

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.

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...

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