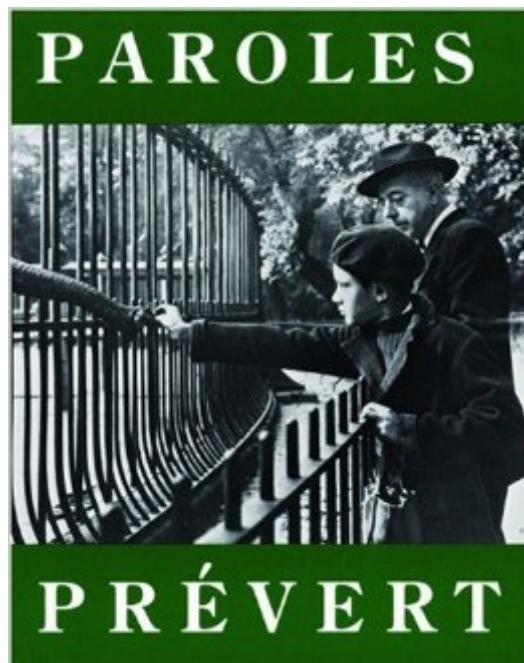


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Paroles: Selected Poems (City Lights Pocket Poets Series) (French Edition)



Synopsis

In the years immediately following World War II, Jacques Prévert spoke directly to and for the French who had come of age during the German Occupation. First published in 1946 by Les Editions de Minuit, a press with its origins in the Underground, *Paroles* met with enormous success, and there were several hundred thousand copies in print by the time these first translations in English were published by City Lights in 1958. Today Prévert speaks out in a voice still attuned to our times, for the human condition (which is always his focus) has not changed. In fact, man's inhumanity to man would seem to have intensified, making these poems ever more touching, ever more prescient.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a fantastic collection of poems. Ferlinghetti did a fabulous job translating these poems into English. Jacques Prévert is a greatly neglected French poet who spoke volumes with his verse. This bilingual edition is a great gift for any lover of poetry. Poems like *Pater Noster* and *Flowers and Wreaths* are beautiful verses. Prévert is simple in language but amazingly poignant at his best. He knew the value of directness. These poems are like little jewels of human wisdom. *Human Effort*, *I Am As I Am*, *Song of The Jailer*, etc. There are many highlights in this book. This often maligned, overlooked poet deserves to be reread today. Many who give this book a couple honest reads will probably be impressed by the sheer poetic wonder of this volume. I would state that because it is bilingual, students of the French language might also find value in finding the translations en face

with the original. This is a great package all around.

"Paroles: Selected Poems," by Jacques Prevert, is Number 9 in the Pocket Poets Series from City Lights Books. This volume is translated by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who also contributes a "Translator's Note." This is a bilingual edition, with the French and English versions of the poems on facing pages. The back cover notes that Prevert's "Paroles" was first published in 1946; Ferlinghetti states that many of these poems "grew out of World War II and the Occupation in France." I noticed some recurring themes and motifs in this volume. Prevert is very concerned with human pain and suffering; also, there are many references and allusions to war. There is a real iconoclastic streak running through this book. Although many of the poems have a surreal, whimsical quality, much of this poetry is also firmly anchored in tangible realities: an orange, a raincoat, a cigarette, "the faint sound / of a hardboiled egg cracked on a tin counter." Some of the poems have an almost haiku-like quality, saying much with an economy of words. There were a number of poems that I found particularly striking. "Song" had a joyful, transcendent quality. "Inventory" had an experimental flavor that reminded me somewhat of Gertrude Stein's work. "I've Seen Some of Them" is like a Whitmanesque litany, but with a darker, cryptic, and tragic tone. "Picasso's Magic Lantern" uses words in odd and startling combinations; this poem epitomizes the role of the poet as a sort of prophet who evokes an altered state of consciousness through his creative process. Prevert's voice in "Paroles," although sometimes dark, is overall compassionate and even tender. He seems to be intent on capturing the contradictions, absurdities, beauty, and despair of the early 20th century in his poetry.

I bought my first copy of this book in the '90s. I return to it often and many of the poems are firm favourites of mine. The translation by beat poet Ferlinghetti (sp?) is superb and many of the nuances of Prevert's wording come through with clarity and charm. Prevert never shrank away from hard or emotive subjects and reading his poems gives insight into who he was and the time in which he lived. I have found this book inspiring, clever, and above all a lesson in clarity of writing. He paints pictures in our minds with such simple words and phrases. Those pictures are often stark and bleak but nonetheless as clear as if you could reach out and touch them. My favourite? I love this book so much I have two - 'Alicante' for its romance and 'Lazy Morning' for its reality. Can't recommend this book more strongly to any one who, like me, has an emotional view on life and death but whose French is rudimentary. I used quotes from Paroles as chapter starts in one of my books (Farewell Bergerac) because the face of my MC in my head fitted well with pictures of Prevert that I have

seen.

This City Lights Books edition of "Paroles" presents roughly half of the poems first published as a collection by the French poet Jacques Prevert in 1946. Each of the 40-plus poems is presented first in French and then in superb English translation by the American poet and critic Lawrence Ferlinghetti. In France, "Paroles" is a staple of public education, and in a survey conducted by "Le Monde" in 1999, it was listed as the 16th most memorable book of the 20th century. In the United States too it has a fine reputation and, in the original language, is widely used for French language tuition, being easily read from the intermediate level on up. Strains of romance and descriptive images, often linked to rain, impart a beauty to the poems in this collection, but the prevailing tone is influenced by the experience of a devastating war just concluded. There is as well a sense of alienation among people and a nihilism of spirit, so much so that I quite expected Edith Piaf to begin singing "Mais vous pleurez, Milord" as I concluded "Dejeuner du Matin" ("Breakfast"), one of my favorite of the collection's poems.

I had become very interested in French poetry but was not sure who to read that was more modern. I first heard of Prevert in my French text book. They had included some biographical information on Prevert and one of his poems for students to read due to its simplicity of language. This was the tip I was looking for, and I was very curious to read more of this poet--and I am glad I did! I would compare Prevert to W.C. Williams in the sense that they both find the profound in the mundane. This is an ability that I greatly admire in a poet, and Prevert has the gift of being able to illuminate the beauty that passes us unnoticed at all times. If you are a long time lover of great poetry or are simply looking to expand your horizons you will not be disappointed with this book. Prevert and his poetry span the entire range of humanity--the young love him as well as the old, the academic as well as the average reader. He is accessible to all, and loved by all.

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