

# **Antonio Machado**

## **Selected Poems**

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I: From 'Proverbios y cantares'

I

My song never chased  
after glory to remain  
in human memory.  
I love the subtle worlds  
weightless and charming,  
worlds like soap-bubbles.

I like to see them, daubed  
with sunlight and scarlet,  
quiver, under a blue sky,  
suddenly and burst...

XXIX

Traveller, the road is only  
your footprint, and no more;  
traveller, there's no road,  
the road is your travelling.

Going becomes the road  
and if you look back  
you will see a path  
none can tread again.

Traveller, every track  
leaves its wake on the sea...

#### IV: 'Yo eschuco los cantos'

I follow the songs  
with age-old rhythms  
the children are singing  
while they are playing  
and showing in song  
what their souls are dreaming,  
like stone fountains  
that show their water:  
in monotonous murmurs  
of undying laughter  
that has in it no joy,  
of ancient weeping  
that has in it no pain  
and speaks of sadness  
the sadness of loving  
of ancient legends.

In the mouths of children  
the singing brings  
the tale's confusion,  
pain that's clear  
as that clear water,  
brings the message  
of ancient love,  
that it conceals.

Playing in shadows  
of an ancient plaza  
the children, singing...

The fountain of stone  
poured out its eternal  
crystal of legend.

The children were singing  
innocent songs  
of things that go on  
and are never ending:  
the story confused,  
the suffering, clear.

The fountain serenely  
continued its tale:  
erasing the story,  
telling the pain.

XI: 'Yo voy soñando caminas'

I go dreaming down roadways  
of evening. Emerald pine-trees  
golden hillsides  
dusty oak-leaves...  
Where does this road go?  
I go travelling, singing,  
into the road's far distance...  
– evening falls slow –  
'I bore in my heart  
the thorn of passion:  
Drew it out one day  
And my heart is numb.'

And suddenly all the land  
was silent, mute and sombre,  
meditating. Sound of the wind  
in the riverside poplars.

Evening's more shadowy  
and the turning road  
that faintly whitens  
blurs, in vanishing.

Lament, my song turns to:  
'Gold thorn, so sharp  
Could I but feel you  
lodged in my heart.'

LXXVIII: 'Y ha de morir contigo el mundo mago'

And is that magical world to die with you,  
where memory goes guarding  
life's purest breaths  
first love's white shadow,

the voice that entered your heart, the hand  
that you had wished to hold in dream,  
and all things loved  
that touched the soul, the depths of sky?

And is that world of yours to die with you,  
the old life you renewed and set in order?  
Have the anvils and crucibles of your spirit  
laboured here only for dust and wind?



CIV: 'Eres tú, Guadarrama, viejo, amigo,'

Was it you, Guadarrama, ancient friend  
mountains of white and grey  
mountains of my Madrid evenings,  
I saw there, brushed on the blue?

Among your deep gullies  
and bitter heights,  
a thousand suns, a thousand Guadarramas  
rode with me, there, into your heart.

### CXIII: The Fields of Soria

#### I

Soria's earth is dry and cold.  
Among the hills and bare sierras,  
green meadows, ashen slopes,  
spring comes  
scattering small white daisies  
over the fragrant grasses.

The earth's not alive, the land dreams.  
At the start of April, snow  
covers Moncayo's shoulder:  
the traveller winds a scarf  
round neck and throat, and shepherds pass,  
wrapped up in their long capes.

#### II

Ploughed fields  
like patches of brown serge  
beehives, vegetable plots,  
dark greenness where sheep browse  
between leaden pinnacles, sowing  
a sweet dream of Arcadian childhood.  
The stiff branches steam  
on far roadside poplars  
a bluish vapour – of new leaves –  
and in the clefts of valleys and ravines  
the flowering brambles whiten  
and perfumed violets bud.

### III

Rolling country, and the roads  
hide travellers there who ride  
the small brown donkeys,  
and then in glowing evening depths  
rise again, humble figures  
on a golden sunset canvas.  
But if you climb a hill and view the land  
from heights where eagles live  
there are steel and crimson gleams,  
leaden plains, and silvered hills,  
ringed round by violet mountains,  
with caps of rose-tinted snow.

### IV

Those figures on the land beneath the sky!  
Slow oxen plough  
the slope as autumn opens  
and in between the dark bowed heads  
beneath the heavy yoke  
a basket there of rushes and broom  
a cradle for a child:  
behind it walks  
a man bent down to earth,  
a woman sowing seed  
in open furrows.  
Under a cloud of carmine flame  
in the fluid sunset gold and copper-green  
the shadows lengthen.

## V

Snow. In the inn on the open plain  
you see the hearth where firewood smokes,  
and a seething pot, bubbles.  
A northerly, sweeps the frozen plain  
lifting the silent snow  
in white swirls.  
The snow falls on fields and plain,  
as if over a grave.  
An old man, shivering, coughs  
and huddles by the fire: an old woman  
spins her twist of wool, while a girl  
sews green trim on to scarlet serge.  
The old ones are a muleteer's parents  
who lost his way one evening  
travelling the whitened land,  
and vanished in mountain snows.  
There's an empty place beside the fire,  
and a dark frown on the old man's brow,  
like a shadowy cleft  
– like the gash of an axe in wood –.  
The old woman watches the plain, as if  
she hears footsteps on the snow. No one there.  
Deserted the road nearby,  
deserted the fields round the house.  
The little girl's thinking of green meadows  
where she'll play with the rest of the girls  
in the gold and azure days,  
when the white daisies flower.

## VI

Soria the cold, Soria the pure,  
the crown of Estramadura,  
with your castle ruined in war,  
that overlooks the Duero

with your eroded ramparts  
with your blackened houses!  
Dead city of noblemen,  
of soldiers, of huntsmen,  
of doorways with emblems  
and a hundred great families,  
city of starving dogs  
dogs scrawny and shrill  
dogs that swarm  
through the sordid streets  
howling at midnight  
when jackdaws caw!  
Chill Soria! The bell-tower  
of the courthouse strikes one.  
Soria, city of Castile  
lovely under the moon!

## VII

Hills of silver plate,  
grey heights, dark red rocks  
through which, round Soria,  
the Duero bends  
its crossbow arc, shadowed oaks,  
stone dry-lands, naked mountains,  
white roads and river poplars,  
twilights of Soria, warlike and mystical,  
today I feel, for you,  
in my heart's depths, sadness,  
sadness of love! Fields of Soria,  
where it seems the stones dream,  
you go with me! Hills of silver plate,  
grey heights, dark red rocks.

## VIII

I've seen once more the golden poplars,  
roadside poplars of the Duero,  
between San Polo and San Saturio,  
beyond the ancient walls  
of Soria – watchtower towards  
Aragon, on Castilian soil.

The riverside poplars that blend  
the rustling of dry leaves  
with water's sound when the wind rises  
have initials carved  
in their bark, lovers' names  
those symbols that are years.  
Poplars of love whose branches yesterday  
were filled with nightingales:  
poplars that tomorrow will be  
lyres of the fragrant spring wind:  
poplars of love by the water that flows  
and passes by and dreams,  
You go with me; I carry you in my heart!

## IX

Yes, you go with me, fields of Soria,  
tranquil evening, hills of violet,  
riverside poplar groves, green dream  
of grey soil and the brown earth,  
bitter melancholy  
of a decaying town,  
you've touched my soul,  
or were you there already in its depths?  
Race of the high Numantian plain,  
keeping faith with God like old believers,  
may the sun of Spain fill you  
with joy, with light, with riches!

CXXVI: To José María Palacio

Palacio, good friend,  
is spring there  
showing itself on branches of black poplars  
by the roads and river? On the steeps  
of the high Duero, spring is late,  
but so soft and lovely when it comes!  
Are there a few new leaves  
on the old elms?  
The acacias must still be bare,  
and the mountain peaks snow-filled.  
Oh, the massed pinks and whites  
of Moncayo, massed up there,  
beauty, in the sky of Aragon!  
Are there brambles flowering,  
among the grey stones,  
and white daisies,  
in the thin grass?



On the bell-towers  
the storks will be landing now.  
The wheat must be green  
and the brown mules working sown furrows,  
the people seeding late crops,  
in April rain. There'll be bees,  
drunk on rosemary and thyme.  
Are the plum trees in flower? Violets still?  
There must be hunters about, stealthy,  
their decoys under long capes.  
Palacio, good friend,  
are there nightingales by the river?  
When the first lilies,  
and the first roses, open,  
on a blue evening, climb to Espino,  
high Espino, where she is in the earth.

(Baeza, 29 April 1913. Machado's wife Leonor Izquierdo died very young,  
in 1911, and is buried in the church at Espino.)

## CLVI: Passages

### I

In the blue, the black  
flock of birds  
calling, flapping, perching  
on the frozen poplar.  
... On the bare poplar  
sombre rooks, still and silent  
like cold dark notes  
penned on February's stave.

### II

The blue mountain, the river, the tall  
copper wands of slender poplars,  
and white of almonds on the hill,  
oh, snow in flower, butterfly on the bough!  
With the broad-beans' fragrance, the wind  
blows over the land's bright solitude.

### III

A white flash  
snakes through leaden cloud.  
The child's eye  
amazed, and the frowning brow  
– the room is dark – of the mother...  
Oh, balcony closed against the storm!  
The wind and hail  
ring on the bright glass.

## IV

The rainbow and the balcony.  
Seven strings  
of the sun's lyre tremor in dream.  
A toy drum gives seven taps –  
– water and glass –.  
Acacias with goldfinches.  
Storks on the bell-towers.  
In the plaza  
the rain has washed the dusty myrtle.  
Who placed those laughing virgin girls  
in the vast quadrangle  
and above, hosannah! in the broken cloud,  
the palm of gold and the blue serene?

## V

Between chalk hills and grey crags  
the train eats the steel trail.  
The row of gleaming windows  
hold a twin cameo profile  
repeated through the silver glass.  
Who is it that has pierced time's heart?

## VI

Who set, between those rocks like cinder,  
to show the honey of dream,  
that golden broom,  
those blue rosemaries?  
Who painted the purple mountains  
and the saffron, sunset sky?  
The hermitage, the beehives,  
the cleft of the river  
the endless rolling water deep in rocks,  
the pale-green of new fields,  
all of it, even the white and pink  
under the almond trees!

## VII

In the silence it goes on  
trembling, Pythagoras' lyre,  
rainbow in the light, the light that fills  
my empty stereoscope.  
They've blinded my eyes those embers  
of the Heraclitean fire.  
World for a moment is  
transparent, void, mute, blind.

## CLVIII: Songs of the High Country

### I

In the white hills...  
Fine snow  
and a headwind.

In among the pine trees...  
the road hides itself  
in white snow.

A fierce wind blowing  
from Urbión to Moncayo.  
Wastelands of Soria!

### II

Later there'll be storks in the sun  
watching the evening redden  
from Moncayo to Urbión.

### III

The door in my heart  
opened on its hinges,  
and once more the gallery  
of my history was revealed.  
Once more the little plaza  
with flowering acacias,  
once more the clear fountain  
telling its tale of love.

#### IV

The brown oak  
and the stony wasteland.  
When the sun sets  
the river wakens.

Oh, far mountains  
of violet and mauve!  
In the darkened air  
only river sounds.

Lilac moon  
of ancient evening  
in a cold land  
more moon than earth!

#### V

Soria, in blue mountains,  
on the fields of violet,  
how often I've dreamed of you  
on the plain of flowers,  
where the Guadalquivir runs  
past golden orange-trees  
to the sea.

#### VI

How often ashen land  
you've veiled my view  
of green lemon trees  
with your oaks of shadow!

Oh, fields of God,  
between Urbión's Castile  
and Moncayo's Aragon!

## VII

In Cordoba, mountaineers,  
in Seville, farmers, seamen  
and labouring sails  
swelling to the sea:  
and on the wide plain  
where the sand drinks  
the briny ocean's spit,  
my heart turned towards  
the founts of Duero,  
Soria the pure...Oh, frontier  
between earth and moon!

High barren plain  
where the young Duero flows,  
earth where her earth lies!

## VIII

The river wakes.  
In darkened air,  
only the sound of the river.

Oh, bitter singing  
of water over stone!  
...By Hawthorn Hill  
beneath the stars.

Only the sound of the river  
in the depths of the valley  
beneath Hawthorn Hill.

## IX

In the midst of the fields  
the hermitage with no hermit  
leaves its window open.

A green tiled roof.  
Four white walls.

Far off the harsh stone  
of Guadarrama shines.  
Water bright without sound.

In clear air  
the poplars of the grove,  
leafless March lyres!

## X: Rainbow at Night

*(For Don Ramón del Valle-Inclán)*

Bound for Madrid, one evening  
the train in the Guadarrama.  
In the sky the rainbow's arch  
of moonlight and water.  
Oh, calm moon of April  
driving the white clouds!

The mother holds her child,  
sleeping, in her lap.  
Sleeping the child still sees  
the green fields going by  
with little sunlit trees  
and gilded butterflies.



The mother, frowning dark  
between tomorrow, yesterday  
sees dying embers  
and an oven full of spiders.

And there's a sad traveller  
who has to view rare sights,  
talks to himself, glances up  
and voids us with his glance.

I think of fields of snow,  
pine-trees on other hills.

And you, Lord, through whom  
all see, who sees all souls,  
say if a day will come  
when we shall see your face.

## CLIX: Songs

### I

By the flowering hills  
seethes the wide sea.  
The honeycomb from my bees  
contains tiny grains of salt.

### II

By the black water.  
Scent of sea and jasmine.  
Málagañan night.

### III

Spring is here again.  
No one knows how it came.

### IV

Spring is here entire,  
Snowy hallelujahs  
of the flowering briar!

### V

Moon at full, Moon at full  
so swollen and so round  
in this March night, so still,  
honeycomb of light  
worked by bees pure white!

## VI

Night in Castile:  
the song is sung,  
or, rather, is unsung.  
When all is asleep  
I'll lean on the sill.

## VII

Sing, sing clear, rhythmically  
the green branching almond tree  
and the river's double willow.

Sing of the grey oak-tree  
that the axe has severed  
of the flower no one sees.

Of the orchard pear-trees  
the white flower, and the pink  
flower of the peach-tree.

And this fragrance breathed  
By the moist breeze  
from the flowering bean.

## VIII

The fountains and the four  
acacias in flower  
in the little plaza.  
The sun no longer burns.  
Pleasant late afternoon!  
Sing, you nightingale.  
It's the same hour  
in my heart.

IX

White inn,  
a traveller's cell,  
with my shadow!

X

The Roman aqueduct  
– a voice from my land sings –  
and the love we possess,  
my child, there's steadfastness!

XI

Words of love  
sound better  
for a little excess.

XII

High Mass  
in Santo Domingo.  
They called me  
a heretic, a Mason –  
praying with you  
what devotion!

### XIII

A fiesta in the green meadow  
– fife and drum –  
A shepherd arrived  
with flowering crook and golden sandals.

I've come down from the hills  
just to dance with her:  
to the hills I'll return.

A nightingale sings  
in the garden leaves:  
sings by night and day,  
sings in moon and sun.  
Hoarse with singing:  
a girl comes to the garden  
to pick a rose.

Between the dark oaks  
there's a stone fountain  
and a little earthen jug  
that's never filled.

Through the oak trees,  
under a white moon  
she'll return.

### XIV

In Valonsadero with you  
on the Eve of Saint John:  
tomorrow on the pampas  
the other side of the sea.  
Till I return,  
keep faith with me,

I'll be on the pampas, tomorrow,  
but my heart will fly from me  
to the slopes of the high Duero.

XV

While you're dancing round,  
sing, girls, sing:  
already the fields are green,  
April your lover is come.

By the riverside  
among the dark oak-trees  
we've seen the silver  
of his sandals gleam.  
Already the meadows are green,  
April your lover is come.

## CLXIV: Dreams in Dialogue

### I

Your form appears to me as in the high  
country...My words evoke  
green fields, plateaus bare and dry,  
flowering briars, ashen rock.

And, obeying memory, dark oaks  
bud on the hill, poplars by the riverside:  
the shepherd toils up the slope,  
a balcony in town is glowing: mine,

Ours. Do you see? Towards Aragon, far off  
the peaks of Moncayo, white and red...  
Look at the fires of that crimson cloud,

and a star in the blue, beloved.  
Santana Hill, beyond the Duero,  
Turning dark in evening silence.

## II

You ask why my heart forsakes this place  
For the sake of the high plateaus,  
and among farming, and sea-going folk,  
I sigh for Castilian wastes?

No one elects his love. My fate  
led me one day to the grey barrens,  
where cold snows in falling veil  
the long-dead oak tree shadows.

From a slice of Spain, high and rocky,  
A ragged branch of rosemary, I  
bring flowery Guadalquivir, to you.

My heart's where it was born, not to life  
I mean, but to love, beside the Duero...  
...The pointed cypress, the wall all white!



### III

Lady, the embers of the evening  
part the dark clouds of the storm  
paint on the ashen stony form  
of some far hill, the glow of morning.

Dawn congealing on cold stone,  
in the traveller's heart striking fear,  
more than, at midday, a mountain lion,  
or in some deep gorge, a giant bear.

Caught, with the flame of one passion,  
in a clouded dream of hope and fear  
I go to the sea, towards oblivion

—and not like night-bound masses here  
rocks darkened by the earth's rotation —.  
Don't call to me: I shan't reappear.

#### IV

Oh solitude, my sole companion,  
muse of marvels, that gave my voice  
the word unasked for, answer my question!  
Who is this now with whom I talk?

Away from the noisy masquerade  
My friendless sadness turns, lady,  
with you, you of the veiled face,  
always veiled to speak with me.

And I think: that I am who I am, to me  
that's no great puzzle, to be the shape  
created in the inner mirror, it's the mystery

rather of your loving voice: show your face,  
so that your eyes of diamond I might see,  
your diamond eyes fixed on me in space.

CLXV: From Sonetos: III

Have I tarnished your memory? So many times!  
Life flows on by like some wide stream,  
and with a tall ship, to the sea,  
it bears green mud, and clouds of slime.

More so if storms have washed banks bare  
dragging along the spoils of tempest,  
and if an ashen cloud in heaven  
is ablaze with bright-yellow flares.

Yet however it flows to an unknown shore,  
life is still fountain-water, freed  
drop by drop, from its pure source,

or torrents of spray, that break noisily  
beneath the sky, from the rocky force.  
And your name sounds there, eternally!

CLXXIV: From 'Other Songs for Guiomar'

III

I will write this on your fan:  
I love you, so as to forget you.  
So as to forget you, I love you.

VI

And I'll send you my song:  
'One sings what one loses'  
and a green parakeet  
for your balcony, to say it.

## LII: Meditation

Now the moon goes climbing  
over the orange grove.  
And Venus is shining  
like a glass dove.

Amber and beryl  
beyond the far mountain,  
and over the calm ocean  
sky of porcelain, purple.

Now it's night in the garden  
– about its tasks goes water!  
and only the scent of jasmine,  
the nightingale of odours.

From ocean to ocean  
How silent it seems, the war,  
while Valencia blossoms  
drinking the Guadalaviar!

Valencia of slender towers  
and soft nights, Valencia,  
I'll be there with you,  
when you I no longer see—  
where sand adds to the meadow,  
where the violet sea recedes.

### LIII: The Crime Was in Granada

*For Federico García Lorca*

#### I: *The Crime*

He was seen walking between the rifles,  
down a long street  
out to chill fields  
still lit by early stars.  
They killed Federico  
when the dawn broke.  
The executioner's crew  
dared not look in his face.  
They shut their eyes,  
said: 'Nor will God save you!  
Federico fell dying  
– blood on his brow, lead in his guts –  
...To think the crime should be in Granada.  
– poor Granada – in his Granada...

## II: *Death and the Poet*

He was seen walking only with Her,  
and unafraid of her scythe.  
– The sun now on tower after tower, hammers  
on anvils – anvil on anvil, of the forges.  
Federico was speaking  
flattering Death. She listened.  
‘Yesterday in my verse, friend,  
the clap of your dry palms sounded,  
you gave ice to my song, your silver  
scythe’s edge to my tragedy,  
I’ll sing to you of your wasted flesh,  
your empty eyes,  
your hair the wind stirs,  
the red lips where you were kissed...  
Now as ever, gypsy, my death,  
how good to be alone with you,  
in this breeze of Granada, my Granada!

## III

He was seen walking...  
Friends, carve  
in the Alhambra, a statue of dreams  
and stone, for the poet,  
over a fountain where water goes grieving  
and saying, eternally:  
the crime was in Granada, in his Granada!

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