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100 Poems From The Japanese



Synopsis

It is remarkable that any Westerner— even so fine a poet as Kenneth Rexroth— could have captured in translation so much of the subtle essence of classic Japanese poetry: the depth of controlled passion, the austere elegance of style, the compressed richness of imagery. The poems are drawn chiefly from the traditional Manyōshū, Kokinshū and Hyakunin Isshū collections, but there are also examples of haiku and other later forms. The sound of the Japanese texts is reproduced in Romaji script and the names of the poets in the calligraphy of Ukai Uchiyama. The translator's introduction gives us basic background on the history and nature of Japanese poetry, which is supplemented by notes on the individual poets and an extensive bibliography.

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Customer Reviews

Many decades ago as I was standing in a seemingly endless line at the college bookstore waiting to pay for my texts, I happened to pick up a copy of Kenneth Rexroth's 100 POEMS FROM THE JAPANESE and started thumbing through it in order to kill some time while I waited...and waited...and waited for my turn at the register. By the time I finally made it up there I couldn't have cared less, I was totally engrossed in the small volume that had been meant merely to keep me from thoughts of violence as I continued to wait...and wait...and wait. I knew that I had to have this book, I had fallen in love with Japanese poetry. Since that day I've had 3 copies of the book in all. The first was stolen by a "friend", the second died from over-work, and the third is sitting in front of me as I try to cobble together this review. I had long hated poetry since its writers tended to exhume

every archaic word they knew and went on for as long as they possibly could until they had finally beaten what ever sentiment, or thought they had tried to express into into a gelatinous pulp and left it and the reader whimpering on the floor in helpless submission. Writers of Western and European poetry that is. For when I opened Rexroth's book I learned there was an alternative to the pompous florid verbosity of Western poets and it could be found in the powerful, exquisitely crafted yet extremely economical poetry of Japan. There are several different poetic forms and a great many shadings and other things to be concerned with, as in the works of all poets, and Rexroth deals with these things both in his introduction as well as in individual notes in the back of the book. He explains everything you need to know in order to understand these poems if you're interested in going beneath their surface beauty.

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