



Piñata

The bilingual poems I've compiled in *Piñata* are paired around a central theme or idea. The paired poems are not direct translations of each other. That would be impossible. My two favorite poems are "Vísteme despacio que tengo prisa" and "Juliet and Romeo." One is about two sisters playing at *Romeo and Juliet* and the other is about two sisters playing at *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. It makes sense of course that one pair of sisters would act out a Spanish classical story and that the other pair would act out an English one. Despite this difference, the theme remains the same—both poems are about two sisters playing with a classical text and, by playing with that story, connect, disconnect, and reconnect. In both poems, there is sibling rivalry, but also a joy of language and play. Here are the poems:

¡Vísteme despacio, que tengo prisa!

—¡Vísteme despacio, que tengo prisa!

—Decía mi abuela, cada domingo de misa.

—Eso —añadía— lo dijo Don Quijote,
o Napoleón o algún otro vejote.

Mi hermana y yo jugábamos a *Don Quijote de la Mancha*.

Ella era Quijote y yo, por ser gordita, Sancho Panza.

—¡Vísteme despacio, que tengo prisa!

—Insistía mi hermana, indicando la camisa
con la que tenía yo que vestirla.

¡Caramba! Había tanto con que asistirla:

la camisa gruesa de algodón,

la que abrochaba yo, botón a botón;

la armadura de lata y de cartón;

y, hecho de un tapete, el pantalón.

—¡Vísteme despacio, que tengo prisa!

Nos meábamos de la risa

cuando tomábamos las espadas

(el limpiador de ventanas y una escoba abandonada),

y atacábamos el colosal ventilador.

—Allí está el monstruo. ¡Uy! ¡Qué mal olor!

—decía Quijote, con cara de horror.

—No creo que sea un monstruo, mi señor

—le contestaba—. En verdad lo siento,
pero es solo un molino de viento.

(Nos habían regalado un libro para niños
titulado: *Don Quijote y los molinos*.)

Quijote primero batallaba el gigante,

luego, gritando —¡adelante!

me atacaba a mí con la espada

hasta matarme con una muerte prolongada.

Y al final, con una irónica sonrisa,

yo le decía: —vísteme despacio, que tengo prisa.



Juliet and Romeo

My sister insisted
on playing Juliet
every single time,
except when she was Tybalt
to my Romeo.

Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?

No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you sir; but I do bite my thumb.

—the only two, almost true, lines
we quoted from the actual text.

Next, we fought to the death with branches.

(An eternally well-meaning aunt,
who taught us Picasso and Rembrandt,
had sent us *Shakespeare for Children*.)

We'd pretend beneath the linden
tree, where my sister insisted
on playing Juliet
every single time;
or, she'd threaten
to set my hair on fire.

(Just kidding.) Still, I was coerced
to play her mother, the friar, *and* the nurse.
And Romeo, of course.

We'd rehearse and ask Doña Beatrice
from the apartment below
to come outside and watch our show.

She was 94, and didn't understand a word.

When Juliet was in the tree
(that was our balcony),
she'd ask if my sister was a bird.

She stood and applauded
every single time,
and claimed that the starling
that my sister played
was awe-inspiring.

Which is why
my sister insisted
on playing Juliet
every single time.