research has well established. The work of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and of the Spaniard Antonio Machado has been analyzed against the background of the esoteric legacy, mainly the traditionalist (or perennialist) esoteric school of thought. Thus this is not as much a research of particular influences -which are also partially recalled and traced- as an inquiry in the field of comparative philosophy and literature.

The research has been conducted along two main conceptual coordinates: the first one which makes an heuristic distinction between what I call essential esotericism and cultural esotericism. And the second one which runs along the main themes into which this study is divided: epistemology, metaphysics and cosmology, anthropology, theory of love and esthetics.

The distinction between essential esotericism and cultural esotericism has been postulated using a conceptual framework lend from the perennialist or traditionalist school of esotericism, but not exclusively. The history of ideas has been another source of valuable analytical tools, especially the work of Antoine Faivre and his followers. Essential or cultural esotericism are concepts that have here a heuristic value and are qualifications not pretending of strict agreement with the complex phenomenon of esotericism. The distinction is therefore hypothetical and is to be seen as a conceptual matrix more than as an accurate account of this field of study. In short the distinction is based in the idea that there exists a kernel or the so called *philosophia perennis* which is the essence of the kind of knowledge that esotericism represents, but of an intrinsic ineffable nature. The external forms of esotericism allude or refer to this "maximum common denominator" (as Aldous Huxley called it in his famous book *The Perennial Philosophy*) in different degrees. The idea is coupled thus with the believe that certain manifestations are closer to this essence than others.

This conceptual framework postulates further not a sharp distinction but an spectrum, along which one can place the systems, ideas, works of art or whatever can be labeled as esoteric on an initially intuitive way. On the extreme closer to the kernel of the spectrum, one can place the works of art or other manifestations one has all reasons to believe are emanating from direct personal experience of higher degrees of reality. The work of the great mystics like San Juan de la Cruz or Ibn 'Arabi can be a good example in this respect. Further in the spectrum one can place the work of esoteric schools like the traditionalist itself, which are inspired almost entirely on these direct manifestations of personal experience and, one can presume, in a certain degree of personal experience. The traditionalist school tries precisely to lay bare the essential metaphysical principles common to all religious way of knowledge, what represents the theoretical -but always provisional- framework of esotericism. On the other extreme of the spectrum –the farthest away from the centrum-, one can place the manifestations which one has all reasons to believe are derivative and mainly obtained by cultural transmission, not through personal experience of the levels of reality alluded. Many works belonging to what has been called the New Age can be an example of this side of the spectrum. This categorization is not without theoretical problems, of course, but a comparison of the work of the great mystics or esoteric writers with that of the culturally influenced ones, cannot but convince the reader that they definitively have another quality. The idea is of the spectrum is analogous to the symbolization of the metaphysics of esotericism by concentric circles in which the Centrum represents the Absolute (or in hermeneutics, the inner truth) and the concentric circles the different degrees of reality (or meaning). The outer periphery is the visible and material world. Nevertheless, it is an interpretative and hypothetical matter and I don't pretend in this work to give detailed argumentative prove of its validity. Finally, we assume that what can be recognized as the inner truth of esotericism reveals universal traits of the human spirit, and in this sense it is possible and even expected that the authors considered may manifest this inner truth and show thus resemblances with the esoteric legacy in different degrees.

This work has concentrated itself on what I believe to be the essential side of the spectrum. This notion of esotericism is more extensive compared with the ones used in the study of influences, limited to proved the cultural presence of certain esoteric ideas in the work of the writers considered, and extends to the field of comparative religion, one of the most important fields of inquiry of the traditionalist school of esotericism. So I have been able to resort to the mystical aspect of the principal religions as well, besides the esoteric legacy as we understand it normally.

With this conceptual framework I have reached the following results:

- The epistemology which emerges of our interpretation is concerned mainly with the subjects of the epistemological status of the believe, certain form of skepticism, the syncretic nature of the work of our writers and what we may call the ontonoetic way of knowledge –where knowledge is in function of being-, which have been called differently as *gnosis*, sapiential knowledge, *sophia*, visionary experience or knowledge of the heart. In general, we have examined the notion that our system of beliefs -and its correlative epistemological systems, as our emotional conditionings- forms an interpretative filter which is at the same time useful in our interaction with common reality and an obstacle to superior kinds of knowledge. Detachment from this hermeneutic web is thus necessary in order to allow other organs of cognition in the human being to begin to work. Scepticism is a tool in this process of detachment, in so far as it loosens the grip of our hermeneutical filters and prevents the mind from exclusive adherence to a belief system. But the scepticism referred to in this context is not the same as the scepticism that denies all forms of knowledge, but a liberating one, that calls for a more direct mode of knowledge. It is exercised therefore mainly on the external level of working of the mind, and reveals the relativity of all formal aspects of reality, including rationality and language. In this respect, Darío and Machado assign a privileged status to the knowledge of the heart and deem accordingly the rational knowledge as limited and subordinated. Following in the romantic tradition –it is said that *modernismo* is in a way the Spanish-American romanticism-, both associate sometimes the reason with death, but each have his own modulation in this consideration. Darío considers, for instance, the utilitarist or positivistic rationality of his times as a form of degradation of the spirit. Machado assigns yet a propedeutic function to rationality, permitting the cognitive distance without which the human being would be immersed in the indistinct flux of sensoriality, but he too despises the utilitarist reason. The knowledge of the heart - and its related family of concepts, as feeling, intuition, emotion, sentiment, etc.- stand out as the way to follow, in life and in poetry. The interdependent aspects of cognitive distance and knowledge of the heart are to be found in the esoteric legacy. The liberation of the hermeneutic filter opens up the perception of the inner self and allows the visionary experience, the encounter of the uncreated light. This resulting cognitive attitude is allied also with faith, the acknowledgment of the necessity of certain traditional frameworks. Truth is to be found in the narrow path that goes between faith and scepticism. Both Darío and Machado are examples of this attitude. Both never abandon completely their Christianity, but are extremely critic about it, and they search at the same time for the common ground with other traditions and paths of knowledge. Their syncretism, based on the idea of a *philosophia perennis*, more obvious in Darío than in Machado, is based in this cognitive attitude.
- As said above, certain formal framework is necessary. This can take the form of a metaphysics to which the knowledge of the heart responds according to the cultural environment and the specific situation. The details of that metaphysics are dependent on factors of time, culture and place. In Darío and Machado one can recognize a metaphysical foundation -Machado links good poetry to metaphysics expressly- which coincides in essential points to the *philosophia perennis* of esotericism. Their metaphysic is less a doctrinal exposition than an harmonization of intuitions. Both attempt to equilibrate in their work the two tendencies recognized by Lovejoy as typical of our platonic cultural heritage: the *other-worldliness* and the *this-worldliness*. In terms of the traditionalist school: the simultaneous existential discontinuity of the beings in relation with the Absolute and their essential continuity in relation with the Absolute. Or incomparability and similitude (Ibn 'Arabi) or transcendence and immanence of the Principle. The metaphysic of both authors has been analyzed under the light of this doctrine of the transcendental unity of being. One of the consequences of this analysis is to exclude the interpretation of their work as pantheistic. The relationship between unity and multiplicity is more complex than what pantheism proposes and doesn't fit well with the work of our authors. Besides, I have chosen two cosmological frameworks to analyze their work, what I call architectural scheme of the universe and the dynamic scheme. The first refers to the hierarchical nature of the cosmos, the second to the circular metaphysical journey that all beings fulfill, from Unity to multiplicity and from multiplicity to Unity. These frameworks are recognizable in different ways in Darío and Machado, in both mainly embedded in his poetry and in the latter even presented as an apocryphal cosmology centered on the idea of a divine Substance and of the idea of a nothingness –linked with rationality- that is a gift from God to men so that knowledge itself is possible, and even -as in the well known esoteric and religious conception- God's knowledge of Himself, in a way referring to the dynamic cosmology delineated in our interpretation. In short, their metaphysic have been proposed as coinciding in the main lines with that of the essential esotericism.
- Both writers can be labeled as humanists, but not for the reasons this attribution usually evokes. They find themselves in the antipodes of the humanist postures which privilege reason and logic as defining characteristics of the evolution of man and which oppose the human being with nature, assigning to the human being the domination

over the universe. They ascribe value to human being not as much as a rational being but as a spiritual being. I have made extensive use of the esoteric notion of Universal Man, which resumes this type of humanism. In this perspective, the archetype of the Universal Man is the archetype of man and universe alike. The anthropology that derives from this perspective supposes the existence of levels of being in the structure of man, as there are levels of being in the universe (the well known correspondence between Macrocosm en Microcosm): the external personality is distinguished from the inner or essential being, in contact with the Absolute, which is referred to in many ways in the esoteric or religious literature. The writers considered allude to this distinction also in different ways, using words like soul, heart, spirit, divine spark, and so on. I contend that this anthropology operates in their consideration of the different fields of expression of man's nature, whether it be esthetics or politics. In an important sense, one can say that their task has been, as it was for related literary movements, like romanticism, the superation of the abyss in which humanity had fallen that separates it from the world and nature, or, using correlative notions, the reunification of subject and object, or soul and body, a unity that is based on the common essence -Universal Man- of both man and world. This quest for unity is not fulfilled with the use of reason or logic thinking, but with the visionary power of the poet, revealer of secret analogies and correspondences (Darío) or with the poetic way of thinking, related with the light of the heart which leads to the integral consciousness (Machado). Ultimately, the divine origin of man is asserted by both and gives its fundament to their spiritual humanism.

- Love has a metaphysical and mystical nature, on all levels, from the cosmic to the human. It is in our writers not only the force that holds the world together, as *circuitus spiritualis*, but the main impulse towards knowledge and liberation of the soul. The beings journey toward Unity -as in the neoplatonic circle- has its driving force in love. Accordingly, the action of love is to be found on any area of human endeavor, in family relationships, in the sexual impulse, in friendship and politics. In both poets, the privileged instance of love in their symbolic imagery is that of the love between man and woman, but in Machado the fraternal relationship -based on the common essence and common Father of human beings- occupies a significant place. The Beloved, as archetype, plays a significant role in both writers and the love union is a divine and mystical one, reflection of the Unity of the universe and the Absolute. Love has in both an esoteric quality insofar as it emerges and refers to the innermost essence of man, which coincides with the essence of the universe. In this sense, love has an ineffable quality which admits infinite levels of existence and, therefore, of symbolic usage.
- Art has also a metaphysical nature. The esthetic of these writers lends many of its principles from this fact and coincides in various points with esotericism. Both writers partake of the poetics of symbolism, in the sense that the work of art should give sensorial form to the Idea. The Idea that should be expressed through different poetical techniques -captured by analogy and correspondence, alluded to by the disposition in the poem of emotionally charged elements, suggested through selected images and symbolic instances, somewhat exquisite and baroque in Darío or austere and essential in Machado- is far from conceptual. This Idea is better linked with the manifestation of the Absolute in living archetypes and the nature of deep emotions and sentiments -both ineffable and mysterious, ultimately, only alluded to by words and, in general, by symbols- than with logic abstractions. The Absolute manifests itself through hierarchical orders of reality, whose correspondences and analogies with our world can be captured indirectly by art. In this respect, I have made use of the notion of the Imaginal World and the Imaginal, coined by Henry Corbin for his studies of Islamic mysticism, notion intimately linked with symbolism. Without pretending that Darío and Machado created imaginal works of art in the strict sense meant by Corbin –privilege of advanced mystics-, this notion has allowed us to understand better their symbolism and their frequent poetic transpositions (a notion which we take, somewhat adapted for our purposes, from the traditionalist René Guénon) to other levels of reality which is proper of the creative imagination of the mystic kind. This transposition is more extroverted in Darío and more introverted in Machado, to use the terminology of W.T. Stace applied to mysticism in general.
- Even though the poetic resources of Darío and Machado differ in important respects, both are driven by a similar intention to renovate the poetic and artistic perception, correlative to a purest perception of reality. Formal renovation corresponds to this desire to liberate themselves from old, and mostly rusty or dysfunctional, cognitive structures in order to gain access to a new sensibility. Darío resorts to more sumptuous poetic devices, while Machado characterizes itself by a concentrated emotivity. But both make use of the sensorial spirituality -or spiritual sensoriality- of the symbolic, in accordance with the principles of essential esotericism. Their sustained appeal to feeling and emotion as the nutrients and effects of poetry might mislead the interpretation of their work as linked with the esoteric legacy, inasmuch as emotion and feeling are considered secondary to direct intellective perception

and even obstructive of this in esotericism, but I propose that their understanding of feeling and emotion goes beyond this external level of meaning and connects them with deep perception of reality. It is in this sense that Machado condemns poetry when at the service of abstract notions and logic, not to advocate superficial emotion but intuition and insight, and when Darío speaks of the music of the ideas he has in mind rather hidden correspondences and archetypes than concepts.

- Darío and Machado assign a privileged status to poetry and to the poet itself. A true poet -as all artists, in general- must posses a metaphysic, which amounts to a deep insight into reality, a reality that transcends the sensorial world and extends to the Absolute. The poems are intimations of this metaphysics. The notion of the poet as "an argonaut of dreams" (Darío) corresponds with related notions of esotericism as the superior man, the shaman, the inspired visionary and many other of this kind.
- Darío and Machado have a high regard for popular and traditional forms of art in general. The influence of this type of literature upon Darío is reportedly important and Machado lends even many of his poetic principles from his appreciation of folklore. This appreciation stems from the intuition that this kind of literature contains more truth than is apparent. Literary forms like fairy tales, legends or myths can be seen also as forms of transposition to another imaginal order of reality, through their symbolic systems and inner structure: the secret relationships of reality on different levels are captured in a way that the rational eye cannot grasp by itself. In this respect, certain branches of esotericism consider these forms of literature the only way in human terms to convey deep metaphysical truths and make them experienciable. In this sense they are irreplaceable. This viewpoint connects Darío and Machado with the esoteric legacy, each with his own emphasis: Darío more in relation with myths or fairy tales and Machado with the sapiential and proverbial side of this literature.

The conclusions that I have reached can be summarized by saying that one of the fundamental motivations of our writers has undoubtedly been what can be called the defense of the spirit against the materialism and utilitarism of their times. This constitutes a metaphysical defense, not only a confrontation of opinions. In this respect, they hold similar stands as esotericism. Theirs has been an heroic task, in a time where almost everything conspired against it. Their work, read from the metaphysical and esoteric perspective used in this study, reminds us that there is more than what our eyes can see, and definitely more under the sun and beyond it than what we can, imprisoned in our cognitive barriers, imagine or understand. More even than literature or philosophy, relative forms also and prone to the degenerative diseases of the modern era and, in fact, of every formal element in the earthly environment. They remind us every human being that feels and perceives deeply, is entitled to say what he or she has to say about the existence, our essential origin and our ultimate destiny. An they remind us, of course, that wherever there is real art, real poetry, there also will speak the Spirit, transcendent and immanent at the same time, the interior and cosmic essence which is the fundamental reason of every esotericism and of all creative endeavor.