

NOTE

The poems in this collection have been recreated in Scots from versions in English of ancient Chinese poems recorded as far back as the seventh century BC, covering a period of well over two millennia. The English versions used as sources were largely those of Arthur Waley, Arthur Cooper, L. Cranmer-Byng, Kenneth Rexroth and David Cobb. The English neo-classical poetic tradition was long preoccupied with abstractions, rather than with the perennial concerns of living people. Thus, when versions in English of wonderful ancient Chinese poems were first published early last century, they were actually regarded with disapproval in England, because they did not fit into this entrenched, sophisticated tradition.

English has now developed into an international scientific and technological language employed by hundreds of millions of people with many different cultural backgrounds, living in different parts of the planet. It is sometimes argued that, because it is not longer the language of any specific community, and has lost contact with its original social roots, English is no longer a suitable language for poetry, which is properly concerned with the life (and plight) of Man as a social being. Although the Scots language is certainly closely related to English, this argument cannot be applied to Scots. Scots is an intimate social language which is much less concerned with abstractions than English. It is specific to an identifiable community and it has a very different emotional flavor from English.

I believe that these versions of Chinese poems in Scots have a vigor and emotional quality in Scots which was not always evident in the English versions from which they were derived. The Scots language can be powerful, tender, earthy or humorous, and the best poetry reflects the sentiment expressed by Burns that *the hert's aye, the pairt aye, that maks us richt or wrang*. The compatibility of the Scots language with ancient Chinese poetry is no doubt due to the fact that this is usually straight from the heart. Scots has its limitations, but it does not lend itself to pomposity or affectation, and may therefore be a more suitable medium than contemporary English for rendering these poems. Whether these recreations do justice to the original poems in Chinese is a question for the judgment of the select band of Chinese scholars who are also familiar with literary Scots.