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## A. J. Thomas

MARSHALL TERRY\*

A .J. AND I walked together one time through the old cemetery at Preston Bend. He pointed to the lake that had flooded the land, yet showed me that his place had survived; some of the people in it were born a century and a half ago; he surmised as we walked and talked that he might not be too far behind. But that was nearly ten years ago.

Still, he must have been surprised, as I have no doubt we always are: I sense him in that last moment, startled, yet full of his grace, his knowledge: summoning in a flash all the reasonable, imperative arguments against it that make us so human, so ready to continue; but, knowing him, also giving a bow, a salute, in that moment, like Martin Fierro, to the old antagonist.

Walking along up there, he used a stick of local wood, while I just strolled along. He told me of his family, its Texas roots and lore, and told me I could use it in a book, if I used it well. He was fifth generation Texas, out of the old oak. And he loved that place that he and Ann created. They made a world together, filled with warmth, a good place to go: full of the graces of being civilized. My memory brings back *anecdotes*, which are the carving into memory of *character*.

How they met us at the airport in Madrid when we flew in to spend the term, with daughters 18 and not quite 13; we were quite anxious and uncertain; there was Ann at the doorway and behind her A. J. with the Buick; they drove us through the streets of Madrid in that gold car, the biggest au-

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tomobile in Spain: the people waved at us and must have thought they were seeing Juan Carlos passing by.

How great they were there, with double lordly Spaniels: I would try to use some pretentious Castilian I really could not pronounce; but he would say, "Co-mo Es-ta Ud? Que tal?" They understood *him* and loved him for it.

And one time we were on a podium together, here at SMU with some other professors; the subject was what the world would be like in the next 200 years. I gave some truly awesome predictions, while he, knowing we could not know, came on speaking to us in what he termed "Aggie French." Mark Twain could not have done it better.

Up on the lake he drove his motorboat, spray flying, through the crowded traffic. "Stand up in the bow, Marsh," he said, "and tell me if anything is heading for us." Neither of us could see a thing, so he speeded up. That was when I realized he was a Zen Master.

For Thanksgiving in Madrid we found a big ugly yellow bird to cook; on the balcony we sat and laughed and talked over a holiday libation, or two. Knowing him, I reckon, must have been like knowing Scocrates, or Seneca, talking to Throeau or Learned Hand: the straight honest wisdom that took events into regard but knew the basic truth of human nature, of humanity, of human hopes but subsequent reality. He never blinked reality.

And we must not do so now.

Still, even as we are saddened by the loss of such a life, he would not want us to be sad. We must be joyful of the gift of his life to us, even as in our minds we argue the case against this painful irony of his passing.

He devoted his life to teaching what he knew from his experience and from study. He invested his life here with us.

Now our memory of him will keep on teaching us.