

# Amor constante más allá de la muerte

FRANCISCO DE QUEVEDO (1580-1645)



ARIEL DORFMAN

It is the last line that does it; the tears come from beyond me, and perhaps from beyond death. The eyes that shed those tears will become dust, the eyes that have seen over and over the love of my life, Angélica, the woman who helped me survive exile and tribulations and peopled my world with hope – those eyes will have been closed by the final shadow. And yet the *polvo*, the dust, is *enamorado*, is in love.

Except that there are no words in English that can offer us the equivalent of *enamorado* or *enamoramiento*, so much so that I have had a correspondence with my friend, the extraordinary Spanish author Javier Marías, about the right translation into English for his equally extraordinary novel, entitled *Los Enamoramientos*, and we reached the conclusion that there was no perfect fit for such a word, not in English, not in any language.

Quevedo knew this many centuries ago and finished his poem with that word, which tells us that we are filled with love, we fall into love as if into an abyss, we ascend to its invitation to *enamorar*, a verb that enhances what both lovers must do, make someone love me, find myself overflowing with love.

That last verse never fails to make me cry. The laws of the universe discovered by physics assure humanity that we are composed of atoms and that protons and neutrons and electrons will scatter and rejoin, that everything is connected, that when we drink a glass of water or shed a tear, some slight marrow of Shakespeare or Brecht or Rumi is submerged in the depths of the liquid coupling of hydrogen and oxygen: the cosmos as a giant blender, making our every cell ultimately immortal. I am not religious and do not believe, as Quevedo did, that the soul will subsist, that God will greet us once our body has finished its course of skin and bone and flesh. But this I do believe: my wife and I have sworn to mix our ashes, to be dust together for eternity. *Polvo seremos, mas polvo enamorado*. Angélica and I will be dust but dust in love. How can I not cry with joy for myself, for her, for all of us on this earth that will itself turn to dust, ashes to ashes, yes, but ashes in love.

## JAVIER MARÍAS

As we grow older, perhaps what saddens us most about the prospect of death – and, oddly enough, what strikes us as most melancholy and unbearable too – is not that we will cease to live and have no more future, that is, no more knowledge, curiosity, or laughter, but the certainty that all our memories, our past, will disappear along with us, that everything we have experienced, seen, heard, thought, and felt will no longer ‘float’ in the world – to use a deliberately imprecise verb.

Maybe that is what is so moving about any attempt to rebel against this future disappearance. Not, I repeat, the disappearance of our own selves, but of all that we preserve within us and that depends for its existence entirely upon our consciousness.

Quevedo’s sonnet is one of the most successful of rebellions. It matters little that, as Borges pointed out, its extraordinary last lines are perhaps ‘a re-creation, or an exaltation’ of a line by Propertius (*Elegies*, Book I, 19). Quevedo’s last two lines – the lines that bring a lump



to the throat – are infinitely superior. As are the first two lines, which throw down the challenge: even though death may close my eyes and sweep me off on the blank white day – ‘*el blanco día*’, that is, ‘*el día en blanco*’, a marvelous way of describing the day on which nothing will be written and on which nothing will happen – even though my veins and my marrow and my whole body will be turned to ash, it will be ash that is still filled with meaning, and even though they will be dust, even though they will be nothing, they will be a nothing that still loves. Yes, this poem is one of the most sublime rebellions in the history of literature. And we, the living, continue to read it, and that, at least, is something.

*Amor constante más allá de la muerte*

*Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera  
Sombra que me llevare el blanco día,  
Y podrá desatar esta alma mía  
Hora a su afán ansioso lisonjera;*

*Mas no, de esotra parte, en la ribera,  
Dejará la memoria, en donde ardía:  
Nadar sabe mi llama el agua fría,  
Y perder el respeto a ley severa.*

*Alma a quien todo un dios prisión ha sido,  
Venas que humor a tanto fuego han dado,  
Médulas que han gloriosamente ardido:*

*Su cuerpo dejará, no su cuidado;  
Serán ceniza, mas tendrá sentido;  
Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado.*

(PUBLISHED 1648)

## Love Constant Beyond Death

Though my eyes be closed by the final  
Shadow that sweeps me off on the blank white day  
And thus my soul be rendered up  
By fawning time to hastening death;

Yet memory will not abandon love  
On the shore where first it burned:  
My flame can swim through coldest water  
And will not bend to laws severe.

Soul that was prison to a god,  
Veins that fueled such fire,  
Marrow that gloriously burned -

The body they will leave, though not its cares;  
Ash they will be, but filled with meaning;  
Dust they will be, but dust in love.

TRANSLATION BY MARGARET JULL COSTA



A Chilean-American citizen born in Argentina, the novelist and playwright Ariel Dorfman (b. 1942) has written many works in English and Spanish, published in over fifty languages. His plays have been performed in more than one hundred countries, including *Death and the Maiden* (filmed in 1994 by Roman Polanski), *Purgatorio*, and *Speak Truth to Power: Voices from Beyond the Dark*. A Distinguished Professor at Duke University, human rights activist, and contributor to major papers and journals across the world, he has received numerous international awards for his poetry, essays, and novels. His latest work is the memoir *Feeding on Dreams: Confessions of an Unrepentant*

*Exile*, a sequel to *Heading South, Looking North*, both of them dedicated to his wife, Angélica.

The Spanish novelist Javier Marías (b. 1951) has published thirteen novels, three collections of short stories, and several volumes of essays. His novels include *Todas las almas / All Souls* (1988), *Corazón tan blanco / A Heart so White* (1992), *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí / Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* (1994), *Negra espalda del tiempo / Dark Back of Time* (1998), and *Los enamoramientos / The Infatuations* (2013). He is also the translator of various English classics into Spanish, notably *Tristram Shandy*. He has held academic posts in Spain, the United States, and Britain as Lecturer in Spanish Literature at Oxford University.