

Antonio Machado

Roads Dreamed Clear Afternoons
An Anthology of the Poetry of Antonio Machado

Translated into English verse
by

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Preface

Recently, looking for a new challenge, I made a return to the poetry of Antonio Machado. Since the late 1950s Antonio Machado has retained an exalted position among "my" poets. For me, as well as for almost everyone in Hispanic studies, Machado awakens an empathy difficult to define or explain. He is the "good gray poet" in the old park in his clear afternoon, observing the flow of the fountain. He is the wayfarer on his road, sadly watching the light fade away at sunset. He is the poet (following Manrique) of the flowing river, of course the river of time. He is a man who dared to call himself "good," who early in this century discovered the *pueblo*, the people, the last ideal of our civilization. He begins as a poet of "solitudes," of the loneliness and alienation of our time, but he goes on to look outward and *create* a Castilian countryside centered in Soria, first real, then even more real in "dream," in memory. Then, in the pervading irony of our time, the poet becomes metaphysician; philosophy is embroiled with poetry. And in some magnificent poems (strangely mixed among his prose) this Antonio Machado who has no hope somehow gives us hope, or if not hope, courage. After I visited his haunts in Seville and Soria in preparing the Twayne volume devoted to him, Antonio Machado has continued to remain one of "my" poets.

My return to Antonio Machado came after a decade of intense activity in translating other major poets. In those ten years I devoted my scholarly energies to the poetic translation of Lorca's *Gypsy Ballad-book*, a major anthology of the poetry of Quevedo, a major anthology of the poetry of Lope de Vega, and recently a massive anthology of the poetry of Jorge Guillén. The tremendous challenge of facing the difficulties of meaning in Quevedo and of form in Guillén prepared me for any eventual-

ity. The return to Machado through the intimacy of translating his poems has been a rewarding one, so continually stimulating that in six months I have produced the poems of this anthology.

Almost certain am I that the Good Reader (to use a fine old convention) even before finishing the *Roads Dreamed Clear Afternoons* of my title felt the question rise, Why another attempt to translate the poetry of Antonio Machado when there are several solid texts available? Indeed, from the 1960s onward there are volumes (not all general anthologies) by Alice McVan, Tomlinson and Gifford, Betty Jean Craige, Robert Bly, Dennis Maloney, Richard Predmore, Alan S. Trueblood, and two by Willis Barnstone. The question is thus legitimate, and I shall endeavour to answer it. When I came back to Machado, before approaching his poetry to translate, naturally I perused some of the volumes of translations, especially those of McVan, Barnstone, Trueblood, and Predmore. In general, I was keenly disappointed with the lack of *consistent traditional form* in the English versions of these volumes. It is true that traditional form has become almost indecent in our time, for with the discovery of free verse, in general a flat, unrhythmical, unrhymed type of expression has prevailed. In some cases, these translators have chosen a middle ground, with effects of form in one stanza, deviation from it in another. Now these scholars are of course respected colleagues in Hispanic studies, and I respect their choice to translate more for meaning than for both form and meaning. But I believe firmly that there is still need for a major anthology of Antonio Machado's poems in consistent traditional forms.

From the beginning I have insisted upon translating poets in traditional forms in Spanish into comparable traditional forms in English. For example, it seemed obvious to me (though one reviewer seemed a bit surprised) that Lorca's gypsy *ballads* should be translated into *ballads* in English, although of course the specific ballad forms in the two languages are quite different. And the Spanish (or Petrarchan) sonnets of Quevedo, Lope de Vega (and even of Lorca, in modified form) I have consistently translated into Petrarchan form in English, a form utilized effectively by Milton, Wordsworth, Elizabeth Browning, Rossetti, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. I believe I have proved that translation faithful in form as well as substance can be done, in readable English verse.

Now Antonio Machado, in contrast with Jiménez and García Lorca, who both wrote important free verse in addition to

traditional verse, is from his first poem to his last *a poet of traditional forms*, especially in regard to rhyme and meter. Machado began with variations of the *silva*, rhyming quatrains, and the Spanish ballad, then emphasized the Alexandrine in his second period, and finally concentrated on the sonnet in his final period. In the period of *Solitudes*, his initial poem is cast in the time-honored form of the quatrain in hendecasyllables, rhyming ABAB. His early lyrics, "Childhood Memory" (V) and "I dreaming roads of afternoon" (XI) are in the popular octosyllable, the line of the ballad, but both have heavy rhyme. A lyric such as "Dear love, the soft breeze tells" (XII) is in the artistic heptasyllable, but it has the assonance of the ballad. Many poems in *Solitudes* are in variations of the *silva*, that is, with hendecasyllables and heptasyllables, sometimes with heavy rhyme, sometimes only with assonance. In *Solitudes* there is a wide variation in meters, with lines from four to sixteen syllables, but all the poems retain pattern and form. In *Castilian Countryside* the poet begins in "Portrait" (XCVII) with the weighty Alexandrine in stanzas rhyming ABAB; then in the major poem "Banks of the Duero River" (XCVIII) he employs Alexandrine couplets, a very unusual form. In this period, he continues to use the Alexandrine, variations of the *silva*, variations of the ballad, and he even reaches the forms of the *cante jondo* in his famous "Proverbs and Folksongs," (CXXXVI, CLXI) pithy stanzas in which rhyme and meter are essential. In his final period, he continues with forms all the way from the *cante jondo* to the Alexandrine, but in this period he focuses upon the sonnet, usually with several together, in modified Petrarchan form. Here is a poet, then, who deeply respects the forms which came down to him, yet he insists upon meaningful variations within these forms, especially the mixing of the popular and the artistic traditions.

It is important that I clarify simply Machado's "clarity" and "simplicity" as they relate to translation of his poetry. Here is the poet and critic José Hierro in the preface of his anthology of Machado's poetry (1973): "Antonio Machado is a poet of transparent word, of simplicity that borders on the miraculous. . . . His expression is . . . that which most closely approximates colloquial speech." Now it is true that *at times* Machado comes forth with a clear and simple phrase or line, such as "Yo voy soñando caminos / de la tarde," or "He andado muchos caminos." His poetry seems to exude clarity and simplicity. In

general, however, Machado's poetry definitely does not have the syntax of everyday speech and the lack of meter which we associate with much contemporary free verse, in which traditional poetic expression and established meter are in fact avoided. He often puts the adjective before the noun, sometimes for the rhyme; he often puts the verb first, with the subject quite distant from it. His syntax is sometimes long and involved, with related clauses; sometimes brief phrases are end stopped within a line. Sometimes he uses the definite article as is normal in speech, but sometimes he as poetic style does not use the article. In vocabulary, he uses some simple and common words (*camino, fuente, tarde* [his symbols]), but he also uses nouns such as *cacofonía*, "poetic" words such as *aurora*, and rare words such as *zalema*. These effects, usual in traditional poetry, are a blessing for the translator, who can thus re-create them properly in both syntax and phrasing by inverting the adjective-noun, and even inverting lines to achieve an effective rhyme.

In translating Spanish poetry with popular touches, I have had to deal with the difficult problem of assonance, from the time of the *Cid* an important feature in Spanish verse. In the Spanish ballad and other popular verse, there is repetition of the same assonance on the even lines *throughout the poem*. Now in English, assonance (much less continuing assonance) is so alien as to be ineffective; and in English, while the rhyme on the even lines is very important in popular ballad and song, the same rhyme is not sustained throughout a poem. While half the time Machado utilizes the cultured (or Italianate) forms, the other half he stands by the popular forms and lines, with continuing assonance. In fact, Machado sometime uses assonance with the Italianate forms, and rhyme with the popular ones. In general, I have translated Machado's assonance with rhyme in English, but for his continuing assonance I have employed varied rhymes. With one of his best-known short poems, "Traveler, your own tracks are" (CXXXVI, xxix), I have used continuing rhyme for his continuing assonance. With other longer poems of this type, I have often begun with continuing rhyme and followed with other continuing rhymes (up to three or four) to suggest the echo of his assonance. With his important long poem "Memories of Dream, Fever, Fitful Sleep" (CLXXII), as an experiment I have translated the first two *sections* of the poem (one of them quite brief!) in the same rhyme. I am aware that in brief lyrics (such as LXXXVIII and LXXXIX, for example) rhyme