

Antonio Machado And The Royal Art: Fact And Fiction

The press release in 2001 to the effect that Ian Gibson was to devote himself over the following five years to the writing of a biography of Antonio Machado was good news for all *Machadistas* who frequently lament the absence of a solid, reliable study of the poet's life. One aspect of the perennially shy Andalusian's life which Gibson should address is Machado's supposed affiliation to Freemasonry. Some scholars take such an affiliation as a given: Machado was a member of the *Logia Mantua* in Madrid, itself part of the *Gran Logia Española* (as opposed to the *Grande Oriente Español*, the other Masonic obedience in Spain). On Internet sites associated with the *GLE* there is no debate: Machado is claimed as one of the Brotherhood, and his name figures on lists of distinguished Masons. However, incontrovertible evidence is in short supply: for instance, the date of his initiation is nowhere mentioned; the extent or otherwise of his Masonic activity is never elucidated. This paper assesses the circumstantial evidence relating to Machado and Freemasonry, although it does not adduce definitive proof of the poet's Masonic allegiance. It includes a discussion of a selection of his texts which might reasonably be said to have Masonic overtones. Above all, it is designed to reopen debate on a neglected dimension of Machado's life.

In a piece entitled 'Machado, poeta institucionista y masón', published almost forty years ago, Joaquín Casaldueiro referred in a rather matter-of-fact manner to Machado's membership of the Masonic Order.¹ He did not cite dates, nor did he give any real concrete information, however, he quoted at length from what he called 'quizás la mejor

¹ *La Torre*, 45-6 (January – June 1964), 99-110.

página que se ha escrito sobre Machado': an article written by Emilio González-López and published in the Masonic journal *El Sol de la Fraternidad* in New York on 26 October 1957.² González-López, a Freemason himself, was also rather blasé about Machado's alleged membership:

Machado antes de ingresar en la logia Mantua...había mostrado siempre en todos y cada uno de sus poemas ese mismo espíritu fraternal para todo lo creado, por las criaturas humanas y por los otros seres de la naturaleza animada e inanimada, que constituye el fondo del alma masónica.³

Casaldüero accepted González-López's assertion uncritically, but then proceeded to a confession of his own, followed by a useful insight that forged a link to the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (a body which, as will be seen in due course, was a significant factor in Machado's putative Masonic pedigree):

En España, como de otras muchas cosas, no se sabe nada de la Masonería. Yo tampoco. Pero para odiar no hace falta saber, se odia mejor si no se sabe. Los reaccionarios o retrógrados o tradicionalistas han odiado a la Institución y a la Masonería, sin embargo, con acierto, adivinando en ambas a su peor enemigo: un sentido moral vital y fecundo. La Masonería por encima de las fronteras, la Institución dentro del país tenían eso de común.⁴

From a historical perspective, it can be said that Casaldüero was certainly right about the depth of hatred of Freemasonry in Spain. In Chapter XIII (entitled 'Spain and Portugal') of Lennhoff's *The Freemasons* the intolerance and violence visited on Masons in the Iberian Peninsula are clearly documented.⁵ Lennhoff makes a point about this which may well elucidate why Machado and people of like mind were attracted to Freemasonry: 'this cruel oppression without the slightest cause explains why, in Spain,

² *ibid*, 100-02.

³ *ibid*, 101. Contrast the reaction of Alice Jane McVan, a translator of the poetry, who viewed Machado's Masonic connection as 'a facet of the poet's life that has been practically unknown'. *Antonio Machado* (New York: The Hispanic Society of America, 1959), 63.

⁴ Casaldüero, 103.

⁵ Eugen Lennhoff, *The Freemasons (The History, Nature, Development and Secret of the Royal Art)*, translated by Einar Frame (London: Methuen, 1934), 156-66.

the Freemasons became more and more the champions of liberty, the leaders of democracy, and the pioneers of liberal thought'.⁶ Contrast that view of the Masonic Order with the perception of it in, say, contemporary Britain and Ireland as a conservative, pro-Establishment 'Men Only' club with strange rituals, funny handshakes, and a propensity for advancing its own at the expense of the 'Profane' (those who are not members). It was not until the formation of the Spanish Republic in 1931 that Freemasonry blossomed fully in Spain, at all levels, including government – this last fact is acknowledged both by the Mason Lennhoff⁷ and by the Jesuit chronicler of the Brotherhood in Spain, José A Ferrer Benimeli.⁸ The tone of the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church had been set by the Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII published on 20 April 1884, and written 'in order to bring more and more into the light its ['the Masonic society'] power for evil, and to do what We can to arrest the contagion of this fatal plague'.⁹ In the post-Republic, twentieth century context Francisco Franco, as *Caudillo*, did all he could to sustain this tradition of paranoid hatred.¹⁰ He lambasted Freemasonry in articles written in *Arriba*, ironically under the Masonic pseudonym Jakim Boor (names of the two pillars in the Masonic temple). He was obsessive about collecting Masonic artefacts and – according to Paul Preston – 'created his own Masonic grotto'.

The opprobrium heaped by church and – saving the years of the Republic – by state on the Masonic Order would certainly have met with disapproval from Antonio Machado and may well have inclined him to ally himself to such a marginalised and victimised

⁶ *ibid*, 156.

⁷ *ibid*, 159.

⁸ *Masonería española contemporánea*, 2 vols (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980).

⁹ *Humanum Genus. Encyclical Letter of our Holy Father by Divine Providence Pope Leo XIII on Freemasonry*, reprint (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1978), 5.

¹⁰ See Paul Preston, *Franco: a Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1993). p.324

grouping. His educational and family background could also have shaped his leanings. With his brother Manuel he attended Francisco Giner de los Ríos' *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* in Madrid, where liberal *Krausista* values of solidarity and fraternity featured strongly on the far from conventional curriculum.¹¹ *Krausismo* was, of course, excoriated by the ultra-Catholic Menéndez y Pelayo in his *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, and thus it had that much in common with one of Machado's great-grandfathers, José Álvarez Guerra, whose four small volumes published in Seville between 1837 and 1857 under the title *Unidad simbólica y destino del hombre en la tierra, o filosofía de la razón por un amigo del hombre* were villified by don Marcelino for their deistic and Masonic tone.¹² *Krausismo* saw Christianity as a phase in the evolution of humanity toward the ultimate goal of an accommodation with God as the Supreme Being. This would have perhaps tallied with the deistic outlook of Machado's father, Antonio Machado y Álvarez, who, according to Geoffrey Ribbans, 'tenía fama de ser masón'.¹³ J G Brotherston asserted that: 'the Machados had been Freemasons for several generations and Antonio Machado y Álvarez clung passionately to his Masonic ideas even after their direct political relevance had been lost'.¹⁴ Taking these family and educational circumstances into account, the evidence favouring at least a pro-Masonic inclination in Antonio Machado is strong. His father may well have been the decisive influence. One of Brotherston's assessments of Machado y Álvarez is particularly pertinent: 'I believe that the way his anticlerical feelings as well as his ideas on "folklore" developed is

¹¹ On the *Krausista* background of Machado and its possible Masonic connections, see Mátyás Horányi, *Las dos soledades de Antonio Machado* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975), 40-43.

¹² On these details, see Nancy Newton, 'Heresy and Contextuality: the Example of Antonio Machado, 1931', *Symposium*, 36, no 3 (1982), 237-56 (p 241).

¹³ Antonio Machado, *Soledades. Galerías. Otros poemas*, ed Geoffrey Ribbans, *Letras Hispánicas* 180, 16th revised ed (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000), 25.

¹⁴ 'Antonio Machado y Álvarez and Positivism', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, XLI (1964), 223-29 (p 225).

particularly significant in view of his concern for the education of his sons'.¹⁵ Perhaps raising their awareness about Freemasonry in their teenage years was part of that education.

In his later, adult life Antonio Machado certainly moved in the company of Freemasons. As Claudio Rodríguez Fer put it: 'desde o seu período de formación institucionalista, tivo estreitos contactos con destacados masóns'.¹⁶ For example, the *Alianza Republicana*, with which Machado was associated, was founded in February 1926, by inter alia well known figures who were, or would later be, Freemasons, such as Alejandro Lerroux and Manuel Azaña. Its manifesto had twenty signatories, including Machado, and at least two prominent names with definite Masonic connections: Eduardo Ortega y Gasset and Ramón Pérez de Ayala. The first meeting of the *Agrupación al Servicio de la República* in 1931, at which Machado was present, was organised by the two aforementioned Masons, as well as by Gregorio Marañón.¹⁷

The case for the argument which favours Machado's having been affiliated to Freemasonry is circumstantially quite strong. But, what have writers and critics had to say on this matter in the last twenty-five years or so, when access to records and archives in Spain has been more open than before? José A Ferrer Benimeli's two volumes are replete with references to Spanish members of the Brotherhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but no mention of Machado is made.¹⁸ De la Cierva, in his more sensationalist treatment of Freemasonry in Spain and abroad, is equally adept at name-

¹⁵ *ibid*, 223.

¹⁶ *Antonio Machado e Galicia* (La Coruña: Edicións Do Castro, 1989), 61.

¹⁷ *ibid*, 61.

¹⁸ *Masonería española contemporánea*.

dropping, but again there is no reference to Antonio Machado.¹⁹ Most modern scholars seem to accept that Machado was a Freemason, but no one adduces incontrovertible evidence. Simón Guadalajara Solera writes of Machado that ‘su afiliación masónica no es algo que resulte sorprendente’.²⁰ Even Oreste Macrí [PP, 43] is fairly non-specific: ‘[Machado] entró, no sabemos cuándo, en la Gran Logia Española, inscrito en la *Logia Mantua* de Madrid’.²¹ Bernard Sesé admitted in 1990 that ‘las críticas están muy divididas en este punto’;²² although at about the same time Carlos Serrano referred casually to Machado’s ‘adhesión a la masonería’.²³ Manuel Tuñón de Lara – himself a Mason - dates Machado’s entry into Freemasonry at around 1926, but counsels against reading too much into this ‘fact’:

Nos parece perfectamente irrelevante esa adhesión de Don Antonio quien, además, siempre anduvo en este mundo por cuenta propia, sin otra disciplina que la de su conciencia [...] No creo que este hecho pase de lo anecdótico y adjetivo en la existencia machadiana.²⁴

Tuñón de Lara may well have been right: Machado probably became a Mason in the mid-1920s but that ‘adhesión’ was not a decisive or terribly important factor in his life. Nowhere in the corpus of Machadian prose, not even in the ‘unedited’ and routine diary entries in *Los complementarios*, is there any hint of Masonic involvement or activity. In

¹⁹ Ricardo de la Cierva, *El triple secreto de la Masonería (Orígenes, constituciones y rituales masónicos vigentes nunca publicados en España)* 3rd ed (Madrid: Editorial Fénix, 1994).

²⁰ *El compromiso en Antonio Machado (a la ética por la estética)* (Madrid: Emiliano Escolar editor, 1984), 62.

²¹ This comes from the source for all subsequent quotations from Machado’s work: *Antonio Machado: poesía y prosa*, critical edition by Oreste Macrí with the collaboration of Gaetano Chiappini, Clásicos Castellanos, nueva serie 11-14, 4 vols (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe / Fundación Antonio Machado, 1989). The works are contained in vols II, III and IV; the pagination is continuous from one volume to the next; page references will be given in this form: (PP, 1234).

²² *Claves de Antonio Machado*, with the collaboration of and translation by Soledad García Mouton (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1990), 71.

²³ ‘Una dialéctica inconclusa: Antonio Machado y la crisis del liberalismo español’ in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Conmemorativo del Cincuentenario de la muerte de Antonio Machado*, 4 vols (Seville: Alfar, 1990), I, 71-83 (p 77).

²⁴ *Antonio Machado, poeta del pueblo*, 4th ed (Barcelona: Editorial Laia, 1981), 189.

an interview published in 1938 Machado might have been said to have been hinting at a Masonic connection in his background, but nothing specific was stated:

Estudié en la Institución Libre de Enseñanza y tuve por maestros a Giner de los Ríos, Cossío y Salmerón, teniendo como condiscípulo a Besteiro. No es difícil, por tanto, deducir que mi formación había de ser liberal y republicana, que por otra parte había de coincidir con la historia política de mis antepasados, ya que mi padre y mi abuelo eran republicanos fervorosos. (*PP*, 2277)

It is undeniable that *Los complementarios* – in common with much other Machadian prose – is full of quasi-Masonic sentiments:

Pero hay otra forma de universalidad que no la expresa el pensamiento abstracto, que no es hija de la dialéctica sino del amor, que no es de fuente helénica, sino cristiana: se llama fraternidad humana, y fue la gran revelación de Cristo. (*PP*, 1233-34)

However, these fraternal sentiments were perhaps simply a mark of the calibre of the man; or, in a different light, might be cited by those seeking to claim Machado as a fairly orthodox, New Testament-inspired Christian.

Even Machado's reactions in his prose to figures who might be said to have had notable 'fraternal' connections yield little. For example, his article of February 1915 devoted to his then recently deceased and beloved 'maestro' don Francisco Giner de los Ríos, of impeccable *Krausista* and fraternal inclination, reveals only that Giner would have been an unlikely candidate for the trappings of Masonic ritual, since, according to Machado, 'desdeñaba...todo lo aparatoso, lo decorativo, lo solemne, lo ritual' (*PP*, 1576). Machado's writings to (*PP*, 1626-28) and about (*PP*, 1769) Ramón Pérez de Ayala contain nothing of Masonic consequence.

The most mature prose has no Masonic agenda either. Instead, for instance, it emerges that the hierarchical structure which is so integral a part of Freemasonry would,

in principle, be utterly distasteful to Juan de Mairena (*PP*, 2113). God for Mairena – and for his master, Abel Martín – is never the Great/Supreme Architect of the Masonic Code; he is, instead, the creator of ‘la nada’ – a notion too obtuse even for Freemasons.

Machado’s verse, while by no means a storehouse of Masonic references, does have more relevant and significant resonances than his prose. The *Soledades. Galerías. Otros poemas* phase has little of interest in this regard, save perhaps the occasional gnomic expression of a fascination with mystery (which could be redolent as much of late Symbolist yearnings as of anything Masonic):

El alma del poeta
se orienta hacia el misterio. (*PP*, 472)

En nuestras almas todo
por misteriosa mano se gobierna. (*PP*, 486)

However, three consecutive poems in the *Poesías completas* configuration of *Campos de Castilla* – the first three in the *Elogios* section – could, arguably, be said to have Masonic overtones. In poem CXXXIX (*PP*, 587-88) the passing of the eponymous don Francisco Giner de los Ríos is marked in significant ways, which counter the impression given of Giner in the already quoted prose (*PP*, 1576) from 1915. Giner is described as ‘el maestro’ (line 1), and as ‘el hermano de la luz del alba’ (line 16), which has quite the ring of a Masonic ‘nombre simbólico’ about it. The instruction on line 14 – ‘¡Yunques, sonad; enmudeced, campanas!’ – cherishes the ethic of constructive collective labour over that of a traditional Christian response; and on line 17 the sun that shines is ‘el sol de los talleres’. (Might these be ‘talleres masónicos’?) An at least literal association with Masons is forged on the opening lines (1-5) of the next poem, CXL ‘Al joven meditador José Ortega y Gasset’ (*PP*, 588):

A ti laurel y yedra
corónente, dilecto
de Sofía, arquitecto.
Cinzel, martillo y piedra
y masones te sirvan.

To complement the association between Ortega and the tools of the trade of masonry comes the reference to ‘arquitectura’ on line 11. Poem CXLI ‘A Xavier Valcarce’ (*PP*, 588-90) has just a hint of Freemasonry in Machado’s reference to himself as an ‘aprendiz’ (admittedly only to a nightingale) on line 4, and in the ‘gala de fiesta’ (line 36) which he urges Valcarce to don near the end of the poem (lines 37-40) and which might be said to be analagous to Masonic regalia:

Y cíñete la espada rutilante,
y lleva tu armadura,
el peto de diamante
debajo de la blanca vestidura.

The deistic philosophy of Freemasonry is nowhere present in *Campos de Castilla*, indeed, if anything, Machado at times shows himself to be more of a pantheist – in, for example, parts v (‘Profesión de fe’) and vi (*PP*, 584-85) of CXXXVII ‘Parábolas’. Nonetheless, while Machado can fondly ironise the fraternities of the Catholic variety in CXXXIII ‘Llanto...’ (*PP*, 563-65), he is himself rather prone to using an idiom not remote from the fraternal, Masonic one in other texts from *Campos de Castilla*. Poem xi (*PP*, 571) of CXXXVI ‘Proverbios y cantares’ begins with a series of truisms which might not look out of place in a Masonic handbook, and then develops through an idiom that could equally be said to be Masonic. The re-birth of Spain envisaged in poem CXXXV ‘El mañana efímero’ includes an image of ‘la España del cinzel y de la maza’ (*PP*, 568);

although that most Masonic of instruments, the ‘compás’, is associated with sterile, unproductive thinking in poem viii (*PP*, 586) from CXXXVII ‘Parábolas’.²⁵

If the views of the critic Rodrigo Álvarez Molina are taken into account, then the *Nuevas canciones* era houses another trio of consecutive Masonic poems: ‘Al gran Cero’ (*PP*, 692-93), ‘Al gran Pleno o Conciencia integral’ (*PP*, 694) and ‘Mairena a Martín, muerto’ (*PP*, 695-96) which span the two sections of *De un cancionero apócrifo* and – according to Álvarez Molina – ‘evocan, por su simbolismo y misterio, una filosofía masónica’.²⁶ Frankly, the Masonic connection here is not apparent, nor – crucially - is it so in other *Nuevas canciones* phase contexts where it might most be expected: in a poem on Ramón Pérez de Ayala (*PP*, 651-52) or in the late ‘poema suelto’ (*PP*, 836) containing the line ‘¡Viva Fermín Galán!’ – a reference to the military man and Freemason from Zaragoza, executed with a ‘profane’ colleague on 14 December 1930 for having tried to organise in Jaca a military uprising against the King. It is the case that the first two lines of poem xlii (*PP*, 634) of CLXI ‘Proverbios y cantares’ virtually paraphrase this instruction from the ‘Código Masónico’²⁷: ‘Ama al prójimo como a ti mismo’, but nowhere in the Masonic Code or in the Biblical directive to ‘love thy neighbour’ can an appendage as impudent as Machado’s third line of poem xlii be found: ‘mas nunca olvides que es otro’.

Machado’s fond recollection of Soria and Leonor in part xii (*PP*, 622) of CLIX ‘Canciones’ includes the sadder memory of the name-calling he was subjected to in that

²⁵ Simón Guadalajara Solera’s observations on ‘Masonic’ language are interesting: ‘Los símbolos de la escuadra, compás y delantal venían a significar, respectivamente, la idea de rectitud de acción, control y trabajo, dándole al lenguaje masónico sus peculiares referencias y claves de interpretación; lo que antes fue instrumento de trabajo (por ejemplo, el cincel y la maza o el martillo), ahora se convierte en distintivo de los valores de la educación y formación de los jóvenes’ (*El compromiso*, 65).

²⁶ *Variaciones sobre Antonio Machado: el hombre y su lenguaje* (Madrid: Ínsula, 1973), 43.

²⁷ A version of the ‘Código Masónico’ is reproduced in *Masonería española contemporánea*, II, 206-07.

place for having had the temerity, as an outsider who was perhaps misunderstood, to marry a young daughter of the town:

En Santo Domingo,
la misa mayor.
Aunque me decían
hereje y masón,
rezando contigo,
¡cuánta devoción!

These lines do not necessarily mean that Machado was a Mason at the time of his relationship with Leonor, but they do perhaps betoken an association in his mind between the word ‘masón’ and wrongful persecution. That association re-emerges in the poem CLXXII ‘Recuerdos de sueño, fiebre y duermivela’ (*PP*, 718-26) – although, interestingly, it is not a factor in the prose ‘Fragmento de pesadilla’ (*PP*, 1161-68) from 1914 on which parts of the poem are based. In the prose text – described by Machado in a footnote as ‘la transcripción casi exacta de un sueño’ (*PP*, 1168) – the narrator/protagonist is executed as a non-specific ‘sambenitado’; whereas in the poem, first published some seventeen years later and viewed by Luis Rosales as ‘una de las piezas más importantes, sorprendentes y extrañas de la lírica de Machado’,²⁸ to the charge of being a ‘sambenitado’ is added that of being a ‘masón’. As Luis Rosales explains, ‘las palabras masón y sambenitado indican el carácter del delito’.²⁹ In this far from straightforward, quasi-surrealist text which blends narrative and lyrical elements, it can be observed on the simplest psychological level that the word ‘masón’ is again attended by some form of persecution complex in Machado. The first reference to the word is a double one with

²⁸ ‘Muerte y resurrección de Antonio Machado’, *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 11-12 (1949), 435-79 (p 435).

²⁹ *ibid*, 453.

exclamation marks and occurs at the beginning of the poem where the nightmarish scenario prior to the execution of the narrator/protagonist is being set:

Esta maldita fiebre
que todo me lo enreda,
siempre diciendo: ¡claro!
Dormido estás: despierta.
¡Masón, masón!
Las torres
bailando están en rueda.³⁰

The second mention, on line 50 (from part iv), is also a double one and features immediately after the poem's first direct reference to execution:

Pero a un hidalgo no
se ahorca; se degüella,
seor verdugo. ¿Duermes?
Masón, masón, despierta.

In the often-quoted phrase of Lennhoff's translator, Einar Frame, Freemasonry may well be 'not a secret society but a society with secrets',³¹ nonetheless Antonio Machado seemed not to have been entirely at ease with this hidden corner of his life. The sense of anxiety and persecution is acute in these later evocations from the poetry and complements his refusal to reveal much at all in other sources. In all likelihood Machado was a Freemason – his family tradition, his personal friendships with known members, his overall sympathy for what might be described as a parallel dissident ideology, and other circumstantial evidence, tend to suggest this. However, 'The Royal Art' (as Freemasonry is sometimes referred to) seems not to have exercised a great deal of influence on either his life or his works. His views on the desirability of decent, morally proper behaviour and of universal fraternity were almost certainly well established before any initiation into

³⁰ On these lines, see Nancy Newton, 'Heresy and Contextuality', 246.

³¹ *The Freemasons*, v.

the Brotherhood – probably in the late 1920s – took place. Suffice it to say for now that a good deal remains to be uncovered in this chapter of the biography of Antonio Machado.

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