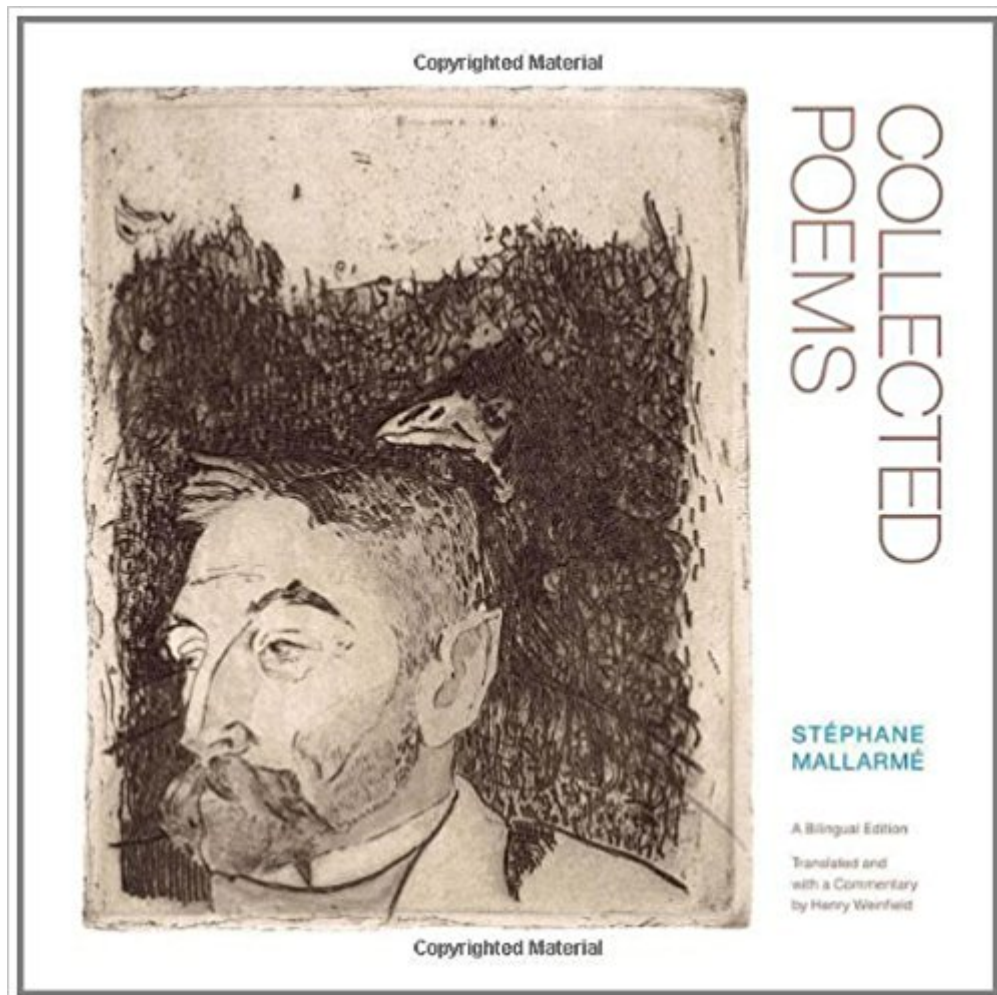


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Collected Poems Of Mallarme



Synopsis

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) is one of the giants of nineteenth-century French poetry. Leader of the Symbolist movement, he exerted a powerful influence on modern literature and thought, which can be traced in the works of Paul Valéry, W.B. Yeats, and Jacques Derrida. From his early twenties until the time of his death, Mallarmé produced poems of astonishing originality and beauty, many of which have become classics. In the *Collected Poems*, Henry Weinfield brings the oeuvre of this European master to life for an English-speaking audience, essentially for the first time. All the poems that the author chose to retain are here, superbly rendered by Weinfield in a translation that comes remarkably close to Mallarmé's own voice. Weinfield conveys not simply the meaning but the spirit and music of the French originals, which appear en face. Whether writing in verse or prose, or inventing an altogether new genre—as he did in the amazing "Coup de Dés"—Mallarmé was a poet of both supreme artistry and great difficulty. To illuminate Mallarmé's poetry for twentieth-century readers, Weinfield provides an extensive commentary that is itself an important work of criticism. He sets each poem in the context of the work as a whole and defines the poems' major symbols. Also included are an introduction and a bibliography. Publication of this collection is a major literary event in the English-speaking world: here at last is the work of a major figure, masterfully translated.

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Customer Reviews

This a beautiful edition of the COMPLETE poems of one of the most important French symbolist poets. If only all French poetry books could be printed in handsome, large-format bilingual editions

like this! The translation is not even half-bad, with Weinfeld doing his best to maintain the actual flavor of Mallarmé's words. Best of all, the poems are translated in a faithful stylistic way-- prose poems STAY in prose, and the early-surrealist poem "Un Coup de Des" keeps its complex typesetting. The commentary is substantial and the poems are arranged in order of the books they appeared in, which makes it easier to follow the progression. Sometimes it seems that Mallarmé is left out of his rightful place in poetry, and this edition should help to alleviate that problem.

This is a beautiful edition that is well translated with exceptional commentaries by Henry Weinfeld. It was a true pleasure reading this book in light of the author's influence on Maurice Blanchot, which was my primary 'project.' The nice little surprise here was the commentary by Weinfeld in which he displays his ability to place each poem within an historical context and a theoretical/interpretive framework. Finally, the use of font and spacing by the publishing house is nearly perfect, just as Stéphane intended.

This volume of COLLECTED POEMS by Stéphane Mallarmé and translated with commentary by Henry Weinfeld is a joy and a treasure. For it contains Mallarmé poems from various of his collections: First Poems, Satirical Parnassus, The Contemporary Parnassus, Other Poems, Album Leaves, Street Songs, Several Sonnets, Homages and Tombs, Other Poems and Sonnets, Poems in Prose, and A Throw of the Dice. The best appreciation of Mallarmé is cited by Henry Weinfeld in his "Introduction" to this volume. The comments were by Paul Valéry (and were about Mallarmé): "This poet was the least-primitive- of all poets, yet it came about that by bringing words together in an unfamiliar, strangely melodious, and as it were stupefying chant -- by the musical splendor of his verse as well as by its amazing richness -- he restored the most powerful impression to be derived from primitive poetry: that of the -magical formula-. An exquisite analysis of his art must have led him toward a doctrine, and something like a synthesis, of incantation." This volume contains the texts of the poems in French on the right-hand side of each page -- and the translation in English on the left-hand side. Mallarmé is an extremely interesting poet, artist, and human thinker/creator, for he has a spiritual crisis in which he came away perceiving: "Yes, I know-, we are merely empty forms of matter, but we are indeed sublime in having invented God and our soul. So sublime, my friend, that I want to gaze upon matter, fully conscious that it exists, and yet launching itself madly into Dream, despite its knowledge that Dream has no existence, extolling the Soul and all the divine impression of that kind which have collected within us from the beginning of time and proclaiming, in the face of the Void, which is truth, these glorious lies." Yet, even this, is not precisely what Mallarmé finally

winds up doing...for his is a "quest for Beauty and for a transcendent ideal and the tragic vision on which that quest is based." And all of this is enveloped in the most beautiful sounds and images...charming and mystifying...for he is also hermetic in his approach, "Everything that is sacred and that wishes to remain so, must envelop itself in mystery." Here is a portion from "The Afternoon of a Faun" in English -- then in French: "...through the motionless and weary swoon/ Of stifling heat that suffocates the morning,/ Save from my flute, no waters murmuring/ In harmony flow out into the groves;" -- "par l'immodible et las sepamaison/ Suffoquant de chaleurs le matin frais sillotte/ Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flute/Au bosquet arrose d'accords;". "...the ancient technique of verse -- for which I retain a religious veneration and to which I attribute the empire of passion and of dreams..."

Mallarmé is rightly regarded as one of the fathers of modernism and symbolism, and this beautiful collection is a testament to his radical artistry. Mallarmé is notoriously difficult to translate, and while Henry Weinfield's translation often fails to account for Mallarmé's ingenious wordplay (any translation would), he nevertheless manages to encapsulate the beauty of his language. Moreover, this collection is a painstaking recreation of Mallarmé's textual specifications- *Un coup de dés* is a beautiful painting/poem which transformed literature as we know it. There are also insightful commentaries on each poem from Weinfield, whose understanding and interpretative work is invaluable. An excellent collection.

The poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé is the caviar of modern French literature; he was an experimentalist with a rigorous and ascetic defense of the ideal. Thusly, the 'philosophical' importance of the materiality of his language surely poses immense difficulties for translators. Henry Weinfield's translations of Mallarmé's *Poésies* published by California are unfortunately not successful in rendering the difficulty. A poet in his own right, Weinfield attempts to reproduce Mallarmé in English verse; since this necessitates vast divergence from the original language of the poems (loose synonyms used when a cognate is available and would not be misleading, big changes in sentence structure) his translations read like poems "inspired by" Mallarmé, not a helpful entrée to the originals like Michael Hamburger's translations of Celan. Though the coffee-table format of the book comes in handy for reproducing the typographical experimentation of Mallarmé's proto-Surrealist *Un coup de dés* jamais n'abolira le hasard* ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance"), it is awkward to hold and transport, and the two-column format makes reading Weinfield's generally good commentaries on each of the poems at the end of the volume

difficult. For those of us who can't pop on down to Schoenhof's and buy a Livre de Poche edition we scan with well-trained eyes, this is a valuable attempt to make great world literature available to an English-speaking audience; the thought that it could be done better cannot be abolished, though.

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