

**THE FINAL SOLITUDE OF THE POET ANTONIO MACHADO**  
(Memories of his Brother, José)

(Part 7)

CONCERNING HIS POETRY (continued)

Before leaving the theme of olives, it would be appropriate to say something about the owners of the farms and estates, among whom we should certainly include that foolish Andalusian gentleman, Don Guido, so clearly described in the poem from which we will now quote a few lines, and which is entitled:

“Lament for the Virtues and Ballad for the Death of Don Guido”

.....  
Don Guido died, a gentleman,  
who was a real carouser as a youth,  
as an old man, he prayed a lot.

.....  
When his money dwindled  
it became his obsession  
to think he ought to think  
about settling down.  
And he settled  
in a typically Spanish way,

by marrying a maiden who possessed a large fortune with which he was able to replace the one he had wasted.

.....  
That great pagan  
became a member  
of a holy order;  
on Maundy Thursday he emerged  
carrying a candle in his hand  
—that rascal!—  
dressed as a penitent.  
Today the bell tells us  
that tomorrow they will carry  
good Don Guido, very formal,  
to the cemetery.

.....  
Some might wonder what you left behind.  
I ask: What did you take with you  
to the world where you are now?  
.....

And then, in answer to this question, it continues:

Oh, end of an aristocracy!  
The faded gray beard  
over his breast;  
dressed in a crude cassock,  
his stiff hands in a cross  
—so formal!—  
the Andalusian gentleman.

Before this the Poet asked God to bless the workers on these country estates and farms. Now he shows us the owners who, not even with a picklock, will be able to pass through the Holy Gates.

That is... not unless they find some way to get past the vigilance of our good Saint Peter.

Several years after the publication of *New Songs*, in 1936, the moment arrived when the Poet was able to publish a more profound version of his work in a new book which included two fictional characters; but behind this mask it was always Antonio, their creator, who was speaking. The time had come when he wanted to expand the scope of his philosophy and his poetry, and so in order to help him do this he invented Abel Martin and a disciple called Juan de Mairena.

With this very important enhancement he created a new mode of operation. It is the first book which he wrote in both prose and verse. This allowed him more freedom and more latitude to express his ideas. And with this his work takes a new turn.

I remember that towards the end of his life, when speaking of the two characters whom he had created—Abel Martin and Juan de Mairena—he told me that in the future he intended to produce books in which there were a large number of characters who would give him the ability to add many new aspects to his work, “since until now Abel Martin and Juan de Mairena were only the first examples of this enlargement.”

But it was going to be too late to take this new step which might have had such great importance for the world of letters. In this case death intervened with a cruel lack of consideration, depriving us of seeing the completion of the Poet’s work.

\* \* \* \* \*

In what follows I will include a few lines from Abel Martin and then some others from Juan de Mairena. From the first, this important excerpt:

You erased being; pure nothingness remained.  
Show me, oh God!, the miraculous hand  
that made the shadow: the dark slate  
on which human thought is written.  
(Abel Martin, *The Counterparts*)

Or as Mairena said somewhat later, paraphrasing Abel Martin:

God spoke: Let there be nothingness.  
And he raised his right hand  
to hide his gaze.  
And nothingness was created.

Thus, following the lead of Abel Martin, Mairena sees creation as a negative act of God, the voluntary act of closing *the great eye that sees everything, as it sees itself*.

I will also include a few lines in *From the Apocryphal Songbook* by Abel Martin:

In the sea of woman  
few capsize at night;  
many do at dawn.

and this charming reference to a plaza, a tower, a balcony, and a lady with a white flower:

.....  
A gentleman has passed by  
—who knows why he passed by!—  
and he took away the plaza  
with its tower and its balcony,  
with its balcony and its lady,  
with its lady and its white flower.

Now night falls erasing the plaza, the tower, the lady and the white flower. But that doesn't matter: all will still be vividly clear in the gentleman's imagination.

*From the Apocryphal Songbook* also contains "The Final Laments of Abel Martin" from which we will repeat these lines:

.....  
Oh, to rest in the blue light of day  
like the eagle rests in the wind,  
high above the cold mountains,  
sure of his wings and of his breath!

From you, nature, I ask for  
great confidence and peace,  
my release from fear and from hope,  
a grain of happiness, a sea of forgetfulness...

And these short "Notes for an Emotive Geography of Spain":

Torreperogil!  
If only I were a tower, a rustic tower  
by the river Guadalquivir!

In Garciez  
there is more thirst than water;  
in Jimena, more water than thirst.

Whoever named these mountains  
Sierra Morena described  
them very well!

One could not say more than what is expressed with these few words.

### III

#### THREE LOVES OF THE POET

##### I

And to travel in dreams  
for love of the hand that guides us.

In addition to the previous remarks, I will now comment on the three loves of the Poet.

The first is his mother. His earliest words were spoken to her, and for her also will be the last: Goodbye, mother!... After this comes the love he felt for Leonor, his young, almost adolescent wife. And finally, created during the time when his poetic thought had reached its greatest maturity, the love devoted to Guiomar.

The love for his mother is also the first which appears in his work when, with these profoundly moving words, he says:

And to feel again in our hand  
the pulse of the good hand  
of our mother... And to travel in dreams  
for love of the hand that guides us.

To travel in dreams! But always while feeling the maternal heartbeat in his hand. It is not surprising to see that his overwhelming desire to unite himself with this sweet vibration causes him such deep emotion. And with such profound emotions, has this Poet not already found in this maternal love the vital theme which is closest to his own heart? It is impossible to think that this love could ever be surpassed; it will always be the greatest of his life.

How could I ever forget, in those final days, the soft caresses of those small, dry hands of his mother, already quite elderly, at whom he gazed with such an intense feeling of love that I would never be able to describe it here completely! Like the feeling he once expressed with these lines:

“ . . . . .  
the good, tranquil light,  
the good light of the world in bloom, that  
I saw one day from the arms of my mother.”

It is during this moment in his mother's arms when he seems to have been given the wonderful gift of being a Poet. Only in her arms would he ever be able to dream the magical world of his poetry.

That is why he remarked more than once that only in the earliest years of infancy does one feel these purest emotions.

Perhaps it was because he received these impressions during a moment of maternal love, and because he also possessed "the supreme gift of evoking his dreams" that he was able to recall these profound sentiments of infancy. According to him, the passage of life will only bury them under a crust that one will have to penetrate, like one must break through the ice which covers the waters of life.

It was his mother who took him by the hand and led him through the ineffable world of poetry. As I write this, I cannot help but remember the delightful painting of Murillo—which he knew so well—in which the beautiful Guardian Angel leads a child by the hand on a night that is illuminated only by stars. It was these blue nights filled with stars in Seville which will be indelibly engraved on the Poet's heart:

.....  
and the dark blue night  
was seeded with stars.

The great sensitivity during this time of infancy will eventually become even more intense, until it is converted into the sadness which accompanied him during his entire life, and which his mother, with the awareness only mothers have, also felt very deeply.

For this reason his filial love grew into the great tenderness he felt as he saw her grow old, becoming once again that feeling of infancy which is felt, not at the beginning of life, but at the end. And it was with infinite sorrow that he saw her approach the banks of the river which would carry her away forever. But that is something he will not see. He would not have been able to endure it. The blue river of life will take pity on the Poet and stop flowing... before that happens.

Nor was his mother able to endure such profound grief; she dies just one day after her son.

Thus, this great love came to an end on this earth. But it will always continue to echo in his poems. Even though they are seldom mentioned, the words with which he remembers his mother show us the feeling of his greatest love.

## II

Beat heart... Not everything  
has been swallowed by the earth.

Now let us see this second great love. And we will begin with these words from one of his poems:

No one chooses his love. One day my  
destiny led me to those gray barren hills  
where the cold falling snow drives away  
the shadows of the dead evergreen oaks.

The winds of life blew him toward the fields of Castile, carrying him to Soria. The Soria which he describes in the poem which ends with these lines:

Cold Soria! The courthouse  
clock strikes one.  
Soria, Castilian city,  
so beautiful under the moon!

Love waits for him on the banks of the Duero. It is there, on these banks, where Leonor appears to the Poet of water. And there he falls in love with the one who will become his young, almost adolescent wife. In her he will find one of the most profoundly moving themes of his work. How long this love will live on in his poems, and how short was the life of this interesting and beautiful figure! She died just a few years after their wedding, as if her only mission in life was to kindle a spark of love that would always burn in the heart of the Poet. Thus, he converts the terrible grief and anguish produced by this tragic loss into the wonderful love which contains only beauty, like that which he describes in these moving lines:

From how many bitter flowers  
I have gathered white wax!

Then, there are the lines referring to Leonor's death which conclude like this:

Alas, what death has broken was  
a thread between the two of us!

This is when he leaves Soria and returns to Andalusia. Rather than lessening his sadness, the difference produced by this change will actually increase it, like a fire that is made stronger by the wind, creating a shadow which follows him for the rest of his life.

Read, for example, these lines when he thinks of her while traveling through the countryside of Jaen, and he says:

Another journey of yesterday  
through the land of Castile  
—pine trees at dawn  
between Almazán and Quintana!—

And the joy  
of traveling together!  
And the union  
that death one day has broken!  
Oh, cold hand  
you are crushing my heart!

Leonor has died, but in spite of her absence, she will continue to live in his heart. She will be his companion during the long journey which remains. And the deep devotion he feels for his dead wife will constantly cause her to reappear in his memory. In this way the Poet triumphs over death.

When he is traveling alone through the countryside of Baeza, he feels the incurable sadness which accompanies his solitude.

Then, it will be in dreams when, mercifully, she comes back to life for a brief moment. And when the magic of this reappearance has ended, he will write:

I felt your hand in mine,  
your friendly hand,  
your young voice in my ear,  
like a new bell,  
like the virginal bell  
of a spring dawn.

So it was this great love that appeared in the path his life was taking. This great love which makes him rebel against the idea of death, and which could also be applied to these words he had once written:

Do the anvils and the crucibles of your soul  
produce only dust blown away by the wind?

a question which, in the moment of great sadness, he seems to answer with these words:

Live, hope: who knows  
what the earth swallows up?

I once heard him say that although reason is not able to prove the continued existence of our spirit, intuition seems to affirm it. And so the Poet's hope rises above the anguish felt by others. With these two threads this love for Leonor is spun:

When we weave, we weave  
with the thread we are given.

### III

And this brings us to the third great love of the Poet. As the single word “mother” is enough to recall all the profound emotion he felt for his first love, he only mentions the name of his wife on one occasion. However, with his third love it is the name which comes first: Guiomar. Of course I am aware that beneath this beautiful name the lady’s real name is hidden.

Because it is taken for granted, we often forget that great men are never lacking for all kinds of admirers and that, among them, the most forward and daring are those who have received the most. They are the type of women who don’t wait to be asked.

So a mature form of love comes to the bard when he was no longer in the prime of life, but at a time when his life and his work were more completely developed. And we see that, when he writes his “Songs for Guiomar” in the manner of Abel Martin and Juan de Mairena, he creates one of his most beautiful poetic figures: Guiomar.

The mysterious lady which this name disguises was at most only the pedestal on which was raised *the other*, the created woman, the Poet's true beloved in this case.

And we can now appreciate these lines:

. . . . . Guiomar, Guiomar,  
I am punished because of you:  
guilty of having created you,  
I can no longer forget you.

Poor Guiomar! She will still have to read this final definition of love which the Poet writes:

All love is fantasy;  
it invents the year, the day,  
the hour and its melody;  
it invents the lover, and even  
the beloved. It proves nothing  
against love, if the beloved  
has never existed.

Here the Poet is absolutely uninterested in the real person and is only trying to achieve a permanent, enduring creation, as in “Today is always evermore.”

But, in spite of this, his creations always preserve the initial human element, as we can appreciate in another stanza of the poem which says:

. . . . .  
near the sea,  
your rosy and tanned flesh,  
suddenly, Guiomar!  
. . . . .

on the cold mother-of pearl  
of your earring on my mouth,

If I have deliberately incorporated this love that was pure *creation*, it is so that one can appreciate what is for me its essential difference from the real, sincere human love he felt for his young wife. In it, both the spiritual and the human elements combine to reach the highest level of love, where only one name will resound eternally: that of LEONOR!

And now, after saying all that has preceded, I will add that it is in Chapter VIII of the first volume of *Juan de Mairena*, in the part which is entitled “Mairena comments on the poems of his teacher,” where the Poet opens the door of his loom to show us the invisible threads he has used to weave his beautiful “Songs to Guiomar.” It is here that he reveals the path he has followed to distance himself from external reality. He replaces it with a spiritual reality, the only one that can achieve the miracle of enduring throughout time. This is how he is able to accomplish something which reaches beyond his deep poetic meaning. I have always felt that by doing this he has offered us, without seeming to do so, a generous and far-reaching lesson.

Other than that, it seems to me that what is revealed through the voice of his character Mairena confirms that all this follows the same process as the rest of his poetry. And I say this, because for me it seems fundamental.

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Returning for a moment to the previous topic of love, I want to add something which I think is very important. Something, I repeat, which shows Antonio’s true intention and which the Poet is not afraid to reveal with his usual candor and charm in the following poem:

Bees make honey from  
flowers, and nightingales,  
melody from love;  
Dante and I—pardon me gentlemen—  
convert—pardon me Lucia—  
love into Theology.

Of course we must repeat these words of the Poet softly, because if Lucia hears them, she will complain vociferously. But we can agree that by mixing humor with truth Antonio reveals something which none of the Lucias of the world want to hear. Because when a poet speaks of converting love into Theology, this is something which no woman could bear with patience. But although Antonio has said: “To tell the truth is presumptuous,” here he feels it necessary to do that...

And for his part, Manuel also has these beautiful, but not very satisfying words for his admirers:

I have sacrificed nothing  
to please blind Cupid.

For me the most beloved  
has only been the pillow  
in my dreams of love.

Something very characteristic of Antonio is that his memory of past events is always recalled with complete clarity in the description of his present emotions. And therefore, in a composition entitled “Roads” where he describes the fields of Andalusia, we see that an emotion showing the feeling of bitterness is still present in his heart, when he writes the last two lines of this poem:

. . . . .  
Roads through the fields...  
Alas, I can no longer walk with her!

As he evokes a memory, the poet always actualizes those impressions which have affected him most deeply. So on another occasion when he remembers the countryside of Soria, he will say:

Now storks will be basking in the sun,  
watching the red sunset  
between Moncayo and Urbión.

Thus, with a *yesterday* that flows into *today*, the current of emotions is continued. In short, more than feelings which evolve, these are living emotions which are always there in his present state of mind. And for me, this continuity represents one of the most important aspects of his work.

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While writing this memoir, I have tried to relate everything to his poems by reliving the moment in which they were written. For me it has been a very poignant experience to try to express some of the profound emotions Antonio’s poems have always produced in me and are a continual reminder of the vital energy of his being.

These are the emotions which I would also like to awaken in the readers of this book, along with a desire to know the entire work of the Poet.

There have now been more than four hundred studies of Antonio’s work in many different types of books, journals, articles, pamphlets, essays, etc. Many of his poems have been translated into different languages.

As I associate myself—with complete modesty—to this brilliant cortege, I do it thinking that perhaps my account, which is very intimate and sincere, may in some way contribute to a better understanding of Antonio. After great works are published, the most interesting are usually those which are discussed so widely that they become known by a large number of persons. Because if one is able to help people appreciate the value of their great men, in whatever degree they are capable of doing so, it will be a significant contribution to culture in general.

I will also add that the Poet's work is a great model of consistency and harmony with itself. Its development represents a continuous growth from the fundamental roots from which it emerged. In the same way that an entire field of red blossoms is there in the potential of a tiny black seed, the Poet whom we love so much is already present in his first book, *Solitude*.

We should not forget that the basic direction of his work had already been announced during his youth in the words of his truly remarkable letter to Unamuno (from which in an earlier section we had copied a few paragraphs). In it he tells us that all our efforts should be directed "towards the light, towards a greater awareness." And that we should not try to achieve a better life for ourselves "which would be sterile for others." These things seem to have been the norms of his entire spiritual life which, if it hadn't been for the war, might have added another ten years of incalculable value to his work, given the projected enhancement of his work, which I mentioned previously.

I am now going to conclude these notes by adding a final part of this book in which I will relate the true story of the bitter and tragic direction of Antonio's destiny, which led toward an outcome from which nothing or no one could separate him, and to which his own words could also be applied:

.....  
I go toward the sea, toward forgetfulness,  
.....  
Don't try to call me; I cannot turn back.

[http://armandfbaker.com/biography\\_toc.html](http://armandfbaker.com/biography_toc.html)