

Selected Poems

By Eduardo Lizalde

I. Sketch-Artist's Rendition of the Wild Beast

2. The Tiger

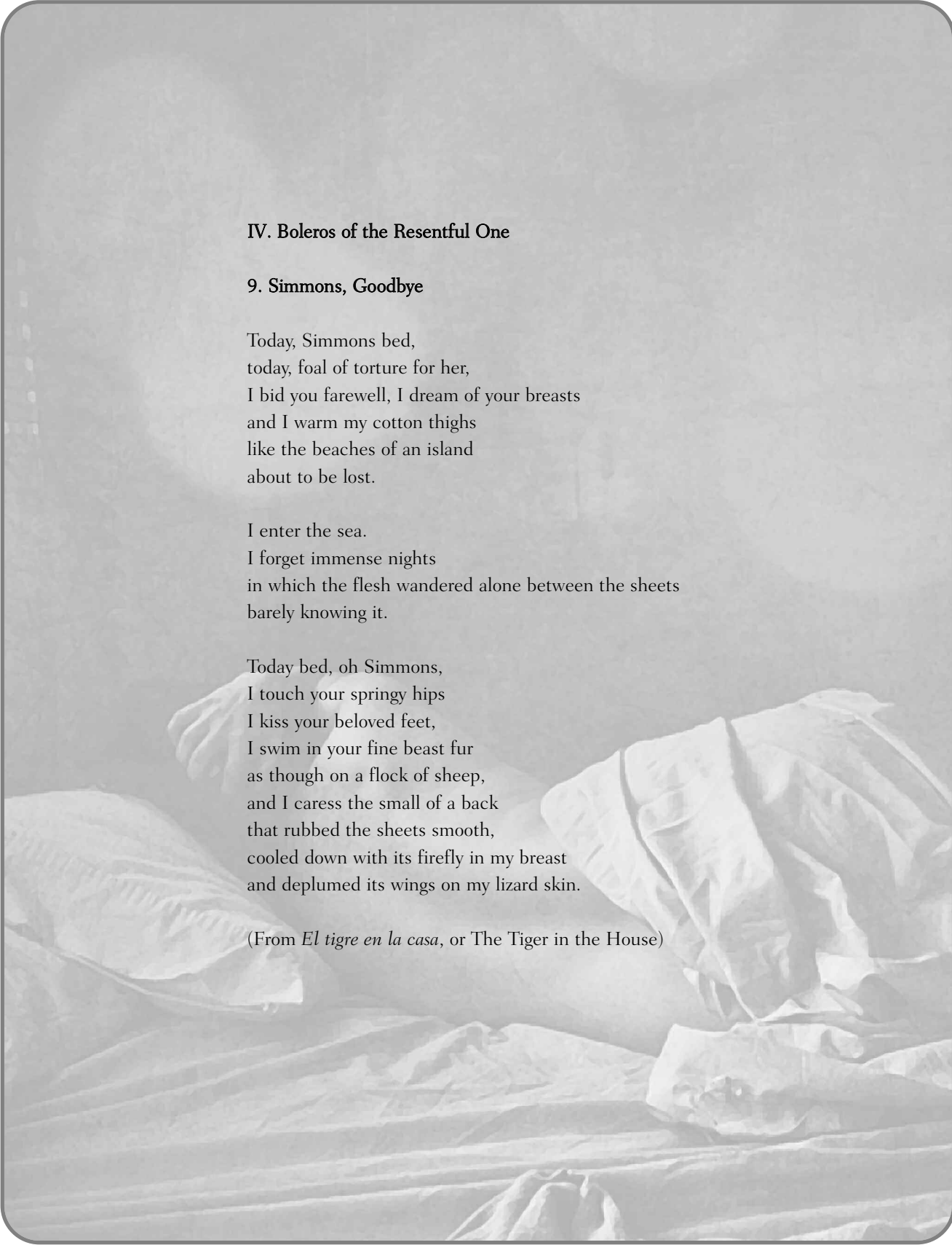
There's a tiger in the house
that rips the insides of whoever looks at him to shreds.
And he only has claws for those who spy on him
and he can only injure on the inside,
and he's enormous:

longer and heavier
than other corpulent cats
and smelly butchers
of his kind,
and he loses his head easily,
he still smells the blood through the glass,
he can sense the fear from the kitchen
despite the sturdiest of doors.

Ordinarily, he grows at night:
he puts his tyrannosaurus head
on the bed
and his maw hangs
over the covers.
His back, then, squeezes into the hallway,
from wall to wall,
and I only reach the bathroom by crawling against the roof,
as though through a tunnel
of mud and honey.
I never look at the solar hive,
the blackened, murderous hornet's nest
that are his eyes,
the furnace of tainted saliva
of his gullet.
I don't even smell him,
so he won't kill me.

(From *El tigre en la casa*, or *The Tiger in the House*)





IV. Boleros of the Resentful One

9. Simmons, Goodbye

Today, Simmons bed,
today, foal of torture for her,
I bid you farewell, I dream of your breasts
and I warm my cotton thighs
like the beaches of an island
about to be lost.

I enter the sea.
I forget immense nights
in which the flesh wandered alone between the sheets
barely knowing it.

Today bed, oh Simmons,
I touch your springy hips
I kiss your beloved feet,
I swim in your fine beast fur
as though on a flock of sheep,
and I caress the small of a back
that rubbed the sheets smooth,
cooled down with its firefly in my breast
and deplumed its wings on my lizard skin.

(From *El tigre en la casa*, or The Tiger in the House)

In the Manner of a Certain Pound

If I could say all this in a poem,
if I could say it, if I really could,
if say it I could,
if I had the power to say it

What a poem, Lord!

Who's stopping you, boy?

Go on: strip down. Why any more priggishness?

What kind of gummy hypocrite do you want to be?

Throw the rhyme and morality into the toilet,

Go on, circulate.

What a great poem,

what a huge poem it would be!

If I could, if I could just, if I could

write down the first letter,

Lasso that first idea like a cow,

If I could start it,

If I could just, damn you,

at least take up the pen.

What a poem!

(From *La zorra enferma*, or The Sick She-Fox)

VI

I stay, tiger, alone, satisfied,

hungry at times,

here in this cantina

where time does not exist.

At this same table

at the La Curva beer hall

where we used to spend our paychecks and our time

my friend Marco Antonio and I,

grave and gravid poets.

I order a beer. I write like I did then,
for what,

a few more or less jolly lines.

But I think about death,

a course humor blows, running like a cold,

it smells of tannin, like fermented time,

a sick wine.

I understand that someone is pursuing me,

someone takes aim,

somebody lies in wait, hunts me,

as though I were a deer, a tiger, he destroys.

I order another beer.

(From *Caza mayor* or Big Hunt)

XXV

I translate from what language and into what tongue

when I write these lines:

they are words of a tiger

whose articulated roar

comes to the ear of the poet

like a mother tongue

—Does Keats, terrified, read an angel?—

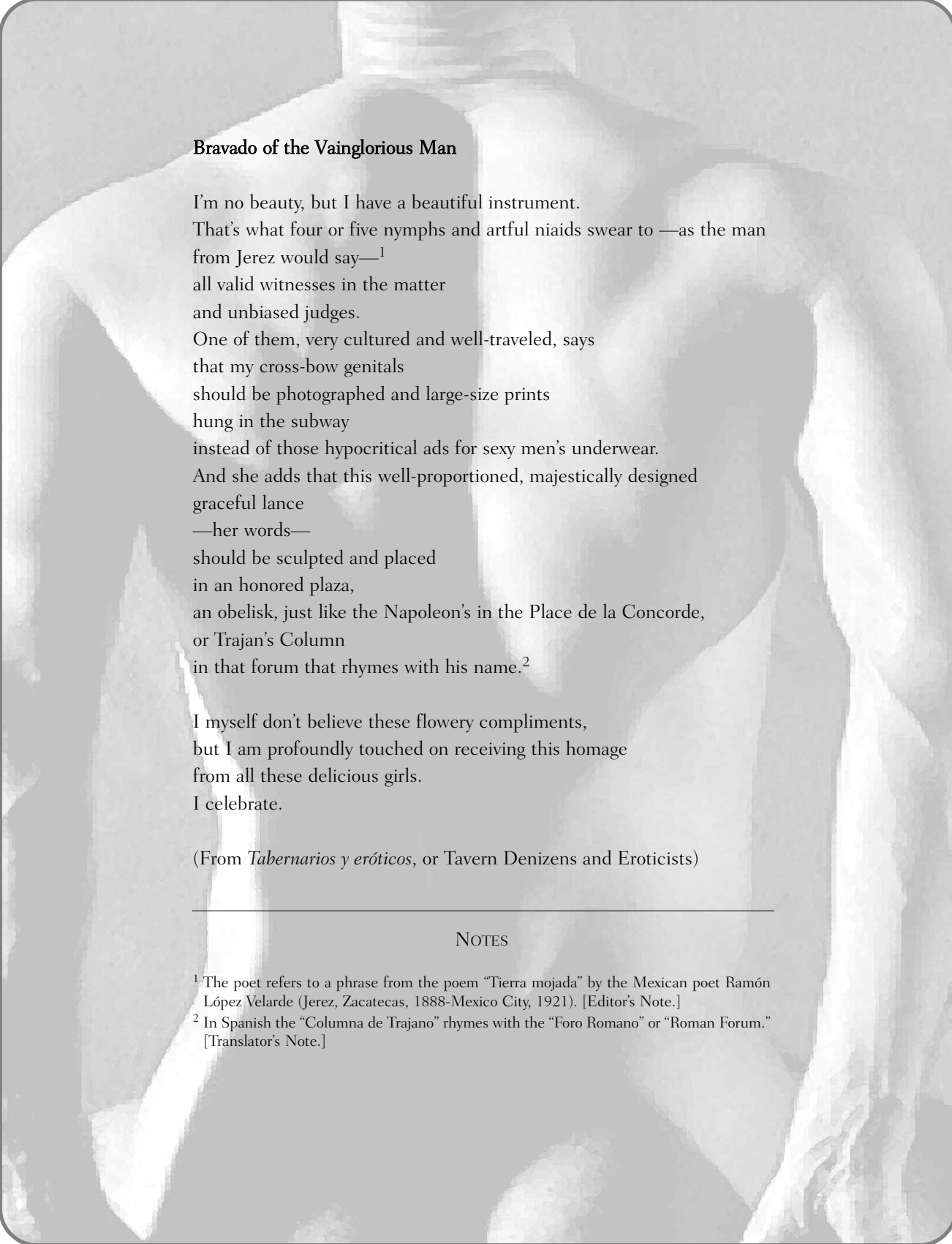
The translation, beasts, polygraphs, poets,

of that unknown, rough speech is this:

“I kill, I drink, I sing,

I suffer more than my victims.”

(From *Caza mayor*, or Big Hunt)



Bravado of the Vainglorious Man

I'm no beauty, but I have a beautiful instrument.
That's what four or five nymphs and artful niaids swear to —as the man
from Jerez would say—¹
all valid witnesses in the matter
and unbiased judges.
One of them, very cultured and well-traveled, says
that my cross-bow genitals
should be photographed and large-size prints
hung in the subway
instead of those hypocritical ads for sexy men's underwear.
And she adds that this well-proportioned, majestically designed
graceful lance
—her words—
should be sculpted and placed
in an honored plaza,
an obelisk, just like the Napoleon's in the Place de la Concorde,
or Trajan's Column
in that forum that rhymes with his name.²

I myself don't believe these flowery compliments,
but I am profoundly touched on receiving this homage
from all these delicious girls.
I celebrate.

(From *Tabernarios y eróticos*, or Tavern Denizens and Eroticists)

NOTES

¹ The poet refers to a phrase from the poem "Tierra mojada" by the Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde (Jerez, Zacatecas, 1888-Mexico City, 1921). [Editor's Note.]

² In Spanish the "Columna de Trajano" rhymes with the "Foro Romano" or "Roman Forum." [Translator's Note.]