

**Lu Hsun**

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**Wild  
Grass**

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鲁迅：野草

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Grass**

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### *Publisher's Note*

All Lu Hsun's prose poems, twenty-three in all, are contained in this collection. Written between 1924 and 1926, they were compiled by the author into one volume entitled *Wild Grass*, which was first published in 1927 by the Peihsin Bookstore, Peking.

This English translation has been made from the 1973 edition published by the People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. To help readers to understand these prose poems better, the preface Lu Hsun wrote in 1931 for an English translation of *Wild Grass*, which never appeared in print, has been included in the present edition.

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*



*Cover of the First Chinese Edition of Wild Grass*

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## **Lu Hsun's Preface, Written in 1931, for an English Edition of "Wild Grass"**

Mr. Y. S. Feng has sent me through a friend his English translation of *Wild Grass*\* and asked me to say a few words. Unfortunately, not knowing English, I can only say a few words of my own. However, I hope the translator will not mind my doing only half of what he expected.

These twenty-odd short pieces, as the dates at the end of each show, were written between 1924 and 1926 in Peking and published successively in the periodical *Yu Ssu*. Most of them were simply occasional reflections. Because at the time it was difficult to speak outright I sometimes had to use rather ambiguous language.

To cite a few examples. "My Lost Love" was written to satirize the poems about lost loves which were then the vogue; "Revenge" was written out of revulsion at the

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\* The translator of *Wild Grass* was Feng Yu-sheng, whose English translation never appeared in print. This preface was later published by the author in *Two Hearts*, a collection of essays written in 1930 and 1931.

number of bystanders in society; "Hope" out of astonishment at the passivity of young people. "Such a Fighter" was my reaction to those men of letters and scholars who abetted the warlords. "The Blighted Leaf" was written for my friends who wanted to preserve me. After the Tuan Chi-jui government fired on unarmed demonstrators, I wrote "Amid Pale Bloodstains," at a time when I had left home and gone into hiding. "The Awakening" was written during the fighting between the warlords of the Fengtien and Chihli cliques, after which I was unable to remain in Peking.

So it may also be said that these were mostly small pale flowers on the edges of the neglected hell, which could not of course be beautiful. But this hell was bound to be lost. This was brought home to me by the expressions and tones of a handful of eloquent and ruthless "heroes" who had not at that time realized their ambitions. Thereupon I wrote "The Good Hell That Was Lost."

Later on I wrote no more things of this kind. In an age when things were changing daily, such writing, and even such reflections, were no longer allowed to exist. To my mind, this was probably a good thing. And here my preface for these translations may well end.

*November 5, 1931*



## Foreword

When I am silent, I feel replete; as I open my mouth to speak, I am conscious of emptiness.

The past life has died. I exult over its death, because from this I know that it once existed. The dead life has decayed. I exult over its decay, because from this I know that it has not been empty.

From the clay of life abandoned on the ground grow no lofty trees, only wild grass. For that I am to blame.

Wild grass strikes no deep roots, has no beautiful flowers and leaves, yet it imbibes dew, water and the blood and flesh of the dead, although all try to rob it of life. As long as it lives it is trampled upon and mown down, until it dies and decays.

But I am not worried; I am glad. I shall laugh aloud and sing.

I love my wild grass, but I detest the ground which decks itself with wild grass.

A subterranean fire is spreading, raging, underground. Once the molten lava breaks through the earth's crust, it will consume all the wild grass and lofty trees, leaving nothing to decay.

But I am not worried; I am glad. I shall laugh aloud and sing.

Heaven and earth are so serene that I cannot laugh aloud or sing. Even if they were not so serene, I probably could not either. Between light and darkness, life and death, past and future, I dedicate this tussock of wild grass as my pledge to friend and foe, man and beast, those whom I love and those whom I do not love.

For my own sake and for the sake of friend and foe, man and beast, those whom I love and those whom I do not love, I hope for the swift death and decay of this wild grass. Otherwise, it means I have not lived, and this would be truly more lamentable than death and decay.

Go, then, wild grass, together with my foreword!

*Lu Hsun*

*Written in White Cloud Pavilion, Kwangchow*

*April 26, 1927*

## Autumn Night

Behind the wall of my backyard you can see two trees: one is a date tree, the other is also a date tree.

The night sky above them is strange and high. I have never seen such a strange, high sky. It seems to want to leave this world of men, so that when folk look up they won't be able to see it. For the moment, though, it is singularly blue; and its scores of starry eyes are blinking coldly. A faint smile plays round its lips, a smile which it seems to think highly significant; and it dusts the wild plants in my courtyard with heavy frost.

I have no idea what these plants are called, what names they are commonly known by. One of them, I remember, has minute pink flowers, and its flowers are still lingering on, although more minute than ever. Shivering in the cold night air they dream of the coming of spring, of the coming of autumn, of the lean poet wiping his tears upon their last petals, who tells them autumn will come and winter will come, yet spring will follow when butterflies flit to and fro, and all the bees start humming songs of spring. Then the little pink flowers smile, though they have turned a mournful crimson with cold and are shivering still.

As for the date trees, they have lost absolutely all their leaves. Before, one or two boys still came to beat down the dates other people had missed. But now not one date is left, and the trees have lost all their leaves as well. They know the little pink flowers' dream of spring after autumn; and they know the dream of the fallen leaves of autumn after spring. They may have lost all their leaves and have only their branches left; but these, no longer weighed down with fruit and foliage, are stretching themselves luxuriously. A few boughs, though, are still drooping, nursing the wounds made in their bark by the sticks which beat down the dates: while, rigid as iron, the straightest and longest boughs silently pierce the strange, high sky, making it blink in dismay. They pierce even the full moon in the sky, making it pale and ill at ease.

Blinking in dismay, the sky becomes bluer and bluer, more and more uneasy, as if eager to escape from the world of men and avoid the date trees, leaving the moon behind. But the moon, too, is hiding itself in the east; while, silent still and as rigid as iron, the bare boughs pierce the strange, high sky, resolved to inflict on it a mortal wound, no matter in how many ways it winks all its bewitching eyes.

With a shriek, a fierce night-bird passes.

All of a sudden, I hear midnight laughter. The sound is muffled, as if not to wake those who sleep; yet all around the air resounds to this laughter. Midnight, and no one else is by. At once I realize it is *I* who am laughing, and at once I am driven by this laughter back to my room. At once I turn up the wick of my paraffin lamp.

A pit-a-pat sounds from the glass of the back window, where swarms of insects are recklessly dashing themselves against the pane. Presently some get in, no doubt through

a hole in the window paper. Once in, they set up another pit-a-pat by dashing themselves against the chimney of the lamp. One hurls itself into the chimney from the top, falling into the flame, and I fancy the flame is real. On the paper shade two or three others rest, panting. The shade is a new one since last night. Its snow-white paper is pleated in wave-like folds, and painted in one corner is a spray of blood-red gardenias.

When the blood-red gardenias blossom, the date trees, weighed down with bright foliage, will dream once more the dream of the little pink flowers. . . and I shall hear the midnight laughter again. I hastily break off this train of thought to look at the small green insects still on the paper. Like sunflower seeds with their large heads and small tails, they are only half the size of a grain of wheat, the whole of them an adorable, pathetic green.

I yawn, light a cigarette, and puff out the smoke, paying silent homage before the lamp to these green and exquisite heroes.

*September 15, 1924*

## **The Shadow's Leave-Taking**

If you sleep to a time when you lose track of time, your shadow may come to take his leave with these words:

"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; I do not want to go there.

"It is you, though, that I dislike.

"Friend, I'll no longer follow you; I do not want to stay here.

"I do not want to!

"Ah, no! I do not want to. I would rather wander in nothingness.

"I am only a shadow. I shall leave you and sink into darkness. Yet darkness will swallow me up, and light also will cause me to vanish.

"But I do not want to wander between light and shade; I would rather sink into darkness.

"However, I am still wandering between light and shade, uncertain whether it is dusk or dawn. I can only raise

my ashen-grey hand as if to drain a cup of wine. At the time when I lose track of time, I shall go far away alone.

"Alas! If it is dusk, black night will surely engulf me, or I shall be made to vanish in the daylight if it is dawn.

"Friend, the time is at hand.

"I am going to enter darkness to wander in nothingness.

"You are still expecting some gift from me. What is there for me to give? If you insist, you shall have the same darkness and nothingness. But I would like it to be only darkness, which may be lost in your daylight. I would like it to be only nothingness, which would never take possession of your heart.

"This is what I would like, friend —

"To go far away alone to a darkness from which not only will you be excluded, but other shadows too. There will be myself alone sunk in the darkness. That world will be wholly mine."

*September 24, 1924*

## The Beggars

I am skirting a high, mouldering 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 like others 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 am disgusted by 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 like others 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 stand above those alms-givers. For him I have only disgust, suspicion and hate.



I am skirting a tumble-down, 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 consider themselves 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*