

THE POCKET POETS SERIES

SAVE TWILIGHT



Selected Poems
Julio Cortázar

Translated by
Stephen Kessler

NUMBER FIFTY THREE

SAVE TWILIGHT

SELECTED POEMS OF JULIO CORTÁZAR

Translated by Stephen Kessler
Pocket Poets Series Number 53

City
Lights
CITY LIGHTS BOOKS
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION (2016)

In 1980, when Julio Cortázar came to California to teach at UC Berkeley for a semester, I met him at the home of the Chilean poet and novelist Fernando Alegría, then chair of Stanford's Spanish and Portuguese department and a writer with whom I had been working for several years as a translator. Julio and his second wife, Carol Dunlop, later came to visit me at my home in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and like virtually everyone else who knew him, I was charmed by his gentle personality and his unusual modesty and humility—especially for a writer so internationally famous and for a handsome man of such physical magnitude (he stood about six-foot-four).

Unlike most big-time writers I had met, Cortázar was not interested in being the center of attention. But he *was* interested in just about everything else: all kinds of music (he was an amateur jazz trumpeter), art ancient and modern, history, politics, movies, and other people and their creative pursuits. In the course of a leisurely conversation in Spanish, French and English (Julio's third and least-spoken language, though he worked as a professional translator and had done among other things a Spanish version of the complete tales of Edgar Allan Poe) I offered, if he were ever to need my services, to translate some of his poems. His major fictions

had been Englished most brilliantly by the great Gregory Rabassa (as well as by Suzanne Jill Levine), but Cortázar, like his fellow Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, thought of himself first as a poet, even though at that time virtually none of his verse had ever appeared in English.

While he was at Berkeley and in the few years following (he died in Paris in 1984) we stayed in touch from time to time through postal correspondence, and I even translated one of his stories for a Bay Area journal called *Soup*, but he never took me up on my offer to translate his poetry. It was only after his death, in 1985, that I discovered, in the Ministry of Culture in Managua, Nicaragua, where Julio had championed the Sandinista Revolution of those years, a copy of his collected poems, *Salvo el crepúsculo*. From that book over the next decade I made a representative selection that was published by City Lights in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Pocket Poets Series in 1997 as *Save Twilight*.

In the course of preparing that manuscript for publication Ferlinghetti had clear ideas about the nature, size and scope of the edition. For purposes of space he decided some of the prose had to go, including the extraordinary essay "For Listening through Headphones," in which Cortázar explores his notion of a reader's intimate experience of poetry, as well as some of the longer poems and a few short ones, along with several parenthetical prose commentaries on Julio's (and his cats') process of selection in assembling his book. Lawrence wanted the Pocket Poets edition to be as tight and

portable as possible, and the resulting volume weighed in at a trim one hundred sixty-nine bilingual pages.

This new, expanded edition restores all the material cut from that first volume, and while even at this size the selection represents less than one-fourth of Cortázar's production as a poet—at least of those poems he chose to collect for print—the book you are holding contains the most generous gathering to date in English of verse (and related prose) by this most inventive and original writer. The author himself, in his tales and novels, tested the distinction between poetry and prose with his improvisational jazzlike prosody, riffing in rhythmic sentences as sensitively measured as his experiments in formal and "free" verse. What unifies his formally diverse writings is a personal voice that is unmistakably Julio's, and that is the voice I have tried to echo as faithfully as possible in these American English versions.

—STEPHEN KESSLER

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SALVO EL CREPÚSCULO

SAVE TWILIGHT

*Este camino
ya nadie lo recorre
salvo el crepúsculo*

This road
nobody's traveling it
save twilight

—BASHO

Lights

BILLET DOUX

Ayer he recibido una carta sobremañera.

Dice que «lo peor es la intolerable, la continua». Y es para llorar, porque nos queremos, pero ahora se ve que el amor iba adelante, con las manos gentilmente para ocultar la hueca suma de nuestros pronombres.

En un papel demasiado.

En fin, en fin.

Tendré que contestarte, dulcísima penumbra, y decirte:

Buenos Aires, cuatro de noviembre de mil novecientos cincuenta. Así es el tiempo, la muesca de la luna presa en los almanaques, cuatro de.

Y se necesitaba tan poco para organizar el día en su justo paso, la flor en su exacto linde, el encuentro en la precisa.

Ahora bien, lo que se necesitaba.

Sigue a la vuelta, como una moneda, una alfombra, un irse. (No se culpe a nadie de mi vida).

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BILLET DOUX

Yesterday a letter came pushing-the-envelope.
It says that "the worst is the unbearable, the ongoing." And
it's for crying over, since we love each other, but now
one sees that love went on ahead, with its hands politely
to hide the hollow total of our pronouns.

On one paper too much.

Well, well.

I'll have to reply, my sweet penumbra, and tell you: Buenos
Aires, fourth of November, nineteen fifty. That's what
becomes of time, a notch of the moon imprisoned in the
almanacs, fourth of.

And it took so little to arrange the day just so, the flower
in exactly the right place, the encounter precisely.

All right, whatever it took.

Go on to the other side, like a coin, a carpet, a departure.
(My life is nobody's fault.)



PARA ESCUCHAR CON AUDÍFONOS

Un técnico me lo explicó, pero no comprendí mucho. Cuando se escucha un disco con audífonos (no todos los discos, pero sí justamente los que no deberían hacer eso), ocurre que en la fracción de segundo que precede al primer sonido se alcanza a percibir, debilísimamente, ese primer sonido que va a resonar un instante después con toda su fuerza. A veces uno no se da cuenta, pero cuando se está esperando un cuarteto de cuerdas o un madrigal o un *lied*, el casi imperceptible pre-eco no tiene nada de agradable. Un eco que se respete debe venir después, no antes, qué clase de eco es ése. Estoy escuchando las *Variaciones Reales* de Orlando Gibbons, y entre una y otra, justamente allí en esa breve noche de los oídos que se preparan a la nueva irrupción del sonido, un lejanísimo acorde o las primeras notas de la melodía se inscriben en una audición como microbiana, algo que nada tiene que ver con lo que va a empezar medio segundo después y que sin embargo es su parodia, su burla infinitesimal. Elizabeth Schumann va a cantar *Du bist die Ruh*, hay ese aire habitado de todo fondo de disco por perfecto que sea y que nos pone en un estado de tensa espera, de dedicación total a eso que va a empezar, y entonces desde el ultrafondo del silencio alcanzamos horriblemente a oír una voz de bacteria o de robot que inframínimamente canta *Du bist*, se

FOR LISTENING THROUGH HEADPHONES

A technician explained it to me, but I can't say I understood. When you listen to a record through headphones (not all records, but just exactly the ones that shouldn't do this), it happens that in the fraction of a second preceding the first sound one can perceive, extremely faintly, that first sound about to sound an instant later at full strength. Sometimes you don't even notice, but when you're waiting for a string quartet or a madrigal or a *lied*, the almost imperceptible pre-echo is really rather disagreeable. Any self-respecting echo ought to come after, not before, what kind of an echo is that. I'm listening to the *Royal Variations* of Orlando Gibbons, and just in between, precisely in that brief night of the ears as they get ready for the fresh irruption of sound, a chord far in the distance or the first notes of the melody inscribe themselves in a kind of microbial audition, which has nothing to do with what's about to begin a half-second later and which is nonetheless its parody, its infinitesimal mockery. Elizabeth Schumann is going to sing *Du bist die Ruh*, there's that customary air at the depths of the record in its perfection which puts us in a state of tense expectancy, of total dedication to what's about to begin, and just then from the ultradeptths of silence we hear horribly some bacterial or robotic voice which inframinimally sings

corta, hay todavía una fracción de silencio, y la voz de la cantante surge con toda su fuerza, *Du bist die Rub* de veras.

(El ejemplo es pésimo, porque antes de que la soprano empiece a cantar hay un preludio del piano, y son las dos o tres notas iniciales del piano las que nos llegan por esa vía subliminal de que hablo; pero como ya se habrá entendido (por compartido, supongo) lo que digo, no vale la pena cambiar el ejemplo por otro más atinado; pienso que esta enfermedad fonográfica es ya bien conocida y padecida por todos).

Mi amigo el técnico me explicó que este pre-eco, que hasta ese momento me había parecido inconcebible, era resultado de esas cosas que pasan cuando hay toda clase de circuitos, *feedbacks*, alimentación electrónica y otros vocabularios ad-hoc. Lo que yo entendía por pre-eco, y que en buena y sana lógica temporal me parecía imposible, resultó ser algo perfectamente comprensible para mi amigo, aunque yo seguí sin entenderlo y poco me importó. Una vez más un misterio era explicado, el de que *antes* de que usted empiece a cantar el disco contiene ya el comienzo de su canto, pero resulta que no es así, usted empezó a partir del silencio y el pre-eco no es más que un retardo mecánico que se pre-graba con relación a, etc. Lo que no impide que cuando en el negro y cóncavo universo de los audífonos estamos esperando el arranque de un cuarteto de Mozart, los cuatro grillitos que

Du bist, cuts off, there's another sliver of silence, then the singer's voice surges forth full force, the real *Du bist die Rub*.

(It's a terrible example, because before the soprano begins to sing there's a piano prelude, and it's the first two or three piano notes that reach us through this subliminal channel I'm talking about; but as you'll have understood (because I presume you've shared the experience) what I'm saying, it's not worth the trouble to look for a better example; I think this phonographic sickness is well known and suffered by everyone.)

My friend the technician explained to me that this pre-echo, which until then had seemed to me inconceivable, was the result of those things that happen when there are all kinds of circuits, *feedbacks*, electronic loops and other ad-hoc vocabularies. What I understood as a pre-echo, and what in good sane temporal logic seemed to me impossible, turned out to be something perfectly comprehensible to my friend, though I still couldn't understand it and it hardly mattered. Once more a mystery was explained, how *before* you begin to sing the record already contains the beginning of your song, but it turns out it's not like that, you began from silence and the pre-echo is nothing more than a mechanical delay which is pre-recorded relative to, etc. Which doesn't keep us, when in the concave black universe of the headphones we're awaiting the start of a Mozart quartet and the four little

se mandan la instantánea parodia un décimo de segundo antes nos caen más bien atravesados, y nadie entiende cómo las compañías de discos no han resuelto un problema que no parece insoluble ni mucho menos a la luz de todo lo que sus técnicos llevan resuelto desde el día en que Thomas Alva Edison se acercó a la corneta y dijo, para siempre, *Mary had a little lamb*.

Si me acuerdo de esto (porque me fastidia cada vez que escucho uno de esos discos en que los pre-ecos son tan exasperantes como los ronroneos de Glenn Gould mientras toca el piano) es sobre todo porque en estos últimos años les he tomado un gran cariño a los audífonos. Me llegaron muy tarde, y durante mucho tiempo los creí un mero recurso ocasional, enclave momentáneo para librar a parientes o vecinos de mis preferencias en materia de Varèse, Nono, Lutoslavski o Cat Anderson, músicos más bien resonantes después de las diez de la noche. Y hay que decir que al principio el mero hecho de calzármelos en las orejas me molestaba, me ofendía; el aro ciñendo la cabeza, el cable enredándose en los hombros y los brazos, no poder ir a buscar un trago, sentirse bruscamente tan aislado del exterior, envuelto en un silencio fosforescente que no es el silencio de las casas y las cosas.

Nunca se sabe cuándo se dan los grandes saltos; de golpe me gustó escuchar jazz y música de cámara con los audífo-

crickets deliver their instant parody a tenth of a second beforehand, from feeling kind of violated, and nobody can understand how the record companies haven't solved a problem that doesn't seem insoluble especially in light of everything their technicians have figured out since the day when Thomas Alva Edison placed his lips close to the horn and said, for all time, *Mary had a little lamb*.

If I think of this (because it annoys me every time I listen to one of those records where the pre-echoes are as exasperating as Glenn Gould's purring when he plays the piano) it's mainly because in these last few years I've taken a great liking to headphones. I discovered them quite late, and for a long time I thought them merely an occasional recourse, a momentary trick to spare my relations or neighbors my preferences for the work of Varèse, Nono, Lutoslavski or Cat Anderson, musicians who sound better after ten at night. And I must say that at first the mere fact of putting something over my ears bothered me, offended me; the hoop squeezing my head, the cord getting tangled around my arms and shoulders, not being able to go get a drink, feeling suddenly so isolated from the outside, wrapped in a phosphorescent silence which is not the silence of places and spaces.

You never know when the great leaps are going to happen; all of a sudden I liked listening to jazz and chamber

nos. Hasta ese momento había tenido una alta idea de mis altoparlantes Rogers, adquiridos en Londres después de una sabihonda disertación de un empleado de Imhof que me había vendido un Beomaster pero no le gustaban los altoparlantes de esa marca (tenía razón), pero ahora empecé a darme cuenta de que el sonido abierto era menos perfecto, menos sutil que su paso directo del audífono al oído. Incluso lo malo, es decir el pre-eco en algunos discos, probaba una acuidad más extrema de la reproducción sonora; ya no me molestaba el leve peso en la cabeza, la prisión psicológica y los eventuales enredos del cable.

Me acordé de los lejanísimos tiempos en que asistí al nacimiento de la radio en la Argentina, de los primeros receptores con piedra de galena y lo que llamábamos "teléfonos", no demasiado diferentes de los audífonos actuales salvo el peso. También en materia de radio los primeros altoparlantes eran menos fieles que los "teléfonos", aunque no tardaron en eliminarlos totalmente porque no se podía pretender que toda la familia escuchara el partido de fútbol con otros tantos artefactos en la cabeza. Quién iba a decirnos que sesenta años más tarde los audífonos volverían a imponerse en el mundo del disco, y que de paso—*borresco referens*—servirían para escuchar radio en su forma más estúpida y alienante como nos es dado presenciar en las calles y las plazas donde gentes nos pasan al lado como zombies desde una dimensión diferente y hostil, burbujas de

music through headphones. Until then I'd had a lofty idea of my Rogers loudspeakers, acquired in London after a know-it-all dissertation by an Imhoff salesman who'd sold me a Beomaster but didn't like the speakers of that brand (he was right), but now I began to realize that the open sound was less perfect, less subtle than its direct passage from headphone into the ear. Bad part included, I mean the pre-echo on some records, I sensed a finer sharpness in the sound reproduction; I was no longer bothered by the slight weight on my head, the psychological prison and the inevitable entanglements of the cord.

I was reminded of those faraway days when I witnessed the birth of radio in Argentina, the first lead sulphide receivers that we called "telephones," not so different from our current headphones except for the weight. Also where radio was concerned the first speakers were less faithful than the "telephones," even though they didn't waste any time eliminating them completely because the whole family couldn't try to listen to a soccer match with however many other sets on their heads. Who could have told us that sixty years later those headsets would return to take their place in the world of the phonograph record, and from there—*borresco referens*—they would serve for listening to the radio in its most stupid and alienating form as we can see in the streets and squares where people pass right by us like zombies from some different and hostile dimension, embubbled in contempt or

desprecio o rencor o simplemente idiotez o moda y por ahí, andá a saber, uno que otro justificadamente separado del montón, no juzgable, no culpable.

Nomenclaturas acaso significativas: los altavoces también se llaman altoparlantes en español, y los idiomas que conozco se sirven de la misma imagen: *loudspeaker*, *haut-parleur*. En cambio los audífonos, que entre nosotros empezaron por llamarse "teléfonos" y después "auriculares", llegan al inglés bajo la forma de *earphones* y al francés como *casques d'écoute*. Hay algo más sutil y refinado en estas vacilaciones y variantes; basta advertir que en el caso de los altavoces, se tiende a centrar su función en la palabra más que en la música (parlante/speaker/parleur), mientras que los audífonos tienen un espectro semántico más amplio, son el término más sofisticado de la reproducción sonora.

Me fascina que la mujer que está a mi lado escuche discos con audífonos, que su rostro refleje sin que ella lo sepa todo lo que está sucediendo en esa pequeña noche interior, en esa intimidad total de la música y sus oídos. Si también yo estoy escuchando, las reacciones que veo en su boca o sus ojos son explicables, pero cuando sólo ella lo hace hay algo de fascinante en esos pasajes, esas transformaciones instantáneas de la expresión, esos leves gestos de las manos que convierten ritmos y sonidos en movimientos gestuales, música en teatro, melodía en escultura animada. Por momen-

spite or simply idiocy or fashion and that way, see for yourself, justifiably split off from the crowd, beyond judgment, not guilty.

Nomenclatures possibly of some significance: speakers are also called *altoparlantes* in Spanish, and the other idioms I know make use of the same image: *loudspeaker*, *baut-parleur*. On the other hand *audifonos*, which started out in Spanish being called "teléfonos" and later "auriculares," arrive in English as *earphones* and in French as *casques d'ecoute*. There's something more subtle and refined in these changes and variations; suffice to point out in the case of speakers that the term tends to center its function on the word more than on music (*parlante*, *speaker*, *parleur*), while headphones inhabit a broader semantic spectrum, they're a more sophisticated term to suit the reproduction of sound.

It fascinates me that the woman at my side may be listening to records through headphones, that her face may reflect without her knowing it everything that is happening in that small interior night, in that total intimacy between the music and her ears. If I'm also listening, the reactions I see in her mouth or her eyes are explicable, but when she's doing it alone there's something fascinating in those passages, those instantaneous transformations of expression, those light hand strokes which convert rhythms and sounds into gestural movements, music into theater, melody into animated

tos me olvido de la realidad, y los audífonos en su cabeza me parecen los electrodos de un nuevo Frankenstein llevando la chispa vital a una imagen de cera, animándola poco a poco, haciéndola salir de la inmovilidad con que creemos escuchar la música y que no es tal para un observador exterior. Ese rostro de mujer se vuelve una luna reflejando la luz ajena, luz cambiante que hace pasar por sus valles y sus colinas un incesante juego de matices, de velos, de ligeras sonrisas o de breves lluvias de tristeza. Luna de la música, última consecuencia erótica de un remoto, complejo proceso casi inconcebible.

¿Casi inconcebible? Escucho desde los audífonos la grabación de un cuarteto de Bartók, y siento desde lo más hondo un puro contacto con esa música que se cumple en su tiempo propio y simultáneamente en el mío. Pero después, pensando en el disco que duerme ya en su estante junto con tantos otros, empiezo a imaginar decursos, puentes, etapas, y es el vértigo frente a ese proceso cuyo término he sido una vez más hace unos minutos. Imposible describirlo—o meramente seguirlo—en todos sus pasos, pero acaso se pueden ver las eminencias, los picos del complejísimo gráfico. Principia por un músico húngaro que inventa, transmuta y comunica una estructura sonora bajo la forma de un cuarteto de cuerdas. A través de mecanismos sensoriales y estéticos, y de la técnica de su transcripción inteligible, esa estructura se cifra en el papel pentagramado que un día será leído y

sculpture. For a few moments I forget reality, and the headphones on her head look to me like the electrodes of a new kind of Frankenstein whose waxen visage is given the spark of life, animating her little by little, making her leave the motionlessness in which we think we listen to music but which isn't that way at all to an outside observer. The woman's face becomes a moon reflecting the distant light, a changing light that throws across her valleys and hills a ceaseless play of shades, of veils, of subtle smiles or brief showers of sadness. A moon of music, ultimate erotic consequence of a remote, complex, almost inconceivable process.

Almost inconceivable? I listen through headphones to the recording of a Bartók quartet, and I feel from the deepest part of me a pure connection with that music fulfilling itself in its own time and simultaneously in mine. But later, thinking about the record now asleep on its shelf with so many others, I begin to imagine movements, bridges, stages, and it's vertigo facing the process whose terminus I've been once again just a few minutes before. It's impossible to describe—or even to follow—in all its phases, but maybe you can see the high points, the peaks of an incredibly complex graph. It begins with a Hungarian musician who invents, transmutes and communicates a sonic structure in the form of a string quartet. By means of sensory and esthetic mechanisms, and by the technique of its intelligible transcription, that structure is encoded on a piece of sheet music which

escogido por cuatro instrumentistas; operando a la inversa el proceso de creación, estos músicos transmutarán los signos de la partitura en materia sonora. A partir de ese retorno a la fuente original, el camino se proyectará hacia adelante; múltiples fenómenos físicos nacidos de violines y violoncellos convertirán los signos musicales en elementos acústicos que serán captados por un micrófono y transformados en impulsos eléctricos; estos serán a su vez convertidos en vibraciones mecánicas que impresionarán una placa fonográfica de la que saldrá el disco que ahora duerme en su estante. Por su parte el disco ha sido objeto de una lectura mecánica, provocando las vibraciones de un diamante en el surco (ese momento es el más prodigioso en el plano material, el más inconcebible en términos no científicos), y entra ahora en juego un sistema electrónico de traducción de los impulsos a señales acústicas, su devolución al campo del sonido a través de altavoces o de audífonos más allá de los cuales los oídos están esperando en su condición de micrófonos para a su vez comunicar los signos sonoros a un laboratorio central del que en el fondo no tenemos la mejor idea útil, pero que hace media hora me ha dado el cuarteto de Béla Bartók en el otro vertiginoso extremo de ese recorrido que a pocos se le ocurre imaginar mientras escuchan discos como si fuera la cosa más sencilla de este mundo.

Cuando entro en mi audífono,
cuando las manos lo calzan en la cabeza con cuidado

one day will be read and selected by four instrumentalists; operating through the inverse process of creation, these musicians will transmute the signs of the score into sound. From that return to the original source, the path is projected forward; multiple physical phenomena born of violins and cellos will convert those musical signs into acoustic elements which will be captured by a microphone and transformed into electrical impulses; these in turn will be converted into mechanical vibrations which will be impressed on a phonographic plate from which will emerge the record that is now asleep on its shelf. For its part the record has been the object of a mechanical decoding, provoking vibrations from a diamond in its groove (which is the most prodigious moment on the material plane, the most inconceivable in nonscientific terms), and now an electronic system of translation of those impulses and acoustical signals comes into play, its return to the field of sound by way of loudspeakers or headphones beyond which ears are waiting in their microphonic condition to communicate in turn the sonic signals to a central laboratory of which deep down we don't have the slightest useful idea, but which half an hour ago gave me the Béla Bartók quartet at the other vertiginous extreme of that trip which it occurs to hardly anyone to imagine while they listen to records as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

When I go into my headphones,
when my hands slip them onto my head so carefully

porque tengo una cabeza delicada
y además y sobre todo los audífonos son delicados,
es curioso que la impresión sea la contraria,
soy yo el que entra en mi audífono, el que asoma la cabeza
a una noche diferente, a una oscuridad otra.
Afuera nada parece haber cambiado, el salón con sus
lámparas,
Carol que lee un libro de Virginia Woolf en el sillón de
enfrente,
los cigarrillos, Flanelle que juega con una pelota de papel,
lo mismo, lo de ahí, lo nuestro, una noche más,

y ya nada es lo mismo porque el silencio del afuera
amortiguado
por los aros de caucho que las manos ajustan
cede a un silencio diferente,
un silencio interior, el planetario flotante de la sangre,
la caverna del cráneo, los oídos abriéndose a otra escucha,
y apenas puesto el disco ese silencio como de viva espera,
un terciopelo de silencio, un tacto de silencio, algo que tiene
de flotación intergaláctica, de música de esferas, un silencio
que es un jadeo silencio, un silencioso frote de grillos
estelares,

Lights

because I have a sensitive head
and besides and above all headphones are sensitive,
it's curious how the impression may be the opposite,
I'm the one entering my headphones, the one who's putting
his head
into a different night, another kind of darkness.
Outwardly nothing appears to have changed, the room with
its lamps,
Carol reading a book by Virginia Woolf in the armchair in
front of me,
the cigarettes, Flanelle who's playing with a ball of paper,
the same as ever, what's right there, what's ours, another
night,

and now nothing's the same because the outer silence
muffled
by the rubber rings my hands adjust
gives way to a different silence,
an interior silence, the floating planetarium of the blood,
the cavern of the skull, the ears opening up to another
listening,
and the record barely in place with that silence like living
expectation,
a velvety silence, a tactile silence, something that has the
feel
of intergalactic flotation, of music of the spheres, a silence
that is a panting silence, a silent whirring of cosmic crickets,

una concentración de espera (apenas dos, cuatro segundos),
ya la aguja
corre por el silencio previo y lo concentra
en una felpa negra (a veces roja o verde), un silencio fosfeno
hasta que estalla la primera nota o un acorde
también adentro, de mi lado, la música en el centro del
cráneo de cristal
que vi en el British Museum, que contenía el cosmos
centelleante
en lo más hondo de la transparencia, así
la música no viene del audífono, es como si surgiera de mí
mismo, soy mi oyente,
espacio puro en el que late el ritmo
y urde la melodía su progresiva telaraña en pleno centro de
la gruta negra.

Cómo no pensar, después, que de alguna manera la poesía es una palabra que se escucha con audífonos invisibles apenas el poema comienza a ejercer su encantamiento. Podemos abstraernos con un cuento o una novela, vivirlos en un plano que es más suyo que nuestro en el tiempo de lectura, pero el sistema de comunicación se mantiene ligado al de la vida circundante, la información sigue siendo información por más estética, elíptica, simbólica que se vuelva. En cambio el poema *comunica el poema*, y no quiere ni puede comunicar otra cosa. Su razón de nacer y de ser lo vuelve interiorización de

a concentrated waiting (perhaps two, four seconds), now the
needle
runs through the former silence and focuses it
in a black plush (sometimes red or green), a phosphene
silence
until the first note or chord explodes
also inside, in me, the music in the center of the glass skull
I saw in the British Museum, which contained the shimmering
cosmos
in the depths of its transparency, so
the music doesn't come from the headphones, it's as if it
surged out of my self, I'm my own listener,
pure space where the rhythm runs
and the melody weaves its progressive web full in the center
of the black cavern.

How not to think, then, that somehow poetry is a word heard through invisible headphones as soon as the poem begins to work its spell. We can become abstracted in a story or a novel, living them on a level more theirs than ours as long as we're reading, but the system of communication remains linked to the surrounding life, the information keeps on being information however esthetic, elliptical, symbolic it becomes. In contrast the poem *communicates the poem*, and it doesn't try to nor can it communicate anything else. Its reason for coming into existence and for being turns it into the

una interioridad, exactamente como los audífonos que eliminan el puente de fuera hacia adentro y viceversa para crear un estado exclusivamente interno, presencia y vivencia de la música que parece venir desde lo hondo de la caverna negra.

Nadie lo vio mejor que Rainer Maria Rilke en el primero de los sonetos a Orfeo:

O Orpheus singt! o Hoher Baum im Ohr!

Orfeo canta. ¡Oh, alto árbol en el oído!

Arbol interior: la primera maraña instantánea de un cuarteto de Brahms o de Lutoslavski, dándose en todo su follaje. Y Rilke cerrará su soneto con una imagen que acendra esa certidumbre de creación interior, cuando intuye por qué las fieras acuden al canto del dios, y dice a Orfeo:

da schufst du ihnen Tempel im Gebör

y les alzaste un templo en el oído.

Orfeo es la música, no el poema, pero los audífonos catalizan esas "similitudes amigas" de que hablaba Valéry. Si audífonos materiales hacen llegar la música desde adentro, el poema es en sí mismo un audífono del verbo; sus impulsos pasan de la palabra impresa a los ojos y desde ahí alcanzan el altísimo árbol en el oído interior.

interiorization of an interiority, exactly like headphones, which eliminate the bridge from outside to inside and vice versa in order to create a state exclusively internal, the presence and experience of music which seems to come from the depths of the black cavern.

No one saw it better than Rainer Maria Rilke in the first of the Sonnets to Orpheus:

O Orpheus singt! o Hoher Baum im Ohr!
Orpheus sings. Oh towering tree in the ear!

Interior tree: the first instantaneous thicket of a Brahms or Lutoslavski quartet, bursting forth in all its foliage. And Rilke will close his sonnet with an image which refines that certitude of interior creation, when he intuits why the wild animals respond to the song of the god, and says to Orpheus:

da schufst du ihnen Tempel im Gebor
and you built them a temple in their ears.

Orpheus is music, not poetry, but headphones catalyze those "friendly similitudes" Valéry spoke of. If material headphones let music arrive from within, the poem itself is a verbal headphone; its impulses pass from the printed word to the eyes and from there raise a mighty tree in the inward ear.