

Classics of Modern Chinese Literature

Xu Zhimo Reader

Translated by Fu Hao

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Biographic Notes

XU Zhi-mo (1897-1931), poet and essayist, was born in Haining County, Zhejiang Province, China. He was educated at University of Shanghai, Peiyang University and Peking University. During 1918-1922 he visited the US and the UK as an overseas student. From 1924 on, he taught at Peking University, Kwang Hua University, the Great China University and Central University. Meanwhile, he was a co-founder of the Crescent Moon Bookstore with Hu Shih, Wen Yiduo, etc, and the editor-in-chief of the *Crescent Moon Monthly* and thus a representative figure of the Crescent Moon school. He died of an air crash. His publications include 4 books of poetry, 3 collections of essays, 1 collection of short stories, 1 play and many translations.

FU Hao is a research professor of English at the Institute of Foreign Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He has published 2 books of poetry, 1 collection of essays, 4 books of literary criticism and 23 books of translated works from world literature.

 To William Harmon,
a friend in need,
whose assistance in improving
my translation is invaluable



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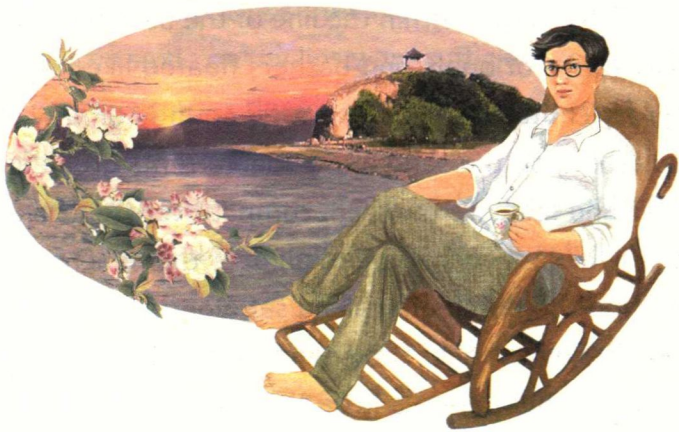
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REVERIE AT THE SEASIDE OF BEIDAIHE^①

They all went to the seashore. I did not go because of an inflammation of my left eye. I sat alone on the front porch, installed in a big comfortable armchair, with chest exposed, feet bare and hair dishevelled by the fitful breeze. The clear coolness of the morning had not refreshed me, just out of bed, but half of my dreams were



① Beidaihe is a seaside resort on the northeast coast of China.



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disturbed by the morning wind. Drooping my eyelids and looking inward, I saw spots of faded colours, just like the remainder of evening twilight clinging to the edge of the sky, seemingly reluctant to leave. The green leaves and red blossoms of the silk trees, judas trees, and wisterias all cast their graceful shadows on the waterside, weaving various charming patterns, and my arms and chest were fully covered with the slant lines of the shade. The bay could be seen directly through the intervals between the trees: the sea seemed also awoken by the morning twilight, dancing delightedly with yellowish and bluish glints. White surf rose by the beach now and then, scattering foam like snow. Within the line of the bathing area, tiny forms of boats and bathers floated like water birds; children's joyful shouts, sounds of waves splashing on the sand and undercurrents groaning rose and fell, intermingled, competitively reporting the liveliness and pleasure all over the beach. But around the porch on which I sat alone, there were hardly any sounds. The charming silk tree flowers just quietly opened a little bit, and even flies and gnats folded their wings. Only the autumn cicadas

among the trees far and near were spinning their endless chants.

Among the endless chants, I sat alone meditating. It was rare to have such a lonely place and such a peaceful mind; there were indescribable harmonies in the loneliness and limitless creativeness in the silence. My mind was like the seashore, on which the first swells of the tide in my life had gradually passed away one by one, with but occasional echoes left among the loose sands, and broken seashells reflecting moonlight and starlight. Now fumbling for the traces in the aftermath of the tide, I recalled the uproar then, which, being dreams or realities, did not need to be questioned any longer, but the slight frown of my eyebrows and little smile on my lips were sufficient to explain numerous causes deeply rooted in the fibre of the soul.

A youth always tends to rebel, loves adventures, dreams of golden chances beyond vast oceans like the sailor going to sea for the first time: longing to cut the cable, hoist the sails, and gladly plunge into the embrace of the infinite. He hates peace and safety and likes self-indulgence and



heroics. Colourless life is a thorn in his side, while boundless seas and dangerous peaks are the paths to freedom he loves. He loves to gather roses not only because of their colours and smells but also of their cruel stinging thorns. He loves to fight the fierce waves not only because of their sublimity and greatness but also because of their talent for devouring everything, which most stimulates his motives of exploration and curiosity. He worships impulse, which, unpredictable, uncontrollable and irresistible, starts, acts and ends all formlessly, like a storm, swift, violent and mysterious. He worships struggle, in which he seeks the meaning of tumultuous life and absolute being, and hails victories with joy or laments losses with elegies on blooded battlefields.

The disappearance of visions is a tragedy predetermined in life. A youth's disillusionment is the tragedy of tragedies, dark as night, murderous as death. Unlike Aladdin's lamp, pure and wild fire of passion, can only give out a momentary light, but not shine forever, and in a moment, maybe, has its last flames put out, with only a limited amount of remains and ashes left, pitying and comforting

itself in the remaining warmth.

The lights of streams, stars, dewdrops and lightning are reflected in the young beautiful eyes. We cannot help marveling over the mystery of the Creator's art, but at the same time the horrible shadows of weariness, decay, and complacency follow the days closely, like the tails of sorrow, distress, loss or mediocre, and like the meteors sweeping up the glory we are mostly proud of – streams, stars, dewdrops and lightning, all gone.

In the brilliant sunshine, there are pleasure, dancing and liveliness. Hope, twinkling hope, is hopping among the endless blue skies, the lustre of green leaves, the singing of birds and insects, the waving of grass – summer's glory and spring's achievement. Spring and hope are everlasting; nature and life, harmonious.

In the blessed valley far away, primroses smile on the slope, lambs leap among rocks, some of the young shepherds play reed pipes, and others lie back on the grassy ground, looking up at the floating and changing white clouds that cast bluish shadows, which move lightly, across the yellowing rice fields. In the pleasant village far away, a rustic



lass looks at the reflection of her home-made skirt for the springtime in the stream, three or four farmhands smoking pipes calculate in advance how big the autumnal harvest will be, and several old women sit outside the doors of their own houses to warm themselves in the sun, with quite a few children about them, dancing and shouting happily around with yellowish coins in their hands.

In the world far, far away, there are limitless peace and happiness, endless spring glory...

Here I could momentarily forget the numberless fallen pistils and petals, or the goodwill of the dead leaves that predicted in a whisper the coming of autumn in the shade of flowers, or the sorrowful

REVERIE AT THE SEASIDE OF BEIDAIHE

and deadened people whose lively smiles on their faces could be no longer restored by the dancing attendance of sunlight and rainwater, or the conflicting and mutually murdering ones whose murderous bestial natures could not be softened by the benevolence of sunlight and rainwater, or the mediocre, low and base ones whose gaze could not be attracted for a moment by the gracefulness of the floating clouds and morning dewdrops, or the self-conscious and despaired ones whose sad feelings could only be increased by the splendid springtime and graceful grass.

I could also momentarily forget everything





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about myself: the innocence of my childhood that was like a cool breeze and clear water, or the vain expectations of my boyhood, or the gradual awakening of my life, or the passionate pursuit of my ideals, or the struggle between optimism and pessimism in my mind, or the difficulty of my climbing the summit of art, or the mystery of momentary revelations and enlightenment, or the sudden turns in the course of my life, or the good or ill fortunes of my falling into perilous vortices, or the dreams I could not recall completely, or my secrets that buried their heads in the bottom of the sea, or the sharp edges that cut my soul and ferocious flames that burned my soul and violent storms that destroyed my soul, or my bitter complaint and deep resentment, or my hopes and wishes, or my patronage and indebtedness, or my past and my present...

The past realities gradually inflated, blurred, and became unrecognizable; the present ones gradually contracted and narrowed into a line in consciousness, a thinnest line, which in turn broke into numerous discontinuous black dots... which, in turn again, faded away one by one? Perished,