

# Jorge Luis Borges Honors Five Poets

*Translated from the Spanish*

By [Evelyn Hooven](#) (July 2018)



Though this multi-lingual Argentine poet was fond of German (Heine's verse in particular), his connection to *English* poetry (including its austerely forceful Germanic origin in the Anglo-Saxon of the Beowulf poet) was particularly inclusive and pronounced: William Blake, John Keats. But I find it especially moving that the near-blind Borges reaches back across the centuries to pay intense homage to the blind and very great John Milton—a lofty instance of professional courtesy.

#### Heine in Paris, 1856

Protracted illness accustomed him  
to anticipate death. It would make him  
fearful of going forth into clamorous day  
or of moving among others. Brought low,  
Heinrich Heine thinks of that river, time,  
that moves slowly, remote from this large darkness  
and from the dolorous fate of being man and Jew.  
He thinks of the intricate melodies  
whose instrument he has been, but he knows well  
that the trill belongs not to the arbor or the bird  
but to time with its vague meanderings.

They cannot save you, no, not your nightingales  
nor flower cantatas, your gilded nights.

### Lines Written in a Copy of the Beowulf Epic

I ask myself from time to time for reasons  
that move me to study, not expecting  
mastery, while my own night advances,  
this language of the acerbic Saxons.  
Exhausted through these years, memory  
falls down in a vain repetition  
of each word and it goes as my life goes—  
it unravels, re-weaves its own tired story.  
It might be (I therefore tell myself)  
that from a mode secret, sufficient, the soul  
knows it is immortal and—vast and laden—  
sets forth for everywhere, can do all things.  
Far beyond this longing and this verse  
it waits for me, inexhaustible universe.

## A Rose and Milton

From the generations of roses  
that have been lost in the depths of time,  
I wish that one may be saved from oblivion,  
one without name or sign among things  
that have been. Destiny will accord me  
this gift of naming for the first time  
that silent flower, the very last  
rose that Milton, unseeing, drew towards  
his face. O you, vermillion or yellow  
or white rose from a boarded-up garden,  
already magically your past shines out,  
through this verse and immemorial,  
gold, crimson, ivory or shaded  
as though in his hands, o invisible rose.

Blake

Where might the rose be that in your prodigal

hand, unknowing, makes gifts of the personal?

Not in the color, for the flower is blind,

nor in the sweet, unfading fragrance,

nor in the petal's weight. Things like these

are few and no more than lost echoes.

The true rose is even further away.

It can be a pillar or a grand battle

or a firmament of angels or a world

infinite, secret and necessary,

or jubilation from a god we can't see

or a planet of silver in another sky

or a terrible archetype that does not assume

the form of the rose.

To John Keats (1795-1821)

From the beginning to your youthful death

the terrible beauty awaited you

as for others a fate lucky or adverse.

It waited for you in the dawns of London,

in the casual pages of a myth

dictionary, in the common givens  
of the day, in a face, a voice,  
and in the mortal lips of Fanny Brawne.  
O Keats, snatched away, posthumous,  
whom time itself blinds, the far  
nightingale and Grecian urn  
are your eternity, o fugitive one.  
You were the fire. In memory's anguish  
today you are not ashes. You are glory.

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Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOP: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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