

Martín Espada

### **My Name is Espada**

*Espada*: the word for sword in Spain  
wrought by fire and the hammer's chime,  
name for the warrior reeling helmet-hooded  
through the pandemonium of horses in mud,  
or the face dreaming on a sarcophagus,  
hands folded across the hilt of stone.

Espada: sword in el Caribe,  
rapier tested sharp across the bellies of Indios, steel tongue  
lapping blood like a mastiff gorged on a runaway slave,  
god gleaming brighter than the god nailed to the cross,  
forged at the anvil with chains by the millions  
tangled and red as the entrails of demons.

Espada: baptizing Taíno or Congolese,  
name they stuttered in the barking language  
of priests and overseers, slave's finger pressed to the blade  
with the pulsing revelation that a Spaniard's throat  
could seep blood like a fingertip, sabers for the uprising  
smuggled in the hay, slave of the upraised saber  
beheaded even as the servants and fieldhands  
murmured he is not dead, he rides a white horse at night,  
his sword is a torch, the master cannot sleep,  
there is a dagger under the pillow.

Espada: cousin to the machete, peasant cutlass  
splitting the cane like a peasant's backbone,  
cousin to the kitchen knife skinning a plátano.  
Swords at rest, the machetero or cook  
studied their blisters as if planets  
to glimpse the hands of their father the horseman,  
map the hands of their mother the serf.

Espada: sword in Puerto Rico, family name of bricklayers  
who swore their trowels fell as leaves from iron trees;

teachers who wrote poems in galloping calligraphy;  
saintcarvers who whittled a slave's gaze and a conqueror's beard;  
shoemaker spitting tuberculosis, madwoman  
dangling a lantern to listen for the cough;  
gambler in a straw hat inhabited by mathematical angels;  
preacher who first heard the savior's voice  
bleeding through the plaster of the jailhouse;  
dreadlocked sculptor stunned by visions of birds,  
sprouting wings from his forehead, earthen wings in the fire.

So the face dreaming on a sarcophagus,  
the slave of the saber riding a white horse by night  
breathe my name, tell me to taste my name: *Espada*.