

# 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.

\*

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.

\*

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.