

# The Domestication of the Gods

Gabriel Alomar



*Introductory Note and Translation by Todd Mack*

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Gabriel Alomar (1873-1941) was a Catalan poet, essayist, and diplomat whose poetic work is best described as Parnassian and *noucentista*. The sonnet translated below is from his book *La columna de foc* (1911).<sup>1</sup> This poem is remarkable for its concise creation of an entire theomachy in a legendary and archaic fantasy world shared by men and gods. The latter are original, though likely inspired in the divine consideration ancient Egyptians and Hindus gave to some animals. However, no ancient writers would have dared to portray their gods as conquered, tamed, and

used by humans. Alomar seems to use man's taming of powerful gods as a metaphor for the movement of art away from the unbridled sentimentality common to romanticism in general and Catalan *modernisme* (*Art Nouveau* literature) in particular and towards the more controlled, neoclassical style of *noucentisme* (*Art Deco* literature). More broadly, the poem can be read as a story of humankind liberating itself from pagan or, for that matter, religious alienation. Thus, Alomar's sonnet can be seen as a good example of left-wing early modern fantasy from Latin Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation is based on the following critical edition: Gabriel Alomar, "La doma dels deus", *La columna de foc*, estudi introductor i edició a cura de Pere Rosselló Bover, Barcelona, Abadia de Montserrat, 2011, p. 95.

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The gods, conquered, left the eternal forests; the embers were dying on the last alters; and like oxen the hippopotamic gods inclined their powerful heads, sliding along their satisfied bellies.

The blood of the sacrifices snaked wet across their feral hind-quarters. And in horrible herds the god-dragons passed by, blowing like tempests, igniting the double-light of those crepuscular eyes.

And men, victorious over the divine beasts, imprisoned the gods by their smooth manes or by their soft wings, incapable of flight.

Between the monstrous nostrils rings were passed, from the bull's neck hung humiliating cowbells, and whips cracked over the sacred beasts.