The Harp and the Poet: The Harp as a Metaphor for the Romantic Heart

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¡Cuánta nota dormía en sus cuerdas,…!
Gustavo Adolfo Bequer

1. Introduction

In the *Thematic Guide to British Poetry*, Ruth F. Glancy defends the closeness of the relationship between music and poetry given the etymology of "lyric" and the practice of playing melodies while reciting (153). Thomas Campion reflects this union in his poem "When to her lute Corinna sings" (1601) in which Corinna's voice is "credited with bringing to life the sound of the lute" (Glancy 153), as the strings of the instrument respond to the very mood of the song and the singer. In the second stanza, however, it is the poet who compares himself to the lute by suggesting that his mistress plays upon him and his emotions as she plays with the cords of the lute:

> And as her lute doth live or die,
> Led by her passion, so must I:
> (…)
> But if she doth of sorrow speak,
> Ev'n from my heart the strings do break. (Campion)

This identification between the body of the poet and the instrument, Glancy argues, is particularly usual in poetry since "The poet envies the lute or harp whose strings are being so gently caressed by delicate fingers" (153). Glancy also offers another example of such analogy, Shakespeare's Sonnet 128, which instead uses a harpsichord (153), but the comparison can also be found in myriads of literary and poetic works from different traditions. The same analogy is established in *Tragicomedia de Calisto y*

Melibea (1499) by Fernando de Rojas in which the lute out of tune is likened to Calisto's disturbed heart (24). In addition, though for a different purpose, Joachim Du Bellay's "Que n'ai-je encor la harpe thracienne" (1558) associates the "poet's feeling of creative power with string instruments —the harp, the lyre and the lute— and with the correspondences among the arts of poetry, painting, architecture, and music" in Joachim Du Bellay's sonnets (Davis 152).

Instead of exploring the origin of the analogy, these pages pose a panoramic reading of a recurrent poetic symbol, the string instrument, whether a harp or a lute, as a metaphor for the romantic heart. A constant phenomenon in romantic poetry, this work also intends to highlight the changes and evolutions that the symbol has experienced. As such, the work focuses on the romantic literature of the nineteenth century of three different nations and, therefore, of three diverse historical moments.[1] The three scenarios proposed are the English Romanticism in "The Eolian Harp" (1796) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), the American Romanticism in "Israfel" (1831) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), and the Colombian Romanticism in "El corazón de la mujer" (1887) by Soledad Acosta de Samper (1833-1913). Whether or not these authors are to be considered paradigmatic is not the concern of the work; the focus is here placed on the character and evolution of the symbol through different traditions and decades, experiencing some alterations along the way but remaining constant in its core nonetheless.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams indicates that a characteristic aspect of "romantic theory" is the recurrence of a series of analogies that imply "that poetry is an interaction, the joint effect of inner and outer, mind and object, passion and the perceptions of sense" (51). He clarifies that such was the idea behind the reference to the eolian lyre, which serves romantic authors like Shelley to illustrate their theories of imagination

[1] Even though the three chosen scenarios belong to the same century, their consideration as different historical moments results from the fact that these three nations are in markedly diverse developmental stages, which gives their cultural and literary expressions a different tenor.

and poetry. Since it enabled the attribution of music to nature instead of art, it became the favourite instrument of poets during the last half of the eighteenth century. But, Abrams continues, "It is noteworthy, however, that not until the nineteenth century did the wind-harp become an analogy for the poetic mind as well as a subject for poetic description" (51). The harp has signified the spontaneous urge that moves the poet to compose art as if driven by metaphysical forces, but at the same time constitutes a reminder of the impossibility to express the totality of his or her poetry due to the poet's mortal condition, existing within the boundaries of society.

The symbol's journey through the nineteenth century and across different countries transmutes its meaning and alters its phenomenological expression. In Coleridge, it assumes indistinctly the shape of a harp or a lute; Poe refers exclusively to the latter, while Acosta de Samper uses the image of the harp to describe the female heart. Although these variations of form may suggest a lack of correlation between them, in fact, the harp, the lyre and the lute can be considered versions of the same symbol. Such was the design of Du Bellay whose "concept of poetic creation and artistic power" (155) assumed the form of these three objects, considering them merely variants of each other (Davis 155, 163).

2. The harp, the lute, el arpa.

In his analysis of "The Eolian Harp", Nobuya Takahashi offers a simple depiction of the instrument:

> The aeolian harp, a name deriving from the Greek god of wind, Aeolos, is a string instrument sounded by natural wind. Mostly equipped with some device such as a slit draught for concentrating the wind, the strings (normally four to twelve) generate the notes uncontrolled by human activities. (Takahashi 19)

Music is a rather important component of Coleridge's poetry, and Takahashi offers some keys for the interpretation of said element in his work. Although music is not the objective of these lines but rather the object itself that produces it, it is impossible to separate both of them:

> [Coleridge] makes sounds heard in various forms, such as instrumental music, songs sung by human or angelic voices, storms or breezes, noises emanating from many sources, or even silence (that is, the absence of sound). But there is one image which stands out more impressively than any others; the aeolian harp. (Takahashi 18)

The simplicity of the instrument is emphasized not only by its construction, but because it can produce music at the slightest touch of the wind: "Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air/Is music slumbering on her instrument" (Coleridge 101). Furthermore, this is an artifact completely sensitive to the world and to nature; music is contained inside it, and though the external world is required to provoke the vibration, even in the absence of wind there is still sound lying dormant in it. In that sense, the instrument is played by the natural elements, but the sounds produced belong to the realm of the numinous. Thus, a metaphor begins to be conceived, one that turns the poet into an instrument moved and played by metaphysical forces so as to compose the most elevated and pure music, almost incommunicable. This idea recalls the instrument that, lifeless and engraved in a Grecian urn, even years later still suggests to the poetic voice an impossible music that does not affect the senses but the intellect (Keats 218-219). This perspective considers that poetry lies dormant within the poet just as music is stored in an instrument even when nobody is playing it. Such notion may suggest the influence of Idealism in that it refers to a reality beyond perception. Idealism is the ancient doctrine bequeathed by Parmenides and Plato that indicates that reality might be, in fact, a mere appearance, and the school of philosophy that accepts the validity of abstract ideas, or universals *ante re*, in a world only dictated by mental processes. Coleridge's stance indicates the "intellectual breeze" as the force that wakes it; other authors endow the same action to other agents.

In "The Eolian Harp", while the narrator pleasantly observes the landscapes that surround him, he reflects about the little wind harp placed along the window:

> And that simplest lute,
> Placed lengthways in the clasping casement, hark!
> How by the desultory breeze caressed,
> Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,

It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
Boldier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound. (Coleridge 100-101)

The description of the device is not yet the definition of the metaphor that will flood romantic writings; however, a very particular simile is presented: the lute as a "coy maid", hesitant to succumb to his lover as if "half yielding" to him. It will be his beloved the one who will incite the maid to produce such sweet music. It is the wind, an external agent, the one who will determine how the harp sounds; however, even though this would be a procedure ruled by chance and unsteadiness, the instrument is never out of tune since its disposition to be played enables it to produce any sound without being discordant. The fickleness of this breeze —of natural and intellectual origin for the instrument and for the poet respectively— will be echoed in the protagonist force of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (114-117). In it, Shelley indicates the existence of a "Force" that, though unseen, binds all beings together, but is only accessible to the poet, while Coleridge uses the metaphor to explain to his beloved the process of his art. Simultaneously, he justifies any profanity he may incur in by emphasizing its accidental nature; it results from the influence of "the intellectual breeze" over his heart just as music is produced by harp as wind passes through it (Coleridge 102). The absence of the physical instrument in Shelley's poem —as a metaphor that does not denote the poet's heart ("Hymn" 115)— is not enough to prevent the relation that exists between the poetics of both authors since in "A Defence of Poetry" Shelley uses the metaphor of the "Aeolian lyre" to expose his own poetic doctrine (Shelley "Defence" 675).[2]

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[2] In their notes to "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", Leader and O'Neill link the poem's "Force" to a similar design in Shelley's "Essay on Christianity" (720) in which Shelley compares this power to breath that whimsically blows through a suspended lyre (Shelley "Christianity" 147). Abrams traces the development of this symbol to Plato's *Timaeus* in which the doctrine of the *anima mundi* is proposed (184).

Coleridge's narrator, after explaining to his "pensive Sara" how beautiful the lute's melody is, overtly compares his own mind to the instrument:

> Full many a thought uncalled and undetained
> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject lute! (Coleridge 101-102)

According to this perspective music is both means and end, then the poet is the instrument that, being exposed to the force, produces music in the form of sudden thoughts, fantasies that flutter; he knows intuitively that such ideas and fancies are like the wind that passes through the lute. Under this perspective, the harp would be his mind, which vibrates and sounds thanks to the irregular flow of thoughts. This suggests a lack of volition on the part of the poetic voice, that is, his mind is analogous to the instrument since external elements are required to trigger his poetic force —or at least to activate its latent melody as previously explained. It is such a predisposition to sensibility that it has no need for contemplation in order to become thought; like the harp to the wind, it is just an instrument through which the world finds a reinterpretation or recreation. This turns the narrator into a poet since, prompted by the external stimuli of nature, he produces poetry deprived of reflection and intention in a natural and spontaneous form —following Wordsworth's famous precept (367)— as without these stimuli poetry would still lay inactive and unexpressed within him:

> And what is all of animated nature
> Be but organic harps diversely framed,
> That tremble into thought, as o er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (Coleridge 102)

These lines present the suggestion that all animated beings are harps that, as in the poet's case, only sound when stimulated by an external element, in this case, a great "intellectual breeze" that floods the consciousness of all creatures producing thought. This force, consists and comprises the souls of everything that lives and, by extension, it can be equated with God:

> We cannot, or need not, the poet asserts, distinguish the life within us from the life without us. There is no boundary. This

> one life creates in human perception the state of synaesthesia: the fusion of sound and sight […] This unification is neatly epitomized in an image composed of breeze, harp, and music. (Takahashi 22)

Towards the end of the poem, the speaker finds disapproval in the eyes of his beloved, he retracts from his claims as if they were heretical and simply shows gratitude for what he has. He appears to reject the understanding of animate beings as harps deprived of volition, getting swept up by predestination or a supreme thought, "The earliest and most tenacious theory to explain these phenomena attributed the poem to the dictation of a supernatural visitant" (Abrams 189). As a result, one could assume that the narrator could not be identified with the instrument, since he disavows his arguments concerning the analogy. In other words, if he can recant his doctrine then it implies that he has a will of his own, blaming those blasphemous thoughts on his "unregenerate" mind, thus distancing himself from the metaphor.

However, the form in which the poem has been elaborated enables us to perceive and maintain that the poetic voice is indeed like an Aeolic harp since the poem itself is the proof that he didn't retract from those ideas: the first stanzas still propose a vision in which the world passes through him creating poetry as a result, constituting in this manner the metaphor that equates the romantic poet with the wind harp. Thus, he constitutes a being absolutely sensitive with an immense burden of poetry latent within him that, at the slightest touch of the external world, explodes in different, though always harmonious, tones of poetry. His art is not moderated by reflection or by will; it is like an accident, which finds in that very accidental nature its harmony and beauty. Even if substantial changes had been made Abrams argues "that poetic vision by no means obviated revision; but, most romantic poets insisted, at its inception a poem is an involuntary and unanticipated *donnée*" (214).

3. Israfel and Usher

The harp's metaphor as a feature of the romantic poet appears as well in the poem "Israfel". Although authors should never be associated with their narrators —a relation that alongside intentionality does not concern this

essay— in Poe's case the task of separating him from the speaker is rather complex. Since the poetic voice could be identified as a poet, Poe might be using his surrogate to voice his own poetic desires. It is clear throughout the poem that the narrator intends to be associated with Israfel. He aspires, with false modesty, to be like the angel; and false modesty is appropriate here since by the poem's conclusion the reader cannot think, in any way, that the speaker incarnates or represents that which he desires. Considering that some authors have suggested that Poe has got associated with his narrators, even with those of his most preposterous fictions (Gargano 22-23), he might have achieved to be identified with the narrator just as the narrator can be associated to the angel, with the reader's help. If readers have granted the narrator such condition —being manipulated, of course— it is rather easy for them to make another concession, this time to the author, as a result of some type of transitive quality of reading:

> Poe, however, although he grandiosely proclaimed a theory of pure art, betrays an air of pretentiousness, posturing, and even downright fraud. To be sure, he has his devoted followers who see him as he wished to be seen: the embodiment of Romantic Artist as a Victim. (Cox 41)

Cox's use of the word "victim" suits particularly well the understanding of the symbol here studied, since one of its most notable features is the passivity that characterises the poet. It signals a lack of volition on the part of the poet that, if in Coleridge served his poetic voice to justify the wrongs that his art may cause, in Poe constitutes the attempt to embrace fully the representation and ideal of the romantic poet.

The note that appears in the poem's title alludes to the *Quran*, describing a being called Israfel, whose heart is like a lute and is among God's creatures the one with the most beautiful voice. This footnote, which according to Gustav Davidson also appeared in the succeeding versions of the poem, wrongly attributed the origin of the line to the *Quran* as in it there is no reference to any angel named Israfel (87) nor a sentence similar to the line of the footnote (88). Instead, the figure of Israfel belongs to Arabic folklore in which he is considered the angel of music and one of the four angels in charge of signalling the Day of Judgement (Davidson 88). As a result, Davidson offers three possible sources: "George Sale's translation of *The Koran* (1734 or later editions); (2) Thomas Moore's

Lalla Rookh (1817 or later editions); and (3) Pierre de Béranger's poem 'La Refus' (1829-1830)" (88). Moore's oriental romance mentions in one of its sections the angel "ISRAFIL" whose sweet voice (185) is characterized "as the note of the charm'd lute" (221). In the notes to the text, Moore clarifies that Israfil is "the Angel of Music" (288) and he also credits Sale's translation of the *Quran* for the characterization of the angel's voice as sweet, "'The angel Israfil, who has the most melodious voice of all God's creatures.' — Sale" (277).[3] Whether or not in his translation of the *Quran* Sale refers to Israfel in the terms that Moore presents, or if Poe used Sale's or Moore's work as an unacknowledged source is of no consequence for the present essay. What is significant, however, is the fact that Poe and Moore, two poets of roughly the same period, use the same analogy in their respective literary creations, which reflects the recurrent and adaptive nature of the symbol. Perhaps this is not so surprising considering the following statement by Killis Campbell:

> It was to the Romantics, moreover, —and in particular to Byron and Moore and Coleridge,— that Poe looked, in so far as he looked beyond his own experiences and observation, for the materials out of which he was to fabricate his scant half a hundred lyrics; and to them also he turned for models and for inspiration. (149-150)

The significance of the third possible source, De Béranger's "Le Refus" relies rather on its relation to another of Poe's works, since in 1839 Poe used the last two lines of the poem again for the epigraph of "The Fall of the House of Usher." Nonetheless, its importance for the poem at hand is without question, since as Campbell has indicated: "The basic idea of 'Israfel' seems to have been suggested by two lines from Beranger's

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[3] Thomas Moore's quote of Sale's translation is correct, as the same line previously cited appears in Section four of the "Preliminary Discourse" (71). It might be significant to note, however, that throughout his analysis Sale identifies Israfil as the angel in charge of blowing the trumpet to signal Judgment Day and the Resurrection (51, 59). It is curious in the least to see how both authors emphasized the virtue of the angel's voice in association with the lute instead of with the trumpet, perhaps to accommodate it to the poetic symbol in vogue.

'Le Refus' (1830)" (158). Poe's poem starts with a description of the heart and the virtues of Israfel:

> In heaven a spirit doth dwell
> "Whose heart-strings are a lute";
> None sing so wildly well
> As the angel Israfel,
> And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
> Ceasing the hymns attend the spell
> Of his voice, all mute. (Poe "Israfel" 175)

Even Nature in its entirety decides to remain silent so as to properly hear Israfel as his heart produces the most wonderful music ever heard. The footnote and the previous lines emphasise the sweetness of his voice. One might think that, as such, the instrument he plays is his voice; however, it is crucial to point out that the instrument is the heart even though the attributes addressed refer to the voice. The voice is merely the air that moves the heartstrings of this sensitive being to sound. The fact that the analogy with the lute is constituted based on his heart may support such view. This process reflects the synaesthesia that Takahashi describes in "The Eolian Harp", the fusion of voice and instrument as the angel sings accompanied by his lute, his heart:

> And they say (the starry choir
> And the other listening things)
> That Israfeli s fire
> Is owing to that lyre
> By which he sits and sings-
> The trembling living wire
> Of those unusual strings. (Poe "Israfel" 176)

The lyre's strings are Israfel's heartstrings, unusual and alive as the instrument itself, and thus, more sensitive than any other. This fragment echoes the lines in which Coleridge's speaker wonders if all animate beings are lutes. However, the last stanza introduces a more sound reference to Coleridge's harp:

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
    Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
    A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
   From my lyre within the sky. (Poe "Israfel" 176-177)

The poet also possesses a lute but his poetry is mortal; he believes that by changing places with Israfel his poetry would become more audacious. At the same time, if Israfel would occupy the poet's position his melody could never be as lovely and wild as before since it would become mortal. Considering this, it can be inferred that the speaker is suggesting that the difference between the angel and himself is just defined in terms of position, that is, what distinguishes them is the condition of mortality. If this is true, then it could be safe to affirm that the poet considers himself to be possessor of a heart whose strings are like those of a lute. The poet has the same formal qualities, so to speak, that the angel that hushes the song of the stars; the fact of his mortality is merely circumstantial. To that extent, the romantic poet is condemned to have a heart-lyre or a heart-harp that is incapable of expressing the totality of its poetry due to the poet's mortal condition. In a sense, such idea reflects Floyd Stoval's analysis of "Israfel", which argues "in this imperfect world the poet can approach truth only through the veil of beautiful forms" (175).

In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the condition of corruption and mortality of the lute finds its ultimate expression. The narrator visits the mansion of his host and friend, Roderick Usher. Through a series of parallelisms the reader receives the feeling that *Usher* refers both to the deteriorated building and to the family, therefore, the fall might allude as well to the dwellers (Poe "The Fall…" 399). The reason behind the narrator's journey is to alleviate with his presence a strange condition of disorder in the mind of his host, not necessarily an illness but rather an idiosyncratic oddity (Poe "The Fall…" 398). It consists in an extremely acute perception of the world as his senses are super-sensitive and perceive the slightest odour, taste and sound (Poe "The Fall…" 403, 406). At this point, one can discover a parallelism between Roderick Usher's condition and the epigraph that heads the narration:

> Son coer est un luth suspendu;
> Sitôt qu on le touche il résonne.
>
> *De Béranger.* (Poe "The Fall…" 398)

As previously mentioned the quote is extracted from De Béranger's poem "Le Refus", though the reference is used with a different purpose since the source deals with political satire and social demonstration. The epigraph alludes to a heart suspended like a lute that will sound at the lightest touch. This, in turn, guides the reader once again to the imagery and verses of Coleridge, who compares the poet with an instrument so delicate and sensitive that even the flow of air moves him to the point of creating melodies without predisposition or intention. The force of nature takes the poet to a state of ecstasy; however, in Usher's case he is excited disproportionally. Later in the narration, the guest and his host meet in artistic sessions, one of them consisting in singing. A double connotation can be found in these music sessions since Usher performs accompanied by a string instrument, the only type that his condition can tolerate. This may recall the situation of Israfel playing the sublime lute that is his own heart. A poetic fragment in its own right, the song's lyrics narrates the story of a haunted palace whose master lives in wealth and in radiant splendour, sitting in glory while people dance to the music of a lute. Then sorrow assails the monarch, tainting and destroying the happiness of the realm, and the music becomes discordant (Poe "The Fall…" 406-407). The poem seems to mirror the reality of what is happening in Usher's life, anticipating the fall of the house and its dwellers, reflecting how the dissonance produced by sorrow in the mind of the master disrupts the harmony of its context.

4. The poetic heart in Colombia

Before we turned to the analysis of the symbol in Acosta de Samper's work, a picture of the Colombian nineteenth century might be illustrative. Colombia is a romantic nation, where the dreams of Wordsworth and Coleridge were almost a reality, since Romanticism constituted the nation and its collective memory (Barreda y Béjar "Romanticismo y poesía" 3) for a period that stretched out from nineteenth century up to half of the twentieth century. Barreda y Béjar have named this process "america-

nismo literario" (literary Americanism), ideologically rooted in the conceptualization of literature as the form of expression of a new society ("El romanticismo hispanoamericano" 12). This romantic condition is derived not only from literature but from all areas, since it was a nation recently founded when the first romantic influences started to arrive in the continent; exploring even, as a result, romantic politics and a romantic constitution. In such context, the romantic writer assumed the role of politician and legislator, organizing not only the values but the very social structure of Colombia (Barreda y Béjar "Romanticismo y poesía" 3). In their attempt to build a romantic America, however, they found a world that by shattering their dreams did no other thing that to confirm them in their romantic character of defeat.

In "El corazón de la mujer" ("The Heart of Woman"), Acosta de Samper presents the instrument in the first line of the introduction. It is impossible not to think in a continuity when a text opens with the mention of a so valued romantic object; especially when it serves as the catalyst for the utmost sensitivity possible, as previously commented: "El corazón de la mujer es un arpa mágica que no suena armoniosamente sino cuando una mano simpática la pulsa" (237) (The heart of a woman is a magic harp that does not sound harmonious but when a caring hand touches it.).

In Acosta de Samper's work a slight change is introduced concerning the explored metaphor, the nature of the external force is substituted for a fellow being. It could be thought that such hand could be any favourable natural agent, but said reading would be too much accommodated to the poetic origins here explored. The hand could be that of a female friend, but taking into account the customs, manners and social structures that reigned in nineteenth century Colombia, the hand must be that of an affectionate man since later in the narration she expresses: "Pero la que ha sido amada y ha amado es un ser angelical" (238) (But the one who has been loved and has loved is an angelic being). Although Soledad Acosta de Samper is erected as a feminist voice in Colombia (Skinner 471), the introduction to this work still transmits certain ingenuity regarding the social roles that she is trying to vindicate. This results from the fact that Samper's proto-feminism, as well as that of some of her contemporaries, was focused on the construction of the Colombian nation (Leal Larrarte 115). Of course, the present text could be read in two different ways: from

a submissive point of view that, we might say, almost humiliates women, or from a perspective in which irony and 'the call to arms' to other women are detected and underlined. Whichever the case might be, we should be reminded how the Colombian nineteenth century regarded women.

In "Consejos a una niña" (Admonishment to a Girl) by the Colombian writer José María Vergara y Vergara, the narrator tells his young listener that the protective fairy-tale figures will disappear from her life once she is old enough to read and comprehend the letter. By that time, those dreams will have been torn by reality and she will be learning the cruel truths of life that, he warns, still store unpleasant surprises for her (Vergara y Vergara 120). It is not strange, then, that the understanding of the world inculcated to women was corrupted from the beginning. In other words, though the letter is addressed to a little girl, it is assumed that she will not read it until she has grown, but then it will be too late to protect her from harm, which is precisely the intent of the text. Deserted by the fairies of youth, the only protection that she can expect is from her appointed and trustworthy guardians, who are the figures that are responsible for her happiness and welfare, even though they might fill her with sorrow. It is noteworthy how joy is tied to a righteous path, since in the uncertainty of life he warns her that the things that may produce joy can be there to harm her, thus the need to be watched over by worthy guardians.

In the case of women, they were condemned to misery since birth. This statement does not pretend to affirm that this was the life that awaited for them, but at least it was the life dreamt and expected for them. Colombian women from that period were demanded to lead a passive life bound to the private domain of domesticity and the care of the family (Leal Larrarte 123). In a pathetic tone the speaker prophesizes that life will take a toll in their respective lives, it will shatter them; the peace of childhood will be disturbed to give way to the agitations of youth, just as his pains will be cured by the peace of the grave. He even bids her to engage in a metaphorical conversation in which she lies in her cradle while he lies in his tomb. (Vergara y Vergara 121). In this darkness, and after having explained the dependence suggested and entailed by the caring hand that has to touch the harp, appears a music, a melody that may alleviate the burden that maturity brings to women; the conviction that the heart of a

woman can, and should, overcome social impositions:

> El alma y el corazón de una mujer son mundos incógnitos en que se agita el germen de mil ideas vagas, sueños ideales y deleitosas que la rodean y viven con ella: sentimientos misteriosos é imposibles de analizar. (Acosta de Samper 237)
>
> (The soul and the heart of a woman are uncharted worlds where stirs the seed of thousands of vague ideas, ideal and delightful dreams that surround her and live with her: feelings that are mysterious and impossible to analyse.)

A woman's heart is a magical instrument, one that at first and on general terms resembles more the poet in Coleridge's verses than the angelic figure and the narrator of "Israfel" or Roderick Usher. This heart is filled with ideas and fantasies like the poetic voice of "The Eolian Harp", but radically differs from it in the following aspect:

> El corazón de la mujer tiene (…) un ligero polvillo; (…) el polvillo es la imagen de las ilusiones inocentes de la juventud que la realidad arranca rudamente, dejándolo sin brillo y sin belleza. (Acosta de Samper 237)
>
> (The heart of a woman has (…) a fine dust; (…) the fine dust is the image of the innocent fancies of youth that reality tears up rudely, leaving it without brilliance and beauty.)

The difference consist in that reality destroys the magic of the instrument, whereas in Coleridge's work the world is what induces the harp to sound thanks to the action of the external element that extracts the poetry contained within the instrument. However, the very difference with the English poet likens this vision to the lyre of Poe, as the external world is too strong for the lute's delicacy and sensitivity. In "The Heart of Woman", the figure of the instrument seems to be synthesised, combining attributes from the previous harps. It is important to point out that Acosta de Samper's work speaks of "la mujer de espíritu poético" (the woman of poetic spirit) (238) as the one who is able to be aware of the treasure hidden in her chest. In addition, the heart of such woman suffers the most from the disillusionment of reality as it is more sensitive, and thus, prone like Roderick Usher's to be hurt. This is significant since in the texts previously

explored, though easy to infer, the vision of the poet as possessor of the lute is never explicitly expressed; rather, it is understood from the narration, from the poetic's voice sensitivity; but they never speak of a poetic spirit like Acosta de Samper's text does:

> El hombre culto cuando ama verdaderamente es siempre poeta en sus sentimientos: la mujer lo es en todos los tiempos en el fondo de su alma, porque su corazón siempre ama. (238)
>
> (The educated man when truly loves is always a poet in his feelings: woman is poet at any time in the depth of her soul since her heart always loves)

A man is a poet only when he loves, but a woman is always a poet. This statement summarises the significance of the harp in the survey of romantic literature here offered. The heart of woman is a magic harp because she is a poet at all times. Only those that can love constantly are the true possessors of a lute in their hearts. The true poet is the one who loves genuinely, thus only poets and women have the sensitive instrument that reacts to the slightest touch, to the world, to human reality and, of course, to love.

Throughout the article, the evolution of the symbol of the harp as the metaphor for the romantic heart has been traced, understanding it as well as a source for poetic production. However, such development does not exclude the existence of others since that symbol can also be tracked on darker notes, for instance from Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode", in which the poetic voice would rather have silenced the harp (446-449), to Rafael Pombo's "Monotonía" (Monotony). In Pombo's poem, the speaker feels defeated by destiny, yet he urges the reader never to stop playing the lute, not to let sensitivity become dull so that it might turn against him in foolish acts (66).

5. Conclusion

Throughout the centuries, and particularly during Romanticism, string instruments have been the symbol of poetry and poetic sensitivity. These objects have served different poets in the expression of their beliefs and theories concerning art. In the early stages of Romanticism, Coleridge's speaker likens the harp to the spontaneous and uncontrolled expression and

composition of poetic material, suggesting the influence of forces beyond human comprehension. In later developments, and even in Coleridge's poem itself, this naïveté is substituted for the awareness that due to the condition of mortality, as in Poe's case, or as a result of the barriers imposed by society as in Acosta de Samper's work, the poet is unable to freely express and achieve his or her full capacities. It is in this manner that the poet's sensitivity becomes a repressed poetry, since the excess of such condition can be a curse, the wreckage of the poet's expectations by the coexistence with mundanity. In Coleridge's case, the poet has to retract from his words, in the case of "Israfel" the poet lacks the immortal condition necessary to be able to express himself completely and in "The Fall of the House of Usher" he has to die due to his excessive sensitivity. Lastly, in the work of Soledad Acosta de Samper, "La vida de la mujer es un sufrimiento diario" (The life of a woman is a daily suffering) (239). And it is so as a result of her sensitivity, her condition of being a poet on a daily basis. She buries her sorrows in her heart, the magic harp that will sound harmoniously only when played by the right hands; otherwise, it will be out of tune as the lute of the poet in "Israfel" and as the music of the cursed king of Usher's song. From Coleridge to Pombo, a broad and wide field has been covered, a field where the harp is the heart insofar as the heart is pure Romanticism.

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Abstract

These pages propose a panoramic reading of a recurrent poetic symbol, the string instrument, as a metaphor for the romantic heart, attempting as well to highlight the changes and evolutions that the symbol has experienced. As such, the work focuses on the English Romanticism in "The Eolian Harp" (1796) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), the American Romanticism in "Israfel" (1831) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and the Colombian Romanticism in "El corazón de la mujer" (1887) by Soledad Acosta de Samper (1833-1913).

Keywords

Harp, Lute, Romantic Symbol, Coleridge, Poe, Acosta de Samper.

Resumen

Estas páginas proponen una lectura panorámica de un símbolo poético recurrente, el arpa o el laúd, como metáfora del corazón romántico, pretendiendo asimismo delinear los cambios y la evolución que dicho símbolo ha experimentado. Por este motivo el artículo se centra en el Romanticismo inglés en "The Eolian Harp" de Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), el Romanticismo estadounidense en "Israfel" (1831) y "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) de Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) y el Romanticismo colombiano en "El corazón de la mujer" (1887) de Soledad Acosta de Samper (1833-1913).

Palabras Clave

Arpa, Laúd, Símbolo romántico, Coleridge, Poe, Acosta de Samper.