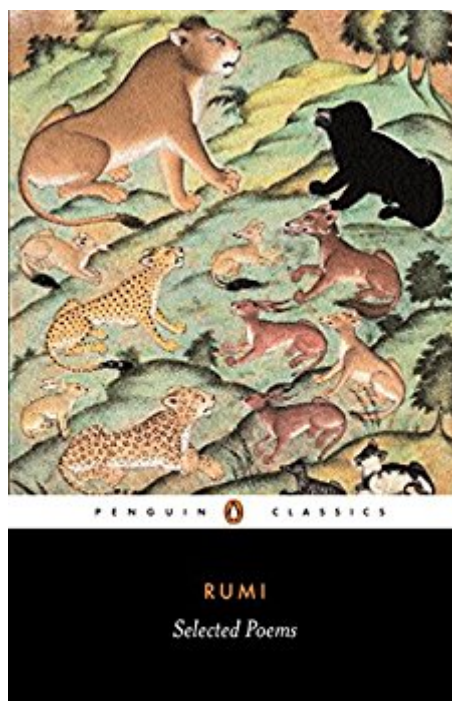


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Selected Poems (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Thirteenth-century Persian philosopher, mystic, scholar and founder of the order of the Whirling Dervishes, Jelaluddin Rumi was also a poet of transcendental power. His inspirational verse speaks with the universal voice of the human soul and brims with exuberant energy and passion. Rich in natural imagery from horses to fishes, flowers to birds and rivers to stars, the poems have an elemental force that has remained undiminished through the centuries. Their themes - tolerance, goodness, the experience of God, charity and awareness through love - still resonate with millions of readers around the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a wonderful introduction to this very moving spiritual poetry. Rumi has an understanding of God and our relationship with Him that is unlike anything most people have ever experienced. His love and passion come across in this poetry, which has been beautifully translated by Coleman Barks. Mr. Barks has taken great lengths to group these poems into various sections that will allow a reader who is new to Rumi's poetry to see Rumi in a variety of ways. The book is not arranged chronologically or broken down into academic categories, but rather encompass larger topics ranging from bewilderment at God's presence to poems meant to teach. Each poem is

carefully crafted to allow the thoughts of this master poet and mystic to shine. This is poetry of the first order. This book is the perfect introduction to Rumi or will complete the collection of any Rumi devotee.

The reading of this book has led me on many wonderful journeys. I found myself having to read slowly as the words were jumping from the lines, and I could spend hours journaling where they led. Love and loneliness, passion and pity, a hunger for God that both consoles and consumes, are all visited in this book. Read it slowly.

I was first acquainted with Rumi and the delightful Coleman Barks at a Jungian retreat. Rumi takes you into his inner world and his relationship with the divine (objective divine) and the divine spark he sees in others (most notably his "beloved"). I've read that it is impossible to translate Rumi's original sing-song ancient Persian into modern English, but Barks certainly does an eloquent job (at least that's what my Persian friends tell me). If you would like to understand true depth psychology or understand the mysteries of love, this is the essential guide.

Poetry (especially religious poetry) is always difficult to translate. At one extreme a translation may be scholastically accurate but difficult to read and rather unpoetic. At another extreme the translator may focus on the poetry at the expense of the meaning and force rhymes that sound really stupid in English. This translation avoids those pitfalls. It is beautiful, easy to read, and full of meaning. It never sounds like cheesy forced poetry or dry, dull scholasticism. This translation also never tells you how to interpret it, but allows you to bring Rumi's words in line with your own experiences. But the true gem here is not Rumi's poetry itself but the introduction by philosophy professor Huston Smith. I have often found Smith's introductions to books more fascinating than the books themselves.

Almost all the great religions have a mystical side, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Gnosticism, Kabbalah, the Nagas within Hinduism, Vajrayana Buddhism, Sufism, the Eleusine Mysteries within ancient Greek religion, Hermetism (a fusion of western and eastern mysticism by the third century, A.D., philosopher, Iamblichus), Avesta, Taoism, Confucianism, and even Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry all had mystical sides. Sufism is one of the mystical traditions within Islam, of which there are a number not well known in the west. Rumi is one of the greats in that tradition, and one of the few eastern poets I've read (such as Omar

Khayam) and there is no doubt he is one of the greatest poets of all time, whether western or eastern. I enjoy Rumi's poems but have to agree with a reviewer that the translations may not be the best since the author admits he knew no Persian, and Sufis are quite definite on the point that their poems are very precise and even technical in their wording and phraseology. As I'm not an expert I'll leave the final opinion on this book to the experts and those more knowledgeable than I. Fortunately, as there are other translations you should also try one of those and compare those renderings with this book. But whichever way you decide to go, Rumi should be essential reading for anyone wishing to expand their literary and intellectual horizons beyond the "usual suspects."

Coleman Barks and his publishers are guilty of false marketing: this book would accurately be described as a collection of Barks' poems "very loosely inspired by Rumi", rather than a collection of Rumi's poems "translated by Barks". These are not poems by Rumi. These are nothing like poems by Rumi. What Barks has done is to read some translations of Rumi's poems. And then, taking those English renditions as a kind of vague source-material, he's written a collection of entirely new beatnik poems, with as tenuous a connection to the source material as one would expect from such a process. In Barks' "interpretations", every quality of Rumi that makes Rumi the poet that Rumi is - has been lost. Not a trace of Rumi's art remains (not his rhythm, his celebrated locutions, not his imagery, not his evocational use of the past-tense - not even his religious instructions). As for Barks' poems, they're charming, albeit in the manner of a voluble American hippie, entertaining the tourists outside Haight Ashbury. In other words, they read like a cross between Robert Bly and Walt Whitman. There's also a lot Allen Ginsberg in there. It's not difficult to see why these poems are so popular in America - they are as American as American apple-pie. Buy this if you want an original and accessible collection of American beatnik poems. I enjoyed reading them. But if you want more authentic translations of Rumi, try A.J. Arberry (although be warned that the more authentic translations are a lot less accessible). The poems are charming, and worth buying for their own sake, but they have nothing to do with Rumi.

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