

Julio Cesar Villegas  
Memories of an Old World

I.

I was born from the roots, vines, and salamanders,  
the ocean that carved its scriptures onto my tongue,  
and the light of sun, shattered into a thousand birds,  
a thousand memories — and somewhere a tree  
no longer grows.

And somewhere there is a land  
where the oceans are not tombs,  
and somewhere there are islands  
where the flames no longer walk.

From my throat rises the horizon,  
with every shard and finger  
clawing against the night,  
against the eyelid,  
against the clouds,  
against the beast.

From the roots and the vines

the salamanders scatter,  
taking with them once more,  
into the earth,  
the memories of a sleeping world.

II.

This world was built from buried hands,  
and I have become afraid of the fruit  
that its children will yield.

I have become afraid of the kapok tree,  
whose leaves are ensnared  
beneath the blood of rosaries.

I have become afraid of the hornets,  
who now turn upon each other,  
and eat each other's young.

The mountains are widowed from the land,  
along their slopes the voices of mothers,  
where crows of flame peck against the flesh,  
and lakes of ancient wine learn their names.

The gardens that once bloomed in the west  
have now become graveyards, children of dust,  
scattered into shadows by the western winds.

One day we will learn to count  
the shadows in the sky.

### III. Ode to Pedro Albizu Campos

Pedro,

the lion of the soul,

the silhouette of hours,

the river of burning pages,

fortress where the night and day eclipse:

¿Si todavía estuvieras aquí,

quisiera todavía quedarte?

Would you ask questions to the soil?

Proclaim to the streets that drops of water,

when uncertain, can form hurricanes?

Our veins trace the continents

of forgotten maps, of trajectories

and histories that wander back

into the mouth of that ancient heart.

¿No sonr e un ni o dentro de ella?

Does a father still remember his son's name?

¿No se recuerda la pierna de su viajes?

Do the fingers recognize lo que  
nunca se puede recordar?

I write to you in ash and blood,  
hablando de otro mundo,  
another life, another mouth,  
en una lengua cortada por la bestia,  
and a hand born from its fragments.

Si todav a estabas aqu , Pedro.

Doves fly unafraid because of you,  
their wings stirring across the water,  
and as the days came to pass,  
you reminded us of hurricanes.

IV.

A drum sends a tremor through the  
body of a sleeping guitar, whose strings  
are not familiar with such a weight,  
and due to lack of preparation,  
or perhaps lack of a better word,  
two of its strings snap with the  
ferocity of a wolf's jaw, sending  
arrows of manic lightning across  
the sleeping sky, and now the stars  
observe the claw of sound that  
unraveled their constellations,  
the tapestries that took them  
innumerable infinities to weave  
to their discernible perfection.

Enraged by the stripping of their  
cosmic fabric, the stars that formed  
the constellations of Dorado and Gemini  
began to implode upon themselves,  
one by one, collapsing upon the very

weight of a nervous drum, a sleepless  
wolf, and their desire to avenge the strings  
that could no longer paint melodies against  
the canvas of time and space.

The lights of Dorado vanished from the air,  
and as the final candle in Gemini's chest  
was to flicker in its final performance,  
a hurricane of flame, a hand of cinder  
clasped its palm onto the raging heaven,  
that orphaned light on the verge of oblivion,  
so as to prevent it from dying such a foolish death.

In the abyss of what it once was, the final  
star of Gemini looks to the shores,  
and they have all become quiet,  
and then it looks to the valleys,  
and not one solitary insect is arguing  
with its neighbor or its children,  
and the cassava trees have folded  
into arcs, as if offering prayer,  
and there is a whisper within



the winds that speaks of the  
moon. The corpse of the  
reckless Gemini turns toward  
the moon, only to find that its  
dormant eye had been awoken,  
and within its pupil the origin  
of the sacred flame:

the beating of the drum's heart  
and the retaliation of the guitar's strings,  
placed together with the self-sacrifice  
of two eternal (and stubborn) constellations  
awakened from the depths of the celestial waters  
the intervention of the island's mother,  
the goddess Atabey.

Daughter of the oceans, the rivers, the lakes,  
the spirit of origin from whom the ground  
receives its blessing to parent a new world,  
her sleep had been disturbed by the cries  
of these instruments, the vessels whose  
purposes were to write the beautiful within

the indecipherable and remind everything  
around, above, and below them of the flowers  
that can bloom in the mouth of a dream,  
and the arrows that only the spirit can feel.

Casting her gaze from the eye of the moon,  
Atabey summons sparrows of fire from the  
palm of the hurricane she has placed against  
the dying fabric of Gemini, and the memory  
of what was Dorado. They fly between the worlds  
and with their talons they resurrect from the  
forgotten the lost stars of the selfish constellations.

Their beaks entwine the strings of light as they once were,  
and neither cluster of stars has to burden  
once more through innumerable infinities  
to return to that nostalgic labyrinth of their souls.

To ensure that the rebel constellations  
will not revolt again, the goddess sends  
the sparrows to perch themselves onto  
the nearest inhabitable emptiness of that

astral map and maintain watch for  
as long as infinity will permit.

As the years had come to pass, the sparrows  
arranged themselves into a constellation of their  
own, not having needed to be born from the  
heavens to acquire a spot in the heart of eternity:  
channels of light that bend into the form of an  
eagle and hover over the skies and the earth —

as to why the sparrows formed the shape  
of an eagle is left to the dreamer's imagination.

As for the frightened guitar  
and the impatient drum,  
the goddess of the moon  
laid them both to sleep,  
and buried them beneath  
the carcass of a condor  
with a poppy in its beak.

The cassava trees unfolded themselves,  
the waves started to chase one another,  
and the valleys were filled with the sounds  
of insects afflicted with their ancient insomnia;

The daughter of the oceans, the rivers, the lakes,  
closes the eyelid of the watchful moon,  
the pupil sealing into the skin of silence,  
and exhales her final breath—

a wolf howls in the distance.

V.

Your hair falls like unopened letters—  
stories and sentences to be read with  
the eyes closed, the summer within us,  
across your lips the wings of a butterfly.

You and I hide within each other:  
away from our buried voices are  
only sleepless knives and impatient wars  
that wish to steal the lights from our eyes.

Every moment is eternal when  
I read those scattered letters,  
and run my hands across the  
hieroglyphs written in your skin.

At times I think of death—  
if my life was lived well enough  
in order to truly make you happy,  
or if I have not died enough yet.

If you look behind my eyes,  
you will see a crow drinking  
from a river of burning wine.

You will see the leaves of an  
unknown plant wrapped around  
the carcass of a decaying galleon.

Vas a encontrar un niño  
que habla en números  
y cuenta en letras.

But with you,

your hair continues to fall  
like the unopened letters,  
your skin possesses stories  
that neither my hand nor  
my heart will ever be able  
to capture, so with the  
eternity of every moment  
that we share with each

other, we will continue  
to hide unafraid between  
one another's worlds  
so that letters can be  
written upon the wings  
of the butterfly.

VI.

The name  
of the house  
that was built upon  
the house of another  
is not the true name of the  
house because the former owner  
never left from that home that you named after  
yourself because you refused to learn how to spell.



## VII. Ode to Juan Muñoz Jiménez

Juan,

The kingdom was yours long before  
all bore a name, and every creature  
of this land recalls the way you spoke:

with a humility that unnerved the spiders,  
a conviction that forged the stones;  
a warrior caught in another's greed.

You watch upon us in bittersweet virtue,  
angel of the catacombs, and I cannot help  
but to think of this island as it once was,  
as opposed to what it has become.

Canyons formed upon sleeping sand,  
eroded by the palms of a windmill—  
every lance you threw was shattered,  
manicato mabuya Quixote.

Tú estás allá, yo estoy aquí.

The rivers have been made slaves,  
the sun screams every day and hour,  
it seems that the beasts we feared  
walk among us, and they walk among  
us knowing that they are beasts.

I wish it had been different for you, Juan,  
that you did not have to fall into the claws of  
the beasts, the talons of the condor—  
into a prophecy that did not include either of us.

You have seen the peasants nailed  
to crosses in the name of a salvation  
and you have seen the families made  
to fight one another until their death.

Tú estás allá, yo estoy aquí.

The sun has broken into rotting medallions,  
and from the battlefields the bodies return

to the ashes; the ground becomes a ghost.

They drink wine from our skulls,  
and play songs from our bones.

You are there, because you were taken from here,  
and though we may have never shared eyes,  
or spoken of the lakes and the hymns of the coquí,  
we have breathed the same air and known the same roads,  
and upon our foreheads we bore the same mark.

I write to you to lessen your burden,  
with every word and every memory,  
remember this, Juan Muñoz Jiménez:

ellos solamente están preparado para la batalla,  
mientras que nosotros estábamos preparado para la guerra.

Tú estás allá, yo estoy aquí.

As your eyelids come to a close,  
so has the weight of an unsolicited empire;  
the scoundrels, vipers that took you

from the hyacinths and the seagulls,  
the ballad of the waterfalls,  
and a voice that only speaks when  
it hears your name.

Wander on, dearest Quixote,  
and fight against every devil  
that challenges your quest  
and every fortress that questions  
your dreams because only you  
know that you are chasing them  
with your eyes open.

You have left us too early,  
but your adventure has only begun—  
with your lance you carve fantasies into the sky,  
carve the stories that we once told to each other,  
and in the middle of the night summon forth  
the dreams that connected us long before  
we knew of kingdoms or wars.

Todavía estás allá, todavía estoy aquí:

Pero de aquí miro hacia las nubes,  
entre los sepulcros y fantasmas,  
y ya se que al fin has conquistado  
los molinos de viento.

VIII.

a dog barks at its shadow during a solar eclipse  
and the shadow barks back

somewhere in the hills  
the army is training  
a handful of peasants

in a library near the ocean  
a granddaughter waits until  
the setting of the sun to read  
about her grandparents

on a solitary railroad  
an argument has broken out  
between the tracks and the soil:  
it is winter, and the tracks can rest,  
but the soil reminds them there is no such thing

the spring had an affair with autumn  
and summer's soul begins to wither

into caverns and forests and the  
branches that never fall off their  
home but no longer remember  
where among the leaves their home was

a blind bull storms into a mass  
as the saints watch from heaven  
and the people watch from the pews  
and the priest watches from his throne  
and the angels watch from the streets  
and the devil watches from his palace  
but only the blind can truly see it

a raincloud shaped like a bone  
visits four towns in one day  
without notifying the ministers  
and now there are thousands  
of crucifixes falling from the sky  
and not enough people to carry  
the weight of another five centuries

a husband and a wife

a wife and a wife

a husband and a husband

a lover and a lover

the heart plays its symphony

even if the crowd refuses to listen

inside a pine tree in the north

rests eight coffins

three lost deserts

the cane of a Taíno chief

and a party that we were not invited to

for each ant in this world

there are just as many sins

and there are just as many dreams—

choose wisely the hills that you marry

a broken bottle is scattered on the ground

but nobody picks it up because

they were in need of a new mosaic



IX.

Compose yourselves;

it is time for the president's speech!

Flock to the plazas, doves and herons,

let the children leave the schools early!

Bring the elderly to the front, they cannot hear;

tell the miners and the tailors to stop for a moment!

Food will not be permitted, this is the president;

he does not take too kindly to the sound of mouths!

The speech begins in five minutes, gather around;

you were supposed to have been here sixteen minutes ago!

Elderly in the front, elderly in the front, they are hard of hearing,

the children do not need to hear because they can very much see!

The time is upon us, the doors of the palace are opening;

has anyone told the priest how long this ceremony will take?

*The priest still has not finished his lunch!*

*He will be here shortly!*

If that is so, good for him that he is eating in private;  
turn your spirits and your very bodies to the president!

*Good morning.*

*Taigüey!*

*I said good morning.*

*Good Morning!*

*As you are all very much aware,  
it is the tenth of October, and—*

*Tenth of October!*

*Has it been that long already?*

*Has the priest fallen asleep?*

*I don't know, someone sho—*

*As you are all very much aware!*

*Twenty-four years have passed*

*since the Five Centuries' War!*

*I stand among you as hero and savior*

*of your land, respect me as such!*

*¡Presidente! ¡Presidente!*

*The children in the back,*

*tell them to quiet down!*

*¡Que se callen ya!*

*¡Los viejitos se están quedando*

*quietos, que aprendan de ellos!*

*Attention!*

*Who gave you permission to speak?*

*You did, Presidente!*

*I was not speaking to you;*

*I was addressing the generals.*

*As you have always done!*

*In the year 1493, when*

*the nights were filled with—*

*Coward!*

has no one found the whereabouts of the priest?

it cannot take this long for a priest to eat lunch!

*Yes it can when he*

*has actual food to eat!*

*Listen to me!*

*As your president and —*

*¡Vayate pal carajo!*

*¡Hipócrita desgraciado!*

*¡Los viejos no pueden escuchar*

*porque han duraron años de mentiras!*

*¡Asesino de los sueños!*

*Do not speak back to me*

*in that tongue!*

*I freed you of your chains!*

*¡Trabajaste para*

*mantener a las cadenas!*

*¡De una cadena a otra!*

*¡Tú hablas en la lengua de Batista,*

*Trujillo, Pinochet, y Videla!*

Everyone, please listen, the story is not complete!

The pages of this day must end with the priest's prayer!

Why are the children moving to the front?

Why are the elderly turning into trees?

*¡Porque ahora es el día*

*que los niños van a ver*

*como el mundo se gira*

*cuando se habla en la*

*lengua de las raíces!*

*Generales! Fuego!*

And somewhere on an island

an old woman writes about

the day when she was let out of school

early to watch the president speak at the palace

it was the only day of her life

when she saw trees bloom

from ashes

and a priest was

nowhere to be found.

X.

Do you remember how in the winter  
the snow ran across the horizon  
like a stallion?

Do you remember how the hills  
formed a country and inside them  
sprang a music that would make  
cathedrals jealous?

Do you remember the afternoon  
when we dug into the ground  
for almost a lifetime and found  
cities and empires that bled  
back into our veins?

Perhaps I can live among the Aztecs  
and write to you of suns, of calculations,  
  
of ritual and survival, of how the oak tree  
of the day is not the same as the oak tree

of the night.

Perhaps I will love among the Incas  
where I can sculpt from this earth  
monsters that were never monsters  
but rather gods overthrown by the  
serpent and the sword.

Patterns burn upon your walls,  
and in your eyes a willow dances,  
the lines of your hands form interminable  
roads and pathways where one happily  
starves if they were to get lost within them.

The color of your skin reminds me  
of when skin did not have a color  
and your smile returns all of  
these demons among us back  
into their nameless damnations.

The words you speak are  
carnations pressed against

the river, and from wherever  
the waters flow, so too will  
my heart, cutting the rope  
of that unspoken darkness.

You walk among this life  
as an eclipse, a war between  
the moon and the sun in which  
only one can remember you,  
and the other can hold you.

I will breathe among the Taíno instead.  
I will dig my feet into this ageless ground  
and feel the roots building monuments in  
my chest and forming arrows in my throat.  
I will write to you on the days of eclipse,  
when the world and heavens surrender,

Y más allá de las siluetas de los árboles,  
una vela está ofrecido a tu templo.



XI.

An eagle flies over the villages  
and the countryside looking for  
worms to eat or seeds to plant.

Vuela sobre los insectos,  
sobre los guajiros, sobre  
sus campos y sus cultivos.

After circling the territory,  
it leaves, its claws empty  
of any insects or direction.

Un numero de dias pasan hasta  
que un campesino mira al cielo  
y observa un oscuridad que respira:

a condor slashing against  
the wind whose wings unleash  
a decade of plagues onto the land.

No había ningún carne para desgarrar  
que sus plumas no han rebanado  
a deltas y pantanos implacables.

The condor dove down onto the  
villages spilling the venom of  
rattlesnakes over the skeletons.

La sombra del cóndor marcó  
las caras de la tierra tan despiadado  
que se convirtieron en miedo de la respiración.

I write in the hand of my mother  
because only through her can I  
know peace inside destruction.

Me escondo como su hijo para borrar al cóndor,  
que al fin vuela de nuevo al horizonte,  
y regresa a su propio madre: la águila.

XII.

I

once read

a book where there

were windows that laughed,

a cat by the name of Camagüey,

a rose that grew in a field of lilacs,

architects that forgot how to swim,

a monk who talked to marble statues,

a volcano that erupted last Thursday,

desks that screamed when you used them,

pencils that refused to write after dinnertime,

admirals who rehearsed their victory speeches,

elephants that grew new tusks for each day of the week,

iguanas that spoke Sanskrit and could write in three languages,

a lonely hummingbird that dug a hole into the ground and stopped flying,

machetes that offered sacrifices to their ancestors every morning,

a dusty flute said to be formed from the wing bones of a crane,

stairs of magma and paper that led to another stairway,

a road where the cat Camagüey supposedly walks,

a dancer who plays guitars with three left feet,

a glass doll who is anything but hollow,

a widow whose spouse never left,

a llama who knew Moctezuma,

a quiet colony of shadows.

### XIII. Ode to José Martí

José,

The rose that sprang from the palm of the morning,  
whose petals remain eternal against the sword,  
whose arms wrap around the rays of sun,  
you exist in the eye of rebellion.

Without water, you baptize;  
without food, you harvest.  
Your skin carries the weight  
of galleons, men, women,  
sparrows, fruits, and serpents  
beheaded by their children.

The world that divides upon itself,  
and the light that constructs pillars,  
they are both parents to you,  
orphan of los campos.

La guerra no se duerme cuando  
los ojos se cierran,  
y el mundo no para de hablar  
cuando las olas regresan.

Ahora es la hora que tu hablas,  
y ahora es la hora que yo respondo.

Que te olvides de la idioma extranjero,  
porque ya somos extranjeros entre  
la misma tierra que nacimos.

No hay ningún cielo,  
no hay ningún infierno,  
porque los reinos  
ya existen dentro  
nuestras almas:

no necesitamos a morir  
para saber como van a sentir.

You place your leaves over the thorns,

to prevent them falling onto the land,  
and no man nor beast can uproot you,  
because only you can cultivate your white rose.

And I continue to remember you with  
your hand outstretched, writing upon  
the canvas of time, the atlas of passion,

and with laughter and tears,  
you show me your eyes,  
and they still hold their promise:

you cultivate neither nettles nor thorns.

XIV.

Every hour is a minute  
that has lived sixty different lives

every day is a fire  
that has twenty-four branches

every week is a battalion  
that has seven generals  
and a hundred and sixty-eight soldiers

every month is a palace  
that has thirty bedrooms  
and seven hundred and twenty rodents

every year is a mirror  
that has three hundred and sixty-five mountains  
and eight thousand seven hundred and sixty tigers

every decade is an ocean  
that has three thousand six hundred and fifty questions



(more or less)

and eighty-seven thousand six hundred answers

every century is a universe

that has thirty-six thousand five hundred trees

and eight hundred seventy-six thousand forests

every millennium is a government

that has three hundred and sixty-five thousand problems

and eight million seven hundred and sixty thousand excuses.

XV.

A train loses sight of its destination,  
its wheels have come alive with  
melodies and lost iron serenades,  
as each board of wood resting  
between the lines of rail watches  
from below this song of despair:

on the train there are poets  
and carpenters, and the frequent  
crack on the window that reminds  
the conductor of his childhood  
house, the four walls that were  
mirrors between reality and fantasy,  
fingers that ran between whispers  
of an unhinged door and a bullet  
that mourns for the voice of time,

and the conductor's train remains  
without a compass, with only the light  
of its visitors guiding it to the world

hidden from all maps, a world where  
strange forms and thunderous symbols  
sleep in one another's arms, the train  
tracks bend into words only spoken  
when there is love in the bark of the  
calabash tree and they begin to form  
paragraphs upon the fossils of the  
newborn soil:

the poets stare from their windows  
and begin writing of passion and  
knights on stallions of noble blood,  
the carpenters look from beneath  
their caps beaten from the winds  
and earth but eroded just well enough  
to fit and remain upon their heads,  
and they place their faces against the  
body of the glass and feel the heartbeat  
of the iron branches beneath them,  
the homilies of the drunken wheels,  
and the joy of coming home to talk  
to their family about the possessions

of someone else.

Their hands were cracked,  
canyons inherited from a lifetime  
of wooden hammers and sinking ships,  
but today was not one of those days where  
the coyotes that roamed within them leapt  
from the shadows and clamped their fangs  
into their owners; no, today was a day to speak  
to mirrors and feel the souls of cracked windows.

The wheels of the frenzied train began to sleep  
and the conductor awoke from his daydream,  
and turned to look at his passengers, all of them  
with wildfires in their eyes that the storms of  
the southern plains could never come close  
to baptizing into graveyards or taking from them:

This was theirs.

Out of everything in this life  
that they could have never had,

that they could have never loved,  
out of the times when vultures and  
rats would feast upon their houses,  
their families, and return the very next day.

The conductor looked at the way the  
poets and carpenters admired their pain;  
the fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers  
and grandparents aboard the lost train  
were ready to step off into this land  
that lacked all name and bore  
uneaten fruit, as they were now  
prepared to dedicate the rest of  
their lives living among the forms and  
symbols that gave birth to them many  
years ago when water seduced the roots,  
stones spoke of the praying mantis,  
and one did not need to get lost in order  
to remember what was within them before  
strange talons scratched against buried mirrors.

XVI.

If I could sing to the phantoms,  
or build cathedrals upon the shores  
of your hands, entonces lo haré.

If I could wander among the trees,  
buried in the labyrinth of your voice,  
entonces lo haré.

In your eyes rests the forest of burning autumn,  
with every leaf praying against the wind,  
and every branch snapping beneath  
the gravity of restless dreams.

Candles dance in ritual  
across the music of your breath,  
and as I look to the hills,  
as I look across this paper night,  
there is no doubt in my soul  
that I am ready to sacrifice this life  
to sleep forever in your warmth.

## XVII. Ode to Humberta Pérez

Humberta Pérez:

Estos versos serán de muchos,  
y la vela solo parpadea a la  
medida que el viento lo permita,  
así que permíteme recordarte  
esculpirte en jardines donde  
los temores no se inviten a la  
cosecha de tus pensamientos.

Te escribo como tu nieto,  
la voz que recuerdas cuando  
el retrato de memorias comienza  
a colapsar, cuando las garras  
de ese demonio se comienza  
a levantar.

Cualquieras flamas que fluyen  
dentro de mi, originan de la  
fuente de tu espíritu y soy solo

un visitante en tu catedral, cada uno  
de tus huesos un rosario de otra persona,  
y por cada momento que siento un clavo  
de hierro forzado a mi pecho por un Ángel  
no visto, recuerdo todas las cruces que  
cuelgan de tus collares de oración y que  
el peso de los mundos que sostienes ha  
sido bastante mayor que cualquier dolor  
que yo podré conocer en esta vida.

No hay tiempo para describir quién eres tú:

Tú naciste de amaranto y incienso,  
de la madera rota de huracanes  
creados con los brazos de tu padre  
y la tela de tu madre.

Nunca los he conocido, pero los  
he sentido, cada grano de arena  
en las costas no alcanza a todas  
las razones que tengo para desear  
verte una vez más, y como un pecador



caer a las cenizas de mi vida y ofrecerte  
todo lo que he conocido, todo lo que  
batallado —

Tú fuiste la primera ola en que nade,  
y la primera página que aprendí a leer,  
y cuando tú sonríes es como si un reino  
de pájaros de papel imprimieran sombras  
a través del cielo, para que pudiese leer  
los cuentos que nuestra familia nunca  
fue capaz de contarme.

Tú caminas conmigo a través de mi sueños,  
y nunca ha habido una mujer tan bella.  
Escribo tu nombre en la arena y dejo  
que las aguas te bendigan en la emperadora  
que siempre eras, y todo lo que ahora llena  
mis oídos son las canciones de relojes y las  
manos de sombras que ciernen sobre las  
luces parpadeantes, mientras tu nieto se  
sienta en su propia oscuridad para resucitar  
los artefactos que construiste dentro su corazón,

que pusiste a dormir hasta que el momento  
apropiado despierte sus párpados.

Solo puedo llorar tanto hasta que  
valles ya no más pueden ser tallados  
a mi piel, y el sabor de sal se vuelve  
repugnante.

Envolveré tu rosario dentro los  
pétalos de mis palabras y te cantaré  
a el paraíso que tu merecias desde  
el mismo día que tu nombre fue  
escrito en este mundo.

Estas líneas no son bastante.  
Sólo hay tanto que podré escribirte.

El día llegara cuando las lágrimas  
que los dos hemos derramado  
esculpan pilares y estatuas a  
la mañana y recuerdan a los  
amarantos que nunca nos habíamos ido.

XVIII.

It is the time to sail away.

Bring with you all that you need,  
and leave here all that you needed,

what rests beyond you tonight  
is everything that was within you,

there will be no hands to guide you  
but the ones that had raised you,

do not feel scared by the rocking  
of the ship, it is preparing you for life,

when you are alone and everyone  
is asleep, stare into the constellations,

they were the parents of this world  
without name, the ocean you breathe,

and remember to count every light  
in the darkness, because they heal,

the fatal hour has come where I  
can now rest, as your ship embarks,

for every star that you count in the sky,  
that is the number of spirits protecting you,

that is the number of deaths I would live for you,  
and that is the number of stories that you will tell.

The centuries have made their home in my skin,  
so I look to you to remember them as they were,

I look to you to write to us when you arrive,  
to send sparrows or messengers of dreams,

tonight I close my eyes knowing that you  
were the world worth discovering in this life —

A small ship sails alone underneath a new constellation.

XIX.

To the thousand birds of the sun,  
To the shadows buried in the sky,  
To the hurricanes of the heart,  
To the wolves of smoke that dream,  
To the delirium of unopened letters,  
To the house by the name of another,  
To the knight that still wanders,  
To the libraries built upon oceans,  
To the ashes that turned into trees,  
To the eclipse of the winter stallion,  
To the snapped talons of the condor,  
To the white rose that fights in peace,  
To the numerous lives of the day,  
To the train without destination,  
To the cathedrals on the shore,  
To the bones that breed rosaries,  
To the small ship under a constellation:

our hearts are a map to the homes we knew  
long before they possessed a name.

XX.

and in a single breath  
the world unfolds into  
the poems whispered  
from the bottom of the sea

a fortress of crystal opens  
its gates for the first time  
since having witnessed  
the birth of original sin

and into this kingdom of  
names and apparition  
enters the poet from the  
islands of another lifetime

and standing before the  
canvas of time they reach  
into their chest and rip out  
their own rib of creation

out of their mouth stretches  
the branches of palm leaves  
covered in saltwater and  
the remnants of a sunstone

with every step the poet takes  
an echo rings through the air  
of the hummingbird that has  
learned once more how to fly

the creatures of the new world  
appear similar to those of the old  
in every way except for the way  
in which they read their maps

the poet leans against the trunk  
of a flame tree and thinks about  
the nails of iron and splintered  
shipwrecks that sleep in their soul

and without a hesitation in their  
heart and body they cast the palm

leaves onto the ground and with  
the new rib of creation begin to write

monsters of solitude do not stop the poet  
pendulums of stone do not stir them away  
nor does the fear of another thing watching:  
within the poet burns ancient forests

with the weight of every world and  
every life and every love that they  
have lived, the poet writes from  
their flesh the exodus of a land  
baptized eternally in its rivers  
and its people who held onto  
the stars to give them away  
when it was time to smile for  
the final time, and the canyons  
that still run across the faces of  
those that remembered how it felt  
to taste the rains of another life  
hidden forever across a closed eyelid:



*Yo nací de las raíces, vides, y salamandras,  
el mar que tallaba sus escrituras sobre mi lengua,  
y la luz del sol, destrozada dentro mil pájaros,  
mil memorias — y en algún sitio un árbol  
ya no crece.*

*Y algún lado hay una tierra  
en donde los océanos  
no son sepulcros,  
y algún lado hay islas  
donde las flamas no  
caminan más.*

*De mi garganta sube el horizonte,  
con cada esquirola y dedo arañado  
contra la noche,  
contra el párpado,  
contra las nubes,  
contra la bestia.*

*De las raíces y las vides  
se dispersan las salamandras,*

*llevando con ellos una vez más,  
dentro la tierra,  
las memorias de un mundo viejo.*