My father liked them separate, one there,
one here (allá y aquí), as if aware
that words might cut in two his daughter's heart
(el corazón) and lock the alien part
to what he was—his memory, his name
(su nombre)—with a key he could not claim.
"English outside this door, Spanish inside,"
he said, "y basta." But who can divide
the world, the word (mundo y palabra) from
any child? I knew how to be dumb
and stubborn (testaruda); late, in bed,
I hoarded secret syllables I read
until my tongue (mi lengua) learned to run
where his stumbled. And still the heart was one.
I like to think he knew that, even when,
proud (orgulloso) of his daughter's pen,
he stood outside mis versos, half in fear
of words he loved but wanted not to hear.