

Classic Poetry Series

Jules Supervielle
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Jules Supervielle(1884 - 1960)

Jules Supervielle was born in 1884 in Uruguay. His life was divided between Montevideo, where he was born, and Paris, where he was educated.

The freshness and originality of his works are often attributed to his South American background. His stories treat grand subjects with everyday simplicity, making much use of fantasy, allegory, and myth.

A Poet

I do not always go alone to the bottom of myself.
I drag more than one live being with me.
Can those who are made to enter my cold caves
ever be sure of coming out again, even for a moment?
Like a sinking vessel, I pull passengers and sailors
pell-mell into my night. I darken their cabins,
I extinguish the light in their eyes.
I make friends with great depths.

Translations by IAN SEED.

Jules Supervielle

Figures

I shuffle faces like cards
in spite of myself, and all
are dear to me. Sometimes
one falls to the ground
and I look for it in vain.
The card has disappeared.
I know nothing more.
Still, it was a fine face
I had grown fond of.
I shuffle other cards.
There's unease in this room,
I mean to say my heart
continues to burn
but not for that card
replaced by another.
The face is a new one.
It completes the hand,
yet it remains disfigured.
That's all I know.
No-one knows any more.

Translations by IAN SEED.

Jules Supervielle

Fish

Fish with your slow memories in deep creeks,
what can I do here with these? I know nothing
of you, except a little foam and shadow
and that one day, like me, you will die.

So why do you come to question my dreams
as if I could somehow be of use to you?
Go back to the sea, leave me on my dry earth.
We were not made to mix our days.

Translations by IAN SEED.

Jules Supervielle

He Alone

If you touch his hand, it's without knowing.
You remember him, but under another name.
In the middle of the night, in your deepest sleep
you say his real name and invite him to stay.

One day - it could be any time at all - there's a knock
and I guess it is he who has come to be near us,
and you look at him with such forgetfulness that he goes
far away to the place he came from, yet leaving

a door, faint and living, as he is.

Translations by IAN SEED.

Jules Supervielle

Homage To Life

It's good to have chosen
A living home
And housed time
In a ceaseless heart
And seen my hands
Alight on the world,
As on an apple
In a little garden,
To have loved the earth,
The moon and the sun
Like old friends
Who have no equals,
And to have committed
The world to memory
Like a bright horseman
To his black steed,
To have given a face
To these words — woman, children,
And to have been a shore
For the wandering continents
And to have come upon the soul
With tiny strokes of the oars,
For it is scared away
By a brusque approach.
It is beautiful to have known
The shade under the leaves,
And to have felt age
Creep over the naked body,
And have accompanied pain
Of black blood in our veins,
And gilded its silence
With the star, Patience,
And to have all these words
Moving around in the head,
To choose the least beautiful of them
And let them have a ball,
To have felt life,
Hurried and ill loved,
And locked it up

In this poetry.

Jules Supervielle

In a Foreign Country

Have these faces come from my memory
and have these gestures touched earth, or sky?
Is this man alive as he seems to believe
with his voice, and this smoke on his lips?
Chairs, tables, unfeeling wood, you I can touch
in this snowy country whose language I do not know.
Stove, with your warmth whispering to my hands,
who is this man before you who resembles me
even in my past, knowing what I think,
touching when I touch you and filling my silence,
who then rises, opens the door, and disappears,
leaving this emptiness behind where I have no place.

Translations by IAN SEED.

Jules Supervielle

Nocturne en plein jour

Quand dorment les soleils sous nos humbles manteaux
Dans l'univers obscur qui forme notre corps,
Les nerfs qui voient en nous ce que nos yeux ignorent
Nous précèdent au fond de notre chair plus lente,
Ils peuplent nos lointains de leurs herbes luisantes
Arrachant à la chair de tremblantes aurores.

C'est le monde où l'espace est fait de notre sang.
Des oiseaux teints de rouge et toujours renaissants
Ont du mal à voler près du cœur qui les mène
Car c'est en nous que sont les plus cruelles plaines
Où l'on périt de soif près de fausses fontaines.

Et nous allons ainsi, parmi les autres hommes,
Les uns parlant parfois à l'oreille des autres.

Jules Supervielle

Prophecy

One day the Earth will be
just a blind space turning,
night confused with day.
Under the vast Andean sky
there'll be no more mountains,
not a rock or ravine.

Only one balcony will remain
of all the world's buildings,
and of the human mappa mundi,
limitless sorrow.
In place of the Atlantic Ocean,
a little saltiness in the air,
and a fish, flying and magical
with no knowledge of the sea.

In a car of the 1900s (no road
for its wheels) three girls
of that time, pressing onwards
like ghosts in the fog.
They'll peer through the door
thinking they're nearing Paris
when the odor of the sky
grips them by the throat.

Instead of a forest
there'll be one bird singing,
which nobody will ever place,
or prefer, or even hear.
Except for God, who listening out,
proclaims it a goldfinch.

Translated by MONIZA ALVI

Jules Supervielle