

了超塵脫俗的象徵。蘇軾讚揚竹子具有“羣居不倚，獨立不懼”的特質（《墨君堂記》），表面寫竹，實則寫人。正是這種孤高正直的氣節，讓他能以灑脫恬適的心境，面對仕途失意的落寞。蘇軾在《定風波》這闕詞裏，以“竹杖芒鞋”作為風雨來襲時的良伴，也就不難理解了。

古代詩詞世界裏的香花異草、佳木美林，不獨令作品風格絢爛奇麗，洋溢大自然新鮮活潑的靈動氣息，更體現人與大自然心物感應的互動過程。即景生情，情蘊景中，既詠物象，又寫人言情，虛中有實，實中有虛，言有盡而意無窮。含蓄蘊藉，意在言外，既是中國古代文學突出的美學風格，也是古代中國民族精神特色之所在。



桂林一枝

Poet Laureate

“老虎伍茲雖然受腿傷困擾，但未有削弱他摘取美國高爾夫球大師賽**桂冠**的決心。”

“本大學數學系今年再創佳績，三位應屆畢業生在《第十屆大學生高等數學競賽》中再摘**桂冠**。”

競賽冠軍又稱“桂冠”，源自古希臘的傳統。當時傑出的詩人或競技的優勝者會獲授桂冠。

自此“桂冠”在西方成為光榮的象徵。

中國古代也有桂冠，只是象徵意義截然不同。中國的桂冠是用桂葉、桂花編成的帽子，取其清香高潔。三國時代，魏國繁欽的《弭愁賦》便有“整桂冠而自飾”句。

在中西文化裏，桂樹與文學的淵源同樣深厚。在古希臘時代，人們會把月桂葉放在枕下，以期在睡夢中得到作詩的靈感。中國的桂花則是文人榮譽的象徵。

桂花與文人學士的關係始於晉朝。《晉書·郗詵傳》記載，郗詵累遷雍州刺史，赴任前晉武帝為其餞行，問道：“卿自以為何如？”郗詵對曰：“臣舉賢良對策，為天下第一，猶桂林之一枝，崑山之片玉。”據說郗詵博學多才，為人剛正不阿，他以桂枝自比，原為自謙之詞，謂己只是羣才之一。後世以“桂林一枝”喻科舉考試中出類拔萃的人。

古代傳說月宮除了嫦娥，還有蟾精、丹桂和玉兔，故月宮又稱“蟾宮”、“桂宮”。自唐以來，人們將這個傳說與郗詵的典故牽合，遂以“蟾宮折桂”、“攀蟾折桂”喻指科舉及第或仕途得意。學子登科也稱“拾桂”、“折桂”、“攀桂”等。家人有折桂登科者，其家室雅稱為“桂堂”。

明清時代，科舉考試分為院試、鄉試、會試和殿試。第二級的鄉試供秀才、貢生、監生等應考。鄉試發榜在九月中旬，時值桂花盛放，所以鄉試俗稱“桂榜”，科場稱為“桂苑”。

桂花的形象深植文人心中，歷代文人皆曾以桂花入詩，當中不乏以桂花喻科考，如唐朝杜甫：“夢蘭他日應，折桂早年知”；唐朝杜荀鶴：“男兒三十尚蹉跎，未遂青雲一桂科”。

‘U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins has publicly declared his opposition to war and says he finds it increasingly difficult to keep politics out of his official job as literary advocate.’

‘Nobel Laureate Richard Smalley wants to bring out the best of nanotechnology.’

Any idea why a handful of poets and scholars are associated with ‘laureates’?

The word ‘laureate’ means ‘crowned with laurel’. In Ancient Rome, traditionally a successful person was crowned with a wreath of laurel leaves. The term ‘laureate’, however, originates from Greek mythology. Apollo, on his way home after slaying Python the giant snake, became enamoured of Daphne, the daughter of the river god Peneus. To flee Apollo’s embraces, the desperate nymph asked her father to destroy her baleful beauty. Her wish granted, she was metamorphosed into a laurel tree. From that time on, Apollo wore a laurel wreath.

After he returned to Delphi, Apollo instituted the Pythian games to commemorate his victory. The prizes awarded were chiefly laurel crowns. Apollo being the god of poetry and music, the laurel wreath became the favourite of poets and scholars as a symbol of success. Since then famous poets and learned men have been known as ‘laureates’.

In Britain, the position of Poet Laureate was informally created by Charles I for Ben Jonson in 1617. The title became a royal office when it was conferred by letters patent on John Dryden in 1670. As Britain’s official poet, the Poet Laureate is charged with writing verses for court and national occasions such as the monarch’s birthday, royal marriages and military victories.

Today Poets Laureate are found not only in Britain, but also in America, South Africa and Australia as well as in the United Nations. The American Poet Laureate, for example, is mainly responsible for promoting the nation’s appreciation of poetry. Edmund Spenser, William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Frost are but a few examples of celebrated poets who were awarded the office.



Earth laughs in flowers.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

