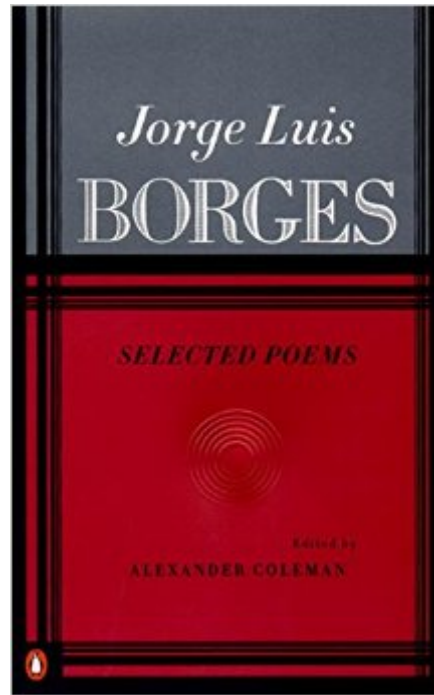


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Borges: Selected Poems



Synopsis

Though universally acclaimed for his dazzling fictions, Jorge Luis Borges always considered himself first and foremost a poet. This new bilingual selection brings together some two hundred poems--the largest collection of Borges' poetry ever assembled in English, including scores of poems never previously translated. Edited by Alexander Coleman, the selection draws from a lifetime's work--from Borges' first published volume of verse, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), to his final work, *Los Conjurados*, published just a year before his death in 1986. Throughout this unique collection the brilliance of the Spanish originals is matched by luminous English versions by a remarkable cast of translators, including Robert Fitzgerald, Stephen Kessler, W. S. Merwin, Alastair Reid, Mark Strand, Charles Tomlinson, and John Updike. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Borges was fascinated by English. As a kid, he grew up speaking it with his English grandmother and he spent the rest of his life ransacking the treasure-chest of English and American literature. In a famous prose-poem published in 1960, "Borges and I", he could cite Robert Louis Stevenson's

prose as one his favorite things (alongside the taste of coffee and the strumming of a guitar). And even after he lost his eyesight in mid-age, most of the books he went on reading in his mind were in English. Consequently, he sounds good in translation. It's tough to make Neruda or Lorca or even a lot of novelists writing in Spanish sound clear and convincing in English. Lorca, for example, wrote in a distinctively Andalusian idiom, and nobody who has never read his poetry in the original can understand how stilted he sounds in English. Borges, by contrast, had a more universal intellect and the strands of his writing span many non-Hispanic cultures. His reading in many different literatures left a deep imprint on him linguistically and helps explain why his work translates so well into other languages. While it's true that much of his poetry has a distinctly Argentine "flavor", it has many other flavors, as well. Depending on the poem, Borges can evoke Quevedo, Leopoldo Lugones, "Beowulf", the Icelandic Prose Edda, Whitman, Omar Khayyam, or Ralph Waldo Emerson. And yet the English influence is present in virtually all of his work. Thirteen translators are featured in this anthology and the quality varies. Barnstone and Merwin are, as usual, impeccably accurate and 1000% unadventurous. Robert Fitzgerald shows yet again that his last name must be some kind of cosmic byword for quality (F. Scott, Edward, Ella, now Robert...).

This review is about a single question. Why if Borges considered himself a poet above all, and if this book contains as it does contain most of his major themes are his real readers and his real fame the readers of his stories essays and short prose-pieces ? Why is the most loved Borges not found in the poems when the poems too do at times like the stories tell stories? Perhaps it is because the language of poetry is more dense and ambiguous and breaks the flow of the story. Perhaps it is because on the nonetheless more extended palette of the story a more extensive picture can be painted. Perhaps it is because too the element of mystery so great in Borges work comes to us in a stronger way in a narrative telling? Or perhaps too Borges whether he likes it or not is in his lists and his recollections really more a figure of prose than of poetry. And perhaps and this the real paradox Borges poetry is too more prose- like than poetic in many ways. Perhaps his way of going on in such intellectual questioning fashion renders his poetry more mind- like and less in deep lyric feeling than the deepest poetry means? I ask this as prelude to saying a few words about these poems most of which I have read, and few of which I remember. And this too is part of it. The Borges name is connected with those tales from The Aleph to Funes to Borges and I . It is less connected with any of the poems. And all of this review seems now to me somehow unfair. Borges is a great writer and his words mean more than anything written about them.

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