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Poems



PENGUIN CLASSICS

LI PO AND TU FU

Poems



Synopsis

Li Po (AD 701-62) and Tu Fu (AD 712-70) were devoted friends who are traditionally considered to be among China's greatest poets. Li Po, a legendary carouser, was an itinerant poet whose writing, often dream poems or spirit-journeys, soars to sublime heights in its descriptions of natural scenes and powerful emotions. His sheer escapism and joy is balanced by Tu Fu, who expresses the Confucian virtues of humanity and humility in more autobiographical works that are imbued with great compassion and earthy reality, and shot through with humour. Together these two poets of the T'ang dynasty complement each other so well that they often came to be spoken of as one - 'Li-Tu' - who covers the whole spectrum of human life, experience and feeling.

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Customer Reviews

LI PO AND TU FU : Poems Selected and Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Arthur Cooper. Chinese Calligraphy by Shui Chien-tung. (Penguin Classics). 249 pp. Penguin 1973, and Reissued. This is a valuable book in many ways. Besides giving a selection of enjoyable translations of China's two greatest poets - Li Po (+ 701-762, 25 poems) and Tu Fu (+ 712-770, 18 poems), it also includes a remarkably full and informative Introduction of almost 100 pages which not only

serves to introduce beginners to the subject of Chinese poetry, and to the work of Li Po and Tu Fu in particular, but which could also be read with profit by others. Each of the 43 poems is followed by an explanatory comment, which can range in length from paragraph to essay form. The book also includes a Guide to the Pronunciation of Chinese Words and Names, and, since twelve of the poems are accompanied by the Chinese text in the striking calligraphy of Shui Chien-tung, a Note on Chinese Calligraphy has been provided by the artist for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with the nature and history of this fascinating art form. Shui Chien-tung has "adopted a manner influenced by Chinese bronze inscriptions [and] has also followed various styles of writing to suit the different poems" (pp.13-14). The result is a clear style which in most cases will cause no problems for anyone who may be studying Chinese characters, since the structure of even the more complex characters can easily be discerned.

Li Po and Tu Fu are traditionally regarded by the Chinese as their two greatest poets. Together their poetry has a "balance of nature". Sometimes they are referred to as one poet, "Li-Tu". This book has a wonderful introduction which tells of each man, his life and together of their friendship. What we know is that they lived during the Tang Dynasty which is considered the 'golden age' of China in which the arts flourished. According to the introduction we do not have an exact date and place of Li Po's birth but it is estimated to be 701 somewhere near the frontier of the Soviet Union. What I love best about Li Po's poetry is his great imagination and imagery. I believe he was a "Romantic" poet. Li Po's view of the world is not set in reality but how he imagines it to be which makes his poetry beautiful. Some of my favorite poems by Li Po: "Drinking Alone with the Moon" about drinking his wine among the flowers and talking to the moon. The moon encourages him and becomes his friend - very lovely poem. Also "Old Poem" is very fanciful and rich - "Did Chaung Chou dream / he was the butterfly, / Or the butterfly / that it was Chaung Chou?" One that I read again and again is entitled "A song of Adieu to the Queen of the Skies, After a Dream Voyage to Her". This is a mystical poem talking of seafarers who tell of the Fairy Isles. The language is simply gorgeous. Tu Fu's nature is different than Li Po's but he is equally as talented. According to the introduction, "Tu Fu as a man is contrasted with Li Po in almost every conceivable way." Many consider him to be the greater of the two poets. His poems are autobiographical and historical.

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