

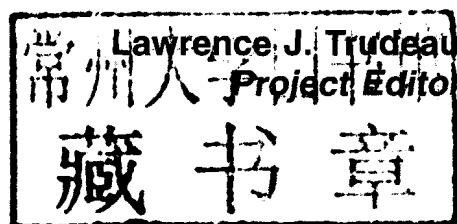
Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 245

Volume 245

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
245**

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

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Dámaso Alonso

1898-1990

Spanish poet, critic, and essayist.

The following entry provides an overview of Alonso's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *CLC*, Volume 14.

INTRODUCTION

Dámaso Alonso is considered an important Spanish critic, poet, and scholar of the twentieth century. First recognized as a member of Spain's Generation of 1927, which included such literary figures as Pedro Salinas, Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, and Vicente Aleixandre, Alonso was later credited with revitalizing his country's poetics following the Spanish Civil War, with the publication of his major collections, including *Oscura noticia* (1944), *Hijos de la ira* (1944; *Children of Wrath*), and *Hombre y Dios* (1955). In these volumes he expressed the anguish and turmoil of his time and defied prevailing literary trends, presenting an innovative and authentic style that is characterized by a focus on concrete reality and a synthesis of emotion and form. Throughout his career Alonso addressed the horrors and anxieties specific to the twentieth century, while at the same time exploring universal and existential themes related to death, love, and the relationship between God and humanity. In addition to poetry, Alonso also produced respected scholarly works, most notably *Poesía española: Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos* (1950), which inspired a new approach to literary criticism in Spain and shaped the country's modern poetics in the decades that followed. For both his poetic and critical achievements, Alonso is often described as one of the greatest intellectual influences on Spanish culture in the twentieth century.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alonso was born October 22, 1898, in Madrid, to an upper-middle-class family. In his youth he visited the border area between Asturias and the Galicia province, where his parents had family ties, but spent most of his life in the cosmopolitan area of Madrid. Alonso completed his early schooling at the Colegio de Jesuitas of Carabanchel and developed an early appreciation for poetry, particularly the romantic verse of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. He was originally interested in pursuing a

career in highway engineering, but in 1916 he developed an ulcer in his right eye, which forced him to abandon his mathematical studies. Alonso was still able to read during this time and immersed himself in the poetry of the Nicaraguan modernist Rubén Darío and the Nobel laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez; he was also inspired by the verse of Antonio Machado. In 1918 he earned his *licenciatura* in law from the University of Madrid but changed his course of study to philosophy and literature soon after. He eventually completed his doctorate in 1928, with a firm background in stylistics, linguistics, and literary history.

The 1920s were important years for Alonso, both personally and professionally. During this time the author published his first collection of poetry, titled *Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad* in 1921, lectured at various colleges, and became a recognized member of Spain's prominent literary circles. In 1923 and 1924 he composed the poems of the twelve-poem cycle, "El viento y el verso," which was first published in 1925 in the literary magazine *Sí* and later collected in the 1944 volume, *Oscura noticia*. Alonso also developed important and lasting friendships with other members of the Generation of 1927, including Pedro Salinas, Gerardo Diego, and Federico García Lorca, and in 1929 he married the writer Eulalia Galvarriato, who remained his lifelong companion.

After spending some time abroad, teaching at Stanford University, Columbia University, and Hunter College in New York, Alonso won the chair of Spanish Language and Literature at the University of Valencia in 1933. He later taught at the University of Leipzig and the University of Madrid. In 1935 the author published a significant critical work, *La lengua poética de Góngora*, for which he won the National Prize for Literature. During the 1940s Alonso once again began writing poetry and produced two significant volumes during this decade, *Oscura noticia* and *Children of Wrath*. In 1945 he was elected to the Royal Spanish Academy and formally installed as a member in 1948. The author lectured in several countries in Latin America during this time, served as a visiting professor at Yale University, and in 1949 became the editor of the respected journal *Revista de Filología Española*.

During the 1950s Alonso published some of his most important critical works, including *Poesía española: Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos*, as well as an-

other volume of poetry, *Hombre y Dios*. Over the next few years, he continued to teach at various universities, wrote several critical works, and served as the director of the Royal Spanish Academy for four terms. In 1985 the author published his final collection of poetry, *Duda y amor sobre el Ser Supremo*, which was inspired by the death of two of his friends, the poets Jorge Guillén and Vicente Aleixandre. On January 24, 1990, Alonso died in Madrid, after suffering a long battle with respiratory disease.

MAJOR WORKS

Although Alonso produced poetry throughout his literary career, he is primarily remembered for those works published during the 1940s and 1950s. One of his major verse collections, *Oscura noticia*, deals mainly with the individual's existential struggle, as well as the duality of the spiritual world and reality. The title of the work, taken from a line by the sixteenth-century mystic poet San Juan de la Cruz and translated as "this message with which God fills you is dark," points to the volume's exploration of human pain and experience, and the need for a God that may or may not exist. Stirred by the harsh realities of the Spanish Civil War, Alonso portrayed human existence as a confusing, chaotic, and complicated affair, and as a result the collection treats a myriad of human emotions. Death and grief are examined in such poems as "Destrucción inminente," "Dura luz de la muerte," and "A un poeta muerto," which was written in response to Lorca's assassination during the Spanish Civil War, while "Oración por la belleza de una muchacha" celebrates the beauty and perfection of a young girl. Alonso also included his poem-cycle, "El viento y el verso," in *Oscura noticia*, which treats the wind as a symbol of the poet's search for truth in a mundane world and conveys a variety of meanings. In such poems as "Puerto ciego de la mar" and "Ejemplos" the wind represents, variously, a watchman of the night, a primal element of the earth, a manifestation of God, and sleep. In the latter poem, the wind also functions as a metaphor for the conflict between reality and the spiritual realm as well as God's agent. Alonso's complex exploration of both faith and doubt in *Oscura noticia* won praise from scholars, and the collection is sometimes credited with reintroducing the subject of religion to postwar Spanish poetry.

According to some scholars, *Children of Wrath* is Alonso's most important and original volume of poetry. Composed in reaction to the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and World War II, the collection represents the poet's outcry against the injustices of life and reflects both his feelings of anger and sense of isolation. Alonso communicates his anxieties in "Insomnio," the

opening poem of the work, in which Madrid is described as a city of corpses. Throughout the volume, amid images of horror and decay, the speaker of the poems struggles with the absurdities of existence and his need to comprehend and embrace life, which is expressed through his existential confrontation with God and the universe. While *Children of Wrath* predominantly offers a negative view of life, Alonso also expresses hope for God, beauty, love, and the redemption of humankind in the collection. A well-known poem from the work, "Mujer con alcuza," explores the human capacity for self-sacrifice and compassion, while other poems, including "A la Virgen María" and "De Profundis," present speakers that are able to see and become one with the light of God. The closing poem of the work, "Dedicatoria final—Las alas," presents a reconciliation between the poet and God. *Children of Wrath* also represents Alonso's break from prevailing formal and stylistic trends of surrealism and "pure poetry." Using authentic, common speech, he presents multifaceted images and metaphors and composed lines of irregular meter, merging form and meaning in the collection.

In another significant volume, *Hombre y Dios*, the poet explores the complicated relationship between God and humanity, while addressing themes introduced in his earlier works, including the struggle to survive, free will, and the injustices of life. The speaker of the poems questions the origins of injustice and grieves for modern society, where political games squelch individual expression, yet acknowledges that humankind has survived war and oppression. In several poems, including the title work, Alonso meditates on God and presents the relationship between humanity and the divine as a symbiotic system, while a discussion of individual freedom and the gift of free will is presented in such poems as "Los cuatro sonetos sobre la libertad." The final poem in the collection, "A un río le llamaban Carlos," offers a meditation on life, death, time, and the essence of humanity. While the various speakers of *Hombre y Dios* at times offer ambiguous or contradictory perspectives on life, scholars have praised the multiplicity of the collection, observing that Alonso's complex and diverse vision forms a multifaceted portrait of human experience.

While Alonso garnered considerable notice for his poetic achievements, he is also remembered for his critical works, including *La lengua poética de Góngora*, an examination of the poetic language of Spanish poet Luis de Góngora, which helped to facilitate that poet's accessibility to subsequent generations of readers; *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz* (1942), a similarly incisive study of the verse of Saint John of the Cross; and *Seis calas en la expresión literaria española* (1951), a survey of Spanish literary expression that he wrote with fellow-poet and critic Carlos Bousoño. *Poesía española: Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos*, however, is

generally considered Alonso's most important and definitive work of literary criticism. Focusing on six poets of Spain's Golden Age in this study, the author applied and interpreted theories regarding language and meaning proposed by Charles Bally and Ferdinand de Saussure, two Swiss structural linguists, in combination with his own ideas on stylistics. In contrast to popular methods of literary criticism, Alonso emphasized the text itself in this work, introducing a critical approach that was primarily concerned with the significance of language and the interrelationship between form and emotional expression in poetry.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

From the beginning of his career as a poet and scholar, Alonso won praise as an important new voice in Spanish letters and a leading member of the influential Generation of 1927, along with Lorca, Salinas, and Rafael Alberti. It was not until the 1940s, however, with the appearance of *Oscura noticia* and *Children of Wrath*, that he attracted attention as a major poet in Spanish literature. Recognized for his powerful treatment of existential themes in these works, he was credited with helping to revitalize postwar Spanish verse. In addition, *Children of Wrath* was considered a formally innovative work, and Alonso's use of free verse and multilayered images, as well as his exploration of concrete reality in this work, were considered a rebellion against the prevailing aesthetic trends of his time, which privileged surrealist techniques and the tenets of "pure poetry," or verse that emphasized abstraction and the musicality of language, rather than meaning or a message. Following the initial success of his two major poetic volumes, Alonso was elected to the Royal Spanish Academy in 1945. During his lifetime the poet also won praise and recognition for his critical works, especially his studies of the poetry of Spain's Golden Age, such as *La lengua poética de Góngora* and *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz*, which introduced new readers to forgotten figures within the Spanish literary tradition. With the appearance of his most respected scholarly work, *Poesía española: Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos*, Alonso became a dominant figure of literary scholarship in the postwar era, credited with initiating new schools of criticism in Spain and influencing subsequent generations. For his many achievements, he was awarded the Miguel de Cervantes prize, Spain's highest literary honor, in 1978.

In recent decades Alonso has continued to attract critical interest for both his poetry and literary scholarship. A number of critics, including Andrew P. Debicki, Graciela Palau de Nemes, and Carole A. Bradford, have concentrated on the imagery in his verse as well as his use of symbol. For Debicki, Alonso's increasing reli-

ance on symbolism provides a necessary unity to his poetry and offers insight into its "essential" qualities of ambiguity and duality. Palau de Nemes has focused more specifically on the poet's symbolic treatment of the wind, arguing that in such writings as "El viento y el verso" this image represents not only the "creative breath of poetry" but "the very breath of God." Other commentators, including Bradford and Elias L. Rivers, have emphasized Alonso's treatment of universal themes. Rivers, who has described some of Alonso's poems as "rootless," has contended that the verse in the poet's major collection, *Children of Wrath*, were "aimed at communication with the common reader," especially in their concern with such themes as "universal protest" and "the probing of 'monstrous' reality." Concerning Alonso's contributions as a critic and scholar, Antonio Sánchez Barbudo has described him as "sensitive and erudite, intuitive and analytical; a man of constant emotions and at the same time an implacable investigator of obscure details." Barbudo concludes that Alonso is an "ideal critic," in that he is "always attentive to the texts themselves and, at the same time, a man of great sensitivity, capable of appreciating the beauty that may reside in literature."

In recent years Alonso has maintained his status as a major poet and critic within modern European literature. Appreciated for his innovative poetics and comprehensive treatment of human emotion and experience, he is generally regarded today as one of Spain's most influential and important literary figures of the twentieth century. According to Elias L. Rivers, Alonso was "a complex, paradoxical man," who provided his readers not only a "powerful" cry of "human anguish" but also the beauty and courage of the individual in the face of chaos and loneliness. Rivers concludes that in his most important works, Alonso "extended the frontiers of poetry in Spain."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad* (poetry) 1921
- La lengua poética de Góngora* (criticism) 1935
- La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz* (criticism) 1942
- Ensayos sobre poesía española* (essays) 1944
- Hijos de la ira* [*Children of Wrath*] (poetry) 1944
- *Oscura noticia* (poetry) 1944
- Poesía española: Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos* (essay) 1950
- Seis calas en la expresión literaria española* [with Carlos Bousoño] (essays) 1951
- Poetas españoles contemporáneos* (essays) 1952
- Estudios y ensayos gongorinos* (essays) 1955
- Hombre y Dios* (poetry) 1955

- Menéndez Pelayo, crítica literario* (criticism) 1956
De los siglos oscuros al de Oro (essays) 1958
Góngora y el "Polifemo" (criticism) 1960; enlarged editions, 1961 and 1966
Primavera temprana de la literatura europea (essays) 1961
Cuatro poetas españoles: Garcilaso, Góngora, Maragall, Antonio Machado (essays) 1962
Del Siglo de Oro a este siglo de siglas (essays) 1962
Poemas escogidos (poetry) 1969
Obras completas. 2 vols. (poetry, essays, and criticism) 1972-73
Gozos de la vista (poetry) 1981
Antología de nuestro monstruoso mundo. Duda y amor sobre el Ser Supremo (poetry) 1985
Poesia (poetry) 1998

*This work includes the twelve-poem cycle "El viento y el verso."

CRITICISM

Andrew P. Debicki (essay date December 1964)

SOURCE: Debicki, Andrew P. "Symbols in the Poetry of Dámaso Alonso, 1921-1944." *Hispania* 47, no. 4 (December 1964): 722-32.

[In the following essay, Debicki studies Alonso's use of figurative language, especially symbols, throughout his poetry, asserting that his increasing use of symbols provides a unity to his work and sheds insight into its "essential characteristics" of ambiguity and duality, and how these qualities develop over time.]

At first glance, the poetic production of Dámaso Alonso appears quite heterogeneous; the neat, formally exact poems of *Poemas puros*, *poemillas de la ciudad*, seemingly detached from and rising above the problems of daily existence, do not have an evident relationship to the anguished verse of *Oscura noticia* and *Hijos de la ira*. The very fact that 23 years elapse between the publication date of the first book and that of the next two might confirm the suspicion that there is bound to be a great difference between them.¹

And yet, a study of Dámaso Alonso's use of figurative language, and especially of symbols, can help us see that his books of verse have much in common. It can also give us an insight into some essential characteristics and values of his poetry, and the way in which these are developed and modified in time.

Before proceeding with our study, we might examine symbols in relation to other kinds of figurative language. We can observe that a metaphor establishes a comparison between two objects or situations. It gives us two separate planes which enrich and modify each other, although each one retains its own nature. The relationship that emerges between them is normally based on their likenesses to each other, but may also involve our noticing differences between them. The key attribute of a successful metaphor, then, seems to be the creation of new insights via the parallels and contrasts generated between two planes.²

On the surface, there is a marked difference between the *modus operandi* of a metaphor and that of a symbol. The latter is an object or action made to represent something beyond itself—an idea, an object, a situation.³ The basic link between symbol and thing symbolized is complete and clear; the first stands for the second. The identification between the two can be conceptual and arbitrary. Instead of two planes complementing each other and generating multiple tensions, we have one element which stands for something outside itself.

But when we examine the symbols used in successful poems, we often find that they do not function in the exact way outlined above. Their effectiveness, indeed, seems to depend on the fact that they carry metaphorical as well as symbolic value; while they stand for something outside of themselves, they are at the same time being compared and contrasted to it, rather than fused completely with it in a conceptual unit. As a result, such symbols establish within the poem rich and often paradoxical relationships, and keep it from being reduced to a sterile abstraction.⁴ They may therefore allow the poem to profit both from the ambiguities achievable through metaphor and the precise expression of abstractions achievable through symbols.

As we look at Dámaso Alonso's poetry, we will observe a constantly increasing use of symbols which seem to operate in this dual way. From his early verse right through *Hijos de la ira* we will find natural objects, as well as human beings, identified with problems or situations outside of themselves, but also used to explore metaphorically multiple facets of the elements symbolized. And as the themes dealt with are presented in increasingly more concrete and complex fashions, the symbols become more and more metaphorical.

Dámaso Alonso's first book of verse, *Poemas puros*, *poemillas de la ciudad*, keeps dealing with the theme of the conflict between a poetic ideal of beauty and common everyday reality. Sometimes this theme is present in a straightforward fashion:

Racimos de burgueses.

Salidas de teatro.

¿Cuándo
sobaremos el lomo a las palabras
con la mano?

Ando
caído y cojo
y triste
y calvo.
¿Cuándo
romperemos, extáticos, la Luna,
amigo mío, hermano?

(pp. 59-60)

The poem starts with a cliché negative view of daily life. The people—clustered perhaps at a theatre exit—lose their human individuality by being compared to bunches of grapes, and are made even more prosaic via the word “burgueses.”

The second stanza transports us to a different world. The image of caressing words suggests that it is the realm of those who treat words with care, the creative artists. The run-on lines and the image of caressing create a less abrupt and more emotive effect, which contrasts with the harsh reality of stanza one. The question marks around this stanza indicate that the world of the artist is merely a dream, not a fact. A realization of this leads the speaker to a state of dejection in lines 6-10. But in addition, the prosaic tone of these lines and the presence of the word “calvo” makes the reader feel that the idealistic speaker himself is caught in the bourgeois world he is trying to escape! The last stanza, through its reference to the moon, makes the desire of a poetic ideal even more ethereal and at the same time childish.

On looking back, we note that the effectiveness of the poem depends largely on the sharp juxtaposition created between the bourgeois world and the ethereal poetic one. The common, cliché images heighten this contrast; in essence, they serve as symbols which concretely dramatize the opposition between widely differing attitudes. Yet the prosaic nature of the speaker adds some ambiguity, suggesting that the frontiers between these attitudes may not be easy to maintain; the ending also hints that an elevated viewpoint has its own limitations, or at least appears childish as it is held by the speaker.

In many poems, the theme of a common versus an elevated reality is presented through symbols that almost seem obvious or worn. In “*Crepúsculo*” (pp. 67-68), the night becomes a monster that devours an idealistic, humanized city; in “*Borrachos de las luces . . .*” (pp. 25-26) the wake of a star or comet stands for an ideal from which one can be distracted by false lights. And yet, as in the case of “*Racimos de burgueses . . .*,” the common nature of the symbol is instrumental in presenting, concretely and yet in essential fashion, what might otherwise remain diffuse. Through such symbols, Dámaso Alonso achieves exactitude while maintaining the poem’s sense of reality.

The conflict between a common and an elevated reality is often related directly to the speaker or a character in a poem. In “*Una isla de luz en la noche . . .*” (pp. 35-36), for example, we find a traveller who is torn between a desire to rest and a wish to travel, and clearly represents a human being faced by the alternatives of a comfortable prosaic existence and a search after higher ideals. And in the section entitled “*Versos a la novia*,” the girl is an embodiment of beauty and harmony. “*Madrigal de las once*” furnishes us an example:

Desnudas han caído
las once campanadas.

Picotean la sombra de los árboles
las gallinas pintadas
y un enjambre de abejas
va rezongando encima.

La mañana
ha roto su collar desde la torre.

En los troncos, se rascan las cigarras.

Por detrás de la verja del jardín,
resbala,
 quieta,
 tu sombrilla blanca.

(pp. 87-88)

The description of sounds which forms the bulk of the poem makes the scene harsh and uninviting. The animals present are made unpleasantly prosaic or aggressive; the bees’ buzzing becomes a muttering, the crickets’ song a scratching, the hens’ pecking an attack on the shadows. The synaesthesia of the sound of the bells as a falling down (lines one and two) is carried further in lines seven and eight; there the bell-tower becomes a necklace and the sounds emanating from it the noise of suitably gigantic pearls falling off from it. The very ingenuity of the image accents the way in which the poem willfully turns an ordinary scene into something disagreeable. And this turning of the prosaic into the grotesque suggests the valuelessness of a common existence.

The last stanza abruptly switches us to a closed-off garden, a scene of aloof elegance. The girl’s parasol contrasts by its grace and quiet with the bulky harshness of what we saw before. And by presenting the girl only through her parasol, Alonso prevents her from becoming corporeal or specific; she remains a graceful symbol which we juxtapose to the bulky matter-of-fact world seen earlier.

Although most of the characters in *Poemas puros*, like the “novia” and the traveller, merely dramatize the conflict between a common and a poetic reality, a human

being is occasionally presented in a more complex fashion. We have already observed that the protagonist of "**Racimos de burgueses**" emerges as someone admiring an ideal and yet contaminated by the ordinary; the speakers in "**Ejemplos**" (pp. 85-86) and "**Ha mucho no doy cuerda . . .**" (pp. 93-94) are quite similar in their attitudes. All in all, the speaker seems to be a vehicle through which Alonso suggests the complexity of the issue of poetic and common reality, and the impossibility of reducing it to a precise opposition. (In the process, this speaker becomes a more particularized metaphor than any other character.)

The theme of contrasting realities is often linked with that of the passage of time. A tired traveller who gives up his quest in "**Respuesta a Lucero**" (p. 37) indicates that as time goes on one's search for an ideal diminishes. And the destructive effect of time upon beauty is seen very clearly in "**El derribo**" (pp. 53-54). In this poem, a series of humanizations describe a house and dramatize its decay. At the same time, they serve another function, as they link the defects of the house with particular human physical ones: the peeled-off wallpaper is like skin that reveals the insides ("Ya se le ven las tripas a la alcoba"), the crooked staircase is a lame hostess ("¡Pobre, la coja / de la escalera que aun invita a todos!"), the house's appearance is like a grimace and a shameless nakedness. All this turns the house into a very dramatic symbol of human decay through the course of time.

Time is also treated cyclically in some poems of this book. While the travellers in "**Volverás a deshora . . .**" (pp. 17-18) and "**Igual . . .**" (pp. 33-34) return from their quests, they see other travellers take their place. And in "**Borrachos de las luces . . .**" (pp. 25-26) the "estela de la vida" is recovered after being lost. Though individual searches after ideals have to end, the general urge to seek an elevated outlook remains.

Much of the value of *Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad*, is due to the way in which nature and human symbols give dramatic precision and concreteness to the otherwise ethereal theme of a common versus an elevated outlook. Yet the paradoxical nature of the speaker and the use of tangible images in poems like "**El derribo**" and "**Madrigal de las once**" keep much of the work from falling into inhuman neatness, while concern with the issue of time relates Alonso's theme to a basic question facing man.⁷

Although *Oscura noticia*, Dámaso Alonso's next book of verse, was not published until 1944, it contains sections dated much earlier. "**Estampas de primavera**" includes poems written between 1919 and 1924 which strongly recall those in *Poemas puros*. "**Viaje**," for example, presents us a speaker much like the traveller in the earlier book:

. . . Cabellera era de trenes
la tarde. Y era una sed
de rutas la mar salada.
Y a mi corazón le dije
—como a un perro—:
"¡Vamos! ¡Hala!"

. . . A mi corazón que estaba
latiendo y llorando, sordo,
sobre la tierra desnuda
y desolada.

(*Oscura noticia*, p. 37)

By making the trains a woman's hair, the poem stresses their extension while de-emphasizing their mechanical quality. And although the thirsty sea can be literally paraphrased as "the causer of a desire to travel in the viewer," the adjective *salada* forces us to view the sea as a human figure made thirsty by the salt it contains. The humanizations of sea and afternoon thus bring these elements emotively closer to the reader and make him see the wish to travel as a desirable one.

The rest of the poem is centered around a single image, that of the heart. First of all the earlier situation is reversed: a human element is now animalized. The image of heart as dog carries through at least partially into the last stanza, and identifies the desire to stay back as instinctive, elemental, animalistic. To some degree, the poem again gives us a conflict between an elevated viewpoint, symbolized by the desire to travel, and a common one, symbolized by the wish to stay. Yet there is an ambiguity here, far greater than any we have seen before: the heart's wish at the end, though elemental, possesses an emotive intensity stronger than that allotted to the opposite desire. (By calling the ground "desolate," the poem makes nature itself take the side of the heart.) And we note in the poem a corresponding increase in the richness of the imagery: the particular metaphors of the hair, the thirst, and the dog develop detailed characteristics of the opposing attitudes symbolized.

"**Mañana lenta**" again depends on a symbol for its meaning:

Mañana lenta,
cielo azul,
 campo verde,
 tierra vinariaega.
Y tú, mañana, que me llevas.
Carreta
demasiado lenta,
carreta
demasiado llena
de mi hierba nueva,
temblorosa y fresca,
que ha de llegar—sin darme cuenta—
seca,
—sin saber cómo—
seca.

(p. 35)

The cart furnishes a fitting symbol for life; if anything it might seem too common, too connected with the conventional image of life as a trip. Yet it gains freshness through the use of vivid detail: the image of grass turning dry before arrival is an excellent visual metaphor for man shriveling in old age. In addition, an ambiguous note is struck by the line “demasiado lenta.” Man, hating old age, still complains at the slowness of life. We have here a reference to the common desire to move into the future, regardless of the fact that it only brings one closer to age and death. Dámaso Alonso has captured, in two words, a most paradoxical feature of man’s outlook on life.

Luis Felipe Vivanco has already indicated the existential and symbolic nature of the poem just studied.⁸ But his hint that this makes it an exception amongst Alonso’s earlier poetry underestimates the symbolic qualities present in *Poemas puros*, and ignores the fact that the theme of time already appeared there. We would say, instead, that “*Mañana lenta*,” just like “*Viaje*,” adds a stronger stress on the existential issues of time and death to a theme and a symbolic technique already common in earlier poems. In addition, again like “*Viaje*,” it displays a more complex and detailed use of metaphor, which seems to suit its existential theme well.

The section “*El viento v el verso*,” dated 1924, contains a whole series of poems which use the wind as a symbol of an idealistic search, and also of the poet who constructs an elevated reality with words and images. (See “*Puertociego de la mar*,” pp. 74-75.) Yet the symbolism is not simplistic; use of detailed images enriches the themes presented.

In *Oscura noticia proper*, written between 1933 and 1943, we also find an extensive use of symbols. In “*Copla*” (p. 31), for example, a song interrupted in the middle is explicitly identified with life cut short by death. In this fashion the poem dramatizes both the poetic possibilities and the limitations of human life, and relates to many of the poems we have been studying. But here the subject of a personal death is treated more directly than before; “*Copla*” represents a more existential treatment of the theme of illusion vs. confining reality.

The theme of death is again central in “*Destrucción inminente*”:

¿Te quebraré, varita de avellano,
te quebraré, quizás? ¡Oh tierna vida,
ciega pasión en verde hervor nacida,
tú, frágil ser que oprimo con mi mano!

Un relumbro fugaz, sólo un liviano
crujir en dulce pulpa estremecida,
y aprenderás, oh rama desvalida,
cuánto pudo la muerte en un verano.

Mas, no; te dejaré. Juega en el viento
hasta que pierdas, al otoño agudo,
tu verde frenesí, hoja tras hoja.

¡Dame otoño también, Señor, que siento
no sé qué hondo crujir, qué espanto mudo!
¡Detén, oh Dios, tu llamarada roja!

(p. 20)

When we look at the poem as a whole, the twig’s life clearly represents that of Man, while the speaker plays the part of God. But it is of the utmost importance to see how the imagery is developed gradually. No exact symbolism is defined in the first stanza. The initial question, addressed to the twig, gives the latter a human role; the rest of the stanza endows the plant with human sensations. As a result, the reader feels the humanity of the plant emotively, before any conceptual connection is drawn.

As the possibility of the plant’s death is contemplated in stanza two, words like “crujir,” “dulce pulpa estremecida,” and “desvalida” help embody the easy horror of its destruction. The reader, having already seen the twig in human terms, cannot help but emotively transfer this effect to human situations. As a result, the third stanza affects him as a welcome reprieve, and he accepts the slow loss of leaves in autumn because it strikes him as a natural demise. Without explicitly placing before the reader any symbolic equivalences, Alonso has managed to keep him involved in the twig’s existence.

Stanza four finally makes the symbolic level clear: now man is not only associated with the twig, he is the twig. The symbol, as in so many earlier poems of Dámaso Alonso, adds a precision that intensifies the significance of the work.

And yet a great deal of the merit of the poem depends on its veiling the exact symbolism until the end. This allows it to develop first a richness of detail which generates emotive meanings, and which would be obscured were the work to begin with neat equivalences. If we knew at the outset that the twig stands for Man, we would not only ignore its particular characteristics, but would also not be led to hesitate, to consider the paradox involved in seeing a plant’s demise in tragic terms. All this, which is figuratively valid and important, would be rejected by us as foolish because we would be looking at the poem literally and exactly.

In “*Destrucción inminente*” we seem to observe what Carlos Bousoño has called “símbolo bisémico”: a symbolic plane lurks beneath the surface of a metaphoric poem, and is hinted at initially only through words which function as “signs of suggestion”. (In this poem, these would be the ones that humanize the twig.) The