

Antonio Machado



CAMPOS DE CASTILLA

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

PATRICK H. SHEERIN

1912 - 2012
I Centenario

Campos de Castilla
Leonor Izquierdo

CAMPOS DE CASTILLA

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

PATRICK H. SHEERIN



Junta de
Castilla y León

Escuela Oficial
de Idiomas de Soria



HUF España



AYUNTAMIENTO
Soria

FAM

Fundación Antonio Machado
de España



Fondation du Prix International
Antonio Machado
Collioure (France)

Caja España 

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ANTONIO MACHADO'S
CAMPOS DE CASTILLA

Patrocinan:



Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Soria

Caja España 

Caja Duero

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HUF España

 **Soria**
AYUNTAMIENTO



Fondation du Prix International Antonio Machado
Collioure (France)

Edición de Jesús Bozal Alfaro

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ANTONIO MACHADO'S
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TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

PATRICK H. SHEERIN

Edición de Jesús Bozal Alfaro

Presentación

Manuel Núñez Encabo

Catedrático y Presidente de la Fundación Antonio Machado

Introducción

Jacques Issorel

Catedrático Honorario

Universidad de Perpignan. Via Domitia.

Soria, Diciembre 2011

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“Sed modesto: yo os aconsejo la modestia, o, por mejor decir: yo os aconsejo un orgullo modesto, que es lo español y lo cristiano. Recordad el proverbio de Castilla: “Nadie es más que nadie”. Esto quiere decir cuánto es difícil aventajarse a todos, porque, por mucho que un hombre valga, nunca tendrá más valor alto que el de ser hombre.”

Juan de Mairena

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A todos los amantes de Machado y de Soria

AGRADECIMIENTOS

Quiero agradecer a todos los que han hecho posible la publicación de este libro. En primer lugar agradezco a D. Jesús Bozal Alfaro, Director de la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Soria, por su ayuda y trabajo, que han sido determinantes para que esta traducción viese la luz del día, y también por su Introducción. Igualmente, agradezco al profesor Jacques Issorel, de la Universidad de Perpignan por haber escrito una Introducción a esta obra y a D. Manuel Núñez Encabo, Presidente de la Fundación Antonio Machado, por la Presentación.

De manera especial agradezco a las personas que han cedido las evocativas fotos que aparecen en este libro, sobre todo a Doña Pilar Cervero Díez por la foto de Leonor Izquierdo, que aparece en la cubierta, y la de Antonio Machado, tomada en 1909, año de su boda.

Gracias también a los patrocinadores:

- Junta de Castilla y Leon: Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Soria
- Caja España – Caja Duero
- Diputación Provincial de Soria
- Ayuntamiento de Soria
- FAM Fundación Antonio Machado de España
- HUF España
- Fondation du Prix International Antonio Machado Collioure (France)

y a todas las personas que han contribuido y ayudado en la publicación de esta traducción al inglés de *Campos de Castilla*.

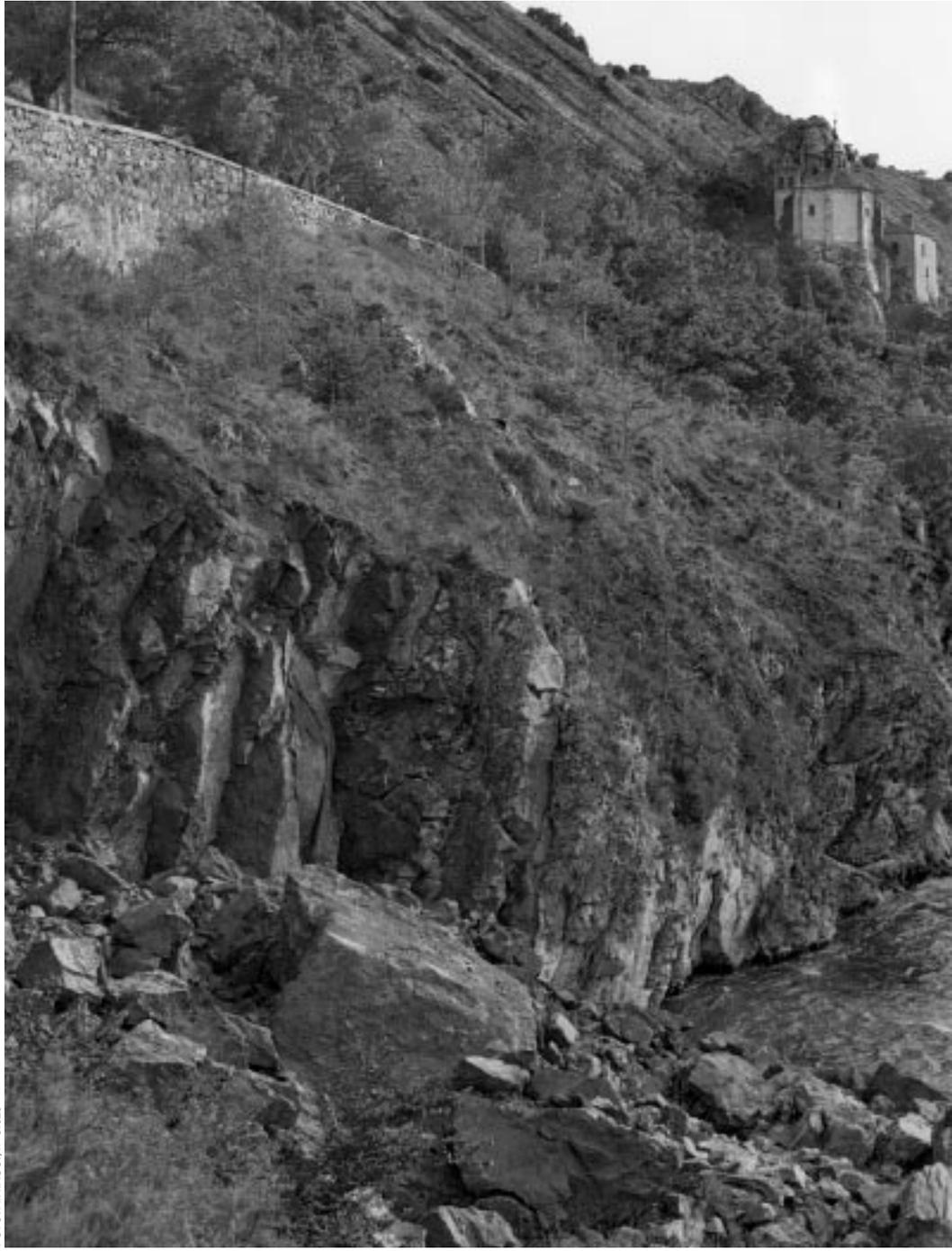


PATRICK H. SHEERIN

Patrick H. Sheerin (Co. Leitrim, Irlanda) realizó sus estudios universitarios en la Universidad de Londres, donde obtuvo la Licenciatura, Bachelor of Arts, en 1969. Dos años más tarde, recibió un Post-Graduate Certificate in Education en la Universidad de Cardiff (Gales). En 1986 se doctoró en la Universidad de Valladolid con una tesis titulada *La poesía contemporánea en Irlanda a través de Patrick Kavanagh, John Montague y Seamus Heaney*. Entre 1974 - 2009 fue profesor titular de Filología Inglesa en la Universidad de Valladolid. Es autor de más de una docena de libros, publicados en España y en Irlanda, varios de los cuales tienen que ver con la traducción. Actualmente, está trabajando en una traducción del libro «Elegies» del poeta irlandés, Desmond Egan.



FOTO: A.H.P.S.O., n° 6.626





El Duero, 1951

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PRESENTACIÓN

MANUEL NÚÑEZ ENCABO

Catedrático-Presidente de la Fundación Antonio Machado

Es una gran satisfacción escribir este breve prólogo-presentación de la edición de *Campos de Castilla* a cargo del profesor Jesús Bozal, con traducción inglesa y notas muy aclaratorias.

Esta edición tiene de entrada el mérito de ser la primera reedición que se publica en inglés de la obra más emblemática de Machado en los inicios del Centenario de su publicación que tiene como punto de referencia mayo de 1912. Los centenarios que tienen unas fechas concretas en que se enmarcan, no pueden limitarse únicamente a las mismas, ya que como ocurre con la publicación de *Campos de Castilla* en mayo de 1912 el mismo contenido de esta universal obra recoge poemas machadianos creados durante toda su estancia en Soria (1907-1912). Esta obra maestra de la literatura universal es al mismo tiempo una obra Soriana.

El primero de mayo de 1907, fecha tan emblemática para la primavera y para la reivindicación social, Machado toma posesión de su Cátedra de Francés en Soria y el paisaje que se abre ante sus ojos le deslumbra. De este descubrimiento surgió un poema definitivo, “Orillas del Duero”, que ya está incluido incluso en la edición de noviembre de ese mismo año de “Solledades, Galerías y otros poemas”. Como señala Manuel Alvar¹ es en ese momento cuando vira en redondo la obra machadiana. Todos los cambios que descubriremos en sus versos se iniciarán y arraigarán para siempre en una fecha definitiva soriana, en su encuentro por primera vez con Soria en mayo de 1907, calificando desde el primer momento a esta ciudad “como hermosa tierra de España”. Una fecha también universal en que a la poesía española le nacieron nuevos temas y nuevos modos poéticos, “también entonces se mudó el destino de nuestra poesía”. A partir de “Orillas del Duero” abandona Machado la torre de marfil de la lírica intimista y se inunda de unos paisajes que rebosan las más profundas sensaciones huma-

¹ Antonio Machado, 2007, *Poesías Completas*. Austral. Espasa Calpe. Madrid, pp. 26-27.

nas, ya que junto al paisaje late la vida de las personas. El descubrimiento de la tierra de Soria fue al mismo tiempo el descubrimiento de Castilla y de la realidad de España: “son tierras que tienen alma”; por eso, a propósito de la tierra de Alvargonzález, escribe: “mis romances miran a lo elemental humano, al *Campo de Castilla*”. La grandiosidad de la poesía de *Campos de Castilla* reside en que se convierte en una poesía visual llena de colores con imágenes y matices cromáticos del paisaje, anteriores a Joaquín Sorolla y otros pintores. En el prólogo a la edición de *Campos de Castilla* de 1917 escribe (refiriéndose a la edición de 1912): “cinco años en la tierra de Soria hoy para mi sagrada, allí me casé, allí perdí a mi esposa a quien adoraba, orientaron mis ojos y mi corazón hacia lo esencial castellano”. Machado añade también que ya en Soria “era otra mi ideología” y afirma contundentemente “el simple amor a la naturaleza es muy superior infinitamente al arte”. Machado es sin duda el gran poeta lírico de Castilla, a partir de él puede afirmarse, como decía Azorín, otro admirador de Castilla, que “a Castilla la ha hecho la literatura”². *Campos de Castilla* está también vinculado al recuerdo de Leonor, ya que el Centenario de Campos de Castilla coincide también con la muerte de Leonor el 1 de agosto de 1912. Tuvo tiempo sin embargo Machado a que su obra llegase a las manos de Leonor en momentos de gran dolor y la leve esperanza que se desprende de su impresionante poema: “A un olmo seco”, fechado en mayo de 1912. Siete días después de dejar a Leonor, Machado abandona Soria. Ha pensado en suicidarse. Se salva por el reconocimiento a su obra como le escribe a Unamuno. Los poemas con referencia a Leonor muerta se escriben en su etapa de Baeza, entre noviembre de 1912 y abril de 1913, pero la intensidad de su lírica sobre Leonor tiene su antecedente en Soria en “A un olmo seco”.

En el Centenario de *Campos de Castilla* que prepara la Fundación Antonio Machado tendrá su digna presencia Leonor. La Fundación nunca ha olvidado el influjo fundamental de Leonor en la vida y obra del poeta. Por eso conmemoró el Centenario de su nacimiento con un gran congreso internacional en Soria sobre la mujer en la literatura, cuyo recuerdo volvió a repetirse con un nuevo congreso en 2007 con motivo del Centenario de la llegada a Soria del poeta. “Mi corazón está donde ha nacido no a la vida, al amor cerca del Duero”.

² El paisaje de España visto por los españoles. Buenos Aires 1942.

Una advertencia importante en relación con el libro *Campos de Castilla* es que los poemas que se integran en esta edición de mayo de la editorial Renacimiento hay que encuadrarlos en sentido amplio ya que los contenidos reales de *Campos de Castilla* rebasan la fecha de la edición de este libro. Precisamente el poema emblemático e iniciador de *Campos de Castilla* escrito desde Soria con el nombre primero de “Orillas del Duero” no se encuentra en esta primera edición. Tampoco su poema “A un olmo seco”.

Anticipándose a este Centenario, la Fundación Antonio Machado con la colaboración del Ayuntamiento y Alcalde de Soria colocó ya en 2010 una placa en la Laguna Negra conmemorando el viaje machadiano que dio lugar a la Tierra de Alvargonzález, incluida más tarde en *Campos de Castilla*. Por eso la Fundación Antonio Machado iniciará los actos del Centenario en los últimos meses de 2011.

No se necesitan sutiles interpretaciones para señalar lo que significó para Antonio Machado su estancia en Soria que dio lugar a la obra culmen de *Campos de Castilla*. Ya un año antes de morir respondiendo a un periodista indicó: “soy hombre extraordinariamente sensible al lugar en que vivo. Allá en el año 1907 fui destinado como Catedrático a Soria. Soria es un lugar rico en tradiciones poéticas. Allí nace el Duero que tanto papel juega en nuestra historia. Allí se produjo el monumento literario del Poema del Cid...y viví y sentí aquel ambiente con toda intensidad. Subí a Urbión al nacimiento del Duero. Hice excursiones a Salas...allí se reveló el perenne hechizo de la obra poética de Gonzalo de Berceo: “su verso es dulce y grave: monótonas hileras de chopos invernales en donde nada brilla: renglones como surcos en pardas sementeras y lejos las montañas azules de Castilla”. Fue en Soria donde comprobó que “esa maestra de castellanía nos invita a ser lo que somos y nada más”... hay un breve aforismo castellano “yo lo oí en Soria por primera vez, que dice así: nadie es más que nadie”. Este humanismo universal de Machado desde Soria, junto con el sublime esplendor de sus poemas, principalmente *Campos de Castilla*, fue el motivo de ser declarado en 1987 por la UNESCO, a instancias de la Fundación Antonio Machado, poeta de valor universal, convirtiendo a Soria con *Campos de Castilla* en la ciudad de la poesía universal.



Camino a Ocenilla (Soria)

VISIÓN CORDIAL DEL PAISAJE

POR

JACQUES ISSOREL

Al final del prólogo de su antología *Páginas escogidas*, publicada en 1917, Antonio Machado escribe: «A una preocupación patriótica responden muchas [composiciones de *Campos de Castilla*]; otras, al simple amor a la Naturaleza que en mí supera infinitamente al del arte». Ese amor a la Naturaleza, a la tierra soriana, le inspiró una parte notable de los poemas de la primera edición de *Campos de Castilla* (1912). “A orillas del Duero”, “Orillas del Duero”, “Campos de Soria”, “Recuerdos” son los poemas más representativos de su visión lírica del paisaje. Mención especial merece otro poema, más breve, y en particular la primera estrofa: “Amanecer de otoño”, en el que, sin acudir nunca a la primera persona y con aparente objetividad, el poeta habla tanto de sus sentimientos como del paisaje que está contemplando:

Una larga carretera
entre grises peñascales,
alguna humilde pradera
donde pacen negros toros. Zarzas, malezas, jarales.

Está la tierra mojada
por las gotas del rocío,
y la alameda dorada,
hacia la curva del río.

Tras los montes de violeta
quebrado el primer albor;
a la espalda la escopeta,
entre sus galgos agudos, caminando un cazador.

Para evocar el paisaje, no elige cualquier momento del día y del año. «Amanecer» connota silencio y soledad. Es el momento del día más propicio al recogimiento y a la meditación. Asimismo es significativa la elección del otoño, estación ya tan presente en *Soledades*, su primer libro. En otoño los colores se van apagando. Tras el resplandor

del estío, la naturaleza se prepara al letargo del invierno, símil de la muerte. El otoño invita a la melancolía y a una «tristeza que es amor», como escribe Machado en “Campos de Soria”. No una tristeza morbosa, sino un sentimiento sutil, una vibración inefable del alma recogida en sí misma y en contacto íntimo con el entorno vegetal, animal y humano. Ya desde el título se establece, pues, una sintonía entre el momento elegido y el estado de ánimo del poeta.

El primer verso prescinde de verbo de percepción (‘veo’, ‘contemplo’) o de acción (‘camino por’). Gracias a la eliminación de elementos intermedios, el lector se ve inmediatamente inmerso en un paisaje al que el adjetivo «larga» confiere de entrada profundidad: la carretera parece prolongarse al infinito, serpenteando entre «peñascales» y «praderas». Unos y otras contribuyen a organizar el espacio, mientras al lector le corresponde situarlos mentalmente aquí y allá. No bien empezado el poema, el lector participa en la elaboración de las imágenes, convirtiéndose en coautor del texto poético.

La ausencia de coma al final del verso acentúa la impresión, ya sugerida por «larga», de una carretera que se pierde a lo lejos. Asociada a «larga», la palabra «carretera» traza una línea que divide el espacio en dos mitades. Para designar la carretera que ve y nos hace ver, el poeta utiliza el artículo indefinido «Una» en vez de ‘La’. El artículo definido hubiera remitido a una carretera precisa, reconocible. Hace al lector partícipe de una experiencia personal suya: un paseo por una carretera de la región soriana al amanecer, pero, al no revelar de qué carretera se trata, no da acceso a su intimidad. Describiendo el paisaje, habla de sí mismo, de la emoción que se apoderó de él una mañana temprano («Sólo recuerdo la emoción de las cosas, / y se me olvida todo lo demás»), pero se niega a la exhibición de sus sentimientos.

¿Quién ignora que las peñas de las tierras de Soria y otras regiones de Castilla son grises? Sin embargo, escribe «grises peñascales». ¿Será un pleonasma, un descuido? «Grisés» hace eco a «otoño». Color de la ceniza y de la niebla, el gris da una impresión de tristeza y melancolía. Aparentemente innecesario, este adjetivo revela, lo mismo que el «otoño» del título, el estado anímico del poeta en comunión con el entorno, mientras va caminando por aquella «larga carretera».

«Alguna humilde pradera»: el adjetivo personifica a la pradera y, de nuevo, a través de este tercer adjetivo, se trasluce la sensibilidad del poeta. La pradera se le antoja «humilde» (y no ‘pequeña’, ‘de forma irregular’, como es en realidad), porque se proyecta y reconoce en ella: humilde, modesto, discreto. Añadamos: solitario, como induce a imaginar el indefinido «alguna».

Tras los tres octosílabos iniciales, el cuarto verso es un hexadecasílabo, o sea, un verso formado por dos octosílabos, separados por una cesura netamente señalada por un punto. ¿Por qué haberlos reunido? La largura del verso traduce gráficamente la inmensidad del paisaje. La mirada del poeta (y la nuestra) se va perdiendo hasta el infinito por una inacabable extensión de «zarzas, malezas, jarales». El perfecto equilibrio del verso (8 + 8) crea una impresión de serenidad, de paz, también sugerida por el verbo «pacen» en cuya sonoridad vibra la palabra ‘paz’. A la amplitud del cuarto verso se añade la de la primera frase, terminada por «negros toros», lo que también permite imaginar la vastedad del paisaje contemplado.

El cuarto verso posee un ritmo doble. Hasta el punto es trocaico (O-o-O-o), después, dactílico (O-o-o-O-o-o), con una sutil transición entre «toros» y «zarzas»:

dónde pácen négros tóros. Zárzas, malézas, jaráles.

El ritmo regular, reposado, apacible del hemistiquio trocaico está en consonancia con el paisaje y el estado anímico del poeta. En el segundo hemistiquio la ampliación del ritmo, conseguida gracias a la sucesión de dos sílabas átonas y una sílaba tónica sugiere la extensión infinita del paisaje.

En la primera estrofa, el único sentido solicitado es la vista. En la segunda, otra vez la vista y también el olfato («tierra mojada»). En la última, de nuevo la vista, mas la aparición del cazador, con su escopeta “a la espalda”, deja presentir un disparo que rompería el silencio virginal de aquel amanecer de otoño. Es esa espera de una posible deflagración lo que nos hace tomar conciencia del silencio matutino. Deseamos intensamente que nunca se produzca, porque sentimos que el encanto frágil del instante quedaría roto como un fino cristal.

Únicamente terrestre en los cinco primeros versos («carretera», «peñascales», «pradera», «tierra»), la visión se hace cada vez más aérea con «alameda», «montes» y «albor». Al alzar la mirada desde la «tierra mojada» hasta la cima de la «alameda», desde el «río» hasta los «montes» y el cielo («albor»), el lector se percata del volumen de un paisaje al principio plano y solo horizontal.

En las dos últimas estrofas, el poeta no necesita incluir adjetivos de «doble luz» («Da doble luz a tu verso, / para leído de frente / y al sesgo») como en la primera. Efectivamente, las dos palabras del título, los adjetivos «grises» y «humilde» le bastan para expresar su visión cordial del paisaje, sin necesidad de insistir más. Una vez instalado el lector en el ambiente del poema, selecciona los elementos paisajísticos («rocío», «alameda», «río», «montes», «cazador») a partir de los cuales, guiado por los colores y la música de los versos, este colabora en la emergencia del poema.

La brevedad de “Amanecer de otoño”, su concisión expresiva, acrecientan la emoción que se siente al leerlo. El lirismo del poeta impregna cada verso de este poema, aparentemente solo descriptivo, sin que necesite usar del ‘yo’ ni de la exclamación. Uno de los primeros lectores en advertir esa característica de la poesía de *Campos de Castilla* fue Azorín. En su artículo “El paisaje en la poesía” (1913) escribió acertadamente:

El poeta se traslada al objeto descrito y en la manera de describirlo nos da su propio espíritu [...] En esos versos sentimos palpar, vibrar, todo el espíritu del poeta.



LA TRADUCCIÓN

JESÚS BOZAL ALFARO

Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Soria

El objetivo de la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Soria no es editar libros sino preparar a sus alumnos para el aprendizaje adecuado de las cuatro destrezas necesarias para dominar un idioma: comprensión oral y escrita; expresión oral y escrita. Pero sus objetivos pedagógicos, como Centro de enseñanza pública, exigen de ella un permanente compromiso con la sociedad en la que realiza su actividad educativa. Colaborar, por lo tanto, en la publicación de la traducción en inglés de Campos de Castilla, de Antonio Machado, forma parte de ellos, pues estos textos, estos poemas traducidos en inglés, acercan a Soria, y a su contexto geográfico y cultural, a los millones de personas que tienen este idioma como su lengua de uso diario.

En 1992, Josette y Georges Colomer publicaron, en Villemomble (Francia), una Breve Antología Bilingüe de poemas de Machado, entre los que figuraban, traducidos en francés, algunos de los que se recogen en este libro: La Tierra de Alvargonzález, Abril, Las Aguas Mil, Amanecer de Otoño, Campos de Soria, A un olmo seco, A José María Palacio, ... Aquel libro, como el del profesor Sheerin, no hacen sino proclamar que Soria es una de las ciudades literarias más importantes del mundo.

Sobre la traducción, Juan de Mairena, el apócrifo de Antonio Machado, reflexionaba en voz alta:

“Todavía más gedeónico – por no decir más absurdo – me parece el pensar que nuestra conciencia traduce a su propia lengua un mundo escrito en otra; porque si esta otra lengua le es desconocida, mal puede traducir, y si la conoce, ¿para qué traduce? Mejor diríamos: ¿para quién? Porque, en verdad, nadie traduce para sí mismo, sino para quienes desconocen la lengua en que el original está escrito y a condición de que el traductor conozca la suya y la ajena.”

Para Machado, por lo tanto, el traductor tiene que conocer, dominar, perfectamente las dos lenguas. Y este es el caso, a nuestro juicio, de Patrick Sheerin, profesor titular de la Universidad de Valladolid entre 1974 y 2009. Esfuerzo humano, en el sentido machadiano, no ha ahorrado, pues lleva trabajando en este empeño desde hace muchos años; intentando además, como escribe él mismo, “ser siempre fiel al espíritu y al significado del original. Espero que, al menos en parte, este intento no haya sido en vano.”

Nos ha parecido indispensable recoger, en su versión castellana, seis de los poemas más significativos de Campos de Castilla: *Por tierras de España. El Hospicio. Orillas del Duero. Un loco. Campos de Soria* y *A José María Palacio*. En ellos se refleja esa “comunidad fraterna” que Julián Marías comprendió perfectamente entre Soria y Antonio Machado. Entre el pueblo de Soria y Antonio Machado.



INTRODUCTION

Antonio Machado

Antonio Machado is a poet who is becoming increasingly better known in the English speaking world, but still not as well known as he should be, given his importance in modern Spanish poetry. It is almost a hundred years since *Campos de Castilla*, his best-known collection of poetry, was first published¹ and it, or parts of it, has been translated into English a number of times². Yet few of the translations do him justice in any real sense of the word and some of them serve literally to put one off reading Machado for the rest of one's life. It is debatable if even the most ingenious translations of a poet's work can give anything near the "feel" that the original has for its readers but surely it is the translator's task to try and get as near as (s)he can to achieving this without distorting the original or making its author seem like some kind of incompetent. This is something that has been done too often to Machado, but to consider the Spanish poet as an incompetent versifier is about as far from the truth as Soria is from Baeza.

Soria and Baeza, (the first in Old Castile, the second in Andalusia) are just two of the places where Machado lived, but what an influence they had on his poetry! He was born in Seville in 1875 and eight years later the family moved to Madrid, where both he and his brother, Manuel, studied at the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. It was here he developed his first interest in literature and, thanks to its liberal ideals and enlightened methods of teaching, he developed a distaste for the slog and rigid pedestrianism of the academic world. After some years of a rather bohemian existence, he travelled with his brother to Paris in 1899, where he came into contact with some of the outstanding figures

¹ A first edition of *Campos de Castilla* was published in 1912, shortly before the death of Machado's wife, and a larger, definitive edition came out in 1917.

² See Bibliography for references to translations of Antonio Machado.

of the fin-de- siècle cultural capital of the world. Among those he got to know were Paul Verlaine, Rubén Darío and Oscar Wilde. These encounters strengthened his desire to dedicate himself to poetry.

His first book of poetry, *Soledades (Solitudes)*, was published in 1903. The poetry is ornate, elaborate, introspective, clearly modelled on the Modernist school he had got to know in Paris. But Machado was beginning bit by bit to find his own voice, and in 1907 he republished a new version of *Soledades* in which many of the previous poems are missing and many new ones added. This new edition is entitled: *Soledades. Galerías. Otros Poemas*. In this same year, 1907, he was offered a job as teacher of French at a secondary school in Soria, north-east of Madrid, in Old Castile. It was to prove a momentous step in his life.

A River Runs Through It

Soria, the unassuming provincial town where he lived for five years, and Soria, the province - the harsh, haunting, depopulated landscape, the decrepit hamlets, the ruinous vestiges of a past, fleeting glory, were branded into his heart. As were the mountains, the forests, the tarns, the ravines and the river - especially the river. The Duero, as he says in his poem, XCVIII: “On the Banks of the Duero”:

The Duero crosses the oaken heart of Iberia and Castile.

The river Duero winds its way across Old Castile from its source in Mount Urbión to the Portuguese border, and it flows all through the first part of *Campos de Castilla* just as the Guadalquivir, the river of Andalusia, flows through the second part.

And the people: the toilers and the despoilers - those who with bent backs worked the stony unforgiving land, and those who cut down or burnt the pine woods and the holm-oak groves to acquire more grazing land - they also formed part of the landscape, as do the huntsmen, the criminals, the madmen, the travellers. One of the inhabitants of Soria was special. Leonor, the daughter of the Izquierdo family, with whom he boarded. He married her in 1909, when he was 34 and she was 15. They got married on the 30th of July and three years later, almost to the day, she died of tuberculosis. The blow was devastating. He left Soria almost immediately to return

only once - twenty years later, when he was awarded the Freedom of the City - and never to get married again, though many years later he formed a platonic relationship with a woman he referred to as *Guiomar*.³

The place where Machado first went after Soria was Baeza, in the province of Jaen, in Andalusia. He worked here also as a teacher of French in a secondary school. It was here that he completed the definitive edition of *Campos de Castilla*, though a first version had been published in 1912, just before the death of his wife. Though situated in Andalusia, Baeza seemed more a part of New Castile, of the La Mancha of Don Quijote: cold and damp in winter, bleak and devoid of intellectual pretensions. It was a suitable setting for Machado to ruminate on his loss and give voice to his sorrow, which is what he did in the first poems he penned in this once-famous fortified town. Machado got to know Baeza well and its people, though there is no love expressed in his poems for the one or the other. Apart from the sense of loss, which we find in the first poems written here, there is a sense of being shut in, of boredom - so well expressed in the poem, CXXVIII, "Meditations on a Rainy Day in a Rural Setting".

The twin magnets of the metropolis, Madrid, and his native Seville always attracted Machado and, not being able to secure work in one or the other, after nine years in Baeza, he opted for a post as French teacher in Segovia. This was sufficiently convenient to the Capital to permit him to get away weekends to Madrid and meet his brother Manuel, with whom he collaborated on several plays, which turned out to be very popular. Twelve years in Segovia and he moved to Madrid, finally, in 1932. Four years later the Civil War broke out and Machado, who was a staunch Republican, had to flee Madrid as the Nationalist forces were closing in. First, he with his mother and uncle were evacuated to Valencia, and then to Barcelona, in 1938. A year later with the surrender of the last Republican stronghold, Machado, in failing health, together with his aged mother and uncle, had to join the queue of refugees fleeing the Nationalist forces and cross the border into France, at Collioure. It was here that he died, on the 22nd February, 1939, three days before the death of his mother.

³ Simply the best book dealing with the importance of Soria in the life and work of Machado is *Antonio Machado en el Corazón de Soria*, edited by Jesús Bozal Alfaro (2007). See Bibliography.

Campos de Castilla

In 1898, Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, to the Americans and was left without practically any of its overseas possessions. In the first twelve or fifteen years of the 20th century a new generation of writers – called the Generation of '98 – reflected the sense of the disillusionment felt by the vast bulk of the population. Among the foremost writers of this Generation are Miguel de Unamuno, José Martínez Ruiz, known as *Azorín*, Pio Baroja and Antonio Machado. Two of the subjects which exercised the concerns of this generation of writers was the intellectual and political stagnation of Spanish society and a rediscovery of the place of Castile in Spanish life landscape and history. Machado's right to a place among this group of writers is based principally on his book *Campos de Castilla*, in which the two preoccupations mentioned above are amply represented.

It is in the first part of *Campos...* that Machado dwells on the Castilian element: Poems like XCVIII: "On the Banks of the Duero"; CII: "Banks of the Duero"; CIX: "Autumn Dawn" and CXIII: "Campos de Soria" celebrate the sombre landscape of Old Castile. Other poems in this first part refer to and analyse its peoples and its history and the conclusions are far from laudatory: XCIX: "In Spanish Lands"; CI: "The Iberian God"; CVI: "A Madman" and CVIII: "A Criminal" are some examples. Of course, the really outstanding example in this first part, and indeed in the whole of the book, is "Land of Alvargonzález", both the story-legend and the poem, which tell us more about Machado's view of, knowledge about and, paradoxically, love of Castile than all the other poems put together.

It is the second part of the book, the poems written when he was in Baeza, that deal most with the stagnation of Spanish life. One has only to look at poems like CXXXI: "Fleeting Past"; CXXXII: "Olive Trees" (especially Part II); CXXXIII: "Lines Lamenting the Death and Extolling the Virtues of the Reformed Rake, Don Guido" and CXXXV: "Fleeting Future", to see what Machado had in mind.

But *Campos de Castilla* does not deal only with Castile and the problems of Spain. There are many reflective poems, even in the first part; for example, the poems from and including CIX: "Autumn Dawn"

to CXII: “Easter Sunday”, not to mention the well known and admired CII: “Holm Oaks” and CXV: “To a Dry Elm”. But, perhaps, the examples of Machado at his reflective best come in the latter part of the book, in the long poem CXXVIII: “Meditations on a Rainy Day in a Rural Setting” and in sequences like CXXXVI: “Proverbs and Songs” and CXXXVII: “Parables”. Reflection is not missing either in many poems dealing with the question of Spain and the Castilian countryside. Another important element in the content of *Campos de Castilla* is provided by the poems of loss: the impressive sequence from CXVIII to CXXV, entitled “Paths” and the three following poems: “To José María Palacio”; “Another Journey” and “Goodbye”.

There are many more elements, themes and motifs in this book which could be singled out, but to examine them all would over-extend the scope of this Introduction. One or two of them, however could be mentioned: in many poems we see Machado as the traveller: by train, in CX: “The Train” and CXXVII: “Another Journey”; by horse-drawn carriage, in CXXXIII: “Olive Trees”, and on foot, in “XCVIII: “On the Banks of the Duero”, and CII: “Banks of the Duero” and by horse-drawn carriage and on horseback, in the prose “Story-Legend” part of “Land of Alvargonzález”. It is not by coincidence that one of Machado’s most-often quoted poems begins:

*Your own footsteps, traveller,
mark the path,
there’s nothing else to show the way.*

(CXXXVI: “Proverbs and Songs”, XXIX)

We could not end this brief survey of the principal themes and motifs in Machado’s poetry without mentioning an element which, perhaps, does not immediately strike the reader, but which is pervasive and important. It is his sense of humour. In a “serious” book like *Campos de Castilla* there may not be much place for humour, but one finds touches of it in various places from the first poem, XCVII: “Portrait”, to the last one, CXXXVIII: “My Jester”. In the former the tone is that of bantering and in the latter, it is slightly embittered.. The banter Machado uses so effectively in “Portrait” is repeated, often mixed with barbed criticism and a certain dose of wryness in many of the poems towards the end of

the book. Some of the poems I refer to are CXXVII: “Meditations on a Rainy Day in a Rural Setting”; CXXXI: “Fleeting past”; CXXXIII: “Lines Lamenting the Death and Extolling the Virtues of the Reformed Rake Don Guido”; CXXXIV: “Women of la Mancha” and, especially, the long sequence, CXXXVI: “Proverbs and Songs”.

This Translation⁴

I have chosen to leave the title, *Campos de Castilla*, as it is, untranslated - for different reasons. First of all, the collection should be known under the title it was given in the original, because Machado is sufficiently important and the collection should be sufficiently well known to warrant this. Who nowadays would translate Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* as *The Flowers of Evil* or Maupassant’s “Boule de Suif” as “Butterball” or “Dumpling”? These compositions are so well known under their original titles that it is unnecessary to translate them, even allowing for the fact that something might be lost in the translation - and it would. Among the translations of Machado’s book into English (which I referred to at the beginning of this Introduction) we find titles like *The Landscape of Castile*, *Lands of Castile*, *Fields of Castile*, etc⁵. These titles are, to put it mildly, misleading. In the first case, the poems are not only about the “landscape”, but also the people, the towns, hamlets, etc.; in the second, the word “lands”, apart from omitting reference to the people, towns, etc., could suggest diverse peoples or possessions as of pertaining to Castile, which Machado did not contemplate, and in the third case, the word “fields”, which is the first translation that springs to mind for “campos”, presents a completely misleading picture of what Castile is like.

Another reason for leaving the title untranslated is that an important number of these poems are not about Castile at all, but about Andalusia and its people. In fact, all the poems from CXXIX to CXXXV are

⁴ For my translation of *Campos de Castilla* I have worked from the Espasa Calpe edition of Antonio Machado’s *Poesías Completas*. See Bibliography.

⁵ See Bibliography for references.

about Andalusia or Andalusians, except CXXXIV, which is about the women of La Mancha. The poems following CXXXV are the reflective-philosophical ones : “Proverbs”, “Parables” and “My Jester”. If Machado wished to entitle his book *Campos de Castilla* he had every right to do so - it showed the importance he attached to this emblematic region of Spain. The best thing a translator can do is to leave the title unchanged; he (or she) is sure to make enough *faux pas* when they sit down to translate the poems.

I hope that the number of *faux pas* I’ve made in this translation are minimal. I have tried to be as faithful as I possibly could to the original where meaning was concerned. This is important as it is also important when translating poetry to try and achieve the same kind of effect the original has on its readers. I refer especially to the form. Machado uses rhyme quite a lot, assonantal rhyme, especially, but also consonantal rhyme⁶. It is an important element in these poems. Assonantal rhyme is not a common feature of English verse, so I was not averse to using consonantal rhyme or half-rhyme, preferring to obtain a more pronounced beat rather than a flat fall at the end of the lines.

No translation, however good it is, can be an adequate substitute for the original. Whatever the good-will or the expertise of the translator, something will always be lacking when poetry, especially, is put into another language. Robert Frost’s quip that poetry is what gets lost in translation is illustrative of this point. I can only hope that not too much has been lost here.

Other Remarks

This book contains, as well as the translations of the poems, a “Bibliography” and “Notes”. I have kept the “Bibliography” deliberately short, as I wished to concentrate on items which had a direct bearing on my approach to this translation. I have also preferred to keep the “No-

⁶ John Dos Passos, in his book, *Rosinante to the Road Again* (See Bibliography) , makes the strange affirmation: “He (Machado) uses rhyme comparatively little, often substituting assonance ...”

tes” as few and as brief as possible, considering that a superabundance of “explanatory notes” might serve to distract rather than clarify. There are some cases, however, where notes are necessary, either to throw light on some obscure point or explain why such or such an interpretation was preferred and here I have not been averse to elaborating as far as I considered reasonable on a topic, expression or image whose interest warranted it. All in all, though, I have kept them to the minimum feasible with the requirements of a translation of this kind. With regards the “identification” of the poems, whether in the table of Contents or elsewhere, I have used the Roman numerals in the first instance and the title of the poem in the second, as is the case in the Espasa Calpe edition of *Poesías completas* and the *Poesías completas: Edición crítica* by Oreste Macrí⁷.



⁷ See Bibliography.

ANTONIO MACHADO'S
CAMPOS DE CASTILLA

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

PATRICK H. SHEERIN

SORI



FOTO: A.H.PSO., n° 12.524.

A. - Vista general





FOTO: SEGUNDO. FOTÓGRAFO: ANTIGUO DEPENDIENTE DE COMPANY, MADRID.

Antonio Machado (1909). Foto propiedad de Pilar Cervero, sobrina-nieta de Leonor Izquierdo. Cedida por Ángel Palomino Gámez, editor de: www.antoniomachadoensoria.com

XCVII

PORTRAIT

My childhood is a memory of a patio in Seville,
and a bright orchard where the lemon trees grew tall;
my youth, twenty years in the land of Castile¹ ;
my life story, some events I don't wish to recall.
I am no great ladies' man like Mañara or Bradomín²
- everyone knows my rough and ready style of dress-
but Cupid's arrow found me none the less,
bringing as much love as such things ever bring.
In my veins there flow drops of Jacobin blood,
but my verse spurts free from springs serene,
and, rather than the average man who knows his creed,
I am good in the way that good is supposed to mean.
I worship beauty and in modern esthetics
I pluck the old roses of the garden of Ronsard,
but I don't think much of modern-day cosmetics,
nor am I one of those new happy-warbler bards.
I despise the singers of vacuous chants
and the chorus of crickets that chirp at the moon,
I try to distinguish the real voices from the cant
and of all the voices I listen but to one.
Am I a classic or a romantic? I don't know;
I should like to leave my verse as the captain leaves his sword;
famous for the hand with which it deals the blow,
and not for its maker's learned craft revered.
I converse with the man who is always by my side
- he who talks to himself hopes to talk to God later on -;
my monologue is a chat with this good friend and guide
who showed me the secret of being kind to everyone.
To sum up, you owe me for what I've written. I owe you nothing.
I turn up daily to my work and with my own money I pay
for the clothes on my back and the house in which I'm living,
the bread which is my food and the bed on which I lie.
And when the day of the last journey comes into sight,
and the boat which never returns is casting free,
you'll find me on board and I'll be travelling light,
almost naked, like the children of the sea.

XCVIII

ON THE BANKS OF THE DUERO

One beautiful day, about midway through July,
I was on my own, climbing a rocky hillside,
seeking the patches of shade, but going slow
and stopping ever so often to wipe my brow
or draw air into my panting breast;
or else, increasing my pace and scorning to rest,
I went steadily on, head bent, and turned right,
leaning on a pastoral staff. I climbed the heights
where falcons, hawks and eagles dwell
treading underfoot wild mountain plants which smell
so strong - rosemary, thyme, sage and lavender -.
On the rough, uneven fields the sun burned like fire.
A wide-winged vulture in solitary, majestic flight
crossed the sky's pure blue and was lost to sight.
In the distance, a mountain peak, sharp and high,
and a hump-back rise, silhouetted against the sky
like an inlaid shield, and purple hills rising from the brown
tinged earth, like scraps of old armour lying around,
high bald sierras where the Duero turns
to form round Soria its crossbow curve-
Soria is a fortress town
in Old Castile resisting Aragón -.
In the distance the horizon was broken
by dark lines of hills crowned with ilex and oak;
with bald rocky crags or some humble field
where the sheep graze and the bull lying with knees
doubled on the grass, ruminates. I saw along the river
in the clear summer sun the green poplars quiver
and carts, horsemen and muleteers moving like small
dots along the distant road with no sound at all,
and crossing the long bridge, under whose arches of stone
the Duero's silver waters turn a muddy brown.
The Duero crosses the oaken heart of Iberia and Castile.

Oh, sad and noble land of fields
without ploughs, without water and without trees,
of high plateaux and desert wastes and screes;
of roadways without inns and decrepit towns
and open-mouthed yokels without dances or songs
who abandon the decaying homesteads and still flee
like your long rivers, Castile, towards the sea!
Castile, but yesterday so domineering, today wretched and low,
wrapped in your rags, scornful of what you don't know.
Are you waiting, sleeping or dreaming? Do you recall
the oceans of spilled blood when you had the fever of the sword?
Everything moves, flows, passes, advances and turns;
the sea and the mountains change as does the eye which discerns.
Has it passed? Still over your fields the phantom strays
of a people who waged their war like holy crusades.
And the mother, so prolific in warriors then,
is scarcely a step-mother now of humble working men.
This is not the same Castile, so generous and off-hand,
as when Myo Cid Rodrigo of Vivar returned
proud of his new fortunes and his opulence
and gave to King Alfonso the gardens of Valencia;
or the Castile which, after the successful fight
which ousted the Moors, claimed from their King the right
to conquer the New World - the mother of fighting men,
soldiers and leaders, who would return to Spain
in regal ships laden with silver and gold,
like ravens when the booty was shared, in the fight like lions bold.
Philosophers fed from the soup kitchens of some convent,
impassively gaze at the ample firmament,
and if in dreams they hear, like a distant chant,
the clamour of merchants from the docks of the Levant,
they won't even react to ask: What's going on?
And now war itself has opened the doors of their homes.
Castile, but yesterday so domineering, today, wretched and low,
wrapped in your tatters and scornful of what you don't know.

The sun is now setting. In the distant town
the bells are ringing with a melodious sound
- it is now rosary time for the old women in black -.
Two handsome weasels appear from between the rocks;
they look at me, scamper away and then reappear.
They are such inquisitive things! ... Darkness falls on the fields.
By the white roadway, the open inn door
looks on to the darkening fields and stony moor.





FOTO: MONTSE MAJÁN

El Duero a su paso por la Ermita de San Saturio (Soria).

POR TIERRAS DE ESPAÑA

El hombre de estos campos que incendia los pinares
y su despojo aguarda como botín de guerra,
antaño hubo raído los negros encinares,
talado los robustos robledos de la sierra.
Hoy ve a sus pobres hijos huyendo de sus lares;
la tempestad llevarse los limos de la tierra
por los sagrados ríos hacia los anchos mares;
y en páramos malditos trabaja, sufre y yerra.
Es hijo de una stirpe de rudos caminantes,
pastores que conducen sus hordas de merinos
a Extremadura fértil, rebaños trashumantes
que mancha el polvo y dora el sol de los caminos.
Pequeño, ágil, sufrido, los ojos de hombre astuto,
hundidos, recelosos, movibles; y trazadas
cual arco de ballesta, en el semblante enjuto
de pómulos salientes, las cejas muy pobladas.
Abunda el hombre malo del campo y de la aldea,
capaz de insanos vicios y crímenes bestiales,
que bajo el pardo sayo esconde un alma fea,
esclava de los siete pecados capitales.
Los ojos siempre turbios de envidia o de tristeza,
guarda su presa y llora la que el vecino alcanza;
ni para su infortunio ni goza su riqueza;
le hieren y acongojan fortuna y malandanza.
El numen de estos campos es sanguinario y fiero:
al declinar la tarde, sobre el remoto alcor,
veréis agigantarse la forma de un arquero,
la forma de un inmenso centauro flechador.
Veréis llanuras bélicas y páramos de asceta
—no fue por estos campos el bíblico jardín—:
son tierras para el águila, un trozo de planeta
por donde cruza errante la sombra de Caín.

XCIX

IN SPANISH LANDS

The men of these parts who burn the pine woods³
and await their booty as they would a kill,
have already despoiled the dark holm oak woods⁴
and chopped down the sturdy oak trees on the hills.
Today, their needy children flee from their homes
and storms bear away the top soil from the land,
from the wretched moorlands where they work, suffer and roam
down the sacred rivers to the oceans grand.
They belong to a tough wandering stock,
shepherds who lead their ovine hordes
to fertile Extremadura, nomadic flocks
daubed by the dust and gilt by the sun on the roads.
Small, agile, long-suffering, crafty-looking men
with deep-sunken, suspicious, restless eyes; and traced
like a crossbow curve, the bushy brows above them
in their high-cheekboned wizened face.
Wicked people abound in country and village,
capable of the most insane vices and bestial crimes,
under whose brown peasant smocks an ugly soul is hidden,
slave to the seven deadly sins at a time.
Their eyes are always clouded with envy or sadness;
they hang on to what they've got and grudge their neighbour his due;
they can neither ward off their ill luck nor enjoy their riches;
they are hurt and afflicted by fortune and misfortune too.
The numen of these fields is bloodthirsty and cruel;
when the dusk is falling on the distant hill,
you will see the form of an archer looming,
the form of a huge centaur armed to kill.
You will see warlike plains and moorland void
- one looks for the Biblical garden here in vain -:
this is territory for the eagle, a piece of asteroid
which is crossed by the wandering shadow of Cain.

EL HOSPICIO

Es el hospicio, el viejo hospicio provinciano,
el caserón ruinoso de ennegrecidas tejas
en donde los vencejos anidan en verano
y graznan en las noches de invierno las cornejas.
Con su frontón al Norte, entre los dos torreones
de antigua fortaleza, el sórdido edificio
de grietados muros y sucios paredones,
es un rincón de sombra eterna. ¡El viejo hospicio!
Mientras el sol de enero su débil luz envía,
su triste luz velada sobre los campos yermos,
a un ventanuco asoman, al declinar el día,
algunos rostros pálidos, atónitos y enfermos,
a contemplar los montes azules de la sierra;
o, de los cielos blancos, como sobre una fosa,
caer la blanca nieve sobre la fría tierra,
¡sobre la tierra fría la nieve silenciosa!...



C

THE POORHOUSE

This is the poorhouse, an old provincial poorhouse,
a large ramshackle building with blackened tiles,
where in summer the swifts build their nests
and the crows caw and squawk on winter nights.
This squalid building with frontage towards the north,
its chipped cracked facade and thick dirty walls
and the entrance between the turrets of an old fort,
is drowned in eternal shadow. The old poorhouse!
While the January sun sheds its feeble rays,
its sad veiled light on the barren, deserted fields,
in the dying day, faces from the window gaze,
the pale, speechless faces of the old and ill,
to look a little at the blue mountain peaks;
or the snow falling from the white winter skies
on the cold earth, as if on a grave; how bleak
the silent snow on the cold earth lies!



CI

THE IBERIAN GOD

What the Iberian man would wish,
like the bowman-gambler in the old song,
is to send an arrow against the God who lashed
his fields with hail and made his wheat go wrong,
and at the same time on his lips a “Glory be”
to the same God in the sky
when He pours abundance on his fields
and fills his granaries with wheat and rye.
“Lord of ruin and hardships,
I adore because I fear You and because I await
your will, but while the prayer is on my lips
my blasphemous heart inclines towards the earth.
“ Lord, because of You, with the sweat of my brow
I earn my bread. I know your power and how
chained and helpless we are here below!
It is You who sends the stifling heat which roasts
the summer grain; yours the storms which raze
the crops; yours also the untimely frosts
and droughts which spoil the fruit on autumn trees!
“Lord of the rainbow over fields of wheat
and pasture land where sheep and cattle graze,
Lord of the fruit which the worms eat
and of the shacks deluged on stormy days,
“it is your breath which makes our fires bright;
it is your light which ripens the golden grain,
and yours is the hand which on St. John’s night
swells the green olives on the trees again!
“Oh, Sender of good luck or neediness
to those on the up or downward slope
Who gives the rich prosperity and laziness
and to the poor their weariness and hope!

“In the inconstant wheel of the year, I have seen
the seed which I have sown with labour, oh Lord,
running the same risk as the gambler’s coin
thrown at random on the gaming board!
“Lord, with double face of love and revenge,
benevolent or spiteful, according to the days,
to You, like a gambler’s dice thrown at chance,
go my prayers, my blasphemy and praise!”
This man who today insults God on the altars
and who is no more attentive to the frown of fate,
is he who in the past dreamt empires over the waters
and said: God will be the way to make us great.
Didn’t he make his God a God of war,
beyond fortune and beyond fate,
beyond all that’s on the earth and far
beyond the oceans and beyond death?
Wasn’t the Iberian holm oak used
to burn infidels in God’s name,
and in that fire of love it fused
at one with God in a holy flame?
But, what does one day count for bad or good!
Today, for the fire in their homes
there is brushwood to be found in the shady wood
and green logs enough in the old holm oak groves.
There are still large expanses of ground
waiting to open their furrows to the curved plough;
for God’s seed there is glebe enough to be found,
though under thistle, caltrop and burdock now.
What does one day count! Yesterday is alert
to tomorrow, as tomorrow is to eternity.
Man of Spain, the past is not dead
nor is the future - or the past - fixed immutably.
Who really knows the God of this land?
I am convinced deep in my heart
that the Iberian man with his robust hands
from the Castilian oak will carve for himself
an austere God to suit this dun, parched earth.

ORILLAS DEL DUERO

¡Primavera soriana, primavera
humilde, como el sueño de un bendito,
de un pobre caminante que durmiera
de cansancio en un páramo infinito!
¡Campillo amarillento,
como tosco sayal de campesina,
pradera de velludo polvoriento
donde paca la escuálida merina!
¡Aquellos diminutos pegujales
de tierra dura y fría,
donde apuntan centenos y trigales
que el pan moreno nos darán un día!
Y otra vez roca y roca, pedregales
desnudos y pelados serrijones,
la tierra de las águilas caudales,
malezas y jarales,
hierbas monteses, zarzas y cambrones.
¡Oh tierra ingrata y fuerte, tierra mía!
¡Castilla, tus decrepitas ciudades!
¡La agria melancolía
que puebla tus sombrías soledades!
¡Castilla varonil, adusta tierra,
Castilla del desdén contra la suerte,
Castilla del dolor y de la guerra,
tierra inmortal, Castilla de la muerte!
Era una tarde, cuando el campo huía
del sol, y en el asombro del planeta,
como un globo morado aparecía
la hermosa luna, amada del poeta.
En el cárdeno cielo violeta
alguna clara estrella fulguraba.
El aire ensombrecido

oreaba mis sienes, y acercaba
el murmullo del agua hasta mi oído.
Entre cerros de plomo y de ceniza
manchados de roídos encinares,
y entre calvas roquedas de caliza,
iba a embestir los ocho tajamares
del puente el padre río,
que surca de Castilla el yermo frío.
¡Oh Duero, tu agua corre
y correrá mientras las nieves blancas
de enero el sol de mayo
haga fluir por hoces y barrancas,
mientras tengan las sierras su turbante
de nieve y de tormenta.
y brille el olifante
del sol, tras de la nube cenicienta!...
¿Y el viejo romancero
fue el sueño de un juglar junto a tu orilla?
¿Acaso como tú y por siempre, Duero,
irá corriendo hacia la mar Castilla?



CII

BANKS OF THE DUERO

Springtime in Soria, springtime
as humble as the dream of an anchorite,
travel-weary wayfarer adream
on a moor stretching to the infinite!
Tawny, yellowish countryside,
like a peasant woman's coarse smock,
dusty plush of meadowland and field
where scraggly sheep graze in flocks!
Those diminutive dry
and cold plots of tilled loam
where sprout patches of wheat and rye
from which our brown bread will come!
And once more rocks on every hand,
bald mountains and naked crags,
territory of the booted eagle, land
of weeds and thicket and scrub,
brambles and thorns and wild plants.
Oh, land ungrateful and strong, my
land! Castile with your decrepit towns!
The flood of bitter melancholy
in your land sombre and forlorn.
Castile, virile land and austere,
Castile, disdainful of fortune and fate,
Castile, land of pain and war,
immortal land, Castile, land of death!
It was one of those evenings when the land flees
from the sun, and to the planet's surprise,
like a purple balloon appeared
the moon, lovely and loved in poets' eyes.
In the opalescent violet sky
a few bright stars gleamed.

the air freshened and seemed
to cool my temples and close by
the murmur of water reached my ears.
Between lead-grey and ashen ridges
blemished with ragged holm oak groves
and bald outcrops of limestone,
the father river, which hollows as it flows
a track through the wastelands of Castile,
buffeted the eight breakwaters of the bridge.
Oh Duero, your water flows
and will flow while the sun of May
melts the white January snows
and sends them down through ravine and gully,
while the mountain ranges are crowned
with a turban of snow and storm
and behind the ash-grey clouds
the sun shines bright and warm! ...
And what of the old *romancero*?⁵
Did perhaps some minstrel dream it here?
Will Castile go, as you do Duero,
searching forever for the sea?



CIII

HOLM OAKS⁶

*To the Masrieras in remembrance of a
visit we made to the Prado*

Holm oak woods of Castile
on highlands and rises,
on mountains and foothills,
with dark undergrowth filled,
holm oaks, brown like the earth;
humility and strength!
While the axe of the woodman
is numbering your days,
oh, holm oaks, will no one
say a word in your praise?
The oak tree tells of war
of valour and feats of the brave,
and its twisted branches are
symbols of immobile rage.
It is more wiry and hard
than the holm oak,
prouder and more lordly far.
It seems that the oak tree high
is crammed and knotted with strength
like an athlete and measures its length
from the earth towards the sky.
The pine tells of the sea and the sky,
of mountains and the earth entire.
The palm tree tells of the desert dry,
of the sun that burns like fire
and of thirsty travellers who dream
in the sands of cooling streams.
The beech trees are older than time.

Someone in the beeches old
read a story of crimes,
of battles and horror cold.
A beech grove among pines
makes the traveller tremble with fear
but the poplars along the river line
tell us when spring is here.
Near the water which flows,
which comes and goes,
quickly or slow,
which rushes and wells
or which eddies and swells.
Like the waters of the river,
they ripple and quiver
with a silvery glow.
The elms are of the parkland
and in their goodly shade
while still our hair was golden
we used to play
and, now we are old and grey,
musing beneath them we stand.
The apple tree is fragrant
for its fruit;
the eucalyptus leaves smell
strong and sweet
and of the orange tree the scent
of blossoms casts a spell,
while the cypress, stiff and dark,
in stately gardens dwells.
What have you to offer, holm oak,
black and base born
in land brown and forlorn;
with your colourless limbs
and your ashen-grey bole,
neither lordly nor trim,
strong without soul
but humble and firm?

Nothing warlike or fierce,
nothing pretty or proud
in your bearing appears,
nothing showy or loud.
Straight or crooked you grow
and you humbly give way
but to life's only law,
which is to live as one may.
You represent the country entire,
dark brown holm oak.
Whether under a sun of fire
or winter's freezing cloak,
the snowstorm or the heat
of January and July,
the driven drops of sleet
or the snow storm from the sky;
always firm, always the same,
impassive, pure and good;
oh you, robust and serene
inhabitant of the wood,
dark, rural holm oak
of the border with Aragón
or the war-like peaks
of the land near Pamplona;
holm oaks of Extremadura,
and of Castile, which made Spain,
holm oaks of the hills,
of the mountains and of the plains;
holm oaks of the high tablelands
encircled by the nascent Duero,
and of the river Tagus which winds
around the city of Toledo;
holm oaks near the coast
- in Santander -, yours
also is the fractious note

in Cordova of the Moors,
like a Castilian scowl,
and you, holm oaks of Madrid,
below Guadarrama cold,
so beautiful and so grim
with your Castilian austerity
- a suitable retort
to the pomp and vanity
and fever of the court! ...
Humble holm oaks, I've seen
in paintings of renown
your simple forms with steeds
and stately greyhounds round;
I know that poets sang your praise
in august odes
and royal huntsmen shot and blazed
amid your boles;
but you are the country and the home
and the friendly shade
of the honest working men
who wear brown serge
and who cut you down for firewood
with their hands.



CIV⁷

Is that you, Guadarrama, my old friend,
the same grey and white mountain
which in my Madrid evenings
I used to see outlined against the blue sky?
Down your deep ravines
and serrated peaks
a thousand Guadarramas and a thousand suns
go riding with me into your heart.

Road to Balsaín, 1911

CV

APRIL SHOWERS

April showers abound.
The wind is blowing high,
and between cloud and cloud
are patches of indigo sky.
Water and sun. Rainbow's shine.
Distant clouds downlash
the zig-zag serpentine
of a yellow lightning flash
and the glass rattles and whines
as drops on the window splash.
Through the drizzle of rain
a meadow greenly shows,
holm oak groves are faint
and the mountain dimmer grows.
The slanting threads of sleet
lash the leaves and buds
and dance with a million feet
on the Duero's troubled flood.
It is raining on the bean-rows
and on wheat fields brown and grey;
there is sun in the holm oak groves
and pools along the roadway.
Rain and sun. The country fades
or gleams in the changing light;
here a hill is lost in shade,
there another comes into sight.
Sun and shadow alternate
on houses far apart
and distant towers modulate.
Towards the mountains dark as slate
clouds in squadrons start,
woolly, ash-grey clouds depart.

UN LOCO

Es una tarde mustia y desabrida
de un otoño sin frutos, en la tierra
estéril y raída
donde la sombra de un centauro yerra.
Por un camino en la árida llanura,
entre álamos marchitos,
a solas con su sombra y su locura
va el loco, hablando a gritos.
Lejos se ven sombríos estepares,
colinas con malezas y cambrones,
y ruinas de viejos encinares,
coronando los agrios serrijones.
El loco vocifera
a solas con su sombra y su quimera.
Es horrible y grotesca su figura;
flaco, sucio, maltrecho y mal rapado,
ojos de calentura
iluminan su rostro demacrado.
Huye de la ciudad... Pobres maldades,
misérrimas virtudes y quehaceres
de chulos aburridos, y ruindades
de ociosos mercaderes.
Por los campos de Dios el loco avanza.
Tras la tierra esquelética y sequiza
—rojo de herrumbre y pardo de ceniza—
hay un sueño de lirio en lontananza.
Huye de la ciudad. ¡El tedio urbano!
—¡carne triste y espíritu villano!—.
No fue por una trágica amargura
esta alma errante desgajada y rota;
purga un pecado ajeno: la cordura,
la terrible cordura del idiota.

CVI

A MADMAN

It is an evening gloomy and bitter,
an evening in the fruitless fall
in a land bare and withered
where a centaur's shadow falls.
On a road through the arid country
between faded poplar trees,
with his madness and shadow for company,
shouting and yelling, the madman flees.
In the distance, dark rockrose,
hills with weeds and thorn
and old decrepit holm oak groves
crowning the heights forlorn.
With his shadow and his fantastic dreams
alone the madman shouts to heaven.
Grotesque and horrible his figure seems,
thin, dirty, ragged and ill-shaven,
and a feverish light illumines his eyes
and the face where his madness is graven.
He flees the town... The squalid evils
the paltry virtues, the meanness and the tricks
of flashy layabouts and uncivil
idle merchants in their shops.
Fields after fields the madman crosses.
Behind the earth scrawny and dry
- rust red of colour and brown like ashes -
comes a dream of iris far away.
He flees the town. The urban toil!
- where flesh is sad and base the soul! -
No tragic bitterness broke this heart,
the heart of this wanderer broken in twain.
He purges a sin in which he had no part:
the terrible wisdom of the insane.

CVII

ICONOGRAPHIC FANTASY

A premature baldness
gleams above the broad, stern brow;
beneath a skin of pale smoothness
the fine lines of the skull show.
Sharp chin and high cheek bones
by the hard burin outlined;
and such lips, touched with a purple stain,
as might be dreamt by a Florentine.
While the mouth appears to smile,
the eyes are perspicacious;
though narrowed by a thoughtful frown the while,
they have a look that is deep and tenacious.
Before him on the table is an old book
on which his hand is idly posed.
Behind him, in the mirror, if we look
we see a golden evening in repose.
Mountains the colour of violet,
and scrub and moorland grey;
the land loved by saint and poet,
by vultures and birds of prey.
From the open balcony to the white wall
a wedge of golden sun expands,
inflaming the gloomy light which falls
where the neglected suit of armour stands.





FOTO: A.H.P.S.O. nº 1.147

Plaza Mariano Granados. Café «El Recreo». Soria.

CVIII

A CRIMINAL

The accused is pale and beardless.
A bitter light gleams in his eyes,
which belies the childish look of his face
and the pious meekness of his ways.
He's still got the habit he learned
in the dark seminary of his youthful days
of going about with eyes downturned
or reading his breviary with lowered gaze.
Devotee of the Virgin Mary,
mother to the lost and the depraved;
in Burgos a student of theology
and almost ready to be ordained.
His was a monstrous crime. One day bored
to tears with all the texts, profane and divine,
unravelling Latin syntax and meanings of words,
it dawned on him that he was wasting his time.
He fell in love with a beautiful young maid
but love in a thrice
like the golden juice of the vine went to his head
and aroused his natural propensity to vice.
His parents, well-off farming folk,
came into his mind in dreams.
He saw them sitting in the warm chimney nook,
their dark peasant faces lit by the fire's gleam.
He wanted to inherit. Oh cherries and walnut
trees in the garden of his home, the verdure
and shade and the golden ears of wheat
overflowing in the summer garners!
And he remembered the hatchet hanging
shining and sharp on the wall of his home,
the strong hatchet used for lopping
and splicing the branches of the felled oak.⁸

.....

In front of the defendant, the judges sit,
dressed in their long black mourning clothes
and with peasant faces and their dark brows knit,
the members of the jury sit in rows.
The defending lawyer pleads the case,
thumping his desk as he perorates;
a clerk scribbles down all he says
while the prosecuting counsel indifferently waits
for the sonorous emphatic plea to end,
and idly examines the judicial decrees
or turns his glasses in his hand,
caressing the golden rims, at ease.
An usher says: "He's sure to get the rope."
The young raven in black expects to be spared;
but a gibbet-happy public hope
that a rigorous justice will give him his reward.



CIX

AUTUMN DAWN

To Julio Romero de Torres

A long road
between grey outcrops of rock,
and here and there a humble meadow
where black bulls graze. Brambles, weeds, creepers.
The ground is moist
now with drops of dew,
and the poplar grove shines golden
to the bend of the river.
Behind the purple mountains
breaks the first dawn light;
a huntsman walking the hills
with a gun slung on his back
and his slender greyhounds around.





*Regina Cuevas Acebes, Concha Vinuesa e Isidoro Martínez Ruiz.
(Cedida por Carmelo Pérez Fernández de Velasco).*



Homenaje del Ayuntamiento de Soria a Antonio Machado en la ermita de San Saturio (1932).

CX

THE TRAIN⁹

For any journey, day or night,
- in cold weather or in heat,
on a third-class carriage seat -
you will see me, travelling light.
If it's daytime, because I
like to watch the trees pass by
and if night, because I make
every journey wide awake.
On the train I never sleep
and yet I travel well and cheap.
What a joy to get away!
London, Madrid, Ponferrada,
are nice to leave on any day.
Arriving is the problem rather.
Thus travelling on the train it seems
makes us lapse into daydreams;
so that we almost quite forget
the spavined nag on which we sit.
How well Neddy knows
every road on which he goes!
Are we going right?
Where are we going to alight?
That nun there in front of me,
how beautiful she looks!
Her expression so serene
holds out more hope to those in pain
than all the books.
And I think: You are good
for you have pledged your love
not to sinners and their brood
but to God above.

But with this and all,
you are maternal,
blessed among women,
motherly and virginal.
In your face a mystic splendour
glows beneath your linen veil.
Your cheeks - those roses pale -
were blooming once and tender
until the fire inside
burned away the earthly dross,
now you are ethereal light;
spouse and handmaid of the Cross.
But what on earth would be said or done
if every girl became a nun?
And what could I do but reach for the gun
if my darling married a barber's son?
On and on chugs the train:
the engine coughs and chokes,
spitting showers of sparks like rain.
Off we go in fire and smoke!



CXI

SUMMER NIGHT

It is a beautiful summer night.
The tall houses of this old town
have their balconies opened
on to the spacious square below.
In the wide deserted rectangle
stone benches, spindle-trees and acacias
cast symmetrical black
shadows over the white sand.
The moon is in the zenith, and in the tower
the lighted face of the clock.
And I in this old town am walking
alone and silent as a ghost.



CXII

EASTER SUNDAY

Look: the bow of life is drawing
its spectrum over the greening land.
Maidens, seek your loves¹⁰
where fountains gush from the stone.
Wherever water laughs and dreams and passes,
there the song of life is sung.
Don't you realize that one day
those eyes born closed to the light,
and which blind at life's parting, will see
astonished, in your arms the light of spring?
Will not those whom your breasts will feed
later one day work the land?
Oh, celebrate this bright Sunday,
new, new your bodies, young mothers in bloom!
Enjoy this smile of your rude mother earth.
Now in their lovely nests the storks are sitting
outlined in white squiggles against the belfries.
The mosses gleam like emeralds on the rocks.
The black bulls are cropping
the fine grasses between the oak trees
and the shepherd grazing his sheep
has left his brown cape on the mountain.



CAMPOS DE SORIA

I

Es la tierra de Soria, árida y fría.
Por las colinas y las sierras calvas,
verdes pradillos, cerros cenicientos,
la primavera pasa
dejando entre las hierbas olorosas
sus diminutas margaritas blancas.

La tierra no revive, el campo sueña.
Al empezar abril está nevada
la espalda del Moncayo;
el caminante lleva en su bufanda
envueltos cuello y boca, y los pastores
pasan cubiertos con sus luengas capas.

II

Las tierras labrantías,
como retazos de estameñas pardas,
el huertecillo, el abejar, los trozos
de verde oscuro en que el merino pasta,
entre plumizos peñascales, siembran
el sueño alegre de infantil Arcadia.
En los chopos lejanos del camino,
parecen humear las yertas ramas
como un glauco vapor -las nuevas hojas-
y en las quiebras de valles y barrancas
blanquean los zarzales florecidos,
y brotan las violetas perfumadas.

III

Es el campo ondulado, y los caminos
ya ocultan los viajeros que cabalgan
en pardos borriquillos,
ya al fondo de la tarde arrebolada
elevan las plebeyas figurillas,
que el lienzo de oro del ocaso manchan.
Mas si trepáis a un cerro y veis el campo
desde los picos donde habita el águila,
son tornasoles de carmín y acero,
llanos plumizos, lomas plateadas,
circuidos por montes de violeta,
con las cumbres de nieve sonrosada.

IV

¡Las figuras del campo sobre el cielo!
Dos lentos bueyes aran
en un alcor, cuando el otoño empieza,
y entre las negras testas dobladas
bajo el pesado yugo,
pende un cesto de juncos y retama,
que es la cuna de un niño;
y tras la yunta marcha
un hombre que se inclina hacia la tierra,
y una mujer que en las abiertas zanjás
arroja la semilla.
Bajo una nube de carmín y llama,
en el oro fluido y verdinoso
del poniente, las sombras se agigantan.

V

La nieve. En el mesón al campo abierto
se ve el hogar donde la leña humea
y la olla al hervir borbollonea.
El cierzo corre por el campo yerto,
alborotando en blancos torbellinos
la nieve silenciosa.
La nieve sobre el campo y los caminos
cayendo está como sobre una fosa.
Un viejo acurrucado tiembla y tose
cerca del fuego; su mechón de lana
la vieja hila, y una niña cose
verde ribete a su estameña grana.
Padres los viejos son de un arriero
que caminó sobre la blanca tierra
y una noche perdió ruta y sendero,
y se enterró en las nieves de la sierra.
En torno al fuego hay un lugar vacío,
y en la frente del viejo, de hosco ceño,
como un tachón sombrío
-tal el golpe de un hacha sobre un leño-.
La vieja mira al campo cual si oyera
pasos sobre la nieve. Nadie pasa.
Desierta la vecina carretera,
desierto el campo en torno de la casa.
La niña piensa que en los verdes prados
ha de correr con otras doncellitas
en los días azules y dorados,
cuando crecen las blancas margaritas.

VI

¡Soria fría, *Soria pura*,
cabeza de Extremadura,
con su castillo guerrero
arruinado, sobre el Duero;

con sus murallas roídas
y sus casas denegridas!
¡Muerta ciudad de señores,
soldados o cazadores;
de portales con escudos
con cien linajes hidalgos,
y de famélicos galgos,
de galgos flacos y agudos,
que pululan
por las sórdidas callejas,
y a la medianoche ululan,
cuando graznan las cornejas!

¡Soria fría! La campana
de la Audiencia da la una.
Soria, ciudad castellana
¡tan bella! bajo la luna.

VII

¡Colinas plateadas,
grises alcores, cárdenas roquedas
por donde traza el Duero
su curva de ballesta
en torno a Soria, oscuros encinares,
ariscos pedregales, calvas sierras,
caminos blancos y álamos del río,
tardes de Soria, mística y guerrera,
hoy siento por vosotros, en el fondo
del corazón, tristeza,
tristeza que es amor! ¡Campos de Soria
donde parece que las rocas sueñan,
conmigo vais! ¡Colinas plateadas,
grises alcores, cárdenas roquedas!...

VIII

He vuelto a ver los álamos dorados,
álamos del camino en la ribera
del Duero, entre San Polo y San Saturio,
tras las murallas viejas
de Soria -barbacana
hacia Aragón, en castellana tierra-.

Estos chopos del río, que acompañan
con el sonido de sus hojas secas
el son del agua cuando el viento sopla,
tienen en sus cortezas
grabadas iniciales que son nombres
de enamorados, cifras que son fechas.

¡Álamos del amor que ayer tuvisteis
de ruiseñores vuestras ramas llenas;
álamos que seréis mañana lirás
del viento perfumado en primavera;
álamos del amor cerca del agua
que corre y pasa y sueña,
álamos de las márgenes del Duero,
conmigo vais, mi corazón os lleva!

IX

¡Oh, sí! Conmigo vais, campos de Soria,
tardes tranquilas, montes de violeta,
alamedas del río, verde sueño
del suelo gris y de la parda tierra,
agria melancolía
de la ciudad decrepita,
me habéis llegado al alma,
¿o acaso estabais en el fondo de ella?
¡Gente del alto llano numantino
que a Dios guardáis como cristianas viejas,
que el sol de España os llene
de alegría, de luz y de riqueza!

CXIII

CAMPOS DE SORIA¹¹

I

It is the land of Soria arid and cold.
Over the bald hills and mountains,
small green fields and ash-coloured heights,
spring is passing
leaving among the fragrant grasses
its daisies small and white.
The earth is without apparent life, the fields adream.
At the beginning of April there is snow
on the back of Moncayo;
the traveller wears a scarf
around his neck and mouth, and the shepherds
pass covered in their long capes.

II

The ploughed fields,
like patches of brown serge,
the little garden, the apiary, the strips
of dark green where the merino sheep graze,
between lead-grey crags, induce
the happy dream of some infantile Arcadia.
The stiff branches of the poplars
distant from the roadway seem to shimmer
like some glaucous vapour - with new leaves -
and in the ravines and gullies
the brambles whiten in bloom,
and fragrant violets sprout.

III

It is rolling country, and the travellers
mounted on small brown donkeys
are now hidden in the roadways,
but soon at the end of the red-flushed evening
their small plebeian shapes will arise,
and streak the golden canvas of the sunset.
But if you scale a height and view
the country from the peaks where eagles nest,
all will be sheens of carmine and steel,
lead-grey plains and silver-coloured knolls,
surrounded by mountains of violet,
their summits crowned in rosy snow.

IV

Rural forms etched against the sky!
Two slow oxen ploughing
on a hill, in the first days of autumn,
and between the black lowered heads
under the heavy yoke,
hangs a basket of reeds and broom,
which is the cradle for a child.
Behind the team of oxen tread
a man, back bent to the ground,
and a woman scattering seed
into the open drills.
Under a cloud of carmine and flame
in the fluid gold and green
of the west, gigantic shadows loom.

V

You can see the logs smoking in the grate
through the inn door which opens on to the snow,
and the pot boiling and bubbling on the fire below.
The north wind crosses the country desolate,
lifting the silent snow in squalls
that whirl and wave.
The snow on fields and footpaths falls
as if falling on a silent grave.
An old man huddled by the fire's verge
trembles and coughs. A young girl darns
green border on a piece of scarlet serge
while her old mother spins a length of yarn.
The old couple had a son before.
He was a muleteer, but one winter's day
as he was travelling on a mountain road, he lost his way
and was swallowed in a drift and seen no more.
Beside the fire there is a vacant place
and a kind of ill-defined mark or line
on the brow of the old man's grim unsmiling face
like the scar an axe blow leaves on a pine.¹²
The old woman looks out the door as if she can hear
steps in the snow, but there is nobody there.
Deserted is the roadway and the country near
around the house is desolate and bare.
The girl is dreaming how she is going to run
and play with other girls in meadows green
on days with cloudless skies and golden sun
when daisies white amid the grass are seen.

VI

Soria cold, *Soria pura*
*cabeza de Extremadura*¹³,
with its castle of knights and heroes
in ruins now on the Duero;
with its crumbling city walls
and its houses blackened all!
Dead city of gentlemen,
soldiers or huntsmen;
of doorways with coats of arms
of a hundred noble homes,
and famished greyhounds in swarms,
of greyhounds all skin and bone,
which prowl
in the sordid lanes and walks
and at midnight howl,
when the crows caw and squawk!
Soria cold. The sound
of the courthouse clock striking one.
Soria, Castilian town,
so beautiful! under the moon.

VII

Silver-coloured hills,
grey knolls, mulberry crags
where the Duero follows
its crossbow curve
around Soria, dark groves of holm oaks,
wild stone-covered ground, bald mountains,
white roads and poplars by the river,
evenings in Soria, the mystical and martial,
today in the depth of my heart I feel
sadness for all this,
sadness which is love! Sorian countryside
where it seems the rocks are adream,
you journey with me! Silver-coloured hills,
grey knolls, mulberry-coloured crags! ...

VIII

I have seen once more the poplars turn golden,
poplars on the banks of the Duero
between San Polo and San Saturio,
behind the old city walls
of Soria - fortress
facing Aragón, in Castilian land.
These river poplars have a dry-leafed
rustle in the wind that harmonizes
with the murmur of the water.
On their trunks they bear
engraved initials, which are names
of lovers, numbers which are dates.
Poplars of love whose branches yesterday
were full of nightingales,
but which tomorrow will be lyres
for the fragrant winds of spring;
poplars of love beside the river
which flows and passes and dreams,
poplars on the banks of the Duero,
you journey with me; I bear you in my heart!

IX

Oh, yes! You journey with me, Sorian countryside,
peaceful evenings, purple mountains,
poplar groves by the river, green dream
of grey soil and dun-coloured earth,
bitter melancholy
of the decrepit city.
You have entered my soul.
Or, were you perhaps already deep therein?
People of the high Numantian plain,
who keep to God like Christian women old,
may the sun of Spain inundate you
with happiness, with light and with wealth!



FOTO: ALBERTO LLORENTE

La Laguna Negra (Soria)

LAND OF ALVARGONZÁLEZ¹⁴

(STORY-LEGEND)

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One morning in early October, I decided to visit the source of the Duero¹⁵ and in Soria I took the Burgos bound coach, which would take me as far as Cidones. I made myself comfortable in the front seat near the coachman and between two travellers: a returned American coming back from Mexico to his native village, hidden among the pine woods, and an old peasant returning from Barcelona, where he had seen his two sons off for La Plata. You won't cross the high tablelands of Castile without meeting people who will talk to you about far-off lands.

We took the wide road to Burgos; to our left was the road leading to Osma, fringed with poplars, whose leaves autumn was already turning a golden colour. Soria was now behind us between grey hills and bare flat-topped ridges. Soria, mystical and warlike, had in the past been the guardian of the gateway to Castile, a sort of barbican against the Moorish kingdoms, crossed by the Cid in his banishment. The Duero in its course around Soria forms a kind of crossbow curve. We were going in the direction taken by a released arrow.

The returned American was telling me about Veracruz, but I was listening to the peasant, who was discussing a recent crime with the coachman. In the pinewoods near Durcielo, a young farm girl had been found covered with stab-wounds and she had been raped after she was killed. The peasant put the blame on a rich cattle dealer from Valdeavellano, who was held under suspicion in the jail at Soria, as the undoubted author of this villainous deed, but he had no faith in justice being done because the victim was poor. In small towns the people only get worked up about gambling and politics, as in large cities they do over art and pornography - those pastimes of the rich - but in the country their only interests are the work on the land and the crimes of men.

“Are you going far?” I asked the peasant.

“To Covalada, sir”, he answered. “And yourself?”

“I’m going the same way, because I intend to go up to Urbión and then along the Duero valley. On the way back, I will come down to Vinuesa through the mountain pass of Santa Inés.”

“Not a good time of the year to go up to Urbión. God forbid you get caught in a snow-storm on that mountain.”

When we arrived at Cidones, the peasant and I got off and we said goodbye to the returned American, who was going in the stage-coach as far as San Leonardo, and each of us mounted a horse and took the road to Vinuesa.

Whenever I talk to country people, I realize how many things they know of which we are ignorant as well as how little it interests them to know what we know.

The peasant rode ahead of me in silence. The people from that part of Castile are grave and tight-lipped; they speak when they are asked a question and their answers are brief and to the point. When the question is such that it requires little elucidation, they hardly deign to reply. They only go into detail when they want to give useful information about things they know well or when they tell stories about the area.

I turned round to look at the hamlet we had left behind. The church with its high belfry crowned with a beautiful storks’ nest, stands out over a few mud-walled houses. Near the highway, the house of a returned American stands out in contrast with the sordid group of surrounding houses. It is a modern, comfortable detached house, surrounded by a garden and a fence of iron railings. In front of the village there is a range of bare hill-tops with grey rocks grooved with reddish clefts.

After riding for two hours, we arrived at Muedra, a hamlet half way between Cidones and Vinuesa, and a few paces further on we crossed a wooden bridge over the Duero.

“If you take that path,” the peasant said, pointing to his right, “you go to the land of Alvargonzález. Nowadays, that land is accursed, though it was once the best land in the area.”

“Is Alvargonzález the name of its owner?” I asked.

“Alvargonzález”, he replied, “was a rich farmer, but now there is nobody of that name in the area. The hamlet where he lived had the same name as himself, Alvargonzález, and the moorland which surrounds it is called land of Alvargonzález. If we took that path we would get to Vinuesa sooner than by the way we’re going. In winter, when hunger drives the wolves out of the woods, they roam the streets of that hamlet and you can hear them howling as you pass through the sheep-folds which used to belong to Alvargonzález but which are now empty and in ruins.

“When I was a boy, I used to hear a shepherd tell the story of Alvargonzález, and I know that it is written down on paper and that blind balladeers sing it in the Berlanga area.”

I begged him to tell me the story, and the peasant began with these words:

“When Alvargonzález was a young man, he inherited substantial land and property from his parents. He had a house with an orchard and garden and an apiary. There were two grassy meadows, fields of wheat and rye, an extent of holm-oak forest not far from the village, some teams of oxen for ploughing, a hundred sheep, a mastiff and several greyhounds for hunting.

He fell in love with a pretty maid from the Burgo area, not far from Berlanga, and a year after their first meeting, he took her as his wife. She was called Polonia, the eldest and prettiest of three sisters, daughter of a farming family, called the Peribáñez, who had been well-off in other times but who were now come down in the world.

There was a famous wedding feast in the bride’s village as there was in the village of Alvargonzález when the wedding couple returned there. There was music of vihuelas, rebecs, flutes and tabors, dances of Aragón and fireworks in the Valencian style. In all that area, on both sides of the Duero, from Urbión, where it rises, till it winds its way into the province of Burgos, they talk of Alvargonzález’s wedding and they remember the feasting there was there for days, because country people never forget something that is showy and noisy.

Alvargonzález lived happily with the love of his wife and the bounty of his land and livestock. He had three sons, and, when they grew up, he

placed the eldest in charge of the orchard and garden and the apiary; the second was put in charge of the livestock and he sent the youngest to study in Osma, for he had destined him for the Church.

There is a lot of bad blood among farming people and envy soon raised its ugly head in the home of Alvargonzález. The two eldest boys got married and the good father had daughters-in-law who brought discord into the house before they gave him grandchildren. They were wicked women and so covetous that they only thought about the inheritance they would have at the death of Alvargonzález and such was their avidity for what they expected would come their way that they didn't enjoy what they had.

The youngest, whom the parents had sent to the seminary, preferred pretty girls to praying and learning Latin, and one day he hung up his soutane, being tired of dressing himself by pulling on his clothes over his head. He declared that he was decided to embark for the Americas. His dream was to travel many lands, cross the seven seas and visit the four corners of the world.

The mother cried her eyes out. Alvargonzález sold the holm-oak grove and gave his son his part of the inheritance.

'Take what is yours, my son, and God go with you. Do what you plan to do and remember that while your father lives you'll have food and shelter in this house, but when I'm dead and gone, everything will belong to your brothers.'

There were wrinkles now on Alvargonzález's brow and his beard was silvered by the bluish-tinged stubble on his face. His shoulders, however, were still robust and erect was the head which was starting to grey only at the temples.

One morning in autumn he set out alone from his house; he did not go this time accompanied by his lean greyhounds with his shotgun slung across his back. He didn't have his hunting gear with him for it didn't cross his mind to go hunting. He walked a long distance under the yellowing poplars along the river bank, cut through the holm-oak grove and there, beside a spring in the shade of a giant elm, he stopped in weariness. He wiped the sweat from his brow, drank a few sips of water and lay down on the ground.

And there, alone, Alvargonzález spoke to God, saying: ‘My Lord and my God, You who have made fruitful the land which I have ploughed, You, to whom I owe the bread on my table, the wife in my bed and thanks to whom the sons I have engendered have grown strong, my sheepfolds are filled with white merino sheep and the fruit trees in my orchard bend with fruit and the hives in my apiary are full of honey; I want You to know, my God, that I am aware how much You have given me before You take it away from me.’

As he prayed he fell asleep, for the shade of the branches and the water that gurgled from the stone seemed to be saying to him: Sleep and rest.

And so Alvargonzález slept, but there was no rest for his spirit, for dreams trouble man’s sleep.

And Alvargonzález dreamt that a voice was talking to him and he saw as Jacob did a ladder of light descending from heaven to earth. Perhaps what he really saw were the sun-rays filtering through the branches of the elm.

It is difficult to interpret dreams, as they unloose our pent up emotions and mix them with our memories and fears. Many people think they can predict what will come to pass through the study of dreams. They are almost always wrong, though at times they hit on it. When a nightmare troubles the heart of a sleeper, it’s not difficult to guess what’s happening: these dreams are memories of things past which are woven together willy-nilly by the trembling clumsy hand of an invisible character: fear.

Alvargonzález dreamt of his childhood. The cheerful fire in the hearth under the wide blackened chimney hood in the kitchen and his parents, brothers and sisters seated round the fire. The gnarled hands of the old man were toying with the cream-coloured candle. The mother was telling the beads of a black rosary. On the smoke-stained wall hung the gleaming hatchet with which the old man chopped up the oak branches for firewood.

Alvargonzález’s dream continued and now it was about the halcyon days of his youth. It showed a summer evening and a green meadow near the walls of an orchard. There, lying on the grass in the shade as the sun was going down and burnishing the tops of the trees with a

golden light, Alvargonzález raised the wineskin and directed the stream of red wine into his mouth to slake his thirst. Around him was gathered the family of Peribáñez: the parents and the three pretty daughters. From the branches of the fruit trees in the orchard and the grass in the meadow there emanated a harmony of gold and crystal, as if the stars were singing in the earth before appearing scattered over the mute sky. Dusk drew on and a full moon, so dear to lovers, rose golden and breathless over the darkening pine wood and tranquil countryside.

Then, just as if the faery dream-weavers had placed a strand of black wool on their distaff, Alvargonzález's dream darkened and a golden door opened lacerating the sleeper's heart.

Then there appeared a shadowy hollow at the end of which a faint light revealed his home empty and devoid of firewood. Hanging from a hook on the wall was the gleaming polished hatchet.

The dream changed to bright day. Three boys are playing at the door of the house. The mother is keeping an eye on them while she sews and from time to time she smiles. Between the two eldest boys hops a glossy black raven with steely eye.

‘Children, what are you doing?’ she asks.

The boys look at each other and say nothing.

‘Go up to the woodland, children, and bring me back an armful of firewood before nightfall.’

The three boys leave. The youngest, who is last to go, turns to look at his mother and she calls him back. The youngster returns home and the two brothers continue their journey towards the holm-oak grove.

And once again Alvargonzález sees the home deserted and the hearth without a fire and hanging on the wall, the gleaming axe.

The two eldest boys return home before dusk with their arms full of firewood. The mother lights the oil lamp and the eldest boy places twigs and bits of rockrose on the oak log and tries to start the fire going in the hearth. Flames crackle around the log but the fire immediately goes out. The hearth of Alvargonzález remains flameless. In the light of the oil lamp, the axe gleams on the wall and now it seems to drip blood.

‘Father, the fire won’t light; the firewood is damp.’

The second boy approaches and he also tries to light the fire, but in vain.

Then the youngest boy throws a fistful of twigs into the fireplace and soon a red flame lights up the kitchen. The mother smiles and Alvargonzález takes the youngest boy in his arms and seats him on his knees at the right-hand side of the hearth.

The two brothers, pale as death, drift away into the nooks and crannies of his dream and in the right hand of the eldest gleams the iron axe.

There close to the spring slept Alvargonzález when the first star twinkled in the blue and a giant moon blotched with purple showed its face above the darkening countryside. The water which gurgled from the stone seemed to be telling an old, sad tale - a tale of agrarian crime.

Alvargonzález’s sons were walking along in silence and they saw their father sleeping close to the spring. Their shadows, lengthened in the evening light, reached the sleeper before the murderers did. There was a darkish hollow in Alvargonzález’s forehead between the eyebrows, like the scar left by the blow of an axe on an oak trunk. Alvargonzález was dreaming that his sons were coming to kill him and when he opened his eyes, he saw that his dream was true.

The evil sons cruelly put the peasant to death at the edge of the spring. An axe-blow to the neck and four stab wounds to the chest put an end to the dream of Alvargonzález. The axe which had belonged to the grandparents and which had chopped so much firewood for the hearth, severed that robust neck which the years had not yet been able to bend, and the knife with which the good father had cut the brown bread which he handed out to his family at the table, pierced the noblest heart in the land. For Alvargonzález was good to his family, but he was also very charitable to the people of the village. He would be grieved for like a lost father by those who had occasion to call at his door as well as by those to whose door he came with help.

The sons of Alvargonzález aren’t aware of the enormity of their deed. They drag their dead father towards a gully through which flows a river that joins the Duero. It is a dark valley full of ferns, clumps of beech and pine groves.

And from there they take him to the Laguna Negra, a tarn which has no bottom and they throw him in with a stone tied to his feet. The tarn is surrounded by an enormous wall of grey and greenish rock where eagles and vultures build their nests. The mountain people in those days were afraid to go near the tarn even when the weather was fine. It is due to travellers like yourself, who visit these places today, that they have lost their fear.

The sons of Alvargonzález returned homewards through the valley where the giant pines and scraggy beech trees grew. They couldn't hear the water rumbling down below in the gully. As they passed, two wolves, who were watching, fled in terror. As they were going to cross the river, the river took another route and they crossed the dry bed. They went through the wood so as to get to their hamlet when darkness had fallen, and the pine trees, the rocks and the ferns made way to let them through, as though they shrank from the presence of the murderers. They passed once more by the spring, and the spring, which was telling its old, old tale, fell into silence as they passed and waited until they had gone before continuing to tell it.

And this is how the villainous sons came into possession of the good peasant's property, he who one autumn morning set out from his house and never returned nor never could return.

Some days later his travelling rug was found near the spring and a trail of blood which led to the gully. Nobody dared to put the blame for the crime on the sons of Alvargonzález, for the country dwellers fear the powerful, and nobody dared to sound the tarn as it would have been futile. The tarn never gives back what it has swallowed. A peddler who was passing through the area was arrested and hanged in Soria, because the sons of Alvargonzález turned him over into the hands of the law and by paying people to give false testimony they managed to get him condemned.

The evil of the human spirit is similar to the Laguna Negra in that it is bottomless.

The mother died a few months later. Those who one morning saw her dead said that her cold stiff hands were placed over her face.

*

The spring sun was shining over the greening countryside and the storks were teaching their young to fly in the cloudless skies of early May. The quails were clacking in the sprouting wheat; the poplars along the road and riverbank were turning green and the plum trees in the orchard were covered in white blossoms. The land of Alvargonzález was generous to its new owners and promised a bounty equal to that which it had given to the old peasant.

It was a year of plenty in that land. The sons of Alvargonzález began to disburden themselves of the weight of their crime, because evildoers are smitten with a sense of guilt when they fear the punishment of God or of men, but if fortune is favourable and fear vanishes, they sit down happily to their table and eat their bread as though it were blessed.

However, though greed has claws to grasp and grab, it lacks hands to till the land. When the following summer came round, the impoverished earth seemed to scowl at its lords and masters. There were more poppies and weeds than ears of grain in the ground they had sown with wheat. The blossoming fruit trees in the orchard were killed by late frosts. Their sheep died in droves because an old woman, believed to be a witch, put a spell on them. And if that year was bad, the next one was worse. The land was accursed and the fortunes of the sons of Alvargonzález waned in the same proportion as quarrels and disputes grew between their wives. Each of the brothers had two children, but they didn't survive because hate had envenomed their mothers' milk.

One winter night the two brothers and their wives were sitting round the fireplace where a few twigs burned and the dwindling flame was on the point of going out. They had no more firewood, nor could they go out searching for more at that time of night. A cutting wind blew in through the cracks in the shutters and it could be heard moaning in the chimney. Outside, whirls of snow were falling. The eyes of all were on the dying embers when, suddenly, someone knocked on the door.

'Who can it be at this time of night?' said the eldest. 'Open the door.'

They remained immobile, as if afraid to open the door.

There was another knock on the door and a voice could be heard:

'Open up, brothers.'

'It's Miguel! Open the door and let him in.'

When they opened the door, there covered in snow and enveloped in a long cloak stood Miguel, the youngest of the Alvargonzález sons, who had returned from the Indies.

He embraced his brothers and sat down with them beside the fire. They all remained in silence. Miguel's eyes were filled with tears and nobody looked straight at him. When Miguel had left his father's house he was a youth, but now he had come back a grown man and he had money in his pocket. He knew about the tragedy that had befallen his house but he didn't suspect his brothers. He had a gentlemanly bearing, with a sun-tanned complexion and a lean face, for the malarial fevers he had caught overseas had left their mark, but the flame of youth gleamed in his large eyes. His chestnut-brown hair fell in soft ringlets over his wide, smooth forehead. He was the handsomest of the three brothers, for the thick bushy eyebrows and narrow forehead of the eldest lent him an ugly look, and the small, restless, cowardly eyes of the second marked him as cunning and cruel.

While Miguel remained silent and lost in thought, the gaze of his brothers was fixed on the thick gold chain that hung round his neck and glinted on his chest.

The eldest brother broke the silence and asked: 'Will you live with us?'

'I will, if you want me to,' he answered, and added: 'My luggage will arrive tomorrow.'

'Some people rise in the world and others go down,' added the second. 'You bring gold with you and we, as you can see, haven't even firewood to keep us warm.'

The wind rattled the door and the shutters and howled in the chimney. The cold was so intense that it cut to the bone.

Miguel was about to speak when there was another knock on the door. He looked at his brothers as if to ask them who it could be at such an hour in the night. His brothers were shaking with fright.

The knock came to the door again, and Miguel opened it.

All he could see was the dark emptiness of night, and then a swirl of wind spattered his face with snowflakes. He could see nobody outside

the door but he could discern a figure disappearing under the snow-covered tops of the pines. As he was about to close the door again, he noticed that somebody had left a pile of firewood on the doorstep. That night a cheerful flame lit up the hearth of the Alvargonzález house.

Miguel did bring money with him from America, though not perhaps as much as his greedy brothers imagined. He decided to settle down in the village where he was born, but as he knew that all the land belonged to his brothers, he bought part of the farm from them and paid them much more gold for it than it was ever worth. When the deal was done, Miguel set himself to work in that ill-fated land.

The gold they received gladdened the hearts of the villainous brothers once more. They spent their money recklessly on all kinds of luxury and vice and so depleted their finances that after a year had passed they were obliged once more to till the land they had abandoned.

Miguel worked from dawn to dusk, ploughing up the land, removing the weeds and sowing wheat and rye, and, while his brothers' lands looked dried and barren, his own were filled with thickly-growing golden grain. His brothers regarded him with eyes full of hate and envy. Miguel gave them the money he had left in exchange for the rest of the blighted farm.

The lands of Alvargonzález now belonged to Miguel and times of plenty returned to them just as in the days of the old farmer. The two elder brothers wasted their money on wild sprees: drink and gambling once more were their undoing.

They were returning to their village one night, drunk, as they had been drinking and feasting all day in a nearby fair. The eldest had a frown on his face and savage thoughts were seething in his mind.

'What do you reckon is the explanation for the luck Miguel has?' he asked his brother. 'The land pours its riches into his lap and it denies us even a scrap of bread.'

'Witchcraft and black arts,' answered his brother.

They were passing near Miguel's orchard and decided to go up and have a look over the wall. The fruit trees in the orchard were laden with different fruit. Under the spreading branches of the trees in the rosebed, they could see a man bent over working the earth.

‘Look at him,’ said the eldest. ‘He works even at night.’

‘Hey, Miguel!’ they shouted.

But the man didn’t look their way. He went on working, cutting branches or pulling up weeds. The two astonished drunks saw what was apparently a halo of light surrounding the figure of the gardener and put it down to the wine they had drunk and which fuddled their brains. Then, the man straightened up and came towards them but without looking at them as if seeking out another corner of the garden to continue working in. The man they saw had the semblance of the old farmer. Alvargonzález had emerged from the bottomless tarn to work in Miguel’s garden!

Next day the two brothers remembered having drunk a lot of wine and seeing strange things in their drunken state. However, they continued wasting their money until they hadn’t a cent left while Miguel went on tilling his land and God showered riches on him.

The elder brothers began to feel once more the blood of Cain running in their veins and the memory of a crime committed egged them on to commit another.

They made up their minds to kill their brother and this is what they did.¹⁶

They drowned him in the millpond and his body was found one morning floating in the water.

The villainous brothers shed crocodile tears over their brother’s death so as to divert suspicion from themselves in the village, where nobody liked them. There was no lack of people ready to accuse them of the crime when they weren’t listening, though nobody dared to lay evidence in the hands of the law.

And so, once more, the land of Alvargonzález returned into the hands of the villainous brothers.

And, the first year they had abundance because they reaped the rewards of Miguel’s work, but the year after that the land became impoverished.

One day the eldest was bent over the ploughshare laboriously opening a furrow in the ground. When he looked back, he saw that the furrow closed in behind him and the earth covered it once more.

His brother was digging in the orchard, where only weeds flourished and he saw blood spurting from the ground. As he leaned on the hoe looking at the garden, a cold sweat bathed his forehead.

And so, once again, the sons of Alvargonzález in silence took the road leading to the Laguna Negra.

As evening was setting in, they traversed the beech copse and the pine wood.

When they reached the tarn, they looked for a moment on the still water.

Two wolves peered out on seeing them and fled in terror.

‘Father!’ they shouted, and by the time the echo: father! father! father! was repeated in the hollows of the rocks, they had been swallowed up in the waters of the bottomless tarn.”¹⁷



CXIV

LAND OF ALVARGONZALEZ

To the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez

I

As a young man Alvargonzález,
with property enough and land
to be deemed well-off elsewhere
but here a wealthy man,
in the festivals at Berlanga
fell in love with a maid,
and he took her as his wife
a year later to the day.

There was a very sumptuous wedding
as whoever has seen it can recall,
and on returning to his village
he gave a famous feast as well;
there were bagpipes and tambourines,
flute, guitar and bandore,
fireworks in the Valencian style
and dances of Aragón.

II

Happily lived Alvargonzález
in his own land which he loved.
Three sons were born to him,
which in the country mean more than gold,
and, when they were old enough, he set
one to take care of the crops,
another to look after the sheep,
and he gave the youngest to the Church.

III

There is much envy and bad blood
among those who work the land,

and in the countryman's home
envy raised its ugly head.
The two eldest boys got married,
Alvargonzález had daughters-in-law,
who brought discord into the house
before a grand-child was born.
The country people in their greed
think how they can profit by a death;
they can't enjoy what they've got
through yearning for what they may be left.
The youngest son found learning Latin
less interesting than pretty maids
and he didn't like to dress
by pulling on clothes over his head;
so one day he hung up his soutane
and set out for foreign lands.
His mother wept, and his father
gave him his blessing and gave him funds.

IV

Alvargonzález is old and now
his brow is wrinkled and overcast;
through his beard like silver shows
the blue-tinged shade of his face.
One morning in autumn
he set out alone from home;
he went without his greyhounds,
hunting dogs second to none;
he went sad and pensive
among the gold-leafed poplar trees;
and after walking for long and long,
he arrived at a clear bright spring.
Then lying down on the ground,
he placed his blanket on a stone,
and there at the edge of the spring
he slept to the water's song.

THE DREAM

I

And Alvargonzález could see
a ladder just as Jacob did:
it was pitched between earth and heaven,
and he heard a voice speaking to him.
But the faery weavers
among the golden fleeces and white
have wreathed another strand
of wool that is black as night.

II

Three boys are playing
at the door of his home,
and between the two elder skips
a raven with wings like coal.
His wife, who is sewing, watches
and, at times, smiles and sings.
- Children, what are you doing? - she asks.
They look at each other and say nothing.
- Go up to the woodland, children,
and before nightfall comes,
with an armful of kindling
make a fire to warm our home.

III

In the house of Alvargonzález
the firewood is piled on the hearth;
the eldest son tries to light it
but the flame will not start.
- Father, the fire won't light,
the firewood must be damp.

His brother comes to help him
and on the oak logs he puts
a pile of branches and chips
but the fire does not take.
The youngest comes and he lights
in the black chimney place
of the kitchen a fire which warms
and brightens all the house.

IV

Alvargonzález takes and lifts
the youngest boy in his arms
and puts him sitting on his knees:
- You made the house bright and warm;
you have first place in my love
though you are my last born.¹⁸
The two eldest boys withdraw
into the corners of his dream.
Between the fugitive pair
an iron axe-head gleams.

THAT EVENING ...

I

Over the naked fields,
like an enormous balloon,
stained with a purple flush,
appeared the full moon.
The sons of Alvargonzález
walked steadily on;
they had seen their father sleeping
by the clear spring alone.

II

On the father's face there is a frown
which gives it a gloomy look;
it is graven between the brows
like the blow of an axe or billhook.
He is dreaming of his sons,
that his sons stab him to death;
and when he wakes he sees
that it is the truth he has dreamt.

III

By the verge of the spring
Alvargonzález lay stretched out dead.
He had four stab wounds
between his side and his breast,
through which his life blood flowed,
and an axe blow in the neck.
The clear water of the spring
through the fields recounts the deed
and meanwhile the two assassins
go fleeing towards the beechwood.
To the Laguna Negra they go,
below the Duero's source;
they bear the dead man and leave
behind them a bloody trace;
and there in that bottomless pool,
which tells no secret tales,
with a stone tied to his feet,
they gave him a watery grave.

IV

Near the edge of the spring
Alvargonzález's blanket was found
and, from there to the beechwood,

a bloody trail on the ground.
No one in the hamlet dared
to go near the black pool,
and it was pointless to sound it,
for it has no bottom at all.
A peddler who was passing through
that part of the land was caught,
accused of the crime in Dauria,
and garrotted to death.

V

When some months had gone by,
the mother died of grief.
Those who found her dead
said that her hands were stiff
and spread over her face,
to hide the world from her sight.

VI

The sons of Alvargonzález
have sheepfold and orchard now,
meadows with fine grass
and fields of wheat and rye.
They have a beehive too which is kept
in an old lightning-struck elm;¹⁹
there are two oxen teams for the plough,
a mastiff and a thousand sheep.

OTHER DAYS

I

The blackberries are now in flower
and the plum trees white with bloom;
now the golden bees suck nectar

to fill their honeycombs,
and in their nests, which crown
the high church-tower tops,
pot-hook-like squiggles against the sky,
protrude the forms of storks.
Now the elm trees by the roadway
and the poplars along the streams,
which flow towards their father
the Duero, are turning green.
The sky is blue and the violet
mountains are bare of snow.
The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches now;
the man who worked the land is dead
but the earth does not cover his bones.

II

The beautiful land of Spain
austere, warlike and fine
Castile, of the long rivers,
has a handful of mountains high
between Soria and Burgos, the same
as fortresses or bastions
or helmets with crests or plumes,
and one of the crests is Urbión.

III

In order to take the road
from Salduero to Covalada,
which is a steep hilly road,
below the pine wood of Vinuesa
go Alvargonzález's two sons
riding on two brown mules.²⁰
They are going in search of livestock
to take back with them to their home,

and in this country of pinewoods
their long day's journey has begun.
Up along the Duero's banks they go,
leaving behind them the stone-arched bridge
over the river and near it
the country house of the idle and rich
returned Americans. Deep down
in the valley the waterfall sounds
and the mules' hooves can be heard
clatter and rattle on the stones.
On the other bank of the Duero
can be heard the pitiful chant:
"The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth."²¹

IV

They have now reached a place
where the pines grow dense and thick,
and the elder brother, who leads the way,
spurs on his mule to go quick,
saying: - Let's get a move on
for there's more than two leagues in all
of this pine wood and we got
to get to the end before night fall.
These two sons of the country,
rough, course-grained and crass,
tremble now when they remember
what happened one evening in the past.
There in the depths of the wood
once more the song is heard:
"The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth,
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth."

V

From Salduero onwards the road
runs parallel to the river bank;
on either side of the river
the pines grow high and rank
and the rocks look dark and threatening
as the valley narrows and shrinks.
The strong pines of the forest
with their massive spreading tops
and naked overground roots
firmly hooked round stones and rocks;
pines with silver-tinged trunks,
whose needles turn a bluish shade,
young pines; there are old ones also
covered with a white leprous mould,
mosses and snow-white lichens,
which cover all their massy trunks.
These fill the valley and are lost to sight
to the right and left of the river banks.
Juan, the elder, says to his brother:
- If Blas Antonio has his stock
grazing near Mount Urbión,
we've got a long journey ahead of us.
- The nearer we get to Urbión
could mean a shorter journey homewards,
if we decided on the short cut
towards the Laguna Negra
and went down the mountain pass
from Santa Inés to Vinuesa.
- Bad country that and a worse road.
I swear I've no wish whatever
to see either of them again. Let's make
the bargain in Covaleda;
stay the night there and come back early
tomorrow with the light of day
through this valley, for, at times,
the long way home is often the near way.
As they ride close to the river

the two brothers realize
that as they advance, the old trees
increase in number and size,
and the looming rocks of the mountain
black out the skyline from their eyes.
The leaping waters of the river
seem to murmur or chant:
“The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth,
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth.”

PUNISHMENT

I

Although a greedy man may have
a pen to protect his sheep,
bags to keep his money,
granaries for his wheat,
and grasping ways, his hands
are no good at working the earth.
So, after a year of plenty
there followed a year of dearth.

II

Blood red poppies grew
in every field that they ploughed
and smut rotted the ears
of corn and wheat in the ground.
In the orchard the blossoming fruit trees
were killed by untimely frosts
and through an evil spell
the sheep sickened and were lost.
The curse of God seemed to land
on the two Alvargonzález
and the year of dearth was followed
by long years of distress.

III

It is a bitter night.
A blizzard is raging outside.
The Alvargonzález are sitting awake
by a fire that is almost dead.
The same bitter memory
weighs in the thoughts of both
as they sit with their eyes fixed
on the dying embers in the hearth.
In the sleepless, fuelless house
the night is long and cold.
A smoky paraffin lamp
hangs on the blackened wall.
The flame flickers in the draught
and shines with a reddish glow
that falls on the pensive heads
of the two murderers below.
With a long harsh sigh
Alvargonzález's eldest son
breaks the silence and exclaims:
- Brother, what evil we've done!²²
The wind rattles the shutters
and beats against the door
and it sounds high in the chimney
with a prolonged, hollow roar.
Then, all is silence again
And the only sound which falls
In the freezing house is the splutter
of the lamp on the blackened wall.
The second son says: - Brother,
let's not think of the past any more!

THE TRAVELLER

I

It is a winter's night.
The wind is lashing the boughs

of the poplar trees. The snow
has covered and whitened the ground.
Through the snow storm a man
wrapped in a long black cloak
which covers him up to the eyes
is riding along the road.
On entering the village, he asks
for the Alvargonzález house
and, when he reaches the door,
he calls out before he dismounts.

II

The two brothers inside
heard someone knock on the door
and the sound of a horse's hooves
batter and stamp on the stones.
They both raised their eyes
full of fright and surprise.
- Who is it? Answer - they shouted.
- Miguel - came a voice from outside.
It was the voice of the traveller
who had left for foreign climes.

III

When the door opened,
the horseman rode in slow
and dismounted inside. He was
covered from head to foot in snow.
For some time in silence
he wept in his brothers' arms.
One of them took his hat and cloak
and the other his horse to the barn,
then he entered the rustic home
and drew near the fire to get warm.

IV

The youngest of the three brothers,
who had set out for foreign lands
when he was young and venturous,
now returned a wealthy man.
He was wearing a dark suit
of thick heavy velvet,
which was fastened round the waist
with a wide leather belt.
A heavy gold chain
was hanging round his neck.
He was tall of stature and robust
and his eyes were large and black
and full of melancholy.
His skin was bronzed by the sun,
and over his forehead the hair
in waving ringlets fell.
His lordly bearing is derived
from a father who tilled the earth
and to whom he owes his fortune,
love, power and wealth.
Miguel was the most handsome
of the three Alvargonzález boys,
for the eldest's face was disfigured
by his thick bushy brows
and a low ape-like forehead,
while the eyes of the second son
could not look at a person straight
and were cruel, baleful and grim.

V

The three brothers in silence
regard the dismal home;
and in the dark of the night
the air chills to the bone.

- Brothers, have you no firewood?
- Says Miguel.
- We have none
- answers the eldest.

A man
miraculously opens the door,
the heavy door, which is locked
and secured with two iron bars.
The face of the man who enters
is like that of the father dead.
A halo of golden light
encircles the white-haired head.
He has a bundle of wood on his shoulder
and an iron axe in his hand.²³

THE RETURNED AMERICAN

I

Miguel from his brothers bought
a part of that ill-starred land,
for from America he had brought
wealth enough for a man.
But gold spent even on badlands
glitters more than gold interred
and much more so in paupers' hands
than hidden in earthenware jars.
The youngest began to work the earth
with faith persistence and will
and the two elder brothers went back
their plots of land to till.
In the fields of Miguel
the teeming summer poured
a rich abundance of grain;
a fertile and golden hoard;
and soon from village to village

the wondrous fact is revealed
that the curse of God has fallen
on the two murderers' fields.
Now the people sing a song
which recounts the dreadful crime:
"At the edge of the spring
they took his life.
The wicked sons put him
to a cruel death.
Into the bottomless pool
they cast the father dead.
He does not sleep under the ground
he who has worked the earth."

II

Miguel, with his two greyhounds
and his gun over his arm,
was going towards the mountains
on an evening peaceful and calm.
He was walking between the green
poplars which lined the way,
when he heard a voice singing:
"He was not buried in a grave.
Through the pine trees in the valley
of the Revinuesa,
they bore their dead father
towards the Laguna Negra."

THE HOUSE²⁴

I

The house of Alvargonzález
is a big rambling house
with four narrow windows.

At a hundred yards from the town,
it is built between two elms
which, like gigantic sentinels,
give it shade in the summer
and dry leaves in the fall.
It is a house of farming folk
who, though rich, are low-born.
You can see the smoky hearth
with its benches of stone
without going into the house,
if you look through the open door.
The food for two families,
in two small earthenware pots,
can be seen boiling and bubbling
over the embers on the hearth.
On the right hand are the courtyard
and the stable; on the left
the orchard with the beehives,
and at the back the worn steps
which lead up to the rooms
where the two families dwell.
Here the Alvargonzález live,
the two sons with their wives.
Children were born to both,
but all the children died,
so there is ample space for all
in the house where their parents lived.
Giving on to the orchard
there is a building apart
with a thick oak-leafed table,
together with two cowhide chairs
and, hanging on the wall,
a black abacus with enormous beads
and a pair of rusty spurs
above a wooden chest.
In this forgotten building

where Miguel now lives,
the aged parents used to sit
on an evening in spring
- when the rose-buds open
and the brambles turn white -
to see the orchard in bloom
or the stork in the blue May sky
teaching its nestlings to use
their ungainly wings in flight.
And when the heat was too great
to sleep on summer nights,
here at the window they heard
the nightingale singing outside.
It was here that Alvargonzález,
proud of his orchard and land
and full of love for his family,
dreamt his dreams of grandeur.
When in its mother's arms
he saw his eldest son,
with its head and smiling face
drenched in the golden sun,
and he saw the baby lifting
its eager, greedy little hands
to pick at the scarlet cherries
and the ripe dark-skinned plums,
or that evening in autumn,
golden, peaceful and fair,
he thought a man might be able
to be happy here on the earth.
Now the people have a song
which from village to village goes:
"Oh house of Alvargonzález,
what days of sadness and woe
await the murderers' house,
where nobody calls at the door!"

II

It is an evening in autumn.
The nightingales have gone
from the gold-leaved poplar grove
and the cicada is dumb.
The remaining swallows,
which have not yet migrated,
will die, and the storks
their nests of broom have deserted
in towers and belfries.
All gone. And over the home
of Alvargonzález the wind-wrenched leaves
of the elms shower down.
The three round-topped
acacias, however, can be seen
in the atrium of the church
with their branches still green,
and the spiky chestnuts
at intervals come loose
from the horse chestnut tree.
There are rose-hips on the rose
again, and the gladness of autumn
shines in the meadows.
Over slopes and hillsides,
on rolling land and dales,
there are patches of new green
grass in the summer-burned fields.
The low, bare mountain tops
and treeless ridges are crowned
about their bald summits
with piles of lead-grey clouds,
and among the withered brambles
and dank, yellowing ferns
below the massy pinewood,
the teeming waters run
to swell the parent river,

through gullies and over stones.
The earth abounds in colours
of silvery blue and leaden greys
with patches of rusty red,
all enveloped in violet light.
Oh, lands of Alvargonzález,
in the heart of Spain alone,
poor lands, lands of sadness,
so poor that they have a soul.
Moorlands crossed by the wolves
which howl at the bright moon
as they go from wood to wood,
wastelands full of round stones,
where white skeletons shine,
by the vultures picked clean;
poor, bare, solitary fields
without roadways or inns,
oh, poor, poor, cursed fields
of this fatherland of mine!

THE EARTH

I

One morning in autumn,
season when the land is ploughed,
Juan and the “American” harness
the two oxen teams of the house.
Martín remains in the garden
hoeing and weeding the ground.

II

One morning in autumn,
season when the fields are tilled,

the early morning light
is reflected behind the hill
where Juan's brown oxen team
advances slowly and still.
Thistle, burdock and thorn,
wild oats and danel too,
cover this cursed land
resistant to pick and hoe.
Of the curved oaken plough
the ploughshare sunk in the earth
with a vain effort advances.
Though it try for all it's worth
and open a groove in the ground,
the groove closes in again.
"When the murderer ploughs
his is an arduous task;
before a furrow in the ground,
he'll have a wrinkle in his face."

III

Martín, who was in the garden,
digging and wielding the hoe,
stopped for a moment to rest.
A cold sweat bathed his brow
when he looked.

In the east
the moon in the sky was full
and stained with a purple blush.
Its light fell behind the wall
of the garden.

Martín's blood
froze with horror and fear.
When he sank his hoe in the earth,
it came out stained with gore.

IV

The “American” settled down
in the land in which he was born,
and as his wife he took
a rich and beautiful girl.
The Alvargonzález farm
and all on it now is his,
for his brothers sold him the house,
orchard, garden, beehives and fields.

THE MURDERERS

I

Juan and Martín, the eldest
of Alvargonzález’ sons, began
a wearisome march one day,²⁵
Duero upriver, at dawn.
The star of the morning
gleamed high in the blue.
The dense snow-white mists
were tinged with a rosy hue
in the valleys and ravines,
and a lead-grey turban was formed
of clouds round Mount Urbión,
where the river Duero is born.
They drew near the spring.
The clear water flowed
with a sound as if recounting
a well-known story, told
a thousand times and which must
be a thousand times retold.
The water that flows through the fields
said over and over again:

I know the crime; is not life
near the water a crime?
As the two brothers were passing
the clear waters repeated:
“By the verge of the spring
Alvargonzález was sleeping.”

II

Juan said to his brother:
- Last night when I was going home,
by the light of the moon the garden
was a marvel to behold.
In the distance, among the roses,
I saw a man inclined
towards the earth; a silver
sickle gleamed in his hand.
Then he straightened and turned
his face. He walked back and forth
a while without looking at me
and once more over the earth
I saw him bend his back.
His hair was white as the snow.
The full moon shone and the garden
was a marvel to behold.

III

At mid-evening they crossed
the mountain at Santa Inés.
It was a November evening,
sad, cold and overcast.
Towards the Laguna Negra
they silently advanced.

IV

In the dying evening
a red sun weakly shone
among the ancient beech trees
and the centenary pines.
It was a stretch of wood
and dark threatening crags;
with here a gaping mouth
or monsters with grasping claws,
and there a shapeless hump
or grotesque belly or paunch,
threatening muzzles of beasts
with jagged fangs for teeth,
rocks and rocks and tree trunks
and trunks and branches and limbs.
Darkness and fear and water
at the bottom of the ravine.

V

A wolf appeared, with eyes
burning and gleaming like coals.
The night had fallen, a night
wet and dark as a tomb.
In the wolf-loud forest, the brothers
wished to retrace their steps.
A hundred lupine eyes
burned in the forest at their backs.

VI

The two murderers reached
the edge of the Laguna Negra,
where a wall of stone surrounds
the still, transparent water;

a wall where vultures nest
and where the echo sleeps.
In the clear waters drink
the eagles from the peaks,
the wild boar from the hills,
the roebuck and the deer;
pure and silent water,
which mirrors eternity.
Impassive water, which keeps
in its bosom the heavenly spheres.
Father!, they shouted; to the bottom
of the still and silent lake
they fell, and the echo, father!
was repeated from rock to rock.



CXV

TO A DRY ELM²⁶

Though once cleft by a lightning bolt
now thanks to May's sun and April's rain
this half withered old elm
is sprouting green leaves again.
The century-old elm on the hill
overlooking the river Duero,
with its dusty worm-eaten trunk
and bark moss grown and yellow!
Unlike the tuneful poplar trees
lining river and road,
this elm will never be
the nightingales' abode.
Instead, long streams of ants
incessantly flow and ebb
up an down the hollow trunk
where spiders weave grey webs.
Oh, elm tree of the Duero,
before you are felled by the woodman's stroke
and the joiner makes you into a bell fringe
shaft of a cart or a wagon yoke;
before you flame in tomorrow's fire
in the hearth of some wretched wayside shack,
before the whirlwind uproots you
or the mountain blasts your branches crack;
before you are borne seaward by the river
in its mad career through valley and ravine,
oh elm, I wish to record the grace
of your greening boughs. This heart of mine,
by virtue of spring's miraculous light,
awaits another miracle of a life-giving kind.

Soria, 1912

CXVI

MEMORIES²⁷

Ah Soria, when I see the cool-looking orange groves
laden with fragrance, and the greening countryside,
with the jasmine blossoms open and the ripening wheat,
the blue of the mountains and the olive trees in bloom;
Guadalquivir racing to the sea, orchards lining its banks,
the gardens full of lilies in the April sun
and the golden swarms of bees leaving their hives
to suck nectar in the surrounding fields,
I know the glowing logs of holm-oak are crackling in your hearths,
the icy north wind sweeping over your stony fields,
and I dream of your rough-hewn mountains - pine-fringed Urbión!
White-capped Moncayo towering into the Aragonese sky! -
and I think: Spring like a feverish chill
will soon be crossing that high plateau, subject of so many ballads,
the poplars along the river will soon be sprouting leaves.
Will that elm tree overlooking the Duero have leaves this year?
There will be storks in the belfries in Soria
and more than one flowering bramble among the rocks;
and to the grassland among the grey crags
the shepherd will lead his flock.
Oh, in that blue sky the swallows will be returning
again to the nascent Duero, and flocks of sheep
will be heading towards the Numantian grasslands
along the deep ravines, under the scorching sun;
there are beech-groves and pine woods traversed by the deer,
hillocks, and uplands, foothills and mountains
where the eagle reigns and the carrion crow
seeks the rotting carcass; tiny sown fields
like ash-coloured smocks, shacks and sheepfolds
among bare rocks, brooks and springs,
where in the evening the tired oxen teams come down to drink,
with here and there little gardens and unpretentious apiaries!
Goodbye, land of Soria; goodbye the high plateau
surrounded by heights and martial mountain peaks,
and hills, in the rock-strewn wilderness of Castile,
ghosts of oak forests and shades of holm-oak groves!
In the desperation and the melancholy
of your memory, Soria, my heart quenches its thirst.
Land of my heart, through and through, towards my birthplace,
along flowering valleys my heart bears you.

In the train, April, 1912

CXVII

TO THE MASTER "AZORIN" FOR HIS BOOK "CASTILLA"²⁸

The inn of Cidones is on the road
between Soria and Burgos. Leonarda, the owner's wife,
whom they call "la Ruipérez", is a little old woman
who stokes the fire on which a pot is boiling.
Ruipérez, the husband, a tiny little oldster
-who has two shrewd eyes under his grey eyebrows -
is gazing silently at the glowing fire.
The pot can be heard bubbling over the flame.
Seated at a pine table a man is writing.
When he dips his pen in the inkwell,
two sad eyes glisten in his lean face.
The man is young and he is dressed in black.
A cold wind lashes the poplars along the road.
A swirl of white dust can be seen through the window.
The evening is darkening. The man in black
has leant his head on his hand rapt in thought.
When the post-chaise, which the man is waiting for, arrives,
night will have fallen over the dun, drab
Sororian countryside. Soon now the grey mountains
patched with scraggly holm oak groves and gashed by torrents,
with their bluish peaks and steep ravines,
the sharp crags, hillocks, slopes and foothills
of the dark moor through which the Duero flows
will lend a steely glow to the declining sun.
It gets dark inside the inn. The glowing fire smokes.
The wick of a musty oil lamp flames and splutters.
The man in black gazes for a long time
into the fire, then wipes his eyes
with a white handkerchief. Why is it
that the noise of the pot and the sparkling of the coals
make him weep? Night has now fallen.
In the distance can be heard the clatter
and gallop of an approaching vehicle. It is the post-chaise.

CXVIII

PATHS²⁹

From the old walls
of the Moorish town,
I view the silent evening,
alone with my shadow and my sadness.
Between sombre orchards
and grey olive groves,
through the gay fields of Baeza
the river flows.
There are bunches of golden grapes
on the reddish stocks of the vines.
Like a shattered, scattered scimitar³⁰,
the Guadalquivir shimmers and gleams.
The distant mountains are asleep
shrouded in mist,
in the maternal mist of autumn
rough masses of stone seem to rest,
in this warm November evening,
in this prayerful, purple dusk.
The passing wind has shaken
the lifeless roadside elms,
raising the reddish dust
from the ground in eddies and swirls,
and the full moon is climbing
breathless, with livid face.
The white ribbons of pathway
criss-cross here and there,
leading to solitary dwellings
in the valleys and sierras.
Pathways through the farmlands ...
Alas, I can never walk them with her!

CXIX

You snatched away what I most loved, O Lord.
Hear once more, my God, my heart cry out to Thee.
Your will, O Lord, was done; my will ignored.
O Lord, we are now alone my heart and the sea.

CXX

You will see her one day, says hope,
if you can wait and hope.
But says despair:
your grief is all that remains of her.
Beat on, my heart... Not
everything has been swallowed by the earth.

CXXI

There, in the high tablelands,
there, where the Duero sketches
its crossbow curve
around Soria, between lead-grey hills
and strips of shabby holm-oak groves,
my heart is wandering in dreams...
Leonor³¹, can't you see the poplars on the river bank
with their immobile branches?
Look at Mount Moncayo blue and white;
give me your hand and let's stroll.
Here in the fields of my home land,
adorned with dusty olive groves,
I am walking alone,
sad, tired, pensive and old.

CXXII

I dreamt that you led me
along a white path,
through the green countryside,
towards the blue of the mountain peaks,
towards the blue mountains,
one peaceful morning.
I felt your hand in mine,
your affectionate hand,
your girlish voice in my ear
like a new bell,
like a virgin bell
of a spring dawn.
It was your voice and
your hand; the dream was so real!
Live on, hope. Who can tell
what is swallowed by the earth?

CXXIII

One summer night
- my balcony being open
and the door of my house -
death entered my home.
He approached her bed
- without even looking at me -,
and with slender fingers,
he snipped something very fine.
Silently, and without a glance,
death passed me by again
I asked: What have you done?
But death did not reply.
My darling lay quiet as if sleeping,
but my heart was broke.
Ah, what death had severed
was the thread that joined us both!

CXXIV

With the melting snow, the foothills
seem to separate from the mountains.
The lowland plain turns green
in the April sun, the plain
with green life aflame,
with life weightless as gauze;
making the soul think of a butterfly,
atlas of the world, and lapse in dreams.
Now the blossoming plum tree and the verdant fields,
with the glaucous vapour rising
from the river bank around its branches,
with the first whitening brambles,
with this gentle breeze
which triumphs over death and stone,
the bottled-up bitterness flows from me
in hope and expectation of Her ...

CXXV

Once more here in my native south,
but now a stranger to all around me,
- I had a homeland where the Duero flows
between grey rocky outcrops
and ghostly old holm-oak groves,
up there in Castile, mystical and warlike,
Castile the kind, the humble and the brave,
Castile the disdainful and the strong -,
in this my Andalusian countryside;
oh, land of my birth and of which I wish to sing!
Memories come back of my childhood, on my mind
flash images of light and of palm trees
and haloed in the golden sun
are high bell towers with storks' nests,

towns with streets without women
under an indigo sky, empty plazas
where orange trees stand glittering
with their round reddish fruit;
images of a shady orchard with the lemon
tree, its dust-coated branches
and pale yellow fruit
reflected in the clear water of the fountain,
a fragrance of tuberose and carnations
and the overpowering scent of basil and mint,
images of grey olive groves
under a scorching, blinding sun,
of distant blue mountain ranges
and the sky crimsoning in the long evenings;
but something is missing, the strings
which bind these memories to the heart,
the anchor holding the boat to the shore;
otherwise these memories are soulless things.
In their patchwork dress they seem
to be memory's scraps and left-overs,
a rough-hewn assortment that memory bears with it.
One day they will surface hallowed with light,
like virginal bodies to reach the primeval shore.

Lora del Río, 4th April, 1913

A JOSÉ MARÍA PALACIO³²

Palacio, buen amigo,
¿está la primavera
vistiendo ya las ramas de los chopos
del río y los caminos? En la estepa
del alto Duero, Primavera tarda,
¡pero es tan bella y dulce cuando llega!...
¿Tienen los viejos olmos
algunas hojas nuevas?
Aún las acacias estarán desnudas
Y nevados los montes de las sierras.
¡Oh mole del Moncayo blanca y rosa,
allá, en el cielo de Aragón, tan bella!
¿Hay zarzas florecidas
entre las grises peñas,
y blancas margaritas entre la fina hierba?
Por esos campanarios
ya habrán ido llegando las cigüeñas.
Habrá trigales verdes,
y mulas pardas en las sementeras,
y labriegos que siembran los tardíos
con las lluvias de abril. Ya las abejas
libarán del tomillo y del romero.
¿Hay ciruelos en flor? ¿Quedan violetas?
Furtivos cazadores, los reclamamos
De la perdiz bajo las capas luengas,
no faltarán. Palacio, buen amigo,
¿tienen ya ruisseñores las riberas?
Con los primeros lirios
y las primeras rosas de las huertas,
en una tarde azul, sube al Espino,
al alto Espino donde está su tierra...

Baeza, 29 de abril de 1913

CXXVI

TO JOSE MARIA PALACIO³³

Palacio, my good friend,
tell me if the spring time
is dressing up the poplars
along river and roadside.
In the high Duero table-land
springtime comes late
but is so lovely and gentle
its coming is worth the wait.
What about those old elm trees,
have the leaves started sprouting?
The acacias I suppose are still bare
and there's snow on the high mountains.
Oh, the mass of Moncayo capped white and pink,
so beautifully etched in the Aragonese sky!
Are there flowering brambles to be found
on the grey rocky heights
and daisies in grassy places,
green speckled with white?
The storks are surely nesting
in those high bell-towers now.
Winter wheat will be greening,
and grey mules yoked to ploughs,
where some farmers are still sowing
late wheat in April's rain,
and clumps of thyme and rosemary
will lure the bees again.
Are the plum trees already in blossom?
Are there violets to be found?
And pheasant poachers with decoys hidden
under long capes are sure to abound.
Tell me, Palacio, my good friend,
are there nightingales on the river banks?
When the first lilies come up
and garden roses begin to bloom,
one cloudless evening go up to the Espino,
to the high Espino, her home, her tomb ...

Baeza, 29th April, 1913

CXXVII

ANOTHER JOURNEY

Day is breaking in Jaen.
Open country, the advancing train
running on its gleaming rails,
devours everything in its path:
clumps of shrub on the railway bank,
stony patches and olive groves,
stretches where only thistles grow,
meadows, houses, distant hills
and valleys where shadows linger still.
Like an unwinding reel,
through the window dimly seen,
there pass before one's eyes
fields which spring has touched with green,
while inside the carriage a harsh light's shed
by the bulb above one's head.
Between banks of storm clouds,
tinged with gold and carmine,
the swirling morning mists
flee along the bottom of the ravines.
This wretched insomnia of mine!
This all-too-familiar cold,
cold of a sleepless dawn!
Oh the panting and the rumble
through the countryside
of the advancing train.
On the seat in front, a man
wrapped in his blanket asleep;
beside him a monk and a huntsman,
with a dog stretched at his feet.
I fix my gaze on my luggage,
my old travelling bag of leather
and I recall another journey I made
to the land traversed by the Duero.
A journey, it seems but yesterday,
through Castilian lands -
a vision of pines in the morning light
between Almazan and Quintana.

Oh, then, the happiness
of travelling with my sweetheart!
Oh, then, the togetherness
which death wrenched apart!
Oh, now, the cold hand
clutching at my heart!
So, get a move on, train,
whistle, belch your smoke,
tug
your army of hooked carriages,
jog
suitcases and hearts!
Loneliness,
barrenness.
So wretched do I feel
that I don't even know
if it's really myself that's travelling,
or if I'm travelling alone.

CXXVII bis

GOODBYE³⁴

Now, never more will I behold,
that ash-grey land where the Duero flows.
Ah, that wide, squat hill of Santana,
and Mirón's little square empty and deserted,
with the evening sun shining on my balcony.
I'll never see you again! Don't ask me to come back.
Souls withdraw from the places they love
in order to sing about them. A soul
requires distance and horizon; absence.
Besides, whoever hears the bitter melody
with which I entertain the travel-loving heart
through these fields of my homeland,
is already familiar with springs, rivers and canals
of the clear water of my shady garden.
Not all the water of the Duero flows into the sea.

Written in Baeza, 1915

CXXVIII

MEDITATIONS ON A RAINY DAY IN A RURAL SETTING³⁵

Here am I a language teacher,
(but yesterday a different creature,
kind of apprentice nightingale
of the modernistic school)³⁶,
in a village damp and cold,
dilapidated, dark and old,
part Andalusian, part Manchegan.
It is winter, the fire's blazing.
Outside my window a drizzle chill
that turns to mist or sleet at will.
A would-be farmer, on my word,
I'm thinking of the land. Oh, Lord,
how great it is to see this rain,
so send it down on us again!
Rain or drizzle without pause
on greening barley and bean rows;
those incessant silent rains
over olive groves and vines.
Wheat-growers will their voices raise
with olive-pickers in thy praise,
as well as those who wait in hope
of finding still a bite and sup;
those who yearly stake their lot,
and sometimes win but often not.
The wheel of fortune's fickle spin
may mean their luck is out not in.
So rain, not mist, we need from You
but sleet or drizzle too will do.
So, let the rain come lashing down
on this my house - ill-lit, I own -
in this winter-evening gloom
by the light which seems to seep
through the rain-lashed window of my room.
Here I dream and meditate.

The rain, it seems, is letting up,
and now, once more, I hear the clock
I hear its every tick and tock;
there in the corner, almost forgotten,
but on it goes ticking and tocking,
always the same, the fits and starts
of its relentless metal heart.
In towns like this, do people feel
the pulse of time as something real?
No, in such towns there's just a fight
against the clock without respite,
against the boring repetition
of hours and days without remission.
But, is the time you mark my time?
And do we measure hours alike?
Your infernal tick-tock brings to mind
a day now past: what I most loved
was wrenched forever from my life³⁷.
Outside my window bells are pealing ...
But now again the rain starts falling,
splashing and splattering on the panes
of the window of my room.
Would-be farmer, the fields again
beguile my thoughts. Oh Lord, this rain
falls like a blessing on the fields
where wheat is growing and boosts its yield.
Oh Lord, we know You send your rain
on rich and poor, on prince and swain.
Oh blessed water; where you fall
life germinates and sprouts for all.
As drop by drop you go to swell
the rivers, fountains, springs and streams,
just like the boring hours that pass,
to lose yourself in distant seas,
spare a thought for growing things
for every thing that germinates
and blossoms in the sun of spring,
the grass that feeds the grazing herds

whose meat ends on our dinner plates.
 Oh, bitter, raving, reasoning state,
 replete with hope; bereft of faith!
 The gathering dusk betokens night
 and so, I turn on the light.
 But a decent match is more revealing
 than the bulb that glimmers from my ceiling.
 And, now, I try to find my glasses:
 where are they hiding, the silly asses?
 Here they are, among my books.
 I pick up one to have a look.
 This is a book by Unamuno³⁸,
 who not only I but also you know
 is the favourite son, the dearly beloved
 of Spain resurgent, on the move.
 Oh, Vice-Chancellor of Salamanca,
 to express my fealty how I hanker,
 me, a humble high-school teacher
 in the back of beyond am your greatest preacher.
 Your philosophy you say is for dilettants,
 changeable, risky, open to chance,
 is my guiding principle, Don Miguel,
 which is something I always wanted to tell,
 as clear and as fresh as the water which flows,
 which springs from the earth, the water which goes
 on its way to the sea, poetry pure,
 heart-warming, life-giving, fleeting but sure.
 And what if they say it lacks a system?
 Life's full of lacks and nobody's missed them.
 The principal thing is you are an explorer
 of the fathomless sea, an eternal rower.
 Here is a book by Henri Bergson:
The Immediate Data of Consciousness.
 A classic case of Gallic guile,
 an example of Bergson's roguishness.
 Don't you think, Unamuno, that Bergson can't
 bear comparison with Immanuel Kant?
 This mischievous Jew has "discovered" free will
 where it's always been in a hole in the wall.
 But then, every savant inflates the worth

of what he's "discovered" for all it's worth.
The main thing is in my opinion
to know in this short life we're living
whether we're serfs or whether free,
and much more so since the boundless sea,
the fathomless ocean where all of us go
will swallow our histories, our joys and our woes.
What is the point of having great thoughts
in a hole like this, of making notes
in the margins of the books we read
to which nobody's going to pay any heed?
For everything is as the Bible says
solitude of solitudes
and vanity of vanities.
Where is my hat and my umbrella?
(Your raincoat too, you forgetful fellow.)
The rain, it seems, is letting up,
so, out for a stroll to the chemist's shop,
where the nightly crowd have gathered to talk.
I stop to listen after my walk.
- Those Liberals are a wretched lot
of immoral dogs, they should be shot.
What do you say, Don José.
- Oh, don't worry your head about that pack.
Before you know, the Conservatives'll be back.
They're the boys that know how to rule
and look after their own. They're nobody's fools.
Everything comes to an end, don't fear.
No government lasts a hundred years.
- These times will change and others appear
and yet again others though we are not here.
So, we won't have to worry if we're not alive.
Let those who are living then struggle and strive.
Life is like that, believe me, Don Juan.
- There's truth in your words; I know you're not wrong.
- Look at the way the barley is growing.
- That's because of the rain that fell since it was sown.
- And the beans are simply a sight for sore eyes.
- They'll be flowering by March if the weather comes right.

- But look at the olives; they're crying for rain,
in torrents, in oceans, again and again.
- Right. The rain is what's needed, but think of the toil
for the farmers, the labourers, the tillers of soil;
when the harvest comes round, how they slog and they sweat.
- Well, they can't expect rain without things getting wet.
- Till tomorrow, my friends. Good night to you all.
There's another day over. No different at all
from the days gone before and the days yet to come;
the monotonous tick of the clock, the boredom.
At my table again, Bergson's book in my hand:
The Immediate Data ... Let me try to understand.
The idea's not bad: This essential being
at times free, at times not, at times blind, at times seeing,
sentient, creative, original, mortal,
which inhabits each person, enlivens each portal ...
That's all to the good, but oh to be able
with one supreme effort to bound free from one's stable!

Baeza, 1913

CXXIX

NOVEMBER 1913

Another year has passed. The sower sows
his seed in the furrows of the earth.
Two oxen teams are ploughing slowly,
while ash-grey clouds pass overhead
casting their shadows on the land³⁹,
on the dun-coloured seed beds
and the grey olive groves. Down
in the valley, the turbid river flows.
There is snow on Cazorla,
a storm is sweeping over Mágina
and the top of Aznaitín. Granada way,
sun on the mountains; mountains of sun and stone.

CXXX

THE SAETA⁴⁰

Who will lend me a ladder
to climb up to the Cross,
to pull out the nails
from Jesus' hands and feet?

WELL-KNOWN SAETA

Oh, *The Saeta*, that song
of the gypsies to Christ,
who always has blood on His hands,
who's always nailed to the cross!
The song of the Andalusian people,
who, every springtime are heard
asking around for ladders
to climb up to the cross!
That song of my homeland,
which would scatter flowers
before Jesus crucified,
reflects the faith of my elders!
But this is not my song!
I can't bring myself to utter
a song to Jesus on the cross,
but instead to He who walked on the waters!



CXXXI

FLEETING PAST

If you enter this provincial casino, you'll see a man there
who was present once when Carancha killed the bull as it charged⁴¹.
He has a withered complexion and greying hair
and eyes shrouded in melancholy.

The lips under his grey moustache are curled in a grimace of disgust
and his sad expression denotes not sadness really,
but something rather more and at the same time less:
the vacuity of the world mirroring his own spiritual emptiness.

He still dresses in the style of the past:
jacket and buttoned-up trousers of Corinthian velvet
and a caramel-coloured Cordovan hat,
well-brushed and round as a halo.

He inherited three different fortunes and wasn't able
to keep them. He married twice and both his wives died.

His face lights up only when he's at the card table,
when he recalls some bull-fighter in his pride
or some gambler's lucky strike or when someone recounts
a daring bandit's deeds or some thug's gory exploits.

He rambles on boringly of politics, uttering trite
insults at the government's reactionary measures
and augurs the return of the Liberals to power
as sure as the return of the stork to the bell-tower.

He does a little farming, but relies entirely
on the weather. At times he heaves a sigh
when he thinks of his olive grove. He looks at the sky
worried if there's no sign of rain. Nothing else
interests this taciturn hypochondriac,
imprisoned in the Arcadia of the now.

Only the smoke curling from his cigarette
seems to play up the lights and shadows on his brow.

This man belongs neither to the past nor the future,
he is simply a nonentity: representing neither
the good nor the bad in the country but rather
something worthless and vain,
that Spain of the past which never really existed;
the grey-haired decrepit image of Spain.

CXXXII

OLIVE TREES

To Manolo Ayuso

I

Old thirsty olive trees
under the sun's bright gleam,
dusty olive groves
in the Andalusian fields!
The torrid Andalusian fields
raked by the midday sun.
From hilltop to hilltop
rows and rows of olive groves!
In this sun-soaked land,
flat-topped ridges, far off sierras
patched with olive groves.
On the criss-crossed footpaths
muleteers and farm-hands
with their basket-laden mules.
And at the inn door guzzling wine
bandits, cut-throats and that kind!
More and yet more olive groves
perched on every hill and crest
like patches of embroidery
or decorations on a dress.
Olive groves bathed in colour:
in the ever-changing light;
golden in the evening sunset,
burnished by the moon at night!
Olive groves that glint and sparkle
under skies of leaden grey
when thunder growls and lightning flashes
as storms break at close of day.
Olive groves, I hope you get
winter rains, and April breezes

and autumn showers to make you wet.
I hope you fill with clustering blossoms
that augur a rich harvest store
and that your purple fruit will fill
a hundred mills or even more.
For from your yield, in farm and field
and olive presses will depend
the food and livelihood
of a hundred working men,
broad-hatted peasants
who even now
attend their work
with shaded brows.
Olive groves and olive workers:
you represent in this place
in your diversity the forests
of Spain and its race.
Those who till the fields
or dwell in towns,
who love the land,
who mill and plough
and shake their fists
at adverse fate.
Simple-minded peasants,
gentlemanly bandits,
those who praise the Lord
and those who cheat the state.
Those in towns and farmhouses
on the banks of the rivers
in the folds of the sierras.
May the blessing of God
wherever you rove
be with you forever
olive groves, olive groves.

II

About two leagues from Ubeda, under a burning sun,
we come to Torre de Pero Gil, a sad Spanish town.

The carriage rolls between dusty grey olive trees.
 In the distance the legendary castle.
 In the town square, beggars and layabouts:
 nothing but rags to be seen ...
 And now our carriage passes the porch of
 the Convent of Divine Mercy,
 with its whitewashed walls and gloomy cypress trees!
 Bitter melancholy
 like an iron grindstone
 grating at the heart! Piety
 enclosed by a wall, in the midst of this midden!
 This house of God, tell me, my brothers,
 this house of God, what does it contain?
 And that scared looking whey-faced youth
 watching us open-mouthed,
 most likely the village idiot
 of whom we've heard: either Lucas
 or Blas or Ginés.
 We continue our journey. Olive groves with
 the trees in bloom. Our carriage proceeds slowly,
 drawn by two broken-down nags,
 in the direction of Peal. Here the soil is fertile
 and yields good fruit. The sun does its work;
 and man does his own, ploughing
 and sowing the soil and through his effort
 yoking the earth to the sky.
 We simply muddy the waters
 of life's fountain and hinder the sun
 with our sad looks,
 with our morose devotions,
 with our idle hands,
 with our thoughts
 - we are engendered in sin,
 we live in a vale of tears. God is far away!-
 This example of Christian piety built
 in this sordid town, in this slag heap,
 this house of God, tell me, oh holy
 cannons of von Kluck⁴², what does it contain?

CXXXIII

LINES LAMENTING THE DEATH AND EXTOLLING THE VIR-
TUES OF THE REFORMED RAKE, DON GUIDO⁴³

A fell pneumonia's put an end
to don Guido's life and all day long
the funeral bells are tolling out
for him: ding-dong! ding-dong!
Don Guido's gone. Now there was a man
who when young was a devil-may-care,
a flashy dresser and fond of the bullfight,
and when he got old, took to prayer.
It is said of him that he kept a harem,
this caballero from Seville
and that in training and handling horses
he showed a great amount of skill.
He is also said to have been very
much of an expert in cooling sherry.
His sole obsession
when fortune frowned
was to think he should think
of settling down.
Which is what he did
in the Spanish fashion,
and he married for money
instead of passion;
hung out his old heraldic device
and aired the traditions of his house,
but all past misdemeanours and scandalous acts
were swept like dust under the mat.
Once the greatest of pagans,
a confraternity he joined
and on Holy Thursday
in the street he'd be found
with a candle in his hand
which the priest had blessed
- the old reprobate -
as a penitent dressed!
Now the tolling bells
have this to say,

that tomorrow don Guido
will be taken away;
good old don Guido,
so solemn and grave,
taken to the cemetery
and put in a grave.
Good old don Guido,
now you are gone
for ever and ever,
and will not return.
“What did you leave?”,
some people may say.
But I ask myself:
“What did you take away
to wherever it is
you happen to be?
Your love of fine trappings,
of silk, gold and jewellery,
of blood in the bullring
and the incense of sacrifice?”
Whatever you take,
bon voyage!
good old don Guido,
to you and your baggage.
My honourable friend,
in your withered face
the future and the past
are just one infinite empty space.
Oh, those wizened cheeks
now so sallow;
the wax-like eye-lids
and the fragile skull
denting the pillow
mark the end of a line
of aristocratic fellows.
The lank grey beard
falling on the breast
of this Andalusian caballero
in a coarse shroud dressed,
with his rigid hands
in the form of a cross
so conventionally placed!

CXXXIV

THE WOMEN OF LA MANCHA

La Mancha and its women...Argamasilla, Infantes
Esquivas, Valdepeñas. The sweetheart of Cervantes,
and of the hero of La Mancha, the mistress and the niece
(the patio, the pantry, the cellar and the fleece
for the distaff, the sewing, the cradle and the platter),
of don Diego the wife and of Panza the *mater*,
the daughter of the innkeeper and all those women who lie
buried in the earth and those who are and will be
the delight of La Mancha and the mother of its sons
in this land of wine-presses, windmills and evening suns.
I mean the woman of La Mancha, handsome and full of life,
very much mistress of herself, perfect as a wife.
The sun of the warm plains where the vines grow
has tanned her skin but has kept fresh as the cellar below
her heart. She is devout; she can pray with sincerity
to God to keep us safe from everything we cannot see.
Her domain is the house - less enclosed than in Seville,
more a woman's place and less of a castle than in Castile⁴⁴ -.
The muse of orderliness inhabits the La Mancha house;
she tidies the kitchen shelves and camphors the clothes;
jots down in her note-book what she spends on her daily needs,
counts out the chick peas and tells her rosary beads.
Is there more to tell? In this land once a great love was ignited;
two eyes inflamed the heart of a La Mancha knight.
Isn't la Mancha the place where Dulcinea lived?
Isn't Toboso the place where the idea was conceived
of the woman brain-child of and enticement to hearts,
carnally unknown to man but who yet gives birth?
Through this La Mancha - of fields, vineyards and windmills -
unchanged and unchanging as the sky under which it extends,
with wrinkled stumps of vines in the sun-scorched earth
and withered pasture lands like patches of frayed cloth;

through this dry boundless plain inundated by the sun,
where nothing obstructs the vision of the eye which scans
(except a small flock of birds like black dots in the deep
blue of the sky over a white-housed hamlet which sleeps
there where a grove of slender green poplars can be seen
alone in an endless waste of yellowing fields),
through this land distant from sea and mountain,
smitten by the glare of the bright sun of Spain,
there once roved a poor knight completely blinded by love
- love which clouded his reason and his poor heart clove -.
And you, in this immense steppe, who can tell whether near or far,
the eternal companion of Quijano⁴⁵ and also the star,
lusty farm lass rooted in the land that is yours;
- oh mother of La Mancha men and inspiring muse -
this is where you dwelt, good Aldozana; here your life was spent
while your lover sallied forth with his spear on justice bent,
you in your white-walled house winnowed the golden wheat.
That burning love was for you and with you, I repeat.
Hail to you women of La Mancha, thanks to the fame
of Don Quixote you will live forever in Dulcinea's name.



CXXXV

FLEETING FUTURE

To Roberto Castrovido

That Spain of flamenco and bull-fighting,
of enclosure and sacristy,
worshipping Frascuelo⁴⁶ and the Virgin Mary,
prone to mock yet tame of spirit,
won't be without its monument
and its day of glory
its infallible tomorrow and its poet.
From its futile past will spring
a tomorrow, empty and, luckily, fleeting
in the form of a young crack-brained chatterbox
a bolero jacket made from a smock
somewhat in the style of realist France,
or even , one could say, of ungodly Paris,
and also in the manner of that Spain
specializing in vices of the most banal kind.
That lesser Spain which prays and yawns,
aged, gambling-loving, boisterous and sad;
that lesser Spain which prays and charges forward blindly
whenever it deigns to use its head,
will still produce its long lineage of men
lovers of sanctified traditions
and of sanctified forms and ways;
we haven't yet seen the end of apostolic beards
or venerable tonsured catholic skulls.
The futile past will engender a tomorrow
empty and, luckily, fleeting,
the shadow of a crack-brained chatterbox,
a bolero jacket made from a smock:
a vacuous past followed by a sterile future.

Like the vomit of drunkard gorged
on bad wine, a red sun crowns
the granite peaks in turbid dregs.
In this stultifying pragmatic evening
a nauseous future is written.
But another Spain is being born,
the Spain of the chisel and mallet,
with that eternal youth which is forged
from the massive past of the race.
A Spain implacable and redeeming,
a Spain which is dawning
with avenging axe in its hand,
a Spain filled with fury and ideas.

1913

CXXXVI

PROVERBS AND SONGS

I

I never sought for glory
nor wished to leave behind
a song that men would sing
I seek another kind
of world; one light and free
floating like soap bubbles
taking colour from the sky
blue, red, or tinged with sunlight.
I like to see them fly
aloft in trembling flight
before they burst on high.

II

Why should we call paths
the tracks fate leaves in its wake?...
For every traveller walks
like Jesus on Galilee's lake.

III

We call a man a foe and say he let us down
when we mistrust him and then catch him out.
It is stupid to bear a rancour because the nut was empty
that our wisdom tooth cracked in our mouth.

IV

Every hour we spend seems fleeting
when we hope to learn something new,
but how they drag when we realize
that we don't really have a clue.

V

Two things are equally worthless:
fruit picked before its ripe,
and the praise of an ignorant man
even though he happens to be right.

VI

What people sometimes call
virtue, justice and goodness,
is one half sheer envy
and the other uncharitableness.

VII

I have observed wild beasts' claws in the most refined hands,
cawing rooks turn honey-mouthed and dreamy idealists vile...
The greatest swindler swears by all that's sacred
and the densest ignoramus thinks he knows it all.

VIII

Don't waste time asking
what you know and what you don't,
for some questions can be answered
but other questions can't.

IX

It was man, who, goaded by all-devouring greed,
through his inborn malice and natural guile
acquired intelligence, and took over the earth.
And still thinks he's right! One of war's supreme wiles.

X

It was envy of virtue
that made Cain kill Abel.
Glory be to Cain! Now it is vice
which people find most enviable.

XI

A sanctimonious person's handshake is almost an affront;
but the handclasp of a fighter never offends.
Virtue is strength; to be good is to be brave:
a shield, a sword and a war club in your hands;
because honourable valour bears all kinds of arms;
not only to defend but also to wound and attack.
So, let the pickaxe pick, the whiplash lash
the forge soften the iron and the file polish and hack,
and let the burin engrave and the chisel cut,
the sword sink and cleave and the great war club whack.

XII

Eyes that one day opened
to the light of life's being,
will one day turn to clay
sated with looking and not seeing.

XIII

The best of all good men is he
who knows that in the life we live
it's all a question of degree:
a little take, a little give ...

XIV

Virtue is something to gladden the saddest heart
and wipe away even Cato's frown.
A good man always keeps, like a wayside inn,
for the thirsty water, for the drunkard wine.

XV

Come and sing along with me:
naught we know: naught know we.
Where do we come from? Where do we go?
From the boundless ocean to the endless sea.
And in between, who can explain
the meaning of life? What is the key
to these three enigmas, this mystery?
There's nothing known:
there's no light thrown
by the words of the wise or the mountain stream.

XVI

Man is by nature a creature quite paradoxical;
an absurd beast who yet needs to feel logical.
He created a world from nothing and when he had done
he said: "I know the secret: being and non-being are both one".

XVII

Hypocrisy is the only thing man has in abundance.
Confident his ten thousand masks will enable him to deceive;
and the double key with which he locks his house
against strangers serves as a skeleton key for the thief.

XVIII

Ah, when I was a boy
I used to dream of the heroes of the Illiad!
Ajax was stronger than Diomedes,
Hector was stronger than Ajax,
and Achilles the strongest of all, simply
because he was the strongest ...Childish innocence!
Ah, when I was a boy
I used to dream of the heroes of the Illiad!

XIX

A nut cracker of empty nuts
is a Colossus of deceit,
who lives on swindles
which he dresses up as truths.

XX

Teresa, soul of fire,
John of the Cross, spirit aglow,
it's cold here, venerable fathers,
our sacred hearts are burning low.

XXI

Last night I dreamt I saw God
and I spoke to God. It seemed
that God heard what I said ...
Then, I dreamt that I had dreamed.

XXII

As happens with all men and women,
the romances of yesteryear,
if they ever really existed,
are almost forgotten by me.

XXIII

Don't be surprised, gentle friends,
if my brow is furrowed and lined;
though I live in peace with men,
I live in war with my mind.

XXIV

Out of every ten heads, nine
rush into things and only one stops to think.
Never be surprised if an ignoramus
beats his brains out trying to drive an idea in.

XXV

The bees suck honey from the flowers,
and the nightingale sings love's melody.
Dante and I - allow me to presume -,
metamorphose, if this word can be used -,
love into Theology.

XXVI

Take a charcoal burner, a savant and a poet
out into the countryside.
You will see how the poet drinks it in in silence,
and the savant looks around him and starts to muse ...
The charcoal burner almost certainly will start to look
for blackberries or mushrooms.
Take the three of them to the theatre
and it is only the charcoal burner who is not bored.
The only ones who prefer what is living to what is painted
are those who think, sing or dream.
The charcoal burner has his head
full of fantasies.

XXVII

Wherein lies the use
of our utilities?
Return to factuality.
Vanity of vanities.

XXVIII

Every man in the world
has two battles to make:
in dreams he struggles with God
and with the sea, when he's awake.

XXIX

Your own footprints, traveller,⁴⁷
mark the path;
there's nothing else to show the way.
Only the footmarks that you leave
on your life's journey day by day.
As you travel you mark the path
and when you turn around you see
the path you make once in your life,
which you can never tread anew.
Traveller, what you think beaten paths,
are ships' wakes on the surface of the sea.

XXX

He who waits loses hope,
as the old saying goes.
This a truth-filled truism!
Truth is what it is
and continues being so
despite opinions which oppose.

XXXI

Heart, but yesterday so sonorous,
I hear no tinkle of your gold coin.
And your moneybox, will it be empty
before it is broken by time?
Let us hope, you and I,
that there is no truth
in what both of us know for certain.

XXXII

Oh, faith of the pensive man!
Oh, faith in thinking's aftermath!
It is only when a heart is born into the world
that the glass of humanity overflows and the sea fills up.

XXXIII

I dreamt of God as a forge
of fire, that softens iron,
as a forger of swords,
as a burnisher of steel,
engraving on each blade
of light the words: Liberty: Empire.

XXXIV

I love Jesus, who told us:
Heaven and earth will pass away.
When the heavens and the earth pass
My word will remain.
What, Jesus, was the word You meant?
Love? Forgiveness ? Charity?
All your words can be summed
up in the command: Be on your guard.

XXXV

There are two types of awareness:
one has to do with light and the other patience.
The first casts a little light
into the murky depths of the sea;
the other means doing penance
with a rod or a net and waiting to see
as the fisherman does, if the fish bite.
Which is the better? Tell me?

The awareness of the visionary
observing in the depths of the aquarium
the living fish,
shooting away and fleeting,
which no one can catch,
or the accursed grind
of emptying on the sand
the dead fishes from the sea?

XXXVI

Empiricist faith. We neither are nor will be.
Everything we have was lent us.
We brought nothing into the world. We take naught away.

XXXVII

You say that nothing has been created?
All right then, if that's what you think,
take a little clay and make a cup
so that your brother can drink.

XXXVIII

You say that nothing has been created?
Potter, to your pots, away!
Make your cup and don't feel defeated
if you cannot make clay.

XXXIX

They say the divine bird,
metamorphosed into a dowdy hen
by a few clips of the scissors
of that sagest of men,
(oh Kant clipped the wings
of all haughty fowl;
like the "sport" of falconry

was his philosophy all),
is trying, they say
to escape from its coop,
to fly over the wall
and to Plato return.
Three cheers! So be it!
Lucky he who lives to see it!

XL

Yes, each and every person in the world equal:
the coach drawn by two broken-down nags,
goes jolting along the road to the stopping place;
the coach filled with the commonest people,
and in their midst a silent hypochondriac with austere face,
whom the people entertain and offer a drink ...
So, when the stopping place is reached, will just one passenger
alight? Or will all have perished by the wayside, do you think?

XLI

It's good to know that glasses
are useful to drink out of;
the worst is we have no idea
what thirst is useful for.

XLII

Did you say that nothing is lost for ever?
Well, if this glass in my hand
falls to the ground and shatters, I'll never
drink from it again.

XLIII

You say that nothing is lost for good
and perhaps what you say is true,
but you lose everything you have
and nothing is left to you.

XLIV

Everything passes and yet remains,
but our daily task is to be
forever tracing pathways
on the surface of the sea.

XLV

To die ... Is it to fall like a drop
of water into the limitless sea?
Or is it to be something different:
a person, without shadow or dream,
a solitary figure roaming
a random path unseen?

XLVI

Last night I dreamt I could hear
God's voice shouting: Alert!
Then that it was God was sleeping
and me shouting: Awake!

XLVII

There are four things in the world
of no use in the sea:
anchor, rudder and oars
and fear of ceasing to be.

XLVIII

When he examines my skull
some new Hamlet may remark:
here we have a pretty fossil
of a carnival mask.

XLIX

I note more and more, as the years pass,
that in that immense glass
where I used to view myself with pride,
it was mercury more than image I supplied.
Now, the mercury on the glass
of the mirror in my house
has been scratched by the hand of fate
and through it everything passes like light.

L

- Our Spaniard here is yawning.
Is it that he is hungry? Bored? Sleepy?
Doctor, has he nothing in his stomach?
- It's his head rather than his stomach that's empty.

LI

Light of the soul, light divine,
lamp, torch, star, sun ...
A man goes feeling his way in the dark;
the lantern on his back casts a light behind.

LII

Two young men are arguing
whether, to get to the local feast,
it's best to take the long way by road
or the short cut across the fields.
And so, arguing and disputing,
a quarrel soon begins.
Both of them pick up cudgels of pine
and lay into each other at will.⁴⁸
Now, they grab each other by the beard
and pull out fistfuls of hair.

A carter passes along the road
singing the following air:
“Pilgrim, in order to get to Rome,
the important thing is to start;
for all roads lead to Rome,
they go from every part.”

LIII

There are Spaniards who want to live today
but find themselves caught between
one Spain in ruin and decay
and a bored, indifferent Spain⁴⁹.
Oh, Spaniards yet to be born,
God help you from the start.
For one or the other of these two Spains
is sure to freeze your heart.



CXXXVII

PARABLES

I

There was a boy who dreamed
he had a cardboard horse,
but when he opened his eyes
he could see nothing, of course.
The boy dreamed again,
and now the horse was white,
he grasped it by the mane ...
Now for sure you're mine!
He'd scarcely grasped the horse
when he woke again.
His fist was tightly closed
but the horse was gone!
The boy became very pensive
thinking there's no such thing
as a horse of dream.
and he didn't dream again.
But the boy grew to manhood
and when he fell in love,
he asked his sweetheart:
Are you real or not?
Then, when he became old,
he thought: All is a dream,
the horse I saw in my dreams
and the horse that is real.
And when death came looming,
the old man asked his heart:
Are you a dream or real?
Who knows what the answer was!

II

To D. Vicente Ciurana

On the limpid sand of the Tartessian plain
where Spain ends and the sea begins⁵⁰,
there are two men with their heads in their hands.
One is sleeping and the other musing, it seems.
The first, in this warm morning of spring,
sitting at the edge of the tranquil sea,
has shut his eyelids against the sparkling waters
to dim the glimmer and has fallen asleep.
In his sleep he dreams of the shepherd Proteus
whose job is to guard the flocks of the deep;
he dreams he is being called by the daughters of Nereus,
and he has heard the horses of Poseidon speak.
The second gazes at the water, with floating thoughts;
a son of the sea, he sails – or else he flies –
his thoughts resemble a soaring seagull,
which has seen a silver fish jumping in the brine.
And he thinks: “This life is just a mirage of the sea
as seen by a fisherman who is stranded on shore.”
The dreamer believes himself illumed by the sea
and thinks that death is just one sea mirage more.

III

There once was a sailor
who got a garden close to the sea,
and became a gardener.
When the garden was in bloom,
the gardener went away
to sail the seven seas.

IV

ADVICE

Be patient; wait for the tide to rise
- like a boat stranded on the coast – and don't worry about leaving.
He who is patient knows that victory is his;
because life is long and art is a plaything.

And if life is short
and your boat doesn't reach the water,
be patient, stay where you are. Don't start,
because art is long and, besides, it doesn't matter.

V

PROFESSION OF FAITH

God is not the sea; He is in the sea, shimmering
like a moon in the water, or appearing
like a white sail;
in the sea He awakes or goes to sleep.
He created the sea, and is born
of the sea, like the cloud and the storm;
He is the Creator and is made by the creature;
His breath is soul and through the soul He breathes.
I have to make You, my God, just as You made me,
and in order to give You the soul that You gave me
I have to create You in me. Let the pure river
of charity which flows eternally
flow into my soul. Dry up, my God,
the muddy fountain of a faith without love!

VI

The God which we all bear in us,
the God which we have in mind,
the God which we all seek
and which we never find.
Three gods or three persons
of the one true God.

VII

Reason says: Let us look
for the truth.
And the heart replies: Vain task.
The truth is already in our grasp.
Reason then says: Ah, lucky he
who the truth can clasp!
But heart repeats: Vain task.
Truth is hope and hope is truth.
Reason retorts: You lie in your teeth.
And heart answers back:
You are the liar, reason, I repeat,
for you say what you don't believe.
Then reason responds: Heart,
you and I will never agree.
And heart says: We shall see.

VIII

Oh pensive head,
how distant is the hum
of the honey bee!
You cast a veil of shadow
over this beautiful world
and yet you think you can see,
for you measure the shadow with a compass.
While the bee makes honey

from the juice of the fields and the sun,
I go on casting truths,
which are really no more than vanities,
into the bottom of my crucible.
From the sea to the percept,
from the percept to the concept,
from the concept to the idea
- oh, what a pretty task! -
from the idea back into the sea.
And the process starts once again!



CXXXVIII

MY JESTER

The demon in my dreams
smiles with his red lips
vivid black eyes that gleam
and teeth fine, like pips.
Then quite jovial and picaresque
he starts a dance which is grotesque,
showing off his misshapen body
his enormous hump, his pot belly,
his ugly bearded face
and his dwarfishness.
Jester, I have no idea
why my tragedy causes you glee.
But you at least are alive
for you dance without motive.



NOTES

- ¹ Machado lived in Seville with his family for eight years, until 1873. They moved to Madrid, where Antonio and his brother attended classes in the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. After Madrid and a short stay in Paris, Machado took up his teaching post in Soria, which is also, of course, in Castile.
- ² Miguel de Mañara Vicentela de Leca. Born in Seville, 3rd March 1627. After a dissolute youth given over to luxury and excess, he was miraculously converted and died in an odour of sanctity on 9th May 1679. The Marqués de Bradomín is a character whose fictitious memoirs form the four *Sonatas* of Ramón de Valle-Inclán. (1902-04).
- ³ The despoilation of the countryside (i.e. burning down the pine woods so that the land could be used for pasture) is one of the crimes that Machado accuses the inhabitants of committing. The original title of the poem - "Por tierras del Duero" - further pointed the finger more directly at the culprits.
- ⁴ (Encina/Encinar) "Encina", the tree, can be translated as "holm oak" or "ilex" or, in America, as "live oak". "Encinar" is consequently "holm oak (or ilex) grove/wood". The "holm oak" is one of the trees that feature most often in Machado's poetry: see poem N° 7 , CIII, "Holm Oaks".
- ⁵ *Romancero*, collection of narrative poems, or ballads, dating from Medieval times, dealing with (generally) epic themes and which had been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, until the XXth century when they were studied and collected by Ramón Menéndez Pidal.
- ⁶ See Note N°4.
- ⁷ This is the only untitled poem in *Campos de Castilla*. In *Poesías completas*, it is titled "Caminos" = "Paths", which is the same title as poem CXVIII.
- ⁸ The "young raven" in this poem has characteristics similar to Alvargonzález's sons. Like the youngest son in that poem, Miguel, he studied for the priesthood but gave it up and like the eldest, Juan and Martin, he is a parricide. It will be noted that it was also with a hatchet or axe, which used to hang at the chimney side, that the sons of Alvargonzález did their father to death. See "Land of Alvargonzález"
- ⁹ The train was a favourite mode of transport for Machado and it features in at least two other poems: CXVI, "Memories", and CXXVII, "Another Journey". This poem, "The Train", shows us a much more light-hearted Machado than in the other two, written after the death of his wife.

- ¹⁰ This poem was published in 1909, and in the July of that year Machado married his young bride, Leonor.
- ¹¹ I have left the title “Campos de Soria” untranslated just as the title of *Campos de Castilla* is left untranslated. It would be erroneous to translate it as “Fields of Soria” as it is not only about “fields” but the town of Soria, the *pueblos*, the surrounding landscape, the people, the vegetation, the river, the essential atmosphere of the province. See my explanations in the Introduction.
- ¹² The mark on the face of the man in the inn, compared to the scar left by the blow of an axe, brings to mind the similarly-described mark on the face of the sleeping Alvargonzález, in the poem “Land of Alvargonzález”.
- ¹³ *Soria pura cabeza de Extremadura* is on the city’s coat of arms. The Extremadura referred to is not the modern region of Spain composed of the provinces of Cáceres and Badajoz, but to the territory reconquered from the Moors.
- ¹⁴ *La tierra de Alvargonzález*, (*Land of Alvargonzález*), is the impressive hub round which *Campos de Castilla* is constructed. It consists of a prose version (Story-Legend) and the version in verse. For long it was believed - it seems the idea originated with the well-known Italian hispanist, Oreste Macrí - that Machado wrote first the prose version and from it composed the version in verse, but this has been convincingly refuted by, among others, Carlos Beceiro, in his article: “Una alerta para la crítica ...”. See “Bibliography”.
- ¹⁵ There are several differences between the prose and verse versions of *Land of Alvargonzález*. This preamble, which takes up one and a half pages is one. It refers to an actual trip Machado made with some friends in 1910 to visit the source of the Duero and, obviously it is not reflected in the poem. Other differences between the prose and verse versions will be indicated as we come to them.
- ¹⁶ The fratricide of their brother only occurs in the prose version. In the poem, Miguel marries a beautiful local girl and presumably lives happily ever after.
- ¹⁷ The ending of the prose version is much more abrupt. See the reasons given by Carlos Beceiro for this.
- ¹⁸ In the prose version these words of Alvargonzález, which were calculated to inflame the murderous envy of the two elder brothers, are absent.
- ¹⁹ This reference to a “lightning-struck elm” reminds us of the poem, CXV “To a Dry Elm”.
- ²⁰ This episode of the two brothers’ quest for livestock and their feelings of guilt is absent from the prose version.

- ²¹ Equally absent from the prose version is any reference to the repeated refrain which recounts the death of Alvargonzález .
- ²² The brothers' expressions of remorse are present only in the poem.
- ²³ This episode is recounted slightly differently in the prose version. In that, the firewood is left outside the door by a shadowy figure seen retreating among the pines. Note, also, the repeated reference to "axe".
- ²⁴ All this long section, "The House", both Parts I and II, describing the house and farm of Alvargonzález, flashbacks to previous, happier times and descriptions of the surrounding countryside, is missing from the prose version.
- ²⁵ See Note N° 15. The final journey of the two brothers towards the Laguna Negra is dealt with in much fuller detail here in the poem.
- ²⁶ See Note N° 19. The Alvargonzález brothers kept a beehive in such a tree. The old dry elm, subject of this poem, still remains, at least the shell of it does, in the town of Soria. This poem is one of the last, if not the last, of the poems that Machado wrote in Soria. The "life-giving miracle" mentioned to in the last line refers to his hope that Leonor will recover from her illness. She did not, unfortunately, and died three months later, in August of 1912.
- ²⁷ This heart-breaking poem, written in the train as he is travelling to his new *destino* in Baeza is one of the many in which the poet looks back with fondness and melancholy at the spare, harsh, mystical Soria where he had lived for five years, had married and where his young wife died. In the five following poems, to a greater or lesser extent, the author celebrates this love and this loss and his yearning, culminating in the short poem "Goodbye".
- ²⁸ "Azorín", pseudonym of José Augusto Trinidad Martínez Ruiz, born in Alicante (1873) died in Madrid (1967). "Azorin", like Machado, was a foremost figure in the "Generation of '98", whose main literary concerns were with the state of Spain after the loss of the colonies following the Cuban war. His book, *Castilla* (1912), crystallizes these concerns. Like Machado and other writers of the "Generation", he sees Castile as reflecting the essence of what Spain means.
- ²⁹ The seven poems that comprise "Paths", from CXVIII to CXXV, dealing with his sense of loss and desolation from the death of his wife, are the most heart-rending and poignant poems that Machado has penned.
- ³⁰ We can see the different image Machado uses to refer to the Guadalquivir from that which he uses for the Duero. In "Campos de Soria" Part VII, and in the prose version of *Land of Alvargonzález* the Castilian river is likened to a crossbow, an arm very much used in the fights against the Moors. However, in this poem, "Paths", the Andalusian river is compared to a very typical Moorish arm, a scimitar.

- ³¹ This is the first and only time in the book that Machado mentions his dead wife by name: Leonor.
- ³² *El Porvenir Castellano*, 8 de mayo de 1916.
- ³³ José María Palacio, editor of the local newspaper, *Tierra Soriana*, and related by marriage to the family of Machado's wife, was one of the poet's best friends in Soria. The mention of the Espino in the penultimate line, refers to the cemetery in Soria where Leonor is buried.
- ³⁴ This is indeed Machado's "adios" to Soria, to which he was to return only once, though he lived some years in nearby Segovia: "I'll never see you again! Don't ask me to come back". This version was composed in Baeza in 1915. A second version, with very slight variations, was written in Cordova in 1919.
- ³⁵ "Poema de un día: Meditaciones rurales", which I translated as "Meditations on a Rainy Day in a Rural Setting", with its 207 lines is one of the longest single poems in *Campos de Castilla*. (*Land of Alvargonzález* is of course the longest, with some 712 lines, while "Proverbs and Songs" has about 309 lines, but these two latter are divided into different sections.) It also marks a different tone from the preceding poems. Gone, almost, are the references to loss and the poignant melancholy, to be replaced by some of the banter we saw in the first part, but mostly by a sense of boredom, of being shut in. From now on the critical eye, which had been directed on the inhabitants of the land traversed by the Duero, will be focused mainly on the inhabitants of the valley of the Guadalquivir: for example, this poem and the three poems CXXXI, CXXXII and CXXXIII. But there is also praise and celebration as in poem CXXXIV, "The Women of La Mancha". However, it will be noted that La Mancha is further to the north than Baeza and it belongs to *Castile*, though not to *Old Castile* but to *New Castile* (nowadays known as Castilla La Mancha).
- ³⁶ Here, Machado makes allusion to "gay saber", which could refer to the medieval troubadour-esque type of love poetry, or to the publication of Nietzsche's (1882-87), or, more plausibly, to the "modernista" school of poetry, of which Machado's friend and Maecenas, the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, was the chief exponent. I preferred to interpret it in the latter sense.
- ³⁷ One last reference to his dead wife.
- ³⁸ Miguel de Unamuno (1864 – 1936), considered also of the "Generation of '98", writer, philosopher and vice-chancellor of Salamanca University, was greatly admired by Machado. Two other philosophers are also mentioned in this poem: Henri Bergson, (1859 – 1941) and more specifically his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889). Machado knew him

and admired him rather less after having attended his classes at the Sorbonne. The third philosopher mentioned, and greatest of them all, is Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804). Machado's admiration for Kant can be seen in this poem and in section xxxix of CXXXVI, "Proverbs and Songs".

- ³⁹ The description of the ploughman slowly ploughing with his oxen team might be of Soria, but in the next lines we see references to "olive groves" and mention is made of the mountains of "Cazorla", "Mágina", "Aznaitín" as well as the reference to "Granada", all of which shows us we are in Jaen.
- ⁴⁰ "Saeta", literally, an arrow or dart or, figuratively, a religious song sung in Andalusia during the Holy Week processions, has no suitable translation in English.
- ⁴¹ "...Carancha killed the bull as it charged." Carancha (Cara-Ancha), well known bullfighter of the last half of the 19th century, was born José Sánchez del Campo, in Cádiz in 1848. Killing the bull as it charged ("matar recibiendo") was much more difficult and dangerous than running to meet the bull.
- ⁴² Alexander von Kluck, German general who took part in the First World War. He invaded Belgium but was defeated by the Allied troops outside Paris. He published his memoirs in 1920.
- ⁴³ The title in Spanish is "Llanto de las virtudes y coplas por la muerte de don Guido", literally, "Lament(ation) about the virtues and verses on the death of don Guido". As the poem is a prime example of Machado's use of banter and barbed criticism, I preferred to elaborate a little in my translation of the title, bringing in a little banter, as I have done also in other parts of the poem. For example, in line 7, I translated "muy galán y algo torero" as "a flashy dresser and fond of the bullfight". Also in my translation, line 32, I added the line "Which the priest had blessed", though this is not in the original. I felt that it was justified, not only to get the rhyme with "dressed" but also to show how much of a hypocrite don Guido had become. Also it is possible that the candle was a "blessed" candle.
- ⁴⁴ As we can see in the first poem, "Portrait", Machado was familiar with both Seville and Castile, having been born and raised in the former and lived "twenty years" in the latter.
- ⁴⁵ "Quijano", one of the names by which Don Quixote was known.
- ⁴⁶ "Frascuelo", Salvador Sánchez Povedano, famous bullfighter, born in Granada and died in Madrid (1898). Reputed to have been very generous to the needy.

- ⁴⁷ It is almost imposible to do justice in translation to this deservedly famous little gem of a poem. One of the reasons is because the word “estela”, which is completely unambiguous in Spanish, must be translated by a phrase in English to bring its meaning out.
- ⁴⁸ This reminds us of the Goya painting of the two men clubbing each other to death in a quagmire.
- ⁴⁹ Literally, “a Spain that yawns”. The indifference of many Spàniards towards the decay of the country was something that exercised Machado’s indignation.
- ⁵⁰ The sea features as a motif in at least four of the seven poems of “Parables” as it does in so many of Machado’s poems, and also in many of those of his fellow Andalusian, Federico García Lorca.



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