

仲
昭



Wei Zhuang 韦庄

Wei Zhuang was born in Wannian County, near Chang'an, probably in 836. Though he grew up in a well-to-do family, receiving a good education, he was a badly behaved child. Many of his childhood friends, who ganged up with him against their unfortunate teachers, later became major officials of the dying empire.

The last years of the empire saw rampant warfare, and Wei and his family eventually had to flee the capital for survival. In 884, they first went to Luoyang, then continued south, crossing the Yangtze in the hope of finding some temporary peace in Runzhou, in Jiangsu (now Zhejiang) Province. There Wei Zhuang became a military secretary in the staff of General Zhou Bao. He worked there for three years before a military *coup d'état* happened right before his eyes and his general was driven out of town. He and his family had to leave too, this time going to Wuzhou in what is now Jinhua, in western Zhejiang. The second poem translated below was probably written there, where he spent another three years or so living in the rocky mountains.

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Wei Zhuang passed the imperial examination in 894 and in 897 was assigned to serve as assistant to a court envoy sent by the court in an attempt to oversee a military man, Wang Jian, who had taken control of western Sichuan. Wei Zhuang somehow won the trust of Wang and in 901 became his confidential secretary (*zhangshuji* 掌书记). As Tang floated downstream in a flood of rebellions and wars, General Wang decided to establish his own little empire in the Sichuan Basin. Involved from the start in planning, documenting, and organizing the ceremonies and rituals by which Wang attempted to legitimize his regime, Wei Zhuang was soon promoted to the powerful role of acting prime minister. He died in the eighth month of the lunar calendar in 910.

《题吉润卢拾遗庄》（《全唐诗》卷 696）

主人西游去不归，满溪春雨长春微。
怪来马上诗情好，印破青山白鹭飞。

**Written on the Wall of Mr. Lu's
Farm House on Creek Ji**

The owner travels west and will not return,
leaving the creek to overgrown wild
vetches.
Spring rains fill it to the brim.

On horseback I'm overwhelmed by poetic
inspiration.
I see egrets in flight – white prints on blue
mountain walls.

《虎迹》（《全唐诗》卷 700）

白额频频夜到门，水边踪迹渐成群。我今避世栖岩穴，岩穴如何又见君。

Tiger Tracks

Beasts with white patterns on their foreheads
visit me again and again during the night.
They gradually appear in families
on the water-margin where I live –
in a cave now to avoid the violent world.

Why do I see you here by my cave door?

Wang Renyu 王仁裕

According to the inscription on the memorial tablet buried in his tomb, Wang Renyu's ancestral home was Taiyuan, in what is now Shanxi Province (Chen Wenxin, ed., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannianshi*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, Vol. 6, p. 595). The clan then moved to Tianshui, now in Gansu Province, where Wang Renyu was born in 880. Like Wei Yingwu and Wen Tingyun, Wang Renyu was a "bad boy," who enjoyed betting on horses and dogs and shooting cross-bows, but never liked school. He was, however, exceptionally talented. At the age of twenty-five, he finally began to focus on his education and within three years had become well-known in eastern Gansu for his literary skills. With this start, he eventually rose into officialdom, and also became a prolific writer, especially in poetry and stories.

At the beginning of the tenth century, the Tang Empire had splintered into several smaller kingdoms and regimes, the northwestern area where Wang Renyu lived still held by Tang loyalists. The general who had taken control of the region liked Wang's literary talent and appointed the poet to be his assistant. Though he had reached the age of thirty-two, Wang Renyu still had something of the dare-devil in him. He hiked Mount Maijishan, famous for the many Buddhist shrines carved in niches high up on cliffs near Tianshui. While there, he climbed a dangerous ladder up to the highest shrine, and looking at the land below him, expressed a feeling that he must leave his name "at the edge of heaven" (quoted in Chen Wenxin, ed., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannianshi*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, Vol. 6, p. 470). As the general's assistant, he was then sent to Sichuan, where a rival warlord had declared himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Shu. Wang now transferred his loyalty to this new group, and became a favorite of the Shu heir, who became emperor after his father died. Shu, however, did not last long: Wang together with the new "emperor" were both soon captured by the army of his old overlord, the general who had sent him down to Sichuan in the first place.

In captivity Wang Renyu was sent to Luoyang, the former eastern capital of Tang. The two poems translated below were probably written on his way there. In Luoyang, in 934, he wrote a collection of stories about the peak years of the Tang Empire. Yet wars were still raging in central China, and in 948 Luoyang was seized by the emperor of the Later Han Dynasty (947-951), a Turk. Wang Renyu now became a high official in the third post-Tang regime he had served. As the vice-minister of an important ministry, he had responsibility for conducting examinations in order to find talent for Later Han. He was quite successful in this business, for his favorite student, Wang Pu, became the prime minister of the short-lived regime, which would collapse in 951. Wang Renyu lasted five years longer, dying in 956.

《放猿》（《全唐诗》卷 736）

放尔丁宁复故林，旧来行处好追寻。
月明巫峡堪怜静，路隔巴山莫厌深。
栖宿免劳青嶂梦，跻攀应惬白云心。
三秋果熟松梢健，任抱高枝彻晓吟。

Releasing A Monkey

I let you go now, go back to your home
forest.
Again and again I bid you farewell –

go find and follow your old tracks.
Along the gorges of Yangtze

among the Wu Mountains
enjoy your life with your family,

quiet in brilliant moonshine.
Never mind the deep mountains –

climb and leap and play
to satisfy your heart in white clouds.

Sleep and rest, avoiding the dream
of those green mountain barriers.

When pine seeds are ripe in late fall,
hold tight to the top branches.

Howl and chant like your poet friend,
from dawn to evening, from evening to
dawn.

《遇放猿再作》（《全唐诗》卷 736）

蟠冢祠前汉水滨，饮猿连臂下嶙峋。
渐来子细窥行客，认得依稀是野宾。
月宿纵劳羁绁梦，松餐非复稻粱身。
数声肠断和云叫，识是前时旧主人。

Running into the Monkey I Released

By the altar, over the graveyard,
on the bank of River Han,
a file of monkeys, hand in hand,
form a ladder, hanging from the craggy
cliff,
taking turns to quench their thirst.

One walks shyly towards the traveler,
closer and closer, to take a good look.

I think I recognize you too –
my old friend and wild guest?

Have you thought of me in your dreams,
as I've thought of you in moon-lit night?

You've returned to your diet of pine seeds
your spirit immortal and free.

You no longer need the human food I fed
you.
I remain a slave of rice and sorghum they
pay me.

Your three howls clear the clouds and
touch
my heart. Are you telling me that you do
recognize me, your former host and friend?

Xue Tao 薛涛

Xue Tao is the only woman poet in this collection. She was born into a good family in Chang'an, in 770. Her father was a government official who went to Chengdu, Sichuan, in service of the empire. At the age of eight, Xue Tao started to write poetry and her name became known among her father's friends. Her father died in Chengdu, survived by his widow and daughter. No documentation survives regarding her mother, but it's reasonable to assume that she died shortly after the death of her husband, for Xue Tao was soon sold into prostitution, where she specialized in music and lyrics. At the age of sixteen, she became the favorite of the general in charge of the whole Sichuan area. She lived in the neighborhood where the "Poet Saint" Du Fu (Tu Fu) used to live, by Wanli (Ten-Thousand Mile) Bridge, over Wanhua (Flower Washing) Creek. She planted bulrushes and rhododendrons in her yard and along the creek. She had long-lasting friendship with several male poets of her time, including Yuan Zhen, Wang Jian, and Zheng Gu.

When Wu Yuanheng became the prime minister of the empire in 807, he recommended that the emperor appoint Xue Tao to be one of the editors for the imperial academy. Although she was the only woman and only prostitute in Chinese history who had that title, many prostitutes who conducted their business near military camps were called "female editors" after Xue Tao died in 832.

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《池上双鸟》（《全唐诗》卷 803）

双栖绿池上，朝暮共飞还。
更忆将雏日，同心莲叶间。

A Pair of Water Fowl on the Pond

A couple makes a home on the green pond.
They fly away in the morning and return
together at night. They'll remember the happy days
raising ducklings beneath lotus leaves.
Two birds, they share one heart.

《鸳鸯草》（《全唐诗》卷 803）

绿英满香砌，两两鸳鸯小。
但娱春日长，不管秋风早。

Wood-Duck Grass*

Fragrant, green, all over the stone steps,
wood-duck grasses send out tiny buds in pairs,
like lovely ducklings that play
all the long spring day.

They never mind autumn winds
that come to put their games to an early end.

* The Chinese call honeysuckle “wood-duck grass” because, like wood ducks, the petals of honeysuckle, yellow and white, or as the Chinese say, gold and silver, grow in pairs.

Guanxiu 贯休

Guanxiu was a Buddhist monk. His family name was Jiang, and he was born in 832, in Denggao Lane, Lanxi County, in what is now western Zhejiang Province, south of the Yangtze and about two hundred kilometers from the coast of the East China Sea. He was converted to monastic life at the age of seven, in He'an Temple, in Lanxi and with a fellow monk of his age learned to write poetry at fifteen. After undergoing full ordination at the age of twenty, he went into a ten-year retreat in the Monastery of Mount Wuxie. In the early 860s he left the monastery and traveled west to Hongzhou, now the Nanchang area in Jiangxi Province, to continue his Buddhist study and practice in the Zhongling Mountains. He apparently stayed there for decades. In the late 880s, the general controlling that area became aware of him, and developed a liking for his poetry and calligraphy, while for his part Guanxiu became friends with a member of the general's staff – the poet Wu Rong, who had been demoted to serve in the area. It was from Guanxiu that Wu Rong learned the Zen attitude towards frustrations in life and how to work himself out of depression. The two became such good friends that, according to Wu Rong, during the one and a half years Wu Rong spent in Hongzhou (from the summer of 895 to the winter of 896), they would miss each other if three days went by in which they didn't meet and talk (see Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 431). But Guanxiu's relationship with the general himself came to a crisis when the general asked him for calligraphy instructions. Guanxiu took offence: how can the general so casually ask for the most serious artistic commitment? His response shocked the general, who exiled him to the unhealthy mountains in what is now Guizhou Province.

After that, Guanxiu went back east to Hangzhou, near his hometown, and settled in the famous Lingyin Temple. His temper and outspoken attitude, however, soon offended another warlord and he had to go west again, to Sichuan where he would bless yet another powerful general with his honesty. Though offended, this military man was able to put up with the criticism and in fact built Longhua Temple for the monk. Guanxiu died there at the age of 82, in the year 912.

《村行遇猎》（《全唐诗》卷 826）

猎师纷纷走榛莽，女亦相随把弓矢。
南北东西尽杀心，断烧残云在围里。
鹞拂荒田兔成血，竿打黄茅雉惊起。
伤嗟个辈亦是人，一生将此关身己。
我闻天地之大德曰生，
又闻万事皆天意，
何遣此人又如此。
犹更愿天公一丈雪，
深山麋鹿尽冻死。

Running into Hunters While Passing by a Village

The hunters comb the woods in larger and smaller groups,
followed by their women holding arrows and bows.

The killing mood comes from the south, the north, the east and west,
competing with the lingering fire on the smoky plain.

Their falcons sweep over the burning fields
with bleeding hares in claws. They whip long
bamboo sticks to scare the pheasants from yellow weeds
until the birds in fear dash up into the sky.

I can't help wondering what life is supposed to mean,
why these people take up such a trade.

I've heard the greatest virtue is to live and let live.
Everything that happens happens by heaven's will.

Then why does heaven make these men?

Why doesn't heaven send a blizzard in June
and freeze to death the elk and deer in ten feet of snow?

《田家作》（《全唐诗》卷 826）

田家老翁无可作，昼甑蒸梨香漠漠。
 只向阶前曝背眠，赤桑大叶时时落。
 古木侵门桃竹密，仓囤峨峨欲遮日。
 自云孙子解耕耘，四五年来腹多实。
 我闻此语心自悲，世上悠悠岂得知，
 稼而不穡徒尔为。

The Activities of an Old Peasant

The old peasant doesn't have much to do –
 he places sliced pears in a bottle to steam.

While the fragrance fills up the village,
 mulberry leaves, large and red, fall to ground.

He dozes off on stairs as the sun warms his back
 and lulls him into a mid-day nap.

The trees are old and thick – bamboo and peaches side by side,
 their shades darker than those of the tall silos.

He tells me that since his grandchildren became
 skilled farmers, he's eaten well for five long years.

On hearing his story my heart begins to ache.

It's a simple truth known to the world that none
 can be happy if they can't harvest what they plant.

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《道情偈》（《全唐诗》卷 828）

草木亦有性，与我将不别。
 我若似草木，成道无时节。
 世人不会道，向道却嗔道。
 伤嗟此辈人，宝山不得宝。

A Short Poem on Dao

Grasses and trees have their own nature
 which is no different from that of mine.

Yet if I behave like grasses and trees,
 I'll never find myself approaching the
 Dao.

People of this world say they want to
 achieve it,
 but they're unwilling to act as the Dao
 dictates.

I pity these people who find no treasure
 although they live in a grand treasure
 house.

《寄僧野和尚》（《全唐诗》卷 829）

鸟外更谁亲，诸峰即四邻。
白头寒枕石，青衲烂无尘。
橡栗堆行径，猿猴绕定身。
恍然重结社，愿作扫坛人。

Sent to Master Wild, a Monk

The surrounding peaks – your closest
neighbors.
The nesting birds – your dearest relatives.

Your white head finds a pillow on a cool
rock.
Your black gown, despite the patches, is
forever clean.

You find plenty of food in piles of acorns,
the chestnuts fall by the foot trail.

Apes and monkeys sit around you as you
sit
in profound meditation.

If you re-open your gate and start a Zen
commune,
I'd volunteer to be the sweeper of your
altar.

《湖头别墅三首 其一》
（《全唐诗》卷 832）

梨栗鸟啾啾，
高歌若自由。
人谁知此意，
旧业在湖头。
饥鼠掀菱壳，
新蝉避栗皱。
不知江海上，
戈甲几时休。

On the Lake House

In the leaves of pear and
chestnut trees
birds, high pitched, twitter
happy and free.

The man who understands
their songs lives
in an old house on the far end
of the lake.

Hungry mice in his pantry
nibble at water caltrop.
New cicadas hide in cracks
of the chestnut trunk.

He wonders when the wars
would finally stop
in the human world beyond
rivers and seas.

《新猿》
（《全唐诗》卷 833）

寻常看不见，
花落树多苔。
忽向高枝发，
又从何处来。
风清声更揭，
月苦意弥哀。
多少求名者，
年年被尔催。

The New Monkey

Finally I see you
after the flowers fall
and mosses cover the tree
trunk.

Suddenly you start howling
on the high branch,
make me wonder where you
come from.

The pure wind sends your
voice high.
It sounds more chilling in the
dim moonlight.

How many fame-pursuers, I
wonder, feel
depressed by your voice year
after year.

Qiji 齐己

Qiji was a Buddhist monk, his name before conversion Hu Desheng. He came originally from the Tongqing Temple in the Dawei Mountains in Hunan. This was a large temple and major landowner, which had more than a thousand tenant peasants who rented land from the temple. One of these tenants was Hu Desheng's father, and at the age of seven Hu Desheng himself started herding cows and buffalos for the temple. An intelligent boy, he was a quick learner, with remarkable language skills. He started writing poetry while sitting on the back of buffalos as he herded them along. His talent was soon discovered by the Tongqing monks, who persuaded his parents to allow him to join the temple as a *shami* – a student monk. That was how the lad Hu Desheng became the monk Qiji.

Qiji soon became a well known poet, highly respected by the poets south of Dongting Lake. He traveled north partly to further stimulate his poetic imagination and partly to meet more poet friends. He started with the famous Yueyang Tower, where he thought he could get a view of the Dongting Lake he had read so much about. However, he climbed up the tower during the wintertime, to discover that at that time of the year the lake shrank down to be just a moderate extension of the Xiangjiang River, the river that flowed past his temple in the Dawei Mountains. I myself was worried about the lake when I read last winter that Dongting Lake had shrunk to one-third of its regular size. Qiji's experience of the same lake somehow sounds reassuring to me, for now I understand that the seasonal change of size has a history extending back long before construction of the notorious dam on the Three Gorges.

Qiji continued his trip to the capital city Chang'an, and met Zheng Gu (included in this selection). They became great friends, and Qiji even respected Zheng Gu as a teacher. From there he hiked the mountains around the capital, the Zhongnan Mountains, Mount Huashan, and the Zhongtiao Mountains on the northern bank of the Yellow River. In later time, he made several more trips of this sort to Zhejiang and Jiangxi, eventually settling in western Hunan, in the Daolin Temple.

He died in 943 in Jingzhou, now Hubei Province.

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《新栽松》（《全唐诗》卷 838）

野僧教种法，冉冉出蓬蒿。
百岁催人老，千年待尔高。
静宜兼竹石，幽合近猿猱。
他日成阴后，秋风吹海涛。

Planting a Pine Sapling

A wild monk taught me how to plant.
I help the sapling grow higher than the
bushes.

Every man grows old within a hundred
years.
A thousand years are just enough for
pines to reach their prime.

Quiet is the pine, suitable companion of
bamboo and rock.
Deep is its shade, shelter for monkeys and
apes.

Looking at the sapling I hear tidal waves
made by giant branches hundreds of
autumns to come.

《放鹭鸶》（《全唐诗》卷 838）

洁白虽堪爱，腥膻不那何。
到头从所欲，还汝旧沧波。

Releasing a Snowy Egret

I love your fine feathers, white and pure.
You eye the slimy eels.
In the end I have to let you follow
your own will and give you back
to the ripples of your native lake.

《小松》（《全唐诗》卷 840）

发地才过膝，蟠根已有灵。
严霜百草白，深院一林青。
后夜萧骚动，空阶蟋蟀听。
谁于千岁外，吟绕老龙形。

The Pine Sapling

Its tiny trunk barely above my knees,
its dragon-clawed roots already possess a
spirit.

In harsh frost all plants turn yellow or
white.
In my yard its greenness makes a small
forest.

Late at night the wind sighs through its
twigs,
to accompany the chirping crickets under
the stairs.

I try but fail to imagine a thousand years
from now –
who would be walking around the pine,
comparing its twisted trunk to an ancient
dragon?

《野鸭》（《全唐诗》卷 842）

野鸭殊家鸭，离群忽远飞。
长生缘甚瘦，近死为伤肥。
江海游空阔，池塘啄细微。
红兰白苹渚，春暖刷毛衣。

Wild Mallards

The mallards on my pond left without
bidding farewell to their cousin ducks.
They're leaner but live longer than the ducks who stay,
cooked for their tasty fat.

The mallards fly over expansive rivers and lakes,
swim and dive in ponds and pools to search
for tiny fish and shrimp. Among the white
flowers of the duckweed in spring, they play
and brush their feathers fresh and green.

《题画鹭鸶兼简孙郎中》
（《全唐诗》卷 844）

曾向沧江看不真，却因图画见精神。
何妨金粉资高格，不用丹青点此身。
蒲叶岸长堪映带，荻花丛晚好相亲。
思量画得胜笼得，野性由来不恋人。

**Written on a Painting of Egrets
As a Letter to Director Sun**

I used to see them on broad rivers
but never observed them so close.

Today in this wonderful painting I see
the true spirit of water fowl.

Never use golden color to add value to
characters,
nor artificial paint to give beauty to their
feather.

The bulrush has grown long on banks –
what a pleasant screen!

The catkins glow bright in the evening –
such a wonderful place to be close.

Thinking carefully I realize
that for a closer look at the birds
I prefer the painting to the cage.

By nature wild birds don't like
to be too close to men.

《辞主人绝句四首。放猿》
(《全唐诗》卷 846)

堪忆春云十二峰，野桃山杏摘香红。
王孙可念愁金锁，从放断肠明月中。

The Monkey's Farewell to the Master

So worthy of my remembrance, ah, the twelve peaks
behind the clouds in spring, along the Wu Gorges.
Peaches and apricots ready for picking – sweet, red, wild.

Looking at the gold chain Your Highness may feel sad.
In moonlight you let me go
despite your broken heart.

《辞主人绝句四首。放鹦鹉》
(《全唐诗》卷 846)

陇西苍鹯结巢高，本为无人识翠毛。
今日笼中强言语，乞归天外啄含桃。

A Parrot's Plea to Its Master

My home was the nest on the highest tree
on the highest peak farthest west,
so far that no one notice my colorful coat.

Now I'm forced to talk the human tongue –
I tell you this: please be kind and let me go
to the other side of heaven to peck on a few peaches.

Horse in Human Language 马作人语

This poem was supposedly written in the ninth century, while the *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan Tang Shi* 全唐诗) was compiled in 1707. What impresses me most is that over a millennium, no Chinese reader or poet ever challenged the idea that a horse could compose a poem in human language. I just wonder what my western colleagues, especially the ecocritics would say about this small wonder of literary production.

The story was allegedly about Lu Yan 路岩, a Tang scholar/bureaucrat who became a prime minister at the age of thirty-six, but was demoted to Xinzhou 新州 (in what is now Xinxing County, Guangdong Province) in the year 873. According to *Beimengsuoyan* 北梦琐言 by Sun Guangxian 孙光宪 (901-968), on the road to demotion in Xinzhou, when passing Jiangling in what is now southern Hubei Province, Lu Yan's horse suddenly spoke up in human language and uttered the lines in the form of a short lyric. The poem turned out to be prophesy: soon after Lu Yan arrived at his demoted office, he was further demoted to Hainan Island, and then was offered the "graceful" opportunity to commit suicide. Sun Guangxian, the collector of this horse story, didn't believe that the horse could predict future disasters, though he never questioned that the horse did utter those words. (See *Taiping Guang Ji* 太平广记. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1994, p. 1043.) Thus, what the horse said is an achievement in Chinese poetry rather than in Chinese mythology.

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《马作人语》（《全唐诗》卷 867）

芦荻花，此花开后路无家。

A Poem Composed by a Horse in Human Language

Catkins – blooming white flowers.
After these flowers,
No home but the road.