

THE FINAL SOLITUDE OF THE POET ANTONIO MACHADO

(Memories of his Brother, José)

(Part 4)

THE OTHER POET

Manuel felt such a great and noble admiration for the work of Antonio that I don't think it was ever matched by that of anyone else. Nothing satisfied him as much as the success of his brother.

The life of these two poets was so closely linked that one of the principal factors which hastened the death of Antonio was the unavoidable absence of his brother.

As for their work—both in poetry and in theater—the day will come when those who study these two brothers will perhaps be surprised to find that, although different in appearance, they are both roots of the same tree.

If the value of their literary work were something which might be weighed, we would see that the scales were evenly balanced. And although this is true, neither the admirers of one nor those of the other will ever admit it, and this is typically Spanish...

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I will now try to make a brief evaluation of the work by the two Poets. Both are Sevillians who opened their eyes to a light which perceived more than it illuminated. There was hardly any difference in age. Manuel was only one year and several months older than Antonio. The influence of the family on their childhood was identical, and their education also springs from the same source—The Free School of Learning—which the two brothers both attended. The first environment of their childhood was, of course, that of Seville. After that it was Madrid, where their lives continued to develop.

The deep love which each brother felt for the other, together with their love of poetry, united them throughout their entire life. From the beginning, they were always seen together.

Their external environment, with all its complexities, would nevertheless serve to determine both their affinities, as well as their differences. Manuel entered into the life that awaited these young people with great determination and decisiveness. And with his unique gifts for adaptation he was able to cope with it. Antonio was more indecisive and reserved, but underneath his apparent timidity he possessed a will that was even stronger than that of his brother, which helped him follow a similar path. He did this even though on some occasions it demanded great patience and an infinite graciousness.

This happened at a time when both had begun to follow a somewhat Bohemian lifestyle. This type of behavior, which was certainly not dissolute, made them finally, and a little belatedly, look for a way to deal with their economic situation. Of course their acquaintance with the degenerate nature of life at its crudest, and with ruined lives which were just barely surviving, became for them a genuine school of vital knowledge. In doing this they were led in part by a curious desire to experience the romanticism which often seems to be the incurable bane of poets.

The romanticism which accompanies this profession, and which has cost so many their lives, is the origin or the prime material, as it were, without which their essential nature could not exist. Naturally, a life lived like that will eventually leave a remnant of sadness and inevitable skepticism from which it is necessary to free oneself in order to continue living. The sadness of living which Manuel described, saying:

My eyes have now been stained
by a vision of ugliness.
I never believed and now I believe
in everything, and in even more...

And which Antonio describes as:

...some things I don't choose to recall.

Let this suffice as a condensed version of the experience of this other type of life which influenced both of them so deeply. Although in Antonio that which remained was a deep sense of anguish.

I am now going to address briefly a topic which has lent itself to many lengthy commentaries and discussions dealing with the similarities and the differences between the two poets.

I will begin with the "Portrait" of Antonio, a poem which was published in 1912 in his third book, *Fields of Castile*, and which is his first and only portrait. It is, as anyone who reads it may appreciate, something fundamental, definitive and transcendent. So fundamental, in fact, that it is really the quintessence of his psychological personality.

His childhood in Seville; his youth in Madrid; his allusion to a Bohemian lifestyle that was in a certain sense obligatory; his total lack of presumption—"you already know the shabby state of my clothes"—; his attitude toward women; his politics with a strong sense of freedom but without extremism; the search for a tranquil source for his poetry; the concept of "crickets who chirp at the moon," both then and now, when one pauses to distinguish "the echoing voices"; his question of whether he is "classical or romantic" and the certainty he is both; but I believe that the most typical and the most transcendent aspect of his character, which was always present and leaves its unmistakable seal on his entire work and on his entire life, is synthesized in this confession:

I converse with the man who is always with me
like one who hopes to speak with God one day.

And after that, a certain disdainful pride which makes him say;

And after all, I owe you nothing; for all I have written,
you owe me...

And finally, one of the most fundamental traits of the Poet: the prediction regarding the end of his life, written some twenty years before his death.

In this absolute and definitive way he leaves us his portrait, created only once, and for all time.

And now let us see how Manuel makes his portrait, which is also admirable. But, different from Antonio, he describes his life at three separate times. The first is found in his book, *Soul*—the first one he wrote—where it appears at the beginning with the title, “Adelphous,” a composition dated in Paris, in 1898.

This is a truly remarkable poem from which many people remember some of the words and in which, as in Antonio’s poem, there are some distinctive aspects of the poet’s character. It begins by saying:

I am, like others who have come to my land
—I am of the Moorish race, an old friend of the sun—
who conquered everything and then lost it all.
My spikenard soul is that of the Spanish Arab.
.....
All my wishes died one moonlit night
when it was beautiful not to think or feel...

Then there are these lines which show his skepticism about a life that will eventually take him wherever it wishes.

.....
These waves brought me and carry me along
and they never allow me to choose my path!

And we can see that there are similar feelings in the portrait of both poets when Manuel also expresses strong feelings of pride and haughtiness:

I ask nothing of you. Nor do I love or hate you. What
you let me do for all of you, you can also do for me...

It must not be forgotten, however, that Manuel was the first to express this feeling, since the lines we have just copied were written in 1898, and *Fields of Castile*, in 1912. This sentiment was something that was characteristic of both poets, and it reminds me of the time when Antonio, in a moment of ill-humor, said: “for the most part, humanity is not worth what it cost to baptize it.”

And commenting further on the poem we have just discussed, I will say that one of the typical aspects of Manuel’s behavior is that he never let himself be carried along

by a rush of events, and he always imposed on them the distinctive mark of his character. This was fortunate for him because, as he used to say, “poetry is one thing,” but the world we live in is something else.

When his first book, *Soul*, was published, we were able to see the qualities which were most characteristic of him: “agility, grace, dexterity, and skill,” which he also possessed until the end of his life. Therefore, we were astonished to see him fall so suddenly, making a grotesque jump with the agility typical of the Pierrot of whom he speaks in his second book, *Whimsy*. Consider, for example, the refinement and the elegance of his miniatures like “Versailles,” which is one of a kind, and in which there is such complete and utter understanding it would be difficult to equal, because the intuition of the Poet—a true poet like this one—surpasses everything. Let us enjoy all this in his poem, “Versailles”:

I picked up a dry leaf
in the park,
and I entered the Trianon
with it in my hand;
the leaf
was clothed in green.

The King and Queen!,
a thousand voices shouted;
the echoes of the royal march
were heard,
and the halberds touched the floor.
The King and Queen! Luis with his cortege
appeared on the threshold.

Luis. Sun. King. His proud
eyes cast their noble glance
on all his people:
the valiant nobles,
the gallant ladies,
the intelligent
and the elegant...
Curly wigs...
Cornucopias portray
exquisite figures;

and the maidens
and little princesses
gossip of love,
of love affairs,
while they are surrounded
by a throng of gallants,
and amid silks, flounces and ruffles,
colors and sound
swirl and recede;

discrete voices
quiet the sound during
the calm hour of cameos.

Gallants and ladies
whisper to each other;
tears without cause,
a sigh that vanishes...
elegant sorrows, gallant pain.

The sky filled with lines
that look like lace...
and the sun sinks into the porcelain
of some scarlet clouds,
and the countryside gallantly
bowed to the moon.

And these “Figulinas” which (except for a difference of time and place) can only be compared to those delightful Greek “Tanagras.” The enchanted world of “Miniatures,” a truly incomparable poem in which those miniaturized loves achieve the magic of being condensed while still reflecting colors that can only be compared to the iridescent hues seen on soap bubbles. Then, he also achieves an unforgettable success with his composition entitled “Fin de siglo.” The eighteenth century which he describes with his usual mastery:

.
the gallant encyclopedist
who painted the miniatures
and invented the guillotine.

The same guillotine which all these princesses and maidens of that enchanted world encountered. Since, as far as I know, they have never invented any other guillotines to match it.

But then let us examine another truly grotesque jump from France to Spain, something that is typically Spanish and reminiscent of the eternal Castilian plateau. I am referring to his well-known poem entitled “Castile,” which half the world already knows by heart, and is waiting for the other half to learn.

One must realize that this moving description of the desolate Castilian plateau could only be equaled and enlarged, somewhat later, by the author of *Fields of Castile*. The terribly dramatic and definitive aspect of these lands where the legendary Cid once traveled, are described by the masterful hand of Manuel. As it also happens in the work of his brother, the oppressive interior is matched by the arduous exterior.

The sun burns, the air smolders.

A time when even the Cid and his men are forced to seek refuge:

In the blinding sun, thirsty and exhausted,
with his twelve followers, through the terrible
Castilian plain—dust, sweat and iron—
the Cid continues his journey into exile.

And their exile takes them through the scorched countryside, following the new impulse of a miracle achieved by a little girl:

her blue eyes were filled with tears.

There is no other deed by the Cid that will equal the sublime beauty of this retreat.

I will now describe another aspect which is very different from what we have seen in order to demonstrate once again the innate talent and skill with which he writes about the most varied poetic topics. I am referring to the unique sonnet: "Portrait of Felipe IV" picturing all the decadence of the House of Austria, which the elevated points of his long blonde moustache tried in vain to hide. And I will also mention the uncompromising resemblance to the time of the Medicis in "Oliveretto de Fermo." As we read these and other poems with many different themes, we can easily understand why Antonio, with his deep understanding, once said to me:

"Manuel is a wonderful poet, but for me the really remarkable thing is not his songs, like most people think, but all the rest: *Soul*, *Whimsy*, *The Bad Poem*, etc."

And let us remember once again the pure, authentic Spanish words of Antonio's great poem, "Alvargonzález," in which he has searched for, and found, values that were equal to those of the people, but where he never ceases to preserve his own characteristic and unmistakable nature which can never be matched by anything or anyone else. In Manuel, on the other hand, the fusion is absolute.

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Returning to Manuel, I believe that it is appropriate to place some emphasis on his poem, "The Bullfight," which is so typically Spanish and is again also quite unique, as everyone knows. The bullfights are pictured so vividly that they do not lose even one iota of their splendor nor, we must also say, of their barbarity which would be difficult to surpass; nor the dynamism, nor the vibrant emotion under a burning and impersonal sun which shines over it all; the hot blood that bubbles forth and then coagulates, and which the *wise monkeys* must clean up after the spectacle. Let's include a few lines here that describe the placing of the *banderillas*:

Agile, alone, happy,
without missing a step
—with nothing but his grace
opposing the fury—
pacing,
marking,
executing
a special motion of slenderness and boldness...
he approaches, squares off, stops,
—raising his arms—
and then above
the horns that reach for his breast,
stabbing the two

banderillas
miraculously... he steps aside,
agile, alone, happy,
without missing a step!

After that we can appreciate it when he says jokingly: “rather than just another poet, my first desire would have been to be a good banderillero.”

Just another poet, who happens to be him.

But in addition to this, there is more, much more: and it constitutes the absolutely perfect description of this event. And it consists of nothing more, or nothing less than these unforgettable and definitive words:

Gold, silk, blood and sun.

After this, we go on to conclude this second stage of the portrait we have started. It comes after “The Bullfight” in a third book entitled *The Bad Poem* (1909). The first stanza of the Portrait begins like this:

This is my face and this is my soul. Read them:
Bored looking eyes and a mouth that thirsts...

In the second stanza are these lines that are so characteristic of him:

The agility, the skill, the grace, the dexterity,
more than volition, strength, and majesty...

Then, typical of his usual simplicity and grace, the composition concludes with these final words:

It's late... I am hurrying through life. And my laughter
is happy; although I will not deny that I am in a hurry.

Many years later, in 1935, in his book entitled *Phoenix* from which I have taken the final and definitive stage of his Portrait that began with “Adelphous” in 1898, he says:

and again I offer myself as I was, as I am
and finally will be, yesterday, tomorrow, today.

And because of their similarity to those of Antonio, I will quote some lines in which he describes the departure of a ship whose return voyage is uncertain.

This poem of Manuel entitled “Seascape” is included in “Various Poets,” 1921. They are the final lines of this section in which he says:

And so when it embarks
for an unknown port,
neither joy nor grief...

and in the wake of my ship
there is only one thing: the sea.

Then, speaking of his songs—*Flamenco Songs* (1912)—it is common knowledge that they were so accepted by the public that they are indistinguishable from those of the folk tradition. This shows the complete identification, as well as a total understanding of this popular genre. In this however, he is surpassed by Antonio who always retains his own unmistakable personality. As for the greater success that Manuel seems to have had with his songs, this is perhaps because of his familiarity with the people, since his poems seem to mirror them almost completely. If we now stop to consider the philosophical significance of Manuel's book, *Soul*, we will see that from the beginning what is most important to him is to isolate the present moment from all that is happening. To preserve the instant that is passing and nothing more: not yesterday nor tomorrow: *today*. However, this ever-present concern (which is also present in the poems of Antonio) will produce a sense of anguish disguised by a joviality and lightness which is more apparent than real. There is no way to deny that, in his innermost self, this poet is sad and he feels a sort of bitter skepticism because he knows that... But then, this is something he will tell us himself:

Happiness...
consists of having good health
and an empty noggin...

Do you understand now—Mairena would have asked his students—why we great men are so sad?

In order to conclude these brief remarks, we will take note of the fact that when the end of life was approaching, both poets seemed to remember the clear and pure light of their childhood in Andalusia. But now, with eyes that are weary. During the last sad and cloudy days of February in Collioure (France) Antonio wrote this single line, the first from a poem he could no longer finish:

These sunny days and this sun of my childhood

And toward the end of his poetry we see that Manuel has a premonition of the sanity which, like Don Quijote, he will feel in the final hour. This is his state of mind when he writes this haiku:

Alas,
I am now
no longer
who I was!

After that will come the final line of his poetic work. It contains only six words. And they should be engraved in marble under his name as the definitive self-portrait of Manuel Machado. And these words are:

angel, shadow, grace, the one who...

HIS TRUE SPIRITUALITY

I converse with the man who is always with me
like one who hopes to speak with God one day.

The thing that reveals the true God to the Poet is the wonder of creation in the moment when the flash that illuminates it appears. Then God is manifested in an instantaneous splendor that rarely occurs in the life of mortals. And one could almost say that poets are, in some ways, those who are chosen by this great wholeness that contains everything, in which is enclosed the revealing flash that is granted those who possess the purest creative faculties. They are the only ones who can say to us “a few true words.” Words that are heard in the silence of the most intimate solitude in which God appears, and to which could be applied the statement:

And in the blessed solitude your shadow appeared.

In Antonio there is a constant desire for a real communion with nature in which he would be able to reach down to the source: what does this river say? And the stone? Indeed, it is that insatiable desire for knowledge which all philosophers have. It would seem that this gigantic mental effort on the part of these superior minds is destined to fail, but one cannot deny that if they never reach the highest summit, they at least achieved some modest success which is, of course, much less than their great efforts deserved. I also believe that these exercises of cerebral gymnastics have had an incalculable effect in the development of human intelligence.

When he is surrounded by nature, our Poet is able to perceive something essential in the light of an instantaneous luminous revelation. Always present in him is a certain anguish that could not help but exist in persons with such intense awareness, but he still worked with a deep religious feeling that spared no effort, while offering his entire heart and soul with a superior level of morality which is so badly needed by the world in which we live. If everyone did the same, there is no doubt that a higher level of ethical values would spread throughout our entire world.

Let's remember that poor puppeteer who could only make jumps and somersaults; seeing the devotion with which the monks were praying to the Virgin and wanting to do something himself before the holy image, he dedicated to her his best acrobatics, putting such love into his work that he finally collapsed on the floor, sweaty and tired. The Virgin then came down from the altar and, with a handkerchief in her hands, wiped the sweaty brow of the puppeteer.

With this same religious sentiment in his heart Antonio devotes himself to the effort to grasp some part of the inaccessible truth. And even though he knows that is not possible, he never ceases to make the effort. And thus, with his constant striving, he receives the greatest gift that God seems to offer: he never forgets the word—the hope of experiencing the divine presence—as opposed to those other words which are the most ominous and desolate that have ever been written, and which appear on the door to the

“Inferno” in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: “Lasciate ogni speranza voi che intrate” (Those who enter here must abandon all hope), which are so horrible that even Dante himself, with all his vivid descriptions of the most horrendous and terrifying torments, was never able to surpass them in cruelty. It seems that he began with the end. Poets say what is beautiful but also, as in this case, what is terrible. In doing this they seem to follow the laws of nature that bring rains and make plants grow, but also hurricanes that wreak havoc on the earth. And... watch out for that hurricane, as that joker Mairena would say.

And in fact, continuing to describe his constant doubts and uncertainties with regard to the ultimate place of the soul, Antonio seems to lose hope when he says:

These eyes which opened
to the light one day,
now are blind and tired
of looking without seeing.

But like a tiny light in the distance this comforting hope appears, which then leads him to proclaim the victory of the soul over time;

The soul—that poor Cinderella who in this selfish
cruel, unfeeling century wanders through the world
bedraggled and hungry!—the soul conquers
the angel of death and the water of oblivion.

It is one of the few times when he says with absolute certainty these words which seem to have been directly inspired by the Supreme Creator.

Thus it was that Antonio searched for God with God himself, and neither ideologues, nor theologians, nor preachers were ever able to convince him of things that in other cases were accepted (it all depends on the listener), with regard to a problem that can never be resolved from outside, since it is so intimate and so personal. If we add to this his lifelong effort to find God in nature, we will see that he has been a true example of *active* spirituality, and in this, as well as with his poetry, he opens paths of infinite transcendence for others.

Then, as I conclude this comment, I will quote some lines taken from his poem, “Profession of faith”:

.
I must make you, my God, as you made me,
and to give you the soul that you gave me
I must create you in myself. May the pure river
of compassion that flows eternally
flow in my heart. Dry up, oh God,
the turbid fountain of a faith without love!

The path to God—the Poet has already said it—is to create Him in oneself by awakening the divinity that we already have in our soul. But for this it is necessary to experience the true nature of the Great Wholeness in which He exists. And one must always be alert because, as he has written in *Solitude*:

He passed by your door. He won't come again.

Finally, let us always remember that Antonio prefers to worship the Jesus who walked on the sea, not the one who was nailed to the cross by the nails of a false piety:

I can not, nor will I sing
to that Jesus on the cross,
but to the one who walked on the sea!

OTHER ASPECTS

His attitude toward politics is manifested very clearly throughout all his work. And it was expressed even more clearly when his admirable articles on international politics were published in "Mirador de la Guerra de la Vanguardia de Barcelona."

It is completely naïve, not to say self-serving, to try to define the Poet as a leftist as is done by some people, and it is *even worse* to say that he was a rightist, which he totally rejected.

One must always take into account that his true nature was morally incorruptible, and he never let himself be influenced by petty political interests.

From the moment he began to reason he possessed a feeling of freedom that was even greater than that of many who consider themselves more advanced. As for dogmatic and dictatorial sentiments, it would be stupid to waste even one drop of ink in discussing these things which had absolutely no influence on him.

Just as Antonio tried to follow the highest possible standard for his poetry and has always acted with the most authentic spiritual motives, he did the same with regard to politics. (If we can even mention something which has become so discredited.)

Of course it would appear that I am mistaken when I say that the Generation of 98 (and in this case I am referring exclusively to the Poet) was not involved in politics. After all, he was precisely one of those who first turned against the politics of the period which culminated in the loss of our Colonies (1898). Ever since then his poems have spoken out, foreshadowing a future struggle for freedom. In fact this attitude was already latent in the depths of his soul and, when it resurfaced in 1936, it did nothing more than repeat the same ideas. Therefore, without any hesitation he gladly took the part of the people from the beginning. But let's be clear about this; it is the people themselves who have approached the ideals of the Poet, which are superior to their own. Naturally, whenever misfortune has made a victory impossible, he feels an indescribable sorrow that things have not turned out as they ought to.

But while we have spoken of his true and sincere support for the people, we must say, nevertheless, that it would be wrong to think that he ever expressed his unconditional agreement with a particular group. This is because Antonio is essentially unclassifiable,

or one of a kind. That is why in poetry, as well as in religion and politics, he always tried to reach the highest possible level of what is ideal. In a word, he tried to lift things up, while others only lowered them.

And now I will go on to include a few interesting anecdotes about the Poet. But before I do that I want to write a few words in support of this new element I am including which, in my opinion, has great importance.

PRAISE FOR THE VALUE OF SOME ANECDOTES

It is true that as a rule the anecdotal part of an author's life is less interesting and more trivial. But it is also true that when it concerns something in which we are directly involved that changes things completely.

And in this respect an anecdote comes to mind that helps to support that precise observation.

The anecdote which I am going to recount is about Pope Leo XIII who occupied the Holy Office during the past century. It is said that on one occasion a Cardinal, whose name I don't remember, approached His Holiness with the greatest respect and whispered these words quietly in his ear: "Holy Father, don't you think these medallions we are giving with such profusion to the pilgrims who come to enjoy your presence are nothing more than cheap trinkets?" To which Leo XIII responded without the slightest hesitation: "But they are given by the Pope." I can't even begin to imagine what the Cardinal was able to reply in response to this shrewd remark.

With that in mind, although some may feel that the following anecdotes are trivial, and even though they seem that way, they actually help to give a more complete understanding of the essential nature of Antonio's character.

I am going to try to remember the time when he was getting ready to apply for the position as Teacher of French in the Institutes of the provinces. It was in 1907 when he was finally ready to enter the profession. He picked Soria for reasons that we have already mentioned in an earlier section.

It is obvious that this choice was of capital importance in the life of Antonio. Because it was there in those fields of Castile where he met Leonor, his one and only love. It was there that he met the being who had the greatest harmony with the landscape which was already imprinted in the depths of his soul.

During the time that passed while he was preparing to apply for this position, he spent hours and hours working. Nevertheless, with great kindness to me, he agreed to be a model for the painting I was then preparing for the Fine Arts Exposition. The reason I am mentioning this is because he is the principal figure in "The Game of Chess" which is depicted in this painting.

It was getting late and we were about to take our usual walk after which we would go to a café where we would stay until supper time.

This was the time when a very serious, hard-working and intelligent professor had arrived from the University of Seville to fill a new position at the University of Madrid. Antonio, who was always ready to learn something new, thought it would be a good idea if we took his course at the university. And so we did. It was a thought-provoking course which was presented with great clarity, making the material very interesting.

Our mother, who happened to be a good friend of the professor's wife, constantly urged us to attend her Wednesday evening gatherings when she invited some friends and students to tea. Antonio struggled with the desire to satisfy his mother's wishes and his very strong urge to avoid these gatherings. And so I remember that he almost always urged me to accompany him to help him bear up under the strain, telling me, as it happened on more than one occasion:

Tonight, Don Pepe!
Make up your mind, José!
go with me to the house
of Talés y Ferté

which is the name he gave to this professor. Of course I was always happy to go with him. But without remembering his frequent tendency to get lost in his thoughts.

One of these nights when she was receiving visitors this good lady, who used to chatter incessantly, was making use—or better, was misusing—these oratorical abilities. At one moment, turning angrily to Antonio she blurted out: “Look here, Don Antonio, this last maid I had not only stole my coffee teaspoons, but today she broke all of my fine china. What do you think about that!... “Ah, madam, good...Very good! Wonderful!” The rest of us sat there like stones.

Once again we have to mention this tendency, since it was so frequent in him, to be totally absent from his immediate reality when his personal thoughts occupied him so completely. It was these moments of absentmindedness that sometimes produced some minor conflicts.

For example, one Sunday afternoon while he was visiting the house of a language professor, as he often did he was absentmindedly making little balls with some papers that were under his hands. While he was deeply involved in conversation, the nephew of the professor—who was called Don Langostín—came into the room with his wife. Both were all dressed up, preparing to go out. They had come to find their theater tickets which they had forgotten on their uncle's table. They looked everywhere but couldn't find them anywhere. But how were they going to find them if the Poet, while lost in conversation with the learned professor, had made them into little balls! There is no way to describe the expression of Don Langostín. And that of the lady... even less. It was simply indescribable.

It was pointless to think that he might stop being so absent-minded and distracted after seeing him go to such incredible extremes. He himself spoke of the time when he had two girl friends on the same street, because he was unable to remember that he already had one there. Once when he was speaking with the second, he suddenly remembered the first. Then, to avoid conflicts, he decided to leave by the other end of the street, leaving both girl friends behind. And after that, just in case, he never set foot on that street again. And what is more, this doesn't seem to be in agreement with what he wrote in his Portrait:

I am not a seducing Don Juan nor a Bradomin...

But these contradictions are typical of all great men. Besides, at that time he had still not written that line, nor the following either:

you already know the shabby state of my clothes

since that was the time when he was aspiring to be an actor and he always dressed in white colors, which was customary in the actor's guild.

* * * * *

As was our custom, every afternoon we went for a walk in order to get out of the city. The hike was usually a long one and afterward we almost always ended up in a café where we would meet our brother, Manuel, thus forming a group of the three brothers, which was a custom that lasted until the beginning of the war.

After one of these afternoon hikes which had been long and strenuous, a young woman who recited poetry marched into the café. She was an extremely attractive woman who was very expressive. With his usual kindness and courtesy, Antonio asked about her travels and her professional accomplishments. Of course, she eagerly told him of her successes, and especially the time when she did a recitation next to Niagara Falls. Antonio leaned back in his seat and exclaimed: "So it was next to...?" "Niagara Falls," the undaunted reciter repeated forcefully. She left after that, saying that the next day she would come back and bring him an invitation to her coming recitals. She had hardly gone through the door when the Poet said: "That's the last time we're coming to this café. You understand, if she gets hold of us again, we'll never get away."

So that is what we did.

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