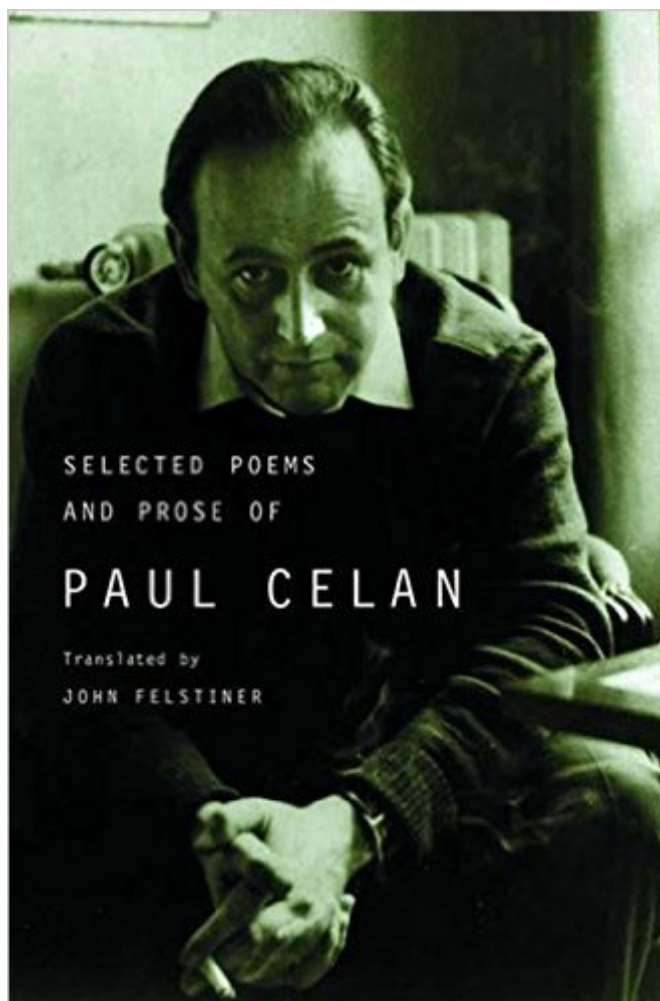


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Selected Poems And Prose Of Paul Celan



Synopsis

The most wide-ranging volume of the work of Europe's leading postwar poet, including previously unpublished writings. Paul Celan was born in 1920 in the East European province of Bukovina. Soon after his parents, German-speaking Jews, had perished at the hands of the Nazis, Celan wrote "Todesfuge" ("Deathfugue"), the most compelling poem to emerge from the Holocaust. Self-exiled in Paris, for twenty-five years Celan continued writing in his German mother tongue, although it had "passed through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech." His writing purges and remakes that language, often achieving a hope-struck radiance never before seen in modern poetry. But in 1970, his psychic wounds unhealed, Celan drowned himself in the Seine. This landmark volume includes youthful lyrics, unpublished poems, and prose. All poems appear in the original and in translation on facing pages. John Felstiner's translations stem from a twenty-year immersion in Celan's life and work. John Bayley wrote in the New York Review of Books, "Felstiner translates ... brilliantly."

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (December 17, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393322246

ISBN-13: 978-0393322248

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #91,152 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European > German #95 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > European > German

Customer Reviews

Paul Celan stands as one of the most influential and visible poets of the second half of the 20th-century. The work he produced from World War II to his suicide by drowning in 1970 has been lauded by subsequent poets, taught in German history courses, and set to music by Berio, Birtwistle, and Rihm. The central theme of most of Celan's poetry is the slaughter of European Jewry in the Holocaust, as the poet was born in a German-speaking Jewish enclave in Bucovina and there lost his parents and his home, scars which even a successful new life in Paris could never

erase. This volume of selected poems with English translations by John Felstiner (author of the biography Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew) is a fine introduction to his work. Celan's poem "Todesfuge" (Death Fugue) is one of his earliest mature pieces and the most common introduction to his poetry. Its opening lines "Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening / we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night / we drink and we drink / we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped" are a powerful depiction of the death camps and fully repudiate Adorno's claim that poetry after Auschwitz is impossible. Some critics have claimed that "Todesfuge" was Celan's only great poem and had it not been for that, then we would have never heard of him. That poem was certainly his break into the literary world, but other material in this volume is just as fine. "Einfuehrung" (Stretto) is something of a rewriting of "Todesfuge" in considerably more desperate language and my favourite of Celan's poems.

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