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One Hundred Poems From The Chinese (New Directions Books)



Synopsis

The lyrical world of Chinese poetry in faithful translations by Kenneth Rexroth. The lyric poetry of Tu Fu ranks with the greatest in all world literature. Across the centuries •Tu Fu lived in the T'ang Dynasty (731-770)â •his poems come through to us with an immediacy that is breathtaking in Kenneth Rexroth's English versions. They are as simple as they are profound, as delicate as they are beautiful. Thirty-five poems by Tu Fu make up the first part of this volume. The translator then moves on to the Sung Dynasty (10th-12th centuries) to give us a number of poets of that period, much of whose work was not previously available in English. Mei Yao Ch'en, Su Tung P'o, Lu Yu, Chu Hsi, Hsu Chao, and the poetesses Li Ch'iang Chao and Chu Shu Chen. There is a general introduction, biographical and explanatory notes on the poets and poems, and a bibliography of other translations of Chinese poetry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kenneth Rexroth is a poet first and a translator second; judged on that basis, his One Hundred Poems from the Chinese is a great success. His approach, set out in a brief introduction, is simply to produce the best English poem he can in the spirit of the original. The resulting translations are more or less free as he thought appropriate for each individual work. The book is in two parts. Part one consists of Rexroth's versions of 35 poems by Du Fu, whom he describes as "the greatest non-epic, non dramatic poet who has survived in any language". He clearly knows these poems

well, and his translations are uniformly good. Part two offers around 70 works by Sung dynasty poets; some are represented by only one piece, some by more extensive selections. These tend to be more free, more personal, and often strikingly modern works. In Rexroth's words again: "The whole spirit of this time in China is very congenial today"- a statement as true today as when it was written in 1971. Many of these poets are still not well translated in English, so Rexroth's translations are invaluable. At the back of the book is a brief, but adequate, notes section with information on each poet and explanatory material. Rexroth's concentration on the lesser-known Sung poets is paralleled by his choice of poems in the Du Fu section. He does not confine himself to the best known pieces found in other collections, striking a good balance between the familiar and the new. An interesting example of Rexroth's approach to translation is: Another Spring
White birds over the grey river.
Scarlet flowers on the green hills.
I watch the Spring go by and wonder
If I shall ever return home.

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