



# The Power of Paradox in the Work of Spanish Poet Antonio Machado 1875-1939

Philip G. Johnston



This study focuses on a key figure in the Spanish literature of the previous one. Written in English, the monograph offers a substantial reassessment of the ideas of Antonio Machado. There can be little doubt that what in a general sense may be termed paradox is a powerful constituent in Antonio Machados makeup. Until now, however, it has not been the subject of a systematic study. This book fills this gap. Paradox is a very slippery term, with connotations that vary from the vague to the precise and from the positive to the pejorative. Without going into detailed definitions, Dr Philip G Johnston sensibly treats paradox from two different angles. On the one hand, he interprets it as meaning intellectual (and temperamental) conflict and contradiction and, on the other, he views it as a figure of speech, a rhetorical device, used for critical purposes, and encompassing concepts such as irony and incongruity (1). This is a sound, practical approach that enables him to draw maximum implications from the subject. The ambiguity that surrounds the term paradox gives rise to a problem he has to face immediately. It is that one of Machados first statements, made in 1903, on his philosophical posture - and an important one at that - is that he does not like paradoxes: Empiezo a creer, aun a riesgo de caer en paradojas, que no son de mi agrado, que el artista debe amar la vida y odiar el arte. Lo contrario de lo que he pensado hasta aqui. Dr Johnston glosses very sagely that this affirmation is to some extent undermined by the overall meaning of the passage which indicates a contradictory change of ideas (6). Machados readiness to change his mind is significant in itself and involves a central literary concern: the relation between life and art. Johnston acutely indicates that Unamunos reply amounted to a reprimand and speculates on its effect on Machado, eleven years his junior: it would almost certainly have made Machado - for whom Unamuno was always a maestro - reconsider or amend his views. More recent evidence clarifies this significant question. Machado published a carta abierta in El pais on 14 August 1903 in reply to Unamunos comments that, amazingly, was completely overlooked until Cecilio Alonso resuscitated it a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> The letter shows Machado, while revealing his total adhesion to Unamunos overall views, willing

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