

SELECTED POEMS BY LI BO:

"AT YELLOW CRANE TOWER TAKING LEAVE OF MENG HAO-JAN AS HE SETS OFF FOR KUANG-LING"
"SUMMER DAY IN THE MOUNTAINS"
"DRINKING ALONE UNDER THE MOON"

Introduction

Li Bo (701-762), along with his younger contemporary Du Fu (712-770), is one of the two most renowned poets of the Tang dynasty. Li Bo did not serve as an official, though he did spend two years as a scholar at the Hanlin Academy (a kind of "think tank" for the emperors). His family background may have had something to do with his failure to become an official: Li Bo's birthplace is unknown, but he was certainly not from an elite aristocratic family. Some scholars speculate that he was born in modern-day Kyrgyzstan. He probably grew up in present-day Sichuan. With no hope for an official career, Li Bo spent much of his life traveling around the empire.

Selected Documents with Questions

"At Yellow Crane Tower Taking Leave of Meng Hao-jan as He Sets Off for Kuang-ling" from *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry*, edited and translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 211. © 1984 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Note: This translation is quoted and discussed in depth in Burton Watson's "Tang Poetry: A Return to Basics," in *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, edited by Barbara Stoler Miller (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 240-243.

"Summer Day in the Mountains" from *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, One Volume, Expanded Edition, edited by Maynard Mack (W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 1311. © 1995 W. W. Norton & Co. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

"Drinking Alone under the Moon" translated by Paul Rouzer.

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"At Yellow Crane Tower Taking Leave of Meng Hao-jan as He Sets Off for Kuang-ling"¹

An old friend takes leave of the west at Yellow Crane Tower,
in misty third-month blossoms goes downstream to Yang-chou.

¹ The poet Meng Hao-jan (689-740) parted from Li Bo at Yellow Crane Tower, overlooking the Yangtze (Yangzi) river at Wu-ch'ang in Hupei (Hubei) province, to sail east down the river to Yang-chou (Yangzhou) in Kiansu (Jiangsu) province.

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

**SELECTED POEMS BY LI BO: "AT YELLOW CRANE TOWER TAKING LEAVE OF MENG HAO-JAN...";
"SUMMER DAYS IN THE MOUNTAINS"; "DRINKING ALONE UNDER THE MOON"**

The far-off shape of his lone sail disappears
in the blue-green void,
and all I see is the long river flowing to the edge of the sky.

[Translated by Burton Watson]

"Summer Day in the Mountains"

Lazily waving a fan of white feathers,
stripped naked here in the green woods
I take off my headband, hang it on a cliff
my bare head spattered by winds through pines.

[Translated by Stephen Owen]

"Drinking Alone Under the Moon"

Among the flowers, a single jug of wine;
I drink alone, no one close to me.
I raise my cup, invite the bright moon;
Facing my shadow, together we make three.
The moon doesn't know how to drink;
And my shadow can only follow my body.
But for a time I make moon and shadow my companions;
Taking one's pleasure must last until spring.
I sing — the moon wavers back and forth.
I dance — my shadow flickers and scatters.
When I'm sober we take pleasure together;
When I'm drunk, we each go our own ways.
I make an oath to journey forever free of feelings,
making an appointment with them to meet in the Milky Way afar.

[Translated by Paul Rouzer]

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Questions:

1. What image does Li Bo convey of himself in these poems?
2. What philosophical traditions does he draw on to create his persona?
3. Compare Li Bo's persona as conveyed in these poems with the persona conveyed by his younger contemporary, the poet Du Fu, in his poetry. In what ways do the men differ, and what might contribute to the differences in their personae?
4. Taking leave of friends is a common theme for Tang poets. Why might this have been so? Why so much attention and emotional investment in the matter of seeing off a friend who is going on a journey to another part of the empire?