

CHRISTMAS IN MACAU



Selwyn Pritchard

Japanese Jesuits carved
granite into sixteenth century

baroque: "The Apocalyptic
woman smashes the seven-

headed hydra"; "The beautified
Luis Gonzaga" grips his heart,

stares down at the harbour;
in her superior niche

Mater Dei cries verdigris
that so many basilicas

were consumed by candles
they left it one wall thick.

In the cobbled cathedral yard
above the town, jaws a-flap

and eyes on springs, pink, red
and gilt, the jolly dragon swirls,

bells twitch and cymbals clash,
firecrackers make us hop and clap

under that tottering, crazy façade,
empty windows full of Chinese sky.

TWO TRANSLATIONS



Don Paterson

RICOCHET

after Machado

On an evening as empty and vast as my boredom,
under the brandished spear of the summer,
I watched as a thousand black shadows grew upright
over the plain, as if stones had been raised
over every low barrow and mound, every molehill:

it felt like my own half-lit, miserable dream
had come alive; that the sun's livid mirror
repeated my every black thought to infinity.
I struck the baked ground with my heel, and it rang
through the whole bloody west like a gunshot.

MARGINAL NOTES

after Machado

Not the timeless marble
or the time-tied melody,
but the word in time.

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The spirit throws up its banks,
its mountains of ash and lead,
its Edenic groves...

*

All imagery
that isn't pulled from the river:
mere bijouterie.

*

Prefer half-rhymes, or assonance:
ideally, the song says nothing
and would have no rhymes at all.

*

Free verse?
You should flee it, rather,
if you find it so enslaving.

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Half-rhymes on verbs,
rhymes on time-words—
they're the most precious.
Nouns and adjectives
are knots in a clear stream,
slow or slowing verbs
in that lyric grammar
where today is tomorrow,
yesterday, still.