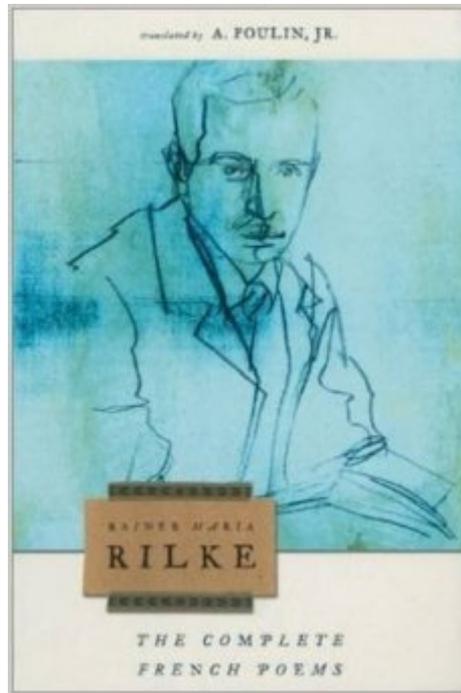


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The Complete French Poems



Synopsis

Originally published as four clothbound editions (The Roses and The Windows, The Astonishment of Origins, Orchards, and The Migration of Powers), this large paperback brings together all of Rilke's French poems, as well as his hitherto unpublished Dedications and Fragments, in an exquisite English translation by A. Poulin, Jr. Before Poulin's important efforts, it wasn't widely known that Rilke—often deemed one of modernity's finest writers for his work in German—also wrote over 400 poems in French. These lyrics were composed toward the end of Rilke's life, after he had produced his masterworks, The Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus. Yet the French poems are entirely of a piece with Rilke's characteristic themes, subjects, moods, and images. As Poulin notes in his Preface to The Complete French Poems: "The French lyrics [are] small poems of careful attentiveness to the things of this world [and] to the elusive states of being in which the world is poetically transformed."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book contains very different work from Rilke's German poetry, decidedly French in nature, with ephemeral images and nuanced depictions of the poetic scenes of life. Many of the poems also are constructed with an amazing sense of the meter and scan of the French language and with an extremely precise rhyme of French vowels. The reader of this edition will see an entirely different side to Rilke.

I first read this book when I was eighteen years old, a starving Bohemian (more or less), and at a crossroads in my life. Years later, I still turn to it, and it sits on my bookshelf, in front of me as I write

this review. If you thought you knew roses before - you may find out, after reading Rilke's French poetry - that you haven't known roses at all. One poem in particular that has followed me through the years has the words: "By sheer dint of prayer, I knew bread." By sheer dint of this book of verse, you may know roses.

Exquisite translations by A. Poulin. A lovely bilingual edition with Poulin's enlightening introduction.

Rilke's French Poems suffice if you are a Rilke admirer and are craving more Rilke knowing that nothing he wrote will match *The Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Like his other poems, they are a definite step down, partially mundane, yet with flashes of mystical insight that spur me to read on. Very good introduction that speaks to some of the translation issues. The original French is fortunately on the left side of the page and makes for a nice contrast. I don't read French, but I know enough about Indo-European languages to roughly sound it out, and there are beautiful rhymes galore. In fact, it appears that nearly all of the French rhymes, whereas hardly any English does. Yet knowing that they rhyme in French adds a little more sparkle to the English. French was Rilke's second language, and as he was not as proficient as in German, something is sacrificed. I recall in the introduction, which makes sense, that writing poems in French were comparable to Rilke starting over and therefore echo his early German poems. The Rose Poems stand out, breathtaking on account of their consistent return to the word and image of the rose, as do some other short poems conveying meditations on a certain thing, such as a window. The dedications and fragments at the end, which wonderfully complete the addition, do not add much noteworthy. I wish that I read French, and would recommend these poems to anyone who does, or is learning. For those not acquainted with Rilke's other works, there are better places to start. For those familiar with his earlier works, this is comparable and the definitive French collection to have. Support local bookstores if you can.

Perfect

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