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Six Yuan Plays (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Although their Mongol overlords (beginning with the founding of the Yuan dynasty by Kublai Khan in 1280) tyrannized the Chinese in nearly every area of life, the arts enjoyed a new-found freedom. On the one hand oppressed, on the other released from the straight-jacket of Confucianism, the Chinese made the most of recent developments in poetry and drama. Yuan plays were a tonic, an amazing spectacle—colorful outbursts of singing, dancing, music, acting and mime. They poured new life into old stories—oppressors were ridiculed, servants became masters, scenes changed, day followed night in the twinkling of an eye—and audiences flocked to enjoy what must have been complete entertainment. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Six Yuan Plays" is an anthology whose contents are translated by Liu Jung-en, who also contributes an introduction. The book brings together plays from 13th and 14th century China. The contents are as follows: "The Orphan of Chao," a revenge story by Chi Chun-hsiang; "The Soul of Ch'ien-nu Leaves her Body," a paranormal love story by Cheng Teh-hui; "The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo," a supernatural story of injustice by Kuan Han-ch'ing; "Chang Boils the Sea," a magical love

story by Li Hao-ku; "Autumn in Han Palace," a political love story by Ma Chih-yuan; and the anonymous "A Stratagem of Interlocking Rings," a story of political intrigue. Throughout this anthology, I was reminded of the popular film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," which also evokes a long-ago era of Chinese history. Many of these plays also reminded me at times of Shakespearean drama. These plays are richly populated with a diverse body of human characters: lovers, villains, emperors, warriors, court officials, and more. There are also a number of supernatural characters such as a Taoist immortal and the Divine Dragon King. Liu Jung-en's English versions of these plays are beautifully written, and contain some really poetic language. This anthology's marvelous mix of courtly intrigue, romance, magic, folkloric elements, and tragedy is really stunning. Together, these plays constitute an enchanting body of literature. I recommend this collection both for literature classes and for individual readers.

I was pleased with the selection of plays, and I thought the translator's notes and simple illustration of the musical instruments employed in these plays were very helpful. I've another of these plays ("Circle of Chalk") in a separate translation produced decades ago and I was delighted to read translations of six more plays in this genre. I hope another volume is forthcoming.

The book is clean and with very few notes. The paper is a little bit yellow, but that does not affect my reading.

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