

## *Spanish Buddha: Don Paterson's Translations of Machado*

Don Paterson's first collection, *Nil Nil*, began in "The Ferryman's Arms". In a moment of departure for "somewhere unspeakable", "I left him there, stuck in his tent of light, sullenly/ knocking the balls in, for practice, for the next time". *God's Gift to Women*, his last collection, began with a word of advice: "A poem is a little church, remembrance". It ended (bar some notes and a final squib) with "Siesta", a poem described as being *after* Antonio Machado. And now the same poem appears, unaltered, in *The Eyes*, in which an interest in "God and love and memory" is announced.

Although it is Machado who supplies both the subject and much of the matter of *The Eyes*, his celebrations of the rural are on the whole excluded. The Sierra de Guadarrama and the Guadalquivir, which flowed past Machado's birthplace, are referred to only fleetingly. "Guiomar" (Pilar de Valderrama, Machado's later love) appears in "An Interrogation", from the *Songs for Guiomar*, but not in Paterson's retitled excerpts from the *Other Songs for Guiomar*. Machado's philosophical interests, the impact of "intuitionism" (Machado heard Bergson lecture in Paris in 1911) and of Unamuno can be perceived in the references to Kant, to "The Immediate Data of Consciousness" and to "Master Unamuno", the "Rector of Salamanca" in "from One Day's Poem", though they are hardly vital to its understanding. His recurrent images of the Pythagorean lyre and of Heraclitean fire are there in various guises, finding their counterpart in a sort of Patersonian Platonism. However, his poem on the death of Lorca is omitted. So is "Memories of Dreaming, Fever and Dozing", amongst others.

Paterson's declared aim is to bring into existence, out of the "several Antonio Machados... the poem Machado is for me". But a couple of the poems (possibly "Seeing", "Time" and "Paradoxes", "the poem we think we have *made up*") may in fact be inventions. So perhaps this translated Spanish poet owns some kinship with the "apocryphal" philosopher-poet, Abel Martin, and his pupil, Juan de Martaina, of Machado's own creation or with the fictional François Aussemmain of Paterson's previous book. Such possibilities call attention to what else Paterson may be doing, specifically to how he chooses

what to translate, the way he translates, and to why or how he mingles the early with the later poems, paring some texts down, extending or dispersing others, in order to achieve what "Sleep" calls "a web of paths/ over the dark land" towards, "...forgetting, amnesty, oblivion", the last line in the book.

*The Eyes* begins at the liminal (or the littoral) and once more with some "Advice". This time it's about a beached boat and waiting for the tide "since life is long, and art merely a toy" or "whatever. To be quite honest with you,/ none of this is terribly important". Partly Machado's text is a joke upon Seneca's rendering of Hippocrates' "vita brevis, ars longa", the high seriousness duly undercut to create another sort of seriousness: "as I put it so well myself", as Paterson puts it, mischievously. What follows, between that opening and a useful, more prosaic "Afterword" in which the poem/church comparison is more or less repeated, is a sequence of just under forty poems. Some of them are cycles of much smaller pieces. Arranged by title (mainly supplied by Paterson) in what is roughly alphabetical order, the parts summed together are suggestive of what the blurb calls "a spiritual portrait". But it is a portrait of Paterson in some of his aspects ("plane by plane,/ corner by corner") as much as it is of Machado, and of the processes integral to its making.

Translators differ in what they intend to do. In Paterson's case, finding linguistic equivalence isn't really the point. He says as much in the "Afterword". These Englished versions enjoy a "surface life" of their own. Less involved than before with what Gavin Douglas called "the fourth of language", Paterson's lexis has become simpler, more austere, less easily characterised as regionalism. In "from One Day's Poem", the latinate "ora... ora" construction is felicitously rendered "swithers"; a stream becomes a "burn". In "Guadarrama" the Sierra has its "corries" whilst in "Ricochet" the heat of a Spanish evening encompasses "barrow and mound". There are tricks with the layout as well. Phrases settle down like birds onto the body of "Two Winter Poems". "Poem", the first of Machado's *Proverbios y Cantares*, is rounded out like the soap bubble to which it compares itself. It finishes with a "pop".

Often Paterson's interventions seem like those of a judicious editor. Several poems follow very closely the formal structure of the original. "A Memory of Childhood" retains its five rhymed quatrains. "Promethean" and "To the Great Zero" are both still sonnets. Sometimes, as in "The Reply", he introduces typographic breaks to mark a change in the argument. In "Poetry" a Spanish pun on "metal" has been jettisoned, to no great ill effect. "Profession of Faith" had a chiasmus (breath-spirit-spirit-breath) at the still centre of the original, for which a rhetoric of quiet exposition has been substituted. Frequently Paterson adds an extra detail by way of pointing up the im-

age. To accommodate the alternating message in the third of the "Three Lyrics" a fan has acquired "two sides"; "false" has been added to the "depths" of a mirror. The protagonist of "The Eyes" walks "just ten yards". Several updates are subtly introduced. A daguerreotype becomes an "old photograph". "Chords" has been converted into the more habitable present tense. But all this is merely part of the process of creating what Paterson (who is himself a guitarist; the book is dedicated to the other half of "Lammas") calls "piano transcriptions of guitar music".

More characteristic of Paterson's quality as a translator and as a poet is his physicality, his instinct for the primacy of the felt experience. In the original of the title poem Machado had applied the adjective "claro" first to "day" and then, by transfer, to "mirror". Paterson collapses this, with just a suggestion of hypallage, into one phrase, "big sunny mirror". In "An Interrogation", too pedestrian a rendering of Machado's final question (crudely "does love break in its cloudy mirrors the bobbin of old twilights?") could, in English, have seemed muddled and diffuse. Here Paterson works from the affective, the physical, back to the language, creating three new images: "love's/ derangements *unstring* the days,/ cut them free from time"; the evening sun is "caught, asleep in the river", and something older, classical, physically emblematic of a journey between worlds, "the obol... of your absence".

The *Other Songs for Guiomar* (from *Juan de Marteina*) are the source for Paterson's "Poetry" and "Three Lyrics". In the first "Song" a mood of personal address creates the background against which to make a relatively abstract formulation in the second: even if the loved one ("amada") never existed, says the speaker, nothing ("nada") is proved against Love. Paterson's solution, now that this "Lyric" has been severed from its particularising context, is to make this audibly more tactile: "the mouth you kissed/ so hungrily did not exist". In "One Day's Poem", a light rain moistens the crops; Machado compliments "the Lord" on this arrangement's good sense. But Paterson's version is extensive. The divinity is conceived of by analogy with the farmer to whom the speaker of the poem is also comparing himself: "I think of the good Lord astride/ the tilled fields, tapping the side/ of his great riddle, keeping up/ the steady murmur/ over the parched crops". In "Dream" what was latent, unworked ("water in your hair"), has been teased out into a demonstration of the precise relationship between the microcosm of a water droplet and the larger world it reflects: "all of it, inverted, minuscule, in each speck/ of rain in her black hair!"

There is something of Dickinson's ear in the way in which Paterson occasionally rhymes voiced and unvoiced consonants ("road" with "coat") or long and short vowels ("sleep" and "-ship") and something of Dickinson's pleasure in the sort of paradox that never quite unrav-

els (as when the loved one in the third of "Three Lyrics" is described as "alive to your heart, dead to your poet") or in the sceptical, crisply expressed: "the thin air of our faith". On several occasions there is a defensively punning, cartoon quality. The bibulous speaker, "one step ahead of time" in "Anacreontic", proposes getting "slaughtered". In "Song", where "all our brilliant talk" throws "no light" there are "three chests" holding "God-only-knows". In "Ricochet" Machado's reverberating sunset is given more specific realisation: "I struck the baked ground with my heel, and it rang/ through the whole bloody west like a gunshot". Occasionally, too, the conception can simply be stretched too far. In "The Visit" death passes by the watcher/dreamer and returns—quite straightforwardly described. Unfortunately Paterson substitutes something mechanical for the original's soundless dreamscape. The result has a complexity which seems unnecessary as "soundlessly, as though on rails,/ he slid backwards through the room". Then he adds a further pointless detail, "*What are you doing?* I hissed", and thus the effect is lost.

Beyond these characteristics there are other things at stake. Machado's *New Songs* cycle moves from a haiku aesthetic towards more bucolic concerns, which Paterson (responsive to the former rather than the latter) has in the main excised. A splendidly English concision is gained, but at the expense of the original's fuller musicality; though the results can impress nonetheless. "The white bees'/ honeycomb/ full moon" is the text of one such "Song" in its entirety. On the other hand, where a cultural or linguistic reference overlays the physical the treatment is less assured, with the result that the "white hosannas/ from the bramble blossoms" ("from *New Songs*")—particularly for the reader who does not also know the Spanish tradition of little Easter pictures ("aleluyas") to be tossed among the crowds—might seem merely sentimental. In "That Roman aqueduct...", with which the excerpted sequence ends, Machado grounds the emotional in the physical *and* the cultural. But Paterson's version, in his context, feels suspiciously like a remnant from what has already been trimmed.

There is a similar problem in the treatment of the *Proverbs*. It is as though Paterson may not have found Machado's wandering tactics (his "detour on the shortcut") entirely sympathetic. He has removed a considerable quantity of material, reducing the cycle by about two thirds. But he also seems to be losing his way at a level beyond or before language. And that leads, over the whole foreshortened cycle, ironically, to longeurs. Sometimes, too, in individual cases, the expression fails to convince. Thus it isn't his rendering the untranslatable ("toronjil" = rose-balm; "toranja" = grapefruit) as "the smell/ of ripe lemons/ in the rose-leaves" that causes some unease so much as an impression that the affective sense of what is said (in this case, a physical sensation is being *provoked* by language) isn't being conveyed.

Both Paterson and Machado are much engaged by time. They are interested too in what can be conveyed through repeated use of the same word or image. *Proverbs* works in Spanish through a circling series of returns to the same departure points. In *God's Gift to Women* Paterson employed the times and destinations of imaginary trains to organise the reader's progress through the book. *The Eyes* uses suppler motifs, and to an extent that goes some way beyond the material from which it draws. The "little square" in "from New Songs" is the same as the "courtyard" in "Sigh", but in this case drawing attention to a local detail isn't part of Paterson's larger purpose. On the other hand, the deliberate placing together of some poems is reflected in a whimsical correspondence between their English titles ("Poem" and "Poetry" or "3 O'Clock" and "The Time"). Others are grouped together thematically. There is a gathering sense of violence and destruction through the successive ordering of "The Reply" ("the shadows of great armies", from 1936), "Revenant" ("tottering like a skeleton/ on the mound of its own rubble", from Machado's first collection), "Ricochet" ("the brandished spear of the summer/... above every low barrow and mound", from 1903) and "Seeing" ("some ruined corridor"). This is a lyric progress, sustained by glosses and accretions, not one that is biographical or psychological. Implicit in both "Poetry" and "Promethean" (and explicit in the original) is the Heraclitean image of a glowing coal ("el ascua"). Though written some years apart, they appear directly opposite one another, as though in mutual commentary. After the poem called "Advice", the interpolated drinker in "Anacreontic" ("Cheers!") rejects "all that sober/ reasonable advice", to reappear as the "bar-room singer" of "Poetry" and again for the final "toast" to "oblivion" at the end. The image of the beached boat in "Advice" foreshadows not only the sail visible on the horizon in "Profession of Faith" but also the "white sail" (Paterson's invention) for which the heart watches out in "Meditation". In "The Time" the boat turns up again, but "tied to the other shore". The children of "A Memory of Childhood" are trapped inside a rainswept schoolroom. By "3 O'Clock" they have been released into a sunlit square: "the stiff air suddenly filled/ with shrieks and yells". And between the two comes the experience of "your man, the Modern Languages Teacher" in "from One Day's Poem", "The rain's slacking off./ Umbrella, hat, gaberdine, galoshes.../ Right. I'm out of here."

It is perhaps in "from One Day's Song" that a productive difference in attitude between Paterson and Machado is most explicitly revealed. The original, subtitled "Meditaciones rurales", was written in 1913 in Baeza, where the latter had a teaching post. The speaker sits in his room, meditates upon the farmers' reliance on the seasons, upon time and loss (there's a reference to the death of Machado's wife, Leonor: "death took away/ the thing I held dearest") and upon philo-

sophical insecurity, before going out to sample some local conversations concerning politics and beans. The poem is punctuated by the ticking of a clock. He then returns to his meditations, conceiving of time as measured monotony, to conclude that the self is a mixed construct which strives to get beyond itself. The narrative strength of "One Day's Song" comes from a series of implicit contrasts: between inside and outside, between country and town, and between how time is measured ("like a tailor taking out his measuring-tape/ to yard on yard of space" in Paterson's fruitful expansion) and how it is experienced. Underpinning everything is a series of images which play on the essentially Heraclitean relationship between fire ("a fire lit", "I watch the filament/ redden and glow;/ I'd get more light from a match") and water (the rain, the river, the sea). The final image of the poem is an act of mediation in which the figure of Kant who "worked out free will/ within his own four walls" finds an agricultural counterpart in the self struggling to escape the confines of its pen ("su corral").

In Paterson's version the whole of the trip into town and subsequent musings are omitted. Where Machado's poem is about coming to terms with something, Paterson is more concerned with action, getting out. His abbreviated rendering is readily interpretable as a critical revisiting of some of the territory occupied by "A Memory of Childhood". For numbers pointlessly chanted in the latter one might here read measurement by clocks. Paterson's concern is with the business of moving forward, not with reaching a specific destination. He omits Machado's lines about the bitterness of wanting and not being able to believe ("creer", twice repeated). Where Machado makes a comparison between himself and Unamuno Paterson underlines the point of the comparison (i.e., "poetry") still further: "There's no foundation," he insists, "only the work".

Gradually, through its progress, *The Eyes* reveals a composite poetics, part Paterson, part Machado. In "To Emiliano Barral" the creator doesn't so much create a figure as uncover it. In "Chords" inspiration arrives "when we're half asleep" as "two or three true words". "Marginal Notes" offers advice on how to achieve "the word in time": "ideally, the song says nothing", as Paterson puts it, firmly. His reduced version of Machado's *Proverbs* cycle becomes a meditation upon alterity ("You see an eye/ because it sees you", "find the you that isn't yours/ and *can't* be") leading to a declaration about the business of art itself: "But Art?... pure play,/ which is to say, pure life,/ which is to say, pure fire". "The Waterwheel", actually a fairly early poem but placed by Paterson towards the end of the book, becomes (in the light of what has preceded it) a Zenlike meditation on the anonymous in poetry: "the water's/ mindless soliloquy".

Gradually, but perceptibly, a religious or spiritual attitude—perhaps more Paterson's than Machado's—is also being re-formed. In "To

Emiliano Barral" Paterson considers the act of bringing out a shape. However, the emphasis is not upon the weight and reflectiveness of the rock but on its blankness: the figure is "holding my breath/ in the frozen dawn" and what is disclosed is not a delusional sense of grandeur and aching melancholy (a gloss on Iberian indolence, according to Machado) but instead a "Spanish Buddha". In the original, "Profession of Faith" (part of *Parábolas*, along with "Advice") posits a mystical interdependency between Creator and created. The speaker vows to create the Creator in his turn and contrasts the pure stream of Caritas with the cloudy springs of "loveless faith". But Paterson's "sea", which has various associations through the *Parábolas*, becomes a pool of consciousness on which God "scatters like the moonlight" and "where He wakes, or sinks to dreams". It isn't a simple contrast towards which Paterson's poem moves but a paradox: in which the "empty heart" of a "pure source" is set against the "turbid river" of a "heartless faith".

Like Calvino (for whom the straight line continued into infinity was a possible way of eluding time, or death, and making himself "unreachable") Paterson is interested in lightness and a similar sort of quickness—in keeping "our/ *danse macabre*/ one step ahead of time..." (a literal rendering of Machado) or in rejecting (this is his invention) "the time-tied melody" in the first of the "Marginal Notes". Something may have changed since a poem such as "The Alexandrian Library", the longest poem in *Nil Nil*, whose superscription (by Paterson's fictional Aussemain) seems to occupy a territory similar to several of those in *The Eyes*. That text was a sort of quest (with plenty of hints of the liminal: "You are poised on the end of the platform, the word/ on the tip of its tongue", for example) for the ultimate book, perhaps the *essential* book. But whereas in the earlier poem the attainment of the ideal was deferred through an accumulation of clutter, that clutter has gone from *The Eyes*. The idealised Nothing is promoted as though almost (partly) achieved and with it comes an emphasis upon decline. "A Memory of Childhood"'s repeated first stanza frames the other three in the original. Paterson adjusts this, reducing the original's sense of stasis and bringing out something more than just the passage of time: the sun, which "has gone in" in the first stanza "has gone out" altogether by the end. In "Poetry" Machado moves towards transcendence: the ember of love shouldn't smoke; instead it should be urged into the cold brightness of a diamond. But Paterson turns this on its head, making a contrast between "early fires" and "later heat", whereby "steadiness", being "oblivious" are to be prized (the ideal is "forever") but are always in danger of falling away, just as "bright" declines into "smoulder". What is broken by Death in the Spanish text of "The Visit" is the link between the living and the dead. In Paterson, curiously, it is something else: "as I watched her breast rise and fall/

my heart grew strangely heavy”.

Like Dickinson and Calvino Paterson evinces some dislike of being fixed. In interview he has spoken of throwing the accent on process, on means rather than ends. *The Eyes* is a strong collection. It forms a convincing unity. One might query the brief tinges of didacticism (the “mindless diamond” of “Poetry”, the “mindless soliloquy” of the water in “The Waterwheel”) or occasional vagaries in the diction (the rain which “lacerates” the windows in “A Memory of Childhood”, the strangely dated “purple hour” in “The Work”). Behind a sense of held in exuberance which surfaces sometimes (“tiny fanes to the beggared gods” is one such Paterson invention) may lie the beneficial discipline of translation. Paterson has been using Machado, in some respect, to *get beyond himself*. “So now the beast is on his feet/ and the miracle of non-being complete...” he writes towards the end of “The Great Zero”. It will be interesting to see where he goes when he is once again on his own.