
José Martí a través de sus Versos Sencillos *José Martí through his Simple Verses*

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Resumen: El conocimiento de la vida y obra de José Martí es propósito esencial de la educación en Cuba. Uno de los textos a través de los cuales se cumplimenta dicha intención es la colección Versos Sencillos. Para su estudio se indica, generalmente, la lectura y análisis de algunas de sus poesías desaprovechando el carácter autobiográfico que poseen para que el estudiante conozca momentos importantes de la existencia de su autor. En el presente ensayo se analizan la dedicatoria – prólogo de este libro, y algunos poemas a través de los cuales se develan vida y principios éticos del Apóstol.

Palabras clave: Versos Sencillos; José Martí; Poemas martianos; Lírica cubana

Abstract: The knowledge about the life and work of José Martí is an essential purpose of education in Cuba. One of the texts through which this intention is fulfilled is the Simple Verses collection. For its study, it is generally indicated the reading and analysis of some of his poems, taking advantage of the autobiographical character that they possess so that the student knows about important moments of the existence of its author. In this essay we analyze the prologue to this book, and some poems through which the life and ethical principles of the Apostle are revealed.

Keywords: Simple Verses; Jose Marti; Marti Poems; Cuban lyric

Introduction

Although writing verses was not a priority in the life of José Martí, it is difficult to know him without approaching this facet of his creation that he put at the service of men, aware that "poetry, which congregates or disintegrates, that fortifies or distresses, that is more necessary to the peoples than the industry itself, for it provides them with the means of subsistence, while it gives them the desire and the power of life" (Martí, OC, t.13, page 135)

Within this poetry stands his collection *Versos Sencillos* (Simple Verses), the most vivid example of the fusion achieved between man and the lyrical world, between poetic thinking and political and social action. In it, Martí expresses his physical and spiritual pains, his loves and joys, his responsibility for

poetry, his commitment to independence and social justice, complex experiences that are inserted in a space full of symbols, chromatic images and novel metric forms.

Therefore, the Simple Verses are not only a unique enjoyment of the senses, but also first-hand information on the life of José Martí and, correspondingly, on the aesthetic and ethical precepts he defended. Given this, this paper analyzes the prologue of the book and some poems, through which you can get to know the life and thought of the Apostle.

Development

A very important component of the Simple Verses is the dedication Martí wrote to Manuel Mercado of Mexico; and Enrique Estrázulas, from Uruguay, two of his closest friends, because it gives the possibility of recognizing the historical and biographical context in which this poem was conceived.

In it he writes:

My friends know how I got these verses from the heart. It was that winter of anguish, in which, through ignorance, or fanatical faith, or out of fear, or out of politeness, the Spanish-American peoples met in Washington under the dread eagle. Which of us has forgotten that shield, the shield in which the eagle of Monterrey and Chapultepec, the eagle of Lopez and Walker, clung in its claws all the pavilions of America? And the agony in which I lived, until I could confirm the caution and the zeal of our peoples; and the horror and shame in which I had the legitimate fear that we Cubans could, with parricide hands, help the foolish plan of separating Cuba, for the sole good of a new masked dissident, of the Hispano-American homeland, reduced by unfair pain. The doctor threw me into the forest: streams flowed and the clouds closed: I wrote verses" (Martí, *Poesía Mayor*, 93).

By the end of the 80s it seemed only fears of Martí and a few on the North American thinkers about the other America, which had begun to be known by all. Already in 1888 the United States government convened the First Conference of American Nations to be held in Washington from October 1889 to April 1890 and, at the very outset, Martí judges Congress and warns against the United States' claims to extend its products to underdeveloped American nations.

To his friend Gonzalo de Quesada, in a letter dated December 14, 1889, he explained his uneasiness over the plan that had been taking place on Cuba to have a pretext for intervention in it, and how the concern had made him sick, so that his bedside doctor recommended absolute rest.

In this regard, in a letter to Rafael Serra, he comments: "Between the heat and the work, and the concern of the spirit, I lay in bed with all, and I leave with my head dry to the mountains" (Martí, OC t. 370). These are the Catskill Mountains, located about 160 km north-northwest of New York City and 64 km southwest of Albany, beginning just west of the Hudson River, where he resided about fifteen days at the beginning of August 1890. On leaving, he had written to Rafael Serra, in an unfinished letter that he went to a corner of leaves and solitude for a few days.

And there came from the sincere heart plain verses, plagued with emotion and essentially simple, which were sheltered from the same prologue, and when asked, he stated:

Why this simplicity is published, written as playing? (...) Nor now, on the occasion of these wildflowers, exhibit a course of my poetics, and say why I repeat a consonant on purpose, or graduate and group them so that they go by sight and hearing to feeling, or jump for them, when he does not ask rhymes or supports embossing the tumultuous idea? These verses are printed because the affection with which they received them, in a night of poetry and friendship, some good souls, have made them already public. And because I love simplicity, and I believe in the need to put the feeling in plain and sincere ways. (Martí, Poesía Mayor, 93)

There is no better example of this conception of simple verse than the name given to the book and its various poems, in which the number 5 stands out where the lyrical self defends a courageous, pure, natural, rebellious, new, ethical poetry.

The poem begins with an image in which a pile of foam is related to the verse. "If you see a mountain of foam, / it's my verse what you see." The mountain, symbol of high moral principles, of the high and natural, is also "foam", which indicates purity, spirituality and the verse is then born from the poet without artifice, as he feels it, and he seeks height, clarity, and enlightenment. This principle he repeatedly defended and does not hesitate in legitimizing it when he says to his son in the dedication of *Ismaelillo*: "If someone tells you that these pages look as any other pages, tell them that I love you too much to desecrate you like that. As I paint you, so have my eyes. With those gala harnesses you have appeared to me. When I cease to see you that way, I will cease to paint you" (Martí, *Ismaelillo*, p.1)

In this poem 5 insists on the idea of the mountain verse, and he adds "A fan of feathers", which suggests the movement, the softness, the color and the beauty, essential elements of this literary expression.

In the second stanza he associates the verse with a weapon for struggling and the lyrical ego states: "My verse is like a dagger." Then it is astonishing that he has selected a weapon like the dagger that is generally related to blood and death in this simile that continues: "That by the fist casts flowers", and now the dagger acquires a different connotation because it will not only serve to kill but also to liberate, and poetry, therefore, becomes a weapon for struggling. Dagger and flower, apparently opposing elements, are coupled to offer the image of a verse not only beautiful, chromatic and perfumed, but also strong, brave and combative.

In the two final verses of this stanza the metaphor is established with a jet - jet of water that shoots vertically and rises from the depths of the earth - from which a very exclusive type of water comes out: "My verse is a spout. Gives a water of coral", so that the lyrical self is in favor of a line that emanates freely and spontaneously as fresh water, which serves to quench thirst and fill the senses, and is reaching more and more moral height.

The third stanza begins with two verses about color: "My verse is of a light green / and dark burning carmine ". At first, there is the green, symbol of fertility, spring awakening, but not any green but a light green, serene and, secondly, appears the carmine, symbol of battle, which also has a particular characteristic, thereby reinforcing the intensity of the image. In this way, the natural, fruitful, calm verse is also a sweeping, passionate, combative verse.

In the following image: "My verse is a wounded deer / that seeks in the mountain shelter", the poet uses an animal to establish the analogy. The verse is now like a gentle deer that flees to the mountain looking for the company of nature when it is hurt by the barbarism and injustice of men. It is lawful to remember that in the prologue Martí stated that the Simple Verses were born during the days he stood on the mountain to rest because of his physical and spiritual pains.

The last stanza is a kind of colophon of the whole composition, where the poet makes an open declaration of principles. "My verse to the brave one pleases: / my verse, brief and sincere, / has the vigor of the steel / with which the sword melts". First, his verse, which is brave, is not designed to please anyone but the brave man, understood by such as to be able to fight for a just cause; second, his verse, which is brief and sincere, -for the great truths, which are born from the depths of the soul, without deception or artifice, are written in simple words, - is both honest, steadfast, unshakeable, always ready to combat against social injustices, as it was stated in the prologue of *Flores del destierro*. "From pain, the verses jump, like the swords of the sheath, when the anger shakes them ..." (José Martí, *Poesía Mayor*, 220)

Other poems in the collection affirm these concepts that Martí defended for the verse and make them gallant because of the sobriety of language and style, the strong presence of American nature, the commitment of the author to the poor of the earth and the universality proclaimed in the prologue and, in the same proportion, become sweet consolation, balm for the ailments, confident of happiness, and of sad and even desperate moments.

An irrefutable example of this is poem 1, which begins with an open confession in which he makes clear that the sincerity he defends for his poetry is an inseparable characteristic of his existence as a human being: "I AM a sincere man / from where the palm grows / and before I die, I want to / send my verses of the soul.

But this man, who is born in Cuba, states later: "I come from everywhere, / and everywhere I go: / arts I am amongst the arts / in the woods, I am woodchuck"; and then it is inevitable to seek the answer to this statement in the circumstances that came from his forced exile, which turned him into a universal being that merged with the environment to give way to a new person, able to appreciate the simple things of life.

The lyrical hero, who proclaims himself as a knower of men and their nature, had to face adversity and suffering: "I know the strange names / of grasses and flowers, / and of deceitful deceits, / and of sublime sorrows". To stand as a privileged witness and at the same time protagonist of the events of the world: "Wings born I saw on the shoulders / of beautiful women: / and leave the rubble, / flying the butterflies." A feeling which he reiterates in poem 2, where he claims to know about Egypt and Africa, Persia and Xenophon, the oldest stories, the quarrels of men, above which he prefers the caress of the fresh air of the mountain, the bees flying on the bells, the song of the wind in the whispering branches.

The pains of the man who has been son and husband come to life in the poem 1. He has suffered for the death of his father, Mariano Martí Navarro; and by the abandonment of his wife, Maria del Carmen de Zayas-Bazán and Hidalgo, and expresses it in these verses: "Fast as a reflection, / twice I saw the soul, two: / when the poor old man died / when she said goodbye to me."

There is in these verses, in the first place, a clear allusion to his father. A father on whom, in many articles, his rough character had been exaggerated, as well as his misunderstandings about the patriotic ideals and lyrical vocation of his son. A father who, over time, Martí came to understand and love for his straight and clean soul, as evidenced in this passage of his article Supreme:

In the home at ordinary times, the father exasperated by the tasks of life, finds every fault, scolds the holy woman, speaks roughly to the good son, throws in complaints and doubts of the house that do not deserve their regret and the wrath which the injustices of the world place upon him; but at the moment when death or life passes through the home, in which there is danger of the loved ones of the poor rough man, the whole soul is torn from love by the unique corner of its entrails, and he kisses the desolate hands he accused and cursed perhaps a moment earlier. (Martí, OC Volume 2, p.250)

And in a letter that he sent to his friend Mercado: "My poor father, the least penetrating of all, is the one who has done most justice to my heart" (Martí, OC book 20, P.45)

On the occasion of his death he would tell his brother-in-law José García:

I had put in my father a pride that grew every time he thought of it, because no one had to live in vilest times, and no one despite its apparent simplicity came out more pure in thought and work of it. Never, Joseph, a protest against this austere life of mine that deprived his of the comfort of old age! Of my virtue, if there is any in me, I can have the serenity; but he had the pride. In my bitterest hours, I could see the joy of having a son who knew how to resist and suffer. (Martí, OC. Volume 20, p.389).

Carmen Zayas Bazán, the third daughter of Francisco de Zayas-Bazán and Varona and Isabel María Hidalgo and Cabanillas, a native of Cienfuegos, whom Martí mentions in the poem as the woman who said goodbye, lived in Mexico and to her he married on December 20, 1877. She, who would be the theme of inspiration in several poems loaded with deep love: "It is so beautiful my Carmen, is so beautiful, / that if the sky the atmosphere empty / of its light, says a star / that in the soul of Carmen would find it "(Martí, OC book 17, p.133); After some time he would become a constant restless, as he wrote in a letter to his friend Manuel Mercado where he expresses the pain that his wife causes him because she does not understand his tasks in favor of the country. The many disagreements led to the definitive rupture when, in the middle of 1891, behind Martí's back, and with the help of Enrique Trujillo, Carmen went to the Spanish consulate and requested her return to Havana.

In verse 8 of this poem one of the great affections in the life of Martí appears, who professed to Maria Mantilla: "I trembled once at the gate, / at the entrance of the vineyard, / when the barbarous bee / stung my baby on her forehead." This girl is the fourth daughter of the marriage made up by Manuel Mantilla and Carmen Miyares, in whose guest house Martí found affection,

friendship and patriotism, that is why, at the birth of the little girl, he becomes his godfather and gives her all the affection he cannot offer to his own child directly.

The condemnation to prison being a teenager is remembered by Martí in the quatrain that follows: "I enjoyed once, in such a way / that I had never enjoyed before: when / the sentence of my death / read the mayor crying". Here the lyrical hero reinforces the idea of sadness suggested by the image of the weeping warden, as opposed to the feeling of joy that is formulated in the first person. And there are reasons for crying: a Cuban young man is accused of treason, condemned by a Spanish war council to six years in prison, and taken to forced labor in quarries that would leave him physically and spiritually marked forever.

José Francisco Martí Zayas Bazán is a presence suffered in the life of the Master. In the tenth grade, in a hyperbolic image, he reflects how much it means to the father: "I hear a sigh, through / from the lands and the sea, / and it is not a sigh. -is / that my son will wake up." This son, muse of his *Ismaelillo*, not to defraud the faith that his father had in him, with only 18 years old joined the expedition of Carlos Roloff who landed on the west coast of Cuba to join the Liberation Army under orders of General Calixto García Iñiguez as an artillery soldier, and ended the war as Captain of the Liberating Army.

The defense of friendship is *leit motiv* in Martí's life and work, even in carnal love, since he considered that the energy that unites all living beings is not erotic but spiritual, cosmic.

Great friends accompanied him and helped throughout his existence, those who received, in payment, his unconditional affection. So it is expressed in verse number eleven: "If they say: of the jeweler / take the best jewel, / I take a sincere friend / and I put love aside."

The idea of the friend and the beauty of sharing with him his most important problems give a sample of his sensitivity and respect for true friendship, a theme he reiterates in the well-known verses of poem 39: "I grow a white rose, / In July as In January, / For the sincere friend / Who gives me his frank hand ", and in 44 where he says he has more than the leopard, more than the king, more than the count, more than the aurora and the bird because he has a good friend.

He insists on the lyrical hero in his knowledge of the world and men, his concern for the advance of imperialism on the continent and the threat that this represents for his native Cuba in the twelfth stanza. The "wounded eagle" (already mentioned in the Prologue as "the eagle of Monterrey and Chapultepec") is observed by the subject at the same time that he dies in his lair

"the poison viper": "I have seen the wounded eagle / fly to the serene blue, / and die in your lair / the poison viper.

The principle which was the driving force of the Apostle's physical and spiritual existence, the duty to die for the freedom of his country and never to betray it, could not be lacking in this poem: "I hide in my brave breast / the pain that hurts me: / the son of a slave town / lives by him and is silent as he dies "; an idea that he takes up in several poems of the Simple Verses. In the 28 a father gives death to the son who has betrayed the mother land: "The ray shines; thunders / the wind by the farmhouse; / the father picks up the son, / and takes him to the grave "; In the 45, the heroes of the 10-year war, who rest in marble cloisters, come alive to ask the "new pines" account of the destiny of their sacrifices and the fulfillment of patriotic duty.

Martí's concept of universal harmony of life is reflected in the second-to-last stanza where the idea of silence and death contrasts sharply with the sound of nature: "Everything is beautiful and constant / everything is music and reason, / and everything, like diamonds, / before being shiny is coal".

In the last two stanzas of this poem he reinforces the total coincidence of man with nature, who leaves "the pomp of the rhymer" and "doctor's mucette" to cling to the natural, the pure, the simple: "I keep silent, and I understand, and I remove / The pomp of the rhymer: / I hang from a withered tree/ My doctor's mucette ", then for José Martí nature inspires, heals, consoles, strengthens and prepares man for virtue. Man is not complete; neither reveals him nor sees the invisible, in his intimate relationship with nature "(Martí, OC t.13, page 23)

In the poem 6 of the Simple Verses the sentiments of tenderness of the son towards the father are reiterated: "If you want me from this world / carry a pleasant memory / I will carry, deep father / your silver hair"; The one who was undoubtedly his playmate, of affinities and, therefore, his dearest sister, Ana: "If you want for a big favor / I'll take more, I'll take / the copy made by the painter / of the sister I adore."

Anecdotes show the nostalgia he suffered in prison and in exile for his "chiquitas": Leonor Petrona (la Chata), Mariana Matilde Salustiana (Ana), María del Carmen (Valenciana), María del Pilar Eduarda (Pilar), Rita Amelia (Amelia), Antonia Bruna (Antonia), Dolores Eustaquia (Lolita), who, along with their mother, would embroider those pads so that the father tried to relieve the friction of the chains on the lacerated skin of the convict José Julián.

In poems 9, 10 and 30 Martí makes readers share the passages of his life. In the 9, he refers to his relationship with a beautiful young woman whom he immortalizes in a story of love and death: "The girl from Guatemala / the one who died of love". In the 10 of his attendance at the presentation of the well-known dancer Carolina Otero, in the discovery of the virtuous artist, of fragrant and delicate dance: "The body yields and waves / The open robe causes / It is a rose the mouth; / Slowly heels"; And in the 30 of his childhood memory when he witnessed the tortures of negroes bound for barracks, death, and in sum the physical and moral pain of slavery: "Red, as in the desert, Horizon // And gave light to a dead slave / Hanged to a tree of the mount ".

Martí's judgments on women, seen from their inner world where essential beauty resides, according to their conception, are present in the Simple Verses. In the poems 8, 19, 43, 16, 18, 20, 21, 37 are, on the one hand, the woman symbol of gestation, of the future of humanity, representative of tradition and Latin American past; on the other hand, the American woman of the middle and upper classes who, emancipated from household tasks, and now they have more time for parties, fun, fashion, threatening fidelity and conjugal stability; and with intermediate features between both the American woman of the lower classes, not only wife but also companion, sister, friend of the man to whom it was united by bonds of affection.

Conclusions

The poems of the *Versos Sencillos* collection are a substantial reference for the students to know firsthand passages of the life of José Martí and many of the ethical and aesthetic concepts that he defended and can be appreciated in the literary work, which is not an isolated object, instead, it is born in a context of specific production, and is a reflection of the feelings, conceptions and opinions of its author and, often, a result of the circumstances of his life.

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