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# **A Poetics of Complicity: Translating Luis García Montero**

By Alice McAdams

*An Honors project in the department of Comparative Literature at Oberlin College*

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*With immense gratitude for the mentorship of Professors Sebastiaan Faber and Bernard Matambo.*

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“Nada es Neutro”: The Personified World of *Diario cómplice*

I. García Montero

Luis García Montero is strongly aware of his place in the vast timeline of Spanish literature. In fact, it is one of the most immediately visible motivations in his writing. Beyond the many epigraphs and dedications exalting his predecessors and contemporaries, his poetry belies the heavy influence of centuries of distinct poetic movements — in the form of celebration as much as aversion. This careful study of the past, and simultaneous constant look toward the future, can be understood as a form of modesty: an avoidance of the writer’s narcissistic tendency to see his own moment in literature as somehow divorced from history. More generally, García Montero has stated that he aspires to combat all forms of human isolation, a condition he sees as both tragic and somewhat imaginary. His poetic perspective is founded on the thorough belief that no person, and certainly not the artist, is ever truly alone. The most profoundly beautiful moments are, for him, those in which two entities intersect, and his poetry seeks to prove that such instances are not anomalies but the rule upon which life operates.

As Spain in the twentieth century underwent a series of brutal changes — a brief experience with republicanism in the 1930s, a devastating civil war, Francisco Franco’s repressive four-decade rule, the reconstruction of democracy after the dictator’s death in 1975 — so too is the country’s artistic culture marked by perennial revolutions. No other group understands this better than poets: as García Montero affirms, “Each literary movement acquires personality by differentiating itself from previous stances, seeking

other possibilities in the tradition” (“Felipe Benítez Reyes” 10).<sup>1</sup> Successive movements have challenged the aesthetics and aspirations of their immediate predecessors at the same time that they have looked to even earlier generations for inspiration. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen poetic themes of romanticism, lyricism, confessionalism and social justice continually abandoned but later reclaimed and repurposed to speak more profoundly to each coming historical and cultural era.

Poetry in the turbulent first half of the twentieth century in Spain was prolific, marked most notably by the group of poets known as the Generation of '27 (so named for the reunion of its members in 1927 in Seville to honor the tricentennial of the death of the Baroque poet Luis de Góngora). The work of these writers spans a huge creative period beginning as early as 1900 with the poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez and reaching into the late 1980s with the late work of Jorge Guillén, Rafael Alberti, and others. Still, the Generation of '27 is most commonly associated with the avant-garde writing in the decade leading up to the 1936–1939 civil war — a conflict that resulted in its members' death (Federico García Lorca) or exile (Pedro Salinas, Luis Cernuda, Manuel Altolaguirre, Alberti, Guillén). In very general terms, their poetry is marked by a grand, introspective emphasis on the self, often driven by the protagonist of a classic poetic hero, and the romantic struggle toward unattainable ideals serves as the central thematic material. Homosexuality and the impossibility of love is a clear undercurrent in the romantic poetry of García Lorca and Cernuda; the conflict summarized in the title of Cernuda's book *La realidad y el deseo* (Reality and Desire) can be understood as one of

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of essays, articles and interviews are mine unless otherwise indicated.

the foundational unifying themes of the Generation of '27. The prewar poets also placed a serious emphasis on the poet's role as descriptor of his environment, as Antonio Blanch observes: "For the poets of 1927, the art of contemplating the world in order to sing of it with greater purity had become a kind of moral responsibility" (as quoted in Cate-Aries 509; translation mine).

Post-war poetry in Francoist Spain, as illustrated in the works of Jaime Gil de Biedma (1929–1990), Ángel González (1925–2008), and others, largely rejected the avant-garde aesthetic in favor of a more prosaic style that emphasized poetry's potential as a vessel for social and political critique. These poets, who are collectively known as the Generation of 1950, tended to prioritize a poem's message over its artistic elegance. García Montero attributes this tendency to a lack of outlets more suited for direct social criticism: "Since no one could talk politics in the newspapers because of censorship, many people talked politics through literature. I think there was very good, committed political poetry, but there was also very bad poetry that was justified not by its literary quality but by the poets' good intentions" (Eire 60). We see the direct, frank poetic voice characteristic of the Generation of '50 in the openly political subject matter of the final stanzas of Gil de Biedma's "Apología y petición" (Apology and Petition, published in *Moralidades* [Morals], 1966): ... *quiero creer que no hay demonios. / Son hombres los que pagan al gobierno, / los empresarios de la falsa historia, / son hombres quienes han vendido al hombre, / los que le han convertido a la pobreza / y secuestrado la salud de*

*España. // Pido que España expulse a los demonios. / Que la pobreza suba hasta el gobierno. / Que sea el hombre el dueño de su historia.*<sup>2</sup>

The so-called *novísimos* of the 1960s and '70s, whose name derives from the anthology *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles* (Nine Newest Spanish Poets) published by Josep Maria Castellet in 1970, in turn rebelled against the utilitarian ideology of the Generation of '50 by declaring that art was meaningless and had no purpose beyond its form. These poets reclaimed art as an end in itself rather than an instrument in service of political change, and they reaffirmed the audience of their poetry as a highly intellectual set of fellow artists. As Juan Cano Ballesta writes, “The new poetic language was sensorial, refined, and acquired a certain aesthetic primacy. . . . They tended toward a poetry that is culturalistic, elitist, and ludic” (694). Antonio Martínez Sarrión’s 1970 poem “Ahora es el momento” (Now’s the Time) exemplifies this style through its use of white space, irregular syntax and obscure international references:

*nada / más  
nada / más que las sienas ardiendo / balcón hacia la noche navegantes / sin aguja  
imantada / rojas constelaciones con nombres de guerrero / la insufrible presión de max  
roach / consiso duro energético porque sí / porque hay niebla porque riegan y el dueño /  
ha de cerrar el club y todos muertos.*<sup>3</sup> The gilded language of the *novísimos* stood in stark

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<sup>2</sup> ... *I want to believe that there are no demons. / They are men those who pay the government, / the businessmen of our false history, / they are men those who have sold our fellow man, / those who have converted him to poverty / and hijacked the health of Spain. // I ask that Spain expel those demons. / That poverty rise to the level of government. / That man be the master of his own history.* Translation mine.

<sup>3</sup> *nothing / more nothing / more than the temples burning / balcony toward the night navigators / without the magnetized needle / red constellations with warriors’ names / the insufferable pressure of max roach / concise hard energetic*

contrast to the prosaic bent of the social poets but recalled the Generation of '27's modernist stylistics.

While it makes sense to assign certain poets of the twentieth century to particular movements of aesthetic and intent, it should also be noted that some writers adapted to the changing tone of Spanish poetry, abandoning their previous styles as the political and literary climate changed. Of the Generation of '27 poet Rafael Alberti, whose early work is thoroughly modernist, Luis Monguió writes, "Alberti made his position crystal clear when in 1934 ... he declared that his past work was for him a 'closed cycle.' In effect, his poetry from, let us say, 1930 to 1940, is instrumental poetry, with political and social implications" (166). Andrew Debicki cautions against an overly simplistic categorization of the Spanish poets into generational groups, as such a strategy causes critics to be "unable to set the work of a poet in the wider contexts of literary and philosophical currents" (41). Indeed, it is naive to view a poet as strictly bound to the artistic generation in which he came of age. Yet neither can one negate the role of a poet's predecessors and contemporaries in the formation of his literary worldview; it is imperative to understand each author in the context of the narrative of tradition.

Luis García Montero, who was born in 1958, came of age at an important time in the trajectory of Spanish literature. After Franco died in November of 1975, the country struggled to transition both politically, as leaders worked to reinstate democracy and rewrite the constitution, and culturally, as artists responded to freedom from the various forms of censorship that had been imposed for four decades. These years coincided with

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*because yes / because there is fog because they water and the boss / has to close the club and all are dead.* Translation mine.

the beginning of García Montero's studies of literature at the University of Granada, the honor of receiving his first poetry award (Federico García Lorca Poetry Prize, 1979) and the publication of his first book of poetry (*Y ahora ya eres dueño del puente de Brooklyn* [Now You Are the Owner of the Brooklyn Bridge], 1980). The late 1970s were the beginning of his singularly prolific and successful career as a writer and professor of literature; it would seem that his personal renaissance both contributed to and was inspired by the artistic revolution happening all over Spain. The palpable change in cultural atmosphere also served to widen the window of opportunity for a new poetry movement to challenge the primacy of the *novísimos*. "My generation began to write at a time when, it seems to me, normality was being restored in Spanish society," said García Montero in a 2004 interview. "Many things were being normalized, and literature had to be made normal as well" (Eire 60).

García Montero is regarded as the foremost leader of a poetic aesthetic known as *poesía de la experiencia* (Poetry of Experience), which has dominated the sphere of Spanish poetry since the mid-1980s. Practitioners of this poetry, which include Álvaro Salvador, Javier Egea and Felipe Benítez Reyes, recognize the profundity of daily life as their central motivating theme and attempt to speak to the experience of the common man through personal confession told with simple, non-extravagant language. The city, with its infinite intersections (both literal and figurative) of the quotidian with the emotional and profound, often serves as the setting for *poesía de la experiencia* and plays an important role in the speaker's dual focus on personal and collective experience. García Montero emphasizes that his intent is to use poetry to dissolve barriers between himself and his audience: "When I establish a relationship with my reader, I am establishing a

relationship with myself” (Baqué Quílez 76). *Poesía de la experiencia* is aptly named because it rejects a poetic focus on highly wrought ideals and instead “places life (thought, emotions, even daily experiences) at the center of attention” (Cano Ballesta 698). As García Montero affirms, “There is no truth in poetry other than verisimilitude” (*Confesiones* 11).

*Poesía de la experiencia* is described by Elizabeth Amann as a “return to human experience and sentiment” (187) and by Cano Ballesta as “a return to emotionalism and to metaphysical meditation” (697), reflecting the extent to which its roots can be observed in earlier eras of Spanish literary history. Because the movement most strongly contrasts with the *novísimos*, which in turn grew out of direct opposition of the Generation of ’50, it is most often characterized as a revival of social poetry. In its use of quotidian language and its desire for practicality, *poesía de la experiencia* indeed draws much influence from the post-war poets, and García Montero has frequently praised them for their aspiration to produce “necessary poetry.” However, his work is equally marked by a reliance on first-person narration and an emphasis on emotional experience, both of which are qualities that can be traced to the romanticism of the Generation of ’27. García Montero melds the priorities of both groups to produce a style that is introspective but outwardly engaged, one that balances autobiography with fiction to tell a story that is personal but avoids exclusivity. He understands personal experience as a reflection of collective experience, and his poetry carefully employs romanticism to speak to broader themes: “Sexuality, especially eroticism, is a social discourse. In our private lives, we internalize models that have to do with the public sphere. ... My love poems force me to think about the time in which I live” (Baqué Quílez 77).

García Montero explicitly challenges the perception of the avant-garde as a rebellion against tradition and argues that *vanguardistas* such as the poets of the Generation of '27 employed tradition and the avant-garde “not as two independent extremes” but harmoniously (*Confesiones* 64). Although his own poetry takes a deliberate stylistic departure from the avant-garde, he maintains a literature professor’s respectful perspective of it within the panorama of history:

The avant-garde interests me as a historical phenomenon. ... What I am less interested in is not so much the avant-garde as an aesthetic movement at a particular moment but the maintenance of an avant-garde perspective, which is different. For example, I am not a religious person, but it would never occur to me to negate the beauty of the Cathedral of León or of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. When I go to a cathedral like that, I enjoy it, but not with the eyes of a believer. I have lost the eyes of a believer for the avant-garde because it seems to me that its historical cycle is closed and that it can now be used like any other historical moment. (Eire 51–52)

García Montero’s poetry most directly takes issue with the standard conception of modernism as a perpetually marginalized voice that speaks to “the experience of extremity” (Mayhew 347). Though his effort to write for, about and from the perspective of “normal people” has caused controversy, as some have accused him of relying on “a highly suspect category of ‘normality’ that condemns all forms of social marginality” (Mayhew) and of “legitimizing forms of power in the established culture” (Iravedra 122), it is clear that his affinity for the normal is based not in a fear or hatred of the marginalized but in a desire to eradicate pretension and exclusivity from poetry. His political views, expressed sharply in essays, interviews and an online column he writes for the newspaper *Público*, consistently reflect progressive values and center on the belief that power has been concentrated in the hands of the privileged for too long. By

expanding poetry's relevance beyond the academic elite and honoring the experience of normal citizens, García Montero attempts to return a valuable resource — art — to the hands of the people. His conception of the poetic perspective as a voice of the common people echoes Rafael Alberti's similar understanding of his role as a poet, as expressed in the title of his 1935 collection *Poeta en la calle* (Poet in the Street).

This populist approach to poetry can also perhaps be credited to García Montero's early experience with poetry as a form of entertainment, as he grew up listening to his father dramatically read verses aloud from *Los mil mejores poesías de la lengua castellana* (The One Thousand Best Poets of the Spanish Language). Like more standard forms of storytelling, poetry was exciting and thrilling: "For me that book almost played the role of adventure novels, where I began to imagine and I found myself participating in the stories" (Eire 49). This sense of unity between poetry and fiction is visible in his work, as the presence of multiple characters and the reliance on an established urban setting allow for the development of a narrative arc. Though his poetry certainly draws on elements of his own life and is motivated by his emotional experience, he is careful not to let his personal story dominate the poem: "One cannot confuse the biographical self with the literary self. ... I treat myself in the poem like a literary character" (Baqué Quílez 75). *Poesía de la experiencia* actively departs from the specificity of individuality and attempts to speak to multiple stories.

García Montero's focus on a common language manifests itself in many instances as an emphasis on shared spaces, assigning great importance to the city as a place of unplanned encounters and constant movement. As Laura Scarano notes, the poet's relationship to the city is founded on a "complicit gesture" of solidarity: "Membership,

identification, recognition, unanimity configure a semantic sphere of strong incidence in the poems, illustrating a radical break with the urban vision of the avant-garde and of the social poetry of midcentury” (18). Rather than deploy the classic romantic poetic hero who has a special insight into the world and its truths, the humble, urban narrator of García Montero’s poems reflects his belief that the poet should “think of himself as a normal person” (*Confesiones* 11). The city-dwelling protagonist is an evolution of the pastoral romantic who, in the mold of William Blake, engages in sentimental contemplations of the nature that surrounds him. The urban narrator, by contrast, gazes upon a scene that is at once beautiful and always somewhat mundane, driven by the practical demands of a fast-paced city life; *Diario cómplice*, in particular, is peppered with references to the *prisa* (“haste” or “hurry”) of the city. By embracing his role as a “normal” member of the city, García Montero champions those who lead decidedly unpoetic lives. He also declines to present himself and his art as inherently better suited to speak of life’s profundity than other members of society, maintaining “a skeptical view of poetry as a language of truth and sincerity” (Bruflat 237).

## II. Diary of an Accomplice

Complicity in a broad sense can be said to define García Montero’s poetic perspective. His work defies a conception of the artist as an isolated creator, emphasizing the influence of environment and community and making explicit the relationship between author and reader. The protagonists of his poems are, fundamentally, members of the world in which they live, with setting consistently playing a dominant role. *Diario cómplice* (1987) both narrows and amplifies the scope of this complicity. The narrative

focuses specifically on the arc of a single love affair, documenting the protagonist's fluid, morphing relationship with his female lover and at one point ("Fragments Collected in an Epistolary") allowing her a voice of her own. At the same time, it exaggerates the autonomy of every aspect of his world, from weather to furniture to body parts, and the most significant story weaving through the collection seems to be an almost magical-realist sense that his surroundings are alive and have conspired to influence his actions. As the identity of the protagonist becomes more general and his volition less clearly his own, the many elements of setting gain such momentum and personality that they come to function less as backdrop than as a diverse and rich cast of characters.

The metaphoric strategy of *Diario cómplice* is perhaps best exemplified in the third stanza of the introductory poem "Invitation": *And nothing is neutral, / not even the shadows of old houses / asking / about their landscape lost in sidewalks, / not even the construction crane / that distantly, / beautiful like a swan, / extends its long neck and rests it / on the gray eaves of the horizon.* Natural, animal and human worlds are carefully melded, as light, manmade structures, technology, birds, color and landscape interact to produce such distinctly human emotions as nostalgia and weariness. The second half of the metaphor is particularly complex in its use of personification. The construction crane evokes an animal whose anthropomorphization throughout literature is so consistent that the image of the crane is at once inanimate, animal and human; in the curve of the machine's arm, the poet sees the neck of a swan, which in turn effortlessly implies a human elegance and femininity. The world of the protagonist throughout this collection is one of almost overwhelming intimacy, as the emotional facets of his inner self are projected onto myriad elements of his outer environment. Far from being "neutral," the

objects and landscape of his world conspire to change the course of his emotional discourse.

This sense of amplification of the poet's personal world underscores much of the first book. In I, II, the lovers' hands are endowed with the power to create the city, and their potential as creators is repeated in I, XIII, when poetry is referred to as "the verses born of us as a shipwreck is born of the sea." The external world exists secondarily to the lovers' world, as in I, III, where streets are "public decorations for a private love," and in I, IV, where the poet affirms that "the days are days because someone loves me." The extreme domination of the personal veers on narcissistic but is redeemed by its emphasis on the duality of the lovers' shared world; the poems suggest that the strangeness and profoundness of their relationship is powerful enough to alter every aspect of the poet's life and world. The pattern of influence is often reversed, however, as light "imagines" the lover in I, XII and the poet sees "a sleeping doorway in every lip" in I, I. Here, it is the external world that wields a god-like power over the romance. Yet in other places the poet employs simile to present himself as merely equal to the inanimate objects of his environment — "streetlights ignite like I do and like me they burn out" (I, XIV) — or he uses prosopopoeia to embody the city entirely, as in I, XII: "I am the city as I look at you, that heat of plastic and bodies that would like to suddenly possess you with its stained arm." The relationship between individual and environment parallels the mercurial nature of romantic relationships, as the question of whether the romance begets the world or vice versa lacks a single definite answer.

Book I relies heavily on surrealism, blurring the lines between the natural, human or animal and the technological. "Invitation" contains a beautiful snapshot of "the

metallic and human color of couple embracing in cars,” an image that is repeated in the “heat of plastic and bodies” in I, XII. In I, VI, the cars “know their path and move like instinctive animals,” recalling the technique employed in “Invitation” to recast a piece of construction equipment as natural. García Montero’s romanticization of utilitarian, quotidian and often ugly objects is a challenge to the classic conception of the poetic hero as the lord of all things idyllic and lovely in nature; his protagonist marvels at the beauty of the quiet omnipresence of cars and telephones in the busy lives of ordinary people. The textual juxtaposition of alcohol and nature similarly serves to rejuvenate devalued imagery in Book II, which includes images such as the “seas of gin full of tempests” (II, XII) and the red houses that remind the protagonists of the “jungles” of so many bottles lined up on a bar (II, XVII). This confusion of the decidedly human with the natural and wild serves, in part, to dissolve the traditional hierarchy of the poeticness of certain objects. García Montero’s inclusion of symbols of everyday life not only honors those who lead urban, unspecial lives but also reconsiders the aesthetic beauty of overlooked things: the gentle tremble of red taillights at night, the colorful, shining order of bottles of gin lined up on a counter.

In another sense, García Montero’s exhaustive personification of his environment can be understood as a thematic representation of his populist convictions. Romantic poetry traditionally employs nature as an extended metaphor for the lover’s beauty, as in Juan Ramón Jiménez’s “Balada de la mujer morena y alegre” (Ballad of the Dark and Joyful Woman): *¡Pon en mi boca las rosas de tu boca, / tu boca roja de sol y carolina! /*

*¡Ábrete toda como una dulce fruta!*<sup>4</sup> Jiménez presents his female muse as a pinnacle of the beauty of the natural world, in which the lusciousness of nature exists to complement and enhance the sublimity of the woman in the poet's eyes. By stark contrast, the protagonist of *Diario cómplice* seems no more fascinated by his lover than by the many inanimate facets of his world, and his descriptions of the beauty of his environment are not done in service of the lover's beauty. The construction crane's swan-like neck in "Invitation" has a femininity all its own; it exists not as an allusion to the lover but as a muse in its own right, equally worthy of the poet's awe. The strangeness of the romanticism of *Diario cómplice* lies in García Montero's persistence in challenging the primacy of the romantic relationship, as he assigns equal importance to relationships of individual to individual (the protagonist to his lover) as to those of individual to group (the protagonist to nature, city, and urban populace).

Intangible elements of setting such as time and weather, though less explicitly personified than flora, fauna and machines, are also complicit in the poet's actions. When the second stanza of I, X, opens with the simple statement, "It was the afternoon before the storm, thunder in the sky," it is clear that the charged air and time of day are remembered by the poet, however illogically, as the causality behind his subsequent affair. The similarly structured sentence that concludes the third stanza — "In the garden, the noise of the last birds, of the first raindrops in the trees" — further illustrates the raw power of quiet details; these small noises enhance the synesthesia of his memory, as does the equally subtle sensation of pre-storm air on his skin. Months play a similar role

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<sup>4</sup> *Place on my mouth the roses of your mouth, / your red mouth of sun and coral! / Open yourself completely like a sweet fruit!* Translation mine.

throughout the collection. The “excessive reality of February” (I, V), “March leav[ing] and April lift[ing] (I, IX), “all that May” (I, XIV), the “humidity of June” (I, XIX), the “insomnia” of the “August cities” (II, IX), the “September” sky (II, XIII), the “October hours” (II, XVIII), the “sentimental disorder” of November (II, XXVII), and the “snow of December” (II, XXX) all lend a definitive flavor to the setting of the poems in which they appear — each month suggests a light, a temperature, a pace of life — and seem to also present the protagonist with a particular state of mind. Their chronology throughout the poems (nearly all are accounted for; January’s and July’s absences exactly six months apart are conspicuous and mysterious) also serves to neatly order the book and place the love affair within the timeframe of a single year.

The poet further personifies his world by treating bodies as separate, autonomous characters. In I, VIII, the lover’s clothes “watch us from the foot of the bed” and prepare to pounce cat-like upon the protagonist and the lover, both of whom are referenced in this poem only by their bodies: “your body recently could have been in them”; “my body also pursues us.” The poem concludes with a disembodied focus on eyes, an image that repeats in I, II (“the feeling of being before your eyes”), I, XII (“the path of your eyes”), I, XV (“the doubt in my eyes and the song they hide”), I, XVI (“eyes of mine, ... you watch me”), I, XVII (“my eyes roam the city”), I, XVIII (“eyes in debt to the night”) and I, XIX (“here again, with me and your eyes”). Similarly, in I, XV, “your heart” is highly imbued with character, described as a wanderer, an outlaw and a witness; in the original Spanish, an emphasis is placed on the masculinity of *el corazón* to enhance the heart’s separation from its female owner. Though odes to a lover’s eyes and heart are classic poetic tropes, García Montero’s treatment of body parts is unusual in that it rarely focuses

on their aesthetic beauty or even their emotional quality. Rather, by presenting the body not as an extension of the being that inhabits it but as an autonomous entity, he amplifies the sense that the characters do not act entirely of their own volition. This emphasized disassociation of self from body echoes the personification and autonomization of other vessels, such the cars that “know their path and move like instinctive animals” in I, VI.

*Diario cómplice* is also dominated by a vague but persistent suggestion of crime. Many references to “the body” carry a connotation of both sex and murder, enhancing the sense of guilt implied in the collection’s title. García Montero applies the same distance to the body as a whole as he does to its various parts, with the effect that bodies often appear as an awkward third party that the protagonist does not know how to address, as in “the strange presence ... of another body” in I, XVI. The protagonist habitually treats his own body and that of his lover as strangers that bear little connection to the characters themselves. This separation is exemplified in I, IX, where the protagonist muses, “I know not the path that separates me from a body from whom I beg dignity, a body not invited to its anniversaries” and later in II, XXIII: “I do not know if I remember myself as a prisoner of a body or free alongside it.” García Montero uses the ambiguity of Spanish articles to his advantage by repeatedly presenting the body as simply “el cuerpo” or “los cuerpos” without identifying or even implying a specific owner. This technique becomes more pronounced in English, as demonstrated in the opening stanza of I, XIX — “To return is a seizure of power over the body” — where the poet has removed all trace of human ownership of the referenced body; here, the connotation of the dehumanized and anonymous body produced by murder is particularly strong. He hints at a connection between these crimes and the poet’s fictionalization of his own life in I, V — ... *stories*

*told in a night of insomnia. // Yet we also know that it would be / worse and more  
expensive / to bring them home, to not hide the body / in the smoke of a bar — and  
“Fragments Collected in an Epistolary”: For all the love it holds, / a letter facedown on  
the table / will always be a cadaver.*

The transition poem between the two books serves as the most complete instance of the character development of the lover, who, although she appears in almost every poem, is elsewhere represented as the faceless female “you” typical of romantic poetry. In “Fragments Collected in an Epistolary,” the lover speaks for herself, and her tone is strongly critical as she accuses the protagonist of objectifying her as a literary character. She calls his poetry “this exercise of yours to which you always return, the doubtful inclination to make life into a book only half real” and scorns his tendency to indulge in “the melodramatic banality of an inner exile.” She insinuates that the protagonist’s immersion in his poetry causes him to superimpose more dramatic elements of her literary character onto her real-life self, allowing the romantic second-person of his writing to eclipse their actual relationship. Yet she admits to sharing in this blurring of the lines between fiction and reality — “without wanting to I resemble this character born of you, my blood invaded by verses and chapters” — and herein lies the most literal application of the collection’s title. If there is a crime recorded in these poems, it is the poems themselves and their transformation of life into a story. The poet’s accomplices in this act range from the many aspects of his setting, which add a multitude of motivated, emotionalized characters to his quotidian existence, to his lover, who reluctantly takes part in the dramatization of herself.

Book II is marked by a decrease in the romanticization of urban objects like cars and streetlights and a greater emphasis on nature, which is explicitly sexualized in many instances. The first seven poems in the book all employ the sea as a metaphor for sex — most graphically in II, III, which presents the motion and salty taste of the waves as a parallel image of fellatio, but also elegantly in the lines “the sea will be a cold sheet fallen to the floor” (II, I) and “we are naked ships that sink” (II, II). The poet’s obsession with the sea and his thorough romanticization of it — recalling similar tendencies in the marine poetry of Rafael Alberti, whom García Montero has studied extensively— is so strong that by II, VI, it becomes necessary to define the lover in relation to the sea: “You who are not the sea.” Yet the poem goes on to contradict this opening line, as we see the lover described in unmistakably marine terms by her “tempestuous skin” and dreams of shipwrecks.

The lover’s relationship to nature is also commented upon in II, II (“the wind, that animal that whistles in your veins”), II, IX (the sea “submerged in your snail’s voice”), II, X (“the sky ... looks too much like your eyes”), II, XIII (“the sky is prejudiced having seen you ask life questions”), II, XV (“I want you to rise with the impatience of the trees”), II, XXII (the light’s mechanism “is sweet and it repeats, like your heart when it preferred me”) and II, XXX (“the snow of December that asks you to return as it lies down”). Though sea and sky are the most prominent natural elements poeticized in Book II, the lover also interacts with, and is serenaded by, moon, trees, wind, snow and light. The protagonist neither personifies nature as an extension of himself nor presents the landscape as a metaphor for the lovers’ relationship. Rather, he most often constructs the natural world as an equal who desires the lover as he does, recalling the jealousy of the

narrator in Pablo Neruda's "Poem XIX" as he watches the sun "coil in the strands of your black mane ... and leave in your eyes two dark oases."<sup>5</sup> Where the first book emphasizes the protagonist's own relationship to the cars, streetlights and telephones that define his daily existence, Book II shifts its focus to the interaction of setting and the lover. Though "the city" appears in several Book II poems, one senses that the couple is physically elsewhere for much of the book, as suggested in the seaside motel of II, I, and the meadows of II, XIII. (The implication of travel is perhaps enhanced by the fact that Granada, which is almost certainly the setting of Book I, is not a coastal city, and many of the second book's poems feature the protagonist gazing at the sea.) The pace throughout is more languid, evocative of a vacation, and marked by the presence of autumn and winter months. While Book I references the more energetic springtime months of February through June, Book II begins in the slow, stifling heat of August and ends in tranquil December.

"Invitation to Return," the collection's concluding poem, also forgoes a focus on a tangible urban environment for an abstract, dreamlike marine world. The protagonist's character, which has become steadily vaguer over the course of the book, almost disappears in this final poem, as the spotlight turns to imagery of landscapes and bodies and ignores the lovers themselves. García Montero maintains a series of wholly abstract subjects throughout the poem, to the effect that a beautiful but confused imagery is prioritized over coherent narrative — a significant departure from his usual style and

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<sup>5</sup> *Un sol negro y ansioso se te arrolla en la hebras / de la negra melena, cuando estiras los brazos. / Tú juegas con el sol como un estero / y él te deja en los ojos dos oscuros remansos.* Translation mine.



Montero argues for a new “I” that exists alongside and in collaboration with the world that surrounds it; his protagonist recuses himself of the imperialism of a poetic voice that masterfully arranges imagery into hierarchies of beauty and emotional value. As his own volition shrinks, the poet becomes equalized to the objects and natural bodies that structure his daily existence, and all are complicit in the formation of the poet’s self. Perhaps most significant among these accomplices is the reader himself, as the participation of an audience allows the poems to evolve from private diary to literature, transforming the protagonist and his lover from ordinary people into “literary characters, true lies, false truth” (I, XXV). The poet’s essence is realized through his relationships, whether with his lover, his city, the light and wind that surrounds him, or his own words, which acquire a life and character of their own.

Indeed, an almost obsessive use of metapoetic technique marks *Diario cómplice*, as the protagonist often addresses his own utterances as forces more powerful than himself. Though the lover is cast as muse and never as a writer herself (which is perhaps surprising given that García Montero is married to the successful novelist Almudena Grandes), he credits his relationship with her as the true author of his poetry: “The verses born of us as a shipwreck is born of the sea” (I, XIII). Here, again, García Montero stands in defiant contrast to a conception of the poet as a confident, definitive voice of truth: his poetry springs forth from his experiences as spontaneously and uncontrollably as a shipwreck, and the words he produces are surrounded by an uneasy aura of crime. The poet — that always-blurry overlap between García Montero and his semi-real protagonist — is conflicted about his own role. He sings the praises of the city and people he loves with sure passion, but is quick to chastise himself (as he does through the lover’s

biting comment in “Fragments Collected in an Epistolary”: “Men, poetry, and the melodramatic banality of an inner exile”) for adopting the status of “poet” with too much certainty. As he affirms in *Confesiones poéticas*, “It is dangerous to become poetic while writing poems. To make real poetry, the first thing one must know is that the poetic genre is a lie” (10). The protagonist desires so strongly to dissolve hierarchies — of imagery, emotion, relationships and sources of truth — that he almost seems to regret the fact that his poetry ultimately flows from a single hand: his own. His apostrophe toward his own verses serves to humbly recognize his lack of complete authorship and to give artistic credit to the strange and lovely world that inspires him.

### III. Translating

For such a successful writer, García Montero is shockingly underrepresented outside of Spain. Beyond the few poems translated piecemeal on blogs, available English versions of his work are limited to a Master’s thesis from 2007 that translated 28 poems and two small collections from the University of Washington, published in 1995 and 2010, which translated a total of 25 poems. These volumes circulate almost exclusively in academic circles, which is both unfortunate and ironic given García Montero’s emphatic desire to extend poetry’s reach to ordinary readers. This dearth of access to García Montero’s work reflects the larger phenomenon of the heavily skewed import-export balance in English-language literature. As the writer and translator Lawrence Venuti notes in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, in many parts of Europe, books translated from English constitute the vast majority of a country’s annual

literary production, while “the practices of American and British publishers have run in the other direction” (5). Venuti observes that between 1984 and 1990 only 3.5 percent of books in the United States and 2.5 percent of books in Britain were translated works, and the number has not risen significantly in recent years. The University of Rochester runs a translation press and a website, called Three Percent after the approximate proportion of U.S. books for which translations continue to annually account, which is dedicated to discussions and online publications of translated writing. To quote from the site’s mission statement, “In this age of globalization, one of the best ways to preserve the uniqueness of cultures is through the translation and appreciation of international literary works. . . . It is a historical truism and will always remain the case that some of the best books ever written were written in a language other than English.”

That would seem to be a fairly common-sense attitude toward world literature, but an Anglocentric focus pervades English-language literature in both the paucity of foreign books published in the U.S. and England and in the strategies that dominate contemporary translation. A convention popular among translators of many genres is the idea that the best translation is one that appears to have been written in the target language; this aesthetic is so ubiquitous that is seldom challenged, with the effect of eclipsing the wide array of dissenting theories. The strategy is commonly applied by substituting a source-language idiomatic expression for what is considered a parallel expression in the target language. For example, the Spanish word *cabrón* is nearly always translated to English as *bastard* or *asshole* to convey the intended slur, rather than preserving the image the word literally suggests, which is that of a male goat. It is often applied to grammar and style rules as well, by adjusting the conventions of the source

language (e.g., a tolerance for long sentences or the passive voice) to fit with those of the target language, in which certain styles of sentences may appear unusual. The most conservative practitioners of this strategy even “translate” cultural icons from the source language. A translation teacher I studied under in Spain once insisted it was appropriate, when dubbing the New York-based sitcom *Friends*, to substitute references to Bloomingdales with the popular Spanish department store El Corte Inglés.

Venuti calls this technique a “fluent strategy” because it strives for the illusion that the original author is a fluent member of the target language and culture rather than an other. He criticizes the technique as censoring the author as well as reinforcing the reader’s willful ignorance of the translator’s presence in the text: “Fluency tries to check the drift of language away from the conceptual signified, away from communication and self-expression. When successfully deployed, it is the strategy that produces the effect of transparency, wherein the translation is identified with the foreign text and evokes the individualistic illusion of authorial presence” (4). The deceptive invisibility of the translator, in addition to “contributing to the cultural marginality and economic exploitation” of translators, augments the reader’s egotistical belief that his culture is universal by obscuring all traces of foreignness from the text. As Venuti aptly notes, manipulating language is necessarily problematic in a political sense: “The foreign text ... [becomes] inevitably coded with other target-language values, beliefs and social representations, implicating the translation in ideologies that figure social differences and may well arrange them in heierarchical relations (according to class, gender, sexual orientation, race, nation).”

I enthusiastically agree with Venuti's condemnation of a fluent strategy and endorse what could inversely be called a foreign strategy, in which the translator endeavors to celebrate, rather than conceal, the elements of a text that mark it as a cultural other. To me, the question posed to a translator is not only how language reflects culture — how a text illuminates the conventions of the author's home — but also how language actively shapes culture by providing a deeply foundational sense of organization through which one experiences the world. Languages address the vast and fluid landscape of life and make it concrete through categorization. These groupings almost always seem obvious to a native speaker and arbitrary to a foreigner; it is only through fluent multilingualism that one is able to begin to see the preconceptions that are inherently imbued in each language.

The question of the relatedness of language and worldview is most succinctly answered in Benjamin Lee Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity, which is understood as a two-pronged hypothesis. First, "structural differences in language systems will, in general, be paralleled by nonlinguistic cognitive differences, of an unspecified sort, in the native speakers of the two languages." Second, "the structure of anyone's native language strongly influences or fully determines the world-view he will acquire as he learns the language" (Brown, as quoted in Kay and Kempton 66). Whorf's hypothesis (generally known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in credit to Whorf's teacher Edward Sapir) is commonly applied to the domain of color in examination of the distinct color lexicons of various languages. The linguistic anthropologists Paul Kay and Willett Kempton exemplify the hypothesis through a comparison of English to the Uto-Aztecan language Tarahumara, which describes both green and blue with a single word, *siyóname*, roughly

translating to “green or blue.” “The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,” they write, “... predicts that colors near the green-blue boundary will be subjectively pushed apart by English speakers precisely because English has the words *green* and *blue*, while Tarahumara speakers, lacking this lexical distinction, will show no comparable distortion” (68).

To give more linguistic examples of Whorfianism: in Spanish, the word *esperar* encompasses the concepts, distinct in English, of *to wait*, *to hope for*, and *to expect*. Conversely, *free* in English is used to express the divergent Spanish concepts denoted by *libre* (boundless) and *gratis* (costing nothing). Because the single word *free* both connotes and denotes more ideas at once than its closest parallels in Spanish, a native English speaker will likely have a more general and abstract understanding of the value than a Spanish speaker. In this way, a subtle but significant cultural divide exists between the languages. In English, we use the preposterously broad phrase *I love you* to convey emotional bonds as different as familial, romantic and friendly, not to mention that *love* is also used to show preference for objects or activities, as in “I love your sweater” or “I love to ski.” Spanish-speakers use *te amo* for deep romantic bonds, *te quiero* for familial and less serious romantic connections, and *me encanta* for things and activities. Because an emotional concept like love does not signify a tangible object — one cannot point at love the way one points at a Granny Smith to show that *apple* and *manzana* refer to the same thing — it’s arguable that the word itself, rather than denoting a concept, creates the concept. We use language as a tool not only to communicate but to think, for without words, we could not draw parallels and make connections between our myriad experiences. For this reason — because language is so intrinsically responsible for the way a person thinks — it is vital, when translating poetry, to preserve linguistic elements

of the text with the same carefulness with which one tries to convey the author's ideas. Indeed, it is foolish to attempt to treat the two as mutually exclusive. Contrary to Octavio Paz's opinion that "language itself is essentially a translation, [because] in the first place it translates from the nonverbal world" (Aranda 1), it is clear that most thoughts would never come to us if we lacked a vocabulary full of potential articulations.

Though English and Spanish have many similarities because of their shared Latin roots — the distance between the two is much shorter than, for instance, that between English and Arabic — there are also several observable ways in which the languages contradict each other. Lucía Aranda, in *Handbook of Spanish-English Translation*, notes that stylistic differences include clichés, which in Spanish are "ornate, passionate, more suited for the dramatic" and in English "plain, factual, more suited for business, science"; point of view, which tends to be "more subjective, anarchic" in Spanish and "more objective, impersonal" in English; and word order, which is "flexible" in Spanish and "less flexible" in English (47–48). Pronouns are especially complicated. Use of the second person differs greatly between Spanish and English in that the former makes a distinction between plural and singular as well as between formal and informal, resulting in four different forms of the English "you." (The verb "tutear," which means to address someone with the informal "tú," always poses a special problem for translators.) In addition, certain Spanish verb forms leave the subject ambiguous. First person and singular third person take an identical form in the past imperfect, leading to phrases such as *estaba siempre pidiendo la palabra* in the poem "Fragments Collected in an Epistolary," in which the verb, *estaba*, could apply to the speaker herself, to an unknown third person, or to the inanimate "memory" or "fire" mentioned in the previous sentence.

This type of situation complicates the translator's task not only because the translator may be unsure which speaker the poet intends but also because, while the original phrasing is defined by its ambiguity, the translator has no choice but to narrow the scope by choosing a gendered pronoun.

Gender is one of the thorniest problems in Spanish-to-English translation, as there seem to be infinite situations in which a word is neutral in one language but gendered in the other. As noted, English is more gendered when it comes to verb expression because Spanish permits the absence of pronouns (*comió* vs. *he/she/you ate*), and the third-person possessive may refer to one or more people of either gender or be used in service of the formal second-person (*su coche* vs. *his/her/your/their car*). On the other hand, gender peppers a Spanish sentence through nouns, which take a masculine or feminine article, and adjectives, which are adjusted to reflect the gender of the noun they modify; Aranda characterizes Spanish as “more marked” by gender than English. García Montero, like many poets who write in Spanish, sometimes capitalizes on the gender of a significant noun to emphasize its masculinity or femininity and further personify the object. In I, XV, the heart of his female lover becomes a figure that operates autonomously, and its independence is subtly underlined by its masculine nature. In the final lines, the protagonist asks, “¿Qué camino sin cruces, sin kilómetros, sabrá llevarme a él?” *Él* means *he* in the sense that it is used to refer to men, but it can also be applied to inanimate objects designated by a masculine noun — in another context, the question might translate clearly as “What road will bring me to it?” García Montero's careful use of the pronoun is neither as neutral as *it* nor as dramatically anthropomorphized as *he* would be

in English; it is a delicate dual function of syntax that defies assignment into the more bluntly designated pronouns of English.

Poetry is almost unanimously considered the most difficult form of writing to translate. The intense degree of precision that commands the choice of each word, the articulate intersection of structure, content and sound, the likelihood that autobiography is woven into the text, enhancing the exclusivity of its meaning — these combined factors cause many to declare, as Yves Bonnefoy did, that “the answer to the question, ‘Can one translate a poem?’ is of course no” (186).<sup>6</sup> Whereas a prose writer generally strives for clarity and endeavors to employ words as relatively clear-cut building blocks contributing to the more important unit of the paragraph or chapter, each word in a poem is likely to have many layers of meaning. These range from a word’s specific personal significance to the poet to its most common prosaic use to its infinite cultural and historical connotations. As the writer Tim Parks has observed of the difficulties of translation, “Each text and each usage in the text has no absolute existence, content, or meaning, but is always understood in relation to where we are now, what we regularly read and expect to see on the page. The translator frequently finds himself obliged to translate not the words themselves, but the distance between those words and other words that might normally have been used, but weren’t. It is a tough proposition.”

Though few would argue in favor of giving up entirely, it’s true that certain elements of the original poem will inevitably be sacrificed in translation. An example of these necessary concessions can be found in references to the body, which presents another complex obstacle for translators of Spanish poetry — like gender, it is imbued

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<sup>6</sup> Translated by John Alexander and Clive Wilmer.

with intimacy and often subtly conveys important emotional information. In this context, the possessive has a much greater presence in English than in Spanish, resulting in the English speaker's propensity to speak of "my body." When we feel pain, we express it as *my leg hurts* — first we establish that the leg is ours, then we say it aches. In Spanish, the convention is *me duele la pierna*, which translates literally as *the leg hurts me*. This tendency to refer to body parts without the possessive applies in other contexts when it is less clear to whom the part belongs, as in I, XIII, when García Montero writes, *la piel se abre con el cielo*. Here and elsewhere, I translate *la piel* as *our skin* to convey the general, collective sense the article implies in Spanish. In other places, the ambiguity of the original is best preserved through omitting the article, as in I, X, where I translate *y el diminuto encaje / rozado por la yema de los dedos* as *and little lace / brushed by fingertips*; since the implied double presence of "your fingertips" and "my fingertips" seems intentional, I chose to avoid making it explicit by using "our." (By contrast, in the 1995 short anthology *La otra sentimentalidad*, translators at the University of Washington translated the line to *and the little border of lace / grazed by the pads of your fingers*.)

When translating poetry, I am often inclined to prioritize word order in the service of allowing the reader to receive a series of images in the order intended by the author. Because Spanish allows object-verb-subject word order, I was frequently faced with a choice between sacrificing a phrase's active voice or the order of its images. In I, V, García Montero writes, *el golpe que nos dejan / las historias contadas una noche de insomnio*; although the object ("us") appears first, the phrase is in fact active. To retain that activeness, the translation would necessarily be *the blow that stories told in a night of*

*insomnia give us*. I chose instead to employ the passive in the service of maintaining both the order of the images and a smoother, less awkward phrasing: *the blow given to us by stories told in a night of insomnia*. In other places, I found the word order in Spanish produced a compelling, though unusual, articulation in English. In I, XX, I translate *porque de ti le hablaban las adelfas* as *because of you spoke the oleanders* — a phrasing that deliberately circumvents the conventional *because the oleanders spoke of you* or, even less intrusive, *because the oleanders talked about you*, in order to allow the palimpsest of Spanish grammar to shine through. This type of translation, in which the verb form is translated literally, tends to produce an elegant, antique effect; like gender-imbued nouns, the strangeness of literal translation can often serve as an aesthetic representation of an emotional current in the poem.

A common consequence of poetry translation is that the delicacy of imagery, and with it the poem's overall tone, are lost through translation choices that are too bluntly quotidian in an effort to make a phrase appear "normal" in the target language. I employ literal translations sparingly so as not to allow a formal tone to dominate, but I believe they can be instrumental in preserving a text's lyricism. Practitioners of a fluent strategy who eschew choices that reveal the presence of the source language risk omitting beauty and grace. When translating, I work to make English act like a thin and translucent tarp under which the curvature of Spanish can be seen, and I try to capitalize on those few important places in the English grammar where the syntax is flexible enough to allow the intrusion of another language. The strange elegance that emerges when more than one language is allowed a voice in a work is, I believe, much of what makes translated writing valuable and interesting. As a reader, I don't like to be deceived; I am put off by

the idea that a translator has gone to great lengths to disguise a text so that it appears to be something it is not — a work originally produced in the target language. The heart of the philosophy behind a foreign strategy is, to me, an attempt to be honest with one's reader about where a work comes from.

Yet literal translations must be utilized carefully: there is a necessary line to be drawn between letting the spotlight linger occasionally on the source language and shining that light so intensely that nothing else in the poem can be seen. While rare and deliberate uses of unconventional source-language syntax or the inclusion of a source-language word can effectively enhance a poem's complexity (and perhaps restore lyricism where some has been lost), too great an emphasis on literal translation can produce a text that is incomprehensible, ridiculous or — worst of all — pretentiously arty. The danger of a careless application of a foreign strategy, of course, is exoticism, in which the text is presented purely as an other at which to marvel. This conflict is especially sensitive with regards to García Montero's work, for the poet is emphatic about wanting to connect with the common reader and to speak in a common language: "Poetry is not the invention of an extravagant language but the personal and rigorous treatment of the language of society" (*Confesiones* 10). *Poesía de la experiencia* reacted against the belief of the *novísimos* that art was meaningless, placing a renewed emphasis on content over form. In keeping with these considerations, my translations consciously retain the frank, honest tone in which García Montero often writes. I have done my best to balance what is personal and individual in his writing with what is cultural and what may be termed universal; I honor the authorship of García Montero at the same time that

I recognize that each writer is born of his language and that to obscure the role of language in a poem is to disrespectfully and dishonestly misrepresent it.

Although a foreign strategy may seem to conflict with García Montero's aesthetic, it runs thematic parallels with the content of much of his work. *Diario cómplice* places a heavy emphasis on collaboration and my translations rely fundamentally on the cooperation of, and dialogue between, English and Spanish. Translators who employ a fluent strategy exacerbate the isolation, ignorance and often narcissism of a community by shielding it from the influence of other cultures, a practice that would offend García Montero's belief that poetry should provide "the possibility to read an argument that is foreign but that speaks to our own lives, that is useful to us, that names our reality" (*Confesiones* 10). A foreign strategy, conversely, fosters interaction between cultures and languages, helping to dissolve the traditionally imperialistic power imbalance between the source and target languages; *Diario cómplice*, as we have seen, is also marked by an erasure of the established hierarchies in poetry between "beautiful" and "ugly" imagery. Furthermore, several of García Montero's works address the multilayered, omnipresent nature of memory and espouse a worldview in which logical, objective truth may be challenged by personal emotional experience. *Quedarse sin ciudad* (1994), in particular, is dominated by the palimpsests of past versions of the poet's native city, an imagery that is present as well in the deliberate disloyalty to English (and the palimpsestal presence of Spanish) in certain lines of my translations. In equalizing the influence of the source and target texts, a foreign strategy is foundationally a subversion of dominant power structures between languages, cultures and nations. These actions are inherently

congruous with the liberal values to which García Montero adheres in both the ethics of his writing and his work in the political sphere.

The strongest impulse visible in García Montero's writing is the desire to dissolve barriers between the self — a finite, knowable entity — and that foreign, undefined mass we know as the other. He accomplishes this primarily by challenging the notion that anyone, least of all the poet, acts alone; the world is his accomplice, and vice versa. García Montero's work thus makes for an extremely compelling translation, because neither do I act alone in producing this collection of English-language texts. We are each other's accomplices. The task we work toward, expressed in the content of his poems as well as in the methodology behind my translations, is that of touching and examining the border that divides one experience from another — a goal that is as much political as it is artistic. These poems hope to challenge isolation, to nourish intercultural understanding, and ultimately to ensure that “poetry continues to be useful” (*Confesiones* 11).

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*Diary of an Accomplice (1987)*

## INVITATION

*...Call me...*

Long tongue of sea,  
restless in the gaze of return,  
this street that populates its loneliness with leaves,  
that tangles in the light like a cluster  
of shadows or of mud,  
of wet newspapers  
over the indigo oil of the tiles,  
and lipstick forgotten on the walls,  
and gardens with doubts  
and ivy  
submerging the door's bourgeois iron.

Long tongue of sea in my memory.

Under the French light  
the watchful numbers on doorways recreate themselves,  
the little mermaid reflected,  
her lips over the water,  
the empty theater of musicians  
waiting for Sunday.  
Everything like a private reclamation,  
the air that lifts head  
from heart and pushes  
toward the strange task of writing one's nostalgia.

And nothing is neutral,  
not even the shadows of old houses  
asking  
about their landscape lost in sidewalks,  
not even the construction crane  
that distantly,  
beautiful like a swan,  
extends its long neck and rests it  
on the gray eaves of the horizon.

I went down to the city  
in that uncertain foretold hour,  
where all the stoplights shiver,  
in that dark field,  
sketched,  
where the breeze of the taxis blows  
with its mossy reflection,

where the light hides  
the shiny under-eye circles of the neighborhood,  
leaving on each body  
a long gaze, an empty scene.

I was in the city  
and saddened at the time of wandering its signals,  
vagabond in the light of the storefronts.  
I want to round the corner,  
discover another spine,  
seek a municipal and friendly heart  
that opens for me the door of its eyes  
and invites me in.

Call me,  
I will return with you,  
wandering slowly the streets that do not exist  
when you do not call me,  
walking for you  
through the afternoon's small anger.  
Call me,  
it's barely eight o'clock, barely a mild  
sonority of life  
returning to the sidewalks,  
it confuses itself in the hurry of teenagers,  
hastens its step at the last stores,  
opens its metallic and human color  
of couples embracing in cars,  
strangers who watch each other  
under the uncertain tent of desire,  
under the artificial moon.

Watch me returning  
over the tall houses of this distracted April,  
I who so fear the borders.

Among the trees  
the sun looks like the eye of a drunk.

Call me,  
today has a different schedule,  
the heat of its reign is different,  
the image of some servants of different blood,  
with the dignity of rational beings,  
thinking hearts that could talk  
if they were not alone,

if someone were to call them.

But everything convenes on your presence:  
watch me returning.

Open doorways,  
advertisements,  
they remind me of your skin,  
this doubtless kingdom  
where I try to speak of the horizon.

The horizon,  
like the dirty counter of an unfamiliar bar  
where I will never be able to lean.

## BOOK I

I

I know  
that tender love chooses its cities  
and each passion takes a home,  
a different way to wander the hallways,  
to turn off the lights.

And I know  
that there is a sleeping doorway in every lip,  
a numberless elevator,  
a stairway full of little parentheses.

I know that every illusion  
has a different way  
of inventing hearts or pronouncing names  
upon answering the telephone.  
I know that every hope  
seeks always a road  
to cover its naked shadow with sheets  
when it wakes.

And I know  
that there is a date, a day, behind every street,  
a desirable rancor,  
a halfway repentance of the body.

I know  
that love has different letters  
with which to write: I'm leaving, with which to say:  
I decided to return. Every time of doubts  
needs its scenery.

## II

If the histories of skin hide  
a dark intuition in their beginnings,  
if this heart of mine were armored,  
the factory of forgetting that works alongside me,  
nothing was as strange  
as seeing you and knowing you waited for me,  
scattered, beautifully, in debt to the wind.

And yet sometimes I remember...  
before meeting you I understood  
the feeling of being before your eyes,  
because you had arrived  
before your own self,  
out of uncertainty and memory,  
summoning in me a gesture,  
an ancient disorder,  
that privileged vassalage  
that desire asks of us over time.

In the year's first timidness,  
along with cold promises and mornings  
unable to change life,  
my dreams and your hair came back with the wind  
seeking a way to feel themselves  
again on some shoulders, sustained  
by a heat alien to their own silence.  
It was as if I had learned  
that the city does not exist beneath the snow,  
that our hands touch and think of creating it,  
of discovering antennas  
and rooftops,  
of inventing the waiting of the trees,  
the postal zones where  
mist dies, as they say,  
the smoke of frightening breasts,  
the infinite distance of their names.

And suddenly at times I remember  
an injury of light  
before its own self,  
on the wall suddenly, in our eyes,  
summoning in me a gesture,  
a future disorder...

### III

Like the first cigarette,  
the first embraces. You had  
a small paper star  
shiny on your cheekbone  
and you occupied the marginal stage  
where parties joined with loneliness, music,  
or the gentle desire for a common return,  
almost always later.

And it was not darkness but those hours  
that turned streets into public decorations  
of a private love.  
Our possible fugitive shadows  
dared together,  
smoking with upturned collars.  
Silhouettes with voice,  
shadows in which history took shape,  
the history that today we are,  
once wagered the heart's peace.

Yet furniture  
also did this to us.  
In front of that window —which never closed well—  
in a room that looks like ours,  
with books and with bodies  
that could be ours,  
we loved each other  
beneath the city's first yawn, its warning,  
its arrogant protest. I had  
a small paper star  
shiny on my lip.

#### IV

If I ever tell you life is a lie,  
talk to me about love or about your body,  
of night with you.

And remind me later  
of the days that are days because someone loves me  
or perhaps  
because you prefer me.



## VI

Red tremble of brakes at night:  
so I dream of love, so I remember.  
Between the forgetful dawn,  
sensations of murky intimacy,  
when to have a familiar partner  
is a relief for the alien.

Blurred gravity of windshields  
in carefree seduction.  
Because cars know their path  
and they move like instinctive animals  
toward home, surely, between our kisses  
that last the length of a stoplight  
and a little more; because to say tomorrow  
is almost to discuss the beyond,  
and we speak of the pain of schedules,  
remote, succumbing to imprudence,  
like the living speak of death.

## VII

I praise your scandals  
and the sulfuric rain you summon  
or the sweet politics of your illusions,  
visible like lips in the dune  
laid against other lips.

Because the body knows a memory  
that is neither reality nor dream.

Remember:  
behind every gesture we guard a name.

## VIII

Like a stretched-out cat,  
your clothes watch us  
from the foot of your bed.  
And your body recently  
could have been in them  
still,  
planning their leap,  
waiting to crash  
wildly against my body,  
which also pursues us,  
at the edge of the chair,  
embracing its own  
long darkness.  
Eyes that were made  
to see  
an accepted danger,  
under the light of the moon.

## IX

Maybe all we are lacking  
is to be a little less young, to experience life  
in another, more distant tone  
                    without abuses  
of our inevitable humanity.

Paradise again.  
Again the good fortune of a house  
not too big, under a Friday sun,  
a sincere refuge on a hill  
from which to watch the earth tenderly,  
as March leaves and April lifts  
the face of the inherited fields  
two hours away.

Against the injured glass of the door,  
I like to watch the roots wanting you,  
to know their desire is mine as they cling  
with wild fingers to your body,  
to your enormous days of small breasts,  
like shadows of the olive tree.  
Just as a dream would have it, you begin the descent  
to sleep with me,  
igniting  
the hidden kingdom of retired light,  
which neither silences arguments of the flesh  
nor brings distance  
to the mundane noise of its vocabulary,  
inherited too with these stones.

Although the smoke of firewood is whiter  
and floats on the sound of peace  
over the aged silence of these mountains,  
although the hymns of the dawn  
weaken their voices, drawing nearer,  
I know not the path that separates me  
from a body from whom I beg dignity,  
a body not invited to its anniversaries, that liturgical heat  
of its ancestors  
and of ancient dances  
of naked shoulders  
that look like the sea.

It is impossible to retire from time.

It is impossible,  
yet I venture to surprise us,  
to tell you, to know you,  
to have the privilege.  
And they are useless, these hours  
that are not of your age nor of mine.

X

That tremble of thigh  
and little lace  
brushed by fingertips  
are the best memory of a few days  
known without hurry, without documentation,  
like timid friends.

It was the afternoon before the storm,  
thunder in the sky.  
You appeared in the garden, secret,  
dressed in clothes of a different time,  
with an extravagant manner of wanting me,  
pretending to be the wind in a wardrobe,  
the light in black silk  
and glass stockings  
so pressed  
to your thighs, forcefully,  
with that dark force  
of their masters in life.

Under the confused color of the wild flowers,  
unexpectedly you offered me  
the memory of your open lips,  
some difficult clothing, and the beam of light  
barely glimpsed on your flesh,  
like lunatic fire,  
like the flame of an almond tree where I placed  
my hand without doubt.  
In the garden, the noise of the last birds,  
of the first raindrops in the trees.

That tremble of thigh  
and little lace, of trespassed body hair,  
its elastic resistance  
defeated by the pass of the years,  
become real again, swell of waves to the touch,  
damp sand between the hands,  
when again, here, in my thoughts  
I give myself up to the difficult solution of your groin  
and I stop writing  
in order to call you.

## XI

They are suspicious of us. The first bus  
has passed, and it surprises us  
at the scene of the crime,  
necks and hands untied,  
at the point of death, giving in.

The light calls us to a halt,  
we feel its revolver at our backs,  
too indecisive,  
its tremble in us, covert  
under the small forest of the sheets.

Run!  
Grab your love and run inside your body!  
There is a lawless canyon in our lips,  
a labyrinth whose exits are burning.  
Look at your heart or your waist,  
that castle overhead  
that my thighs crown like a lake of fog.

Run!  
It heeds only the wind of our skin,  
passing and returning.  
And may the blasts sound,  
may the gunshots sound,  
may the sirens sound at your back.

## XII

You pass like a scandal through the streets.

Among the green old men of the trees  
light imagines you,  
as it places its spider on your shirt  
with a merciless invitation  
to bear the dark, fugitive  
will of bliss.

You pass like skin under a hand,  
train smoke, that broken silence.

And I am the city as I look at you,  
that heat of plastics and bodies  
that would like to suddenly possess you  
with its stained arm.

But only the afternoon  
may welcome the lost footsteps,  
the worn blue of your jeans,  
the path of your eyes and the ships  
when you round the corner.

### XIII

The pines have reached their pensiveness.  
Your loneliness, so poorly documented,  
ignores that people roam the street  
a little more naked  
and that skin opens to a sky  
of tumultuous blue,  
half song, half false coin.

And over the fields,  
spring returned  
under the transparency of a dress  
or in the ambiguous garden  
that rests  
—startled by blackbirds and swifts—  
with life against the wall of the house.

Only in you, like shadows,  
do the intuitive bodies rise,  
the halfway footprints of the birds,  
that foreignness  
of their games in the navigable air.

And you watch them rise,  
maybe disappeared,  
scheming in the branches where love schemes  
to write the verses  
born of us  
as a shipwreck is born of the sea.

You represent two things:  
sadness and beauty,  
limitation  
and the wings of a dream.

Impares. Fila 13. Butaca 3. Te espero como siempre.  
PABLO GARCÍA BAENA

Springtime movies are advertised in the streets  
with arduous commotion  
and with photographs.

Agitated

—as if it were young and had arrived running—  
the light reddens over the walls  
of the city,  
and the trees hold a metallic gleam,  
the impression of a body  
that desires nakedly.  
A rumor of hope  
arrives, grows  
to fill even the inhabitable loneliness  
of the empty sheets.  
There are advertisements, glass, warehouses  
and escalators in a bit of a hurry.  
Cars pass,  
stars, vans,  
and astonished teenage girls  
who shine  
vaguely differently.

Streetlights  
ignite like I do  
and like me they burn out.  
Love wanders these streets.

But behind, behind all that May  
you were there,  
round, white, full,  
as if the moon had bitten your breasts.

XV

Your heart, closed for renovations,  
goes wandering in music,  
not wanting to answer me.

Always the outlaw, it does not resist  
coexisting under this metal  
kingdom of words.

The gaze it carries knows  
that errant pain  
of nocturnal ships.

It became a witness to tell me  
of the doubt in my eyes  
and the song they hide.

It is silence, silence nonetheless,  
emptiness fettered  
to moonbeams.

What road without crosses, without kilometers,  
knows how to lead me to it?  
Where can I find it?

XVI

...madrigal...

Eyes of mine, laden,  
you watch me with anger  
as the party ends.

Arrested,  
with the impatience with which a soul takes note,  
you notice me at the instant  
of some decision,  
at the strange presence, emaciated,  
of another necessity  
and of another body,  
while you pass whistling over my temples.

You have loved much, I know,  
but you love like he who leaves one hundred witnesses,  
one hundred dreams in a single night, one hundred different traces  
of the same passion, gentler over time,  
legendary.

Nights of rock, leisurely, on the outskirts,  
and a dark patio where desires mature,  
where leather jackets confuse  
with the smell of life.  
Memories turned into Holy Days.

A history lacking credit with today,  
and above all a world much less  
marginal than its verses,  
you summon me here.

This world you place in the mirror,  
eyes of mine, laden.

## XVII

Nothing lonelier than pain,  
because it excludes too he who feels it,  
whether his pain is a betrayal or a companion.  
From my own emptiness  
forever I the excluded.  
You,  
so disappeared,  
swallowed by the earth like passing rains,  
you can be beneath the shadows  
that share night with my shadow,  
in bars open like wounds,  
burger joints  
that the city inhabits and decorates  
with the immobile sadness for sale in a cabaret,  
where people shed  
the modesty of knowing themselves to be tormented.

Next to the dead cars at the edge of the street,  
there is an empty place that becomes a teardrop.

And I,  
desperately I wander it,  
because my eyes too  
roam the city seeking a parking space  
in the final hours of this endless Monday,  
remote and alone.

## XVIII

Maybe I awaken  
and someone  
naked like I am  
is at my side,  
with an unexpected loneliness  
and eyes in debt to the night,  
talking to me about you,  
asking for the story of your absence.

## XIX

Truth occurs as infrequently  
as lie. To return  
is a seizure of power over the body,  
armed with neither falsehoods nor nudity.

Here again, the traveler embraced,  
ill-timed figure of some dawn,  
with the humidity of June  
under betrayed clothing,  
afraid to pause or to decide.  
Here again, with me and your eyes,  
because the sun rises behind our back  
and the old doorways are a refuge  
where darkness has the skin of a throat,  
imaginable only next to my lips,  
under your hair,  
compañero in the night still open,  
to halfway tremble, tolerate breath,  
redirect words in silence.

Here again. Again  
without excuses, without order, with the nostalgic pain  
brought on by defeat,  
because life is beautiful in the embrace,  
your body the reason  
and I the desire.



XXI

Sé más feliz que yo.  
JUAN AROLAS

I am happier than I, it is not my habit.  
I was afraid to know it.

XXII

In more than thirteen nights  
I have spent thirteen dreams with you.  
I would know how to tell you...

In your marijuana-colored eyes,  
you guard a slow proposition of bliss,  
a boat that recedes without showing us its back.

You undress daily  
in a way that will never become one of my poems,  
your syllables become enemies of time,  
with unfolded gestures you unfold our clothes  
and a strange arrogance takes over me,  
suddenly becoming its custom.

And I, who do not confess to owing you all I have  
because one inherits verse like nostalgia,  
I do not dare to tell you  
the sensation of hearing your closeness,  
the surrender you give me with the heat of your skin,  
my indispensable feelings.

## XXIII

To that part of you where the wind sings,  
where, beyond habit, clear darkness is summoned,  
I dedicate this night with its verses.

Because a ballerina resembles a tear  
rolling down the cheek of dreams,  
because your black netting, vaguely  
unraveled by the day, holds me  
to one half of your chest,  
because light tells us  
that your breasts, palaces of my nights,  
are the same ones —full of reality—  
that accompany me  
when life is nothing like a dream,  
when we would like to wake up.

## XXIV

Like he who has left the battle,  
like he who runs to arrive on time  
through enemy camps,  
chosen among nobles for his history  
to save the last words,  
like an unhappy messenger, the day comes to us  
and his horse is a cry of alarm.

May he take possession of our dream.  
He will not find monarchs in the throne,  
nor swords that invite him to bow,  
nor old sentries at the door.  
He will discover again the battle  
from which he could never separate himself,  
and two bodies who know his news  
will await him in the castle.

## XXV

Remember that you exist only in this book,

that you are alive thanks to my ghosts,  
to the passion I inject in every verse  
in order to remember the air you breathe,  
the clothes you put on and I take off,  
the taxis in which you travel every night  
(siren and heart of the cab drivers),  
the drinks you share in bars  
with people who live on those counters.  
Remember that I wait for you on the other side  
of the train tracks when you arrive late,  
that the telephone, uncomfortable sentry,  
becomes a guest without news,  
that there is an empty rumble of elevators  
complaining alone, convening  
as they lift or lower your nostalgia.  
Remember that my kingdom is the doubts  
of this city that has nothing but haste,  
and that freedom, terrible swan,  
is not the nocturnal bird of dreams,  
it is complicity, toughness  
wounded by the sword that forces us  
to know we are literary characters,  
true lies, false truths.

Remember that I exist only because this book exists,  
that I can kill us both by ripping a page.

## FRAGMENTS COLLECTED IN AN EPISTOLARY

Mi carta, que es feliz, pues va a buscaros,  
cuenta os dará de la memoria mía.  
R. DE CAMPOAMOR

Strange love: like in bad songs and in tragic days, while darkness and ice, embracing at the bottom of glasses, decorate our history of reasonable beings, I leave you this heroless letter on the table. It carries no intention: it demands neither morals nor tormented instincts; it is simply a literary gesture, a private representation, the torn apart amphitheater of our eyes.

\*

He who tries to choose happiness deserves only to be invited to its rites. The sea in your words is nothing but a decision for tomorrow, a chosen awareness, the step that draws you away from this body or the stone that flings itself into emptiness. I do not know if you realize: you are prepared to deceive yourself, and an offer of resignation is always a bitter gift, unnecessary word for that which we do not know. Through desire you will try to save the inopportune gray of the rain, you will speak to me of childhood summers with the light of bourgeois habits in a seaside town, spoiled today, and you will write poems that mix with the sand of the sexes, premeditated freedom of the waves and the lonely rancor of your intelligence. You already know these predicted days are impertinent, full of failed comfort, like the bad verses in a good poem, friends with those who have not yet lost confidence. Though it sometimes happens close to us, though the nights sometimes end well, as we later recall, they do not allow us to rest.

\*

Men, poetry, and the melodramatic banality of an inner exile. Nights spent traveling, lonely nights in some theater, the voice of that actor dubbed poorly.

\*

I fear I have started to share in this exercise of yours to which you always return, the doubtful inclination to make life into a book only half real, with verses found upon rounding a corner, like unknown landscapes of family, feelings that follow the order of the pages. It would not have been difficult to say that it had to do with some personal luxury of your character, of the privilege you had allowed through your own way of thinking about destiny, the trading of dreams and truths that each heart needs to survive. But it is a world in which I now begin to feel myself immersed, murky and dark, undercurrent propelled by a distant will, more dangerous because it acts within me and turns me into the foam the surf expells upon crashing into its own shores. And I, as if imitating you, as if becoming you, between the devastated walls that are the palace of our unreality, I begin to abandon too many conspiracies, too many ancient personal battles, and without wanting to I resemble this character born of you, my blood invaded by verses

and chapters. Or more accurately, the character of the book in which you have submerged your life, slave to a crown without armies. And to betray me is to betray you: passion and Hell, or the Hell of not living passionately.

\*

... the best memory of those days, dressed in clothes of another time, comes to me still upon thinking of your poems, upon sensing again the excessive vanity of fire. In a room chosen only for its light, I was always asking to take the floor, calling attention to myself, interrupting the tone of the conversation, without respect for the bowed — finally silent — shadows, the last shadows of the bodies. Their meager vanity, their worst concession to the fear of being along.

\*

... rarely do two joined solitudes resist words.

\*

I should not have drunk, I would not have needed excuses to talk to you. Why do I write this note, this confused letter I will leave on the table before we go, wrapped up in hurry, tied from now on to the eyes you bring with you when you return? To tell you I don't think I'll return? I do not even know; I write with the hand of an unemployed actress, evoking scripts without a scene, decorations taken halfway down, phrases relegated to a corner and maintained in the air of an empty theater. The orderly desert of its stalls is the melancholy of he who needs to love what has not yet arrived. My orderly desert: a life that can no longer offer spectacle. Is it perhaps an attempt to take off the reins, to feel under my fingers, albeit weakly, the horse of some pages that now pertain to me as much as to you? To exile me from the book will doubtless nourish it, will find one definitive point for my character. There are nights in the year when one needs only to need.

\*

And thanks to the demon (in nights like this one, it is the name we give to history), spontaneity looks like a vice of another time, like chewing tobacco or having a conscience. You learned it from bad poetry, not from bad poems.

\*

But you're right — and why lie? — neither desire nor anguish are usually Hell.

\*

All the nights before a journey give intimacy back to us for an instant, they unstick us from our selves, like trampled petals returned to the wind.

\*

... but fear populates itself with vertigo and invites me to its game. Because I admit that all seduction, like all metaphor, hides a mode of violence, an invaded distance between two hearts. No one can fall in love with anything but his own idea of love: we are the hand of a fabric chest. Can we renounce knowing it? Disillusion is the only respectable lie of lucidity.

\*

... and in that whirlpool, in that impossibility of speech, your lips, like a shot of grace.

\*

In our greedy souls of loved people, just as in our bodies, we get used to preferring dampness. It happens often and regularly that we fall to the temptation of telling ourselves about life. I remember no details, only the inexistence that provoked certain conversations lived in first person. I guard its unreality, like returning home at night, sustaining the light burned by the streets, its changing and artificial cloudscape drained of color by bursts of light, and the blurriness of eyes in the windshield, and the desire to not look at everything for once, to not speak in whole words. They are memories we have shared. Do you also return from a poem like this?

\*

... and the best verses are like decisions, determined imprudent actions; upon making them you felt the fear of those dreams with no return, the pencil that draws this dark region to which one is always returning.

\*

There are no enigmatic discrepancies between reality and imagination. There exists an imaginary reality, a fabled mode where history and story join, poems and poetry, loneliness and those of us that are alone.

\*

... violet dawn through the window and the city looks like an anchored ship; I see its shadow sail slowly, without disappearing, slowly, clustering under the striped light of the horizon and the shine of the whisky you left half full. You are not here, it is a dawn you do not know but that will undoubtedly enter your poems.

\*

For all the love it holds,  
a letter found face down on the table  
will always be a cadaver.

## BOOK II

# I

These are not blue days,  
but the sea attacks us on the highway,  
drawing near its waves  
— martial and ebbed—  
like old soldiers to the shore.  
Also like an orgasm.

Reflected on the windshield  
are ferries with women's names,  
making love in the bay  
making do with the sea.

This is not the 18th day.  
We tear it finally from the calendar,  
and this rain, peaceful in summer,  
fills us with a smoke like that of  
the cigar you sometimes enjoyed sharing,  
so as to love me slowly,  
to continue caressing me.

This is not the 18th day.  
A teenager with a dragon's stare  
brings our suitcases to the tenth floor,  
leaving us next to this dubious sky  
whose body is sore  
from so many gray clouds and storms  
that moan like you when I kiss you.

Tomorrow, when we wake, the sea will be  
a cold sheet, fallen to the floor.

## II

When I bring my ear to your neck  
— as one listens to the sea —  
one hears love. I do not know if the wind,  
that animal that whistles in your veins,  
knows the terrible region where it calls,  
the old cliff that exists behind its voices.  
But the aquatic light comes to us  
more somber each time,  
full of guarded loneliness,  
with the smell of grass that marks all drowned people.

When your heart is a timekeeper  
entangled in mine  
and rhythmically  
we are naked ships that sink,  
when the surface  
lasts for only a second,  
mermaids tell us we have disappeared.

The metro too whistles below the sea.  
One hears love at your neck.  
The sunken city awaits us.

### III

The sea  
that closes and opens  
like a book with pages of foam,  
surprises us in your mouth,  
under your hair scattered between my thighs.

#### IV

Last generations  
of difficult girls,  
of boys bound to pride  
and old turntables, they remind me  
that on some terrace by the sea,  
under the heat of a world,  
I too stood  
with that same lack of existence.

(Sand in bra and jeans,  
thigh buried, body hair one with the moon,  
hands bestowed  
to separate shadow from profile,  
they came to tell me  
that I should cede not a palm's width of terrain  
in my invasion of the body that simultaneously invades us.)

Tasting of ice,  
on ships that seemed not to move,  
undefined and distant  
they continue dancing there, seated in my eyes.  
Each time more distantly  
this music reminds me  
that we do not all go down to the sea  
on a possible night  
of ignited wetness in summer.

I inherited almost nothing,  
only temptation and her smile  
and those elevators  
smaller than a kiss.

V

They were like fissures in the house,  
like shadows.  
Legs knew not  
how to surround a heart  
upon shutting off its air.  
Arms knew not  
how to be borders for a moment  
that would never last.  
Bellies, driven through snow, knew not  
how to melt their surroundings.  
Lips knew not  
how to rest on the world  
like a horizon.  
They knew not,  
and they were like shadows in the street,  
like cold footprints.

But legs and arms,  
lips and bellies confused together,  
they had love, they discovered it  
exiled in the sheets one day,  
older each time and asking  
why the age of the sea  
looked like chests that breathe.

## VI

You who are not the sea,  
who trembles like a bird when wind looks at you,  
who wanders the rocks, the sun of the shore,  
the reason of the ocean.

You — this awakening without a compass —  
who navigates the wisest calm and the storm,  
unpredictable weather, tempestuous skin  
at the light of the sheets.

You who are not the sea,  
who will not always return,  
who fills with written bottles and hangovers  
the lips of the earth, the cloudy waist  
of the last moons.

You who gives order to salt,  
you will have a long dream,  
they will tell you the story of a shipwreck.



It seems that it is I to whom it draws near,  
who walks tall around my legs,  
resting its skin against my chest,  
when they draw near, the memories,  
those somnambulist cats of time  
who keep watch together  
like spoken words  
fallen on the white  
tablecloth of those parties.

Where is memory,  
behind what heartbeat does it rise  
to show its face,  
the treasure it carries in its undereye circles  
of lost songs, of promises  
that launch us suddenly somewhere else?

My history is not a book, like you say,  
it is the rounded corner of a page,  
because to think also of what I have not been  
defines me more exactly  
by choices  
or presentiments,  
because there are verses that never get written  
and the loyalty I have to poetry:  
it is too weak,  
it respects not even nostalgia.

Forgive me. Do you remember  
the game of growing up alone,  
of a voice that calls you by your name?  
Life does not betray, it only exists  
in a different way than what was expected  
and it is fair that it takes care of itself. I summon it  
when I feel like wasting it.

IX

They follow me,  
the broken telephones of Granada,  
when I go to find you  
and whole streets are communicating.

Submerged in your conch-shell voice,  
I would love the sea, out of a mouth  
pressed against mine,  
knowing that it is calm at a distance,  
while gardens  
pass, breathe,  
retract  
on their instinct of absence.

In them nothing exists  
ever since those summers began to kidnap you.  
Only I inhabit them  
to discover the face  
of lovers who kiss,

with my eyes out of work,  
my heart without traffic,  
the insomnia that guards the August cities,  
and ambulances secret like birds.

X

I need silence as much as secrets.  
Sometimes, like them, I need light,  
while all streets  
decide to anchor themselves in pools  
and the sky  
of the lonely supermarkets  
looks too much like your eyes.

But night goes down  
to sit in the plazas at night.  
They are  
the sought-after seats of twilight,  
so said someone who tried  
to start a conversation with me.

And I spoke of you, I spoke of the weeks,  
of the interest the days show in not passing.

XI

For her,  
queen of the bars,  
queen of the seas of gin,  
full of tempests.

## XII

Like a strident rooster  
the telephone wakes me.  
Two in the morning. There is news of you.

### XIII

In September  
your lips fill with cellars  
and the sky is prejudiced  
having seen you ask life questions.  
Yet also the sky,  
wrinkled and precise  
like your teenage windbreaker,  
wants to be halfway open,  
shine, having been recently loved,  
resting in the grass  
the weight of its long mane of cloud.

In September  
yeses fill your mouth with smoke.

## XIV

Three by three, love,  
four by four,  
with their song of nocturnal birds in flight,  
cars have been passing by the house.

And I, who lives sometimes  
outside of your dream,  
almost an unprepared sonambulist among them,  
I have not wanted to avoid the beating of their wings  
of light over the sheets,  
who arrived in a hurry,  
they loved your waist,  
searching an exit through your spine.

XV

This lost kingdom  
where each politics takes the form of a kiss,  
of a private scar  
behind our embraces,  
it is dominating us with its dreams,  
from distance to distance.

I want you to rise  
with the impatience of the trees,  
growing until the exact moment  
to rub my lips, to seek in them  
wetness without rain.

I know we will discover  
naked silhouettes in the house,  
visiting memories,  
ghosts of a night without summer,  
that will wander in us and will ask for the bill,

because darkness, like a mirror,  
returns to us the image it gives.

But I know all the questions  
that I cannot answer,  
the body where live the interrogations,  
your dream caught in the handkerchief, as if you had cried it out.

XVI

To grab someone at the waist,  
rest in the borders,  
imitate a much less social desire —  
life tends to be like this dance,  
like *el último tango* of the night.

Next to the humid orchestra  
that plays by memory  
and out of happiness,  
partners pair up and mirrors watch.

Paris on the screen,  
an empty house,  
two bodies empty and touching.

The cold of the street. The slowness of the world  
and a cigarette for the road.

## XVII

This city invites me to want you.  
I see its houses red in the dawn,  
and they look like organized bottles  
on the counter of a bar,  
jungles in which to live  
from cup to cup.

## XVIII

Under the burnt light  
your eyes are cold seeking  
these October hours  
and their garden stained in gin,  
dry leaves, silences  
that speak of us as they fall.

Because if it no longer exists,  
although no one worries about his solemnities,  
there are nights in which the truth,  
that uncomfortable guest,  
arrives and leaves us dirty, empty, without tobacco,  
like in a restaurant of chairs mouth-up  
and about to close.

“They are waiting for us.”

I know not how to answer you,  
only that I am conscious of my own irony,  
because man is also a wolf with his own self.

“They are waiting for us.”

Black and tall, silent vultures,  
they wait for us, those clouds in the street.

## XIX

Who goes there,  
unending verse among my verses,  
neglected dream,  
silence of lights and doors?

Who goes there,  
after having left, persisting  
with eyes of battle,  
under the dead shadow of keys?

Who goes there,  
coming without arriving, vacating  
the tone of his voice,  
the unending count of his steps?

In those same lips that have packed your bags  
I sought the heroes of destiny.  
They came one day to bring you with them,

and I understood that no one understands anything.

XX

You had a heart, once. Only distance  
remains under your chest, only  
the exercise of living, the haste  
of loving loneliness like a ghost  
reduced to instinct, and necessarily.  
And necessarily you have understood  
that the last kisses were panic,  
not even doubt, the astounding  
desire to live with one's questions.



without questions.

The sun is weak, the reason does not matter  
and I will draw near to the sheets slowly.  
Avoiding the I love you,  
in the confusing lucidity of the dawn  
we will leave the night behind,  
just as a ship leaves at its back,  
like an immense footprint, the sea entire.  
And as we kiss,  
I will remember without a doubt  
other sunrises in the water,  
looking at my reflection face-to-face,  
with the same fear of going under.

Rarely do two joined solitudes  
resist words.

## XXII

The skies grow used to surrendering  
lifelessly to the asphalt.  
The light moves in search of bodies.  
Its mechanism is sweet and it repeats,  
like your heart  
when it preferred me.

An ownerless shadow,  
something that is not night  
but that walks out of night's womb,  
upon returning it draws near, it becomes confused,  
it passes slowly until it is lost.

I watch my loneliness  
return without me, naked,  
from where I carry it,  
in the umbra defeat of its steps,  
from doorway to doorway, murmur of no one.

XXIII

If once you had never existed,  
if the heat of your thighs had not  
sought me like a precise heartbeat  
and my elective ambiguities  
— the darkest days of my self —  
had not had you like a credit  
of affirmation or excuse,  
                                  it is possible  
that this return home in loneliness  
and too soon  
would remind me now a little less  
of the teenager who wagered the world,  
with the world at his back.

Only love is hard.  
Mired in the night, returning  
between authority and lies,  
we spoke of power or of dreams  
when we talked of embracing.  
And maybe I do not know, I do not know if I remember  
myself as a prisoner of a body or free alongside it,  
seeking salvation or in servitude,  
miserable and damned, but amazed.

Maybe this is only about your absence,  
about the fact that loss is hard for everyone  
and I lack love, as you know.  
Maybe with you I was  
far too close to its kingdom,  
which I need now to deny,  
to use the tricks one has  
to be able to keep going.

Because we are surely this way,  
mistaken husks,  
lonely bonfires in the road,  
paradises of four rooms  
that one only understands  
after having signed many times,  
just here,  
                                  where it says *The traveler*.  
And for me, because I prefer to hide my defeats,  
I want you to remember me defeated,

like he who waits for something  
beyond time and facts.  
Maybe because we should have foretold it  
or because, in any case, no one knows  
where dreams end.

XXIV

What will they be like, the lights of which you speak?

Do not ask about me.  
Write about names of cities,  
announce your clumsiness so as to die in them,  
so as to hide me inside their birds' wings.

In your language you tell me  
the weary presence of a strange  
occurrence of strange trees,  
of weird buildings, old theaters without an appointment,  
where the only familiar spectacle  
is the stolen,  
greedy illusion that calls you  
as you cross the street.

You tell me I walk like the crowds  
and the voice freezes us quicker than water,  
and over the ice dream words  
loaded with cities,  
because they know we are weak,  
capable of living a lie  
that hides too much loneliness.

Here, I too hope they will embrace me,  
that once I will be embraced  
by some spirit.

XXV

This moon the color of an old saxophone  
will keep me in Paris.

This moon the color of an old butterfly,  
of an old soul seeking in the wind  
eyes to watch the end of the century,  
cats who are the doubts of the night.

Lie down with me. Wake in your memory  
that restlessness that guards those that finished loving,  
the imperceptible hurry of lips  
that seek a neck on which to rest their breath.  
And let me look at you, face to face,  
with these same oriental eyes  
that love uses to watch us.

XXVI

Under a cold polygon rain,  
with a storm-drugged sky  
and suburban clouds.

Because this love of borrowed keys wraps us  
in a provisional intimacy,  
walls that provide no company  
and objects like owls in shadow.

They are  
the saddest sheets of the earth.  
Look  
how the people live.

XXVII

And to celebrate  
that fog too pertains to us,  
we stir up memories, we scatter books  
distantly and newspapers,  
we pursue a world of impermeable journeys.

“November is a sentimental  
disorder,” you tell me.

So we kiss  
and your eyes, mine,  
begin to fume,  
to colonize the doubts of our rooms,  
escape from the windows of our house,  
entangle themselves in the streets and cut through neighborhoods,  
making the city flood  
while, love, you tell me weakly  
that you will not return with me,  
not now.

## XXVIII

You owe the south a letter, like history.

I wonder about you, about what now,  
leaning on my shoulder, you would say to me  
upon contemplating the careless passing  
of people in the park, their outline  
against the first light of winter,  
when the cold slides along  
the sick trunks of the trees.

I am lacking your opinions at my side,  
while children yell and put on jackets,  
walking like schoolchildren, and workers  
speed up the necessary march  
before maids, soldiers  
that confuse their clothing  
with the sick tones of winter.

I no longer know if you remember the hustle  
of the distant stores, the women  
bent over and clean with their baskets,  
or the drink sellers,  
the poor street market stalls  
that sell lies  
with the sick haste of habit.

And yet it exists, you tell me,  
the south exists too in this park  
taken by the cold, while pass  
— like the collars of teenagers who wait —  
raised questions,  
stubborn hopes,  
the sick secrets of the future.

To imagine the possible places you are,  
to see you arrive nightless to *La Tertulia*,  
to recognize your hurried voice  
upon telling an anecdote  
or asking about me,  
to know that we saw each other before knowing each other,  
these are long chapters of my life.

I suppose they will leave to you as well  
this same emptiness,  
this impatience to be alone  
while we forget  
all heat that aches of being forgotten.

The shipwreck is a kindred gift to man.  
After it happens  
footprints tend to have  
that discomfort of lies,  
memory is dogma,  
loneliness my chest that you caressed.

But to change the subject,  
time — a good friend  
who deforms the past like love deforms a body —  
will ensure that each day looks not like a gunshot,  
that we will see each other again on some afternoon,  
in the corner of a year and without feeling  
too much impotence.

It will surely be  
like becoming again,  
like living again in a difficult era  
or getting drunk together  
to experience our hangovers separately.

Like burns under our fingers,  
on a second floor  
we will continue to be present and waiting  
for that exact moment of shipwreck on the shore,  
when upon leaving the sea  
you write me in the sand:

*I know love exists,  
but I don't know where I learned that.*

XXX

To collect your footprints,  
snow has fallen  
over the sidewalk.

The snow of December,  
that asks you to return  
as it lies down.

Since sunrise,  
without becoming at all humble  
under your feet.

How solitary I live  
in this  
cold heart.

Where snow waits,  
preparing its return  
for your footprints.

## INVITATION TO RETURN

Para ir al infierno no hace falta cambiar de sitio ni postura.

RAFAEL ALBERTI

Who knows the winds, who distantly  
creates a voice in which to guard memory,  
who knows his naked skin  
like he knows the trace of his name,  
and does not fear it, and accompanies it  
beyond the winter pent up in his syllables,  
who decides everything in a night,  
suddenly, like a kiss,  
who appears out of the fog on a bridge,  
who rubs his fingers over his own emptiness,  
who leaves the sea, who loses  
the fear of becoming distant.

In the weakened  
purple shadow of the waves,  
where go sinking with the port  
the ancient signposts and lights,  
there will float waiting  
new conversations in the water.  
They will be the forced disillusion  
that falls from the rigging with the breeze,  
returning to memory  
the tempest of speech  
or words split like masts.  
Because dreams leave  
debris like shipwrecks,  
with wood and bodies sunken in the sheets,  
full of dominated freedom.

It is not the unclean city  
that pushes the candles. Neither does the heart,  
primitive cabin of desire,  
adventure in ignited islands  
where the sea hides its ruins,  
seaweed of Baudelaire, foam and silences.  
It is necessity, the solitary  
necessity of man,  
that brings us to shelter,  
that makes us tremble, live in bodies  
that resist the voice of sirens



Beside your hair, capital of the winds,  
history in two, the noise of tears,  
they must be the necessary past,  
remote mystery,  
things to tell after some years,  
if someone asks about us.

And yet, and necessarily,  
between the low night and this house  
where I am wont to write,  
I will await the lips  
that with a strange call ask me again:

Prison of love, for whom do you carry  
one man of glass and the other of oblivion?

## The City as Phoenix: Cultural Evolution in *Quedarse sin ciudad*

Granada, Spain, was named for the pomegranate, and if you split one open and look at the crowded, criss-crossing segments, it's possible to see a resemblance between city and fruit. Like many other cities of Andalusia, the large region of southern Spain stretching from the Portugal border to the east coast, Granada is visibly marked by the history of the clashes between Christians, Jews and Muslims in the area. Its neighborhoods are a collage of various influences and moments of power, from the old Jewish district to the hillside jumble of whitewashed houses known as the Albaicín, the Moorish quarter of the city. There are buildings and structures in Granada so old one can hardly believe they still stand — far more impressive, in terms of longevity, than the sixteenth-century cathedral are the Moorish arches that decorate the city walls, built over a millennium ago. Nowhere is the layered history of the city more vividly displayed than at La Alhambra, the ornate palace and expansive gardens that were the property of Muslim kings for centuries and now constitute one of the most precious cultural landmarks and tourist destinations of an overwhelmingly Catholic Spain. All over the city, ancient works of art jut up against department stores and traffic lights; these palimpsests of earlier eras illustrate the messy, beautiful, unpretentious presence of history in Granada.

When Francisco Franco died in November of 1975, Luis García Montero was two weeks away from his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The months and years that followed, in which Spain underwent a painstaking reform of the political system its dictator had spent the past four decades maintaining, and with it a national renaissance as artists responded to newfound

freedoms of expression, coincided with García Montero's personal liberation from childhood into adulthood. It was also the beginning of his very successful career as a poet, as he is widely celebrated today as one of Spain's most significant and prolific contemporary poets. Though García Montero's writing rarely addresses the dictatorship directly — his politically oriented pieces focus more generally on issues of consumerism and capitalism — his writing is clearly influenced by the fact that his formative years as an adult and as an intellectual coincided with Spain's transition to democracy. Urban life under Franco's rule, particularly in the 1960s and '70s, is often represented in literature and film by the images of empty streets, because people feared being outside, and of televisions, because many felt strongly compelled to stay at home and be comforted by the innocuous human contact of sanctioned media. (The opening scenes of Pedro Almodóvar's 1997 film *Live Flesh* are one vivid example of this tendency.) In opposition to the isolation and agoraphobia cultivated by the dictatorship, García Montero's writing reflects a strong desire to engage with others — realized as his readership — and to break through the isolation of selfhood by conveying personal experience within the context of common language and collective experience. In his own words, "The poet has no choice but to depart from his own individuality ... in order to arrive at larger themes that affect others. When I create a relationship with my reader, I am creating a relationship with myself. I split myself in half, I put myself on the other side of the table; when I write, I try to write not only what's in my own head but also what the person on the other side of the table is seeing" (Baqué Quílez 76).<sup>7</sup> He has repeatedly expressed a wish to impact the general reader and extend poetry's reach beyond intellectuals and academics.

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<sup>7</sup> All translations of essays, articles and interviews are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Along with Felipe Benítez Reyes, Javier Egea and Álvaro Salvador, García Montero has come to prominence as one of the leaders of a contemporary literary movement in Spain known as *poesía de la experiencia*, or Poetry of Experience. Practitioners of this poetry, whose name comes from the title of Robert Langbaum's 1957 book, in general forego florid descriptions and heroic-protagonist archetypes in favor of unpretentious language and commonplace settings. The goal is often to access emotional truth or comment on social justice through the experience of the common man in everyday life, in an effort to, as Elizabeth Amman puts it, "rehumanize poetry." In large part, the emphasis on accessibility of *poesía de la experiencia* was born out of criticism toward the dominating style of poetry in Spain in the 1970s, known as the *novísimos* after José María Castellet published *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles (Nine Newest Spanish Poets*, in 1970) lauding the work of a group of writers that practiced a poetry of avant-garde aesthetics and spoke from within a sophisticated, international set of high-culture references. The *novísimos* wrote in an elite language that prioritized form over content and asserted that art was socially and politically meaningless; they, in turn, were reacting against the popularity of social poetry in the 1950s and '60s, which used poetry as a vessel for political criticism. In response to the gilded style of the *novísimos*, García Montero and his contemporaries emphasized "intimate and autobiographic remembrance, confessionalism, ... an urban sensibility, a return to emotionalism and to physical meditation" (Cano Ballesta 697). While not necessarily a revival of social poetry, *poesía de la experiencia* draws heavily on the work of the social poets known as the Generation of 1950, such as Jaime Gil de Biedma and Ángel González; García Montero lauds the group for its desire to answer the question, "How can we write poetry that is necessary?"

(*Confesiones* 102). In tandem with his work in the political sphere, where he often accuses the Spanish government of consolidating power in the hands of the rich and widening income inequality levels, several of García Montero's poems address the negative influences of capitalism and consumerism on contemporary society.

Ironically, some poets have accused García Montero and his contemporaries of being themselves members of the (literary) bourgeoisie and of deliberately marginalizing radical viewpoints. In what is likely a direct response to the label *poesía de la experiencia*, the strain of explicitly sociopolitical poetry that emerged in the 1990s has become known as *poesía de la conciencia* — Poetry of Conscience. Several of the practitioners of this poetry, including Jorge Riechmann and members of the Valencia-based collective Alicia Bajo Cero, have attacked *poesía de la experiencia* for ignoring global issues like climate change, for turning its back on the public sphere, and for promoting a retreat into oneself rather than engaging with one's community. García Montero, in particular, has been criticized for writing what he calls "poetry for normal people," on the basis that writing for an established norm helps concretize existing power structures and displace marginal perspectives.

In my opinion, these critics have misinterpreted the emphasis *poesía de la experiencia* places on intimacy, confession and personal experience as self-absorption, undervaluing the connection between the personal and the political. Araceli Iravedra summarizes García Montero's response to these attacks well: "To define oneself as a citizen and install oneself in the norm, far from sanctioning it, can allow us to attack it, to participate in a redefinition of public spaces" (132). *Poesía de la experiencia's* endeavor to write in a common language and speak to common experience ultimately serves a

populist agenda: in defiance of the *novísimos*' appeal to a highly intellectual and elite audience, García Montero and his contemporaries strive to allow a larger majority of readers to find the writing accessible and meaningful.

The city has come to be an important backdrop to García Montero's elaboration of emotional experiences as achieved through daily life. As Laura Scarano writes in her introduction to García Montero's anthology *Urban Poetry*, his work is marked by "the evident omnipresence of the city." There is "such a strong identification between poet and city that the distance between subject and object is dissolved; the poetic voice is thoroughly urban because the poet says no more about the city than the city says about him" (15). It is this blurring of the lines between individual and city that dominates *Quedarse sin ciudad*, creating a sense that as the city changes, the protagonist does as well. Yet there are also moments in which the poet feels left behind, betrayed or confused by the evolution of his city, and herein lies the central conflict of the collection.

In an interview with the writer Ana Eire in 2004, García Montero related this anecdote in response to a question about a sense of "outer emptiness" provoked by one's surroundings:

I began to write this book [*The Intimacy of the Serpent*, 2003] one night when I was telling a story to my young daughter, and at that moment I heard a motorcycle cross the street. The noise of the motorcycle was a language of the street, and suddenly I had the sense that this language was completely different for me than it was for my daughter. For me, it means going back to a provincial city at the beginning of the '60s, where I was growing up in a poor country, and the motorcycle was what construction workers used to get to work in the suburbs of the city to build the new neighborhoods of the Spain that was starting to grow. ... It might also have been the noise of *campesinos* going to do work in the fields. That was the language of the motorcycle: a poor Spain wearing sandals and going

to work at dawn in the cold. For my daughter, the sound of a motorcycle will always be the sound of fun, of movement, of young kids going out to have fun at night to drink, who go on their motorcycles participating in a society of well-being and happiness. We grew up in different countries.

This story is striking because it reveals two conflicting emotions. On the one hand, García Montero feels joy for the liberated, happy country in which his daughter is growing up; this new Spain is undeniably better than the repressive poverty he knew at her age. Yet also he feels the loneliness of the distance between himself and his children, and he is weighed down with the knowledge that certain iconic elements of Granada — even those that speak of poverty and unhappiness — will not be understood by his loved ones. The identification of a “language of the street” is exemplary of his tendency to see unity and personality in the subtle, often subconscious actions of the urban crowds that surround him. García Montero personifies the city not only by giving voice to inanimate structures but also by interpreting the collective habits of a crowd as significant actions, often depicted in his poetry as a kind of dance. His poetic perspective is frequently that of a bird’s eye view observing the hustle and bustle of the city from a distance and finding grace and patterns in its scurryings.

It is with this perspective that *Quedarse sin ciudad* opens, as the protagonist of the first poem appears to stand atop a hill gazing at Granada on the horizon. As he watches her — and from the beginning there is an emphasis placed on the city’s femininity, an amplification of the gendered article in *la ciudad* — she is peaceful in the darkness, and the protagonist’s view of her seems marked by a proud sense of kinship. In these first moments, his position relative to the city is that of a father standing over the bed of his sleeping daughter, or perhaps of a husband bending over his wife. But this

feeling of security is abruptly disrupted when, in a single moment that is simultaneously drastic and barely perceptible, the city shifts below him. Her change seems motivated by a destiny of sorts, the turning of ancient clocks — she is called by a “powerful instinct,” moved by a “schedule’s discipline.” The vampire allegory is employed here to show the interdependence of city and individual, as the city first bites the protagonist, who then becomes part of the city himself and commences transforming others as well. While the process of the city’s evolution might suggest the symbol of a snake shedding its skin (which García Montero invokes in *The Intimacy of the Serpent* and elsewhere), this more peaceful imagery is passed over for the metaphor of the vampire, which imbues the change with violence.

The grave submission of individual to city is echoed in Poem V, where García Montero turns to fairy tales to illustrate the emotional journey of his protagonist. As in the first poem, here parallels are drawn between individual and city that serve to almost equate the two. The protagonist becomes the Evil Queen repeatedly asking her magic mirror for confirmation that she is the fairest. His jealousy takes the form of the question “Is this city still mine?” and in the mirror’s affirmative response he has the pleasure of knowing his inner and outer worlds — the face he sees in the mirror and the bustling crowd in the background — are unified. When the mirror no longer reflects his own face, it speaks to him not of another man but of another city, of a new Granada whose habits are different from those of the city the man has always known. In playing the role of Snow White, the city is further anthropomorphized, and in his depressive acceptance of his foreignness, the protagonist becomes somewhat dehumanized; he fades into the background, allowing the new city to dominate with its youthful personality. In poem I as

well as V, the protagonist is surprised by the city's evolution but, as demonstrated in his resignation, also seems to have expected the change on a deep, subconscious level.

Other poems portray the protagonist as the keeper of the keys of past versions of Granada. In III, the fairy tale motif continues, as the disappeared cities appear as delicate, vulnerable sleeping beauties waiting for the one who loves them to wake them with a kiss. The sense of ownership is strong here — they are characterized not as various ancient eras of Granada but as “the cities of your own past,” defined by the times in which the protagonist himself has lived. The previous poem, II, also presents the layered past of Granada as omnipresent for he who has lived through it. Here, past versions of the city act as transparencies laid over one another, and as the protagonist walks through the city he is anguished by simultaneously seeing the city as it currently exists and the seasons and structures of his past. (One is reminded of the title of Luis Cernuda's collection *La realidad y el deseo* [*Reality and desire*], which epitomizes the central thematic conflict of the poetry of the Generation of '27. García Montero maintains a blog by the same name, which confronts political and social issues, on the website of the online newspaper *Público*.) “All is stored behind a single gaze,” writes the poet, confirming the interconnectedness of personal and historical memory (as Iravedra notes of García Montero's work, “History is lived only in first person” [130]) as well as the importance for the protagonist of maintaining his role as the guard of all-but-disappeared memories. Poem III echoes this sentiment by asserting that the past cities survive and live “where you live, behind everything, on the other side of your eyes.” The use of the second person, here and elsewhere, is significant for its expansion of the role of the

memory keeper beyond the sole figure of the protagonist, serving to dissolve some degree of the loneliness that pervades this collection.

This overwhelming feeling of *déjà vu* is often provoked by the improbable permanence of physical structures. Libraries are described fondly in poem IV as “a definition of your cities”; they represent a sort of enclave of character quietly speaking to the spirit of the city. In poem VI, La Alhambra, the fortress-turned-palace-turned-public garden that has been the hallmark of Granada since its creation in 889 AD, stares down at the protagonist and jars him into thoughts of history and regality at unexpected moments. He is reminded of its presence while immersed in urban banality: between buildings, above a plaza, around a corner, and reflected on the windshield of a car waiting at a stoplight. (The windshield and the reflections it holds are favorite images of García Montero.) The juxtaposition of these disparate elements — city life in the 1990s and the arresting grandeur of the palace — is moving, and it is at this intersection of the quotidian and the eloquent that García Montero’s poetry is so often inspired. He alludes to the symbolic significance of La Alhambra but maintains that it is only *like* a metaphor, resisting the urge to reduce it to allegory: “Granada looks in the mirror of metaphor. . . . responding just as a metaphor would.” It is its ability to evolve that marks La Alhambra as a reflection of the city’s own evolution, yet its undeniable status as an icon also imbues it with an element of timelessness. The palace in this poem seems to provoke a sense of loss in the protagonist — “everything conquered is lost” — but this sadness is contradicted by the fact that La Alhambra clearly still stands, and although its many repurposings might serve to prove the inevitable bulldozing of the past, it could just as easily represent the resilience of the city’s spirit. The question raised here is a central

theme of the collection as a whole: As a city evolves and sheds its layers, how can one determine when the essence of its character has truly been lost?

In poems VII and VIII, the poet again steps back to view the city and its inhabitants from a distance. Poem VII features “the crowd” as a sinister character that wanders zombie-like through the streets, neglecting, in its pursuit of empty electronic noises, to engage in the thoughtful consideration of beauty that the poet finds essential. There is an implicit contrast drawn here between the mindless ambling of the crowd and the *caminante* or *paseante* (both of which I translate as “wanderer”) that often serves as a representation of the protagonist; while the crowd stumbles toward an invisible destination, the wanderer is a strolling flâneur who uses his walks to observe the city in both its minute details and larger patterns as well as to think introspectively about his own position. Crowd and individual follow similar paths, however, as the former spirals to the city’s interior and arrives at its inner “labyrinth” and the latter moves perpetually in circles, his most frequently noted action that of rounding a corner. In the following poem, the motions of the crowd are again the focus, but here the sentiment is warmer. From his bird’s eye perspective, the protagonist sees the patterns of his city’s women form a unified arc like that of the sun across the sky. This poem exemplifies García Montero’s penchant for blurring the lines between people and environment, as individuals, buildings and the angle of the sun are morphed into a single entity that is at once character and setting. Though there are hints of sexism here — the protagonist finds the mixed-gender crowd in poem VII sinister and threatening but smiles fondly upon the female component of, presumably, the same group — the more significant takeaway from the poem is not that the poet believes all women to be the same but that he is deliberately confusing his

personal relationships with his relationship as an individual to the crowd. The effect is to further augment his loneliness, as his one-on-one relationships with women become generalized and impersonal while he struggles in vain to create intimacy with a city that will ultimately treat him with indifference.

The final poems highlight the strain of optimism in the poet's conflicted feelings toward his city. In poem IX, a line is drawn between the two contemporary Granadas — the poor, provincial suburb and the boardrooms of unfeeling rich executives — which are harshly divided by circumstance yet identical in their unhappiness. One lives with the curtains drawn while the other never looks out the window, one under “a mediocre sun” and the other under fluorescent lights, both plagued by jealousy, fear and shame. Yet the third stanza longingly describes the emergence of a third city that “wants to become” and sets about gathering its icons and gestures. This new city echoes the old ones of the poet's past, or perhaps only the most sentimental pieces of his nostalgia: it rejects placeless consumerism and media for the thoroughly Granadian images of Andalusian snow and Federico García Lorca. In ending with this third city, the poem seems to suggest its imminent triumph over the poisons of capitalist greed.

The tenth poem opens with the essential question posed in Poem V: Is this city still mine? The answers that follow circumvent a direct response but prescribe a mode of survival for both individual and city. The solution as expressed in the poem runs counter to the protagonist's habit of distorting boundaries between himself and his surroundings, as it asserts that the redemption of each lies in their separate, respective qualities: the individual is saved from painful nostalgia by the linear, irreparable nature of his aging and mortality, while the city that is stung by the intense palimpsests of its past eras is

reminded of its phoenix-like ability for rebirth. Both are rescued by the dignity of their true characters. Yet even in the wake of this admission, the protagonist, who identifies himself martyr-like as the “silver fish” that has been paved over by society, indulges in several final instances of anthropomorphization and dehumanization. The city undergoes the pain of nostalgia, which it experiences somatically through scars. In the last lines, the protagonist addresses a second person who at first glance appears to be the enviable citizen able to adapt to the changing cultural landscape of Granada but is in fact La Alhambra, personified in the protagonist’s entreaty for the palace to “have pity.” While the protagonist is fated to be “a foreigner in his own desire, in his own city,” La Alhambra is imbued with the transience of the city, able to renew itself with each arriving generation and thus evade the condemnation of irrelevance. The palace comes to play a special role in that it, like the protagonist, is almost equal parts character and setting, person and place, active and passive.

The form of these pieces of writing merits special attention, as *Quedarse sin ciudad* is García Montero’s only book devoted to prose poetry and one of the few instances in which he has undertaken the form at all. Primarily, prose poetry is a relevant choice for the thematic material the collection covers because the content is dominated by dichotomies and the protagonist’s attempts to overcome them. Indeed, the central conflict of the poems is always a divide — between individual and crowd, past and present, mutable and permanent — and the movement that fuels the writing is the protagonist’s struggle to create bridges and dissolve borders. Prose poetry reflects this impulse because it too defies genre, weaving the brevity and lyricism of verse with the more traditionally utilitarian medium of prose; it is a dialogical form skillfully applied to mirror the

prevalent dichotomies of the poems. In addition, García Montero's departure from standard poetry in this case can be potentially interpreted as a desire to give voice to a narrative arc and allow more room for a fictionalized story to unfold, or to enhance the accessibility of his content by offering the poem in a visually prosaic form. In interviews and essays, he has been consistently emphatic about the importance of fiction in confessional writing such as poetry. Of his 2008 book *Weary Gaze*, a poetic work that incorporates autobiographical elements, García Montero said, "It is my biography, but I treat myself in the poem like a literary character. This doesn't mean that what I tell is a lie, only that I tell it in a way that uses fiction so that it serves not only me or my friends or my wife or those who know me but also the general reader. ... [In telling my story] I had to decide what could hinder an understanding of what I wanted or what could help my literary character represent a time or an era" (Baqué Quílez 75). This attitude that confessionalism is best used in the service of a generational or universal theme is strongly present in *Quedarse sin ciudad*. García Montero's choice to make both the first and second person ambiguous and morphing — the protagonist speaks for himself in the opening poems but appears in third person as "the wanderer" or "the foreigner" in others, and the poems are addressed at various times to members of the younger generation, members of his own generation, and La Alhambra — is deliberate, as it avoids a single construction of the reader/author relationship and broadens the scope of the poems to address a range of potential readers. His blending of storytelling with personal anecdotal history is not a contrived manipulation of an established concept of himself but rather a reflection in his writing of his personal conviction that "the self is a fiction that one constructs" (Eire 58).

Yet for all its universality, this book is in many ways specific: it is a love letter to the city of Granada. *Quedarse sin ciudad* illustrates vividly and wrenchingly one of the deepest relationships of the writer's life, that between himself and the place to which he remains rooted. In a 2008 interview, García Montero said of his city: "When Granada appears [in my poetry] it is because I believe that, as Max Aub said, we are from the city where we went to secondary school. And I went to secondary school in Granada. The cities where we have been children are those that allow us to establish a dialogue with time." He continued:

I will always repeat that the biggest lesson of urban poetry is not to talk about skyscrapers or stoplights, but to put us in contact with modernity, to know that nothing solid exists: the bookstore where I bought my first book is closed, the little garden where I played as a child has disappeared because a building has been put up. One knows that there is nothing solid, and this implies escaping dogmatism and inviting in awareness and consciousness, and that is what interests me in my poetry. (Baqué Quílez 78)

For every artist, the question of creation — of volition, of influence, of origin — is always relevant. At its foundation, this collection of poems examines these themes within the concept of home, and it asks: Does our home create us, or do we create it? García Montero is perpetually conflicted. As he affirms above, one's life is shaped by the city that nurtured his childhood, yet it is essential to know that one is separate from a city, able to grow and survive even as bookstores and gardens crumble. To the poet, Granada is by turns mother and lover, caring for him only to grow distant and foreign, protecting him even as he feels the urge to protect her. She is as much shapeshifter as phoenix, and in their inseparability the poet too experiences tantalizing moments of immortality. As he writes:

*It's true: The city that made us unmakes us, and in the debris it builds us up again.*

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*To Be Left Without City* (1994)

I.

The city came to perch on my shoulder.

I was seeing her on the horizon, nocturnal, opened by lights and wings, quiet, as if she were seeking the heat of the moon or the message of the headlights. Slowly I drew near to her, I finished returning. Granada in the shadows looked like a sleeping bird.

But there was a moment in which I sensed the tremble of her nerves, the abrupt agitation of dreaming, the call of a powerful instinct, a schedule's discipline. And all so suddenly. And she rose to fly, crossed the air like an arrow in flames, like a predestination ignited. And she came to rest on my shoulder, and she left her bloody kiss on my neck.

Since then I fear her with absolute surrender, as the victim needs its vampire. Pale, with circles under my eyes, almost bloodless, to the city I return still. I am he who appears from the shadows, who crosses the street, who loses himself toward a secret destiny. And I look at you for a moment, and I perch on your shoulder, and I bring my lips to your neck.

## II.

Memory is a venom that mixes with our own years, the knowledge that life is the scenery to our own loneliness.

I walk beside a river that no longer exists toward a library whose doors are closed, and I will never be able to return to the house I have just left because it disappeared many years ago, and they have changed the name of the street and the numbers on the doorways, the bars are different, the light is an other and the couples that loved each other have stopped embracing at the same hour in the same shadow.

It's true: The city that made us unmakes us and in the debris it builds us up again.

I can walk the road of an autumn past, but I know the lovers of today seek in their kisses the lips of another time. Desire is ashamed to remain and it becomes self-conscious upon discovering that it dreams out of an aged body, out of an abundance that does not exist.

In between, me. And yes, life is a dream, but not because it lacks truth, not because the intense realities of its scars are a lie but because in dreams coexist all the eras of a single city, and all is stored behind a single gaze, in the cellars of our own loneliness, and the streets disappeared years ago are of flesh and bone, and the man who walks beside the river that no longer exists may forget for a moment that his life, what he calls his life...

Granada looks like a memory becoming the present. In the garden of today the rain of winters past falls so slowly.

### III.

Behind a gaze sleep the disappeared cities. They are lying down, their breath almost imperceptible, in a forest's clearing, years above us, crossing through youth and adolescence, infancy and inherited memories, those that exist like photographs of a time that passed without us. They sleep with a serene face, rosy cheeks, a clean gown. Upon opening the tunnel's last door, the air is dense, the silence feverish, there is a strange calm that tastes of waiting. The cities of your own past are lying down like sleeping beauties, and it is enough to lean over them and kiss their lips so that they rise once more to life, so that they embrace you and begin to dance with you to a music that once played and that lives where you live, behind everything, on the other side of your eyes.

#### IV.

Libraries are also a definition of your cities. There are libraries that are soul mates of cities that pause at five in the afternoon to drink tea. Libraries that have heard the Marseillaise and have often opened their windows to see in the street the tumult of revolution. Libraries that are born in the frost of tall cathedrals, wounded by fog. Libraries that are accustomed to the sirens of ships and that submerge every dusk into a sailor's nostalgia.

The passerby should ask the libraries of Granada about the disoriented and emphatic character of this city. A city of the South with cold moons and fog, a city that does not know the sea nor drinks tea at five in the afternoon but that knows how to shut itself in the interior of a sailor's nostalgia and remembers the lost flags of its defeat, this history of centuries and silence that incarnates the water of the fountains and the murmur of leaves.

V.

In the bathrooms of nocturnal bars the mirrors answer the questions of the people. Is this city still mine? There are moments of fullness that deserve an affirmative response, because our eyes swim in the music and know the language of suggestion and happiness. But there is a day in which the bewitched mirror speaks to us of another world that was born without us, the beauty of a Snow White who provokes neither envy nor anger, only the definitive mark of a foreigner. That Granada has a different way of kissing, another way to drink, another way to dress, a different agenda, a night of new directions. The mirror tells the foreigner that the city is not his, and the foreigner understands the sinister age of the telephone numbers, the grass that sprouts in the ruined neutrality of mathematics, the distance that fits in a nearby name. There are crossed-out words that stare up at us from paper like we are stared at by a naked body from our memory.

The foreigner remains without city and imagines the footprints of his own oblivion, the number of times his name will have been erased from photographs.

## VI.

Granada looks in the mirror of metaphor. Overhead, anchored in a forest like a ship in the greenish water of its port, La Alhambra guards its silence against the city and allows itself to stare, responding just as a metaphor would to the restless eyes of those who must seek it.

It appears around a corner, between two buildings, above a plaza, on the windshield of a car waiting at a stoplight. It appears suddenly, straight and noble, surrounded by itself, able to suggest free water and rest to all hearts pierced by a hook of smoke.

In the windowpanes, in the storefronts, in the mirrors of the nocturnal bars are reflected the faces of those who need oxygen, the silver fish that bends and dies in the hard, dry cobblestones. Whoever looks it in the eye can find La Alhambra.

Everything conquered is lost. Fountains and myrtles that murmur of beauty and murmur of death.

## VII.

In the interior of the city there is a labyrinth of quotations and lost words. The telephone calls that go unanswered, the ringing that crashes in the dark city of hallways, the unknown regular who stops buying the last drink in the usual bar, the empty chairs, the dead cars, everything that carves a hollow in the soul of the city, everything that looks like the run-over body of a dog, the tainted oil of underground parking garages, the angels abandoned in public gardens, everything forms a web of silences, a labyrinth of secrets and losses.

The crowd crosses over the dry rosebushes, walks lost in thought, does not ask time about love or deception, does not stop to watch the shadow of the helpless. The crowd and the helpless follow the path of the telephonic serpents, of the ringing that goes unanswered. They arrive at the labyrinth that knits the city to its quotations and its lost words.

Granada is the rose without contours, the petal on which the crowd and the helpless step.

## VIII.

At five minutes to nine in the morning all women pass with the air of a young mother or an older sister.

At eleven thirty the women bring to the streets a murmur of perfume and lipstick, murmur of wrinkled salesgirls and clandestine kisses.

At four in the afternoon the women carry themselves with the chaste air of teenagers going to study at the house of a friend.

At five thirty, above all in days of winter sun, the women have the shining eyes of workday meals, and someone surprises them with long desserts with secret friends.

At eleven at night, especially in the spring and the last weeks of autumn, the women burst with profound faces of good love, love that is true and forever.

At four in the morning all women are old friends, old university classmates, patient accomplices for the dawn.

There are many clocks that mark in the city the lonely rhythm of our thoughts. The clock of women, of men, of marriages; the clock of cars, of trees, of balconies; the clock of noises, of silences. The crowd too has its codes.

## IX.

There is a Granada that lives behind the curtains, under the light of a mediocre sun, marked by the provincial clock of an aimless pride. City of Sunday mornings with clean clothes, sheets filled with fears and silences, jealousies that run secretly through the veins of small businesses and decency. All its residents have names, they need to be scandalized by television and they learn to live in the heat of its sleeping money.

There is a Granada that lives without looking out the window, unnamed, under artificial suburban lights and grand emaciated buildings. City of January nights, elevators that rise ten floors without saying a word, ice that dissolves and pours out onto the wide surfaces. Geraniums cannot understand the bitter meaning of cement, and the executives' jackets become ashamed in the hungry atmosphere of buses.

Between the two Granadas, between the ancient and the lonely, there is a third city that wants to become and so it searches for its clocks, the greeting of its residents, the light of each of its four seasons. The warm snow of the South for its winter, spring of navigable dreams, the nakedness of a lover's freedom in summer and the melancholy of a drawing of Federico García Lorca in autumn.

X.

Is this city still mine?

For the wanderer who rounds the cape of plentitude and discovers shadows and the venomous sting of memory, there is but one recourse: the dignity of being mortal.

For the city that is pained by its scars and remembers other worlds in its own land, there is but one road: the dignity of being transient.

And you, metaphor that survives in the wave of the forest, place of desire and melancholy, have pity on the silver fish that dies in the dry hardness of the cobblestones; have pity on the frightened eyes that watch you from a distance. Have pity, because the wanderer knows he is condemned to be a foreigner in his own desire, in his own city.

APPENDIX A: *DIARIO CÓMPLICE*

## INVITACIÓN

*...Call me...*

Larga lengua del mar  
sin calma en la mirada del regreso  
esta calle que puebla su soledad con hojas,  
que se enreda en la luz como un racimo  
de sombras o de barro,  
de periódicos húmedos  
sobre el aceite añil de las baldosas,  
y carmín olvidado en las paredes,  
y jardines con dudas  
y la hiedra  
sumergiendo los hierros burgueses de la puerta.

Larga lengua del mar en mi memoria.

Bajo la luz francesa se recrean  
el número vigía en los portales,  
la pequeña sirena reflejada,  
sus labios sobre el agua,  
el teatro vacío de los músicos  
esperando el domingo.  
Todo como un reclamo primitivo,  
el aire que levanta la cabeza  
del corazón y empuja  
al oficio extranjero de escribir su nostalgia.

Y nada es neutro,  
ni siquiera las sombras de las casas antiguas  
preguntando  
su paisaje perdido en las aceras,  
ni siquiera la grúa  
que lejana,  
hermosa como un cisne,  
tiende su largo cuello y lo descansa  
sobre el alero gris del horizonte.

Yo bajé a la ciudad  
en esa hora incierta,  
presentida,  
donde tiritan todos los semáforos,  
en ese campo oscuro,  
dibujado,  
donde sopla la brisa de los taxis

con su reflejo a musgo,  
donde la luz oculta  
las ojeras brillantes de los barrios,  
poniendo en cada cuerpo  
una mirada larga, una escena vacía.

Yo estuve en la ciudad,  
y entristecido al tiempo de recorrer sus signos,  
vagabundo en la luz de los escaparates,  
quiero doblar la esquina,  
descubrir otra espalda,  
buscar un corazón municipal y amigo  
que me abra la puerta de sus ojos  
y me invite a pasar.

Llámame,  
voy a volver contigo,  
recorriendo despacio las calles que no existen  
cuando tú no me llamas,  
caminando por ti  
a través de la ira pequeña de la tarde.  
Llámame,  
son apenas las ocho, apenas una leve  
sonoridad de vida  
regresa en las aceras,  
se confunde en la prisa de los adolescentes,  
precipita su paso por las últimas tiendas,  
abre su colorido  
metálico y humano  
de parejas en coches abrazadas,  
extraños que se miran  
bajo la carpa incierto del deseo,  
bajo la luna artificial.

Mírame regresando  
sobre las altas casas de este abril distraído,  
yo que tanto temía las fronteras.

Entre los árboles,  
el sol parece el ojo de un borracho.

Llámame,  
hoy es otro el horario,  
es distinto el calor de su reinado,  
la imagen de unos siervos con sangre diferente,  
con dignidad de seres racionales,

corazones pensantes que podrían hablar  
si no estuviesen solos,  
si alguien los llamara.

Pero todo convoca en tu presencia:  
mírame regresando.

Los portales abiertos,  
los anuncios,  
me recuerdan tu piel,  
ese reino sin dudas  
donde pretendo hablar del horizonte.

El horizonte  
como la barra sucia de un bar desconocido  
en la que nunca me podré apoyar.

I

Yo sé  
que el tierno amor escoge sus ciudades  
y cada pasión toma un domicilio,  
un modo diferente de andar por los pasillos  
o de apagar las luces.

Y sé  
que hay un portal dormido en cada labio,  
un ascensor sin números,  
una escalera lleno de pequeños paréntesis.

Sé que cada ilusión  
tiene formas distintas  
de inventar corazones o pronunciar los nombres  
al coger el teléfono.  
Sé que cada esperanza  
busca siempre un camino  
para tapar su sombra desnuda con las sábanas  
cuando va a despertarse.

Y sé  
que hay una fecha, un día, detrás de cada calle,  
un rencor deseable,  
un arrepentimiento, a medias, en el cuerpo.

Yo sé  
que el amor tiene letras diferentes  
para escribir: me voy, para decir:  
regreso de improviso. Cada tiempo de dudas  
necesita un paisaje.

## II

Si las historias de la piel ocultan  
una intuición oscura en sus inicios,  
si tuve acorazado  
el corazón que tengo,  
la fábrica de olvidos que conmigo trabaja,  
nada fue tan extraño  
como verte y saber que me esperabas,  
dispersa, bellamente, en deuda con el viento.

Y sin embargo, a veces, yo recuerdo...  
antes de conocerte comprendía  
la sensación de estar frente a tus ojos,  
porque habías llegado  
anterior a tí misma,  
desde la incertidumbre y la memoria,  
evocándome un gesto,  
un antiguo desorden,  
ese privilegiado vasallaje  
que el deseo nos pide sobre el tiempo.

En la primera timidez del año,  
junto a promesas frías y mañanas inútiles  
para cambiar de vida,  
regresaban del viento mis sueños con tu pelo,  
buscando la manera de sentirse  
otra vez en un hombro, sostenidos  
por un calor ajeno a su propio silencio.  
Fue como si aprendiese  
que la ciudad no existe debajo de la nieve,  
que las manos se rozan y piensan en crearla,  
en descubrir antenas  
y tejados,  
en inventar la espera de los árboles,  
los distritos postales donde muere  
la bruma, según dicen,  
el humo de los pechos espantosos,  
la infinita distancia de sus nombres.

Y sin embargo, a veces, yo recuerdo  
una herida de luz  
anterior a sí misma,  
por la pared de pronto, por los ojos,  
evocándome un gesto,  
un futuro desorden...

### III

Como el primer cigarrillo,  
los primeros abrazos. Tú tenías  
una pequeña estrella de papel  
brillante sobre el pómulo  
y ocupabas la escena marginal  
donde las fiestas juntan la soledad, la música  
o el deseo apacible de un regreso en común,  
casi siempre más tarde.

Y no la oscuridad, sino esas horas  
que convierten las calles en decorados públicos  
para el privado amor,  
atravesaron juntas  
nuestras posibles sombras fugitivas,  
con los cuellos alzados y fumando.  
Siluetas con voz,  
sombras en las que fue tomando cuerpo  
esa historia que hoy somos de verdad,  
una vez apostada la paz del corazón.

Aunque también se hicieron  
los muebles a nosotros.  
Frente a aquella ventana —que no cerraba bien— ,  
en una habitación parecida a la nuestra,  
con libros y con cuerpos parecidos  
estuvimos amándonos  
bajo el primer bostezo de la ciudad, su aviso,  
su arrogante protesta. Yo tenía  
una pequeña estrella de papel  
brillante sobre el labio.

#### IV

Si yo te comentase que la vida es mentira,  
háblame del amor o de tu cuerpo,  
de la noche contigo.

Y recuérdame luego  
los días que son días porque alguien me ama  
o acaso  
porque tú me prefieres.

## V

Tú me llamas, amor, yo cojo un taxi,  
cruzo la desmedida realidad  
de febrero por verte,  
el mundo transitorio que me ofrece  
un asiento de atrás,  
su refugiada bóveda de sueños,  
luces intermitentes como conversaciones,  
letreros encendidos en la brisa,  
que no son el destino,  
pero que están escritos encima de nosotros.

Ya sé que tus palabras no tendrán  
ese tono lujoso, que los aires  
inquietos de tu piel  
guardarán la nostalgia artificial  
del sótano sin luz donde me esperas,  
y que, por fin, mañana  
al despertarte,  
entre olvidos a medias y detalles  
sacados del contexto,  
tendrás piedad o miedo de ti misma,  
vergüenza o dignidad, incertidumbre  
y acaso el lujurioso malestar,  
el golpe que nos dejan  
las historias contadas una noche de insomnia.

Pero también sabemos que sería  
peor y más costoso  
llevárselas a casa, no esconder su cadáver  
en el humo de un bar.

Yo vengo sin idiomas desde mi soledad,  
y sin idiomas voy hacia la tuya.  
No hay nada que decir,  
pero supongo  
que hablaremos desnudos sobre esto,  
algo después, quitándole importancia  
avivando los ritmos del pasado,  
las cosas que están lejos  
y que ya no nos duelen.

## VI

Rojo temblor de frenos por la noche,  
así sueño el amor, así recuerdo,  
entre la madrugada olvidadiza,  
sensaciones de turbia intimidad,  
cuando tener pareja conocida  
es un alivio para los extraños.

Borrosa gravedad de parabrisas  
en la despreocupada seducción.  
Porque los coches saben su camino  
y van como animales en querencia  
a la casa, sin dudas, entre besos  
que nos durán el tiempo de un semáforo  
y un poco más; porque decir mañana  
es casi discutir el más allá,  
y hablamos del dolor de los horarios,  
alejados, cayendo en la imprudencia,  
como los vivos hablan de la muerte.

## VII

Elogio tus escándolos  
y la lluvia de azufre que convocas  
o la dulce política que son tus ilusiones  
visibles como labios en la duna  
tendida de otros labios.

Porque el cuerpo conoce una memoria  
que no es la realidad ni son los sueños.

Recuerda:  
detrás de cada gesto conservamos un nombre.

## VIII

Como un gato tendido,  
nos viliga tu ropa  
al final de la cama.  
Y tu cuerpo reciente  
pudiera estar en ella  
todavía,  
meditando su salto,  
esperando estrellarse  
salvaje con mi cuerpo,  
que también nos persigue,  
al filo de la silla,  
abrazado a su propia  
y larga oscuridad.  
Ojos que fueron hechos  
para ver  
un peligro aceptado,  
debajo de la luna.

## IX

Quizás sólo nos falte  
ser algo menos jóvenes, sentir en otro tono  
más distante la vida

sin abusos  
con nuestra inevitable humanidad.

De nuevo el paraíso.  
Otra vez en la suerte de una casa  
no demasiado grande, bajo el sol de los viernes,  
un refugio sincero en la colina  
donde mirar la tierra con forma de caricia,  
mientras marzo se va y abril levanta  
la frente de los campos heredados,  
a dos horas de viaje.

Junto al cristal roto de la puerta,  
me gusta comprobar que te desean  
las raíces por mí, cuando se ciñen  
con sus dedos salvajes a tu cuerpo,  
a tus enormes días de pezones pequeños,  
como sombras de olivo.  
Igual que lo hace un sueño, bajas por la pendiente  
para dormir conmigo,  
incendiando  
el encubierto reino de la luz retirada,  
que no calla los pleitos de la carne  
ni le pone distancia  
al ruido mundanal de su vocabulario,  
heredado también con estas piedras.

Aunque es más blanco el humo de los leños  
y flota en son de paz  
sobre el envejecido silencio de estos montes,  
aunque los himnos de atardecer  
debilitan las voces, acercándolas,  
no conozco la senda que me aparte  
de un cuerpo al que pedirle dignidad,  
un cuerpo no invitado a sus aniversarios, ese calor litúrgico  
de los antepasados  
y los bailes antiguos  
con los hombros desnudos  
parecidos al mar.

Es imposible retirarse a tiempo.

Es imposible,  
mientras yo me aventuro a sorprendernos,  
decirte, conocerte,  
tener un privilegio.  
Y de nada nos sirven esas horas  
que no son de tu edad ni de la mía.

## X

Aquel temblor del muslo  
y el diminuto encaje  
rozado por la yema de los dedos,  
son el mejor recuerdo de unos días  
conocidos sin prisa, sin hacernos notar,  
igual que amigos tímidos.

Fue la tarde anterior a la tormenta,  
con truenos en el cielo.  
Tú apareciste en el jardín, secreta,  
vestida de otro tiempo,  
con una extravagante manera de quererme,  
jugando a ser el viento de un armario,  
la luz en seda negra  
y medias de cristal,  
tan abrazadas  
a tus muslos con fuerza,  
con esa oscura fuerza que tuvieron  
sus dueños en la vida.

Bajo el color confuso de los flores salvajes,  
inesperadamente me ofrecías  
tu memoria de labios entreabiertos,  
unas ropas difíciles, y el rayo  
apenas vislumbrado de la carne,  
como fuego lunático,  
como llama de almendro donde puse  
la mano sin dudar.  
Por el jardín, el ruido de los últimos pájaros,  
de las primeras gotas en los árboles.

Aquel temblor del muslo  
y el diminuto encaje, de vello traspasado,  
su resistencia elástica  
vencida con el paso de los años,  
vuelven a ser verdad, oleaje en el tacto,  
arena humedecida entre las manos,  
cuando otra vez, aquí, de pensamiento,  
me abandono en la dura solución de tus ingles  
y dejo de escribir  
para llamarte.

## XI

Sospechan de nosotros. Ha pasado  
el primer autobús, y nos sorprende  
en el lugar del crimen,  
desatados los cuellos y las manos  
a punto de morir, abandonándose.

Nos da el alto la luz,  
sentimos su revólver por la espalda,  
demasiado indeciso,  
su temblor en nosotros, encubierto  
bajo el pequeño bosque de las sábanas.

¡Corre!  
¡Coge el amor y corre cuerpo adentro!  
Hay un desfiladero sin leyes en los labios,  
un laberinto ardiendo de salidas.  
Mira tu corazón o tu cintura,  
ese castillo en alto  
que mis muslos coronan como un lago de niebla.

¡Corre!  
Atiende sólo al viento de la piel  
pasando y regresando.  
Y que suenen las ráfagas,  
que suenen los disparos,  
que las sirenas suenen a tu espalda.

## XII

Pasas como un escándalo por medio de la calle.

Entre los verdes viejos de los árboles  
te imagina la luz,  
mientras pone su araña en tu camisa,  
con una despiadada invitación  
a soportar la oscura, fugitiva  
voluntad de la dicha.

Pasas como la piel debajo de una mano,  
el humo de los trenes, aquel silencio roto.

Y yo soy la ciudad mientras te miro,  
ese calor de plásticos y cuerpos  
que quisiera de pronto poseerte  
con su brazo manchado.

        Pero sólo la tarde  
puede acoger los pasos que se pierden,  
el desgastado azul de tus vaqueros,  
la ruta de los ojos y los barcos  
cuando doblas la esquina.



Cines de primavera se anuncian en las calles  
con tumultos difíciles  
y con fotografías.

Agitada

—como si fuese joven y llegara corriendo—  
enrojece la luz por las paredes  
de la ciudad  
y hay un brillo en los árboles metálico,  
una impresión de cuerpo  
que desea desnudo.  
El rumor de esperanza  
llega, crece  
hasta en la inhabitable soledad  
de las sábanas solas.  
Hay anuncios, cristales, almacenes  
y escaleras mecánicas  
que tienen  
un poco más de prisa.  
Pasan coches, estrellas, furgonetas  
y muchachas atónitas  
que brillan  
vagamente distintas.

Se encienden como yo  
y como yo se apagan los semáforos.  
Callejea el amor por estas calles.

Aunque detrás, detrás de tanto mayo,  
estabas tú redonda, blanca, llena,  
igual que si la luna te mordiese los pechos.

## XV

Tu corazón, cerrado por reformas,  
vagando va en la música,  
sin querer contestarme.

Forajido de siempre no resiste  
convivir bajo el reino  
metal de las palabras.

La mirada que trajo conocía  
ese dolor errante  
de los barcos nocturnos.

Se convirtió en testigo por decirme  
las dudas de mis ojos  
y la canción que esconden.

Es silencio, silencio sin embargo,  
vacío encadenado  
al rayo de la luna.

¿Qué camino sin cruces, sin kilómetros,  
sabrás llevarme a él?  
¿Dónde puedo encontrarlo?

XVI

...madrigal...

Ojos míos cargados  
que me miráis con ira  
al terminar la fiesta.

Detenido,  
con la impaciencia con que apunta un alma,  
me fijáis al instante  
de alguna decisión,  
a la presencia extraña, descarnada,  
de otra necesidad  
y de otro cuerpo,  
mientras pasáis silbando por las sienas.

Habéis amado mucho, ya lo sé,  
pero como quien va dejando cien testigos,  
cien sueños de una noche, cien rastros diferentes  
de la misma pasión, más dócil con el tiempo,  
legendaria.

Noches de rock, sin prisa, a las afueras,  
y un patio oscuro donde maduran los deseos,  
donde las cazadoras de cuero se confunden  
al olor de la vida.  
Recuerdos convertidos en fiestas de guardar.

Una historia sin crédito en el día,  
y sobre todo un mundo mucho menos  
marginal que sus versos,  
me convocáis aquí.

El mundo que ponéis en el espejo,  
ojos míos, cargados.

## XVII

Nada más solitario que el dolor,  
porque también excluye a quien lo siente,  
si con él se traiciona o se acompaña.

De mi propio vacío  
siempre yo el excluido.

Tú,  
tan desaparecido,  
tragada por la tierra como lluvias de paso,  
puedes estar debajo de las sombras  
que comparten la noche con mi sombra,  
en los bares abiertos igual que las heridas,  
las hamburgueserías  
que la ciudad habita y condecora  
con la tristeza inmóvil que vende un cabaret,  
donde las gentes pierden  
el pudor de saberse atormentados.

Juntos a los coches muertos a un lado de la calle,  
hay un lugar sin nadie que se convierte en lágrima.

Y yo  
desesperadamente lo recorro,  
porque también mis ojos  
vagan por la ciudad buscando aparcamiento,  
en las últimas horas de este lunes sin fin,  
lejano y solo.

## XVIII

Me despierto tal vez  
y alguien  
desnudo como yo  
está a mi lado,  
con una inesperada soledad  
y los ojos en deuda con la noche,  
hablándome de ti,  
preguntado la historia de tu ausencia.

## XIX

La verdad sólo ocurre pocas veces,  
igual que la mentira. Los regresos  
son tomas de poder sobre los cuerpos,  
ni tienen falsedad ni van desnudos.

De nuevo aquí, caminante abrazado,  
figura intempestiva de algún amanecer,  
con la humedad de junio  
debajo de la ropa traicionada  
y miedo a detenerme o decidir.  
De nuevo aquí, conmigo y con tus ojos,  
porque el sol se levanta detrás de nuestra espalda  
y los viejos portales son refugio  
donde la oscuridad tiene la piel de un cuello,  
imaginable sólo al lado de mis labios,  
debajo de tu pelo,  
compañero en la noche todavía entreabierta,  
para temblar a medias, soportar el aliento,  
reconducir palabras en silencio.

De nuevo aquí. De nuevo  
sin excusas, sin orden, con el dolor nostálgico  
que ponen las derrotas,  
porque la vida es bella en el abrazo,  
tu cuerpo la razón  
y yo un deseo.

## XX

Se descalzan los días  
para pasar de largo sin que nos demos cuenta.  
Son casi despedidas, casi encuentros  
—felices pero incómodos—  
de cuerpos que se miran  
y que aplazan la cita.

Aunque detrás,  
suelen quedarnos huellas que no son los recuerdos.

De aquel jardín inculto yo conservo  
el hombre que venía a desearte,  
a caminar sin ti,  
silvestre y solo.  
Porque de ti le hablaban las adelfas,  
con sus ramas difíciles como muchachas jóvenes,  
y las palmeras altas igual que tu desnudo,  
y aquel cielo corrido  
que buscaba  
la luz con que el amor te distingue los ojos.

No envejecemos nunca. Tal vez no envejecemos.

Y ahora puedo decírtelo,  
cuando tú me recuerdas las adelfas,  
y tu desnudo en arco dibuja una palmera,  
y los ojos se nublan  
sobre el jardín silvestre de los enamorados.

Tal vez no envejecemos. O es acaso que el tiempo  
se quitó los tacones para no molestarnos.  
O es acaso el deseo  
que camina en los labios todavía descalzo.

XXI

Sé más feliz que yo.  
JUAN AROLAS

Soy más feliz que yo, no es mi costumbre.  
Tuve miedo a saberlo.

## XXII

En más de trece noches  
he pasado contigo trece sueños.  
Yo sabría contarte...

De tus ojos color de marihuana  
conservas una lenta proposición de dicha,  
un barco que se aleja sin volvernos la espalda.

Te desnudas diaria  
en la forma que nunca podrá hacerlo un poema,  
enemigas tus sílabas del tiempo,  
con gestos desdoblados vas doblando la ropa  
y una soberbia extraña se apodera de mí,  
convertido de pronto en su costumbre.

Y yo, que no confieso deberte cuanto tengo  
porque se hereda un verso igual que una nostalgia,  
no me atrevo a contarte  
la sensación de oír tu cercanía,  
la entrega que me haces de calor en la piel,  
lo indispensable de mis sentimientos.

## XXIII

A esa parte de ti en donde silba en viento,  
donde la clara oscuridad se cita  
más allá de los hábitos,  
la dedico esta noche con sus versos.

Porque una bailarina se parece a una lágrima  
rodando en la mejilla de los sueños,  
porque tu malla negra, vagamente  
deshecha por el día, me retiene  
en la mitad de un pecho,  
porque la luz nos dice  
que tus senos, palacios de mis noches,  
son los mismos —llenos de realidad—  
que me acompañan  
cuando vivir no es parecido a un sueño,  
cuando nos gustaría despertar.

## XXIV

Como quien ha dejado la batalla,  
como quien corre por llegar a tiempo  
a través de los campos enemigos,  
elegido entre nobles por su historia  
para salvar las últimas palabras,  
mensajero infeliz, nos viene el día  
y es un grito de alerta su caballo.

Que tome posesión de nuestro sueño.  
No encontrará monarcas en el trono,  
ni espadas que lo inviten a inclinarse,  
ni centinelas viejos en la puerta.  
Descubrirá de nuevo la batalla  
de la que separarse nunca pudo,  
y dos cuerpos que saben su noticia  
lo estarán esperando en el castillo.

## XXV

Recuerda que tú existes tan sólo en este libro,

agradece tu vida a mis fantasmas,  
a la pasión que pongo en cada verso  
por recordar el aire que respiras,  
la ropa que te pones y me quitas,  
los taxis en que viajas cada noche,  
sirena y corazón de los taxistas,  
las copas que compartes por los bares  
con las gentes que viven en sus barras.  
Recuerda que yo espero al otro lado  
de los tranvías cuando llegas tarde,  
que, centinela incómodo, el teléfono  
se convierte en un huésped sin noticias,  
que hay un rumor vacío de ascensores  
querellándose solos, convocando  
mientras suben o bajan tu nostalgia.  
Recuerda que mi reino son las dudas  
de esta ciudad con prisa solamente,  
y que la libertad, cisne terrible,  
no es el ave nocturna de los sueños,  
sí la complicidad, su mantenerse  
herida por el sable que nos hace  
sabernos personajes literarios,  
mentiras de verdad, verdades de mentira.

Recuerda que yo existo porque existe este libro,  
que puedo suicidarnos con romper una página.

## FRAGMENTOS RECOGIDOS EN UN EPISTOLARIO

Mi carta, que es feliz, pues va a buscaros,  
cuenta os dará de la memoria mía.  
R. DE CAMPOAMOR

Extraño amor: como en las malas canciones y en los días trágicos, mientras la oscuridad y el hielo, abrazados al fondo de los vasos, decoran nuestra historia de seres razonables, te dejo esta carta sin héroes encima de la mesa. No hay intención en ella: ni demanda moral ni instinto atormentado; es simplemente un gesto literario, la representación privada, el despedazado anfiteatro de nuestros ojos.

\*

Quien pretende elegir la felicidad sólo merece ser invitado a sus ritos. Nada es el mar en tus palabras sino una decisión para mañana, la consciencia escogida, el paso que te aleja del cuerpo o de la piedra que se arroja al vacío. No sé si te das cuenta: vas dispuesto a engañarte, y ofrecer la renuncia es siempre un don amargo, palabra innecesaria para el que no lo sabe. A través del deseo intentarás salvar el gris inoportuno de la lluvia, me hablarás de veranos infantiles con luz de costumbres burguesas an un pueblo marino, hoy echado a perder, y escribirás poemas que mezclan la arena de los sexos, la libertad premeditada de las olas y el solitario rencor de tu inteligencia. Ya ves, los días previstos son impertinentes, llenos de fracasada comodidad, como los malos versos en un bueno poema, amigos con los que no se acaba de tener confianza. Aunque a veces sucedan muy cerca de nosotros, aunque a veces terminen bien sus noches, recordados después, no nos dejan descansar tranquilos.

\*

Los hombres, la poesía y la banalidad melodramática de un exilio interior. Noches de viaje, noches sin compañía en algún cine: mal doblado la voz de aquel actor.

\*

Temo haber empezado a compartir este ejercicio tuyo al que siempre regresas, la inclinación dudosa por hacer de la vida un libro no del todo real, con versos encontrados al doblar la esquina, como desconocidos paisajes de familia, sentimientos que siguen el orden de unas páginas. No me hubiera sido difícil decir que se trataba de un lujo personal de tu carácter, del privilegio que te habías permitido con tu propia manera de pensar el destino, la compraventa de sueños y verdades en la que cada corazón necesita apoyarse. Pero es un mundo por el que ahora empiezo a sentirme sometida, turbia de sombra y colorido, corriente abajo impulsada por una voluntad ajena, más peligrosa porque actúa dentro de mí y me convierte en la espuma que el agua expulsa al chocar con sus propias paredes asolados que son el palacio de nuestra irrealidad, empiezo a abandonar demasiadas conjuras, demasiadas antiguas batallas personales, y me parezco sin quererlo a ese personaje que nació desde ti, con la sangre invadida por versos y capítulos. O

mejor, personaje del libro al que has sometido tu vida, siervo de una corona sin ejércitos. Y traicionarme es traicionarte: la pasión y el infierno, o el infierno de no vivir apasionados.

\*

... el mejor recuerdo de aquellos días, vestidos de otro tiempo, me sigue llegando al pensar en tus poemas y al volver a sentir la desmedida vanidad del fuego. En una habitación tomada únicamente por su luz, estaba siempre pidiendo la palabra, llamando la atención, interrumpiendo el tono de las conversaciones, sin respetar las sombras —al final en silencio— inclinadas y últimas de los cuerpos. Su pobre vanidad, su peor concesión al miedo de estar solo.

\*

...raras veces resisten dos soledades juntas las palabras.

\*

No he debido beber, no debería necesitar excusas para hablarte. ¿Por qué escribo esta nota, esta carta confusa que dejaré en la mesa antes de irnos, escondida en la prisa, atada desde ahora a los ojos que traigas cuando vuelvas? ¿Decirte que no pienso regresar? Ni siquiera lo sé; escribo con la mano de un actriz en paro, evocando guiones sin escena, decorados a medio quitar, frases que se arrinconan y se mantienen en el aire de un teatro vacío. El ordenado desierto de sus butacas en la melancolía de quien recuerda una silueta que se fue y la esperanza de quien necesita amar al que aún no ha llegado. Mi ordenado desierto: una vida que no puede ofrecer más espectáculo. ¿Es tal vez un intento de quitarte las riendas, de sentir en los dedos, aunque muy débilmente, el caballo de unas páginas que ya me pertenecen tanto como a ti? Exiliarme del libro significa sin duda alimentarlo, encontrar un punto definitivo para mi personaje. Hay noches en el año donde se necesita simplemente una necesidad.

\*

Y gracias al demonio (en noches como esta, es el nombre que le damos a la historia), la espontaneidad se parece a un vicio de otro tiempo, como mascar tabaco o tener conciencia. Tú lo aprendiste de la mala poesía, no de los malos poemas.

\*

Pero tienes razón, ¿y para qué mentirnos?, ni el deseo ni la angustia suelen ser un infierno.

\*

Todas las noches anteriores a un viaje nos devuelven la intimidad por un instante, nos despegan hacia nosotros mismos, como pétalos pisados otra vez en el viento.

\*

La poesía en el gesto más femenino que te conozco. Escribes porque temes la dominación.

\*

... pero el miedo se puebla de vértigo y me invita al juego. Porque admito que toda seducción, como toda metáfora, oculta un modo de violencia, una distancia invadida entre dos corazones. Nadie puede enamorarse sino de su propia idea del amor: todos somos la mano para un pecho de tela. ¿Podemos renunciar a saberlo? El desengaño es la única mentira respetable de la lucidez.

\*

... y en aquel torbellino, en aquella imposibilidad de decir, tus labios, como un tiro de gracia.

\*

De nuestras avariciosas almas de personas amadas, igual que de nuestros cuerpos, acostumbramos a preferir las partes húmedas. Nos ha ocurrido con frecuencia y mil veces caímos en la tentación de contarnos la vida. No recuerdo detalles, sólo la inexistencia que provocaban ciertas conversaciones vividas en primera persona. Conservo su irrealidad, como regresos a casa por la noche, sosteniendo la luz quemada de las calles, su celaje cambiante y artificial desteñido por ráfagas de lluvia, y la borrosidad de los ojos en el parabrisas, y ganas de no mirar del todo por una vez, de no decir enteras las palabras. Son recuerdos que hemos compartido. ¿También así regresas de un poema?

\*

... y tus mejores versos parecían decisiones, determinados actos sin prudencia; sentías al hacerlos el temor de los sueños sin retorno, el lápiz que dibuja esa región oscura de la que uno siempre está volviendo.

\*

No hay discrepancias enigmáticas entre la realidad y la imaginación. Existe una realidad imaginaria, un modo fabulado donde se juntan las historias y la historia, los poemas y la poesía, su soledad y los que estamos solos.

\*

... amanecer violeta detrás de la ventana y la ciudad parece un barco anclado; veo su sombra navegar despacio, sin desaparecer despacio, agrupándose bajo la luz rayada del horizonte y el brillo del whisky que te has dejado a medias. No estás aquí, es un amanecer que desconoces, pero que pasará sin duda a tus poemas.

\*

Por mucho amor que guarde,  
una carta encontrado boca abierta en la mesa  
será siempre un cadáver.

# I

No son días azules,  
pero el mar nos asalta en carretera,  
acercando sus olas  
marciales, escoradas,  
como soldados viejos a la orilla.  
También como un orgasmo.

Sobre los parabrisas  
se ven barcas con nombres de mujeres,  
haciéndose el amor en la bahía  
y haciéndose a la mar.

No es el día 18.  
Lo arrancamos por fin del calendario,  
y esta lluvia, tranquilo de verano,  
se nos llena de un humo parecido  
al cigarro que a veces te gusta compartir,  
para amarme despacio,  
para seguir más tarde acariciándome.

No es el día 18.  
Un joven con mirada del dragón  
nos sube las maletas hasta el décimo piso,  
dejándonos al lado de este cielo dudoso,  
al que le duele el cuerpo  
de tantas nubes grises y tormentas  
que gruñen como tú cuando te beso.

El mar será mañana, al despertarnos,  
una sábana fría, caída por el suelo.

## II

Cuando acerco mi oído hasta tu cuello  
—igual que el mar se oye—  
puede oírse el amor. No sé si el viento,  
ese animal que silba por tus venas,  
conoce la región terrible a donde llama,  
el viejo acantilado que hay detrás de sus voces.  
Pero la luz acuática nos llega  
cada vez más sombría,  
llena de vigilada soledad,  
con el olor a césped que tienen los ahogados.

Cuando tu corazón es un cronómetro  
enredado en el mío  
y acompasadamente  
somos barcos desnudos que se hunden,  
cuando la superficie  
dura sólo un segundo,  
las sirenas nos dicen que desaparecemos.

Silban los metros bajo el mar también.  
Puede oírse el amor junto a tu cuello.  
La ciudad sumergida nos espera.

### III

El mar  
que se cierra y se abre  
como un libro con páginas de espuma,  
nos sorprende en tu boca,  
bajo tu cabellera dispersa entre mis muslos.

#### IV

Generaciones últimas  
de muchachas difíciles,  
muchachos obligados al orgullo  
y tocadiscos viejos, me recuerdan  
que en alguna terraza junto al mar,  
bajo el calor de un mundo,  
estuve yo también,  
con esa misma falta de existencia.

(La arena en el sostén y los vaqueros,  
el muslo hundido, el vello con la luna,  
las manos otorgados  
a separar la sombra del perfil,  
vinieron a decirme  
que no debe ceder ni un palmo de terreno  
al invadir el cuerpo que a la vez nos invade.)

Con su sabor de hielo,  
en barcos que parecen no moverse,  
indefinidos y lejanamente,  
siguen bailando ahí, sentados en mis ojos.  
Cada vez más distante  
la música que suena me recuerda  
que no todos bajamos hasta el mar  
una noche posible  
de humedad encendida en el verano.

Casi nada heredé  
sólo la tentación y su sonrisa  
y aquellos ascensores  
más pequeños que un beso.

V

Estaban como grietas en la casa,  
como sombras estaban.

    No sabían  
las piernas rodear un corazón  
al encoger el aire.

    No sabían  
los brazos ser fronteras de un momento  
que jamás se retiene.

    No sabían  
los vientres por la nieve conducidos  
derretirse con ella.

    No sabían  
los labios apoyarse sobre el mundo  
igual que un horizonte.

    No sabían,  
y estaban como sombras en la calle,  
como huellas del frío.

Pero piernas y brazos,  
labios y vientres juntos confundidos,  
tuvieron el amor, lo descubrieron  
desterrado en la sábanas un día,  
más viejo cada vez y preguntando  
por qué la edad del mar  
se parece a los pechos que respiran.

## VI

Tú que no eres el mar,  
que tiembles como un pájaro cuando te mira el viento,  
que caminas las rocas, el sol de las orillas,  
la razón del océano.

Tú —despertar sin brújula—  
que navegas la calma más sabia y la tormenta,  
el tiempo imprevisible, la piel embravecida  
a la luz de las sábanas.

Tú que no eres el mar,  
que no siempre regresas,  
que pueblas con botellas escritas y resacas  
los labios de la tierra, la cintura nublada  
de las últimas lunas.

Tú que ordenas la sal,  
tendrás un largo sueño,  
te contarán la historia de un naufragio.



Parece que soy yo quien hasta mí se acerca,  
quien erguido camina rodeando mis piernas,  
apoyando la piel sobre mi pecho,  
cuando se acercan ellos, los recuerdos,  
esos gatos sonámbulos del tiempo  
que vigilan reunidos,  
como palabras dichas,  
caídas en el blanco  
mantel de aquellas fiestas.

¿Dónde está la memoria,  
detrás de qué latido se levanta  
para enseñar su rostro,  
el tesoro que lleva en sus ojeras  
de canciones perdidas, de promesas  
que nos tiran de pronto hacia otra parte?

Mi historia no es un libro, como dices,  
es la esquina doblada de una página,  
porque pensar también lo que no he sido  
me define de un modo más exacto  
por elecciones  
o presentimientos,  
porque hay versos que nunca se llegan a escribir  
y la fidelidad que tengo a la poesía:  
es demasiado débil,  
ni siquiera respeta su nostalgia.

Perdóname. ¿Recuerdas  
el juego de crecer en soledad,  
una voz que te llama por tu nombre?  
La vida no traiciona, sólo existe  
de un modo diferente al esperado  
y es justo que se cuide, pues la cito  
cuando tengo interés en malgastarla.

## IX

Me persiguen  
los teléfonos rotos de Granada,  
cuando voy a buscarte  
y las calles enteras están comunicando.

Sumergido en tu voz de caracola,  
me gustaría el mar desde una boca  
prendida con la mía,  
saber que está tranquilo de distancia,  
mientras pasan, respiran,  
se repliegan  
a su instinto de ausencia  
los jardines.

En ellos nada existe  
desde que te secuestran los veranos.  
Sólo yo los habito  
por descubrir el rostro  
de los enamorados que se besan,

con mis ojos en paro,  
mi corazón sin tráfico,  
el insomnio que guardan las ciudades de agosto,  
y ambulancias secretas como pájaros.

X

Necesito el silencio igual que los secretos.  
A veces, como ellos, necesito la luz,  
mientras todas las calles  
deciden fondear en las piscinas  
y el cielo  
de los supermercados solitarios  
se parece a tus ojos demasiado.

Pero la noche baja  
a sentarse en las plazas por la noche.  
Son  
las cotizadas sillas del crepúsculo,  
según me dijo alguien que buscaba  
tener conversación.

Y hablé de ti, hablé de las semanas,  
del interés que muestran por no pasar los días.

XI

Por ella,  
la reina de los bares,  
la reina de los mares de ginebra,  
llenos de tempestad.

XII

Como un gallo estridente  
me despierta el teléfono.  
Dos de la madrugada. Hay noticias de ti.

### XIII

Por septiembre  
se te llenan de sótanos los labios  
y es relativo el cielo  
después de haberte visto preguntarle a la vida.  
Pero también el cielo,  
arrugado y preciso  
como tu cazadora adolescente,  
quiere estar entreabierto,  
brillar recién amado,  
descansando en la hierba  
el peso de su larga cabellera de nubes.

Por septiembre  
se te llenan de humo los síes en la boca.

## XIV

De tres en tres, amor,  
de cuatro en cuatro,  
con su canción de aves nocturnas en bandada,  
han estado pasando los coches por la casa.

Y yo, que a veces vivo  
por fuera de tu sueño,  
casi un desprevenido sonámbulo entre ellos,  
no he querido evitar sus aleteos  
de luz sobre las sábanas,  
que llegaban con prisa,  
te amaban la cintura,  
buscando la salida por tu espalda.

## XV

Ese perdido reino  
donde cualquier política tiene forma de beso,  
de cicatriz privada  
detrás de los abrazos,  
nos está dominando con sus sueños,  
de distancia a distancia.

Quiero que te levantes  
con la misma impaciencia que los árboles,  
creciendo hasta lo exacto  
para rozar mis labios, para buscar en ellos  
la humedad sin la lluvia.

Sé que descubriremos  
siluetas desnudas por la casa,  
recuerdos visitantes,  
fantasmas de una noche sin verano,  
que andarán en nosotros y pedirán su cuenta,

porque la oscuridad, como un espejo,  
nos devuelve la imagen que le damos.

Pero conozco todas las preguntas  
que no sé contestarte,  
el cuerpo en donde viven las interrogaciones,  
tu sueño en los pañuelos, como de haber llorado.

## XVI

Cogerse la cintura,  
detenerse en los bordes,  
imitar un deseo mucho menos social,  
la vida suele ser como este baile,  
como *el último tango* de la noche.

Junto a la orquesta húmeda,  
que toca de memoria  
por la felicidad,  
las parejas se agrupan y los espejos miran.

París en la pantalla,  
una casa vacía,  
dos cuerpos despoblados y rozándose.

El frío de la calle. La lentitud del mundo  
y un cigarro al salir.

## XVII

Esta ciudad me invita a desearte.  
Veo sus casas rojas en el alba,  
y parecen botellas ordenadas  
en la barra de un bar,  
selvas donde vivir  
de copa en copa.

## XVIII

Bajo la luz quemada,  
tienen frío los ojos con que buscas  
estas horas de octubre  
y su jardín manchado de ginebra,  
hojas secas, silencio  
que de nosotros hablan al caerse.

Porque si ya no existe,  
aunque nadie se ocupa de sus solemnidades,  
hay noches en que llega la verdad,  
ese huésped incómodo,  
para dejarnos sucios, vacíos, sin tabaco,  
como en un restaurante de sillas boca arriba  
y a punto de cerrar.

—Nos están esperando.

Nada sé contestarte,  
sólo que soy consciente de mi propia ironía,  
porque el hombre es un lobo también consigo mismo.

—Nos están esperando.

Negras y en alto, buitres silenciosos,  
nos esperan las nubes en la calle.

## XIX

¿Quién anda ahí,  
verso sin terminar entre mis versos,  
desatendido sueño,  
silencio de luces y las puertas?

¿Quién anda ahí,  
después de haberse ido, persistiendo  
con ojos de batalla,  
bajo la sombra muerta de las llaves?

¿Quién anda ahí,  
viniendo sin venir, deshabitando  
el tono de su voz,  
la cuenta inacabada de los pasos?

En esos mismos labios que han hecho las maletas,  
yo buscaba los héroes del destino.  
Vinieron una tarde por llevarte con ellos,

y comprendí que nada se comprende.

XX

Tuviste un corazón. Sólo distancia  
te queda bajo el pecho, solamente  
el ejercicio de vivir, la prisa  
de amar la soledad como un fantasma  
reducido al instinto, y necesario.  
Y necesariamente has comprendido  
que los últimos besos fueron pánico,  
ni siquiera la duda, el asombroso  
deseo de vivir con sus preguntas.



El sol es débil, la razón no importa  
y yo me acercaré despacio hasta las sábanas.  
Evitando el te quiero,  
en la confusa lucidez del alba  
dejaremos la noche,  
igual que un barco deja a sus espaldas,  
como una huella inmensa, todo el mar.  
Y mientras nos besamos,  
recordaré sin duda  
otros amaneceres en el agua,  
mirando frente a frente mi reflejo.  
con el mismo temor a sumergirme.

Raras veces resisten  
dos soledades juntas las palabras.

## XXII

Acostumbran los cielos a entregarse  
sin vida en el asfalto.  
Mueven la luz en busca de los cuerpos.  
Su mecánica es dulce y se repite,  
como tu corazón  
cuando me prefería.

Una sombra sin dueño,  
algo que no es la noche,  
pero que surge andando de su vientre,  
al regresar se acerca, se confunde,  
pasa lejanamente hasta perderse.

Miro mi soledad  
volver sin mí, desnuda,  
de donde yo la llevo,  
un la umbría derrota de sus pasos,  
de portal en portal, rumor sin nadie.



mas allá de los tiempos y los hechos.  
Quizás porque haga falta haberlo presagiado  
o porque, en todo caso, nadie sabe  
dónde acaban los sueños.

## XXIV

Cómo serán las luces que me cuentas?

No preguntes por mí.  
Escribe sobre nombres de ciudades,  
anuncia tu torpeza para morir en ellas,  
para ocultarme dentro de sus alas de pájaro.

En su idioma me dices  
la cansada presencia de un extraño  
acontecer de árboles extraños,  
de raros edificios, cines viejos sin cita,  
donde el único espectro familiar  
es el arrebatado,  
codicioso espejismo que te llama  
al doblar una calle.

Me cuentas que camino como las multitudes  
y la voz se nos hiela con más prisa que el agua,  
y sobre el hielo sueñan  
cargadas de ciudades las palabras,  
porque nos saben débiles,  
capaces de vivir una mentira  
que oculte demasiada soledad.

También aquí yo espero que me abracen,  
que alguna vez me abrace  
cualquier aparecido.

## XXV

Esa luna de color saxofón  
me retendrá en París.  
Esa luna de viaja mariposa,  
de alma viaja buscando sobre el viento  
ojos para mirar el fin del siglo,  
gatos que son las dudas de la noche.

Tiéndete junto a mí. Despierta en la memoria  
esa inquietud que guardan los que acaban de amarse,  
la imperceptible prisa de los labios  
que buscaron un cuello donde apoyar su aliento.  
Y déjame mirarte, frente a frente,  
con estos mismos ojos orientales  
que utiliza el amor para observarnos.

## XXVI

Bajo una lluvia fría de polígono,  
con un cielo drogado de tormenta  
y nubes de extrarradio.

Porque este amor de llaves prestadas nos envuelve  
en una intimidad provisional,  
paredes que no hacen compañía  
y objetos como búhos en la sombra.

Son  
las sábanas más tristes de la tierra.  
Mira  
cómo vive la gente.

## XXVII

Y para celebrar  
que la niebla también nos pertenece,  
revolvemos recuerdos, desperdigamos libros  
ajenos y periódicos,  
perseguimos un mundo de impermeables viejos.

—Noviembre es un desorden  
sentimental, me dices.

Nos besamos entonces  
y tus ojos, los míos,  
empiezan a echar humo  
para poblar las dudas de las habitaciones,  
salir por las ventanas de la casa,  
enredarse en las calles y atravesar los barrios,  
haciendo que se anegue la ciudad,  
mientras, amor, me dices débilmente  
que no vuelves conmigo  
por ahora.

## XXVIII

Le debes carta al sur, como la historia.

Me pregunto por ti, por lo que ahora,  
apoyada en el hombro, me dirías  
al contemplar el paso descuidado  
de la gente en el parque, su dibujo  
contra la luz primavera del invierno,  
cuando el frío resbala por los troncos  
enfermos de los árboles.

Faltan tus opiniones a mi lado,  
mientras gritan los niños abrigándose,  
con paso de colegio, y los obreros  
aceleran la marcha necesaria  
delante de mucamas, de soldados  
que confunden sus ropas con los tonos  
enfermos del invierno.

Ya no sé si recuerdas el bullicio  
de las tiendas lejanas, las mujeres  
inclinadas y limpias con el cesto,  
o los repartidores de bebidas,  
los pobres tenderetes callejeros  
que venden sus mentiras con la prisa  
enferma de los hábitos.

Y sin embargo existe, me dirías,  
también existe el sur en este parque  
tomado por el frío, mientras pasan,  
como cuellos de jóvenes que esperan,  
las interrogaciones levantadas,  
las tercas esperanzas, los secretos  
enfermos del futuro.

Imaginar los sitios posibles donde estabas,  
verte llegar sin noche a La Tertulia,  
reconocer tu voz apresurada  
al contar una anécdota  
o preguntar por mí,  
saber que nos mirábamos antes de conocernos,  
son capítulos largos de mi vida.

Supongo que también te dejarán a ti  
este mismo vacío,  
esta impaciencia por estar sin nadie  
mientras se nos olvida  
todo el calor de duele de olvidado.

El naufragio es un don afín del hombre.  
Después de que sucede  
suelen tener las huellas  
esa incomodidad que tienen las mentiras,  
el recuerdo es un dogma,  
la soledad el pecho que tú me acariciaste.

Pero cambiando de conversación  
el tiempo —buen amigo  
que deforma el pasado como el amor a un cuerpo—  
hará que cada día no parezca un disparo,  
que volvamos a vernos una tarde cualquiera,  
en un rincón del año y sin sentir  
demasiada impotencia.

Será seguramente  
como volver a estar,  
como vivir de nuevo en una edad difícil  
o emborracharnos juntos  
para pasar a solas la resaca.

Igual que quemaduras debajo de los dedos,  
en un segundo plano  
seguiremos presentes y esperando  
ese momento exacto del naufragio en la orilla,  
cuando al salir del mar  
me escribas en la arena:

*Sé que el amor existe,  
pero no sé de dónde lo aprendí.*

XXX

Por recoger tus huellas,  
ha caído la nieve  
sobre la acera.

La nieve de diciembre,  
que te pide el regreso  
mientras se tiende.

Desde el amanecer,  
sin humillarse nunca  
bajo tus pies.

Qué solitario vivo  
en este corazón  
donde hace frío.

Donde la nieve espera,  
preparando el regreso  
para tus huellas.

## INVITACIÓN AL REGRESO

Para ir al infierno no hace falta cambiar de sitio ni postura.

RAFAEL ALBERTI

Quien conozco los vientos, quien de la lejanía  
haga una voz donde guardar memoria,  
quien conozca la piel de su desnudo  
como conoce el rastro de su nombre,  
y no le tenga miedo, y la acompañe  
más allá del invierno encerrado en sus sílabas,  
quien todo lo decide sin la noche,  
de golpe, como un beso,  
que suba entre la niebla por el puente,  
que le roce los dedos a su propio vacío,  
que salga al mar, que pierda  
el temor de alejarse.

El la debilitada  
sombra violeta de las olas,  
mientras se van hundiendo con el puerto  
los antiguos letreros y las luces,  
flotarán esperando  
nuestras conversaciones en el agua.  
Serán el obligado desengaño  
que con la brisa caiga desde la arboladura,  
devolviendo al recuerdo  
la tempestad de hablar  
o palabras partidas como mástiles.  
Porque los sueños dejan  
igual que los naufragios algún resto,  
con maderas y cuerpos hundidos en las sábanas,  
llenos de dominada libertad.

No es la ciudad inmunda  
quien empuja las velas. Tampoco el corazón,  
primitiva cabaña del deseo,  
se aventura por islas encendidas  
en donde el mar oculta sus ruinas,  
algas de Baudelaire, espumas y silencios.  
Es la necesidad, la solitaria  
necesidad de un hombre,  
quien nos lleva a cubierta,  
quien nos hace temblar, vivir en cuerpos  
que resisten la voz de las sirenas,  
amarrados en proa,



la historia en dos, el ruido de las lágrimas,  
tienen que ser pasado necesario,  
alejada miseria,  
cosas para contar después de algunos años,  
si es que alguien pregunta por nosotros.

Aunque también, y necesariamente,  
entre la baja noche y esta casa  
donde suelo escribir,  
yo esperaré los labios  
que con llamada extraña de nuevo me pregunten:

¿Prisionero de amor, para quién llevas  
un hombre de cristal y otro de olvido?

*APPENDIX B: QUEDARSE SIN CIUDAD*

I.

La ciudad vino a posarse en mi hombro.

Yo la estaba viendo en el horizonte, nocturna, abierta de luces y de alas, quieta, como buscando el calor de la luna o el mensaje de los faros del coche. Lentamente me acercaba a ella, cumplía mi regreso. Granada se parece entre las sombras a un pájaro dormido.

Pero hubo un momento en que pude notar el temblor de sus nervios, la repentina agitación del sueño, la llamada de un instinto poderoso, la disciplina de un horario. Y todo de repente. Y levantó vuelo, y cruzó el aire como una flecha en llamas, como una predestinación encendida. Y vino a posarse en mi hombro, y dejó su beso sangriento en mi cuello.

Desde entonces la temo con una entrega absoluta, igual que la víctima necesita a su vampiro. Pálido, con ojeras, casi sin sangre, a la ciudad regreso todavía. Soy el aparecido de las sombras, el que cruza la calle, el que se pierde hacia un destino secreto. Y te miro un momento, y me poso en tu hombro, y acerco mis labios a tu cuello.

## II.

El recuerdo es un veneno que se compone con nuestros propios años, la consciencia de que la vida es el decorado de nuestra propia soledad.

Voy junto a un río que ya no exista hacia una biblioteca que está cerrada, y nunca podré volver a la casa de la que acabo de salir porque hace muchos años que desapareció, y le han cambiado el nombre a la calle, los números a los portales, son distintos los bares, la luz es otra y las parejas que se amaban han dejado de abrazarse a la misma hora en la misma sombra.

Es verdad, la ciudad que nos hizo nos deshace y en los escombros vuelve a edificarnos.

Puedo andar por el camino del otoño pasado, pero sé que los amantes de hoy buscan en sus besos los labios de entonces. El deseo se humilla para permanecer y se transforma en conciencia al descubrir que sueña desde un cuerpo envejecido, desde una plenitud inexistente.

En medio, yo. Y sí, la vida es un sueño, pero no por falta de verdad, no porque sean mentira las realidades intensas de sus cicatrices, sino porque en los sueños conviven todos los tiempos de una misma ciudad, y todo se almacena detrás de una mirada, en el sótano de nuestra propia soledad, y son de carne y hueso las calles hace años desaparecidos, y el hombre que va junto a un río que ya no existe puede olvidar por un momento que su vida, lo que él llama su vida...

Granada se parece a un recuerdo al hacerse presente. El el jardín de hoy cae la lluvia lentísima del invierno pasado.

### III.

Detrás de una mirada duermen todas las ciudades que desaparecieron. Están tendidas, con una respiración casi imperceptible, en un claro del bosque, años arriba, atravesando la juventud y la adolescencia, la infancia y los recuerdos heredados, esos que existen como fotografías de un tiempo que pasó sin nosotros. Duermen con el rostro sereno, las mejillas sonrosadas, el traje limpio. Al abrirla última puerta de la galería, el aire es denso, el silencio tiene fiebre, hay una extraña calma con sabor a espera. Las ciudades de tu propio pasado están tendidas como bellas durmientes, y basta que te inclines sobre ellas y beses sus labios para que se levanten de nuevo a la vida, para que te abracen y se pongan a bailar contigo siguiendo una música que alguna vez sonó y que vive porque tú vives, detrás de todo, al otro lado de tus ojos.

#### IV.

Las bibliotecas son también una definición de tus ciudades. Hay bibliotecas que pertenecen por alma a ciudades que se detienen a las cinco de la tarde para tomar el té. Bibliotecas que han oído la marsellesa y han abierto muchas veces las ventanas para ver en la calle el tumulto de las revoluciones. Bibliotecas que nacen con el frío de las altas catedrales, hiedras de niebla. Bibliotecas que están acostumbradas a las sirenas de los barcos y se sumergen cada atardecer en una nostalgia de marinero.

El paseante debe preguntarse a las bibliotecas de Granada por el carácter desorientado y rotundo de esta ciudad. Una ciudad del Sur con lunas de frío y nieve, que no conoce el mar, ni toma el té a las cinco de la tarde, pero que sabe encerrarse en el interior de una nostalgia de marinero y recuerda las banderas perdidas de su derrota, esa historia de siglos y silencio que se encarna en agua de fuente y murmullo de hojas.

V.

En los lavabos de los bares nocturnos los espejos responden a las preguntas de la gente. ¿Sigue siendo mía esta ciudad? Hay momentos de plenitud que se merecen una respuesta afirmativa, porque los ojos nadan en la música y conocen el idioma de la sugerencia y la felicidad. Pero hay un día en que el espejo hechizado nos habla de otro mundo que nace sin nosotros, la hermosura de una Blancanieves que no provoca envidia ni cólera, sino la marca definitiva del extranjero. Granada tiene entonces una manera distinta de besarse, otro modo de beber, otra ropa, una agenda diferente, una noche de nuevas direcciones. El espejo le dice al extranjero que la ciudad no es suya, y el extranjero comprende la siniestra voz de los números de teléfono, la hierba que brota en la neutralidad arruinada de las matemáticas, la distancia que cabe en un nombre cercano. Hay tachaduras que nos miran desde el papel como nos mira un cuerpo desnudo en la memoria.

El extranjero se va quedando sin ciudad y se imagina las huellas de su propio olvido, el número de veces que habrá perdido su nombre en las fotografías.

## VI.

Granada se mira en el espejo de una metáfora. En alto, anclada en un bosque como un barco en el agua verdosa de los puertos, la Alhambra guarda silencio frente a la ciudad y se deja mirar, responde igual que una metáfora a los ojos inquietos de los que deben buscarla.

Aparece detrás de una esquina, entre dos edificios, encima de una plaza, en el parabrisas del coche que espera un semáforo. Aparece de pronto, erguida y noble, encerrada en sí misma, capaz de sugerir agua libre y descanso a todos los corazones que tienen clavado un anzuelo de humo.

En el cristal de las ventanas, en los escaparates, en los espejos de los bares nocturnos se reflejan las caras de los que necesitan oxígeno, el pez de plata que se dobla y se acaba en la dureza seca de los adoquines. Quien le mira a los ojos puede encontrar la Alhambra.

Todo lo que se conquista se pierde. Fuentes y arrayanes que murmuran la belleza y murmuran la muerte.

## VII.

En el interior de la ciudad hay un laberinto de citas y palabras perdidas. Las llamadas telefónicas que nadie contesta, los timbres que se estrellan en la ciudad oscura de los pasillos, el cliente desconocido y regular que deja de tomarse la última copa en la barra de siempre, las sillas vacías, los coches muertos, todo lo que funda un hueco en el alma de la ciudad, todo lo que aparece como el cuerpo atropellado de un perro, el aceite impuro de los aparcamientos subterráneos, los ángeles abandonados en los jardines públicos, todo va formando una red de silencios, un laberinto de secretos y pérdidas.

La multitud cruza por delante de los rosales secos, camina ensimismada, no pregunta por la hora del amor o de los desengaños, no se detiene a mirar la sombra de los desamparados. La multitud y los desamparados siguen el camino de las serpientes telefónicas, de los timbres que no hallan respuesta. Desembocan en el laberinto que teje la ciudad con sus citas y sus palabras perdidas.

Granada es una rosa sin contorno, el pétalo que pisan la multitud y los desamparados.

## VIII.

A las nueve menos cinco de la mañana todas las mujeres pasan con aire de madre joven o de hermana mayor.

A las once y medita las mujeres ponen en la calle un rumor de colonias y carmines, rumos de dependientas demasiado arregladas y deseos clandestinos.

A las cuatro de la tarde las mujeres llevan el aire casto de las adolescentes que van a estudiar a casa de una amiga.

A las cinco y media, sobre todo en los días con sol de invierno, las mujeres tienen los ojos brillantes de las comidas de trabajo y uno las sorprende en sobremesas largas con amigos secretos.

A las once de la noche, sobre todo en la primavera y en las últimas semanas del otoño, las mujeres irrumpen con caras profundas de buen amor, amor de verdad y para toda la vida.

A las cuatro de la mañana todas las mujeres son viejas amigas, antiguas compañeras de universidad, pacientes cómplices para la madrugada.

Hay muchos relojes que marcan en la ciudad el ritmo solitario de nuestros pensamientos. El reloj de las mujeres, el de los hombres, el de los matrimonios; el reloj de los coches, el de los árboles, el de los balcones; el reloj de los ruidos, el de los silencios. También la multitud tiene sus códigos.

## IX.

Hay una Granada que vive detrás de los visillos, bajo la luz de un sol mediocre, marcada por el reloj provinciano del orgullo sin norte. Ciudad de domingos por la mañana con ropa limpia, sábanas llenas de miedos y silencios, envidias que corren secretas por las venas del comercio pequeño y la decencia. Todos sus habitantes tienen nobleza, necesitan escandalizarse ante los televisores y aprenden a vivir en el calor de su dinero dormido.

Hay otra Granada que vive sin mirar por las ventanas, sin nombres, bajo la luz artificial de los suburbios y los grandes edificios demacrados. Ciudad de enero por la noche, ascensores que cruzan diez pisos sin una sola palabra, hielo que se deshace y desemboca en las grandes superficies. Los geranios no pueden comprender el significado amargo del cemento y las chaquetas de los ejecutivos se humillan en la atmósfera hambrienta de los autobuses.

Entre los dos Granadas, entre los antiguos y los solitarios, hay una tercera ciudad que quiere hacerse y busca sus relojes, el saludo de sus habitantes, la luz de cada una de sus cuatro estaciones. Nieve cálida del Sur para el invierno, primavera de sueños navegables, desnudo de amante libre en los veranos y la melancolía de un dibujo de Federico García Lorca en el otoño.

X.

¿Sigue siendo mía esta ciudad?

Para el paseante que doble el cabo de la plenitud y descubra las sombras y la picadura envenenada de la memoria, sólo hay un recurso: la dignidad de ser mortales.

Para la ciudad que se duele de sus cicatrices y recuerda otros mundos en su propio paisaje, sólo hay un camino: la dignidad de lo transitorio.

Y tú, metáfora que pervives en la ola de un bosque, palacio del deseo y la melancolía, ten piedad del pez de plata que se acaba en la dureza seca de los adoquines; ten piedad de los ojos asustados que desde lejos te miran. Ten piedad, porque el caminante sabe que está condenado a ser extranjero en su propio deseo, en su propia ciudad.