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Poetry

Border of a Dream: Selected Poems
Antonio Machado
Willis Barnstone, translator
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One can only approach Antonio Machado's poetry with a reverential and grateful heart. One of the foremost poets of Spain, of the genius Generation of '98, his poems bring a spare and accurate voice that pierces through to the essential in everything. Reading Machado is like jumping into a purifying flame.

This bilingual edition covers forty years of Machado's poetry. It includes a foreword by John Dos Passos and a reminiscence by Juan RamÃ³n Jiménez. All of Machado's major works, such as Fields of Castilla and Solitudes, Galleries and Other Poems, are represented among the 136 poems, providing the largest collection of Machado's poetry in English.

The translator, twice a Pulitzer Prize Nominee in poetry and currently a distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Indiana, also wrote the introduction to this volume. He approaches translation as something born out of a friendship between the two writers, which allows for a freer and deeper revision into the new language. As he says in his essay An ABC of Translating Poetry, "A translation is an X-ray, not a Xerox."

Chief among the obvious benefits of such a thorough collection is that Machado's voice is allowed to ring whole. Readers are afforded the contrast between the ecstatic language of an earlier poem, such as: "O luminous afternoon! / The air is under a spell. / The white stork / dozes in flight" with a poem from the last two years of his life: "I will give you my song. / One sings what is lost, / with a green parrot / to say it on your balcony." One can see the poet's evolution, from his early political poems to his landscape poems to his fervent love poems, the language becoming ever sparer and more incandescent.

Though Barnstone's credentials and skills cannot be doubted, his approach to translation sometimes creates an odd situation for those who cannot read the accompanying Spanish.

Beyond occasional quirks in word choice or phrasing that sometimes move far away from the original, he does not always provide all of the original's stanzas, or translate the ones provided. For the reader comfortable in both languages, the omissions and alterations are easy to negotiate as creative license, especially if one accepts Barnstone's more intuitive approach to translation.

Though he is often characterized as a poet of stillness and memory, Machado uses language that vibrates with so much clarity, and images that are so purely observed, that his poetry cannot be described as anything but passionate. With a generous and good heart, Machado sends poetry ringing out into the world, blessing readers with its vision.

Naomi Millán