

POETRY AND PROSE OF THE TANG AND SONG



Panda Books



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Translated by
Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang



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First edition 1984
Copyright 1984 by CHINESE LITERATURE
ISBN 0-8351-1164-4

Published by CHINESE LITERATURE, Beijing (37), China
Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation
(GUOJI SHUDIAN), P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

Translators' Note

THIS collection of poetry and prose from the Tang and Song Dynasties contains translations of ours which appeared in the magazine *Chinese Literature* between 1957 and 1965. Works by 18 writers, including such celebrated names as Wang Wei, Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Su Shi and Lu You, have been chosen. This selection does not attempt to be comprehensive, nor to present all of the best poetry and prose of the period. Both the prose romances and Song lyrics in the *ci* form, for instance, have been omitted, as well as the interesting late Tang *chante-fables* and Song vernacular writing. Perhaps another selection of lesser-known works from the Tang and Song can be made at some future date. We would like to express our thanks to our colleague Hu Shiguang for his careful editing of this selection and supplying the biographical notes.

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang

1983

CONTENTS

Wang Wei	7
Li Bai	17
Du Fu	37
Han Yu	63
Liu Yuxi	99
Bai Juyi	107
Liu Zongyuan	135
Li He	179
Sikong Tu	191
Wang Yucheng	207
Fang Zhongan	211
Ouyang Xiu	215
Wang Anshi	219
Su Shi	227
Chao Buzhi	263
Lu You	267
Fan Chengda	287
Xin Qiji	293

Wang Wei

Wang Wei (701-761 or 698-759) was from Qixian County in Shanxi. He embarked upon an official career at an early age and in his later years retired to his country home in Lantian County, southeast of present-day Xi'an. A great painter and an accomplished musician, Wang for many represents the classical ideal of the cultured scholar-official. The majority of his poems are about nature and are written in a restrained, exquisite and deeply symbolic style.

chilling and inspiring. Virtually his entire family was murdered in the Holocaust. Still, Frankl found a way to sustain a sense of meaning in his life.

When the brutality of the concentration camp pressed in on him, Frankl held to a fantasy that gave him strength. He imagined himself after the war standing before a class of students. In his fantasy he was teaching them about the meaning that can be found in suffering. Frankl determined that he would take along with him these horrors and that they would be transformed into something of value. Quoting philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Frankl boldly declared, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."

As Rabbi Harold Kushner observed in his best-seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, "We need to get over the questions that focus on the past and on the pain—'Why did this happen to me?'—and ask instead the question which opens doors to the future: 'Now that this has happened, what shall I do about it?'"

At 23, as part of my work toward

my counseling degree, I found myself caring for hospital patients for the first time. Working with gravely ill people provoked a storm of unsettling memories and I sought the counsel of a beloved professor. For several weeks I periodically sat in his office weeping.

He was a man with young children and I knew that his wife was dying of cancer; but he listened to my problems attentively. Finally, I told him that I felt guilty crying for myself. Surely, I said, your sorrow is more profound than mine. In the 17 years since then, I have quoted many times my professor's reply: "Don't let my suffering rob you of your own."

You may have to give up the idea that you aren't entitled to mourn because others have greater sorrows. All of us have both the right and the responsibility to take our losses seriously. Grief, when ignored or denied, can harm us in countless ways. Facing our losses is part of how we find our freedom again.

For information on reprints of this article, see page 205

Hands Off!

A FRIEND OF MINE was giving an important dinner party for her husband's business associates. She put guest towels and soap in the bathroom, and, not wanting her teen-agers to use them first, attached warning notes that read: "Use these and I'll kill you."

When the guests left after a successful evening, she went into the bathroom and found the towels and soap untouched—with her warning notes still on them.

—Contributed by G. W.

Wei River Farm

A village in the setting sun;
 Down humble lanes the cows and sheep wind home;
 An old man, waiting for a shepherd boy,
 Leans on his staff beside his wicker gate.
 Pheasants are crying, wheat is in the ear;
 Silkworms are dormant, sparse the mulberry leaves;
 Up come two farmers shouldering their hoes
 And meeting fall to talking. . . .
 Till, envying their carefree life,
 I chant the sad old song *Longing for Home*.^{*}

The Countryside After Rain

FRESH washed by rain the rolling plain,
 No mist or dust as far as eye can see;
 A gate in the stockade gives on the ford,
 The village trees verge on the valley's head;
 White water gleams beyond the fields
 And green peaks loom behind the hills;
 A busy season, this, for farming folk;
 Whole families are tilling the southern fields.

^{*} From the *Book of Songs*.

Passing the Monastery of Gathered Fragrance

WHERE is it, the Monastery of Gathered Fragrance?

Mile after mile I climb the cloudy peaks;
Here are old trees, a path that no man treads
And deep in the hills the sound of a temple bell;
A fountain chokes on jagged rocks,
Among these dark green pines the sun seems chill;
I come at twilight to a deep pool —
Can the monk at his devotions curb the evil dragon?

An Autumn Evening in the Hills

THROUGH empty hills new washed by rain
As dusk descends the autumn comes;
Bright moonlight falls through pines,
Clear springs flow over stones;
The bamboos rustle as girls return from washing,
Lotus flowers stir as a fishing boat casts off;
Faded the fragrance of spring,
Yet, friend, there is enough to keep you here.

My Retreat by the Zhongnan Mountains

MIDWAY through life I set my heart on Truth
And have come to end my days by the Southern
Hills;

When the mood takes me I stroll out alone,
My pleasure shared by none.

I walk to where streams rise,
Sit watching as the clouds drift up the sky,
And meeting with an old man in the woods
Talk and laugh with him, forgetting to return.

Living in the Hills

IN solitude I close my wooden gate,
As shadows fall I watch the setting sun;
The cranes have made their nests among the pines,
And to my rustic door few callers come;
Fresh powder dusts the young bamboo,
Its faded petals the red lotus sheds;
At the ferry landing lights spring up
And girls laden with water-chestnuts come flock-
ing home.

The Zhongnan Mountains

NEAR the celestial capital, Taiyi*
Marches range after range to meet the sea;
Far off I glimpse it shrouded in white clouds,
And a blue haze, fading as soon as seen;
Its central peak divides the regions round,
Shadow and sunlight sunder its far valleys;
Seeking some lodging for the night,
I hail the woodcutter across the stream.

Watching the Hunt

A gusty wind, twang of horn-backed bows:
The general is hunting at Weicheng;
Hawks' eyes are keen above the withered grass,
Horse-hooves fall lightly where the snow has
 melted;
They wheel past Xinfeng Market
And head home to the camp at Xiliu,
Turning once to mark where the vulture fell:
The plain sweeps far off to the evening clouds.

* The highest peak of the Zhongnan Mountains.

A View of the Han River

THE three rivers of Xiang meet in the land of
Chu;
Through the gateway of Jing the nine tributaries
flow;
The river sweeps beyond the earth and sky,
Half visible the hills and half unseen;
Towns seem afloat upon the bank ahead,
Waves are rocking the distant sky;
A fine day like this in Xiangyang
And the old hermit will get happily drunk!

My Mission to the Frontier

A single carriage sets off for the border,
Journeying past the subject state of Juyan;
On we jolt, leaving Han fortresses behind,
A wild goose winging back to the Hunnish sky.
In the great desert one straight plume of smoke,
By the long river at sunset a ball of flame;
Before Xiao Pass we meet a mounted patrol
And learn that our forces have taken Mount Yan-
ran.

The Deer Enclosure

EMPTY the hills, no man in sight,
Yet voices echo here;
Deep in the woods slanting sunlight
Falls on the jade-green moss.

The Magnolia Enclosure

THE autumn hills glean the last light of day
As winged birds chase their mates,
Their vivid colours flash across the green,
Through drifting evening mist.

The Luan Family Rapids

IN spattering autumn rain
Over the rocks the swirling rapids plunge;
The leaping water sprinkles all around,
Startled into flight, the white egret alights again.

The Bamboo Lodge

SEATED alone by shadowy bamboos
I strum my lyre and laugh aloud;
None knows that I am here, deep in the woods;
Only the bright moon comes to shine on me.

Hibiscus Valley

HIBISCUS high on the trees
Flaunt red in the hills;
To this secluded valley no man comes,
Yet the flowers bloom and fall year after year.

The Gully of Twittering Birds

IDLY I watch the cassia petals fall;
Silent the night and empty the spring hills;
The rising moon startles the mountain birds
Which twitter fitfully in the spring gully.

Asking for News of Home

FRIEND, come from home,
What home news do you bring?
The day you left had the winter plum
Before my latticed window burst into bloom?

In the Hills

FROM dwindling stream white stones emerge;
Frosty the day and few the crimson leaves;
No rain has fallen on the mountain path —
Men's clothes are soaked by the green solitude.

Seeing Yuan the Second Off on a Mission to Anxi

A morning shower in Weicheng has settled the light
dust;
The willows by the hostel are fresh and green;
Come, drink one more cup of wine,
West of the pass you will meet no more old friends.