

LAND OF ALVARGONZALEZ

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LAND OF ALVARGONZALEZ

Antonio Machado, who is greatly admired in English-speaking countries, is surprisingly little translated into that language. The only English translation of a selection of his poems that I know is that in the series "Penguin Modern European Poets" (1974), where he shares a book with Juan Ramón Jiménez; 46 pages (24 poems) being devoted to the former and 54 pages (51 poems) to the latter. This neglect by translators is difficult to understand, for on the face of it the author of "Campos de Castilla" offers fewer difficulties than, say, Federico García Lorca — a poet who has been much more favoured by translators, good, bad and indifferent.

Of course, one has seen the occasional Machado poem translated in college magazines — "Campos de Soria", or sections of it, seeming to be the prime favourite. There is also a good translation of the "Soria cycle", titled "Fields of Soria", by William Zander, in "The Literary Review", (summer 1978), but so far I have not heard of any English translation of "Campos de Castilla", a work which had an impact comparable to that of "The Waste Land" in England or "Les Fleurs du Mal" in France.

This neglect is surprising and while I am not saying that it has instigated me to make up the deficiency, I consider it provides in part a good excuse for offering a

translation of the present poem. This must not be the only justification, for when a person attempts an uncommissioned translation it must be because something in the original attracts and urges him to respond to it in his own language. It must be a labour of love. In this respect it has been easy for me. Machado is a poet it is not difficult to reverence. His strong, unadorned verses offer an immediate appeal and the straightforwardness of his diction only enhances the subtlety of his feeling and the niceness of expression and detail.

But, I don't have to defend Machado. His virtues are well known. I shall not try to defend my translation either; let it fall or stand on any merits it might have. I have already explained my reasons for attempting it; there only remains to mention one or two points which gave rise to the only difficulties presented by the translation of the poem.

The first was a question of the medium: prose or verse? And if verse, which type, rhyming or non-rhyming? Prose was out. Of verse I could have chosen non-rhyming, but then something of effect would have been lost since the assonantal rhyme on the even lines is such an important element in the original. English being a consonantal language, assonance was difficult to achieve to any extent and impossible to maintain throughout the poem, so I fell back on courtesy rhyme, half rhyme and approximate vowel sounds. When even this was not possible I was not averse to using full rhyme, believing that the slight jar of a full rhyme was preferable to the flat fall of non-rhyme—though there is a little of this also in my translation.

The second difficulty was presented by the line lengths. Spanish is much more syllabic than English and this has the effect of slowing the rhythm of the short lines in the original poem. Lines in English with the same number of

words would sound much too staccato and headlong in the reading, so it was necessary to body them out by introducing an extra word (but always one connected with the context), or by using the more wordy of two possible translations, when the case presented itself. Many instances of this can be seen in the course of the poem. The first line will serve as an example. In the original it is:

Siendo mozo Alvargonzález,

Here, in just three words there are ten syllables. The translation is:

As a young man Alvargonzález,

The five English words can only muster between them nine syllables.

The poem presented no great difficulty of interpretation, so in that sense it was easy to be faithful to the original. Translation has been called "la belle infidèle", but there is a limit to how unfaithful a translation can be and still be called a translation. I think particularly translators should avoid twisting syntax to achieve a rhyme or any other special effect. As an example of what should be avoided I quote the first verse of the English version of "Retrato", in the Penguin book, mentioned above:

Recollections of a patio in Seville,
a lucid, lemon-ripening garden — my infancy.

The years of my youth? Twenty on soil of Castile;
a plotlessness I shall not recall, my history.

This borders on the burlesque. A person reading this and who didn't know the original would think Machado was some kind of nincompoop and one couldn't blame him for not reading any further — a pity, for some of the other poems are nicely translated. Admittedly Machado sometimes does invert syntax, but it sounds more natural in the Spanish where the sentence structure is less rigid, and it

is particularly hallowed by tradition in Spanish poetry. In my translation I used inversion of syntax very sparingly.

In places I have had to vary a little from the original to get the effect I wanted. Where I have done this I have put a footnote giving the literal translation of the phrase or line(s) from the Spanish. When it was a question of changing just one word or adding a word not found in the original in order to fill out a line, I considered it was not necessary to annotate, otherwise the footnotes would be too numerous and the abundance of numbers would tend to distract. Machado occasionally switches from the present simple to the past imperfect—at times in order to get the right number of syllables for his lines and at others for dramatic effect. In my translation I generally followed his tense indications.

I have been emboldened to offer this translation for "ES" by the knowledge that in the past issues of the review have carried translations of poems. I refer to issues one and two with the translations by Dra. María Jesús Pérez Martín of Hopkins "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and Henry Vaughan's "They are all gone into the world of light!" Both these poems offered difficulties to the translator which "La tierra de Alvargonzález" fortunately did not present; had it done so I would assuredly not have attempted it. They are accompanied by detailed explications and commentaries which necessarily compete for importance with the translations themselves. Again, fortunately, "La tierra de Alvargonzález" needed the minimum of explication, thereby halving the translator's work, which otherwise, because of its length, would have been daunting. Unadorned, therefore, and buttressed merely by this brief introduction, the translation follows.

LAND OF ALVARGONZALEZ

To the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez.

I

As a young man Alvargonzález,
with property enough and land
to be deemed well-off elsewhere
but here a wealthy man (1),
in the fair at Berlanga
fell in love with a maid,
and he took her as his wife
a year later to the day.
There was a very splendid wedding,
as all who saw it well recall,
and on returning to his village
he gave a famous feast as well;
there were bagpipes and tambourines,
flute, guitar and bandore,
fireworks in the Valencian style
and dances of Aragón.

II

Happily lived Alvargonzález
in the love of his land and home.
Three boys were born to him,
and in the country sons mean gold (2),
and once they were old enough, he set
one to work in garden and orchard (3),

(1) Literally, "owner of a medium-sized property, which in other lands is called well-being and here opulence.

(2) Lit., "which in the country are riches".

(3) "huerta" can be orchard or garden. I have used both words because in the poem we see the Alvargonzález had fruit trees, roses (and vegetables?) in it.

another to look after the sheep,
and he gave the youngest to the church.

III

There is much envy and bad blood (4)
among those who work the land,
and in the countryman's home
envy raised its ugly head (5).

The two eldest boys got married,
Alvargonzález had daughters-in-law,
who brought discord into the house
before a grandchild was born.

The country people in their greed
think how they can profit by a death (6);
they can't enjoy what they've got
through yearning for what they may be left.

The youngest son found Latin and prayers
less attractive than pretty maids
and he didn't like to dress
by pulling on clothes over his head;
so one day he hung up his soutane
and set out for foreign lands.
His mother wept and his father
gave him his blessing and gave him funds (7).

IV

Alvargonzález is old and now
his brow is wrinkled and overcast (8);

(4) Lit., "much blood of Cain". One of the many biblical references in the poem, for which there is no equivalent English expression.

(5) Lit., "envy started a fight".

(6) Lit., "The greed of the country has its eye on the inheritance that follows death".

through his beard like silver shows
the blue-tinged shade of his face.

One morning in autumn
he set out alone from home;
he went without his greyhounds,
hunting dogs second to none (9).

He went sad and pensive
among the gold-leafed poplar trees;
and after walking for long and long,
he arrived at a clear bright spring.

Then lying down on the ground,
he placed his blanket on a stone,
and there at the edge of the spring
he slept to the water's song

THE DREAM

I

And Alvargonzález could see
a ladder just as Jacob did:
it was pitched between earth and heaven (10),
and he heard a voice speaking to him.
But the faery weavers of dream
among the golden fleeces and white
have wreathed another strand
of wool that is black as night (11).

(7) Lit., "gave him his blessing and (his part of) the inheritance".
As we see in the "Cuento-Leyenda", the inheritance refers to the proceeds from the sale of the ilex grove.

(8) Lit., "The stern brow of Alvargonzález is now wrinkled".

(9) Lit., "keen (sharp) hunting dogs".

(10) Lit., "which went from earth to heaven".

(11) Lit., "among the white tufts and golden fleeces have put a wisp of black wool".

II

These boys are playing
at the door of his home
and between the two elder skips
a raven with wings like coal.
His wife, who is sewing, watches
and, at times, smiles and sings.

— Children, what are you doing? — she asks.
They look at each other and say nothing.

— Go up to the woodland, children,
and before nightfall comes
with an armful of kindling (12)
make a fire to warm our home (13).

III

In the house of Alvargonzález
the firewood is piled on the hearth;
the eldest son tries to light it
but the flame will not start.

— Father, the fire won't light,
the kindling must be damp.

His brother comes to help him
and over the logs of oak
he piles the branches and chips
but the fire does not take (14).
The youngest comes and he lights
in the black chimney place
of the kitchen a fire which warms
and brightens all the house.

(12) "estepa" is rockrose, but I have translated it here and in the next verse by "kindling", which is used for starting fires.

(13) Lit., "make me a good flame".

(14) Lit., "but the embers go out".

IV

Alvargonzález takes and lifts
the youngest boy in his arms
and puts him sitting on his knee:
— You made the huose bright and warm (15);
you have first place in my love
though you are my last born.

The two eldest boys withdraw
into the corners of his dream.
Between the fugitive pair
an iron axe-head gleams.

THAT EVENING

I

Over the naked fields
like an enormous balloon,
stained with a purple flush,
appeared the full moon.
The sons of Alvargonzález
walked silently on;
they had seen their father sleeping
by the clear spring alone.

II

On the father's face there is a frown
which gives it a gloomy look;
it is graved between the brows

(15) Lit., "Your hands make the fire".

like the blow of an axé or billhook (16).
He is dreaming of his sons,
that his sons stab him to death;
and when he wakes up he sees
that it is the truth he has dreamt.

III

By the verge of the spring
Alvargonzález lay stretched out dead.
He had four stab wounds
between his side and his breast,
through which his life blood flowed,
and an axe blow in the neck.
The clear water of the spring
through the fields recounts the deed (17)
and meanwhile the two assassins
go fleeing towards the beechwood.
To the Laguna Negra they go,
below the Duero's source;
they bear the dead man and leave
behind them a bloody trace;
and there in that bottomless pool,
which tells no secret tales (18),
with a stone tied to his feet
they gave him a watery grave (19).

IV

Near the edge of the spring
Alvargonzález' blanket was found

(16) Lit., "like the blaze mark of an axe".

(17) Lit., "The clear running water recounts the deed in the country".

(18) Lit., "which keeps its secrets well".

(19) Lit. "they gave him a tomb".

and from there to the beechwood
a bloody trail on the ground (20).

No one in the village dared
to go near the black pool,
and it was pointless to sound it
for it has no bottom at all.

A pedlar who was passing through
that part of the land was caught,
accused of the crime in Dauria
and garrotted to death.

V

When some months had gone by
the mother died of grief.

Those who found her dead
said that her hands were stiff
and spread over her face
to hide the world from her sight (21).

VI

The sons of Alvargonzález
have sheepfold and orchard now,
meadows with fine grass
and fields of wheat and rye.
They have a beehive too which is kept
in an old lightning-struck elm;
there are two oxen teams for the plough,
a mastiff and a thousand sheep.

(20) Lit., "could be seen a trail of blood".

(21) Lit., "her face hidden with them".

OTHER DAYS

I

The blackberries are now in flower
and the plum trees white with bloom;
now the golden bees suck nectar
to fill their honeycombs (22),
and from their nests which crown
the high church-tower tops,
patient squiggles against the sky,
protrude the forms of storks (23).

Now the elm trees by the roadway
and the poplars along the streams
which flow towards their father (24)
the Duero, are turning green.

The sky is blue and the violet
mountains are bare of snow.

The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches now;
the man who worked this land is dead
but the earth does not cover his bones.

II

The beautiful land of Spain
austere, warlike and fine
Castille, with its long rivers,
has a handful of mountains high
between Soria and Burgos the same
as fortresses or bastions

(22) Lit., "suck for their beehives".

(23) Lit., "appear the hooked squiggles of storks" As this is one of the two or three metaphors in the whole poem, I considered it appropriate to use a metaphor in the translation.

(24) Lit., "which seek the father Duero".

or helmets with crests or plumes,
and one of the crests is Urbión.

III

In order to take the road
from Salduero to Covalada,
which is a steep hilly road
below the pine wood of Vinuesa,
go Alvargonzález' two sons
riding on two brown mules.
They are going in search of livestock
to take back with them to their home,
and in this country of pinewoods
their long day's journey has begun.
Up along the Duero's banks they go,
leaving behind them the stone-arched bridge
over the river and near it
the country houses of the idle and rich
returned Americans. Deep down (25)
in the valley the waterfall sounds
and the mules' hooves can be heard
clatter and rattle on the stones.
On the other bank of the Duero
can be heard the pitiful chant:
"The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth."

(25) Lit., "the country houses (or settlement) of the idle and opulent small town of Spanish Americans who have returned". An "indiano" is a Spaniard who, having become rich in America, returns to his own country to settle down.

IV

They have now reached a place
where the pines grow dense and thick,
and the elder brother, who leads the way,
spurs and urges his mule to go quick (26),
saying: — Let's get a move on
for there's more than two leagues in all
of this pine wood and we got
to get to the end before night fall (27).

These two sons of the country,
rough, coarse-grained and crass (28),
tremble now when they remember
what happened one evening in the past.
There in the depths of the wood
once more the song is heard:
"The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth,
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth."

V

From Salduero onwards the road
runs parallel to the river bank;
on either side of the river
the pines grow high and rank (29)
and the rocks look dark and threatening
as the valley narrows and shrinks.
The strong pines of the forest
with their massive spreading tops
and naked overground roots

(26) Lit., "spurs his brown mule".

(27) Lit., "finish them (off) before night comes".

(28) Lit., "roughly and unevenly made".

(29) Lit., "the pine wood grows and rises".

firmly hooked round stones and rocks (30);
pines with silver-tinged trunks,
whose needles turn a bluish shade,
young pines; there are old ones also
covered with white leprous mold,
mosses and snow-white lichens,
which cover all their massy trunks.

These fill the valley and are lost to sight
to the right and left of the river banks.

Juan, the elder, says to his brother:

— If Blas Antonio has his stock
grazing near Mount Urbi6n (31),
we've got a long journey ahead of us.

— The longer way towards Urbi6n
can mean a shorter journey homewards (32),
if we decide on the short cut
towards the Laguna Negra
and go down the mountain pass
from Santa In6s to Vinuesa.

— Bad journey that and a worse road.
I swear I've no wish whatever
to see either of them again. Let's make
the bargain in Covaleda;
stay the night there and come back early
tomorrow with the light of day
through this valley, for, at times,
the long way home is often the near way (33).

As they ride close to the river (34)
the two brothers realize
that as they advance, the old trees

(30) Lit., "fastened to the stones".

(31) Lit., "If Blas Antonio is grazing his herd of cows near Urbi6n".

(32) Lit., "can be cut on the way back".

(33) Lit., "he who thinks he is taking a short cut is (really) making a detour".

(34) Lit., "The two brothers ride near the river and observe..."

increase in number and size,
and the loomnig rocks of the mountain
black out the skyline from their eyes (35).
The leaping waters of the river
seem to murmur or chant (36):
"The land of Alvargonzález
will be filled with riches and wealth,
and he who has worked the land
does not sleep beneath the earth."

PUNISHMENT

I

Although a greedy man may have
a pen to protect his sheep,
bags to keep his money,
granaries for his wheat,
and grasping ways, his hands
are no good at working the earth.
So, after a year of plenty
there followed a year of dearth.

II

Blood red poppies grew
in every field that they ploughed
and the smut rotted the ears
of corn and wheat in the ground.
In the orchard the blossoming fruit trees
were killed by untimely frosts
and through an evil spell

(35) Lit., "and the rocky places of the mountain close the horizon on them".

(36) Lit., "seem to sing or tell".

the sheep sickened and were lost.
The curse of God seemed to land
on the two Alvargonzález
and the year of dearth was followed
by long years of distress.

III

It is a winter's night.
A blizzard is raging outside (37).
The Alvargonzález are sitting awake
by a fire that is almost dead.
The same bitter memory
weighs in the thoughts of both (38)
as they sit with their eyes fixed
on the dying embers in the hearth.
In the sleepless, fuelless house (39)
the night is long and cold.
A smoky paraffin lamp
hangs on the blackened wall.
The lamp light flits in the draught
and shines with a reddish glow
that falls on the pensive heads
of the two murderers below.
With a long harsh sigh
Alvargonzález eldest son
breaks the silence and exclaims:
—Brother, what evil we've done!
The wind rattles the shutters
and beats against the door
and it sounds high in the chimney
with a prolonged, hollow roar.
Then all is silence again

(37) Lit., "The snow is falling in swirls".

(38) Lit., "They have their thoughts fixed on the same memory".

(39) Lit., "They have neither sleep nor firewood".

and the only sound which falls
in the freezing house is the splutter
of the lamp on the blackened wall (40).
The younger son says: —Brother,
let's not think of the past any more! (41).

THE TRAVELLER

I

It is a winter's night.
The wind is lashing the boughs
of the poplar trees. The snow
has covered and whitened the ground.
Through the snow storm a man,
wrapped in a long black cloak
which covers him up to the eyes,
is riding along the road.
On entering the village, he asks
for the Alvargonzález house
and when he reaches the door,
he calls out before he dismounts.

II

The two brothers inside
heard someone knock on the door
and the sound of a horse's hooves
batter and stamp on the stones (42).
They both raised their eyes
full of fright and surprise.

(40) Lit., "and at intervals the wick of the lamp splutters in the numbingly cold air".

(41) Lit., "let's forget what's over and done".

(42) Lit., "and the hooves of a horse on the stones".

—Who is it? Answer —they shouted.
—Miguel —came a voice from outside.
It was the voice of the traveller
who had left for foreign climes (43).

III

When the outer door was opened,
the horseman rode in slow
and dismounted inside. He was
covered from head to foot in snow.
For some time in silence
he wept in his brothers' arms.
One of them took his hat and cloak
and the other his horse to the barn (44),
then he entered the rustic house
and drew near the fire to get warm (45).

IV

The youngest of the three brothers
who had set out for foreign lands
when he was young and venturous,
now returned a wealthy man.
He was wearing a dark suit
of thick heavy velvet,
which was fastened round the waist
with a wide leather belt.
A heavy chain formed
a loop of gold on his breast.
He was tall of stature and robust
and his eyes were large and black

(43) Lit., "who had left for distant lands".

(44) Lit., "Then he gave horse to one and his cloak and hat to the other".

(45) Lit., "he sought the closeness of the fire".

and full of melancholy.
His skin was bronzed by the sun
and over his forehead the hair
in waving ringlets fell.
His lordly bearing is derived
from a father who tilled the earth
and to whom he owes his fortune,
love, power and wealth.
Miguel was the most handsome
of the three Alvargonzález boys
for the eldest's face was disfigured
by his thick bushy brows
under a low ignoble forehead,
while the eyes of the second son
could not look at a person straight
and were cruel, baleful and grim (46).

V

The three brothers in silence
regard the dismal home;
and in the dark of the night
the air chills to the bone (47).
—Brothers, have you no firewood?
—says Miguel.

—We have none
—answers the eldest.

A man
miraculously opens the door,
the heavy door, which is locked
and secured with two iron bars.

(46) Lit., "and the second (was made ugly) by his restless eyes which cannot look straight (and which are) grim and cruel".

(47) Lit., "the cold and wind get worse".

The face of the man who enters
is like that of the father dead.
A halo of golden light
encircles the white-haired head.
He has a bundle of wood on his shoulder
and an iron axe in his hand.

THE RETURNED AMERICAN (48)

I

Miguel from his brothers bought
a part of that ill-starred land,
for from America he had brought
wealth enough for a man (49).
But gold spent on badlands
glitters more than gold interred
and still more in paupers' hands
than hidden in earthenware jars.

The youngest began to work the earth
with faith, persistence and will
and the two elder brothers went back
their plots of land to till.

In he fields of Miguel
the teeming summer poured
a rich abundance of grain;
a fertile and golden hoard (50);
and soon from village to village
the wondrous fact is revealed
that the curse of God has fallen

(48) See note 25 on "indianos".

(49) Lit., "much wealth".

(50) Lit., "Now the fertile summer returned to Miguel's fields with
massy ears (of cereals) pregnant with golden grain".

on the two murderers' fields (51).

Now the people sing a song
which recounts the dreadful crime:
"At the edge of the spring
they took his life.
The wicked sons put him
to a cruel death.
Into the bottomless pool
they cast the father dead.
He does not sleep under the ground,
he who has worked the earth".

II

Miguel, with his two greyhounds
and his gun over his arm (52),
was going towards the mountains
on an evening peaceful and calm.
He was walking between the green
poplars which lined the way,
when he heard a voice singing:
"He was not buried in a grave.
Through the pine trees in the valley
of the Revinuesa
they bore their dead father
towards the Laguna Negra".

THE HOUSE

I

The house of Alvargonzález
is an old rambling house

(51) Lit., "the two murderers have a curse on their fields".

(52) Lit., "and armed with his gun".

(53) Lit., "when the door is open to the fields".

with four narrow windows.
At a hundred yards from the town,
it is built between two elms
which, like gigantic sentinels,
give it shade in the summer
and dry leaves in the fall.

It is a house of farming folk,
who, though rich, are low-born.
You can see the smoky hearth
with its benches of stone
without going into the house
if you look through the open door (53).

The food for two families,
in two small earthenware pots,
can be seen boiling and bubbling
over the embers on the hearth.

On the right hand are the courtyard
and the stable; on the left,
the orchard with the beehives,
and at back, the worn steps
which lead up to the rooms
where the two families dwell (54).

Here the Alvargonzález live,
the two sons with their wives.
Two children were born to both,
but all the children died,
so there is ample space for all
in what the parents' house provides (55).

(54) Lit., "divided into two dwellings (or flats)".

(55) Lit., "Both couples, who had two children (each), whom they were unable to bring up, have more than enough room in the paternal house".

Giving on to the orchard
there is a building apart
with a thick oak-leaved table,
and hanging on the wall,
there are two cowhide chairs,
a black abacus with enormous beads
and a pair of rusty spurs
above a wooden chest.

In this forgotten building
where Miguel now lives,
the aged parents used to sit
on an evening in spring
—when the rose-buds open
and the brambles turn white—
to see the orchard in bloom
or the stork in the blue May sky
teaching its nestlings to use
their ungainly wings in flight (56).

And when the heat was too great
to sleep on summer nights,
here at the window they heard
the nightingale singing outside.

It was here that Alvargonzález,
proud of his orchard and land
and full of love for his family,
dreamt his dreams of grandeur.

When in its mother's arms
he saw his eldest son,
with its head and smiling face
drenched in the golden sun,
and he saw the baby lifting
its eager, greedy little hands

(56) Lit., "teaching its young to make use of their slow wings".

to pick at the scarlet cherries
and the ripe dark-skinned plums,
or that evening in autumn,
golden, peaceful and fair,
he thought a man might be able
to be happy here on the earth.

Now the people have a song
which from village to village goes:
"Oh house of Alvargonzález,
what days of sadness and woe
await you, murderers' house;
let nobody call at your door!"

II

It is an evening in autumn.
The nightingales have gone
from the gold-leafed poplar grove
and the cicada is dumb.

The remaining swallows,
which have not yet migrated,
will die, and the storks
their nests of broom have deserted
in towers and belfries.

All gone. And over the home
of Alvargonzález the wind-wrenched leaves
of the elms shower down (57).
The three rounded acacia
shrubs, however, can be seen
in the atrium of the church
with their branches still green,
and the spiky chestnuts

(57) Lit., "Over the house of Alvargonzález the elms are shedding their wind-wrenched leaves".

at intervals come loose
from the horsechestnut tree.
There are rose hips on the rose
again, and the gladness of autumn
shines in the meadows.

Over slopes and hillsides,
on rolling lands and dales,
there are patches of new green
grass in the summer-burned fields (58).
The low, bare mountain tops
and treeless ridges are crowned
about their bald summits
with layers of lead-grey clouds,
and among the withered brambles
and dank, yellowing ferns
below the massive pinewood,
the teeming waters run
to swell the parent river,
thru gullies and over stones.

The earth abounds in colours
of silvery blue and leaden grey
with patches of rusty red,
all enveloped in violet light.

Oh lands of Alvargonzález,
in the heart of Spain alone,
poor lands, lands of sadness,
so poor that they have a soul!

Moorlands crossed by the wolves
which howl at the bright moon
as they go from wood to wood (59),

(58) Lit., "On hillsides and hills, on steep slopes and gullies (glens), the new green and the still summer-burnt grass alternate".

(59) Lit., "Moorlands that the wolf crosses howling at the clear moon from wood to wood".

wastelands full of round stones,
where white skeletons shine,
by the vultures picked clean;
poor, bare, solitary fields
without roadways or inns,
oh, poor, poor, accursed fields
of this fatherland of mine! (60)

THE LAND

I

One morning in autumn,
season when the land is ploughed,
Juan and the "American" harness (61)
the two oxen teams of the house.
Martín remains in the garden
hoeing and weeding the ground (62).

II

One morning in autumn,
season when the fields are tilled,
the early morning light
is reflected behind the hill
where Juan's brown oxen team
advances slowly and still (63).

Thistle, burdock and thorn,
wild oats and darnel too,

(60) Lit., "oh poor, accursed fields, poor fields of my fatherland!"

(61) See note 25 on "Indianos".

(62) Lit., "pulling out weeds", or, more commonly, "weeding" An intance of how the line had to be lengthened in English to approximate the metrical effect and number of syllables of the Spanish.

(63) Lit., on a hill, with the morning sky as backdrop, Juan's brown (oxen) team slowly advances".

fill this accursed land
resistent to pick and hoe.

Of the curved oaken plough
the ploughshare sunk in the earth
with a vain effort advances.
Though it try for all it's worth
and open a groove in the ground,
the groove closes in again (64).

"When the murderer ploughs
his is an arduous task;
before a furrow in the ground,
he'll have a wrinkle on his face."

III

Martín, who was in the garden,
digging and wielding the hoe,
stopped for a moment to rest.
A cold sweat bathed his brow
when he looked.

In the east
the moon in the sky was full
and stained with a purple blush.
Its light fell behind the wall
of the garden.

Martín's blood
froze with horror and fear.
When he sank his hoe in the earth,
it came out stained with gore (65).

(64) Lit., "It seems that according as it cleaves the inside of the ground and advances, the furrow closes in again".

(65) Lit., "The hoe (spade) he sank in the earth was stained with blood".

IV

The "American" settled down (66)
in the land in which he was born,
and as his wife he took
a rich and beautiful girl.

The Alvargonzález farm
and all on it now is his,
for his brothers sold him the house,
orchard, garden, beehives and fields.

THE MURDERERS

I

Juan and Martín, the eldest
of Alvargonzález' sons, began
a wearisome march one day,
Duero upriver, at dawn.

The star of the morning
gleamed high in the blue.
The dense snow-white mists
were tinged with a rosy hue
in the valleys and ravines,
and a lead-grey turban was formed
of clouds round Mount Urbión,
where the river Duero is born.

They drew near the spring.
The clear water flowed
with a sound as if recounting
a well-known story, told
a thousand times and which must
be a thousand times retold.

(66) See note 25 on "indianos".

The water that flows through the fields
says over and over again (67):
I know the crime; is not life
near the water a crime?

As the two brothers were passing
the clear waters repeated:
"By the verge of the spring
Alvargonzález was sleeping."

II

Juan said to his brother:
—Last night when I was going home,
by the light of the moon the garden
was a marvel to behold.

In the distance, among the roses,
I saw a man inclined
towards the earth; a silver
sickle gleamed in his hand.

Then he straightened and turned
his face. He walked back and forth (68)
a while without looking at me
and once more over the earth
I saw him bend his back.
His hair was white as the snow.
The full moon shone and the garden
was a marvel to behold.

III

By mid-evening they had crossed
the Santa Inés mountain pass.
It was a November evening,

(67) Lit., "says in its monotone".

(68) Lit., "He took a few steps through the garden".

sad, cold and overcast.
Towards the Laguna Negra
they silently advanced.

IV

In the dying evening
a red sun weakly shone (69)
among the ancient beech trees
and the centenary pines.

It was a stretch of wood
and dark threatening crags;
with here a gaping mouth
or monster with grasping claws,
and there a shapeless hump
or grotesque belly or paunch (70),
threatening muzzles of beasts
with jagged fangs for teeth (71),
rocks and rocks and tree trunks
and trunks and branches and limbs.
Darkness and fear and water
at the bottom of the ravine.

V

A wolf appeared, with eyes
burning and gleaming like coals.
The night had fallen, a night
wet and dark as a tomb (72).

(69) Lit., "When the evening was falling, a red sun filtered through..."

(70) Lit., "there a grotesque paunch".

(71) Lit., "and jagged teeth".

(72) Lit., "wet, dark and black".

In the wolf-loud forest, the brothers (73)
wished to retrace their steps.
A hundred lupine eyes
burned in the forest at their backs.

VI

The two murderers reached
the edge of the Laguna Negra,
where a wall of stone surrounds
the still, transparent water;
a wall where vultures nest
and where the echo sleeps.
In the clear water drink
the eagles from the peaks,
the wild boar from the hills,
the roebuck and the deer;
pure and silent water,
which mirrors eternity (74).
Impassible water, which keeps
in its bosom the heavenly spheres (75).
Father!, they shouted; to the bottom
of the still and silent lake
they fell, and the echo, father!
was repeated from rock to rock.

(73) "La selva ululaba"; literally, "The forest was howling". This personification is one of the few figures of speech in the poem. It is extended by the metaphorical use of "burned" in the next sentence.

(74) Lit., "which copies eternal things".

(75) Lit., "in its bosom the stars".