A Music for Baihua:
Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* and "A Good Story"[1]

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Lu Xun and other May Fourth writers like him were present at a unique literary-historical moment: they oversaw and participated in the first writings in a new language, which we now call modern Chinese. *Sanwen shi* or prose poetry uniquely filled the need of early Republican Chinese poets to dream and invent new a poetics for *baihua.* Lu Xun in particular cared deeply about the future of language in both its political and aesthetic character. Arguing that Lu Xun used Baudelairean prose poetry as a jumping-off point for his own linguistic creations, this essay rereads his book of prose poetry, *Wild Grass*, and closely attends to the visual and aural prosody of one of its poems.

Expressing a set of opinions shared and echoed by many scholars who study the period, T. A. Hsia writes, "During the May Fourth period the Chinese language itself took on the melodramatic colorings of the battle between new and old. Conscious rebelliousness developed the rebels' prose, and Lu Xun was one of its chief architects."[2] This critical focus on rebellion, albeit amply justified by the writers' political activism and the importance of their opposition to classical systems both political and literary, obscures an equally important role that Lu Xun and others like him played. *Baihuawen* 白话文, the written vernacular Chinese that had by the 1920s replaced classical Chinese as the language of literature, had a fiction tradition but virtually none in poetry; if *baihuawen* were to become the voice for all participants in modern Chinese literature, it would need the music of poetry in order to possess both

[1] This essay and I both owe a considerable debt to Perry Link, whose guidance made the research and composition of this piece possible, and who then stayed with the project, both encouraging and testing it, until it reached a final form.
[2] *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 147. Compare Jaroslav Průšek's assertion that post-World War I China was "truly the only epoch in the history of literature to which the term [literary revolution] can, in full justice, be applied," in *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 179.

"a literature in the national language, and a national language of literature."[3] As Michelle Yeh puts it, "Having rejected most, if not all, of the conventions of traditional poetry, it is only natural, almost imperative, that modern Chinese poets redefine poetry."[4] Although this new language could be defined partly in opposition to traditional culture, something had to be imagined and then created in order for it to survive: in "redefining poetry," what matters is not just the *re-*, but the *define*. Hsia's choice of the word "architect" seems telling, if subtle: part of the process was construction, something that happened in and to the artist and reader, a making rather than a destroying. In a representative anecdote, at the beginning of Lu Xun's prose poem "A Good Story," the speaker lays the Tang dynasty encyclopedia *Chuxue ji* 初学记 on his knee and goes to sleep. The wealth of classical knowledge and structure in the discarded volume is present, but inert: the important event is the dreaming.

One of the new forms that allowed for dreaming and innovation in the early Republican period was a form whose name came from Western prose poetry, in Chinese called *sanwen shi* 散文诗. The vogue for and particularities of *sanwen shi* in 1920s China, when seen as an engine for language invention and prosodic creation, gain a depth of meaning that provides some insight into the ideas at play in specific, individual *sanwen shi*. In 1915, Liu Bannong 刘半农 translated four prose poems by Turgenev and published them as short fiction in the magazine *World of Chinese Fiction*: over the next five years, he would begin to write his own *sanwen shi*, along with Zhou Zuoren 周作人 and a number of the contributors to *Xin qingnian*.[5] *Sanwen shi* became popular enough that Guo Moruo 郭沫若 began his 1923 essay "Introduction to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*" 少年维特之烦恼序引 with the debate between rhymed writing (*yunwen* 韵文) and *sanwen shi*.[6] Prose poetry caught the attention and imagination of the poets of Republican China: the following essay intends to examine the reasons why, as well as show how, Lu Xun made the innovation and the dream that are prose poetry into a new music for Chinese language in *Wild Grass*.

Poetic forms have two qualities: a set of formal strictures and some relationship to previous art. Because form is a tool for the creation of poetry and not primarily a tool of analysis, individual poems often obey, violate, ironically uphold, or ignore either the strictures or the traditions of their forms. The form remains, however, a useful raw material, a starting point for artist and reader alike. As an example, the English sonnet usually has fourteen lines, makes a conceptual turn or leap after either the eighth or

[3] Hu Shi 胡适, "Jianshe de wenxue geming lun" 建设的文学革命论, *Xin qingnian* 新青年 v. 4 no. 4 (Tokyo: Daian, 1918), p. 317. My translation (as are all other translations in this essay not otherwise credited).

[4] "A New Orientation to Poetry," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 12 (1990), p. 90.

[5] For Liu's Turgenev translations, see 中华小说界 2:7 (1915). For a discussion of the translations, see Michel Hockx, *Questions of Style* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 162-5.

[6] Guo's essay is reprinted in Lang Gong, ed., *Xin wenyi pinglun* 新文艺评论 (Shanghai: Shanghai minzhi shuju, 1923), p. 449.

twelfth line, and meditates on some aspect of love: readers with some experience reading sonnets, though, will call up a raft of counter-examples, from Shakespeare's appreciation of self-control in Sonnet 94[7] to George Meredith's sixteen-line sonnet sequence *Modern Love*. What makes *sanwen shi* special as a poetic form, though, is that both fundamental qualities, namely stricture and tradition, remain nearly undefined during the period when the poetic form is most popular. In a preface to his poem "Rivulet," Zhou Zuoren writes, "When people ask what form this poem of mine is written in, even I can't respond. The Frenchman Baudelaire advocates the prose poem (*sanwen shi*), and this is a bit like that, but he uses the form of prose, while I'm now dividing my writing line by line....perhaps it doesn't count as poetry, we'll never know; but this is irrelevant."[8] Guo Moruo, in the essay noted above, sees the most vigorous discussion of poetry as bogged down in the distinction between rhymed poetry and *sanwen shi*, and wants to focus the debate instead on "how poetry can enter into one's heart and remain there without change"[9]; like Guo Moruo, as Michel Hockx points out, many of the defenders of prose poetry defined it as lineated poetry without rhyme.[10] Each writer and critic seems to have a different understanding of the form, with only some of them aware of or interested in its most common Western formal quality, lack of lineation. Furthermore, the generally accepted quality of *sanwen shi*, its lack of rhyme, was in practice violated continually.[11] The real consensus seems to be that consensus was unnecessary for writers more interested in creation than definition, and although the debate over rhyme grew intense for a time, there never seemed to be a need to precisely determine the formal limits of *sanwen shi*, or any evidence that authors or critics tried to do so.

Unquestionably, though, the poetic genre of *sanwen shi* is accompanied by a certain number of expectations that arise from its history. The term was derived from a literal translation of the Western term[12] "prose poetry" by taking the classical term

[7] "They that have the pow'r to hurt, and will do none," *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 1860.

[8] Zhou Zuoren in Jia Zhifang 贾植芳, ed. *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue zuopin xuan* 中国现代文学作品选 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1986), 1: 443.

[9] Lang Gong, *Xin wenyi pinglun,* p. 449.

[10] *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity* (Leiden: CNWS, 1994), p. 66. Hockx quotes Wang Renshu's 王任叔 (also known as Ba Ren 巴人) "Small Homage to a *Prose Poetry* Writer!" published in *Wenxue zhoubao*: "Many [of Xu's works] are miscellaneous poems, divided into lines. In fact, those are also prose poems, because they do not have end rhyme."

[11] Cf. the last couplet of the second stanza of Zhou Zuoren's "Rivulet" in Jia Zhifang *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue zuopin xuan*, p. 443: a twelve-syllable line with an extended hyphen in the center as caesura is followed by a thirteen-syllable line, with an identical rhyme on 流动 in each line, and the near-rhyme 堰 and 般 before each line's caesura, at syllable six.

[12] Likely the English, because the French form is different: "poèmes en prose," which would translate as something more like 散文写的诗. The Russian is *stikhotvoreniia v prose*, which also adds a preposition that the Chinese omits. Unfortunately, as with most word origins, the first use of this term is difficult to determine; however, the French and Russian terms both heavily

for unrhymed prose, 散文, and prepending it to the term for lyric poetry, 诗. Those who named *sanwen shi* chose to allude to the most famous and well-respected genre of classical poetry, *shi*, even though classical *ci* 词 poems were more colloquial and would have been better suited to the *baihuawen* movement. The decision to choose this particular name, if it was a decision and not mere accident, might have been an attempt to gain some kind of authority for the fledgling form: apart from these being some of the only terms available (*shi* having already been borrowed into *baihua* to refer to poetry generally), they certainly evaluated the poems in the genre as somehow equal to or matched with the great poetry of the past. This could be combined with the fact that a term with strong relationships to contemporary foreign culture might have provided, during the late Republican period, valuable authority to the form. Michelle Yeh writes that "for a long period of time, the West was virtually equated with progress and served as the dominant model for Chinese poets."[13] In many ways, then, the term *sanwen shi* was a pleasurable one: with one foot in classical belles-lettres and one in the progress of the West, it could have a strong positive connotation while simultaneously reengineering a classical term to do the work of modernity, a process metonymic for the *baihuawen* practice of recombining classical characters to make new compounds and words.

Again, though, as to the particulars of the tradition of *sanwen shi*, individual interpretations varied widely. While Zhou Zuoren routinely mentions Baudelaire when he talks about prose poetry, Liu Bannong, a writer of *sanwen shi* and contemporary of Lu Xun's, held the contrary opinion that "French poetry... has extremely strict rules. No matter which collection of poetry you look at, there is absolutely no one who dares to change the set meter or write a rhymeless poem (*wuyun shi*)."[14] Like Zhou and Lu Xun, Liu Bannong spoke no French; unlike them, he seems to have been unable to get access to any French work written after 1890. This example is indicative of the way in which the Western tradition of prose poetry passed into China: Guo Moruo's discussion about prose poetry comes as an introduction to Goethe's epistolary novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, during which he writes, "If there is anyone who, from start to finish, does not understand the meaning of *sanwen shi*, I invite them to read this work, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*!"[15] In Guo's eyes, *sanwen shi* was a certain kind of near-ecstatic interaction between writer and reader, and the term was one of praise. Sometimes when modern English speakers hear a piece of language that they like, they might say "that's like a poem"; Guo Moruo's use of the term seems to be in this vein. When Lu Xun described *Wild Grass* in an introduction to the anthology of his selected works, he wrote, "I had

underline that works in this genre are poems, while that insistence is slightly lighter in the less inflected English and Chinese terms, where word order alone indicates what is to be considered an adjective and what is a noun.

[13] Yeh, "A New Orientation to Poetry," p. 89.

[14] Translated in Hockx, *Questions of Style*, p. 172.

[15] Lang Gong, *Xin wenyi pinglun*, p. 449.

some little emotional impressions, so I wrote short pieces, to exaggerate a bit they were *sanwen shi*, and later they were printed into a book which I called *Wild Grass*."[16] This seems lightly to echo Guo Moruo's interpretation of the term, and although Lu Xun had quite a complex relationship to the form, in this situation he seems to try to avoid using the term to praise his own writing. Many authors and critics of the period seemed to have read prose poetry, but few are known to have read works *about* prose poetry, and in the absence of conversation fixing the term's associated tradition, each writer and critic was allowed to have an idiosyncratic, personal understanding of the term. The part of the tradition of s*anwen shi* that came from foreign literature, then, in the years before it was widely understood to be a way that the Chinese wrote and had sufficient native examples to create expectations, depended heavily on what languages the author spoke and read, which national literatures he or she was interested in, and what definition of the tradition best served an individual writer's needs.

The chief benefit of pursuing such a form, which had the connotational ring of authority but without providing much in the way of guidance for individual authors, may have been its freedom. Whatever story one might tell one's self about the *sanwen shi*, it would be difficult to contradict. As Baudelaire says in his prose poem "The Windows," "Perhaps you are saying to me, 'are you sure that this fable is the truth?' What does outside reality matter to me, if my imagination has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?"[17] Because *sanwen shi* is not prose poetry and because the majority of its readers likely didn't know or care much what Western prose poetry was, they were free to interact with the poem directly, without the intermediary that tradition represents; because *sanwen shi* lacked clear rules, writers had the opportunity to undertake the massive task of inventing poetic language for the new generation of *baihua* poets, readers, and speakers.

The preceding, I hope, will be interpreted both as a description of attitudes towards *sanwen shi* in the early Republican period and as an estimation of the hopelessness of talking generally about this form during this period. Ironically, the very plasticity of *sanwen shi* as a genre has invited critics to act much like writers of the period when assessing the form and tradition, defining and redefining it to meet critical contingencies. As seen above, Guo Moruo identifies it as a level of accomplishment reachable by authors; Sun Yushi 孙玉石 , writing in the 1980s, takes a definition from Baudelaire as a textbook truth and applies it to only the authors whom it fits best.[18] Both of these opinions are, considering the variety of possible

[16] *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 13: 469.

[17] Charles Baudelaire, *Little Poems in Prose,* tr. Aleister Crowley (Paris: Edward W. Titus, 1928), p. 102.

[18] *'Ye cao' yanjiu* 《野草》研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), p. 233. The definition, attributed to Baudelaire but not cited, is "A kind of prose that means poetry, a music without rhythm or end rhyme." Baudelaire's version, from the preface to *Little Poems in Prose*,

truths about *sanwen shi*, inarguably correct, although they have the power to mislead. It is when ideas about the genre, inchoate as it is, are applied to individual works that real violence can be done to the reception and understanding of individual poems and collections.

Of Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, Jaroslav Průšek writes that although "the question remains open... I am inclined to the opinion that the poems in prose are his independent creation and that he succeeded in producing an original parallel to this remarkable trend in European poetry."[19] Leo Ou-fan Lee agrees, but goes further, identifying the particular source of 'influence' that Průšek may be anxious about: "Kuriyagawa Hakuson in his book cited Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*, which may have led Lu Xun to this French Symbolist poet. While there are indeed some similarities of mood and texture...it seems that in terms of meaning and conception the two are still substantially different."[20] Lee prefers to locate the story of Lu Xun's *sanwen shi* in that same Kuriyagawa Hakuson's 厨川白村 *Symbols of Mental Anguish* (Chinese:《苦闷的象征》), saying that "one could also see Lu Xun's prose poetry as a special kind of prose — a poetic variation of the personal essay" and an attempt to "realize Kuriyagawa's theory of art." He describes the relevant part of Kuriyagawa's theory as being that "the most essential ingredient of art is its symbolic nature."[21] This is, as are the above examples, as true as many other possible statements about *sanwen shi* that can be made out of the presence of individual poems. The genre is part essay, it does hold a liminal position between poetry and prose, it is by any estimation a variation of something — and because the elasticity of the term gives those who speak of it so much room to move, critics can create for themselves the comparatively easier task of advertising Lu Xun's unique and self-invented genius, his inspired interpretation of a little-known Japanese critic, instead of the comparatively more difficult task of showing how he entered into dialogue with and then individualized the form and content of Baudelaire's *Little Poems in Prose*.

As Lee notes, immediately before beginning work in earnest on *Wild Grass* in 1924, Lu Xun read and translated Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Mental Anguish*, which included a complete Japanese translation of Charles Baudelaire's prose poem "Windows," part of which has been quoted above.[22] In notes attached to part two,

appears below. Baudelaire's indeterminate idea, his ambitious and unreachable dream, gets elided away by the critic into a certain categorization which allows research.

[19] Průšek, *Lyrical and the Epic*, p. 57.

[20] Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: a Study of Lu Xun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 215, n. 20.

[21] Ibid., p. 92. Note that this is a sentiment also held by Baudelaire and the later French Symbolists, and additionally that Lee's assessment inverts the terms, speaking of a *poetic essay* instead of a *prose* (散文) *poem* (诗).

[22] The writing of *Wild Grass* began in September 1924 according to David E. Pollard, *The True Story of Lu Xun* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), p. 88. *Kumen de xiangzheng* was published in December, 1924. Lu Xun's translation is in *Lu Xun yiwen ji* 鲁迅译文集 (Beijing:

section two of the chapter of the translation entitled "Self-Discovered Joy," Lu Xun writes:

> Baudelaire's *sanwen shi* was translated into Japanese in the original volume; I have, however, used Max Bruno's German translation to make a comparison, and there are quite a few places that differ. For now I have consulted these two books in order to translate into Chinese. If there's anyone who could trouble themselves to add some corrections, this is vehemently hoped-for and would be deeply appreciated. Otherwise, in the future I'd still like to find a friend who speaks French to revise it; but now, I do this temporarily and perfunctorily.[23]

Translating Hakuson's book required the translation of other poems, including those by Shelley, Charles Van Lerberghe, and B. Taylor, but Lu Xun singles out "Windows" as especially interesting. At the very least, we can now know that before he wrote *Wild Grass*, Lu Xun did have access to a readable translation of *Little Poems in Prose*, and had read at least one of its poems. On careful parallel readings of the two texts, though, more connections are perceptible. In Baudelaire's poem "The Dog and the Flask," a person offers a dog perfume and the dog shrinks back. The person says "Unworthy companion of this sad life of mine, how you resemble the public, to whom one must never present the delicate perfumes...but [only] carefully selected scraps of nastiness!"[24] In *Wild Grass*, a man calls a dog 势利 or "selfish, self-interested" in "The Dog's Retort" and the dog replies, "I'm not up to man in that respect . . . . I'm ashamed to say I still don't know how to distinguish between copper and silver, between silk and cloth, between officials and common citizens, between masters and their slaves."[25] The narrator, in this case a man dreaming, turns and flees in shame. This is perhaps the clearest example of a poem in *Wild Grass* that sits in direct dialogue with *Little Poems in Prose*. Although the situation is symbolic rather than realist, Lu Xun writes with a sensitivity to the less fortunate that is the hallmark of works of fiction such as "Medicine" or "A Small Incident"; one can almost visualize his reaction to the effete artist's snide voice that thunders out of Baudelaire's poem. Other concordances are less dramatic and less oppositional: both Baudelaire's "Chimera" and Lu Xun's "The Passer-by" and "The Beggars" begin with strangers encountering each other in a strangely blank landscape, for example. "Autumn Night" in *Wild Grass* contains a light echo of the emotion in Baudelaire's "The Artist's Confession": "Autumn Night" reads: "I have never seen such a strange, high sky. It seems to want to leave this world of men....For the moment, though, it is singularly blue; and its scores of starry eyes are blinking coldly,"[26] while Baudelaire writes, "How great is the delight of drowning

Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959), 3: 48-49. Most of the works of Lu Xun, including translator's notes, are available at http://win.mofcom.gov.cn/book/index.html after searching for 鲁迅.

[23] *Lu Xun quanji*, 10: 263.

[24] Baudelaire, tr. Crowley, p. 14.

[25] *Wild Grass* 野草, tr. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2000), p. 89.

[26] *Wild Grass*, p. 7.

one's look in the vastness of sky and sea; solitude, silence, incomparable chastity of the blue..."[27]

Lee's analysis, that the two collections are different in "meaning," is of course correct: while Baudelaire and Lu Xun shared a desire for change and a belief in the power of art to effect that change, the outcomes they desired were quite different. In the 1930 essay "Those Who Speak of Hastening the Revolution But Do Not Revolt," Lu Xun describes Baudelaire in this way:

> Everybody knows that Baudelaire of France was a decadent (颓废 *tuifei)* poet, but he welcomed revolution right up until the moment that revolution was about to harm his decadent lifestyle, and only then did he start to loathe revolution. So paper revolutionaries on the eve of the revolution, moreover the most thorough, most intense revolutionaries, during the brief period of the revolution can lose their previous false fronts — unconscious false faces.[28]

The picture of the anomic, cowardly elite that Lu Xun draws as Baudelaire's portrait is certainly not the attitude of a fawning imitator, but neither is it the language of a disinterested historical observer. When writing to the younger writer Xiao Jun 萧军, in response to a letter that hasn't survived, Lu Xun writes, "That book of mine *Wild Grass*: the technique certainly can't be considered bad, but its mood is too depressed (颓唐 *tuitang*) because I wrote it after encountering many reversals. I hope you can distance yourself from the influence of this kind of depressive mood."[29] 颓废 means not only decadent, but dejected and depressed as well[30] — the shared root 颓, whose additional meanings have to do with falling and collapsing, dominates both compounds and their interpretation in *baihua* is far from fixed. My interpretation of the connection between these passages is that despair, justified or not, is something Lu Xun sees as a defeat, a toppling; it is also the luxury of those not currently fighting for survival or

[27] Baudelaire, tr. Crowley, p. 3.

[28] *Lu Xun quanji*, 4: 231. Originally published in *Mengya yuekan* 萌芽月刊 1:3 (1930).

[29] *Lu Xun quanji*, 4: 224.

[30] The *Han Ying cidian* 汉英辞典 lists "dejected, dispirited" for 颓唐 and "dispirited, decadent" for 颓废, while Lin Yutang's *Chinese-English Dictionary* lists 颓废 as "downhearted, dispirited" and 颓唐 as "disconsolate, decadent, out of luck." The most common classical allusion is Confucius predicting his own death, saying that Mount Taishan will "颓." The *Guoyu cidian* has two definitions for 颓废, which translate to "to degenerate (verbal) or collapse," and "dispirited, cannot be roused." In the *Guoyu*, 颓唐's definition is identical to that of 颓废. In the *Ci hai* dictionary, 颓废 is defined as "fallen, disabled" and 颓废主义 *tuifei zhuyi* as "Decadence," with a reference to Baudelaire specifically, while the entry for 颓唐 defines it as "for the facial expression to become dejected" and cites Lu Xun's *Wandering*, describing the feelings of the remembered heroine in "Regret for the Past" after she is forced to eat the chickens she'd raised by hand. What all this demonstrates is that even now, but especially in the 1920s, these terms were in the process of being created, and often hung somewhere between a classical exegesis, a foreign parallel, and a personal, contextual use that went unrepresented by either tradition.

constructing the future. This retreat from engagement with the world of facts may be part of Baudelaire's ideology, but for Lu Xun, retreat is artificial, temporary and comes from "encountering reversals," 碰钉子, literally "meeting with nails." These may have ranged anywhere from his argument with and estrangement from his brother Zhou Zuoren,[31] to the worsening national political situation, to "the lack of impact on national life that the work of himself and other reformers had had."[32] All these, though, were external obstacles, influences on his mood for which he seemed to take no ideological responsibility: what mattered was what got created, and in *Wild Grass*, it is "the technique" that "can't be considered bad." Lu Xun seems to visualize himself as struggling under the influence of these external obstacles in a way that is similar to the way he thinks of Baudelaire (but probably quite different from Baudelaire's thoughts on Baudelaire): fallen, failed, and therefore withdrawing into small, personal pleasures like the esoteric and numb amateur of antique rubbings that Lu Xun describes in the preface to *Call to Arms*. This book does not, in its own pages or later in the mouth of the author, justify itself in terms of political engagement or correct thinking: it is instead "the technique" that is foregrounded, the way to write which makes a contribution.

Of course, the experience of looking up into the sky and feeling its vastness in a rush of vertigo is nothing unique or new, and poets have been writing responses to other poets since well before the Han poet Yang Xiong 揚雄 wrote *Fan Sao* 反骚 in response to Qu Yuan's 屈原 *Li Sao* 离骚. The problem confronted by readers interested in dialogues between poets may come from terms like "influence," with its connotation of passivity for the "influenced," or "adaptation," which insinuates that the intertextual writer is performing an act which is something other than creative. Critics like Průšek or Lee, who are passionate about the authors they study, tend in the face of these terms to rally around the independence, uniqueness and genius of their writers. Nationalism is a further obstacle: when Achilles Fang wrote that "Ezra Pound was the godfather, and Amy Lowell the god-mother, of the Chinese literary revolution of 1917," Zhou Zhiping initially responds not to the facts about "influences," which are questionable, but the perceived cross-national causation, the birthing, that he sees in Fang's assessment: "What I cannot agree with is that... it seems as if without these two American writers, China's literary revolution would have been aborted, or at least deferred."[33] I agree with Zhou that this idea is hard to stomach, but believe further that no book, no matter how much it echoes another, is a child of anyone except its author: this includes nations, which because they are not human, because they have no limbs and cannot hold pens, require individuals or groups of individuals in order to create literature. This is perhaps why Fang used the nonprocreative "godfather" and "godmother." Once literature is conceptualized as

[31] Pollard, *The True Story of Lu Xun*, p. 82.
[32] Ibid., p. 90.
[33] Fang, quoted in Zhou Zhiping (Chih-ping Chou), *Hu Shi yu Lu Xun* 湖适与鲁迅(Taibei: Shibao wenhua chuban gongsi, 1977), p. 78; Zhou's response appears on p. 79.

the direct product of a national spirit or a network of influences, crucial analytical tools for reading it are lost. As Yeh writes, "the dichotomy between native and foreign becomes too simplistic and highly problematic. The modernity of Chinese poetry from 1917 on should be more properly seen as the result of the poets' searching, among multiple alternatives, for forms and styles through which to express the particular modernity of their complex society."[34] An art form, especially an open-ended or experimental form like *sanwen shi*, becomes wholly different the moment it crosses borders and is read by people with different experiences and expectations; the fact that one work of art converses with another does not mean that it is the same art, or that it is "derived" from the prior work of art in some kind of mechanistic fashion. Once these ideas are accepted, it is possible to see elements of Lu Xun's aesthetic and his desires for Chinese language and literature that are invisible to those who imagine him either as the passive child of a foreign tradition or a lonely genius shaping a new China out of whole cloth.

In translation, the most direct and professional method of literary discourse between distant writers, Lu Xun advocated what he called a "stiff" style with the express purpose of widening and changing the Chinese language, as well as solving its deficiencies through the use of new and foreign structures to include more kinds of thought, more syntactic and expressive capabilities, and more life. "To cure this ailment, I believe we have to do it the hard way and seek to render thought in wayward syntactical structures. What is old and foreign (coming from other provinces, regions and countries) can finally be embraced as our own. This is not a figment of the imagination."[35] Questions of identity, patrimony, ownership and "Chineseness" seem beside the point: because Lu Xun sees himself and his generation as being tasked with the creation of *baihuawen*, he naturally focuses on what the language can *do* for those who speak it. As Lydia Liu writes, "to me, the crucial thing here is...what practical purpose or needs bring an ethnographer to pursue cultural translation."[36] Like the term *sanwen shi,* once a word or idea enters the Chinese language, Lu Xun sees it as "our own" because only then can it be upheld or opposed by the majority of the nation unable to speak foreign languages, and his goal is to change the Chinese language until it can comfortably and effectively encompass the breadth of Western ideas and experiences. The size of the challenge, additionally, seems to give him a sense of responsibility to make the best language possible regardless of what tools may be necessary to bring it about: "We should still uphold a precise, so-called "Westernized" language, because if we are to speak precisely, the original grammar of Chinese is not enough, and the mass language of China

[34] Yeh, "A New Orientation to Poetry," p. 90. Note that the searching *belongs to*, because it is carried out by, the poets.

[35] Translated in Tak-Hung Leo Chan, *Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, Issues and Debates* (Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2004), p. 159.

[36] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

absolutely cannot go on forever being unclear."[37] The discomfort he feels in using the label "Westernized" is palpable; one has the feeling that he is trying to show that he is convinced enough of the utility of this language change that he will remain a proponent even in the face of nationalist and anti-imperialist arguments to do otherwise. In the end, the choices he makes, the structures he chooses to render in Chinese, and the way that he encounters and internalizes the ideas and experiences of others are all manifestations of his self, his will and intent — whether or not he shares them with others who spoke them first, and no matter which side of what ocean they live on. His intent when translating seems to have been very directly to reform and improve *baihuawen*.

An additional element that a belief in Lu Xun's "independent creation"[38] obscures is the backbreaking labor and immense power of Lu Xun's erudition. Fully able to work in five languages (Shaoxing dialect, classical Chinese, *baihua*, German and Japanese) and conversant with two more (English and Russian), he read works of all kinds widely, deeply, and accurately. His translation work was difficult, and part of his self-perceived responsibility to labor on behalf of his community: while translating *Dead Souls*, he described himself as sitting "with the dictionary constantly in my hand and my body constantly covered with cold sweat, and still only having myself to blame for having such an insufficient language level."[39] The works Lu Xun chose to enter into dialogue with, like *Little Poems in Prose*, were chosen from a mental library of immense size, and their selection should be seen as yet another form of Lu Xun's self-expression. That he considered the translation of foreign works into Chinese as a sometimes unpleasant struggle, that he was unsatisfied with his own abilities and wanted to be able to do more, speaks to his vision of a more inclusive, encompassing *baihuawen*. Were he less interested in improving the language by enriching its relationships to other manners and methods of speech, he may very well have remained satisfied with the nascent *sanwen shi* tradition that was already extant in the work of Liu Bannong and many others.

The dream of a better language, one that is clearer, more flexible, and more beautiful, is shared by both Lu Xun and Baudelaire, who writes, "Which of us, in his ambitious moments, has not dreamed of the miracle of poetic prose, musical, without rhyme and without rhythm, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of the psyche, the prickings of consciousness?"[40] Knowing that this dream is not yet reachable, Lu Xun chooses to sacrifice fluency in his translation work, but as Lundberg concludes, "there is a definite difference between Lu Xun's 'translation language' and his 'original

[37] Lu Xun, letter to Cao Juren 曹聚仁, quoted and translated in Lennart Lundberg, *Lu Xun as a Translator: Lu Xun's Translation and Introduction of Literature and Literary Theory, 1903-1936* (Stockholm: Orientaliska Studier, 1989), p. 230.

[38] Průšek, *Lyrical and the Epic*, p. 57.

[39] From Lu Xun, "Notes without Title," translated in Lundberg, *Lu Xun as a Translator*, p. 232.

[40] Baudelaire, *Little Poems in Prose*, tr. Crowley, p. 7.

language'....In his own writings he decided himself."[41] *Wild Grass* represents, perhaps even more than his fiction, a set of decisions about the beauty and musicality of the *baihua* for which Lu Xun was such a passionate advocate. *Wild Grass* comprises a variety of forms and styles, including a short play, "The Passer-By," a satiric poem he describes as "New Doggerel in the Classical Style" called "My Lost Love," parables such as "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave," and no less than eight dream narratives, a third of the book, most of which start with 我梦见, "I saw in a dream...". This essay is too short to examine each of these categories individually, but the dream narratives seem best to represent the kind of freedom that matches the spirit of *sanwen shi*: each dream, like each poet's version of the formal rules and traditions of *sanwen shi*, invents itself with perfect authority, even though it echoes and mimics all manner of things first experienced in the waking world. Furthermore, the dream narratives of *Wild Grass* seem to be used as a kind of sandbox for aesthetic play and invention. One of the clearest examples of this is the poem "A Good Story," 好的故事, where the speaker dreams the experience of a beautiful story without recreating its context or describing any facet of its communal or national import, attempting to express symbolically how the best stories *feel* without having to situate them in any fixed relationship to the present world of people and facts.

The freedom of a dream and the freedom of *sanwen shi* seem like complementary and rational choices for Lu Xun during this period: as Maurice Bloch writes, "if we are dealing with a language use where syntax does not articulate freely, the potential of language for carrying arguments becomes reduced and the propositional force of language is transformed."[42] The poetic forms of classical Chinese compress line length, enforce the elision of particles and other directive words, demand the presence of rhyme, and in the most restrictive cases, force language into complex tonal patterns. I believe, as Lu Xun and other writers of the early twentieth century seem to, that these rules limit expression as does all linguistic ritual according to Bloch: "Although the restrictions are seen usually as restrictions of form rather than restrictions of content, they are a far more effective way of restricting content than would be possible if content were attacked directly."[43]

To take a simple and specific example, in *Wild Grass* Lu Xun writes a satirical poem called "My Lost Love" with the subtitle "New Doggerel in the Classical Style." The pattern of the poem is that the speaker's love gives him lyrical gifts that are easily represented in a classical seven-character line, for example a "golden watch-chain" or *jin biao suo* 金表索. A three-character object clause is perfect for a classical seven-beat poem, as it allows the subject and verb to occupy the first four syllables, then uses the required caesura after the fourth syllable to gather a slight anticipation for the beauty of the elaborate, adjectivally modified noun that finishes the line. All of the lover's

[41] Lundberg, *Lu Xun as a Translator*, p. 234.
[42] Maurice Bloch, "Symbols, Song, Dance, and Features of Articulation," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 15 (1974,) p. 56.
[43] Bloch, "Symbols, Song, Dance," p. 62.

gifts are of three syllables, with an adjectival clause and a noun, and mostly have classical referents: a "hundred-butterfly scarf," *bai die jin* 百蝶巾, a "pair of swallows, sketched," *shuang yan tu* 双燕图, and "roses," *mei gui hua* 玫瑰花. The speaker's return gifts, however, all violate traditional poetic expectations or traditional poetic forms. In the second stanza, the return gift is a stick of haw candy *bing tang hu lu* 冰糖壶卢, sentimentally appropriate (if perhaps a little cheap to buy) but an inappropriately colloquial, quotidian object which has no delicate three-syllable formulation and sticks out gruesomely past the edge of the seven-beat line.[44] Most classical poets, if they couldn't find another way to say *bing tang hu lu*, would exchange the object for something whose name fits the stricture: this is just one way in which metrical restriction, disproportionately limiting colloquial or newly minted words that aren't monosyllabic or otherwise metrically flexible, becomes the "restriction of content" to which Bloch refers. It is as if, in English, a poet tried to insert "potassium carbonate" into a sonnet. The chemical compound not only has too many syllables to fit in easily to a sonnet line, but also violates iambic meter, especially with its anapestic "carbonate." This means that in most cases, the word's associated content is excluded from the ritual of sonnet poetry. What Lu Xun may be pointing out in "My Lost Love" is that an increasingly large part of modern life — not just its most technical language, as in the English example, but its things and feelings, its "neurasthenia," (神经衰弱, at the end of stanza three) its candied haws — aren't represented by the classical language, and are kept out of classical poetry by formal constraints. Freedom of content, one of the goals of writing about dreams, needs to be matched by a freedom of form, which may have motivated the use of *sanwen shi* over other options during the composition of *Ye cao*.

Having established, even if only provisionally, that some of the structures of *Ye cao* and specifically "A Good Story" might be designed to create a free space in which to invent and refine *baihuawen* into poetic music, the task remains to examine the poem itself in an attempt to determine what that music is and how it is arranged. There seems to be some critical agreement on the particular attention to sound in *Ye Cao* and "A Good Story." Meng Ruijun 孟瑞君 writes, "The mood of 'A Good Story' is representative of a richly expressive musical aesthetic," and Li Tianming 李天明 concurs, saying of "A Good Story" that "one of its most conspicuous characteristics is its musicality."[45] A feeling is present to at least some readers, one that senses the presence of a willful patterning to the sounds much in the way that the ear can

[44] It's interesting to note here that since this word is of colloquial origin, the characters to represent it are determined phonetically and aren't associated with the meaning of the word, which nowadays is more often written 冰糖葫芦, or "ice candy bottle gourd" even though the candy looks nothing at all like a gourd.

[45] Meng Ruijun, *'Ye cao' de yishu shijie* **野草的艺术世界** (Beijing: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1994), p. 218; Li Tianming, *Nanyi zhishuo de kuzhong* 难以直说的苦衷 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), p. 145.

distinguish the fuzz of an untuned television from the cyclical hiss of the ocean. Intuition is insufficient, though, to begin a discussion about the sound patterns of the poem, and multiple, albeit occasionally contradictory, methods exist of charting or tracking the systems by which the sound of "A Good Story" might be organized. Although some of the possible methods will be applied below, they are intended only as a kind of diagnostic test — it seems clear from his writings that Lu Xun himself probably didn't conceptualize the prosody of his work as it is analyzed below, but inasmuch as the methods he did use are unavailable to us (it is possible that he intuited the sonic patterns of these poems just as we sense their presence on first hearing the poems read aloud) these analytical tools are the best way to open a conversation about sound in "A Good Story."

The intense critical discussion about the presence or absence of rhyme that was touched on above makes it a natural first encounter with the sound of the poem, especially considering that the absence of rhyme during this historical period is as important a musical feature as the presence of rhyme. The biggest methodological barrier, however, to identifying rhyme in "A Good Story" has to do with Lu Xun's background: a native of Shaoxing, he grew up speaking the regional dialect, related to but fully distinguished from the Wu dialect of the region in and around Shanghai. He moved to Beijing in 1912, but by the time the composition of *Wild Grass* began, he had less than full fluency in the northern dialect on which the pronunciation of *baihuawen* was based. In 1933, the Shanghai-based *Publishing News* printed a "sketch" of Lu Xun by a pseudonymous author that said, "Lu Xun very much likes to deliver speeches, it's just that he stammers a little bit, plus he's *nan qiang bei diao* 南腔北调."[46] The four-character idiom literally means "southern accent northern intonation" or a spoken voice that mixes several different accents in a confusing or off-putting way.[47] This relatively minor jab (followed in the article by some carefully considered praise) inspired a significant reaction from Lu Xun, who by the end of the year had written a piece that would become the foreword for a collection of *zawen* or short essays that would be titled *Nanqiang beidiao*. Responding there to the three allegations that he loved speechifying, stammered and had a mixed accent, he wrote, "I am quite amazed at the first two points, but the last one I really admire. Honestly, I can't speak the cottony-soft, performative vernacular of Suzhou, I can't knock out any Old Beijinger, I'm not decent, I just won't do, I am fundamentally *nan qiang bei diao*. Furthermore, in

[46] L*u Xun quanji*, 4: 429, note 1.

[47] The light insinuation of this idiom may be, because *qiang* is also a word for the human body cavity or trunk, that the northern accent is artificial and oratorical and that the southern accent is the natural underlying state, which would make sense as the pseudonymous author would likely also be a southerner and a Wu dialect speaker, and feel that Lu Xun as a fellow southerner should speak in a less northern idiom. This would add another dimension to Lu Xun's reaction, if what was at stake was not just his ability as an oratorical entertainer, but the willingness of dialect-speaking southerners to learn and use a *baihua* based on northern dialects.

the last few years this deficiency has also brought about a tendency in my writing."[48] He goes on not to define the tendency but to ascribe it to the end of his regular speaking engagements with *Yu si* magazine, and to the loss of the educational correction he received from the half-hostile audiences that attended those events. He chooses the idiom as a title, perhaps, because of the portmanteau nature of the *zawen* he writes in 1933, again self-identifying with a lack of structure, or more accurately, a lack of stricture, in his own art.

Knowing, however, that Lu Xun's personal idiom was something of a mix of Shaoxing dialect and northern Mandarin, and especially considering the position of some critics that the rural scene of "A Good Story" is inspired by the sights of Lu Xun's hometown, the discussion of rhyme must be predicated by an examination of the poem's idiolect.[49] Shaoxing dialect is related to the Wu dialect and is a direct descendant of the language of the people of Yue, a Warring States nation eventually annexed by the state of Chu.[50] Because of their long history of differentiation, one of the features of many Wu-related dialects, Shaoxing dialect included, is a set of character forms that partially differ from *wenyan* or classical characters: the third person singular pronoun, for example, is 伊, and the plural (a distinction not made by most classical writers, or made with the additional character 辈) is 耶. Unlike other dialects that lack an individual written representation and whose grammatical and lexical differences therefore 'hide' in the reinterpretation or cross-application of more generally shared classical characters, it's possible to track the use of some few aspects of the language. After undertaking a statistical analysis of Lu Xun's work, Raymond Hsü finds only a few instances of dialect vocabulary. He concludes that many of these expressions, spread out over the length of a prolific career, are probably unintentional. [51] A Chinese-language dictionary of dialectal phrases in Lu Xun's writing has only one entry for "A Good Story" specifically attributed to Shaoxing dialect, a metaphoric expression for sorghum that appears in paragraph 7.[52] In fact, Hsü finds Lu Xun to use more *baihua* than most of his contemporaries, noting that "the general impression that Lu Xun uses much less *baihua* than an average modern writer has presumably become current because of the tendency for readers to be so attracted by his colorful and often

[48] *Lu Xun quanji*, 4: 427.

[49] On the story's setting, see Tomoyuki Katayama, 片山智行, *Lu Xun 'Ye cao' quan yi* 鲁迅野草全译, tr. Li Dongmu 李冬木 (Changchun: Guilin daxue chubanshe, 1993), p. 63, and Wei Junxiu 卫俊秀, *Lu Xun 'Ye cao' tansuo* 鲁迅〈野草〉探索 (Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989), p. 50.

[50] For more about Shaoxing dialect, see the introduction to Yang Wei 杨葳 and Yang Naijun 杨乃浚, *Shaoxing fangyan* 绍兴方言 (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chuban gongsi, 2000).

[51] Raymond S. W. Hsü, *The Style of Lu Hsün: Vocabulary and Usage* (Hong Kong: Centre for Asian Studies, 1979), pp. 124, 78.

[52] Xie Dexian 谢德铣, *Lu Xun zuopin fangyan cidian* 鲁迅作品方言词典(Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1992), p. 54.

original use of the other elements, particularly *wenyan*, that they overlook the fairly high proportion of *baihua*."[53]

Even if he did intend to write with *baihua* structures and in *baihua* characters and compounds, the question remains as to whether the *sound* of those words in Lu Xun's experience did or did not match the experience of his readers both then and now. This is a difficult undertaking, especially without access to recordings of Lu Xun reading any of his work, much less "A Good Story," but some tentative conclusions can be made by using contemporary recordings of the poem read in Shaoxing dialect. In the eighty years that have passed since the composition of *Wild Grass*, Shaoxing dialect has changed in ways that can't be easily measured; nevertheless, contemporary recordings are one of the few ways available to approximate the sound of the words as Lu Xun might have experienced them. After a thorough examination of a contemporary Shaoxing speaker reading "A Good Story," it does appear that the poem has more rhyme than might be audible from a Mandarin reading.[54] Listening to the piece read in *Shaoxinghua*, it appears that only one set of phrases clearly rhymes in Shaoxing dialect but not in contemporary Mandarin.[55] The location, however, is an interesting one, in the first paragraph, following a light rhyme between *de* and *le* (light, because it is made up of particles and not stronger nouns, verbs, or adjectives) that is extant only in Mandarin idiolects. The syntactically parallel couplet that follows ends with the contemporary Mandarin syllables "*jin*" and "*bian*," which not only rhyme in Shaoxing but also are much closer to the pronunciation of the preceding phrase, which ends in the contemporary Mandarin syllable "*an*" but sounds in Shaoxing more like "*gnin*." This single instance is based on a necessarily inexact methodology, but it does suggest, in agreement with Hsü's conclusion above, that the sound patterning of the poem was generally audible in *baihua*, with some exceptions which may well have been unintentional.

The arrangement and frequency of rhyme in "A Good Story" seem to show the strong presence of its creator's attention. Illustrating, perhaps, that its author ignored the black-and-white distinction between rhymed and rhymeless poetry found in some criticism, rhymes in this poem are localized in two passages, the first paragraph and the first instance of the lyrical list of sights that appear in the dream-story. What is rejected is not necessarily rhyme, but a regular insistence on rhyme, and what rhyme exists is therefore freed from a structural role and can be used to attract attention or intensify emphasis. Rhyme is a good way to announce, at the outset of the poem, that sound will make up an important part of the listener's experience; it can also serve as a kind of hook to draw attention, which is especially crucial in "A Good Story"

[53] Hsü p. 121.

[54] Many thanks to Wei Dong of Princeton University both for recording the poem and for a wealth of knowledge about Shaoxing dialect. Readers may obtain an .mp3 of his reading by contacting the author directly.

[55] In an attempt to apply the Chinese tradition of *fenju* 分句, I will use the inaccurate English term "phrase" to represent one 句, or the space between punctuation marks. See below.

because it opens with the most common and unremarkable scene in the collection, the speaker falling asleep and starting to dream. Usually, in poems like "Dead Fire," the framing scene is contracted to a couple of characters: "I dreamt that I was running along the mountain of ice."[56] This poem lacks that immediacy of exotic sensual experience. "A Good Story" does, though, have a sonic structure at the outset that turns the cheap lamp-oil and cigarette smoke of the speaker's surroundings into something strangely lyric. The appearance of very intense rhymes in the fifth paragraph, rhymes that appear much closer together and more numerously than they would ever be allowed to in a classical poem, emphasizes that list as one of the fundamental experiences of the poem, the 一一看见，一一知道[57] or "seeing one by one, knowing one by one" experience that is first related in the rhymed list of the fifth paragraph, and then recurs as the list is repeated in rhymed and unrhymed fragments throughout the piece. Although it's unlikely that any of Baudelaire's rhymes survived through the process of Japanese translation, it is useful to note that he, too, makes sparing, emphatic use of rhyme both in lists and in other circumstances. In "The Windows" he writes, "Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux..."[58], composing a brief, tight ABAB rhyme at the outset of a longer and more complicated list of adjectives. It seems possible that although originally prose poetry and *sanwen shi* may have both seemed like freedom from rhyme, as time passed it became clear to practitioners that their greater freedom was to rhyme at will.

In classical poems, use of rhyme was difficult to separate from the use of meter: regular, even rhythms intensify and are intensified by the use of regular rhymes, as each aids the other in creating a cycle of expectation and satisfaction. In the most highly refined classical poems, meter, or the combination of strictures a poem obeys with respect to time, was synonymous with rhythm, which I define more broadly as a poem's relationship to time. "A Good Story" has no discernible meter, but it is awash in organized and audible rhythms. One method I've chosen to use to visualize and systematically describe these rhythms is adapted from the classical practice of dividing written texts into phrases or 句 that appear between pauses. Because "A Good Story" uses Western punctuation, these pauses are all present in the text itself, obviating the need for the kind of grammatical analysis required to divide classical Chinese into phrases. Because Chinese syllables are roughly, though not exactly, similar in duration, the number of syllables between punctuation marks can provide a rough estimate of the time it takes to speak the language between each pause.[59] From

[56] *Wild Grass*, p. 83.

[57] *Wild Grass*, p. 62.

[58] Baudelaire, *Petits Poèmes en Prose* (Paris: Garnier, 1958), p. 173.

[59] As in English, the length of the pauses represented by punctuation in Chinese vary widely and depend on a number of issues such as the need to take a breath, the kind of punctuation, the presence of a paragraph break, the rhythmic relationship between the phrases on each side of the punctuation, etc. etc. The *fen ju* method treats them as locations of rhythmic boundaries as opposed to being rhythmically expressive in and of themselves.

a quick scan of the rhythm of "A Good Story," it seems that like rhymes, phrases of identical temporal length appear in clusters, with the largest clusters appearing in paragraphs one, five, seven, eight and eleven. By way of example, in paragraph five, there are four consecutive four-character phrases followed by a two-character phrase and then three more four-character phrases. For comparison, the first two pages of the preface to *Call to Arms* features only one significant site of rhythmic repetition, which takes place when Lu Xun parts with his mother and describes her anxieties over his future.[60] Although the importance of Lu Xun's modern education gives a sardonic twist to his mother's disappointment in his choice, the moment of parting is traditionally lyrical, and the use of a classical seven-syllable form seems quite justified. Intentional or not, that kind of rhythmic touch appears only once in the more than six hundred characters of the preface to *Call to Arms* but is repeated over and over in the five hundred and fifty characters that make up "A Good Story," with hardly a paragraph going by without some sort of doubling or tripling of a syllabic rhythm.

One of the key rhythmic differences between "A Good Story" and traditional Chinese poetry is the variety of rhythmic repetition. Classical Chinese poems are most commonly composed in four, five or seven syllable lines, like those that make up the majority of "My Lost Love"; "A Good Story" uses those rhythms, particularly four and seven syllable phrases, but adds the presence of some eight and ten character phrases. This is significant because, as we saw above in "My Lost Love," the length of a poetic line can control or restrict vocabulary use in the line, and a sentence composed in generally single-syllabic classical Chinese fits well semantically into a seven-syllable line. As the single-syllable words of classical language become the two-character words of *baihua*, sentences that previously fit cleanly into seven-syllable meters begin to press against and then burst the limits of the form. Furthermore, classical Chinese allows the elision of particles and pronouns in a way that proponents of *baihua* like Lu Xun, who tried to work towards a language with the ability "to speak precisely," would not allow. *Baihuawen* simply requires more characters than classical Chinese: the addition of longer phrase lengths to the set of options for rhythmic patterning is crucial to allowing speakers of the new language to simultaneously create both music and fully articulated, unabridged ideas.

[60] Lu Xun, *Call to Arms* **呐喊**, tr. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2000) pp. 2-6. The other two locations of repeated rhythms are less sonically interesting: the pair of six-syllable phrases in paragraph two is the end of a larger list, and has around the caesura a repeated grammatical structure 蟋蟀要**原对的，结子的**平地木, (*xishuai yao* ***yuandui de, jiezi de*** *pingdi mu*) (my emphasis) that overwhelms the repetition of the rhythm and seems more easily interpretable as inspired prose writing than strong rhythm. The three two-syllable phrases in the middle of paragraph three are a list of school subjects, and although the fact that they are all two-character compounds could be intended to draw attention to their newness and modernity (classical subjects would have had single-character *wenyan* names), the passage is in quite a different tonal and sonic register than the lists of "A Good Story."

Some of the repeated metrical structures occur in situations of syntactical parallelism, the subject of a 1972 paper by Charles Alber that argues that "the most intriguing and effective literary device which Lu Xun uses in *Wild Grass* is parallelism."[61] Without engaging in the value debate over which devices are most effective, there is one instance of completely unique parallelism (as well as several instances of recognizable, traditional parallelism, one of the ancient mainstays of classical Chinese literature) in "A Good Story" that is worth identifying. In the seventh paragraph, the speaker says: "带织入狗中，狗织人白云中，白云织人村女中. . . . . ."[62] (*dai zhiru gou zhong, gou zhiru baiyun zhong, baiyun zhiru cunnü zhong*) or "The belts interwove with the dogs, the dogs interwove with the white clouds, and the white clouds with the country girls..."[63] Parallelism in classical poetry or classical parallel prose is fundamentally united with rhythm: two poetic lines or phrases in an essay that are parallel will virtually always have the same number of characters. In *baihua*, however, it is much easier to retain syntactic parallelism without having rhythmic repetition, perhaps due to addition of modern Chinese two-syllable compounds to the classical vocabulary, which mostly represented one action or thing with one character. In *sanwen shi*, which doesn't demand each phrase to be of identical length, identical rhythm and identical syntax no longer have to appear together, and the above line, which expands as it interweaves and intermingles, still never loses its noun + 织入 + noun + 中 structure. The two-syllable structure of *baihua* doesn't require this kind of flexibility in its poetry; this particular line could have been equally easily composed using one-syllable nouns common to both classical Chinese and *baihua* (for example, 带织入狗中，狗织入云中，云织入人中 would also be intelligible in *baihua*), but the tool of rhythmically varied syntactical parallelism is far more available to writers of *baihua* than it would have been for writers of classical Chinese.

One of the limitations of dividing paragraphs and sentences into phrases or *ju* is that the practice poorly describes the comma-separated lists which are centrally important occasions for musical language in "A Good Story." Because most lists, and certainly the recurring lists of sights recorded by the speaker of "A Good Story," have no necessary rules of order, they can be arranged in many different kinds of patterns, whether intended to create a sound, express a mood or idea, or simply surprise the reader. The argument can be made that the lists of "A Good Story" sometimes follow the motion of the speaker's gaze, moving for example from "bushes and withered trees" to "thatched cottages, pagodas, monasteries" as if the speaker's eyes are lifting, following the stretch of the trees to scan the horizon.[64] Undeniably, though, the lists are arranged in a way that emphasizes the ear over the eye. It would be reasonable to

[61] Charles Alber, "Wild Grass, Symmetry and Parallelism in Lu Xun's Prose Poems," in William Nienhauser, ed., *Critical Essays on Chinese Literature* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1976), p. 3.
[62] *Wild Grass,* p. 60. Ellipsis in the original.
[63] Ibid., p. 61.
[64] *Wild Grass*, p. 59.

think that after looking at "monasteries," the speaker would begin to see "monks," which does happen, but only after a digression to 晒着的衣裳 *shaizhe de yishang*, "clothes hanging out to dry" introduces the final sound of 和尚 *heshang*, or monk. This kind of relationship repeats throughout the lists, or rearranged instances of the same list, that dot the poem, and it seems to underline the fact that the speaker is dreaming not a "good place" but a "good story," something other than a vision, something composed in the mind and transmitted from person to person through language.

This mediated nature of "A Good Story" and of all poetry is present not only in its sound, but also in its visual prosody. If one of the goals of *Wild Grass* with respect to *baihua* is the creation of a music, then the printed word on the page is the written note that must accurately represent its associated sound or idea. The original publication of *Wild Grass* in the journal *Yu si* 语丝 had visual features that represented new trends in the printing and arrangement of *baihua*, foremost among which is the previously mentioned practice of putting punctuation in the poetic or prose line itself. In the journal *Xin qingnian*, where Liu Bannong, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun all had important early publications, punctuation followed the Qing dynasty standard and was relegated to a slim margin outside the vertical line of text. The pauses and grammatical information indicated by punctuation were a kind of cheat, displayed in the same fashion as dots or underlining to indicate proper names or book titles, a guide to clarify and standardize the text, rather than a necessary experience of the text. *Yu si* inserts punctuation into the vertical line and thereby affects the time it takes for the eye to scan a line of text. "A Good Story" takes full use of this new visual structure. Its variety of punctuation and insistence on its importance are quite striking.[65] Two punctuation uses stand out: one is the combination of long ellipses with other punctuation, a practice virtually never seen in the West but which gives an indication of the nature of the pause that the ellipsis represents. For instance, after the first introduction of the list of objects in paragraph five, the ellipsis follows a comma, identifying the content of the ellipsis as a list item or set of list items and insinuating that the list continues; in paragraph seven, after the phrase 我就要凝视他们 . . . . . . (*wo jiuyao ningshi tamen*......) or "I just wanted to look more closely at them..." the ellipsis is followed by a period, perhaps expressing a moment when the speaker pauses, remembering the situation, and then stopping suddenly upon recalling the moment of the dissolution of the good story.[66] Whereas ellipses in English, at least, are

[65] The punctuation and some of the language in the *Yu si* version of "A Good Story" differ from Lu Xun's versions as they were later published, with changes like the use of more semicolons in the place of commas, different sentence boundaries, some rearrangement of sentences, and some obvious misprints. The basic tools and the most visually insistent devices, however, are similar between versions, so I have foregone a careful analysis of the piece's evolution. The rest of this paragraph will refer to a reprint of *Yu si* 语丝(Beijing: Beida Yiyuan xin chaoshe), 1:13 (1925), p. 5.

[66] One of the underremarked features of Chinese and Japanese punctuation is the combination of Western marks, like the ellipsis, with Chinese and Japanese marks, like the hollow period

interpreted by context, Lu Xun's use here has a set of additional guides, as an orchestra does — the conductor signals a full rest either sharply, suddenly, or with a gradual, flowing gesture, and the orchestra's manner of falling silent gives extra meaning to the silence that follows. The second noticeable feature is the use of so much punctuation; it's easy to distinguish one of Lu Xun's prose poems from other works in prose, such as the article on *Yu si*'s facing page, because of the distinctively short sentences. This is especially true for "A Good Story," perhaps indicating a desire to control the speed of reading in the absence of a traditional poetic line, and perhaps reflecting the poem's method of "seeing one by one, knowing one by one."

The question may be raised at this point about what the use of prosody in "A Good Story" tells us about the story itself, the pastoral scene, the idealized community, the melting and flowing of sensation into sensation, or the eventual loss of the dream and the dark night with which the poem ends. The impact of musical language, however, is less lexical or ideological and more tonal. Whether we count syllables or not, the reading of "A Good Story" gives a strong sense of pattern, a feeling that the words, like the words of a ritual or prayer, contain something more than their meanings. The heightening of experience that this poem's prosody communicates is common to many kinds of poetry: in a given body of literature, the tools of heightening become fixed over time until an educated listener can identify a piece of speech as a poem without being given any other context. In the first thirty years of its widespread use, *baihua* had no such tradition, and because writers like Lu Xun were dissatisfied with the simple importation of classical structures and tools, the tradition had to be invented. "A Good Story," and to a larger extent *Ye cao*, were influential acts of invention in this respect. The period of *Ye cao*'s composition was also the period during which Lu Xun was developing and perfecting his style in the short essay or *zawen* form, of which Leo Ou-fan Lee assesses as having "a fierce innovativeness... his defiance of the rigidities of genres leads to a creative blending: there is poetry in his prose and vice versa."[67] Prosodic structures first established in the freedom of the prose poem could be applied to other speech acts in *baihua*, and Lu Xun's insistence reproduced above that *Wild Grass* was valuable even if only for its form confirms that he saw something worthwhile in the effort to compose the collection.

Additionally, however, the prosody of "A Good Story" and *Wild Grass* tell us much about Lu Xun's creative aesthetic and his desires concerning the Chinese language of the future. In "How to Write," he writes generally about prose: "As for the prose form, it is actually quite loose, its flaws don't amount to much... guarding against flaws isn't as good as forgetting about them altogether." [68] Looseness, flexibility, ability to encompass difference and foreignness, responsiveness to both the

"。." An English author couldn't combine the ellipsis with a period: the result would be indistinguishable from an ellipsis with four marks instead of three.

[67] Lee, *Voices from the Iron House,* p. 116.

[68] Translated in Nicholas Kaldis, "The Prose Poem as Aesthetic Cognition" *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 3: 2 (2000), p. 45.

individual will and to the objective world of facts: these are the formal and linguistic preferences expressed by the choice of *sanwen shi*, and borne up by the poems' combination and variation of *wenyan*, *baihua*, and Shaoxing dialect, of different kinds of rhyme, meter, and punctuation — southern accents and northern intonation, *nan qiang bei dao*. The music for *baihua* that is advocated by the prosody of *Wild Grass* is not regular or fixed, but adaptive, genre-crossing, border-crossing and opportunistic. Instead of "guarding against flaws" and attempting to solidify a work of poetry into perfection, Lu Xun seems to be seeking out more space, more freedom, and more options to make meaning, even knowing that his attempts to do so will also gradually become an inert historical facet to the history of *baihua.* Instead of a permanent solution or a new classical form, his acts of creation must be temporary survival, a brief flourishing of wild grass, in order to allow the process of creation to continue.