

SELECTED POEMS BY WANG WEI:
"FIELDS AND GARDENS BY THE RIVER QI"
"DEER FENCE"
"VILLA ON ZHONG-NAN MOUNTAIN"
"READING THE CLASSIC OF MOUNTAINS AND SEA, I"

Introduction

Wang Wei (701-761) was born into an aristocratic Tang family. As a youth, he was sent to the capital cities of Luoyang and Chang'an to study, make connections with influential people who could act as his patrons (a necessity for career advancement in the Tang), and take the civil service examinations. A brilliant and talented young man, Wang Wei was a great success in society, literature, art, music, and academics. He had a successful but turbulent career as a court official. Like many men of his time, Wang Wei's success as an official rose and fell with the rise and fall of his patrons. Thus his career alternated between periods of service at the imperial court and periods of less glamorous service in provincial administrative positions. Wang Wei's career also suffered a setback when he was captured by An Lushan's rebel forces in 755. Wang Wei eventually agreed to serve in An Lushan's rebel government — a decision that turned out to be a mistake when the new Tang emperor, Suzong, finally defeated the rebels in 764. Wang Wei was, however, spared punishment and even gained appointment in the new emperor's court, perhaps because his younger brother was one of the Suzong emperor's generals.

Selected Documents with Questions

"Fields and Gardens by the River Qi" translated by Paul Rouzer.

"Deer Fence," "Villa on Zhong-nan Mountain," and "Reading the *Classic of Mountains and Sea, I*" from *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 318-319, 390, 393. © 1996 W. W. Norton & Co. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Selected Poems by Wang Wei:
"Fields and Gardens by the River Qi"
"Deer Fence"
"Villa on Zhong-nan Mountain"
"Reading the *Classic of Mountains and Sea, I*"

"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.

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on SELECTED POEMS, BY WANG WEI

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.

[Translated by Paul Rouzer]

"Deer Fence"

No one is seen in deserted hills,
only the echoes of speech are heard.

Sunlight cast back comes deep in the woods
and shines once again upon the green moss.

[Translated by Stephen Owen]

"Villa on Zhong-nan Mountain"

In my middle years I came to much love the Way
and late made my home late by South Mountain's edge.

When the mood comes upon me, I go off alone,
and have glorious moments all to myself.

I walk to the point where a stream ends,
and sitting, watch when the clouds rise.

By chance I meet old men in the woods;
we laugh and chat, no fixed time to turn home.

[Translated by Stephen Owen]

"Reading the *Classic of Mountains and Sea*, I"

Summer's first month, all plants grow tall;
around my cottage, trees dense and full.

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on SELECTED POEMS, BY WANG WEI

There flocks of birds rejoice to find lodging,
and I too cling with love to my cottage.

With the plowing done and the sowing,
now and then I can read my books.

The narrow lanes keep out deep ruts,
and tend to turn away old friends' carts.

In pleasure I pour out the wine of spring
and pick from the garden's vegetables.

A light rain is moving in from the east,
a nice breeze comes along with it.

I browse in the tales of the King of Zhou
look through the charts of the Mountains and Seas.

In an instant I have covered the universe —
if this is not joy, what is?

[Translated by Stephen Owen]

Questions:

1. What mood or moods are conveyed in these poems?
2. What kind of a persona or image does the poet convey of himself? What kind of man do you imagine him to be from reading his poetry?
3. Which philosophical and/or religious tradition(s) does the poet draw upon?