

SELECTED POEMS BY DU FU:
"ON THE RIVER"
"I STAND ALONE"
"VIEWS IN SPRINGTIME"

Introduction

Du Fu (712-770) is among the most celebrated poets of the Tang. He served as an official (although never in the high-ranking posts that he hoped for). He also lived through the An Lushan Rebellion, being taken prisoner by the rebels in 756 and escaping to rejoin the Tang court the next year.

Selected Documents with Questions

"On the River" from *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry*, edited and translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 234. © 1984 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

"I Stand Alone" from *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 426. © 1996 W. W. Norton & Co. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

"Views in Springtime" translated by Paul Rouzer.

Selected Poems by Du Fu:

"On the River"

"I Stand Alone"

"Views in Springtime"

"On the River"

On the river, every day these heavy rains —
bleak, bleak, autumn in Ching-ch'u.

High winds strip the leaves from the trees;
through the long night I hug my fur robe.

I recall my official record, keep looking in the mirror,
recall my comings and goings, leaning alone in an upper room.

In these perilous times I long to serve my sovereign —
old and feeble as I am, I can't stop thinking of it!

[Translated by Burton Watson]

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
SELECTED POEMS BY DU FU: "ON THE RIVER"; "I STAND ALONE"; "VIEWS IN SPRINGTIME"**

"I Stand Alone"

A single bird of prey beyond the sky;
a pair of white gulls between riverbanks.

Hovering wind tossed, ready to strike;
the pair, at their ease, roaming to and fro.

And the dew is also full on the grasses,
spiders' filaments still not drawn in.

Instigations in nature approach men's affairs —
I stand alone in thousands of sources of worry.

[Translated by Stephen Owen]

"Views in Springtime"

The country is smashed: hills and rivers remain.
The city turns to spring: plants and trees grow deep.

Moved by the moment, flowers splash tears;
Resentful of parting, birds startle the heart.

Beacon fires have lasted for three months now;
Letters from home are worth 10,000 in gold.

I've scratched my white hairs even scarcer,
until none will be left to hold hairpin to head.

[Translated by Paul Rouzer]

Questions:

1. What mood does the author convey in these poems?
2. What can you conclude about the author's career as an official?
3. "Views in Springtime" is a poem drawing on the imagery of spring, a time of rebirth and renewal. How does Du Fu use the imagery of spring to communicate his feelings about the state of the dynasty during his period of imprisonment by rebels in Chang'an?
4. What are Du Fu's ideals? How would he like to see his world?