



## The Selected Poems of Tu Fu

*Du Fu , David Hinton (Translator)*

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## **The Selected Poems of Tu Fu** Du Fu , David Hinton (Translator)

Tu Fu radically altered poetry as he found it in the High T'ang period. In addition to making formal innovations in language and structure, he extended the range of acceptable subject matter to include all aspects of public and private experience, thus becoming in the words of translator David Hinton, "the first complete poetic sensibility in Chinese literature."

This edition of *The Selected Poems of Tu Fu* is the only comprehensive selection of the poet's work currently available in English. While retaining a scholar's devotion to the text, Hinton has attempted "to recreate Tu Fu's poems as new systems of uncertainty." By reflecting all the ambiguity and density of the originals, he has created compelling English poems that significantly alter our conception of Chinese poetry. Included with the poems are the translator's introduction and translation principles. as well as a biography of Tu Fu; together these provide a fascinating portrait of a uniquely sensitive spirit during one of the most tumultuous periods in Chinese history.

## **The Selected Poems of Tu Fu Details**

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## From Reader Review The Selected Poems of Tu Fu for online ebook

### Michael says

Damn! Du Fu can write some poetry. Simple language ripples with feeling - the strongest being what he doesn't say but only alludes to; these be some of the oldest and best poems of loneliness and despair and awe at the beauty all around us.

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### Peycho Kanev says

#### NEW YEAR'S EVE AT TU WEI'S HOME

The songs over pepper wine have ended.  
Friends jubilant among friends, we start  
A stabled racket of horses. Lanterns  
Blaze, scattering crows. As dawn breaks,

The fortieth year passes in my flight toward  
Evening light. Who can change it, who  
Stop it for even a single embrace—this dead  
Dazzling drunk in the wings of life we live?

#### MOONLIT NIGHT

Tonight at Fu-chou, this moon she watches  
Alone in our room. And my little, far-off  
Children, too young to understand what keeps me  
Away, or even remember Ch'ang-an. By now,

Her hair will be mist-scented, her jade-white  
Arms chilled in its clear light. When  
Will it find us together again, drapes drawn  
Open, light traced where it dries our tears?

#### MOONLIT NIGHT THINKING OF MY BROTHERS

Warning drums have ended all travel.  
A lone goose cries across autumn  
Borderlands. White Dew begins tonight,  
This bright moon bright there, over

My old village. My scattered brothers—  
And no home to ask Are they alive or dead?  
Letters never arrive. War comes  
And goes—then comes like this again.

## FAREWELL AT FANG KUAN'S GRAVE

Traveling again in some distant place, I  
Pause here to offer your lonely grave  
Farewell. By now, tears haven't left dry  
Earth anywhere. Clouds drift low in empty

Sky, broken. Hsieh An's old go partner.  
Sword in hand, I come in search of Hsü,  
But find only forest blossoms falling and  
Oriole songs sending a passerby on his way.

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### **Farren says**

I really appreciate how Du Fu writes about getting drunk. A lot.

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### **Jee Koh says**

Like all the other Chinese scholars of his time, Du Fu aspired to serve the court in the country's vast bureaucracy. He was passed over again and again, and lived with his family in poverty for much of his life, intermittently relieved by the generosity of friends and patrons. The country's loss is poetry's gain. Du Fu might have written as much and as well if he were a high-ranking official (although that is very doubtful), but he would not have been as innovative in his subject matter.

Struggling with the various miseries of poverty, he gained a profound sympathy for the weak and helpless, and wrote wrenching poems about commoner families suffering from devastating warfare. Separated from his family in order to find work, he celebrated in verse the simple joys of playing with his son and watching chickens scratch in the backyard, when he was finally reunited with them. Equally new was his expression of romantic sentiments for his wife. Before Du Fu, feelings of affection were reserved, at least in poetry, for courtesans and male friends. But Du Fu wrote, in "Moonlight Night,":

Tonight  
in this same moonlight

my wife is alone at her window  
in Fuzhou

I can hardly bear  
to think of my children

too young to understand  
why I can't come to them

her hair  
must be damp from the mist

her arms  
cold jade in the moonlight

when will we stand together  
by those slack curtains

while the moonlight dries  
the tear-streaks on our faces?

The progression of ideas and images is utterly simple and convincing. "Slack curtains" is a masterly touch. It speaks of their financially straitened circumstance as well as their strong longing for reunion, but it does so in an image that gives the opposite impression of tension and strength.

David Young's unrhymed couplets, here and elsewhere in the book, capture very effectively the extensive use of parallelism and caesura in Chinese verse. The minimal punctuation--beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period or question mark--also evokes the openness and suggestiveness of Chinese poetry. Yet the translation reads like a successful English poem.

The translations are arranged in the book according to the chronology of the poet's life. The eleven section titles sum up its course: Early Years in the East, 737-744, Back at the Capital 745-750, War and Rebellion 750-755, Trapped in the Capital 756-758, Reunion and Recovery 758-759, On the Move 759, Thatched Cottage 759-762, More Disruptions 762-765, East to Kuizhou 765-766, The Gentleman Farmer 767-768, Last Days. Young introduces each section with a paragraph of biographical context that, read together with the poetry, gives the sense of a tumultuous life.

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### Clif says

David Young's chronologically arranged translations of 170 of Du Fu's poems, combined with his introductory notes to each new phase of the poet's life (from 737-770 CE), offer us excellent insights into both the man who wrote the poems and the poems that made the man world famous. Du Fu (or Tu Fu) was truly a man who suffered great losses in his life and who, as a consequence, developed great empathy for all of those who suffer, regardless of social class. This empathy emerges strongly, even in translation. Du Fu lived during a time of frequent war and he and his family suffered separation and sometimes great privation.

Unlike certain other T'ang Dynasty poets who successfully managed a life at court, Du Fu never succeeded in holding onto court favor for long. His poetry reflects his frequent travels, as he moved in search of opportunities, some of which never materialized, and none of which lasted for long. He frequently compares himself to thistledown blown by the wind. His poems reflect his frequent anxiety, his yearning for the simpler life of a religious hermit, and his not wholly successful attempts to derive solace, at first from Confucianism, and later from Taoism.

I don't read Chinese, so I can't speak to the accuracy of Young's translations, though I understand that his versions are more than usually successful at revealing the technical brilliance of Du Fu's poems. Still, Young's versions strike me as a trifle flat. They are less vivid than either Kenneth Rexroth's or David Hinton's. Reading them in these English versions, it is sometimes difficult to understand why these poems are held in such high esteem by the Chinese, who consider Du Fu their greatest poet. Nonetheless, English

readers can be grateful for this book of translations, which gives us a unique appreciation of the man behind the poems.

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### **Christopher Sparks says**

Tu Fu is my kind of poet, on and on about the moon and autumn and trees. For me he is at his best when describing scenes of everyday life in the highly compressed mode of his later works.

I am pleased I knew nothing of his fame before beginning the text, but it is clear Tu Fu's accomplishment is well deserved. His talent strikes through clearly enough to make an impression in translation 13 centuries later. I have read it is difficult to not be influenced by his writing, as with Shakespeare, he is in almost everything if you dig deeply enough.

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### **Jim Coughenour says**

Whenever I read the poets of the Tang, I slip into a kind of reverie, losing myself inside the poem. Nothing exotic about this; I suspect it happens to most readers, but it's still remarkable when you consider that these poems are generally only a few lines long. Maybe it helps to be past a certain age too: these are poems of maturity and their beauty is indissoluble from loss, sorrow, melancholy – the sense of moments passing, bereft to us, evoked by a moon shining in black water or the sound of rain falling in the night. And, I should add, the "crazy" aspect of being alive, the scrape of futility.

*I laugh at myself—a madman  
growing older, growing madder.*

As a reader, I'd place Young's translations in the company of Burton Watson and David Hinton – although he mars his version of "Facing Snow" with the phrase "aging codger" – I can't picture *codger* belonging in any but a comic poem. My favorite translations (first love?) remain those of Kenneth Rexroth, who admittedly translates Du Fu's poems into his own, but still manages to convey their pure poetic otherness. The strength of this version is in its presentation - its sequence, exact commentary and unfussy, expressive phrasing. Here's Du Fu on New Year's Eve, drinking pepper wine:

*my life has started to race  
downhill, toward its evening*

*and what is the use of caution  
the value of restraint?*

*better to put my cares aside  
and just get drunk.*

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### **Josh says**

They say he's the best poet of China. He wrote 1300 years ago. I like him. He's saddening. He's a poet though.

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### **Jo says**

One of our sons studies Chinese, so for fun I recently pulled this volume from our shelves and we are reading a poem a night, after grace, just as we begin eating dinner. Who could be a better companion for our evenings than Du Fu (712 - 770)? That river-gazer, that wine connoisseur, that lute-player, friend, philosopher, observer-of-seasons. We marvel at the vitality of his voice, nearly 1300 years later. We're BIG Du Fu fans!

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### **Rae says**

Tu Fu's poetry is unforgettable and very moving. He lived through so many tragic events, and seeing his life through poetry is an amazing experience. His poetry can be a little hard because of the depressing atmosphere, but the emotional connection he creates in each poem is very powerful. His poetry is so rich with Confucian morality, yet he isn't preachy about it as some religious poetry can be. It is something that is ingrained in his life and, subsequently, in his poetry as well. Tu Fu's poetry doesn't always come across well in translation, so it is a good idea to find other translations of the same poem in order to find complete understanding. Tu Fu's poetry really influenced me because of the emotional power contained in each poem. He definitely deserves the title of the best poet in China.

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### **Mark Bruce says**

Love those old Chinese poets, whose lives were so exotic that they talked about disappointments in career advancement and getting drunk, unlike the more sedate poetry of today. Some achingly lovely moments in this book. I don't speak or read Chinese, so I can't tell you if this is a good translation, but it's damned fine poetry.

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### **Deni says**

estos poemas que nos llegan desde tan lejos parecen venirnos a decir que la poesía mantiene siempre la misma esencia, sin importar el tiempo. estos poemas tristes, contemplativos, repletos de una belleza intrínseca y minimalista, son inspiradores y compañeros, para leer lentamente, perdiéndonos entre sus versos e imágenes. la tristeza de Du Fu es también la mía, yo también estuve tan borracho como él. sus añoranzas, sus cantos a la amistad, su nostalgia y su total incomprendión por el ritmo burocrático y beligerante del mundo lo vuelven un poeta total. continuaré buscando poemas de estos chinos que escribían tanto tiempo atrás, sospecho que contienen una certeza que se explica a sí misma en la claridad y sencillez de sus aseveraciones.

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## **Robert Sheppard says**

WHAT EVERY EDUCATED CITIZEN OF THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW IN THE 21ST CENTURY:  
INTRODUCTION TO THE IMMORTAL TANG DYNASTY POETS OF CHINA---LI BAI (LI PO), DU FU (TU FU), WANG WEI AND BAI JUYI----THE MEETING OF THE BUDDHIST, TAOIST AND CONFUCIAN WORLDS----FROM THE WORLD LITERATURE FORUM RECOMMENDED CLASSICS AND MASTERPIECES SERIES VIA GOODREADS—ROBERT SHEPPARD, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) is considered the "Golden Age" of Chinese poetry and a time of cultural ascendancy when China was considered the pre-eminent civilization in the world. At its commencement Chang'an (modern Xian) its capital with over one million inhabitants was the largest city on the face of the Earth and a vibrant cosmopolitan cultural center at the Eastern end of the Eurasian "Silk Road" when Europe had declined into the fragmented "Dark Ages" of the post-Roman Empire feudal era and the "Islamic Golden Age" of the Abbasid Caliphate was just beginning to rise to rival it with the construction of its new and flourishing capital at Baghdad. China itself had suffered a similar fragmentation and decline with the fall of the Han Dynasty, equal in scope and splendor to the contemporaneous Roman Empire, but with the comparative difference that Tang China had achieved reunification while Europe remained disunited and had lost much of its Classical Greek and Roman heritage, only to be recovered with the Renaissance. Tang Dynasty China by contrast was in a condition of dynamic cultural growth and innovation, having both retained its Classical heritage of Confucianism and Taoism but also assimilated the new spiritual energy of the rise of Buddhism, at the same time the European world assimilated the spiritual influence of Christianity and the Muslim world that of Islam.

Into this context were born four men of poetic genius who in the Oriental world would come to occupy a place in World Literature comparable to the great names of Dante and Shakespeare: Li Bai (Li Po), Du Fu (Tu Fu), Wang Wei and Bai Juyi. All of these geniuses were influenced by the three great cultural heritages of China: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, just as Western writers such as Dante and Shakespeare were influenced by the three dominant Western Heritages of Greek Socratic rationalism, Roman law and social duty and Christian spirituality and moral cultivation. It was during the Tang Dynasty that Chinese culture became fully Buddhist, especially with the translations of Buddhist Scripture brought back from India by Xuanzong, the famous monk-traveller celebrated in the "Journey to the West." Each poet was influenced by all three heritages, but with perhaps one heritage on the ascendant in each man in accordance with his temperament and worldview, with Du Fu emphasizing the social conscience and duty of Confucianism in his poetry, Li Bai the free spirit and dynamic natural balances of Taoism, and Wang Wei and Bai Juyi emphasizing the Buddhist ethos of detachment from this world and overcoming desire in quest of spiritual enlightenment.

THE GLORIOUS TANG DYNASTY---HIGH POINT OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

The Tang Dynasty, with its capital at Chang'an, then the most populous city in the world, is generally regarded as a high point in Chinese civilization—equal to, or surpassing that of, the earlier Han Dynasty—a Second Golden Age of cosmopolitan culture. Its territory, acquired through the military campaigns of its early rulers, rivaled that of the Han Dynasty. In censuses of the 7th and 8th centuries, the Tang records estimated the population at about 50 million people, rising by the 9th century to perhaps about 80 million people, though considerably reduced by the convulsions of the An Lu Shan Rebellion, making it the largest political entity in the world at the time, surpassing the earlier Han Dynasty's probable 60 million and the contemporaneous Abbasid Caliphate's probable 50 million and even rivaling the Roman Empire at its height, which at the time of Trajan in 117 AD was estimated at 88 million. Such massive populations, economic and cultural resources would not be matched until the rise of the nations and empires of the modern era.

With its large population and economic base, the dynasty was able to support a large proportion of its population devoted to cultural accomplishments as well as a government, Civil Service administration, scholarly schools and examinations, and raise professional and conscripted armies of hundreds of thousands of troops to contend with nomadic powers in dominating Inner Asia and the lucrative trade routes along the Silk Road. Various kingdoms and states paid tribute to the Tang court, and were indirectly controlled through a protectorate system. Besides political hegemony, the Tang also exerted a powerful cultural influence over neighboring states such Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, with much of Japanese culture, government, literature and religion finding its model and origin in Tang Dynasty China.

In this global Medieval Era we can say with fairness that while Europe went into fragmentation and decline until the Renaissance the two pre-eminent centers of world civilization were Chang'an of the Tang Empire and Baghdad of the Abbasid Caliphate and the Islamic Golden Age. Two incidents characterize the interaction of these two Medieval "Superpowers," and also affected literary production of the age: The Battle of Talas and the An Lu Shan Rebellion. The Battle of Talas of 751 AD was the collision of the two expanding superpowers, the Tang and the Abbasid Muslims, which in the defeat of the Tang Empire's armies resulted first in the halt of its expansion along the Silk Road towards the Middle-East, and secondly, in the important transfer of Chinese paper-making technology through captured artisans from China to the Arabs, an important factor fueling the Islamic Golden Age and its literature. The An Lu Shan Rebellion, arising out of the doomed love affair of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong and the Imperial Concubine Yang Gui Fei disrupted all of China, perhaps causing the deaths of 20-30 million people, and affecting the personal lives and writings of all the poets including Li Bai, Wang Wei and Du Fu. It also was the occasion of the Abbasid Caliph sending 4000 cavalry troops to help the Tang Emperor suppress the rebellion, a force that permanently settled in China and became a catalyst for growth of the Muslim population in China and Muslim-Tang cultural interpenetration along the Silk Road. It also became the subject of the Tang poet Bai Juyi's immortal epic of the Emperor, the Rebellion and the tragic death of the beautiful Imperial Concubine, Yang Gui Fei in "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow."

## THE COALESCING OF THE CONFUCIAN, TAOIST AND BUDDHIST WORLDS: THE PARABLE OF THE THREE VINEGAR TASTERS

The Parable of "The Three Vinegar Tasters" is a traditional subject in Chinese religious painting and poetry. The allegorical composition depicts the three founders of China's major religious and philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The theme in the painting has been variously interpreted as affirming the harmony and unity of the three faiths and traditions of China or as favoring Taoism relative to the others.

The three sages of the tale are dipping their fingers in a vat of vinegar and tasting it; one man reacts with a sour expression, one reacts with a bitter expression, and one reacts with a sweet expression. The three men are Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Zi, respectively. Each man's expression represents the predominant attitude of his religion and ethos: Confucianism saw life as sour, in need of rules, ritual and restraint to correct the degeneration of the people; Buddhism saw life as bitter, dominated by pain and suffering, slavery to desire and the false illusion of Maya; and Taoism saw life as fundamentally good in its natural state. Another interpretation of the painting is that, since the three men are gathered around one vat of vinegar, the "three teachings" are one.

## CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism saw life as sour, in need of rules, social discipline and restraint to correct the degeneration of people; the present was out of step with a more "golden" past and that the government had no understanding of the way of the universe—the right response was to worship the ancestors, purify and support tradition, instil ethical understanding, and strengthen social and family bonds. Confucianism, being concerned with the outside world, thus viewed the "vinegar of life" as "adulterated wine" needing social cleansing.

## BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, who first pursued then rejected philosophy and asceticism before discovering enlightenment through meditation. He concluded that we are bound to the cycles of life and death because of tanha (desire, thirst, craving). During Buddha's first sermon he preached, "neither the extreme of indulgence nor the extremes of asceticism was acceptable as a way of life and that one should avoid extremes and seek to live in the Middle Way". "Thus the goal of basic Buddhist practice is not the immediate achievement of a state of "Nirvana" or bliss in some heaven but the extinguishing of tanha, or desire leading to fatal illusion. When tanha is extinguished, one is released from the cycle of life---birth, suffering, death, and rebirth---only then can one achieve Nirvana.

One interpretation is that Buddhism, being concerned with the self, viewed the vinegar as a polluter of the taster's body due to its extreme flavor. Another interpretation for the image is that Buddhism reports the facts as they are, that vinegar is vinegar and isn't naturally sweet on the tongue. Trying to make it sweet is ignoring what it is, pretending it is sweet---living for illusion or Maya---is denying what it is, while the equally harmful opposite is being overly disturbed by the sourness. Detachment, reason and moderation are thus required.

## TAOISM

Taoism saw life as fundamentally good in its natural state.

From the Taoist point of view, sourness and bitterness come from the interfering and unappreciative mind. Life itself, when understood and utilized for what it is, is sweet, despite its occasional sourness and bitterness. In "The Vinegar Tasters" Lao Zi's (Lao Tzu) expression is sweet because of how the religious teachings of Taoism view the world. Every natural thing is intrinsically good as long as it remains true to its nature. This perspective allows Lao Zi to experience the taste of vinegar without judging it, knowing that nature will restore its own balance transcending any extreme, via Yin and Yang and "The Dao," the underlying Supreme Creative Dialectic driving all things and human experiences.

## LI BAI (LI PO), SUPREME TANG DYNASTY LYRICIST AND TAOIST ADEPT

Li Bai (701-762) came from an obscure, possibly Turkish background and unlike other Tang poets did not attempt to take the Imperial Examination to become a scholar-official. He was infamous for his exuberant drunkenness, hard partying and "bad boy" romantic lifestyle. In his writing he chose freer forms closer to the folk songs and natural voice, though laced with playful fancy, as in the famous example of his lyric conversations with the moon. He frequented Taoist temples and echoed the Taoist embrace of the natural human emotions and feelings; that connection got him an appointment to the Imperial Court, but his misbehaviour soon ended in his dismissal. Nonetheless, he became famous and invited into the best circles to recite his works. He emphasized spontaneity and freedom of expression in his works, yet created works of extraordinary depth of feeling:

### Drinking Alone With the Moon

A pot of wine amoung the flowers.  
I drink alone, no friend with me.  
I raise my cup to invite the moon.  
He and my shadow and I make three.

The moon does not know how to drink;  
My shadow mimes my capering;  
But I'll make merry with them both---  
And soon enough it will be Spring.

I sing--the moon moves to and fro.  
I dance--my shadow leaps and sways.  
Still sober, we exchange our joys.  
Drunk--and we'll go our separate ways.

Let's pledge---beyond human ties---to be friends,  
And meet where the Silver River ends.

Popular legend has it that Li Bai died in such a drunken fit, carousing alone on a boat on a lake, when he, drunk, leaned overboard to embrace the reflection of the moon in the waters, and drowned.

## DU FU---SUPREME POET OF SOCIAL CONSCIENCE AND ENLIGHTENED CONFUCIAN SPIRIT

Du Fu (712-770) was the grandson of a famous court poet, and took the Imperial Examination twice, but failed both times. His talent for poetry became known to the emperor, however, who arranged a special examination to allow his admittance as a court scholar-official. His outspoken social conscience,

denunciation of injustice and insistence on following the pure ideals of Confucianism however, alienated higher officials and his career was confined to minor posts in remote provinces, and his travels and observations were often the occasion of his poetry. He acutely rendered human suffering, particularly of the common people, and his stylistic complexity and excellence made him the "poet's poet" as well as the "people's poet" for centuries, as exemplified in his famous "Ballad of the Army Carts:"

### Ballad of the Army Carts

Carts rattle and squeak,  
Horses snort and neigh---  
Bows and arrows at their waists, the conscripts march away.  
Fathers, mothers, children, wives run to say good-bye.  
The Xianyang Bridge in clouds of dust is hidden from the eye.  
They tug at them and stamp their feet, weep, and obstruct their way.  
The weeping rises to the sky.  
Along the road a passer-by  
Questions the conscripts. They reply:

They mobilize us constantly. Sent northwards at fifteen  
To guard the River, we were forced once more to volunteer,  
Though we are forty now, to man the western front this year.  
The headman tied our headcloths for us when we first left here.  
We came back white-haired---to be sent again to the frontier.  
Those frontier posts could fill the sea with the blood of those who've died.  
In county after county to the east, Sir, don't you know,  
In village after village only thorns and brambles grow.  
Even if there's a sturdy wife to wield the plough and hoe,  
The borders of the fields have merged, you can't tell east from west.  
It's worse still for the men from Qin, as fighters they're the best--  
And so, like chickens or like dogs they're driven to and fro.

Though you are kind enough to ask,  
Dare we complain about our task?  
Take, Sir, this winter. In Guanxi  
The troops have not yet been set free.  
The district officers come to press  
The land tax from us nonetheless.  
But, Sir, how can we possibly pay?  
Having a son's a curse today.  
Far better to have daughters, get them married---  
A son will lie lost in the grass, unburied.  
Why, Sir, on distant Qinghai shore  
The bleached ungathered bones lie year on year.  
New ghosts complain, and those who died before  
Weep in the wet gray sky and haunt the ear.

## WANG WEI--SCHOLAR-OFFICIAL, "RENAISSANCE MAN" AND BUDDHIST POET

Wang Wei was one of the most prominent poets of the Tang Dynasty, but also a famous painter, calligrapher and musician. He hailed from a distinguished scholar family, passed the highest Imperial Examination with honors and worked his way up the bureaucratic hierarchy, often assuming posts in far-away provinces. His poems displayed the high court poetic style--witty, urbane and impersonal, reinforced by the Buddhist detachment and equanimity of his religious beliefs. He became influential at the royal court until being captured in the An Lu Shan Rebellion, he was forced to work for the usurping Emperor, then punished by the reinstated Emperor. In accordance with Chan (Zen) Buddhism his work reflects the detached and melancholy view of transitory life seen as illusion. His official travels involving years of absence or threatened death far from home were often the occasion of many of his poems:

### Farewell to Yuan the Second on His Mission to Anxi

In Wei City mornibng rain dampens the light dust.  
By the travelers' lodge, green upon green---the willows color is new.  
I urge you to drink up yet another glass of wine:  
Going west from Yang Pass, there are no old friends.

## BAI JUYI (BO JUYI), AUTHOR OF THE "SONG OF EVERLASTING SORROW," TALE OF THE DOOMED LOVE OF THE EMPEROR XUANZONG AND THE BEAUTIFUL IMPERIAL CONCUBINE YANG GUI FEI

Bai Juyi (772-846) of a later generation from the other three poets, passed the Imperial Examination with honors and served in a variety of posts. He, like Du Fu, took seriously the Confucian mandate to employ poetry as vehicle for social and political protest against injustice. He also, like Bai Juyi, tried to simplify and make more natural and accessible his poetic voice, drawing closer to the people. His most immortal classic is the "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" which presents in verse the epic tragic tale of the great love affair between Emperor Xuanzong and his Imperial Concubine, Yang Gui Fei, reminiscent of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, which ended during the An Lu Shan Rebellion as the army accused her of distracting the Emperor from his duties and corruption and demanded her death. The poem relates how the Emperor sent a Taoist priest to find his dead lover in heaven and convey his devotion to her and her answer:

"Our souls belong together," she said, "like this gold and this shell--  
Somewhere, sometime, on earth or in heaven, we shall surely meet."  
And she sent him, by his messenger, a sentence reminding him  
Of vows which had been known only to their two hearts:  
"On the seventh day of the Seventh-month, in the Palace of Long Life,  
We told each other secretly in the quiet midnight world

That we wished to fly in heaven, two birds with the wings of one,  
And to grow together on the earth, two branches of one tree."...  
Earth endures, heaven endures; sometime both shall end,  
While this unending sorrow goes on and on forever.

## SPIRITUS MUNDI AND CHINESE LITERATURE

My own work, *Spiritus Mundi*, the contemporary epic of social idealism featuring the struggle of global idealists to establish a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly for global democracy and to head off a threatened WWIII in the Middle-East also reflects the theme of the Confucian ethic that literature should contribute to social justice and public morality. Like Du Fu it abhors the waste, suffering, social irresponsibility and stupidity of war. Like Li Bai it celebrates the life of nature and human emotions, including sexuality. About a quarter of the novel is set in China, and one of its principal themes is a renewal of spirituality across the globe.

World Literature Forum invites you to check out the great Chinese Tang Dynasty poetic masterpieces of World Literature, and also the contemporary epic novel *Spiritus Mundi*, by Robert Sheppard. For a fuller discussion of the concept of World Literature you are invited to look into the extended discussion in the new book *Spiritus Mundi*, by Robert Sheppard, one of the principal themes of which is the emergence and evolution of World Literature:

For Discussions on World Literature and n Literary Criticism in *Spiritus Mundi*:  
<http://worldliteratureandliterarycrit...>

Robert Sheppard

Editor-in-Chief  
World Literature Forum  
Author, *Spiritus Mundi* Novel  
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*Spiritus Mundi* on Amazon, Book I: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CIGJFG0>  
*Spiritus Mundi*, Book II: The Romance <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CGM8BZG>

### **Gregg says**

A noble effort to present Du Fu as China's most important poet to contemporary English readers. Unfortunately it left me with a sense of: I guess you had to be there. I remained solidly in 21st century.

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### **Edgar Trevizo says**

Fino, exquisito, delicado. Sin más ornamento que sus ideas, cada poema es un pequeño paseo en silencio, dentro de uno mismo. Gran poesía.

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