

diverse studies will attract a similarly catholic readership.

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*Wild Grass, Symmetry and Parallelism in Lu Hsün's Prose Poems\**

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In 1931, less than five years after completing the collection *Wild Grass* 野草, Lu Hsün 鲁迅 resolved never to write such poems again, lest perhaps his morbid feelings should somehow survive and, as he feared earlier, depress China's youth.<sup>1</sup> Lu Hsün does not say precisely why he now rejects the prose poems in their entirety, though the poem "The Awakening" 一覺<sup>2</sup> (April 10, 1926) provides a strong clue. Or perhaps he made the decision later in 1927, when he wrote at the end of the preface to the collection: "Be gone weeds, together with my inscription!"<sup>3</sup> In any case, the writer was not the only one to become disenchanted with his work. Many critics have looked back on the collection with a certain distaste, a certain sense of displeasure. Many find in the poems thoughts and emotions which are paradoxical, contradictory, and, above all, depressing. Nor have contemporary critics, for that matter, altered

\*This paper was presented in 1972 at a panel discussion on Lu Hsün at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in New York. The purpose of the paper was to arouse interest in Lu Hsün's prose poems and in this respect the work has already been partly successful. In April 1974 another panel discussion was organized and Leo Ou-fan Lee of Princeton University presented his tentative views in a paper entitled "The Tragic Visions of Lu Hsün: Hope and Despair in the *Wild Grass*." I look forward to the publication of the final draft, which, I believe, will complement this paper. This kind of exchange of ideas is vital to the field, and I am grateful that it is beginning to take place. The author will be grateful for all constructive comments on this paper. The variety of reactions, emotional and intellectual, to Lu Hsün's works is surprising. No one will have the "last word" in interpreting his complex art.

<sup>1</sup>Chou Shu-chen 周樹人, *Lu Hsün ch'üan-chi* 鲁迅全集 [Collected Works of Lu Hsün], compiled by the Lu Hsün Memorial Committee (20 vols. Shanghai: Lu Hsün ch'üan-chi ch'u-pan-ah, 1938), IV, p. 346. Hereafter this title will be annotated as *Collected Works*.

<sup>2</sup>*Selected Works of Lu Hsün*, ed. and trans. by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (4 vols. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956-1960), I, pp. 360-2. This is the most complete collection (19 of 24) of *Wild Grass* poems in translation available. Hereafter the collection will simply be designated *Selected Works*. [The editors would like to note that a separate collection of the Yangs' translations of *Wild Grass* was published in Peking, by the Foreign Language Press, 1973.]

<sup>3</sup>William R. Schultz, "Lu Hsün, The Creative Years" (Unpublished dissertation, University of Washington, 1955), p. 197. See Appendix for reprint of the poem "Inscription."

past judgments.<sup>4</sup> "What he might have done," writes T. A. Hsia 夏濟安, in reference both to the prose poems and the writer's life in general, "is to bring these moods into a greater 'fusion' which should reflect richly, and in a larger symbolic unity, the world as he saw it."<sup>5</sup> Critics, it seems, will never be satisfied unless a writer, to paraphrase Matthew Arnold, "sees life steadily and sees it whole."<sup>6</sup> But, alas, humans swallow life in morsels, not in one indigestible whole, and writers often can do little more than look at the world honestly, try to comprehend what they see, and transform their experience into art, so that others see what they see the way they see it. I doubt that the "perfect symbolic equivalent"<sup>7</sup> for reality (for which T. A. Hsia so assiduously searches) exists even in the greatest, most imaginative prose or poetry.

The cosmos which Lu Hsün creates for *Wild Grass* is, admittedly, rather oversimplified and romantic. Essentially, the world is a battleground of two opposing forces, the forces of good and the forces of evil.<sup>8</sup> On the one side there is creation, on the other destruction. Light struggles against darkness, love against hate, hope against despair. The poet is trapped, as it were, between the two forces, in a no-man's-land—somewhere "between dark and light, life and death, past and future."<sup>9</sup> He is caught between action and inaction, in a

<sup>4</sup>The "inscription" was not published either in the 1938 edition of Lu Hsün's *Collected Works* or in the Yangs' translation of the writer's *Selected Works*. The *Selected Works* also does not include "Revenge (I)" and "The Tomb Inscription," two of the most grotesque, though most important prose poems discussed in this paper. Except for V. V. Petrov, Soviet critics have almost totally ignored the collection, although a complete translation of the collection did appear in 1971. Even Huang Sung-k'ang, in the only English language book devoted to Lu Hsün, avoids any discussion of the poems. In my opinion, therefore, there is still much to be learned about *Wild Grass* and the circumstances under which the poems were created.

<sup>5</sup>Ts'an Hsia, "Aspects of the Power of Darkness in Lu Hsün," in *The Gate of Darkness, Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*, Far Eastern and Russian Institute publications on Asia, No. 17 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup>See Matthew Arnold's essay "On the Modern Element in Literature" (1857) in R. H. Super (ed.), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (7 vols. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), I, p. 28. In this essay Arnold quotes one of his own early poems "To a Friend" (1848) in which he praises Sophocles. Now he asserts that Sophocles not only possessed the same energy, maturity, freedom, and intelligence as the majority of Athenians, "but all these [traits—C.J.A.] idealized and glorified by the grace and light shed over them from the noblest poetical feelings." This is all well and good, but Arnold categorically states that "he who is morbid is no adequate interpreter of his age!"

<sup>7</sup>T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness*, p. 162.

<sup>8</sup>According to the Gestalt psychologists, "nature does her bookkeeping by double-entry." For a discussion of opposed forces and their role in psychology see Frederick S. Paris, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy* (N. Y.: Dell Pub. Co., 1951), pp. 41-53.

<sup>9</sup>Schultz, "The Creative Years," p. 297.

semi-conscious state of emotional and psychological paralysis. Thus, in the opening lines of the preface, Lu Hsün through his first-person narrator complains: "When depressed I sense a fullness; and yet at the very moment I open my mouth to speak I feel a void." Or again in the poem "Hope" 希望<sup>10</sup> he writes: "My heart is extraordinarily lonely. And yet my heart is tranquil, void of love and hate, joy and sadness, colour and sound." Now we can argue that the world Lu Hsün creates is "realistic" or that it is not realistic, that it does not exist in reality or that it is too real, perhaps even surrealist. (Hsia contends, for example, that Lu Hsün's times "can never fully be comprehended by means of such contrasting metaphors as light and darkness, because there was such an interesting variety of shades of grey."<sup>11</sup>) None of this, however, seems to matter, for Lu Hsün was depicting a mood, a mood which, however transitory, was in and of itself worthy of characterization. What does matter is whether or not he created the mood well, with an effective use of artistic techniques.

The most intriguing and effective literary device which Lu Hsün uses in *Wild Grass* is parallelism. By parallelism I mean not only a balance of imagery, though balance of imagery itself is important, but rather an all-pervasive symmetry that seems to dominate the work as a whole.<sup>12</sup> *Wild Grass* makes efficient use of many compositional building blocks. More often than not, words and images are parallel with other words and images. Sentences, or complete thoughts, are parallel with other sentences. Paragraphs are parallel with other paragraphs and so on. An entire poem is often built, more or less, on a single parallel which gives it a unity of theme as well as a unity of structure. In short, parallelism in *Wild Grass* controls not only patterns of imagery and syntax, but patterns of logic as a whole.

Achilles Fang ventures to state that parallelism is "ingrained in Chinese thinking."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps parallelism is ingrained also in Lu Hsün's thinking. *Wild Grass* seems, at times, like a collection of unfinished situations which threaten to stretch off into the future like unbroken parallel lines. Yet Lu Hsün does make an attempt to close the parallels and dispose of all the unfinished situations. He often constructs an analogy, carries the analogy till it no longer

<sup>10</sup>*Selected Works*, I, pp. 322-3.

<sup>11</sup>T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness*, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup>In an unpublished paper on Lu Hsün entitled "The Essays: Some Observations on Form and Substance" delivered by Harriet Mills at the 1972 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, the author observes that "one could write a whole treatise on nothing but Lu Hsün's manipulation of repetition." This is, undoubtedly, one aspect of his style that deserves greater elaboration.

<sup>13</sup>Achilles Fang, "Some Reflections on the Difficulty of Translation," in Arthur F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 273.

seems useful, then abruptly breaks the trend of thought with a surprise reversal. In the poem "The Shadow's Leavetaking" 影的告别<sup>14</sup> for example, we hear the shadow say:

"There is something I dislike in heaven; I do not want to go there. There is something I dislike in hell; I do not want to go there. There is something I dislike in your future golden world [utopia]; I do not want to go there."

The shadow continues to insist that it does not want this and does not want that, until finally something more positive emerges. "I am going to enter darkness to wander in nothingness." Now, at least, we learn *what* the shadow wants as opposed to what it does not want. Now the gestalt seems to be closing; or is it? There is a sense of resolution when the shadow says "That world will be wholly mine," but there is no emotional satisfaction. The shadow cannot "wander in nothingness," unless, of course, it ceases to exist.

Every such situation and conclusion, I take it, belongs to the author's fantasy life. Imagine, for example, the author or the first-person narrator, who substitutes for the author, saying to himself: "I can only be satisfied if I wander into nothingness. I can only be myself if I cease to exist." In this light, the shadow's so-called "leavetaking" is a traumatic experience, because leavetaking actually means death.

I have chosen several of the *Wild Grass* poems in order to illustrate the author's use of structural and/or syntactical parallelism. In each instance, however, you will note how he attempts to resolve the immediate contradiction. And yet, each situation affords little if any emotional satisfaction, so that the author is engaged in an endless game of self-torture. He is caught in a psychological impasse. He cannot go backward, and he cannot go forward. How then does the author end this game? That is a question I will leave for the end of this paper in my analysis of the "Inscription" 題辭 or "Preface." Now on to structural parallelism and the relentless game of self-torture.

Perhaps the most clear illustration of Lu Hsün's use of structural parallelism is "The Beggars" 求乞者.<sup>15</sup> (Notice, incidentally, that like most others in the collection, this poem is written in the first person. Here, as in most of Lu Hsün's poems and short stories, the first-person narrator not only relates the story, but actually participates in the action, almost as if it were a recurring drama.) "The Beggars" can be divided roughly into seven scenes or "acts,"

<sup>14</sup>*Selected Works*, I, pp. 316-17.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, I, pp. 318-19 (See Appendix). I have supplied the scene numbers and titles in order to clarify the presentation. In one instance, however, the work has been classified as a play, even though there is no formal justification for doing so (Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, *Modern Drama from Communist China* [N. Y.: New York University Press, 1970]). By using the term "dramatic" I merely wish to emphasize the dynamic quality of the prose poems.

three dramatic and four descriptive, and these scenes are so arranged that dramatic and descriptive scenes continually alternate with one another. The opening scene, as one would expect, is primarily a prologue, a descriptive scene that creates the appropriate mood and setting for the two actors, the child beggar and the unidentified pedestrian, who just happens to be passing that way.

(Scene I: Prologue. Enter the pedestrian.)

I am skirting a high, crumbling wall, trudging through the fine dust. Several other people are walking along. A breeze springs up, and above the wall the branches of tall trees, their leaves still unwithered, are stirring over my head.

A breeze springs up and dust is everywhere.

Take note. The scene is static, but already the poet has established several images that will constantly reappear throughout the poem—the "high crumbling wall," "the breeze," "the fine dust" and the nameless pedestrians walking along the street. The first character, the pedestrian, although he too is nameless and unidentified, has already been introduced. The introduction of the second character, the child beggar, in the next scene already creates a kind of tension, a source of conflict.

(Scene II: The first dramatic scene. Enter the child beggar.)

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, yet he blocks my way to kowtow and whines as he follows me.

I dislike his voice, his manner. I detest his lack of sadness, as if this were some game. I object to the way in which he follows me, whining.

Now the child beggar encounters the pedestrian and already the reader is aware of the hostility between the two characters. That is why I call this the first "dramatic" scene, even though there is no dialogue and little, if anything, that might be called histrionic. The description of emotional conflict creates, at least, the sense of drama. Before heightening this emotional tension, however, the writer abruptly returns in Scene III to the imagery of the prologue, almost as if to remind the reader that, despite this heightened sense of conflict, the world of the beggar and the pedestrian has not at all disappeared.

(Scene III: The first interlude.)

I walk on. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

The writer reconstructs the background, the autumn "breeze," the omnipresent "dust," and the pedestrians who merely go about their business. Scene IV, what I call "the second dramatic scene," is only a slight variation of the first, but it too contributes to the sense of dramatic tension. Stylistically

speaking, Scene IV is much like Scene II, except that now a new dimension is added.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, but he is dumb. He stretches out his hands to me in dumb show.

I detest this dumb show of his. Besides, he may not be dumb; this may just be his way of begging.

I do not give him alms. I have no wish to give alms. I remain above those alms-givers. For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate.

In this scene the drama develops still further, simply because the pedestrian finally decides to act on his emotions. He resolves not to give the beggar alms, and this is the crucial decision in the poem. But again there is an interlude, a return to the descriptive imagery of Scene I.

(Scene V: The second interlude.)

I am skirting a tumbledown, mud wall. Broken bricks have been piled in the gap, and beyond the wall is nothing. A breeze springs up, sending the autumn chill through my lined gown, and dust is everywhere.

Once more the writer brings the background into focus—the crumbling wall, the autumn wind, and the dust. Until now the narrator's antagonism toward the beggar has grown steadily and the beggar has made no reply. The tension has increased, so to speak, in one direction; but with the final dramatic scene a sudden reversal occurs.

(Scene VI: The reversal.)

I wonder what method I should use in begging. In what voice should I speak? What dumb show should I use if pretending to be dumb? . . .

Several other people are walking alone.

I shall receive no alms, not even the wish to give alms. I shall receive the disgust, suspicion and hate of those who are above the alms-givers.

I shall beg with inactivity and silence. . . .

I shall at last receive nothingness.

One might have expected the beggar himself to respond to the anger and mistrust that have built up inside the pedestrian. It is not the beggar, however, who resolves the tension, but rather the pedestrian himself, who simply acts as if he were the beggar. The black and white contrast disappears, and at the same time a new parallel is created. The conclusion, as the narrator himself realizes, seems inevitable, for even from a purely human standpoint, only the merciful can obtain mercy. And now, having balanced the scales of human and poetic justice, the author returns to the already familiar street scene. With a sense of finality he recalls the haunted images of the prologue.

(Scene VII: The epilogue.)

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere. Several other people are walking alone.

Dust, dust. . . .

.....

Dust. . . . .

微風起來，四面都是灰土。另外有幾個人各自走路。

灰土，灰土.....

.....

灰土.....

.....

Wéi-fēng ch'í-lái, szü-mièn tōu shih hūi-t'ü. Líng-wài yǒu ch'í-ko jén kò-tzu tsü lü.

Hūi-t'ü, hūi-t'ü. . . .

.....

Hūi-t'ü. . . . .<sup>16</sup>

The work ends, as it were, where it began, but not without several new discoveries. The would-be benefactor, to be sure, has changed places with the beggar and this results in a revelation. But notice also the onlookers, the other nameless, uninvolved pedestrians who amble unobtrusively through the poem. They too are unmerciful and they too, if human and poetic justice prevails, will also be left to beg for mercy.

The imagery in "The Beggars," the high wall and the dust that blows everywhere, perfectly expresses that mood of "inconsolability" so characteristic of *Wild Grass* and even of Lu Hsün's earlier works. The high wall, as we know from various prefaces to *Outcry* 吶喊, is a symbol of the emotional barrier between human beings. In 1925, the author complained:

Painting the soul of such a mute people is really to be reckoned a difficult thing in China, because . . . we are in the final analysis people of an ancient kingdom which has never been through reform, so individuals still do not communicate with one another, and what is more, one's hand almost doesn't communicate with one's foot.<sup>17</sup>

This last allusion to the hand and foot is a pun on the word for brothers. In Chinese society, of course, brothers are expected to be closely tied together, just as if they had one body. One is the hand, the other the foot. One works for the good of the other. But the analogy can really be carried much further. Lu Hsün seems to be saying, both in this preface and in "The Beggars," that such a "mute world" not only keeps brothers apart, but every individual's head and heart fail to work together for the good of the body. Society then is a collection of maimed individuals who cannot interact. The dust, as I see it, is symbolic of the relationship between human beings. Both are everywhere,

<sup>16</sup> *Collected Works*, I, p. 472.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, p. 446.

and both roam through the streets without really affecting anyone, except of course as some kind of transient nuisance. Such a view of the world may seem rather barren and cruel. But remember, the poet is angry as well as saddened by its existence. And even more, he assumes responsibility for the world by directing the accusations against himself.

In "The Beggars," the dumb show or silent morality play that develops through mere changes of scene, we have observed how Lu Hsiin develops action. He seems to create action out of inaction and to change the predictable into the unpredicted, but always with a remarkable sense of unity and symmetry. "Revenge (I)" 復讐<sup>18</sup> is another brilliant example of this technique, for it too is a quasi-morality play, though slightly different in structure. In this instance, instead of a short descriptive prologue, there is a rather lengthy philosophical discourse used to explain the principle behind the bizarre drama which follows. Again a contrast is drawn between the two actors, the protagonist and the antagonist. On the one hand the two lovers stand face to face, naked in the open wilderness; on the other hand, the crowd gathers around to gawk at the lovers and enjoy their nakedness. Then the action shifts back and forth, from the lovers to the crowd and from the crowd to the lovers, from those who create the spectacle to those who enjoy it and vice versa. Finally, there is a concluding passage which attempts to end the suspense both dramatically and philosophically.

Let us go back and trace carefully the development of the poem. First, the introduction:

(Scene I: Prologue.)

Human skin is probably no more than a fraction of an inch thick, yet behind it courses red, hot blood, which flows through vessels, more dense than layers of larvae climbing up a wall, and comes out warm. Everyone uses this warmth to seduce, excite, coax, tenaciously hug, kiss, and embrace each other in order to attain life's drunken bliss.

But take a sharp, pointed dagger, give it one thrust, pierce this puny, peach-coloured skin, and you will see that red, hot blood spurt out like an arrow, letting all the warmth drain straight out of the victim: then with an icy breath escaping through pale lips, the human mind becomes dumbfounded, attains life's giddy, excruciating bliss, and the body too is eternally plunged into life's giddy bliss.

According to the logic of love, an act which causes excruciating pain can also cause excruciating bliss—a bizarre but believable paradox. And notice how Lu Hsiin naturalistically describes the flow of human blood, its movement through and out of the body. (The rich, red blood flows through vessels "more dense than layers of larvae climbing up a wall" and then it "spurts out like an arrow.") With such a prelude, however, the first dramatic scene opens:

<sup>18</sup>See Appendix.

(Scene II: Enter the lovers.)

So it was that this couple, completely naked, fingering sharp daggers, stood face to face in the open wilderness. . . .

The statement is blunt and terse, but the image it evokes is highly erotic. The couple standing face to face will most probably reciprocate each other's love even in death, stab each other as they meet in a death embrace. But before the action develops, the scene at once shifts to the crowd. They too are waiting in the wilderness.

(Scene III: Enter the crowd.)

Pedestrians rushed in from all sides, in thick layers, like larvae climbing up a wall, like army ants shouldering fish heads. Their garments were all smart-looking, but their hands were empty. Even so, they rushed in from all sides and stretched their necks taunt to watch either the embrace or the death. They could already imagine the fresh flavor of sweat or blood that would be left on their own tongues once the affair was over.

Several images in this description of the crowd are of particular interest. The "thick layers" of pedestrians, for example, recall the thick layers of blood vessels mentioned earlier. Both are compared to dense layers of larvae crawling up a wall. Now Lu Hsiin merely adds a simile, and he compares the crowd to a swarm of "army ants shouldering fish heads," another grotesque and absurd image to be sure, but quite contemporary in its naturalism, and also quite effective.

Observe the scene. On the one hand we have the couple standing face to face, on the other hand the crowd, an unidentified mass of people with necks stretched taunt. This last image, I am sure, is already familiar to readers of *Outcry*. Yet here there is a new perspective, because the two images are balanced. And with what result? The pure, white, naked flesh of the lovers stands out against the crowd, the collection of dead fish heads. The one image attracts, the other repels. The one is sensual, the other vulgar. If the first image is erotic, then the second can be called "anti-erotic."

Again the scene shifts, this time back to the lovers, though already the denouement is taking place.

(Scene IV: The encounter.)

This couple stood face to face in the vast wilderness, completely naked, fingering the daggers, yet they didn't embrace and they didn't die, nor was there any sign that they intended to embrace or die.

In the end the lovers do not die; they continue to live. Their round, full bodies wither, but the two continue standing face to face for an eternity. As a result,

The pedestrians . . . became bored; they felt boredom seep into their pores, felt their own inner boredom seep out of their pores, crawl across the wilderness, and seep into the pores of others. At length they felt their mouths and tongues wither, and even their necks grew weary. They ended up face to face, staring at each other, then slowly drifted off. They even lost interest in life.

Absurd of all absurd endings, and yet how ironic! In "The Beggars" we have already seen how a pedestrian is made to change places with a beggar, only to discover that he too is a beggar. Now we see another reversal of roles, the crowd changing places with the lovers. It is the crowd and not the lovers who lose their vitality. The crowd truly withers and becomes numb in the experience. The people in the crowd end up staring at each other, but in a meaningless, not a meaningful way. The crowd experiences a sterile void, the lovers a "fertile void." Notice also how Lu Hsün again creates action out of inaction. Boredom itself becomes animated, so that it too crawls across the wilderness and seeps from one body into another. Lu Hsün has developed a sense of irony and the absurd which permeates even the most innocent metaphor or simile.

The two prose poems analyzed above bring to mind an important issue, and that is the theme of humanism. In "The Beggars" there is latent sympathy for the downtrodden, despite the generalized contempt for nameless pedestrians. There is an expression of true humanism. In "Revenge (II)" 復讐 (其二)<sup>19</sup> Lu Hsün generalizes this humanism. The implied author sees Christ not as the almighty and merciful saviour of mankind, but rather as a sadistic and whimsical deity who enjoys suffering on the cross, because he knows that his own anguish will cause the Israelites much greater anguish in the future. In the final analysis man is victimized by a capricious God who does not want to save the world, but to plunge it into chaos and darkness. That is why the narrator can forgive the Israelites in the final line of the poem. "Those who reek most of blood and filth are not those who crucify the Son of God, but those who crucify the son of man."

From the above arguments one might conclude that the author or implied author is highly humanistic. In other poems, however, this viewpoint is completely reversed and an important polarity emerges. It should be noted, for example, that "Revenge (I)" itself balances "Revenge (II)." The crowd depicted in the former truly becomes dehumanized. The animate actually becomes inanimate. In "The Good Hell That Was Lost" 失掉的好地獄,<sup>20</sup> however, there is an even more appropriate balance for "Revenge (II)." Man snatches control of Hell from the Devil and becomes even more dictatorial than the former master.

<sup>19</sup>Selected Works, I, pp. 320-1.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 343-4.

Man . . . wielded absolute power over hell, his authority exceeding that of the devil. He reconstructed the ruins, having given the highest post to the Ox-headed One. He also added fuel to the fires, sharpened the sword hills and changed the whole face of hell, doing away with the former decadence.

At once the mandrake flowers withered. The oil seethed as before, the swords were sharp as before, the fires blazed as before, and the ghosts groaned and writhed as before until none of them had time to regret the good hell that was lost.

This was man's success, the devil's misfortune. . . .

From such statements, filled with the very fire of Dante's *Inferno*, one might easily assert that the philosophy expressed in *Wild Grass* is "anti-humanistic" and not humanistic at all.

Wayne C. Booth, author of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, warns critics not to confuse the author with the narrator. On the other hand, he also asserts that:

A great work establishes the "sincerity" of its implied author, regardless of how grossly the man who created that author may belie in his other forms of conduct the values embodied in his work. For all we know the only sincere moments of his life may have been lived as he wrote his novel.<sup>21</sup>

Or, we might add, as he wrote his prose poems! The narrator of *Wild Grass*, therefore, does indeed speak for Lu Hsün, though not in any simplistic manner. One must look at his overall philosophy and not at one particular, attractive part. Clearly, Lu Hsün is always turning the world upside down and contradicting every rational expectation. The rich man becomes a beggar, the curiosity seekers become objects of curiosity. So also on a higher plane. Christ, the light of the world, plunges the world into darkness, and Lucifer, the soul of evil, proves more merciful than tyrannical man. It seems to me, therefore, that any objective critic—and here one can sympathize with T. A. Hsia—is forced to deal with the ambivalent world view expressed in *Wild Grass*. How, then, can one understand that philosophy?

Lu Hsün sees man as a victim of tyranny from above, yet he also sees man as a perpetrator of tyranny. Man should be capable of sympathy, especially toward those who suffer, but human beings are capable of inflicting pain. Man should be sensitive, aware of the fragility of human emotions, but more often than not he is completely insensitive. Like animals, men devour each others' flesh, or if not the flesh itself, the very soul that takes refuge within that flesh. But man, it seems, is only one expression of a Manichean universe where the forces of light and darkness are continually vying. For Lu Hsün, as poet and philosopher, there are no easy solutions to human problems. The gap between "now" and "then," between the world as it is and the world as it "should" be, is a great chasm. Realizing this, finding some truth in the

<sup>21</sup>Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 75.

paradox, is at best a small comfort, for seeing life as it is does not ensure the courage to live it.

So far I have analyzed *Wild Grass* from one perspective, the way in which the narrator looks at society and the world outside himself. But *Wild Grass* provides the reader with two perspectives, one social and one personal. Sometimes we are on the inside of the poet looking out and sometimes on the outside looking in. Note, for example, how the two viewpoints are cleverly merged in the poem "Hope."<sup>22</sup> First, the personal viewpoint.

I am probably growing old. Is it not a fact that my hair is turning white? Is it not a fact that my hands are trembling? Then the hands of my spirit must also be trembling. The hair of my spirit must also be turning white.

But this has been the case for many years.

Before that my heart once overflowed with sanguinary songs, blood and iron, fire and poison, resurgence and revenge. Then suddenly my heart became empty, except when I sometimes filled it with vain, self-deluding hope. Hope, hope—I took this shield of hope to withstand the invasion of the dark night in the emptiness, although behind this shield there was still dark night and emptiness. But even so I slowly wasted my youth.

Thus far in the poem attention is focused entirely on the narrator and his own world. The passage is truly a lament for the poet's lost youth. Soon, however, the focus shifts.

I knew, of course, that my youth had perished. But I thought that the youth outside me still existed: stars and moonlight, dead fallen butterflies, flowers in the darkness, the funeral omens of the owl, the weeping with blood of the nightingale, the indecision of laughter, the dance of love. . . . Although it might be a youth of sadness and uncertainty, it was still youth.

Notice the contrast and the very effective use of surrealist images. This second passage concentrates on the world outside the poet. Eventually, in yet another development, the two worlds converge.

But now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no dead fallen butterflies, no indecision of laughter, no dance of love. The young people are very peaceful.

So I have to grapple alone with the dark night in the emptiness. Even if I cannot find the youth outside me, I would at least discard my own old age. But where is the dark night? Now there are neither stars nor moonlight, no indecision of laughter, no dance of love. The young people of the world are very peaceful, and before me there is not even a real dark night.

Despair, like hope, is but vanity.

The final portrait of the narrator is like that of the shadow mentioned earlier, for like the shadow, the narrator wanders between light and shade, between decision and indecision. He realizes that "despair, like hope, is but vanity."

<sup>22</sup>*Selected Works*, I, pp. 322-3.

An agonizing conclusion, indeed, but entirely sincere and entirely consistent. After all, if the world itself is caught on the horns of a dilemma, how can the individual escape?

The narrator of *Wild Grass* (like the author himself) is a middle-aged man, and this provides a balance and perspective. "The present," writes Frederick S. Perls, with an extraordinary insight, "is the ever-moving zero-point of the opposites past and future."<sup>23</sup> The implied author, therefore, looks backward to his youth as well as forward to the future. He relives the joyful days of the past and suffers not only from the uncertainties of the present, but from the future, unknown agonies, especially the fear of death. Most recollections of the past are warm and infect the poems with lyricism. Witness, for example, the scene portrayed in "The Kite" 风筝 and "Snow" 雪.<sup>24</sup> Listen when the poet talks of a "long departed spring" in his "long forgotten home."

At home, the time for kites is the second month of spring. When you hear the whirr of a wind-wheel, you raise your head to see a grey crab-kite or a soft blue centipede-kite. Or there may be a solitary tile-kite, without a wind-wheel and flown too low, looking pathetically lonely and forlorn. By this time, though, the willows on the ground are putting out shoots, and the early mountain peaches have budded. Set off by the children's fancy-work in the sky, together they make up the warmth of spring.

All these memories are seemingly beautiful and comforting, but they are actually a lie. Inevitably the present intrudes.

Where am I now? All round me dread winter reigns, while the long-departed spring of my long-forgotten home is floating in this northern sky.

Now, suddenly, the narrator's feelings about kites show a change.

Yet I never liked flying kites. Far from liking kites, in fact, I detested them as playthings of good-for-nothing children.

The typical symptoms of impasse have reappeared, because "the various pasts and the present," as it were, "interpenetrate one another."<sup>25</sup> A similar dichotomy of likes and dislikes appears in the poem "Snow." In this poem reminiscences of the past are associated with the snow of the romantic south, which is "extremely moist and pretty, like the first indefinable intimation of spring or the bloom of a young girl radiant with health." The snow of the north and the present, on the other hand, is described as a "lonely snow,"

<sup>23</sup>Frederick S. Perls, "Past and Future," in *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (N. Y.: Vintage, 1969), p. 95.

<sup>24</sup>*Selected Works*, I, pp. 326-8 and pp. 324-5 respectively.

<sup>25</sup>Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy*, pp. 290ff. contains a fascinating discussion of time past and future and their relationship to time present.

because "the snowflakes that fall in the north remain to the last like powder or sand and never intermingle, whether scattered on roofs, the ground or the withered grass."

"The Wayfarer"<sup>26</sup> (or "The Passer-by" 過客) is another example of how time past and time future both contribute to the anxieties of the present. The wayfarer, you may recall, is himself a middle-aged man. He is determined to follow the elusive "voice" (undoubtedly the voice of conscience) even to the "graveyard," which lies amid "wild roses and lilies." But who can give the wayfarer directions or tell him "the way"? The seventy-year-old man, with his white hair and black gown, has never been beyond the graveyard. And yet, he seems already dead, for he has long since disregarded the voice. Both characters, therefore, seem to be representations or incarnations of human fear. In his crippled state, the middle-aged man illustrates the physical and spiritual hardships of the present, with all its concomitant pains and anxieties, real or imaginary. To the wayfarer the old man, on the other hand, represents the almost certain debility of the future, for the old man is simply what the middle-aged man *could* become. For both, it seems, the cause is hopeless, and the difference in their ages is not very significant. Both are, in a sense, living corpses.

In "The Tomb Inscription" 墓碣文<sup>27</sup> the narrator attempts to come face to face with death and the grave. The imagery is grotesque, the vision that of a nightmare, and even more than the real world, this dream world is full of contradictions. On the surface the poem tells of a once wandering spirit who was transformed into a long snake with venomous teeth. These venomous teeth, explains the poem, "were not used to gnaw people, but to gnaw the spirit's own body, until at length it perished and collapsed." The wandering spirit, I believe, is the poet's own spirit; the corpse, his own corpse. And the epigraph, written on *both* faces of the tombstone, is one that the poet has written for himself. First, the front side of the tombstone tells the history of the wandering spirit.

I dreamt that I was standing in front of a gravestone, reading the carved inscription on its face. The stone seemed to have been made of sandstone. There was a great deal of erosion; then, too, clumps of moss had grown up, so only a fragment of the inscription remained.

"... in a time of fiery song, cold; in the heavens, an abyss. In all that strikes the eye, emptiness; in hopelessness, salvation.

"... a wandering spirit was transformed into a long snake with poisonous teeth. The teeth were not used to gnaw people, but to gnaw the spirit's own body, until at length it perished and collapsed....

"... Leave!..."

<sup>26</sup>Selected Works, I, pp. 332-8.

<sup>27</sup>See Appendix.

One can hardly fail to see some similarity between the lines written on the front of the tombstone and those from the poem "Hope" already quoted above, "... my heart once overflowed with sanguinary songs, blood and iron, fire and poison, resurgence and revenge." In the same poem the poet goes on to explain that after this youthful ardor his heart "suddenly... became empty." Does not the tombstone express the same sentiments, but in a more distilled form? "In a time of fiery song, cold; in the heavens, an abyss. In all that strikes the eye, emptiness; in hopelessness, salvation." Witness also the allusion to cannibalism, the familiar theme of the "Diary of a Madman." Then, too, there is the reverse side of the tombstone, which tells not of the life but of the death of the wandering spirit. His chest and stomach are all battered, and his liver (the seat of human courage) is gone. So unmistakable, I believe, is the reference that many will interpret this as the diary of a demented poet contemplating the grotesque act of self-cannibalism.

I went around behind the stone and a solitary grave came into view. No grass or trees were there; these had fallen to ruin. Then I passed through the great opening and spied a corpse, his chest and stomach all battered, the liver gone. The face showed neither grief nor joy, yet it seemed to be wreathed in a veil of mist.

Doubting and trembling, I couldn't manage to turn away, yet I had already seen the faded inscription on the shaded side.

"... pluck out your heart and eat it, if you want to know its real flavor. But if the pain is fierce, how can its real flavor be known?"

"... once the pain subsides, slowly eat it. But if the heart is already spoiled; again, how can its real flavor be known? ...

"... Answer me. Or else, leave! ..."

Like many a traditional storyteller, Lu Hsün creates an illusion of reality, even in the most surrealistic circumstances. He pretends that the tombstone is eroded and that the inscription is but a fragment. And so, the inscription could well be taken as "a matter of historical fact." Hence T. A. Hsia's interpretation: "... he plucked out his own heart and ate it; he wanted to find out its original taste." (.....抉心自食, 欲知本味。) <sup>28</sup> But, it should be noted, there are no time words or particles in the passage to provide a firm indication of tense and the reflexive pronoun *tsu* 自 is non-specific as to person. As a result, the inscription invites a variety of interpretations. It could easily apply to the implied author himself—a grim realization of what he is actually doing to himself as well as the futility of his own self-torture. If so, then we have the elements of another internal debate, and the passage, despite its contradictory arguments, fits easily into the general framework of *Wild Grass*. Hence my translation "pluck out your heart and eat it, if you want to know its real flavor." This rendition of the passage invites the reader to vicariously experience the author's suffering, and that, I believe, is another

<sup>28</sup>T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness*, p. 151.

possible reason for the deliberate vagueness of the inscription. Then, too, with this interpretation the broad theme of the futility of life and death emerges quite strongly.

In at least two related poems ("Such a Fighter" 這樣的戰士 and "Amid Pale Bloodstains" 淡淡的血痕中<sup>29</sup>) Lu Hsiün makes reference to the rebellious warrior who battles against nothing.

He walks with great strides through the ranks of nothingness, and sees again the same nods, the same banners and surcoats. . . .

But he raises his javelin.

At last he grows old and dies of old age in the lines of nothingness. He is not a fighter after all, and the nothingness is the victor.

I wonder if this rebellious hero's corpse, this projection of self, is not laid to rest underneath the tomb inscription. Artistically speaking, one would expect that the rebellious hero, having struggled against the forces of nothingness, would show no emotion at all in death. And this corpse too shows no emotion, "neither grief nor joy." The face is simply "wreathed in a veil of mist."

"The Tomb Inscription," therefore, is not unusual in its composition and structure. Like most others, it too relies on contrast and parallelism, both obvious and subtle. The tombstone has two sides, the poem two points of focus. On first glance both inscriptions seem to refer to the life and death of the "wandering spirit" mentioned in the poem, but on closer scrutiny the same inscriptions have a more real and frightening import. The dead corpse that rises from the tomb to confront the narrator is nothing more than the specter of things to come. A nightmare—true, but ever so plausible and real.

In the past few pages I have examined the narrator of *Wild Grass* from two perspectives. I have tried to understand the world as he understands the world, and I have tried to understand him as he understands himself. In short, I have tried to look at reality through the narrator's eyes and to crawl around, so to speak, in his own skin. But one other task remains, and that is to find a conclusion, to understand where all this energy and soul-searching led. I believe that conclusion can be found only in the "Preface" or "Inscription" although this in itself is somewhat of a paradox. After all, a conclusion belongs at the end, not at the beginning. Nevertheless, it is in the "Preface," written one year after all the other poems, that the poet at last organizes his thoughts, deals with his emotions, and lays to rest the specters that haunted him for over two years. And most remarkable of all, the "Preface," which was written after the ordeal, preserves the spirit and artistic integrity of the collection as a whole. Like the other poems, it too relies on contrast, parallelism, and the sudden reversal of expectations. In fact, this poem seems to integrate these elements more than any of the others.

<sup>29</sup>*Selected Works*, I, pp. 351-2 and pp. 358-9 respectively.

Paradox, as I have already mentioned, plays an important role in *Wild Grass*. The "Preface," the opening prose poem, is actually a chain of paradoxes in which one proposition justifies the next. The second statement may be only an inversion of the first, but this restatement of themes enables the poet to expand his syllogism and to reinforce the paradox. The truth emerges from the seemingly false. Examine, for example, the opening lines of the poem.

When depressed I sense a fullness; and yet at the very moment I open my mouth to speak I feel a void.

The past life is already dead. And in its passing I find happiness, because in this I know that I am yet alive. The dead life is already rotten, decayed. And in its decay I am greatly pleased, because in this I know that I am not yet a void.<sup>30</sup>

These opening lines exploit the diametrically opposed ideas of fullness and void, death (or decay) and life. The dead past, asserts the poet, can give rise to life and joy, because death itself is an affirmation, something real which the mind can observe if not comprehend completely. Life, then, produces decay, and decay in turn produces life; fullness gives way to emptiness, but the void is immediately filled again. So works the curious logic of the paradox. Now the poet applies these general truths to his own concrete experience.

Disregarded upon the ground the clay of life gives no birth to stately trees; it enlivens only weeds, and this is my transgression.

Weeds, their tap roots shallow, their flowers and foliage ugly, nevertheless suck up the dew, suck up the water, suck up the blood and flesh of human corpses as all vigorously grasp at life. And yet, at the very moment of life they will be trampled and cut, leading straight to death and decay.

The poet's life is the mud in which the stately tree of creative talent tries to grow. But the tree finds no support in the mud, and the only crop the soil can produce is weeds, wild grass. The poet, therefore, compares his poetry to weeds, something unwanted and troublesome. Weeds are the most useless and noxious produce of the land, heterogenous plants that spring up not only where they are unwanted but where they create a nuisance to other forms of life. True, the weeds also will live out their allotted span. They will suck up life-giving water, but in the very act of struggling to survive they will be preparing to die. Has it not often been said that man himself begins to die the very moment he is born? I believe that the poet too has finally accepted the reality of death. So, he offers these weeds, all that the soil of life provides, "to friend and foe, to man and beast, to those who love and those who love not." He offers his entire, though meagre harvest to everyone in the hope that these weeds will quickly die, and if I read correctly, in the very act of dying affirm the existence of life. Otherwise, and notice the inversion of tenses, he "will not have lived," and that, asserts the poet, would be worse than death

<sup>30</sup>Schultz, "The Creative Years," p. 297.

and decay. To be alive one must create; to be alive physically and not to create is to be dead.

In this poem we have, basically, images which turn back on themselves, and the language necessarily does the same, so that there are numerous contrasts and a continual balancing of leading ideas. Balance is established through the contrast of words, phrases, clauses, and even whole sentences, i.e. complete ideas. Let's examine some of these contrasts for a moment. First there is the contrast of words or single images. The word for death (either *szü* 死 or *szü-wáng* 死亡<sup>31</sup>), for example, appears eight times. Often it is balanced by the word for life (either *shēng* 生, *shēng-húo* 生活, or *shēng-ts'ün* 生存) which appears seven times. Individual words then become building blocks. "Life and death," for example, forms a compound, a pair of contrasting images linked by a conjunction. Such compounds in turn are linked with compounds to form complex phrases. For example, "dark and light, life and death, past and future" (明與暗, 生與死, 過去與未來). Finally, this chain of images may be balanced by a similar triad, as in the line: "This clump of weeds between light and dark, life and death, past and future, I lay before friend and foe, man and beast, those who love and those who do not" (這一叢野草……獻於友與讎, 人與獸, 愛者與不愛者之前作證). Such triads also form a series of prepositional phrases, similar to the example just cited above: "for friend and foe, for man and beast, for those who love and those who love not" (為友與讎, 人與獸, 愛者與不愛者). Or to give yet another example, a combination of verb-object compounds. Speaking of the harmful effects of the weeds, the artist notes that they "suck up the dew, suck up the water, suck up the blood and flesh of human corpses" (*hsī-ch'ü lü*, *hsī-ch'ü shüi*, *hsī-ch'ü ch'én-szū jén te hshēh hó jòu* 吸取露, 吸取水, 吸取陳死人的血和肉), and yet "they will be trampled, they will be cut down" (*chiāng tsāo chièn-t'ā*, *chiāng tsāo shān-ì* 將遭踐踏, 將遭刪刈). Finally there is a balance or contrast between two sentences, complete ideas. In the face of death the poet twice celebrates life. "But I am content, delighted. I will laugh, I will sing" (Tàn wǒ t'ān-ján, hsin-ján. Wǒ chiāng tà hsiào, wǒ chiāng kō-ch'àng 但我坦然, 欣然。我將大笑, 我將歌唱). Thus, a seesaw rhythm is created, a rhythm which sounds something like the popular refrain, "she loves me, she loves me not, she love me."

Once this seesaw rhythm is understood, one begins to see the argumentative nature of the poem and the collection as a whole. Reality is dualistic; there is death and life, decay and growth, emptiness and fullness. But how does the poet feel about all these contradictions? Here it is easy to get stuck in *his* impasse. Twice, as I have already mentioned, the poet is ready

<sup>31</sup>Chou Shu-jen, *Lu Hsün san-shih nien chi* 魯迅三十年集 (8 vols. Hong Kong: Hsin-i ch'u-pan-she, 1968), III, pp. 5-6.

to laugh and sing. But doubt again shows her ugly face. What if the earth were completely barren? "If Heaven and Earth were so serene," he declares, "I would not be able to laugh or sing. Though Heaven and Earth are not so serene, perhaps I will still be unable." Thus, the poem seems to come full circle. We are back again where we began, back in the impasse. The poet would speak but he cannot, he would laugh and sing but he cannot.

How, in the end, are these paradoxes resolved? Again, one must return to the issue of death. And here I want to recall some of the images of leavetaking, death, and nothingness (or emptiness and void) which have appeared in the above poems. First, there is the image of leavetaking as shown by the wayfarer and the shadow. Secondly, there is the image of death, the final leavetaking, as suggested by the corpse, the lovers, and the brave fighter. And finally, there are the images of nothingness. The shadow fears dying and being lost in nothingness. The beggar fears being abandoned and receiving nothing. The brave fighter is threatened with being devoured by nothingness. All these images, it seems to me, are closely related. Death lies at the very core of *Wild Grass*.

In the poem "Hope" there is a rather strange epitaph for Sandor Petöfi that relates closely to the "Preface" or "Inscription." "It is already seventy-five years," observes the narrator, "since this great lyric poet and Hungarian patriot died for his fatherland on the spears of the Cossacks. Sad though his death, it is even sadder that his poetry has not died." Note that the "Inscription" ends with a very similar wish, not for Petöfi, but for the narrator or implied author himself.

For myself, for friend and enemy, for those who love and those who love not, I wish the death and decay of these weeds to arrive speedily. If not, I then will not have lived, and, compared with death and decay, truly would this be unfortunate.

The collection ends with this death wish. For, as I mentioned above, death is itself a confirmation, a visible sign that life has been present, although at last it has drained away.

In his prose poems Lu Hsün's derision gives way to sympathy, and sympathy gives way to derision. Courage gives way to anxiety, and anxiety again gives way to courage. Love becomes hate and hate, love. Hope becomes despair and despair, hope. Emotions seethe like molten metals that only now and then assume a definite shape. These emotions are not shown in black and white, like stage directions printed on cue cards. Rather, they are the emotions of a man who refuses to see life simply, a man so overwhelmed with emotion that at times he is devoid of emotion. But through the whole experience that man is honest enough to see the truth, to see the world with all its paradoxes

and to recognize these paradoxes within himself. First, he experiences an impasse, and then the "death layer" which lies beneath. And beneath this death layer miraculously there is life. So, in the process of coming to grips with death the poet discovers something vital. It is the spirit of the rebellious fighter, the man who struggles even when there is nothing left to struggle for, the man who searches even when there is no end in sight. And here I cannot help but recall the so-called "dead fire." That fire, it seems to me, is the "perfect symbolic equivalent" for the rebellious fighter's ardor. Like the fire, man's ardor can be hardened into ice or burn itself to embers. But that, too, does not seem to matter. What matters is that the flame, itself a rebellious spirit, forever struggles to be free!

The narrator of the *Wild Grass* poems does not see himself as an outcast of humanity, but rather as an outcast among outcasts. The world within him is a reflection of the world outside with all its ambivalence and paradox. The microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm, and we, the readers, catch a glimpse of both worlds. Sometimes we see the poet as others might see him, sometimes as he sees himself. Sometimes we are on the outside looking in, sometimes on the inside looking out. But from whichever point of view the poet shows us "reality," he is always scrupulously honest. We may doubt the validity of his judgments, for he himself suspects them, but we can never doubt the validity of his feelings. And so, at least from my point of view, the poet has achieved what most if not all poets set out to do. He has described reality in such a way that others can enter his own world. He has transformed his experience into art so that others can see reality as he sees it. If Lu Hsün has done these things and done them well—and I believe that he has—his moods and emotions not only have their own validity but are embodied in a unique, artistic form. We hardly need ask if the world he depicts is "real" or not. The dead fire in its struggle is beautiful.

## APPENDIX

## Chinese texts and translations

## The Beggars

*Translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi*

## Revenge (I)

*Translated by Charles J. Alber*

## The Tomb Inscription

*Translated by Charles J. Alber*

## Inscription

*Translated by William Schultz*

## The Beggars

(trans. by Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi)

I am skirting a high, crumbling wall, trudging through the fine dust. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and above the wall the branches of tall trees, their leaves still unwithered, are stirring over my head.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, yet he blocks my way to kowtow and whines as he follows me.

I dislike his voice, his manner. I detest his lack of sadness, as if this were some game. I object to the way in which he follows me, whining.

I walk on. Several other people are walking alone. A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere.

A child begs from me. He is wearing lined clothes and does not look unhappy, but he is dumb. He stretches out his hands to me in dumb show.

I detest this dumb show of his. Besides, he may not be dumb; this may just be his way of begging.

I do not give him alms. I have no wish to give alms. I remain above those alms-givers. For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate.

I am skirting a tumbledown, mud wall. Broken bricks have been piled in the gap, and beyond the wall is nothing. A breeze springs up, sending the autumn chill through my lined gown, and dust is everywhere.

I wonder what method I should use in begging. In what voice should I speak? What dumb show should I use if pretending to be dumb? . . .

Several other people are walking alone.

I shall receive no alms, not even the wish to give alms. I shall receive the disgust, suspicion and hate of those who are above the alms-givers.

I shall beg with inactivity and silence. . . .

I shall at last receive nothingness.

A breeze springs up, and dust is everywhere. Several other people are walking alone.

Dust, dust. . . .

.....

Dust. . . .

September 24, 1924

## 求乞者

我順着剝落的高牆走路，踏着鬆的灰土。另外有幾個人，各自走路。微風起來，露在牆頭的高樹的枝條帶着還未乾枯的葉子在我頭上搖動。

微風起來，四面都是灰土。

一個孩子向我求乞，也穿着夾衣，也不見得悲感，而攔着磕頭，追着哀呼。

我厭惡他的聲調，態度。我憎惡他並不悲哀，近於兒戲；我煩厭他這追着哀呼。

我走路。另外有幾個人各自走路。微風起來。四面都是灰土。

一個孩子向我求乞，也穿着夾衣，也不見得悲感，但是啞的，攤開手，裝着手勢。

我就憎惡他這手勢。而且，他或者並不啞，這不過是一種求乞的法子。

我不布施，我無布施心，我但居布施者之上，給與煩膩，疑心，憎惡。

我順着倒敗的泥牆走路，斷磚疊在牆缺口，牆裏面沒有什麼。微風起來，送秋寒穿透我的夾衣，四面都是灰土。

我想着我將用什麼方法求乞：發聲，用怎樣聲調？裝啞，用怎樣手勢？……

另外有幾個人各自走路。

我將得不到布施，得不到布施心；我將得到自居於布施之上者的煩膩，疑心，憎惡。

我將用無所為和沈默求乞！……

我至少將得到虛無。

微風起來，四面都是灰土。另外有幾個人各自走路。

灰土，灰土，……

.....

灰土.....

(一九二四年九月二十四日。)

## Revenge (I)

(trans. by Charles J. Alber)

Human skin is probably no more than a fraction of an inch thick, yet behind it courses red, hot blood, which flows through vessels, more dense than layers of larvae climbing up a wall, and comes out warm. Everyone uses this warmth to seduce, excite, coax, tenaciously hug, kiss, and embrace each other in order to attain life's drunken bliss.

But take a sharp, pointed dagger, give it one thrust, pierce this puny, peach-coloured skin, and you will see that red, hot blood spurt out like an arrow, letting all the warmth drain straight out of the victim; then, with an icy breath escaping through pale lips, the human mind becomes dumbfounded, attains life's giddy, excruciating bliss, and the body too is eternally plunged into life's giddy bliss.

So it was that this couple, completely naked, fingering sharp daggers, stood face to face in the open wilderness.

The two were just about to embrace, just about to die. . . .

Pedestrians rushed in from all sides, in thick layers, like larvae climbing up a wall, like army ants shouldering fish heads. Their garments were all smart-looking, but their hands were empty. Even so, they rushed in from all sides and stretched their necks taunt to watch either the embrace or the death. They could already imagine the flesh flavor of sweat or blood that would be left on their own tongues once the affair was over.

Even so, this couple stood face to face in the vast wilderness, completely naked, fingering the daggers, yet they didn't embrace and they didn't die, nor was there any sign that they intended to embrace or die.

The two remained this way for an eternity, and their once round, living bodies were already about to dry and wither, but still there was not the least sign that they intended to embrace or die.

The pedestrians then became bored; they felt boredom seep into their pores, felt their own inner boredom seep out of their pores, crawl across the wilderness, and seep into the pores of others. At length they felt their mouths and tongues wither, and even their necks grew weary. They ended up face to face, staring at each other, then slowly drifted off. They even lost interest in life.

At length only the vast wilderness remained and this withered couple standing, completely naked, in the middle; with dead men's eyes they watched the pedestrians wither, the great bloodless massacre, and were eternally plunged into life's giddy, excruciating bliss.

December 20, 1924

## 復讐

人的皮膚之厚，大概不到半分，鮮紅的熱血，就循着那後面，在比密密層層地爬在牆壁上的槐蠶更其密的血管裏奔流，散出溫熱。于是各以這溫熱互相蠱惑，煽動，牽引，拚命地希求偎倚，接吻，擁抱，以得生命的沈酣的大歡喜。

但倘若用一柄尖銳的利刃，只一擊，穿透這桃紅色的，菲薄的皮膚，將見那鮮紅的熱血激箭似的，以所有溫熱直接灌漑殺戮者；其次，則給以冰冷的呼吸，示以淡白的嘴脣，使之人性茫然，得到生命的飛揚的極致的大歡喜；而其自身，則永遠沈浸于生命的飛揚的極致的大歡喜中。

這樣，所以，有他們倆裸着全身，捏着利刃，對立于廣漠的曠野之上。

他們倆將要擁抱，將要殺戮……

路人們從四面奔來，密密層層地，如槐蠶爬上牆壁，如馬蟻要打獵頭。衣服都漂亮，手倒空的。然而從四面奔來，而且拚命地伸長頸子，要賞鑒這擁抱或殺戮。他們已經豫覺着事後的自己的舌上的汗或血的鮮味。

然而他們倆對立着，在廣漠的曠野之上，裸着全身，捏着利刃，然而也不擁抱，也不殺戮，而且也不見有擁抱或殺戮之意。

他們倆這樣地至于永久，圓活的身體，已將乾枯，然而毫不見有擁抱或殺戮之意。

路人們于是乎無聊；覺得有無聊鑽進他們的毛孔，覺得有無聊從他們自己的心中由毛孔鑽出，爬滿曠野，又鑽進別人的毛孔中。他們于是覺得喉舌乾燥，頸子也乏了；終至于面面相覷，慢慢走散；甚而至于居然覺得乾枯到失了生趣。

于是只贖下廣漠的曠野，而他們倆在其間裸着全身，捏着利刃，乾枯地立着；以死人似的眼光，賞鑒這路人們的乾枯，無血的大戮，而永遠沈浸于生命的飛揚的極致的大歡喜中。

(一九二四年十二月二十日。)

## The Tomb Inscription

(trans. by Charles J. Alber)

I dreamt that I was standing in front of a gravestone, reading the carved inscription on its face. The stone seemed to have been made of sandstone. There was a great deal of erosion; then, too, clumps of moss had grown up, so only a fragment of the inscription remained.

"... in a time of fiery song, cold; in the heavens, an abyss. In all that strikes the eye, emptiness; in hopelessness, salvation.

"... a wandering spirit was transformed into a long snake with poisonous teeth. The teeth were not used to gnaw people, but to gnaw the spirit's own body, until at length it perished and collapsed...

"... Leave!..."

I went around behind the stone and a solitary grave came into view. No grass or trees were there; these had fallen to ruin. Then I passed through the great opening and spied a corpse, his chest and stomach all battered, the liver gone. The face showed neither grief nor joy, yet it seemed to be wreathed in a veil of mist.

Doubting and trembling, I couldn't manage to turn away, yet I had already seen the faded inscription on the shade side.

"... pluck out your heart and eat it, if you want to know its real flavor. But if the pain is fierce, how can you know its real flavor?..."

"... once the pain subsides, slowly eat it. But when the heart is already spoiled, how are you to know its real flavor?..."

"Answer me. Or else, leave!"

I was just about to leave. Then the corpse sat up in the grave, and without moving its lips, said:

"Wait until I turn to dust, you will see my grin!"

I fled, not daring to look back, in dire fear of seeing him in pursuit.

June 17, 1925

## 墓碣文

我夢見自己正和墓碣對立，讀着上面的刻辭。那墓碣似是沙石所製，剝落很多，又有苔蘚叢生，僅存有限的文句！

「……于浩歌狂熱之際中寒；于天上看見深淵。于一切眼中看見無所有；于無所希望中得救。……」

「……有一游魂，化爲長蛇，口有毒牙。不以噬人，自噬其身，終以殞順。……」

「……離開！……」

我繞到碣後，纔見孤墳，上無草木，且已頽壞。即從大開口中，窺見死屍，胸腹俱破，中無心肝。而臉上卻絕不顯哀樂之狀，但濃濃如烟然。

我在疑懼中不及迴身，然而已看見墓碣陰面的殘存的文句！

「……抉心自食，欲知本味。創痛酷烈，本味何能知？……」

「……痛定之後，徐徐食之。然其心已陳舊，本味又何由知？……」

「……答我。否則，離開！……」

我就要離開。而死屍已在墳中坐起，口唇不動，然而說——

「待我成塵時，你將見我的微笑！」

我疾走，不敢反顧，生怕看見他的追隨。

(一九二五年六月十七日。)

## Inscription

(trans. by William Schultz)

When depressed I sense a fullness; and yet at the very moment I open my mouth to speak I feel a void.

The past life is already dead. And in its passing I find happiness, because in this I know that I am yet alive. The dead life is already rotten, decayed. And in its decay I am greatly pleased, because in this I know that I am not yet a void.

Discarded upon the ground the clay of life gives no birth to stately trees; it enlivens only weeds, and this is my transgression.

Weeds, their tap roots shallow, their flowers and foliage ugly, nevertheless suck up the dew, suck up the water, suck up the blood and flesh of human corpses as all vigorously grasp at life. And yet, at the very moment of life they will be trampled and cut, leading straight to death and decay.

Yet I am confident and delighted. I will laugh and I will sing.

I myself love my weeds, and yet I hate the earth which would make of weeds an ornamental thing.

Subterranean fires dart to and fro, and spit forth; and suddenly the fused mountain top erupts, consuming all the weeds and even the stately trees, leaving absolutely nothing to decay.

Yet I am confident and delighted. I will laugh and I will sing.

If Heaven and Earth were so serene, I could not laugh or even sing. If Heaven and Earth be not so serene, perhaps I still would be unable. This collection of weeds, between dark and light, life and death, past and future, I lay these before friend and enemy, man and beast, those who love and those who love not as evidence.

For myself, for friend and enemy, for those who love and those who love not, I wish the death and decay of these weeds to arrive speedily. If not, I then will not have lived, and, compared with death and decay, truly would this be unfortunate.

Be gone weeds, together with my inscription!

April 26, 1927

## 題辭

當我沈默着的時候，我覺得充實；我將開口，同時感到空虛。

過去的生命已經死亡。我對於這死亡有大歡喜，因為我藉此知道牠曾經存活。死亡的生命已經朽腐。我對於這朽腐有大歡喜，因為我藉此知道牠還非空虛。

生命的泥委棄在地面上，不生喬木，只生野草，這是我的罪過。

野草，根本不深，花葉不美，然而吸取露，吸取水，吸取陳死人的血和肉，各各奪取牠的生存。當生存時，還是將遭踐踏，將遭刪刈，直至於死亡而朽腐。

但我坦然，欣然。我將大笑，我將歌唱。

我自愛我的野草，但我憎惡這以野草作裝飾的地面。

地火在地下運行，奔突；熔岩一旦噴出，將燒盡一切野草，以及喬木，於是並且無可朽腐。

但我坦然，欣然。我將大笑，我將歌唱。

天地有如此靜穆，我不能大笑而且歌唱。天地即不如此靜穆，我或者也將不能。我以這一叢野草，在明與暗，生與死，過去與未來之際，獻於友與讎，人與獸，愛者與不愛者之前作證。

爲我自己，爲友與讎，人與獸，愛者與不愛者，我希望這野草的死亡與朽腐，火速到來。要不然，我先就未曾生存，這實在比死亡與朽腐更其不幸。

去罷，野草，連着我的題辭！

一九二七年四月二十六日，魯迅記於廣州之白雲樓上。

# Critical Essays on Chinese Literature

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