



## Bilingual / Bilingüe

Rhina P. Espaillat

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  
(*sunombre*)—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 (*orgullosa*) of his daughter's pen,

he stood outside *mis versos*, half in fear  
of words he loved but wanted not to hear.