

Siempre he sido traductor

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Some years ago, as part of a literary translation workshop, I wrote an autobiographical poem in Spanish. I recently got around to translating it into English—and these are both versions. In the original, I was trying to convey the rhythm of the *malambo*, a type of folk music played in Uruguay. I carried the same basic rhyme structure over to the English version, so that both could be sung to the same music. ★

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Nací en Buenos Aires
de padres muy ingleses,
pero fuimos al Uruguay
al cabo de pocos meses.

El hijo de emigrantes
vive en campos muy fecundos,
porque oye y aprende
lo mejor de ambos mundos.

Veinte años transcurrieron
en la capital uruguaya,
con inviernos en la escuela
y veranos en la playa.

En las calles de mi pueblo
casi nunca hablaba inglés
pero en casa con familia
al contrario, al revés.

Mi carrera publicitaria
me arrancó de mis raíces,
y salí a recorrer
todo un mundo de países.

Cinco años en España:
instrucción fundamental,
que mejor se entiende el río
conociendo el manantial.

Ahora aquí en Texas
con gentiles anfitriones,
llevo muchos buenos años
haciendo traducciones.

Fue la suerte de mi vida
ser bilingüe natural,
y por ende, por supuesto,
peregrino cultural.

Tuve muchas ambiciones:
astronauta; escritor;
pero ahora que lo pienso
siempre he sido traductor.

I've always been a Translator

I was born in Buenos Aires
but not many months went by
till my parents, who were English,
traveled on to Uruguay.

A migrant family's children
can absorb an education
from the cultures of their parents
and their new adopted nation.

My twenty years in Uruguay
were delightful as a rule,
I spent summers on the beaches
and the winters going to school.

Though I seldom spoke much English
on the streets of my home town,
when I mingled with my family
it was the other way around.

My career in advertising
satisfactorily unfurled,
so I left my roots behind me
and set off to see the world.

Half a decade spent in Spain
was educational, of course,
since you understand the river
so much better at the source.

Gracious hosts have since encouraged
my complete assimilation,
and I've worked for years in Texas
in the field of translation.

It was my immense good fortune
being bilingual born and bred,
so the path of cultural pilgrim
was a natural one to tread.

I'd aspired to be a writer
or a spaceship navigator,
but I see now that I've always
been a working translator.