

Classic Poetry Series

Wang Wei

- poems -

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A Farmhouse on the Wei River

In the slant of the sun on the country-side,
Cattle and sheep trail home along the lane;
And a rugged old man in a thatch door
Leans on a staff and thinks of his son, the herdboy.
There are whirring pheasants, full wheat-ears,
Silk-worms asleep, pared mulberry-leaves.
And the farmers, returning with hoes on their shoulders,
Hail one another familiarly.
...No wonder I long for the simple life
And am sighing the old song, Oh, to go Back Again!

Wang Wei

A Green Stream.

I have sailed the River of Yellow Flowers,
Borne by the channel of a green stream,
Rounding ten thousand turns through the mountains
On a journey of less than thirty miles....
Rapids hum over heaped rocks;
But where light grows dim in the thick pines,
The surface of an inlet sways with nut-horns
And weeds are lush along the banks.
...Down in my heart I have always been as pure
As this limpid water is....
Oh, to remain on a broad flat rock
And to cast a fishing-line forever!

Wang Wei

A Message from my Lodge at Wangchuan to Pei Di

The mountains are cold and blue now
And the autumn waters have run all day.
By my thatch door, leaning on my staff,
I listen to cicadas in the evening wind.
Sunset lingers at the ferry,
Supper-smoke floats up from the houses.
...Oh, when shall I pledge the great Hermit again
And sing a wild poem at Five Willows?

Wang Wei

A Message to Commissioner Li At Zizhou

From ten thousand valleys the trees touch heaven;
On a thousand peaks cuckoos are calling;
And, after a night of mountain rain,
From each summit come hundreds of silken cascades.
...If girls are asked in tribute the fibre they weave,
Or farmers quarrel over taro fields,
Preside as wisely as Wenweng did....
Is fame to be only for the ancients?

Wang Wei

A Song at Weicheng.

A morning-rain has settled the dust in Weicheng;
Willows are green again in the tavern dooryard....
Wait till we empty one more cup --
West of Yang Gate there'll be no old friends.

Wang Wei

A Song of a Girl from Loyang

There's a girl from Loyang in the door across the street,
She looks fifteen, she may be a little older.
...While her master rides his rapid horse with jade bit and bridle,
Her handmaid brings her cod-fish in a golden plate.
On her painted pavilions, facing red towers,
Cornices are pink and green with peach-bloom and with willow,
Canopies of silk awn her seven-scented chair,
And rare fans shade her, home to her nine-flowered curtains.
Her lord, with rank and wealth and in the bud of life,
Exceeds in munificence the richest men of old.
He favours this girl of lowly birth, he has her taught to dance;
And he gives away his coral-trees to almost anyone.
The wind of dawn just stirs when his nine soft lights go out,
Those nine soft lights like petals in a flying chain of flowers.
Between dances she has barely time for singing over the songs;
No sooner is she dressed again than incense burns before her.
Those she knows in town are only the rich and the lavish,
And day and night she is visiting the hosts of the gayest mansions.
...Who notices the girl from Yue with a face of white jade,
Humble, poor, alone, by the river, washing silk?

Wang Wei

A Song of an Autumn Night.

Under the crescent moon a light autumn dew
Has chilled the robe she will not change --
And she touches a silver lute all night,
Afraid to go back to her empty room.

Wang Wei

A Song of Peach-Blossom River

A fisherman is drifting, enjoying the spring mountains,
And the peach-trees on both banks lead him to an ancient source.
Watching the fresh-coloured trees, he never thinks of distance
Till he comes to the end of the blue stream and suddenly- strange men!
It's a cave-with a mouth so narrow that he has to crawl through;
But then it opens wide again on a broad and level path --
And far beyond he faces clouds crowning a reach of trees,
And thousands of houses shadowed round with flowers and bamboos....
Woodsmen tell him their names in the ancient speech of Han;
And clothes of the Qin Dynasty are worn by all these people
Living on the uplands, above the Wuling River,
On farms and in gardens that are like a world apart,
Their dwellings at peace under pines in the clear moon,
Until sunrise fills the low sky with crowing and barking.
...At news of a stranger the people all assemble,
And each of them invites him home and asks him where he was born.
Alleys and paths are cleared for him of petals in the morning,
And fishermen and farmers bring him their loads at dusk....
They had left the world long ago, they had come here seeking refuge;
They have lived like angels ever since, blessedly far away,
No one in the cave knowing anything outside,
Outsiders viewing only empty mountains and thick clouds.
...The fisherman, unaware of his great good fortune,
Begins to think of country, of home, of worldly ties,
Finds his way out of the cave again, past mountains and past rivers,
Intending some time to return, when he has told his kin.
He studies every step he takes, fixes it well in mind,
And forgets that cliffs and peaks may vary their appearance.
...It is certain that to enter through the deepness of the mountain,
A green river leads you, into a misty wood.
But now, with spring-floods everywhere and floating peachpetals --
Which is the way to go, to find that hidden source?

Wang Wei

A Study

Light cloud pavilion light rain
Dark yard day weary open
Sit look green moss colour
About to on person clothes come

There's light cloud, and drizzle round the pavilion,
In the dark yard, I wearily open a gate.
I sit and look at the colour of green moss,
Ready for people's clothing to pick up.

Wang Wei

A View of the Han River

With its three southern branches reaching the Chu border,
And its nine streams touching the gateway of Jing,
This river runs beyond heaven and earth,
Where the colour of mountains both is and is not.
The dwellings of men seem floating along
On ripples of the distant sky --
These beautiful days here in Xiangyang
Make drunken my old mountain heart!

Wang Wei

An Early Audience at the Palace of Light. (Harmonizing a poem for Secretary Jia Zhi.)

The red-capped Cock-Man has just announced morning;
The Keeper of the Robes brings Jade-Cloud Furs;
Heaven's nine doors reveal the palace and its courtyards;
And the coats of many countries bow to the Pearl Crown.
Sunshine has entered the giants' carven palms;
Incense wreathes the Dragon Robe:
The audience adjourns-and the five-coloured edict
Sets girdle-beads clinking toward the Lake of the Phoenix.

Wang Wei

An Evening in the Mountains

After rain the empty mountain
Stands autumnal in the evening,
Moonlight in its groves of pine,
Stones of crystal in its brooks.
Bamboos whisper of washer-girls bound home,
Lotus-leaves yield before a fisher-boat --
And what does it matter that springtime has gone,
While you are here, O Prince of Friends?

Wang Wei

Answering Vice-Prefect Zhang

As the years go by, give me but peace,
Freedom from ten thousand matters.
I ask myself and always answer:
What can be better than coming home?
A wind from the pine-trees blows my sash,
And my lute is bright with the mountain moon.
You ask me about good and evil fortune?....
Hark, on the lake there's a fisherman singing!

Wang Wei

At the Lake Pavilion

Small barge go to meet honoured guest
Leisurely lake on come
At railing face cup alcohol
On all sides lotus bloom

On a skiff I meet an honoured guest,
Slowly, slowly, it comes across the lake.
Facing at the railing, we drink a cup of wine,
On all sides, lotus flowers are in bloom.

Wang Wei

Bamboo Adobe

I sit along in the dark bamboo grove,
Playing the zither and whistling long.
In this deep wood no one would know -
Only the bright moon comes to shine.

(Translated by Liu Wu-chi)

Wang Wei

Birds Calling in the Ravine

I'm idle, as osmanthus flowers fall,
This quiet night in spring, the hill is empty.
The moon comes out and startles the birds on the hill,
They don't stop calling in the spring ravine.

Wang Wei

Bound Home to Mount Song

The limpid river, past its bushes
Running slowly as my chariot,
Becomes a fellow voyager
Returning home with the evening birds.
A ruined city-wall overtops an old ferry,
Autumn sunset floods the peaks.
...Far away, beside Mount Song,
I shall close my door and be at peace.

Wang Wei

Deer Enclosure

Empty hill not see person
Yet hear person voice sound
Return scene enter deep forest
Duplicate light green moss on

Hills are empty, no man is seen,
Yet the sound of people's voices is heard.
Light is cast into the deep forest,
And shines again on green moss.

Wang Wei

Duckweed Pond

Spring pond deep and wide

Time for the vessel's return

Slow the duckweed flows together

Willows draw them apart again

Wang Wei

Farewell

Down horse drink gentleman alcohol
Ask gentleman what place go
Gentleman say not achieve wish
Return lie south mountain near
Still go nothing more ask
White cloud not exhaust time

Dismounting, I offer my friend a cup of wine,
I ask what place he is headed to.
He says he has not achieved his aims,
Is retiring to the southern hills.
Now go, and ask me nothing more,
White clouds will drift on for all time.

Wang Wei

Farewell (II)

Hill at mutual escort stop
Day dusk shut wood door
Spring grass next year green
Prince offspring return not return

We bid each other farewell beside the hill,
As day meets dusk, I close the wooden gate.
Next year, in spring, there will be green grass again,
But will my honoured friend return?

Wang Wei

Farewell to Hsin Chien at Hibiscus Pavilion

A cold rain mingled with the river
 at evening, when I entered Wu;
In the clear dawn I bid you farewell,
 lonely as Ch'u Mountain.
My kinsfolk in Loyang,
 should they ask about me,
Tell them: "My heart is a piece of ice
 in a jade cup!"

Wang Wei

Fields and Gardens by the River Qi

I dwell apart by the River Qi,
Where the Eastern wilds stretch far without hills.
The sun darkens beyond the mulberry trees;
The river glistens through the villages.
Shepherd boys depart, gazing back to their hamlets;
Hunting dogs return following their men.
When a man's at peace, what business does he have?
I shut fast my rustic door throughout the day.

Wang Wei

Fine Apricot Lodge

Fine apricot cut for roofbeam
Fragrant cogongrass tie for eaves
Not know ridgepole in cloud
Go make people among rain

Fine apricot was cut for the roofbeam,
Fragrant cogongrass tied for the eaves.
I know not when the cloud from this house
Will go to make rain among the people.

Wang Wei

Harmonizing a Poem, (beside Palace Attendant Guo.)

High beyond the thick wall a tower shines with sunset
Where peach and plum are blooming and the willowcotton flies.
You have heard in your office the court-bell of twilight;
Birds find perches, officials head for home.
Your morning-jade will tinkle as you thread the golden palace;
You will bring the word of Heaven from the closing gates at night.
And I should serve there with you; but being full of years,
I have taken off official robes and am resting from my troubles.

Wang Wei

Huazi Ridge

Fly bird go no limit
Join mountain again autumn colour
Up down Huazi Ridge
Melancholy feeling what extreme

A bird in flight goes on without limit,
Joined hills are autumn's colours again.
From top to bottom of Huazi Ridge,
Melancholy feeling has no end.

Wang Wei

Hut Among the Bamboos

Sitting alone
 in the hush of the bamboo grove
I thrum my lute
 and whistle lingering notes.
In the secrecy of the wood
 no one can hear --
Only the clear moon
 comes to shine on me.

Wang Wei

In My Lodge at Wang Chuan,(After a Long Rain.)

The woods have stored the rain, and slow comes the smoke
As rice is cooked on faggots and carried to the fields;
Over the quiet marsh-land flies a white egret,
And mango-birds are singing in the full summer trees....
I have learned to watch in peace the mountain morningglories,
To eat split dewy sunflower-seeds under a bough of pine,
To yield the post of honour to any boor at all....
Why should I frighten sea gulls, even with a thought?

Wang Wei

Jinzhu Ridge

Wingceltis goldenrain shine empty bend
Fresh and green ripple ripples ripples
Secret enter Shang hill road
Woodcutter not able know

Wingceltis and goldenrain shine at the empty bend,
Fresh and green, rippling ever onward.
A secret road leads up to Shangshan hill,
Even the woodcutter does not know.

Wang Wei

Lily Magnolia Enclosure

Autumn hill gather surplus shine
Fly bird chase before companion.
Colour green moment bright,
Sunset mist no fixed place.

The autumn hill gathers remaining light,
A flying bird chases its companion before.
The green colour is momentarily bright,
Sunset mist has no fixed place.

Wang Wei

Looking Down in a Spring-rain

Round a turn of the Qin Fortress winds the Wei River,
And Yellow Mountain foot-hills enclose the Court of China;
Past the South Gate willows comes the Car of Many Bells
On the upper Palace-Garden Road-a solid length of blossom;
A Forbidden City roof holds two phoenixes in cloud;
The foliage of spring shelters multitudes from rain;
And now, when the heavens are propitious for action,
Here is our Emperor ready-no wasteful wanderer.

Wang Wei

Mengcheng Col

New house Mengcheng entrance
Old tree surplus sorrow willow
Come person again for who
Only sorrow former person be

Who will come after, I do not know,
He must feel sorrow for those in the past.

Wang Wei

Mount Zhongnan

Its massive height near the City of Heaven
Joins a thousand mountains to the corner of the sea.
Clouds, when I look back, close behind me,
Mists, when I enter them, are gone.
A central peak divides the wilds
And weather into many valleys.
...Needing a place to spend the night,
I call to a wood-cutter over the river

Wang Wei

My Retreat at Mount Zhongnan

My heart in middle age found the Way.
And I came to dwell at the foot of this mountain.
When the spirit moves, I wander alone
Amid beauty that is all for me....
I will walk till the water checks my path,
Then sit and watch the rising clouds --
And some day meet an old wood-cutter
And talk and laugh and never return.

Wang Wei

Peach Blossom Journey

Fishing boat pursue water love hill spring
Both banks peach blossom arrive ancient river crossing
Travel look red tree not know far
Travel furthest blue stream not see people
Mountain mouth stealthy move begin cave profound
Mountain open spacious view spin flat land
Far see one place accumulate cloud tree
Nearby join 1000 homes scattered flower bamboo
Firewood person first express Han surname given name
Reside person not change Qin clothing clothing
Reside person together live Wu Ling source
Still from outside outside build field orchard
Moon bright pine below room pen quiet
Sun through cloud middle chicken dog noisy
Surprise hear common visitor contend arrive gather
Compete lead back home ask all town
At brightness alley alley sweep blossom begin
Approach dusk fisher woodman via water return
Beginning reason evade earth leave person among
Change ask god immortal satisfy not return
Gorge inside who know be human affairs
World middle far gaze sky cloud hill
Not doubt magic place hard hear see
Dust heart not exhaust think country country
Beyond hole not decide away hill water
Leave home eventually plan far travel spread
Self say pass through old not lost
Who know peak gully now arrive change
Now only mark entrance hill deep
Blue stream how many times reach cloud forest
Spring come all over be peach blossom water
Not know immortal source what place search

A fisher's boat chased the water into the coveted hills,
Both banks were covered in peach blossom at the ancient river crossing.
He knew not how far he sailed, gazing at the reddened trees,
He travelled to the end of the blue stream, seeing no man on the way.
Then finding a crack in the hillside, he squeezed through the deepest of caves,
And beyond the mountain a vista opened of flat land all about!
In the distance he saw clouds and trees gathered together,
Nearby amongst a thousand homes flowers and bamboo were scattered.
A wood-gatherer was the first to speak a Han-era name,
The inhabitants' dress was unchanged since the time of Qin.
The people lived together on uplands above Wu Ling river,
Apart from the outside world they laid their fields and plantations.
Below the pines and the bright moon, all was quiet in the houses,
When the sun started to shine through the clouds, the chickens and dogs gave voice.
Startled to find a stranger amongst them, the people jostled around,
They competed to invite him in and ask about his home.
As brightness came, the lanes had all been swept of blossom,
By dusk, along the water the fishers and woodsmen returned.

To escape the troubled world they had first left men's society,
They live as if become immortals, no reason now to return.
In that valley they knew nothing of the way we live outside,
From within our world we gaze afar at empty clouds and hills.
Who would not doubt that magic place so hard to find,
The fisher's worldly heart could not stop thinking of his home.
He left that land, but its hills and rivers never left his heart,
Eventually he again set out, and planned to journey back.
By memory, he passed along the way he'd taken before,
Who could know the hills and gullies had now completely changed?
Now he faced only the great mountain where he remembered the entrance,
Each time he followed the clear stream, he found only cloud and forest.
Spring comes, and all again is peach blossom and water,
No-one knows how to reach that immortal place.

Wang Wei

Random Poem

You also come from my home town,
You must know all the home town news.
At dawn, before the silken window,
Is it too cold for plum blossom to show?

Wang Wei

Remembrance

A red berry grows
 in the south country --
The boughs are full of them
 when spring arrives.
Gather some, I pray,
 and fill your pockets --
These are the best
 forget-me-knots!

Wang Wei

Replying to Subprefect Zhang

Old age think good quiet
Everything not concern heart
Self attend without great plan
Empty know return old forest
Pine wind blow undo belt
Hill moon light pluck qin
Gentleman ask end open reason
Fisherman song enter riverbank deep

Now in old age, I know the value of silence,
The world's affairs no longer stir my heart.
Turning to myself, I have no greater plan,
All I can do is return to the forest of old.
Wind from the pine trees blows my sash undone,
The moon shines through the hills; I pluck the qin.
You ask me why the world must rise and fall,
Fishermen sing on the steep banks of the river.

Wang Wei

Returning to Songshan Mountain

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Wang Wei

Seeing Off Yuan the Second on a Mission to Anxi

Weicheng morning rain moisten light dust
Visitor house green green willow colour new
Urge gentleman further finish one cup alcohol
West outside Yang Pass no friend person

At Weicheng morning rain has dampened light dust,
By the hostel, the willows are all fresh and green.
I urge my friend to drink a last cup of wine,
West of Yang Pass, there will be no friends.

Wang Wei

Sometimes I'd walk

Sometimes I'd walk,
walk far from home,
the things I've seen,
and I alone.

Wang Wei

Song of an Old General

When he was a youth of fifteen or twenty,
He chased a wild horse, he caught him and rode him,
He shot the white-browed mountain tiger,
He defied the yellow-bristled Horseman of Ye.
Fighting single-handed for a thousand miles,
With his naked dagger he could hold a multitude.
...Granted that the troops of China were as swift as heaven's thunder
And that Tartar soldiers perished in pitfalls fanged with iron,
General Wei Qing's victory was only a thing of chance.
And General Li Guang's thwarted effort was his fate, not his fault.
Since this man's retirement he is looking old and worn:
Experience of the world has hastened his white hairs.
Though once his quick dart never missed the right eye of a bird,
Now knotted veins and tendons make his left arm like an osier.
He is sometimes at the road-side selling melons from his garden,
He is sometimes planting willows round his hermitage.
His lonely lane is shut away by a dense grove,
His vacant window looks upon the far cold mountains
But, if he prayed, the waters would come gushing for his men
And never would he wanton his cause away with wine.
...War-clouds are spreading, under the Helan Range;
Back and forth, day and night, go feathered messages;
In the three River Provinces, the governors call young men --
And five imperial edicts have summoned the old general.
So he dusts his iron coat and shines it like snow-
Waves his dagger from its jade hilt in a dance of starry steel.
He is ready with his strong northern bow to smite the Tartar chieftain --
That never a foreign war-dress may affront the Emperor.
...There once was an aged Prefect, forgotten and far away,
Who still could manage triumph with a single stroke.

Wang Wei

South Hill

Light boat south hill go
North hill vast expanse hard reach
Separate bank see person home
Long way off not recognise

A light boat sets off from the southern hill,
The north is hard to reach across the vastness.
On the other bank, I look for my home,
It cannot be recognised so far off.

Wang Wei

Stopping at Incense Storing Temple

Not know incense store temple
Few enter cloud peaks
Ancient trees no person path
Deep hills what place bell
Spring sound choke sheer rock
Sun colour cold green pines
Dusk empty pool bend
Peace meditation control fierce dragon

I did not know the incense storing temple,
I walked a few miles into the clouded peaks.
No man on the path between the ancient trees,
A bell rang somewhere deep among the hills.
A spring sounded choked, running down steep rocks,
The green pines chilled the sunlight's coloured rays.
Come dusk, at the bend of a deserted pool,
Through meditation I controlled passion's dragon.

Wang Wei

Temple Tree Path

Narrow path sunless temple locust tree
Deep dark much green moss
Should gate except meet sweep
In case have hill monk come

A narrow, sunless path to the temple tree,
Deep and dark; abundant green moss.
Wait by the gate when finished sweeping the yard,
In case a monk should come down from the hill.

Wang Wei

The Beautiful Xi Shi

Since beauty is honoured all over the Empire,
How could Xi Shi remain humbly at home? --
Washing clothes at dawn by a southern lake --
And that evening a great lady in a palace of the north:
Lowly one day, no different from the others,
The next day exalted, everyone praising her.
No more would her own hands powder her face
Or arrange on her shoulders a silken robe.
And the more the King loved her, the lovelier she looked,
Blinding him away from wisdom.
...Girls who had once washed silk beside her
Were kept at a distance from her chariot.
And none of the girls in her neighbours' houses
By pursing their brows could copy her beauty.

Wang Wei

The Cornel Grove

Bear fruit red and green
Again as if flower further open
Hill at if remain guest
Place here cornel cup

When bearing fruit it's red and green,
As if the flowers were budding again.
If a guest remains on the hill,
Set a cup of cornel here.

Wang Wei

Thinking of My Brothers in Shantung on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month

Alone now in a strange country,
 feeling myself a stranger,
On this bright festival day
 I doubly pine for my kinsfolk.
Far away, I know my brothers
 will be climbing the heights
With dogwood sprays in their jackets,
 and one man missing!

Wang Wei

To Qiwu Qian Bound Home After Failing an Examination.

In a happy reign there should be no hermits;
The wise and able should consult together....
So you, a man of the eastern mountains,
Gave up your life of picking herbs
And came all the way to the Gate of Gold --
But you found your devotion unavailing.
...To spend the Day of No Fire on one of the southern rivers,
You have mended your spring clothes here in these northern cities.
I pour you the farewell wine as you set out from the capital --
Soon I shall be left behind here by my bosom friend.
In your sail-boat of sweet cinnamon-wood
You will float again toward your own thatch door,
Led along by distant trees
To a sunset shining on a far-away town.
...What though your purpose happened to fail,
Doubt not that some of us can hear high music.

Wang Wei

Toward the Temple of Heaped Fragrance

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Wang Wei

Wei City Song

Wei City morning rain
dampens the light dust.

By this inn, green,
newly green willows.

I urge you to drink
another cup of wine;

west of Yang Pass
are no old friends.

Wang Wei