

· 心境之旅论丛 ·

Bad Luck for Poets, Good Luck for Poetry

A Comparative Study of John Donne and Wang Wei

诗人不幸 诗之幸

——约翰·邓恩与王维比较研究

By WANG Gaidi

王改娣 著

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内 容 简 介

英国诗人约翰·邓恩是个颇有特点的诗。这位在有生之年声名显赫，但随后却被忘却了将近 200 年的诗人，到了 19 世纪末 20 世纪初，终于又赢获了人们对他的重视。尤其在 20 世纪，邓恩研究日益为人们所关注。然而，中国国内对邓恩其人其诗却知之不够。不过，史有巧合，与邓恩状况相似的是中国诗人王维。虽然历代学者对这位杰出禅诗诗人不乏评论，但相对于王维在诗歌上的卓越艺术成就而言，目前对他的研究尚显单薄。在此情况下，作者希望本文对邓、王二人的研究能对学界有所补益。另外，邓恩和王维在诗歌主题、创作风格上的近似，正好为我们提供了一个进行中英诗歌比较的切入点，使我们能够从各别诗人身上略窥中英诗歌和中英文化的走向，同时希望能为中国新诗的发展提供些许参考。

Foreword

She appears still a child, but is already a bright scholar.

What is youth? 'tis not hereafter. "Present mirth has present laughter". While other girls in their sweet 20s joined the madding crowd in search of the trendy pleasures, she joined the traveling crowd in search of the realms of gold. Eagerness to learn took her to the great minds, past and present, Chinese and overseas. Eternal lines were constantly repeated on her lips, and settled in her memory. She was not satisfied with written information alone, and even went so far as to the temples to talk with the monks and see for herself about Chan Buddhism and Chan poetry. In poetry she has her mirth, her laughter.

One poet lived in the 17th century England, where he pioneered the Metaphysical poetry; another lived in the 8th century Cathay, where he pioneered the Chan poetry: would it make any sense if we brought the two together for comparison? Nobody else has thought of the idea, it was hers. As one of her first readers, I think she has not conceived it for nothing. Here I would like to recommend this thesis, a work after years of effort, to the reader and hope it can attract critical attention.

On the eve of publication of Gaidi's monumental work, I offer my hearty congratulations! I feel honored to be asked for a foreword. As I often get pleasant surprises to see her giant strides, I would like to at-

tach my *Reply* to her 2004 New Year greetings here as an expression of what I think of her.

Reply to Gaidi's New Year Greetings

I rarely keep a New Year card,
But the one from you I'll do.
The words it carries smack a bard.
I wondered if it's true.

Three days away a scholar may
Be looked at with new eyes.
I really think that I may say
The same to some young guys.

Wang Baotong

Kaifeng

22 Feb. 2004.

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Introduction

It was the intensity and complexity of emotion and language in John Donne's poetry that first aroused my keen interest.

John Donne (1572-1631) was the founder of the metaphysical school in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in England. He was considered a master by many of his contemporaries but was almost forgotten for many years in literature due to some unjust but influential comments on his poetic works. However, Donne's influence was never disregarded. Since the publication of *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century* by H. J. C. Grierson (1866-1960), metaphysical poets have been rediscovered. In 1921, an article published by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) in *Times Literary Supplement*, later reprinted as "The Metaphysical Poets," helped to improve the position of the metaphysical poets in the literary world. Donne gained respect in the 20th century, and his influence seems overwhelming in the literary world. As I learned more about his work, life and career, I found he had much in common with Wang Wei, one of the best loved Chinese poets of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Like Donne, Wang Wei (701-761) was thought of highly in his time. However, conflicts between Confucianism and Buddhism in Chinese ideology have affected the evaluation of Wang Wei's poetry a great deal. Since Confucianism has long been dominant in China, Buddhism

is considered only of second importance. Wang Wei's poetry which is much associated with Chan, a Chinese Buddhist school, has always been deliberately ignored by Confucian critics. As a result, Wang Wei is rarely placed on a par with the first-class poets in Chinese literature. But the brilliance of Wang Wei's poetry still remains. Up to the present, Chinese poetry has always been described as intangible, suggestive and possessing natural grace, qualities characteristically belonging to Chan poetry, which has an undeniable place in world literature. Even those traditionally considered as major poets, such as Li Bai (701-762) with his grandeur, Du Fu (712-770) with his profundity, and Bai Juyi (772-834) with his popularity, seem to be overshadowed or even overwhelmed by Wang Wei with his simplicity and elegance (Qian Zhongshu 14-15).

Although the two poets, Donne and Wang Wei, lived in different countries and in different ages, they shared a lot in life experience. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to make a comparative study of them. I checked information data and found nobody doing research of this nature. Burning with a desire to dig, I set about taking it as my task to discover how their poetry changed with life experience, especially how they combined poetry with religion so perfectly in their later periods.

In the West, criticism on Donne began early and has become more and more heated up to the present.

A. J. Smith's *John Donne, the Critical Heritage* (1983) is a marvelous collection of all kinds of opinions on Donne and his poetry from 1598 to 1889. In the early years of the 20th century, H. J. C. Grierson and T. S. Eliot's research brought Donne into the modern literary world. Since the 1940s, with the popularity of New Criticism,

literary research on Donne has become very popular. Louis L. Martz's *The Poetry of Mediation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, published in 1954 and revised in 1962, contains an entry, "Metaphysical Poetry," in which he analyzes the meditative structure of Donne's two "Anniversaries" and reveals "the dual vision of Donne's poetry." His study produced a great impact on later researches in Donne. Aldrich Deborah Larson's *John Donne and Twentieth-century Criticism* came out in 1989. Larson mainly attempts to align Donne with, or set him in contrast to, various literary traditions and casts an eye on critics on Donne's attitude to women, religion and science. J. B. Leishman in *The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne* (1951) arranges Donne's poems into different classes based on biographical suppositions. In 1981, John Carey published *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. This is really an excellent critical work. In this book, Carey adopts a psycho-biographical approach to Donne in his study of the poet's life, mind and art. Carey covers all of Donne's writings: poetry, prose and sermons. *Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne's Poetry* edited by John R. Roberts in 1975 is divided into 8 sections: Donne's reputation; Donne and the development of English Poetry; Donne's use of tradition; prosody; love poetry; religious poetry; the "Anniversaries," and miscellaneous poems. Besides the books mentioned above, there are many other critical works such as Arthur F. Marotti's *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (1986), *Critical Essays on John Donne* (1994), and *John Donne* edited by Andrew Mousley (1999).

There are also plenty of critical articles on Donne. For instance, in "John Donne," Achsah Guibbory points out the characteristics of

Donne's poems. Joan Bennett gives an analysis of Donne's secular and religious poems and concludes that the same profound feelings are shown by Donne both to his beloved and to God in her "The Love Poetry of John Donne." Frances Austin's "John Donne" in his *The Language of the Metaphysical Poets* does a good job on Donne's poetry from a linguistic point of view. David Reid's *The Metaphysical Poets* contains one chapter which covers Donne's life, general characteristics of his poetry, satires and moral verse, some love poems and religious verse.

In China, research on Donne was far from satisfactory in the past. Although one of the most influential poets in English literature, Donne was rarely included in books of English literature compiled by Chinese scholars. But things have been changing since Professor Yang Zhouhan's book *English Literature in the Seventeenth Century* came out in 1985. Here, a whole chapter is devoted to Donne, mainly centering on Donne's sermons with a few words on his "Holy Sonnet XIV." Following that work was *An Anthology of English Literature with Chinese Annotation*, which contains five of Donne's poems with detailed notes by Professor Yang. *An Anthology of English Verse* edited with an introduction by Professor Wang Zuoliang came out in 1993, which includes Donne's "Holy Sonnet X" and 3 love poems. Professor Hu Jialuan's *An Anthology of Best English Poems* published in 1995 also includes Donne's "Holy Sonnet XIV" along with two others of Donne's love poems. In 1997, Professor Wang Zuoliang gave a general survey of Donne's poetry in his *A History of English Poetry. A Comprehensive History of English Literature*, edited by Professor Hou Weirui (1999) presents an introduction to Donne and the metaphysical school. *The*

Starry Heavens: English Renaissance Poetry and Traditional Cosmology written by Professor Hu Jialuan, which involves his excellent analyses of some of Donne's poetry was published in 2001. And *A Systematic Venture into John Donne* by Yan Kui (2001), focusing on Donne's poetic works, was the first such book published in China.

Apart from these books, quite a number of critical articles on Donne and his poetry have been published in China, "A Mixture of Passion and Reasoning" by Liu Hanyu and He Changyi, "On Donne's Cosmological Awareness" by Yan Kui, "A Simple Analysis on Conceits" by Lin Yuanfu, "Male-Chauvinism and Colonialism of the Metaphysical Poets" by Zhang Deming, to mention just a few. Nevertheless, compared with other poets with similar poetic achievements, Donne and his poetry are still far from familiar to Chinese readers. Until now, such study has been rather superficial than comprehensive. For that reason, the author of this book attempts to do some research on the subject.

On another hand, criticism on Wang Wei and his poetry is closely associated with that of Chan poetry, which has had a long history in China. Since the introduction of Buddhism to China in 2 BC (Buddhist Scriptures were brought here in AD 67), it has constantly affected Chinese poetry. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), China's "metaphysical school" which originated in Taoism and Confucianism became much influenced by Buddhism, and poets tried to reflect such links in their composition. Most of China's metaphysical poems had imitated the "pure conversation" style^① of the philosopher wits of the time of Wei

① “清谈”之风

(220-265), eminent scholars like He Yan (?-249)^①, Xia Houxuan (209-254)^② and Wang Bi (226-249)^③, centering on dull discussions of lofty nonmundane matters or cosmogony, and propagating nihilism. But metaphysical poetry of the later stage (in Jin) shows elements of Buddhism joining in, which helped bring about Chan poetry. During the Tang through Song Dynasties (618-1279), Chan poetry became mature and reached a climax, as did criticism of Chan poetry. *The Style of Poetry* (Wang Changling, ca. 698-757)^④ and *The Form of Poetry* (Jiao Ran, ?-?)^⑤ of the Tang Dynasty mark the beginning of poetic criticism of Chan. *On Poetry* (Sikong Tu, 837-908)^⑥ of the late Tang Dynasty and *Canglang the Recluse on Poetry* (Yan Yu, fl. 12th century)^⑦ of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) are great works on poetry. In these two books, Sikong Tu and Yan Yu speak highly of Wang Wei's poetry. There are also many books on classic poets and poetry concerned with the comments on Wang Wei's Chan poetry, such as *Selected Tang Poems with Comments* by Hu Yinglin (1551-1602)^⑧, *Consummation of Tang Poetry* by Zhong Xing (1574-1625) and Tan Yuanchun (1586-1637)^⑨, *From Er'an on Poetry* by Xu Zeng (1612-1671)^⑩, *Speaking of Poetry* by Shen Deqian (1673-1769)^⑪ and

① 何晏

② 夏侯玄

③ 王弼

④ 王昌龄《诗格》

⑤ 皎然《诗式》

⑥ 司空图《诗品》

⑦ 严羽《沧浪诗话》

⑧ 胡应麟《唐诗选评》

⑨ 钟惺、谭元春《唐诗归》

⑩ 徐增《而庵诗话》

⑪ 沈德潜《说诗碎语》

From Cultivation Studio on the Poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu by Pan Deyu (1785-1839)^①. Wang Wei's poetry was collected even in his own time^②. Since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), quite a few famous collections have appeared. For example, Gu Qijing's^③ *A Collection of Wang Wei's Poetry* was published in 1556; Gu Kejiu's^④ *Wang Wei's Poetry Collected in the Tang Dynasty* came out in 1559. And *The Annotated Poetry Collection of Wang Youcheng* edited by Zhao Diancheng^⑤ in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) has long been regarded as an authority.

Modern scholars have also shown keen interest in Wang Wei's poetry. Since 1994, more than 300 papers on this subject have been published in various journals in China^⑥. Yuan Xingpei's *An Artistic Research into Chinese Poetry* (1987) contains comments on Wang Wei's Chan poetry. Chen Yinchi gives an excellent introduction to Wang Wei's life and Chan poetry in his *Buddhism in the Sui and Tang Dynasties and Chinese Literature* (2002). Of the modern scholars, Chen Tiemin is the most distinguished for his *Fresh Views on Wang Wei* which appeared in 1990. In this book, Chen Tiemin presents a fine analysis of Wang Wei and his poetry from various angles. By reexamining Wang Wei's life and career, he clears up some long existing doubts in history. He edited the famous work *The Annotated Poetry Collection*

① 潘德輿《养一斋李杜诗话》

② The first collection of Wang Wei's poetry was compiled by his brother Wang Jin (王缙 700?-781) following Emperor Dai Zong's decree.

③ 顾起经

④ 顾可久

⑤ 赵殿成

⑥ The information came from <http://www.cnki.net> on March 6th, 2003.

of Wang Wei which was published in four volumes in 1997. Basing himself on Zhao Diancheng's achievements, Chen Tiemin here furnishes his annotation with more abundant and more convincing findings. However, of all these critical essays and works, few are concerned with Wang Wei's secular poems. In this book, the author intends to do some work in this respect.

In addition, though lots in common exist between Donne and Wang Wei, there have been no articles or books dealing with the comparison between the two. In this book, a comparative study of the two poets is going to be made. Furthermore, though many critics have recognized John Donne's and Wang Wei's great achievements and widespread influence, few seem to question the way in which the two poets have been placed in literary history; still fewer raise any doubt about their inappropriate literary positions. This also is what the author of the present book attempts to do.

A number of literary approaches have been employed in this book, including traditional theories such as historical, sociological, biographical approaches and contemporary theories such as New Criticism. Historical criticism and biographical criticism are important in the history of Chinese literary criticism. Mencius (372-289 BC) said, "If it is not enough to understand the author by chanting his poems and reading his other works, one has to study the times in which he lived."^① As for New Criticism, the author finds it hard to put it aside when studying Donne's poetry. "New Criticism is a species of formalism. As the term suggests, formalism emphasizes a text's formal fea-

① "诵其诗,读其书,不知其人可乎?是以论其世也。"

tures. In doing so, it provides us with a vocabulary with which to articulate those characteristics thought to be peculiar, or at least especially pertinent to, literary texts" (Mousley 7). In this book, the author is going to use "close reading" a lot to interpret poems. In addition, images in poems can never be overlooked. Zhu Guangqian once said, "There is an artistic conception in every poem, composed in feelings and images" (*On Poetry* 55). Images are especially important for classical Chinese poems, which are usually picturesque. Donne's poetry is noted for its clever use of images and metaphors. How to interpret images is crucial to the understanding of both Donne's and Wang Wei's poetry. Analysis of figurative language such as images, symbols, metaphors and similes is an important point. In this book, the author will try to use these methods in New Criticism to interpret Donne's and Wang Wei's poems. Furthermore, since the two poets are going to be examined through comparison here, the author thinks it necessary to get to them by "Parallel Study," an important approach in Comparative Literature, and make a comparative study of Donne and Wang Wei in terms of their themes, subject matters, styles, characteristics and so on. In short, although different literary approaches are applied, they are only tools, or means to an end. That is to say, the author will use them to expound her view and will not spend much time in explicating them.

The present book endeavors to compare Donne and Wang Wei from three angles. One chapter is devoted to the similarities between the two poets in life and career, since their poetic works are much related to their life experience. That is followed by a comparative study of Donne and Wang Wei's non-religious poetry in the first period of each.