

A Boat Full of Seagulls: 10 Poems and Tangos Translated from the Spanish by Stephen Page



In this installment, we're excited to share a beautiful collection of 10 poems and tangos translated from the Spanish by Stephen Page. The authors include luminaries like Jorge Luis Borges, Federico García Lorca, Antonio Machado, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, and César Vallejo, among others.

We'd love to hear from you! Let us know how you like our selections using #NTM2017 #TranslationMonth @TranslateMonth on Twitter. Happy National Translation Month!

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

Translator's Note

I loved translating these works. It was a lot of work but, overall, fun. That I am somewhat bilingual helped me, but that did not make the task in anyway easy. Idioms, idiomatic expressions, phrases, slang, historical references, articles (or no articles before nouns), and syntax are the greatest challenges in translating any work. Moreover, poetry is demanding during translation as double innuendos, symbolism, meter, assonance, alliteration, and rhyme do not pass over unless one has a grasp on both languages (and even then, some things require conversion that is simply as close as possible from the original). —*Stephen Page, translator*



... and Eve Looked At the Boy....
By Maria del Mar Estrella

... and Eve looked at the naked boy in her lap
and called him Caín.
What a small and trembling body!
How pink his skin is!
How warm, how sweet smelling!
Eve watched him, watched him a long time
with astonishment, with anxiety . . .
(it is the first time she has contemplated a baby),
and he is hers . . . hers, hers.
The boy is ugly and he cries
and he is beautiful. There is nothing so beautiful.
With the pain she had bearing him,
drunk with love she kisses him,
and she sings softly: “Caín, Caín . . . my son.”



New England, 1967

By Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)

They have changed to the forms of my dream;
now they are oblique red houses
and delicate bronze leaves
and chaste winter and pious wood.
Like on the seventh day, the Earth
is good. In the crepuscular persists something
that almost is not, daring and sad,
an old rumor of Bible and war.
Soon (they say to us) the snow will arrive
and America waits for me on each corner,
but I feel in this declining afternoon
the so slow today and the so brief yesterday.
Buenos Aires, I continue walking
on your corners, without why or when.



The sea and you
By Julia de Burgos

The rush of the sea upon my door
is blue sensation between my toes,
and your impetuous leap into my spirit
is not less blue, it makes me eternal.

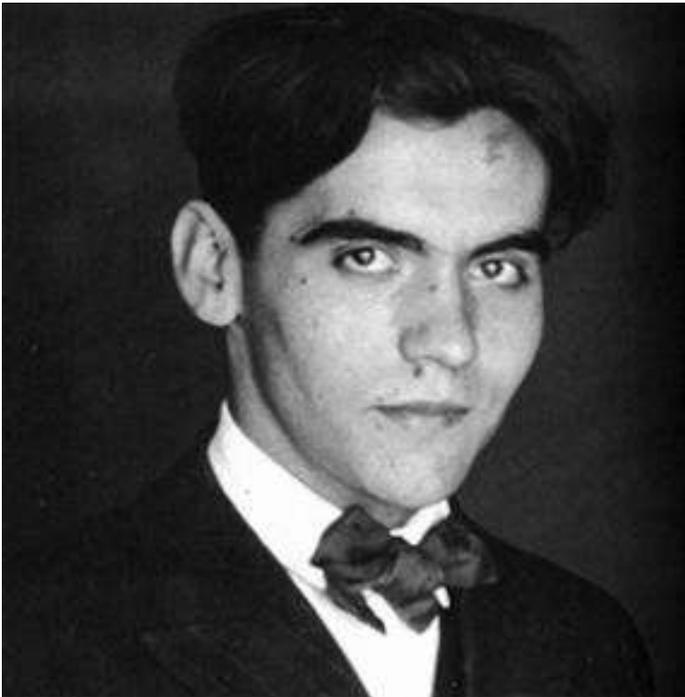
All the color of the aurora awakens
you in the sea swimming to me,
and your mad love arrives as a shipwreck
breaking ports and oars.

If I had a boat filled with seagulls,
for only an instant would I detain,
then shout until they flap away
into a duel of mystery!

Everyone finds their own voice,
that intertwines their dreams with the wind,
that places stars inside their eyes
so that they sparkle in union.

May a duel of music in the air
open magnolia kisses,
may the waves dress as passion
and passion dress as sailboats.

All the color of the aurora awakens
you and the sea stretching in a dream
that carries my boat full of seagulls
and leaves me in a water of two skies.



Rain

By Federico García Lorca

Rain has a vague secret of tenderness,
something from resigned and amiable solemnity,
a humble music awakens with she
who vibrates the sleepy soul of the landscape.

It is a blue kiss that receives the Earth,
the primitive myth that returns to be realized.
The already cold contact of old sky and earth
with a meekness of constant sunset.

It is the aurora of fruit.
The one that brings us flowers

and anoints us with the seas' holy spirit.
The one that spills life on the sown land
in the sadness of the soul does not know itself.

The terrible nostalgia of a lost life,
the fatal feeling of having been born late,
or the anxious illusion of an impossible morning
with the near restlessness of the color of meat.

Love awakes in the gray of its rhythm,
our inner sky has a triumph of blood,
but our optimism becomes sadness
when contemplating the dead drops in crystals.

And they are the drops: infinite eyes that watch
the white infinity that the mother served to them.

Each drop of rain trembles in the turbid crystal
and leaves divine wounds in the diamond.
They are poets of the water who have seen and meditate
on what the myriad of rivers do not know.

Oh quiet rain, without storms or winds,
tame and calm rain of the prawns and soft light,
good and pacific rain that is the truth,
that saddens and cries about the fallen things!

Oh Franciscan rain that carries your drops
to souls of clear sources and humble springs!
When upon the fields you slowly descend
your sounds open the roses of my chest.

The primitive song that sings of silence
and the sonorous history that speaks of an arbor
that comments weepingly about the desert of my heart
in a deep black pentagram without a key.

My soul has the sadness of serene rain,
resigned sadness of an unrealizable thing,
I have on the horizon the morning star
and my heart impedes me from quick contemplation.

Oh quiet rain that the trees love
and you upon the emotionally sweet piano;
give to the soul the same fog and resonances
that you put in the sleepy soul of the landscape!



Autumn Dawn

By Antonio Machado

To Julio Romero de Torres

A long roadway stretches
between craggy gray rocks,
and some humble prairie
where black bulls graze. Brambles, weeds, thickets.

The earth is wet
with dewdrops,
and an avenue lined with golden-leaved trees
runs along the curve of the river.

Behind the violet mountains
dawn breaks;
between two thin greyhounds,
a hunter walks, his shotgun slung over his shoulder.



Landscape of Patagonia
by Gabriela Mistral

III. - THREE TREES

Three trees chopped down
Left on the side of the trail.
The woodcutter forgot them, and they converse
of love, grasping for each other like they are blind.

The declining sun puts
its blood in the cleaves of the logs
and the winds take the fragrance
of its open flank!

One, twisted, reaches
its immense arm and the foliage trembles
toward another one, and their wounds
are like two eyes, full of plea.

The woodcutter forgot them. The night
will come. I will be with them.
My heart will receive their gentle
resins. They will make me burn.
And the day will find us
mute and piled in a heap of pain!



Twenty Poems of Love
By Pablo Neruda

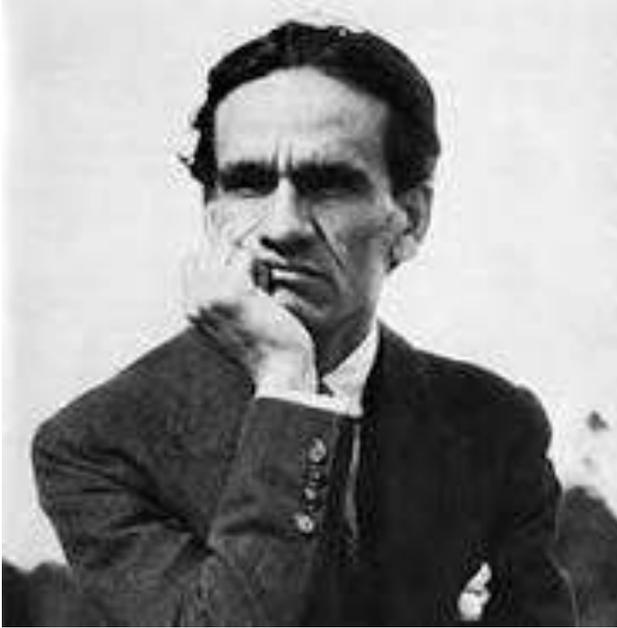
I

Body of woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like the world in your attitude of surrender.
My wild peasant body digs into you
and makes the son of the Earth rise.

I was only a tunnel. The birds fled from me
and the night entered with its powerful invasion.
In order to survive I forged you into a weapon,
an arrow for my bow, a stone for my sling.

The hour of revenge has arrived, and I love you.
Body of fur, moss, earth and avid milk.
Ah the breast glasses! Ah the absent eyes!
Ah the rose pubes! Ah your slow and sad voice!

Body of my woman, I will follow in your grace.
My thirst, my anxiety without limits, my undecided way!
Dark channels where the eternal thirst follows,
and the fatigue follows, and the infinite pain.



The Black Heralds
By César Vallejo

There are blows in life, so heavy...I do not know!
Blows like the hatred of God; as if before them,
the undertow of everything suffered
wells up in the soul... I do not know!

They are few; but they are... They open dark furrows
in the most fierce face and the most hard back.
Perhaps they will be the horses of Attilian Barbarians;
or the black heralds that Death sends to us.

They are the fallen slings of the Christs of the soul,
of some adorable faith that Destiny blasphemes.
Those bloody blows are the crackles
of some bread in the door of the furnace that burns us.

And Man... Poor ... poor! Turn your eyes, like
when you call us with a pat on the shoulder;
turn your crazy eyes, and all that you have lived
wells up, like a pool of blame, in a stare.

There are blows in life, so heavy... I do not know!



Poster

Musician by: Atilio Stampono

Lyrics by: Homero Exposito

Singer: Adriana Varela

Cruel on the poster,
 the propaganda is cruel on the poster,
 and in idolatry of a paper poster
 the illusion is vanished,
 the heart is raffled...
 And you appear
 Selling your last shred of youth,
 Having me again carry the cross.
 Cruel in the poster, you laugh, heart!
 It makes you want to shoot yourself on the corner!

The night already cancels
 The dark circles under your eyes...
 Its brush already wets the air
 as it does with him the spring...
 But what?
 if here are your things but you are not,
 because you are something for everyone,
 as naked as a shopstore window...
 I fought on your side, for you,
 for God, and I lost you!

I gave a home...
I was always poor, but I gave you a home!
The laughs were on me to fight,
fighting for you,
bleeding for you...
Soon the truth,
Will scrub your palate with sand
and suffocate you without the ability to shout.
I gave a home you...
It was the fault of love!
It makes you want to shoot yourself on the corner!



Handsome Man Without a Group

Music: Salvador Merico

Words: Manuel Romero

Singer: Cristina Banegas

He was a handsome man without a group,
with an aquiline nose,
and nicely trimmed hair.
He robbed my heart when he entered
with his long stride
and his shameless speech.
But by the end of the afternoon,
he left with a younger woman
and I was struck with sudden shame.

Whore! How a handsome lover
has made you unhappy, the shark
was baited to an open trap
and slipped in like an fool.

His behavior disgraced me,
but I was also amused.
It slapped me in the face
but also it made me laugh.
And I am not sorry,
because a woman
must learn to be silent
and if today I learn about life
I am well due credit
that makes this my debut.

He was a handsome man without group,
and if I were not in misery
it would be sweet.
The bastard was a ladies man,
but however deep he struck me
the scar makes me sing.
When I gave him competition
he beat his fists
upon the cobbled streets,
if I won, there was great feasting,
and I was restored,
if I lost I was returned
to my sluttish reputation.

He was brute with a long hand
that touched me with evil intention,
and in a bitter moment,
he left me like my bastard father.
Today I am attractive and wealthy,
and it saddens to me to remember
what has become of that bastard
who with a temperate hand
could drive my train
and make me a satisfied woman.

About the authors

María del Mar Estrella was born in Buenos Aires and says poetry is in her blood. Among the many published works are: "Corazón inhabado" ("Bottle of the Sea", 1982), "El Poblador" (Losada 1963), "Pueblo de Caín" and "Los dioses mutilados" (Mutilated Gods Water Editions 1997). Some of her author prizes are: the Poetic Prose Prize at the Floral Games of San Miguel, the National Initiation Prize of the General Directorate of Culture for her work "El poblador", International Poetry Prize "Pablo Neruda" in Peru, National Prize Roberto Themis also in Peru, Special mention of the National Fund of the Arts for her book "Corazón inhabado". She has also written songs. In this regard, she won several awards in recent years.

Jorge Luis Borges was an Argentine short-story writer, essayist, poet and translator, and a key figure in Spanish-language literature. **Born:** August 24, 1899, Buenos Aires. **Died:** June 14, 1986, Geneva, Switzerland. **Buried:** Cimetière des Rois, Geneva, Switzerland.

Julia de Burgos (February 17, 1914–July 6, 1953) was a poet from Puerto Rico. As an advocate of Puerto Rican independence, she served as Secretary General of the Daughters of Freedom, the women's branch of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. She was also a civil rights activist for women and African/Afro-Caribbean writers.

Federico García Lorca is one of the most important Spanish poets and dramatists of the twentieth century. García Lorca was born June 5, 1898, in Fuente Vaqueros, a small town a few miles from Granada. His father owned a farm in the fertile vega surrounding Granada and a comfortable mansion in the heart of the city. His mother, whom Lorca idolized, was a gifted pianist. After graduating from secondary school García Lorca attended Sacred Heart University where he took up law along with regular coursework. He published his first book, *Impresiones y Viajes*, in 1919.

Antonio Machado, in full **Antonio Cipriano José María y Francisco de Santa Ana Machado y Ruiz** (26 July 1875–22 February 1939), was a Spanish poet and one of the leading figures of the Spanish literary movement known as the Generation of '98.

Gabriela Mistral (Spanish: [ga'βɾjela mis'tral]; 7 April 1889–10 January 1957) was the pseudonym of **Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga**, a Chilean poet-diplomat, educator and humanist. In 1945 she became the first Latin American author to receive a Nobel Prize in Literature, "for her lyric poetry which, inspired by powerful emotions, has made her name a symbol of the idealistic aspirations of the entire Latin American world". Some central themes in her poems are nature, betrayal, love, a mother's love, sorrow and recovery, travel, and Latin American identity as formed from a mixture of Native American and European influences. Her portrait also appears on the 5,000 Chilean peso bank note.

Pablo Neruda was the pen name and, later, legal name of the Chilean poet-diplomat and politician **Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto** (July 12, 1904 – September 23, 1973). He derived his pen name from the Czech poet Jan Neruda. Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

César Abraham Vallejo Mendoza (March 16, 1892–April 15, 1938) was a Peruvian poet, writer, playwright, and journalist. Although he published only three books of poetry during his lifetime, he is considered one of the great poetic innovators of the 20th century in any language. He was always a step ahead of literary currents, and each of his books was distinct from the others, and, in its own sense, revolutionary. Thomas Merton called him "the greatest universal poet since Dante". The late British poet, critic and biographer Martin Seymour-Smith, a leading authority on world literature, called Vallejo "the greatest twentieth-century poet in *any* language." He was a member of the intellectual community called North Group formed in the Peruvian north coastal city of Trujillo.

Homero Aldo Expósito (November 5, 1918–September 23, 1987) was an Argentine poet and tango songwriter. He was born in [Campana](#) and grew up in the city of [Zárate](#), a very important city in the development of the tango. The name *Expósito* stems from the fact that Homero's father had been an orphan and had decided to adopt this surname meaning *of unknown origin*. From a young age, Homero, along with his brother and the future famous drummer [Tito Alberti](#), were part of an orchestra.

Manuel Romeo (September 21, 1891–October 3, 1954 in [Buenos Aires](#)) was an [Argentine film director, screenwriter, dramatist and score composer](#), and one of the influential directors in the [cinema of Argentina](#) of the classic era. He directed and wrote over films between 1931 and 1951 even composing the musical scores for several.

About the translator



Stephen Page is the author of *A Ranch Bordering the Salty River*, *The Timbre of Sand*, and *Still Dandelions*. He holds two AA's from Palomar College, a BA (with honors) from Columbia University, and an MFA from Bennington College. He is the recipient of The Jess Cloud Memorial Prize for Poetry, a Writer-in-Residence with stipend from the Montana Artists Refuge, a full Writer Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center, an Imagination Grant from Cleveland State University, and an Arvon Foundation Ltd. Grant.