

仲
昭



Wang Bo 王勃

Wang Bo was born in the year 650 and died in 676. Like John Keats, his talent was recognized by society at an early age and he lived a comparably short life. Growing up in Jiangzhou, Shanxi Province, Wang was known as a child prodigy. Recommended to take an examination in the court, he passed with honor and at the age of fourteen was given an official position as the secretary to a prince. His poems were well received, and he became one of the Four Great Poets of the Early Tang Dynasty (the other three being Yang Jiong 杨炯, Lu Zhaoling 卢照邻, and Luo Binwang 骆宾王).

The proud young genius soon ran into considerable trouble: he was first demoted because his humorous essay on cock-fighting offended the emperor. Then, he was charged with killing a servant. Though spared execution, his father was demoted to the position of a county magistrate in the remote southern prefecture of Cochinchina, an area including parts of the present-day provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, and northern and central areas of Vietnam. On his way to join his father in the far south, Wang fell into the sea; although he was soon fished out of the cold salt water, he became very ill from the shocking experience and died shortly thereafter.

According to the modern Chinese scholar Zhang Mingfei 张明非, together with the other three great poets of the Early Tang period Wang inspired the “mountains and rivers” school of previous dynasties with a sense of actual human dwellings (*Tang Yu Lun Sou*. Guilin, Guangxi University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 195-205). In addition to a vivid description of the physical locale, Wang offers the reader a sense of how it feels to live in that environment. Professor Ge Xiaoyin 葛晓音 further argues this addition allowed Wang to develop a sense of seasonal and diurnal changes in the landscape as the lights, weather, and temperature change (*Shanshui Tianyuan Shi Pai Yanjiu*. Shenyang, Liaoning University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 112-20).

《山中》（《全唐诗》卷56）

长江悲已滞，万里念将归。
况属高风晚，山山黄叶飞。

From the Mountain

The Long River flows
sad and slow.
Ten thousand miles from home,
I pray for my return.
High in the mountain
the night wind blows.
Mountains, mountains—
yellow leaves fly.

《冬郊行望》（《全唐诗》卷 56）

桂密岩花白，梨疏树叶红。
江皋寒望尽，归念断征篷。

A Winter Walk Outside the City Walls

Tight sweet olive shrubs
White rock flowers
The last of last year's pears
hanging among a few red leaves

From the cold river cliffs
I watch sails disappear
My thoughts of home
disappear with them.

《登城春望》（《全唐诗》卷 56）

物外山川近，晴初景霭新。
芳郊花柳遍，何处不宜春？

A Spring View from the Top of the City Wall

From the world of things,
I come closer to mountains and rivers.

Fine weather freshens the misty landscape—
flowers and willows outside the city walls.

What place is not appropriate for spring?

《咏风》（《全唐诗》卷 55）

肃肃凉风生，加我林壑清。
驱烟寻涧户，卷雾出山楹。
去来固无迹，动息如有情。
日落山水静，为君起松声。

On Summer Wind

Severe and chilly rises the wind
brings purity to my woods
chases the smoke out of the gurgling
ravine
rolls the mountain mist out of my hut
windows

Come and go, it leaves no clear traces
Move and stop, it feels as if with empathy
Mountains and rivers quiet
The sun strikes the harp of pine needles

Guo Zhen 郭震

Guo Zhen was born in what is now Daming County, Hebei Province, in the year 656. Contrary to what he describes in the poem, his poetic talent was well-received by Empress Wu, who heard of his poems in the year 695 and invited him to return to the capital, Chang'an, for a court interview. Guo seized this opportunity and presented to the court his poem about a legendary sword; Empress Wu appreciated it enough to have it hand-copied and presented to scores of her favorite courtiers. Guo Zhen went on to rise to rather high positions in the military, in 712 becoming general commander of the Northern Army. He was, however, soon demoted and sent to the south, and died on the road in 713 (Chen Wenxin, Liu Jiafu, et al., eds. *Zhongguo Wenxue Nianjian: Sui, Tang, Wudai*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, pp. 118, 198-99).

Through most of his career, Guo was a high-ranking official, and eventually a peer. Though there is no mention in the surviving historical record regarding his actual treatment of poets new to officialdom, still, the camaraderie shown in the piece below between poet and crickets is both original and quite striking. Comparison of the crickets' song with his own poetry is not directly stated in the poem, but is suggested in the personal pronoun *jun* 君 (meaning gentleman, Sir, princely man), with which the poet addresses them. The poem is both humorous and thought-provoking.

《蛩》（《全唐诗》卷66）

愁杀离家未达人，一声声到枕前闻。
苦吟莫向朱门里，满耳笙歌不听君。

Crickets

Saddened to death, I'm a man
who left home in search of fame and rank.

Chirp after chirp penetrates the pillow around my head.

Don't you direct your bitter chanting
at the Red Gates,* I tell those crickets.

The lords' ears, full of sweet songs and pipes,
have no time for you.

*In the Tang Dynasty, only aristocrats were allowed to paint their gates red.