In, *Problemas y Más Problemas,* José Manuel is boy without a country or friends. Having moved from Spain to Germantown, Tennessee, he is a stranger in a strange land who speaks a new language but with echoes of the language he spoke growing up in Seville. He has only one friend in America, but then he is lost too. It is José Manuel’s fault. It is not his fault. No one understands but José Manuel himself, and he can’t share his pain and loneliness with anyone.

An older boy who speaks Spanish approaches José Manuel at school. He is Tico, and he is a member of a gang of tough guys. They have tattoos and a bad reputation. They might even kill people. José Manuel does not care. José Manuel is desperate. He needs to fit in.

Tico introduces José Manuel to the members of the gang. They will accept José into their band if he proves himself loyal and tough. Loyalty will take time to prove, but first he must show he is tough enough to earn a place in this new family:

Tiene que pelearse con diez miembros de la pandilla a la vez. Tiene que durar un minute sin gritar ni llorar. José Manuel mira al grupo. La mayoria de ellos son más grandes que él y parecen muy Fuertes. Sabe que esto va a doler mucho, pero sabe que si decide no seguir ahora todos se van a burlar de él. Además cree que esa opción ya no existe poque los otros forman un círculo alrededor de él. Se prepara. No hay ningun ruido en el cuarto menos el sonido de su Corazon latiendo en sus oídos. Tice dice

*He has to fight with ten members of the gang at the same time. He has to last a minute without shouting or crying. José Manuel looks at the group. The biggest of the boys are larger than he, and they seem very strong. He knows that he could get very hurt, be he knows that he has to continue now, or they will mock him. Besides he believes that there are no other options because the others form a circle around him. He prepares himself. There is no sound in the room except the sound of his heart beating. Tico says a single word in a low voice. “Now” and so begins the longest minute of his life. When it is over he has a purple eye and his ribs hurt, but the other members smile and they say now he has a new family. (Problemas, Capitulo 4)*

Necessity and fear bring José Manuel to this moment. Necessity and fear get him through it. And toughness. José Manuel was not born or raised into a life that would prepare him for this. His parents are college educated and have professional jobs. He lives in a nice home and has nice things. He is well bred and good-looking. He seems to have options, but he has lost his way in Tennessee. Everyone, and especially teenagers want to be part of a group, or at least have friends. José’s experience demonstrates the extreme and dangerous things that teens might do to feel accepted.

**He has to fight Él tiene pelear**

He Él

has to fight tiene pelear

with ten con diez miembros

at the same time. a la vez.

He Él

has to last tiene durar

a minute un minuto

without shouting or crying. Sin gritar ni llorar.

He knows. Sabe.

He has to. Tiene saber.

There are No hay

no options. opciones.

The longest minute of his life. El minute más largo de su vida.

It is over. Termina.

He Él

has a new family? tiene una nueva familia.

***He has to fight***is a poem created from simply deleting and rearranging words from the passage in the short story, *Problemas y Más Problemas,* cited above. This versified arrangement of words creates a new context, a new world in which the meaning of the original passage is clearly changed but yet preserves traces of the original source, the context and the meaning conveyed by the words that the author created in his story.

In the poem, the main character is nameless and nothing of his past is revealed. The reader is forced to think about who this solitary “He” is and why he has to fight with “ten” of some other force. Is “He” a man? Could the ten be men? Demons? Self-identities? Chickens? We don’t know. But we are told that his adversaries must be confronted *en masse*. This too is a mystery.

“He/has to last/a minute/without shouting or crying.” This He, by the very compositional placement of the word, seems isolated and alone, or is He prominent and independent? For some reason, and in some situation, He is forced to endure either an actual minute, or some comparably short duration of time, without voicing his opinion or demonstrating his pain or fear. Is this a trial imposed upon him against his will and by others or is He testing himself against himself, surviving a challenge or proving his meddle? “He knows,” but just what, and does he know he must do something or is it that he should know, must know given the unknown circumstances of this evident crisis?

More and more problems . . .

“There are/no options.” Why are there no options? ***Are*** there no options? The contrast of existence and the negation of that existence seem emphasized by the separation of the sentence in two lines of verse. Might this raise the issue of free will and man’s ultimate freedom or essential imprisonment? Or is this just the clumsy syntax of a benighted “poet?”

Whatever the fate of this still unknown and vague He, his greatest, or, at least, longest trial is over quickly, just 60 seconds. “It” is over, but we still don’t now what He endured or what is now completed. And with this mission accomplished has He reached some new level of acceptance or accomplishment or is **it**--his hope, his goal, his life--now over?

And at the end, finally, some light; a puzzling question. We just don’t know why He has to fight, but we feel we want to know his plight. We are all human. We are family. We want to know why we have to fight; for everything.