



## Selected Poems

*René Char , Tina Jolas (Editor) , Mary Ann Caws (Editor)*

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The Selected Poems of Rene Char is a comprehensive, bilingual overview reflecting the poet s wide stylistic and philosophical range, from aphorism to dramatic lyricism. In making their selections, the editors have chosen the voices of seventeen poets and translators (Paul Auster, Samuel Beckett, Cid Corman, Eugene Jolas, W.S. Merwin, William Carlos Williams, and James Wright, to name a few), in homage to a writer long held in highest esteem by the literary avant-garde.

## Selected Poems Details

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## From Reader Review Selected Poems for online ebook

### Jonfaith says

**There is only the one like me, the companion man or woman, who can wake me from my torpor, set off the poetry, hurl me against the limits of the old desert for me to triumph over it.**

It occurred to me that I bought this book new 20 years ago. That reflects upon my priorities in my early 20s. Hey, I should spend money on a new book I won't read for decades. Such memory isn't necessarily wistful, just peculiar. Char creates a series of challenging images. Some are steeped in the privation of the Occupation, some appear bucolic. I am enjoying this stroll through the corridors of verse, there's much to absorb, some of which remains ill-defined even with scrutiny.

**I had not take with me the thin line of my return. I had the approval of my mornings nd that of a trampled stream.**

Given the contrary chords of language, I am alert to an altered disposition or perspective.

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### Caisey Ferguson says

This book will always be very special to me. The translations are superb, far superior to the versions you will find online. The poems contained here showcase Char's immeasurable talent as a visionary/surrealist poet. His verse mysteriously addresses the reader, offering consolation and hope. The poems are universal in their application, and one may always return to them. One of the finest collections of poetry I have ever laid eyes on.

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### ilknur a.k.a. iko ? says

o kadar çok istiyorum ki bask?s? yok :)

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### Sean says

*The world, these days, is hostile to the Transparents.*

Experiencing failure to explicate feelings for Char's poetry. Wishing for ability to read it in French, but satisfied for the moment with the translations, which (having no point of reference) seem adequate, even good or possibly great, based on the fascinating phrasings and word pairings as appearing in English. And in fact these translations are not the work of one person but many, including noted poet-writers such as Paul Auster, William Carlos Williams, W.S. Merwin, and even good ol' Sam Beckett. The volume is split about 50/50 between lined and prose poetry, all of which deserves multiple readings to discern and separate the individual living layers, which peel back and twist away as if to resist interpretation.

Themes of separation (physical and emotional), shifting psychic states and during them what passes into and out of us, life's inevitable cyclic renewal in nature, emotions inherent in seasonal change, all permeated by a sort of exultant darkness flowing from tacit acceptance of 'the void'. Char presents in his poetry as uncompromising, as a resister, and in fact he joined the French Resistance during WWII, and later the movement against storage of atomic weapons in Provence.

There is a title of one poem, 'Remanence', which is a physics term referring to the magnetic induction remaining in a material after a magnetizing force has been removed from it. This is a good way to characterize Char's poetry...a reader may feel uncertain of what is being described yet still feels the effects lingering inside for some time afterwards, pulling the reader back to the source, and with the ghostly magnetic remains, also pulling in like-minded others.

Char was close to Maurice Blanchot, even dedicating one of these poems to him, and one can see some common ground in the prose work of these two philosopher-writers.

Some excerpts:

To Friend-Tree of Counted Days

*Brief harp of the larches  
On mossy spur of stone crop  
—Façade of the forest,  
Against which mists are shattered—  
Counterpoint of the void in which  
I believe.*

---

[from Mumbling]

*Go on, we endure together; and together, although separate, we bound over the tremor of  
supreme deception to shatter the ice of quick waters and recognize ourselves there.*

---

## Jenni says

It was good, and some translations are better than others (several different people translate these poems). But overall, I have a feeling he doesn't translate well. The French versions are alongside the translations, but I do not read French. He can be incredibly abstract. I don't think these translations are bad; Mary Ann Caws has a few lovely ones, as does James Wright and several others, but some felt like a near "miss." Still, it's definitely worth buying and reading. Sometimes translations grow on me over time.

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## Jenna says

I considered starting this review with a euphemistic sentence like: "This is a challenging book, never underestimating its readers' intelligence."

But who am I hiding from here, anyway? Here is a more honest opening sentence: "I had no idea what these poems were saying or doing most of the time, but I enjoyed them anyway."

Some of the more accessible poems in this collection are: "Evadne," a fairly straightforward reminiscence about young love; "La Sorgue," a Neruda-esque ghazal about a river; "Le Martinet," an overtly symbolic lyric that likens the human heart to a bird; "Madeleine qui veillait," a haunting prose poem that depicts a ghostly visitation in realistic detail; and "Allegiance," a philosophic rationalization of the inherent value of unrequited love, jarring in its embrace of cognitive dissonance.

Char often adopts the stance of a visionary, and many of his poems resemble intersessionary prayers, voiced by a saint who speaks in riddles:

"Restore to them what is no more present in them....  
For nothing is shipwrecked or delights in ashes;  
And for the one who can see the earth's fruitful end,  
Failure is of no moment, even if all is lost" (p. 39).

"O rainbow of this gem-cutting shore, bring the ship nearer to its longing. Let every supposed end be a new innocence..." (p. 49).

In one prose poem, titled "Argument," Char even argues explicitly that modern poetry has a responsibility to be visionary, rather than merely representational:

"Those of today want the poem to be the image of their lives... Born from the summons of becoming and from the anguish of retention, the poem rising from its well of mud and stars, will bear witness, almost silently, that it contained nothing which did not truly exist elsewhere, in this rebellious and solitary world of contradictions" (p. 39).

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## **Megan says**

Most beautiful love poem ever written and ever to be written. Check it out. you will find it.

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## **S. says**

I liked a lot of this, but some of it seems beyond me.

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## **Fergus says**

When I was in my early twenties, still constantly haunting my mom's library - close to my parents' home - I was enchanted by her latest acquisition: score upon score of new vinyl classical recordings!

I was in paradise.

I played my nepotistic sense of privilege to the hilt, incessantly ignoring her staff's overdue notices...

Pierre Boulez' AMAZING musical homage to Rene Char was an all-time favourite.

And his version of La Sorgue is ELECTRIFYING!

What human soul is not stirred to the very depths of its being by the words of René Char?...

English to follow.

#### LA SORGUE

Chanson pour Yvonne

Rivière trop tôt partie, d'une traite, sans compagnon,  
Donne aux enfants de mon pays le visage de ta passion.

Rivière où l'éclair finit et où commence ma maison,  
Qui roule aux marches d'oubli la rocaille de ma raison.

Rivière, en toi terre est frisson, soleil anxiété.  
Que chaque pauvre dans sa nuit fasse son pain de ta moisson.

Rivière souvent punie, rivière à l'abandon...

Rivière au coeur jamais détruit dans ce monde fou de prison,  
Garde-nous violent et ami des abeilles de l'horizon.

#### THE SORGUE

Song for Yvonne

River setting out without companion, too soon, at a bound,  
Give the children of my country the face of your passion.

River where the lightning ends and my home begins,  
That rolls the rubble of my reason down the frontiers of forgetfulness,

River, in you the earth quivers, the sun is uneasy,  
Let every poor man harvest your bread in his night.

River often punished, often left alone...

River with an indestructible heart in this mad prison-world,  
Keep us violent and friend to the bees on the horizon.

\*\*\*

Rene Char: poet, lover, environmentalist, mystic, and one of the most unassumingly and quietly seminal of French post-war writers!

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## **Lou Last says**

### **MOURNING AT NEVONS**

For a violin, a flute and an echo.

The stride of a girl  
Has caressed the lane,  
Has passed through the gate.

In the park at Nevons  
The grasshoppers sleep.  
White frost and hailstones  
Introduce autumn.

And the wind decides  
Whether leaves will fall  
Or the nests first.

\*

Quickly! Memory ignores  
Who showed him this face,  
This wide stare, this spillage,  
This swaying as of a jellyfish  
Above deep time.

It is like the vervain  
Each summer cut to the ground,  
The season of earth's seeding.

\*

The window and the park,  
The plane tree and the roof  
Discharged loads of bees,  
From pollen to honeycomb  
From the swarm to the flower.

A free gliding bird  
Hovering for his food  
Flung down words  
Like a hearty sailor.

When the bed closed  
On my whole wearied body,  
Fair eyes turned  
From their work to me.

The needle glittered;  
And I felt the thread

In the treasure of fingers  
That edged the batiste.

Ah! Far off is that time.  
The years of growing,  
And no father for my arm!

Spreading all her gifts,  
The beloved stream  
Came to my need.  
Poplars and guitars  
Revived at evening  
To celebrate this marvel  
In which heaven had no part.

A prairie reaper  
Rising, bending,  
Roused the swallows,  
Endlessly silent.

Its keel stuck  
In the slime of the islet,  
A boat lay dead.

The hour between school and night,  
The bramble gripping them,  
A mixture of rascals  
Ran, cruel and deaf.  
The mist veered over them,  
Icy and maternal.  
On the bamboo of the jungles  
They had been modeled,  
Dear bobbing reeds!  
\*

The invalid gardener smiles  
At the thought of the lost tools,  
Of the dead wood multiplying.  
\*

The estate divided  
By the will of a dead man,  
Has crushed and destroyed  
The lawn and the trees,  
The sleeping idleness,  
The shadowy space  
Of my park at Nevons.

Since one must give up



What one cannot keep,  
Which becomes something else  
Whether or no the heart wills—  
Roundly forget it,

Then beat the bushes  
To seek without finding  
That which must cure us  
Of the unknown ills  
We bear with us everywhere.

## MIDDLE FINGER

At the top of the swirling stairs, the door has  
no safety bolt: it's the roof. I am to my joy at the  
heart of this thing, my suffering no longer serves.  
As in needlework, this frame of mind has only one  
stitch to hold it: from the stone of the sun to the  
bluish slate. It would be enough for the middle fin-  
ger to separate from the hand and, at the first moss  
between two slippery tiles, innocently the passage  
would open.

\*

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## Mikael says

ive said it somewhere else i dont really understand it but its probably better not to understand this degree of  
sadness

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