
In his “Nota a la Segunda Edición” Antonio Barbagallo explains that this book is the revised and updated version of a text based on his doctoral dissertation and originally published by the Diputación Provincial de Soria. The current edition adds a new chapter and “varios párrafos y citas” that result in “un estudio mucho más completo” (the author’s words). As for the extensive and helpful Bibliography included in the present volume, Barbagallo’s impassioned claim to have read “todo lo pertinente y alcanzable” constitutes a needlessly risky proposition, since “everything” is a comprehensive term.

In chapters 1 and 2, Barbagallo declares his intention of focusing on two books of poems, *Soledades* and *Campos de Castilla*. (Chapter numbers are used in this review to facilitate discussion, but they do not appear in the original text). He pays special attention not only to fundamental themes in both books, such as “el paisaje, el tiempo y la muerte,” but also to the ways in which these themes become interrelated and intertwined. Through detailed analysis of poems XXXII (“Las ascas de un crepúsculo morado”) and XCIV (“En medio de la plaza y sobre tosca piedra”) Barbagallo reaches the conclusion that, in spite of significant differences between *Soledades* and *Campos de Castilla*, there is no rupture but rather continuity between the two books. For Barbagallo, the noticeable “cambio” from one to the other consists mainly in the evolution of a central consciousness—a protagonist “yo”—that transcends self-pity and achieves a more general understanding of and concern for Spain, the land and its people, a process that carries the poet from a mostly subjective to a mostly objective poetic stance. Barbagallo emphasizes the relevance of autobiographical material to a fuller understanding of any writer’s work, which leads him to a sympathetic appraisal of Machado as a “good” man (agreeing with the poet’s own description in his self-portrait) and, therefore, unable to harbor extreme ideological positions, to hate the Spain which he deplores in his poetry and in his life. Chapters 3 continues the exploration of Machado’s approach to Spain through landscape, time, and history, “la historia socio-cultural y la intrahistoria,” the latter a concept that he shares with Unamuno. Present, past, and future coalesce in *Campos de Castilla*, where Machado evokes with longing Spain’s ancient glories, watches with sadness Spain’s current woes, and expresses hope for a better, renewed Spain.

In the following chapter (4) on “La tierra de Alvar González,” subtitled “cainismo: envidia-injusticia,” Barbagallo undertakes a close reading of this long poem. He disagrees with the prevalent view that envy and greed are the main causes of Alvar González’s death and argues that the true cause of
the criminal act is “la injusticia,” the father’s unjustified preference for the youngest son and disregard of his older brothers that incites them to commit parricide. Moreover, argues Barbagallo, the murderers are “víctimas de un destino cruel. Nacieron para ser asesinos y el camino para llegar a serlo fue por medio de la actuación arbitraria del padre.” Thus, the poem in its entirety poses “una gran pregunta existencial,” questions the why and how of each individual destiny. Chapter 5 examines Alvar González’s youngest son as a prototype of the “indiano/señorito,” essentially different from the hard-working “campesino,” and provides a smooth transition to the issue of emigration (ch. 6), especially “la emigración forzada [por la pobreza]” which plays an implicit rather than explicit role in Machado’s poetic appropriation of Spain through Castilla. The next two chapters (7 and 8) assess the theme of solitude from two points of view: “soledad cósmica o existencial” and “soledad personal o individual.” Barbagallo contends that Machado’s radical solitude, his longing for an unattainable God, his fear of “la nada,” the personal anguish of a man “siempre buscando a Dios entre la niebla” are finally alleviated by the discovery of love in the person of Leonor, his future wife, and that in her “don Antonio ha encontrado la salvación.” Hence, her death leaves the poet distraught and alone, with the utter loneliness that comes from having had and having lost what matters most: true, profound love. Chapter 9 on “El dolor de los hombres” does not seem to add any new material to what has already been forcefully stated, but the last two pages (“A modo de conclusión”) provide a concise and informative summary of the text as a whole.

This is a deeply felt, perceptive study of Machado by a forthrightly partisan critic. In some ways, though, Barbagallo is partisan to a fault. Many references to other scholars’ readings and interpretations of Machado’s poetry seem unnecessarily contentious, and frequent expressions of personal feeling and close identification with the poet at times interfere with the text’s intended scholarly tone (for example, the repeated references to Machado as “don Antonio,” or exclamations such as “¡Qué hermoso es este paisaje para Machado! ¡Qué hermoso es para nosotros!”). This book would have benefitted from a more restrained, less subjective approach to the topic under discussion, and from a tighter structure. That said, Antonio Barbagallo’s book offers a spirited, insightful introduction to Antonio Machado, the man and the poet, and particularly to his best known and possibly most significant books of poems, Soledades and Campos de Castilla.