

Perversions of Masculinity: The Masochistic Male Subject in Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo, and Freud

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The celebrated Chinese poet Xu Zhimo once compared the writings of his contemporary Yu Dafu to the sores on a leper who talks about them incessantly in order to draw attention to himself. Although physical degeneration and fascination with ailments are by no means the obsessions of Yu Dafu alone, this is one of the few instances in which one gets a glimpse into the narcissism of a shameless exhibitionist who does not mind being a nuisance, for even loathing would be a most welcomed form of attention—as Yu has just successfully solicited from his peer.

On the other hand, what can be easily overlooked in moments in which such behavior is singled out is how central this obsession with exposing one's ills is to the larger discursive framework of national survival, a preoccupation unparalleled in the 1920s and 1930s. After all, Lu Xun, the most important figure in the genesis of modern Chinese literature, frequently speaks of the rotten Chinese national character as correctable only through the cutting

away of festering sores. What thus seems significant is less the centrality of ailment as a metaphor for an endangered national identity than the mode of nationalistic discourse generated by such masochistic self-flagellation.

Indeed, the construction of a viable national character figures prominently in every instance of locating the source of China's weakness. National identity is obsessively dealt with in all possible venues of assessment and reevaluation, the expression of the urgent need for alternative narratives of a tradition no longer viable for either the articulation or the survival of modern nationhood. These alternatives, however, are paradoxically sought in the same West that also occasioned this felt oppression. Translations of Western literature, social treatises, and political tracts during this period reached an unprecedented volume. The conclusions to be drawn from them consistently return to the critique of the inadequacies of modern China: its failure to transmit its glorious cultural heritage, the stagnant social institutions it has preserved unchanged from the past, and the decayed character of its people.

The ability to identify and expose ruthlessly the social as well as psychological ills of China itself became, for writers and intellectuals, one of the last guarantees of a spiritual change through which a much needed cultural transformation might be possible. The demands of larger societal transformations were, however, often at odds with the desires of the individual that were also rediscovered in this process of self-examination. It is not surprising, then, that among the many competing Western ideologies available to the Chinese intellectuals, mostly through translations, Freudian psychoanalysis also became a part of this intellectual effort to inquire into the interiority of the individual. As noted in a recent work on the reception of psychoanalysis in China, publication on Freud in China increased from 1920 and reached its highest volume in the mid-1930s, shortly before its decline with the official onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War, after which the focus of psychoanalytical study shifted from problems of individual sexuality to those of national and social issues.¹

A parallel development can also be discerned in the area in which psychoanalysis made its largest impact—literature. Before the overwhelming onset of war under which all individual imperatives were subsumed, the psychic life of the unconscious was a focus of tremendous interest for

Chinese intellectuals who hoped to renegotiate categories of self-identity from claims of history. It is not coincidental that both Lu Xun and Guo Moruo first experimented with psychoanalysis in an attempt to renarrate historical and mythical accounts from the Chinese classical tradition.² The psychic genesis of the subject, together with the pseudoscientificity psychoanalytical discourse was endowed with, held a promising reserve for exploring the interiority of the individual, a territory that had not yet been fully exhausted by the weight of a tradition dominated by Confucianism.³

The attempt to articulate a new sense of self more in keeping with the demands of modernity inevitably entailed a preoccupation with the inner constitution of the individual. In the writings of Chinese male intellectuals, “self-dissection” is an expression for cultural critique used by not only Lu Xun but also his contemporaries such as Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu. The metaphor of self-dissection also gave rise to tropes that expressed the results of this self-examination in terms of the infliction of physical suffering. Indeed, images of self-laceration, torturous infliction, and physical pain abound in their literary works. Literary modernity in China, much like the concept of modernity itself, is conditioned at the same time it is haunted by the inevitability of failure, the event of having failed oneself.

Because of the perceived link between individual identity and national character, the obsession with national failure and survival finds its literary expression in masochistic suffering. In the works of Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu, masochistic suffering occasioned by this self-examination is compounded with the problematization of masculine identity. The important question here is why a sense of personal inadequacy is so central to one’s allegiance to nationalism, a sense of failure that is confirmed and reenacted on a literary level as a masculinity plagued with masochism. Might this be simply a sexual deviation, a display of decadence in protest against the normalization of masculinity as the revolutionary patriotism required by nationalism?⁴ Or, as yet another possibility, is masochistic masculinity the only mode of psychic experience in which the male subject’s identification with nationalism can be effected? Why is masochism the preferred expression of a dysfunctional national identity—a national identity under the threat of disintegration—as a masculinity in mourning of normalization?

Each of these questions will be in some way thematized in the literary texts I will consider. At the same time, I engage these problems through a simultaneous inquiry into their psychoanalytical premise, for the interaction between Freudian psychoanalysis and Chinese writers, I argue, extends beyond translated vocabulary and reaches into a much more difficult area where cultural differences play an important role in conceptual appropriations. I also claim that the problematization of masochism as that of melancholia occasions an innovation in psychoanalytic thinking. My engagement of psychoanalysis together with Chinese literary texts reflects not the privileging of a theoretical tool over modern Chinese literature but, rather, a conceptual elaboration of the historical encounter between Freudian psychoanalysis and May Fourth writers.⁵ First, I stress the significance of masochism as constitutive of a literary modernity demanding a certain allegiance of masculinity, and then I complicate that apparent subversion—emasculated masculinity versus proper masculinity—once more by introducing the affinity between masochism and melancholia. In doing so, I want to sustain the tension between not only masculinity and nation but, equally important for this essay, between the theoretical apparatus with which I intervene and the specificity of Chinese literary modernity.

Freud and China: Translating Masochism

To understand Freud's presence in Chinese literary modernity is to recognize it as a formation of disseminated knowledge through the act of translation.⁶ What gives the act meaning, however, is less the transference of the intended effect of Freudian psychoanalysis but, rather, its unintended reception. Freudian thought often took on incongruous forms of articulation in the understanding of Chinese writers. From the more familiar dream analysis to popularized understanding of sex in handbooks on secrets of the bedchamber, Freud's reception in China was not simply gauged by quantifiable volumes of translation but diffused through fragmented—sometimes even proverbialized—appropriations of knowledge.

Even though our observation of the direct connection between Freud and Chinese intellectuals is limited by a rather incomplete record, this unintended interaction nonetheless produced a certain subjectivity in the Chinese

literary imagination. From the ways in which Freud is deployed in their literary writings, one finds the psychoanalytical conception of sexuality as the most captivating issue for the Chinese intellectuals. Lu Xun experimented with what he later remembers as an aborted attempt to give a psychoanalytical framework to his retelling of the story of creation by the woman goddess in Chinese mythology.⁷ Distracted by an article in the newspaper that he happened to read in the middle of writing, Lu Xun was unable to continue his project with the seriousness he had originally intended. The next time Lu Xun discussed Freudian psychoanalysis was two years later in 1924 and with a much more critical view. Armed with the analysis of the Japanese literary critic Kuriyagawa Hakuson, whose works he was translating, Lu Xun found grounds for rejecting the theory of the libido in favor of a more general sense of vital force, a theory based on Henri-Louis Bergson's *élan vital*, which Kuriyagawa synthesized into his theory of creative origins in *Symbol of Angst*. Lu Xun's translation was widely read by intellectuals of different ideological persuasions. His translation was quoted more than the two already existing Chinese versions. Yu Dafu explicitly lists this book as a reference in his postscript to his important piece on literary criticism, "Life and Art."⁸

In 1933 Lu Xun made his most overt and lengthy attack on Freud, a critique prompted by the by-then pervasive and indiscriminate use of Freudian dream analysis. Lu Xun remarked that Freud could not have understood the importance of simply staying fed, since he obviously was not threatened with that prospect to which most people were subjected.⁹ The assertion that all girls love their fathers and sons their mothers, Lu Xun added, hardly explains why a newborn infant puckers his or her lips. Could the infant have wanted to kiss the opposite sex? No, Lu Xun flatly stated; no one would doubt that the child did it out of hunger and not sexual desire. Even though this reasoning may strike the modern reader as less than sophisticated, Lu Xun's astonishing refusal of the sexual in favor of the eating metaphor at the time reflected his more urgent concern with the threatened existence of China, in view of which sexuality is less a repression in need of therapeutic enlightenment than one of the many sacrifices people had to make as a matter of course.

Despite Lu Xun's criticism of psychoanalysis, the fascination with the psychoanalytic conception of sexuality remained unabated among Chinese writers at least until the war. Lu Xun himself continued to speak of Freud in as late as 1935, a year before his death. Other writers also took great interest in how psychoanalytic explanations of sexuality can reorient literary criticism in a more modern critical perspective. In his 1935 review of the biography of the late Qing courtesan Sai Jinghua, Yu Dafu suggested the use of Freudian analysis for probing into the possibility that the male characters with whom the female protagonist was involved—except for Third Master, who had unusual stamina—all died from physical exhaustion due to her extraordinary sexual appetite.¹⁰ Interestingly, this fascination with sexual prowess and masculinity is also reflected in Yu Dafu's own writings, which frequently obsess on men who are in one way or another emasculated and weakened by sexually threatening women. Indeed, as we will see, Yu Dafu's engagement with Freud is played out in a much more complex way on the literary register. The one writer, however, who explicitly acknowledged the use of Freudian dream analysis in his narrative constructions is Guo Moruo. Written in 1922, "Late Spring" was Guo Moruo's attempt to deal with the ambivalence and unconscious guilt of a married man who feels sexual attraction for a nurse caring for his sick friend.¹¹ The fantasy and the punishment it incurs culminate in a dream in which, modeled on Euripides' *Medea*, the wife kills their two sons before going mad.

Guo's painstaking efforts, however, were largely lost on his critics. Yu Dafu, who was Guo's close friend, had previously warned him that if Guo did not spell out what he was trying to do in "Late Spring," no one would understand his design. Once criticisms arose precisely as Yu had predicted, Guo finally decided to explain in a 1923 essay, "Criticism and Dreams," how and where he was using dream analysis, even though he considered it most uneconomical to gloss one's own story.¹²

It is important to point out that Guo Moruo's *conceptual* appropriation of dream analysis, which is more revealing than his terminological one, should not be taken as an unequivocal acceptance of Freudian psychoanalysis. His deployment of Freud as discursive capital at a time when the unconscious of the individual enabled for the first time discussions that made it accessible to popular "scientific" understanding is not the same as giving an uncritical

endorsement. To establish grounds for equivalence between Freud's notion of dream and Guo's own supplied definition would facilitate the task of the literary critic in mapping out Freud's influence on the formation of modern Chinese literature, but only at the expense of ignoring the complexity of an appropriated legitimating discourse. The task Guo took upon himself was how to render Freudian psychoanalysis in terms accessible to common sense in the context of Chinese culture, that is, drawing on an epistemological order quite different from the one that determines Freudian psychoanalysis in its own cultural context. A key statement Guo made in "Criticism and Dreams" demonstrates this point. After summarizing what various Western psychoanalysts have said about dream analysis, Guo shifted to his own culturally specific context: "To borrow an even more simple phrase, [dream analysis] is what we in a proverbial saying call 'what we think during the day, we dream at night.' This saying basically exhausts (*shuowan*) the fundamental principles of the psychoanalytical school on dream analysis."¹³ Only at this moment, in which Guo shed the plumage of Freudian terminology and offered a "native" understanding of dream analysis, does the epistemological shift in this act of cultural appropriation become apparent. This shift, moreover, constitutes the tenuous link of cultural translation where difference rather than the logic of equivalence underlies the moment of cultural encounter.

In significant ways, this shift that is necessary for Guo's cultural translation of Freud demonstrates the problem in locating the reception of Freud in China as a category of inquiry. As with speaking of Chinese reception of Western thought in general, the problem lies in the unequivocal assumption of some neutral base for equivalence. When Guo speaks of Freudian psychoanalysis and evokes it as a form of legitimating discourse to talk about dreams, for example, one may find it irresistible to rely on this as a point of intersection from which a comparative analysis may proceed. It is difficult to conceptualize this evocation, at its moment of utterance, as already a form of appropriating gesture that, through the native epistemological shift necessary to its articulation, is radically distinct from Freud in the Western critical context. This radicality, it should be said, is not a point of disengagement. It demarcates, rather, that boundary between culturally bound claims that is constantly being redrawn in the process of appropriation. In

this sense, masochism and masculine sexuality within the frame of Chinese literary modernity are not so much adapted versions of certain decontextualized elements from Freudian psychoanalysis as they are the pivoting points where the latter's defamiliarity becomes productive of a discourse that it neither does nor can authorize. The point of disengagement, where Freudian psychoanalysis becomes irrelevant to its appropriated form, is continually averted and postponed by the tension of cultural appropriation. The logic of engagement between Freud, psychoanalysis, and the Chinese intellectuals no longer takes the form in which it is sought—the reception of Western thought in a non-Western context as measured by incongruities in interpretation based on issues of common concern, such as sexuality, dream analysis, and masochism—but persists in diffused points from which distinct narratives depart with their own necessities.

The term *masochism* in its English original occurs at least twice in Guo Moruo's writings, once in 1921 and in 1924. At the time, controversies over the *baihua* movement—a language reform effort that sought to change written classical Chinese into the more accessible vernacular form—divided those like Guo himself and traditional scholars who refused to compromise the form of classical Chinese for the sake of promoting mass literacy. For Guo and many of his contemporaries, the vernacular language reform was indispensable to China's modernizing process. Because the opponents to the movement, as Guo saw it, would rather keep the learning processes as painful as possible than spread the benefits of literacy to all, he called them pathological antiquarians who must “pierce [themselves] with needles to the point of bleeding” in order to feel a certain pleasure.¹⁴ Furthermore, Guo asserted, they wanted to impart their own “masochism”—which Guo translated as passive sadism (*beidongde yingnuekuang*)—to others as active sadism (*zhudongde yingnuekuang*). Strikingly, in Yu Dafu's 1922 story “Endless Night”—which we will examine shortly—precisely such a scene of piercing oneself with needles is staged as eroticized masculine masochism. Masochism, however, was not always translated as passive sadism, *beidongde nuedaikuang*, which is clearly taken from the Japanese translation. Another Chinese writer, Zhou Zuoren, translated it as *ziku*, or self-torment, defining the agency of torture as oneself.¹⁵ To appreciate how masochism figures as a central mode of discourse in Chinese intellectuals' understanding of issues

bearing on China's survival and humiliation, one need only read the following quote from Lu Xun explaining why he felt it necessary to translate Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Out of the Ivory Tower*:

In translating this book, my purpose is not to expose another's fault in order to bring gratification to the Chinese. China now does not have the ambition of exploiting others' crises, nor do I feel it incumbent upon me to jeer at the weakness of another nation. Yet when I watch him whip himself, it is as though the pain were felt on my body. Then, however, it was as though suddenly I was given a sedative. Those who live in ancient and festering countries . . . feel a certain pain, like a yet-to-burst sore. Those who have never had one or had it cut away probably wouldn't know this. Else, they'd understand that the pain of its removal brings far more pleasurable relief than the pain of enduring it. I supposed this is the so-called "painful pleasure"? What I wish to do is precisely to first awaken that pain, and then impart this "painful pleasure" to other people suffering the same illness.¹⁶

Now that we have contextualized masochism in the broader historical interest Chinese writers had in Freudian psychoanalysis and in particular its theory on sexuality, we still need to consider masochism itself. There is no one Chinese term used consistently in the 1920s and 1930s to translate the word *masochism*. If one were to look up in a Chinese lexicon the Chinese translation found in either the German- or English-Chinese dictionaries from the time, for example, the term does not appear as belonging to the usual Chinese lexicon. Masochism does not occur as an indigenous concept. It appears only in translation for either the German word *Masochismus* or the English equivalent, *masochism*. The Chinese word for mistreatment, *nue*, occurs in classical usage, but only in conjunction with either ideas of governance used to depict despotic rule, *nuezheng*; oppression of the people, *nuemin*; unusually cruel punishments; and abuse of power or, more narrowly, natural calamities such as illness.¹⁷ The combination of *nue* eventually incorporated into one of the frequently seen Chinese translation for masochism is *nuedai*, to ill treat.

Interestingly, the word *masochism* is seldom listed in even more contemporary Chinese lexicons—with the exception of specialized dictionaries such as that of psychology. In contrast, the word *sadism* occurs much more

frequently. Even though masochism is often referred to as the opposite of sadism, the reverse seldom occurs in these glosses. This apparently accepted primacy of sadism over masochism, even on a lexical level, is odd, since the two are, as the available glosses would suggest, complements of each other and therefore have no particular hierarchical sequence. For whatever reason this ordering nonetheless came about, it does seem to probe the question of cultural normativity and what may have been considered by the lexical compilers as a dispensable pathology to be introduced into the Chinese language. It is not clear when *masochism* was first translated, but certainly by the early 1920s it was used typically to refer to a cultural symptom of, in particular, male Chinese intellectuals' experience of a thwarted modernity and nationalism. Because there was no one translation for this pathology, we must delve into the cultural force of its conceptual deployment.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, terms from Western scientific discourse were often translated first into Japanese and appropriated into Chinese through kanji. Psychoanalysis was no different, and hence one might consider the genealogy of the Chinese translation of the original German word *Masochismus* via its Japanese renditions.¹⁸ In fact, in the preface to a German-Chinese dictionary compiled in the 1930s, one editor acknowledges the crucial importance of consulting German-Japanese dictionaries during the course of its compilation.¹⁹ Thus, turning to the German-Japanese dictionaries compiled in the 1930s, one notices that *Masochismus* is without exception symptomatized as a perversion (*biantai* 變態) or licentious disorder (*yingluanzheng* 淫亂症) in sexual love (*xing ai* 性愛) where one's degradation or abjection (*quru* 屈辱) is sought at the hands of someone else. Just as frequently, sadism is suggested as the antonym of masochism. The only difference between the two would seem to lie in the direction of the act, an observation that is already familiar to us in psychoanalysis. From the Chinese translations that are clearly taken from the Japanese—*beinuedaikuang* 被虐待狂 (and its shorter version *beinuekuang*), *shounuenian* 受虐戀, *beinuedai yingluanzheng* 被虐待淫亂症, and *beinueai* 被虐愛—we see that the predominant trait of the illness lies in its passivity, to-be-done-to, to-be-subjected-to (*bei, shou*). Although the distinguishing trait of passivity in masochism is well documented in Western psychoanalytical literature, what is striking about the Japanese gloss is that

this act of degradation is suffered specifically at the hands of a *yixing* 異性, that is, someone of the opposite sex. This specification, which is usually made in a parenthetical remark, did survive its transport back into Chinese on at least one occasion, yet the gender specificity is seldom seen anymore in contemporary Chinese dictionaries in which masochism is listed. In a 1939 comprehensive English-Chinese dictionary published by Commercial Press, *masochism* is glossed as an abnormal state of sexual desire in which one derives pleasure from suffering the mistreatment, *nuedai* or harm, inflicted by someone of the opposite sex, *yixing*.²⁰ One usually finds in Chinese dictionaries, either from English or German, however, only the above mentioned terms—*beinuckuang*, *nuedaibeinuedai*, *yingluanzheng*, etc.—without any mention of the gendered agency. This inconsistency in the gender specification may be attributed to the fact that the word *masochism* itself may not have yet entered everyday usage in Western vocabulary at the time, and hence would have been even less likely to appear in ordinary English- or German-Chinese dictionaries. However, we will have occasion later to consider, on a literary register, the implications of a prescribed heterosexuality that will resonate a gendered mourning indispensable to male masochism.²¹

Pleasure in Pain

Although the word *masochism* derives from the name of the nineteenth-century Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and was formally first recognized as a pathology by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, its rendition into Chinese via Japanese—and perhaps, more significantly, what was not carried through in this linguistic routing—demands a symptomological reading with an emphasis on heterosexuality. Yet before we can fully evaluate the significance of this appropriating shift of accent, I shall turn to the literary texts themselves and discern masochism as an indissociable constituent of the formation of the male subject and of the masculinity that defines him.

Yu Dafu's 1922 short story, "Endless Night," is about a young man in his mid-twenties who leaves Shanghai for a teaching job in an unnamed province.²² His lover is unable to go with him, and he is lonely and desolate. The school proves to be a battleground between warlord politics and local corruption, and the students themselves are often bought to carry out

retaliations. The protagonist, Yu Zhifu, however, is more preoccupied with a persistent problem—the fulfillment of his sexual drive, which, we are told in the last section of the five in the story, is “twice as strong as in other people.”²³ This hyperbolic affirmation of masculine sexuality, however, appears blatantly incongruous with all the sexual or potentially sexual episodes in the story. When Yu Zhifu spends an entire night with someone, we learn they actually “talked” the whole night long. Physical love and spiritual friendship are, for the most part, confused until one realizes that the most felicitous sexual act in the story occurs in a dream from which the protagonist awakes and finds that “he is holding himself right there.”²⁴ Yet even that almost accomplished solitary act is uncertain, for in the dream they, again, only “talked.” After he enthusiastically and desperately seeks out a brothel, he again only converses. For whatever reason Yu Zhifu shies from pleasure, he does not hesitate to seek pain. Indeed, the two seem inextricably bound to each other:

He immediately takes out the used needle and handkerchief he had conned. Sitting down at the table, he covers his mouth and nose with these two precious objects. Deeply, he inhales their fragrance. Then he suddenly notices the mirror standing on the table, and wants to reflect every one of his present movements into it. Taking hold of it, he watches his own silly expressions for a while. Yet he feels that this used needle has not yet been appropriately used. Struck dumb, he stares into the mirror for a couple of minutes. Then he viciously pricks his cheek with the needle. Suddenly a drop of blood rolls like a coral bead down his face, which was already turning partly white from excitement. After he wipes it away with the handkerchief, he sees yet another round moist drop rolling down the face in the mirror. Facing the face with blood drops in the mirror, looking at the dark red trace on the handkerchief, sniffing the fragrance on that used cloth and needle, then thinking about the mannerism of their owner, he feels a kind of pleasure which soaks through his entire body. Not much later, the lights went out. Afraid that the pleasure he’s enjoying is about to be interrupted, he sits without a stir in the dark room, still coveting that demented pleasure.²⁵

Beyond the initial shock and uncomfortable laughter that may accompany the first reading of this scene in “Endless Night,” one would not fail to

notice with what detailed control the protagonist has staged this moment of mania. Contrary to the appearance of thoughtless abandonment, this scene is punctuated with precise moments of self-reflection, a curious reflexivity that, while difficult to place as rational thought, nonetheless insinuates the subject's intent into the scene. Yu Zhifu constantly arrests himself in the ritualized act of self-mutilation. More important and gratifying than inflicting pain upon oneself is the occasion to see it, to see oneself suffer. As Yu Zhifu takes a couple of minutes to examine himself in the mirror after each executed step of the ritual, the seemingly maniacal and irrational enigma of this scene takes on a reason of its own, legitimated by no other than the subject himself, who decides at every juncture how his own suffering will unfold.

The protagonist appears to make his moment of suffering the culminating embodiment of his will, his mastery over the most convincing reenactment of his abjection. Each movement in the scene of self-mutilation is relished and ensured to meet the requirements of a certain exactitude, a certain "appropriateness." At the same time the administrator and the victim of suffering, he presides over his own suffering with a certain inviolable sovereignty. Though the one on whom pain is inflicted, he maintains the jurisdiction over the way in which he suffers. Only in light of this careful, ritualized preparation leading up to the scene of self-mutilation can we begin to see the contour of the masochist, whose enjoyment is not pain itself but, rather, the reproduction of that pain in a most sincere adherence to truth, perverting the punishment by turning its juridical force into voluntary ascription.

The scathing critique "Endless Night" received from readers as well as critics was significant. Although the readers' letters are not available to us, one can gather from Yu's own defense as well as other critics' comments what the central issues of contention were. In his review published shortly after the story, Mao Dun, another prominent male intellectual figure at the time, spoke favorably of "Endless Night."²⁶ What endears the protagonist to his readers, Mao claims, is precisely his acknowledgment of his own inability to renounce a life of sins. Mao Dun's argument is in direct response to those who criticized "Endless Night" for its male protagonist's failure to give up his decadent ways with alcohol and women. Such a display of utter lack of will, it was said, would only lead China's youth to misunderstanding and

thus have a negative influence on them. Su Xuelin, a woman critic who is often dismissed for her extreme and personalized style of attack, called Yu Dafu the embodiment of “satyriasis.”²⁷ She specifically took issue with the needle scene, the realism of which she questioned. How can this kind of laughable behavior, she asked, be realistic for the average man unable to release his sexual urge?

Criticism along these lines led Yu Dafu to publish what he called an “apology” on behalf of “Endless Night” only three months after its appearance in print.²⁸ The need he felt to offer an explanation was prompted by the overwhelming number of letters he had received from readers who were unsatisfied for one of the following two reasons: The main concern appears to be the thematization of “unethical sexual desires,”²⁹ which, in view of the early stage of the development of New Literature for modern China, not only corrupted youths but also furnished the opponents to the movement with ammunition. The author, according to another group of critics, should have refrained from advertising “depraved sexual desires” and “inciting young people to descend into the bestial world of homosexual love,”³⁰ if only out of a sense of shame. To the latter criticism, which Yu saw as an attack on his person, he defended himself quite fiercely, disclaiming any autobiographical source of the fictional protagonist.

Although Yu returned again and again in his literary career to wrestle with his critics on the issue of conflating the author with his characters—and scholarship on the author has also focused on this issue—the significance here is that the thematization of homosexuality which is specific to “Endless Night” is never dealt with.³¹ Instead, it is conveniently subsumed under a more general question of artistry. Upon closer examination, Yu’s clarification does very little to address the meaning of homosexuality in “Endless Night.” As with his critics, the issues he takes up never address the sexual constitution of masculinity itself but, rather, confirm the premise of heterosexuality. Even though Yu quickly counters accusations of improper behavior, the impropriety he defends never transgresses the bounds of heterosexuality and only reasserts it by way of hyperbolic expression.

Yu Dafu later claimed that he wrote “Endless Night” at a time when the combination of “seeing the decline of one’s own country” and “suffering

the humiliation of being in a foreign country” inflicted on him a mournful grief like that suffered by “a new young widow after the loss of her master.”³² The period Yu Dafu described coincided with the time of his study in Japan. His most well-known piece, “Sinking,” was written only a year before “Endless Night.” The famous last lines spoken at the end by the Chinese protagonist studying in Japan express a sense of nationalism spurred by the humiliation of his failed sexual venture with a corpulent Japanese prostitute. Unlike what his critics at the time charged—that his writings distracted young people from the exigencies of national survival by dwelling on narcissistic, sexual indulgences—Yu Dafu’s work in fact reveals clearly the experience of nationalism as generated in the psychic foundation of sexuality. The endangered nation needs to be saved in much the same way that a shattered masculine identity attempts to survive.

I will return to the question of what in these texts the shattering might be from which masculinity must reconstitute itself. For the moment, the drama of the male masochist in “Endless Night” is not complete without the woman, in whose hands his destiny ostensibly unfolds. Upon feeling his un-suppressible “bestial instinct,”³³ Yu Zhifu puts on “Chinese clothing” before embarking on his midnight search for sexual gratification. The significance of the Chinese clothing should not be overlooked, for in a similar episode in a brothel at a later point, he dons foreign clothes and speaks English while evading the prostitute’s simple question of whether or not he is Chinese.³⁴ His allegiance to Chineseness is, strangely, suspended in Western tongue and clothing. Yet more poignantly, this subversion of national identity comes into play only when the uncertain venture of sexual gratification is simultaneously undertaken. With each unguaranteed quest for sexual gratification, the protagonist enjoys not only the thrill of his “depraved” behavior but also the disavowal of Chinese identity. Keeping in mind that the issue of national identity is never far behind the masochist, we are now prepared to examine more fully the status of the woman in his quest. On the verge of giving up the task altogether after hours of fruitless searching, Yu Zhifu spots a small shop selling cigarettes and foreign goods where a young woman is totaling the day’s sales:

“What would you like to buy?”

He first buys a few cigarettes, and glances at the woman. In his eyes at this moment, her looks are rare for a merchant woman. Actually she is only a commonplace woman. Yet her figure is petite, chic enough, and her clothes are pretty modish. So he thought her somewhat attractive. Like a hungry dog, he stared for a minute or two before asking her, “Do you have needles for sale?”

“You mean sewing needles?”

“Yes, but I want one that’s been well used (*yongshu*). It would be best if, after you sell a new one to me, we can exchange the new one for your used one.”

The woman smiles and asks, “Are you using it to cook medicine with?”

He answers evasively, “Uh yes, yes. How did you know?”

“There’s always some prescription like that in our country medicine.”

“Indeed, indeed. This needle is actually pretty easy to get, but there’s still one thing that’s difficult to obtain.”

“What’s that?”

“A woman’s used handkerchief. Since I’m here all alone, without friends, this is impossible to find. I’ve actually given up on the idea altogether.”

“Will this do?” As the woman says this, she takes out a used handkerchief made out of foreign cloth from her pocket. He sees this, and his heart starts pounding.

Flushed, he says, “If you agree to let me have it, I would be willing to buy one of top quality to trade you for it.”

“Please just take it. There’s no need for the exchange.”³⁵

Considering the strenuous efforts with which the protagonist has searched for the properly lowly woman, it is striking how he solicits a barter exchange, rather than her affection. Indeed, the preparations are meticulous. The acquisition of the two “precious objects,” *baowu* (that is, the handkerchief and the needle), in itself is worthy of an elaborately planned pilgrimage. Like a “hungry dog,” we are told, Yu Zhifu stumbles through town, looking for “the lowliest woman” befitting the ownership of these items. The object of his urge, we are told, is precisely “this sort of woman.” The inauspicious

start of his search, marked by physically thwarted movements of falls and stumbles in the unfamiliar outskirts of the town at night, appears only to forebode a result even less successful. After hours of fruitless searching, he breaks down into an emotional reverie, longing after all for a woman who, in her cherishment of him, would redeem and save him from the brink of suicide with an “embrace with blood and tears.” Contemplating suicide, Yu Zhifu bemoans why this ungratified longing, which he already had to suffer during his earlier years in Japan, should continue to plague him in his own country.

Although the redemptive figure of the woman appears central to the protagonist’s despair on a level he professes to, her actual function is rather that of facilitating the continual staging of a tactful evasion. The circuitous path of his desire, far from having simply the woman as its object, veers away from her. The woman is included in the scene to the extent that she fulfills the condition of his quest for the objects and testifies to the difficulty and ingenuity of that labor. She is made complicitous in his drama insofar as she contributes, by virtue of her participation, to the credibility of its details and execution. Her consent is crucial, yet even more significant is the chain of exchange she thereby agrees to set into motion. The “thoroughly used” quality of the objects she agrees to give up becomes, in that sense, her consent to enter the masochist’s fantasy as substitute for the object of his fantasy. The feminine figure becomes that which enables rather than exhausts the significance of the object for the masochist. The contractual form in which the masochist bargains for the handkerchief underlies the more significant point that it is not so much the woman’s giving away of her handkerchief but her agreement to it as a willing sacrifice that is crucial for the masochist, for her function is that of substitution and not fulfillment. This, as one may by now recognize, is the strategization behind fetishism.

The protagonist’s overly strenuous solicitation is not so much for the sake of the objects themselves as for exerting a certain persuasive, narrative control over the transaction. He offers and even insists on replacing her used items with “new,” “top quality” ones. His efforts are spent not primarily on the acquisition for himself but, more significantly, on defining her act of giving up as a sacrifice, a renunciation that needs to be compensated. Furthermore, this sacrifice can only be compensated by him, as he offers

again and again to provide her with better and newer substitutes. This precondition of fetishism, however, is never fulfilled. As the woman finally makes it a gift rather than a sacrifice—"Please just take it. There's no need for the exchange."—she is refusing his fetishistic fantasy. However, this refusal is out of neither spite nor subversion, both of which would still engage her in the male subject's demand. Her refusal is that of a gift-giving.

The woman's nonparticipation in the male subject's fetishism, however, hardly prevents him from carrying it out. To the extent that she is involved, from the male masochist's point of view, she is not needed as an autonomous other. Her otherness has already been accounted for in the masochist's fantasy as the other who must be persuaded and won over by his scheme. That limits the extent to which she is recognized as a subject. She is not so much excluded from the scene as included for a specific purpose. It is not coincidental that the objects he seeks must be "used," *yongshu*, or more precisely, thoroughly used. He takes the object as that which is the token of exchange substituting for the woman in fulfilling his masochistic desire. The woman shopkeeper serves only as an element in a more elaborate fantasy that is not exhausted by her presence alone but which uses her as a point of proliferation and repetition and takes that instrument of torture as the cruel consent of the torturess herself. The careful placement of the proper interlocutor and the appropriate objects points to an order of fantasy beyond the highly dramatized quality of the masochistic scene.

The problem in placing the feminine figure in the male subject's masochistic fantasy is that we are never dealing with her in her uncorrupted form, that is, without the contour of fantasy. This phenomenon is by no means particular to "Endless Night" and in fact appears throughout Yu Dafu's works. In "The Past," for example, written five years later, the predominance of fantasy is inseparable from the male subject's voluntary servitude in masochism:

If there should be occasions on which I disobey her commands, she would, without thinking twice, raise that plump tender hand and slap me right in the face. As for me, after enduring her reprimands, I would instead feel an inexpressible satisfaction. Sometimes, for the sheer reason of wanting to feel her beating again, I would disobey her commands on purpose,

wanting her to come beat me or use that pointy leather shoe to kick me in the loins. If either were not sufficiently exercised, I would intentionally say, “Doesn’t hurt! It’s not enough! Come try again! Hit me again!” She would then also, without reservation, raise up her hand or foot to beat me. Only when my cheeks are beaten red, or my loins sore and aching, do I then docilely obey her orders and do the things she wants me to do. On such occasions, [her sisters] would try to persuade her to stop and tell her not to go overboard. Yet I, the beaten, would solemnly beseech them not to interfere.³⁶

The narrator does not shun any opportunity to accentuate his undignified “hen” to the dominating “rooster,” a position he willingly concedes to the woman, Number Two. Her dominating role, however, is conditioned on a certain capacity to be reenacted at the prompting of the narrator. Even though these provocations are expressed in the form not of command but of disobedience, they guarantee the same outcome in accordance with the design of the masochist. For him, transgression locates the site of pleasure, evoked in every predictable instance of her administering the punishment. The “inexpressible satisfaction” he then feels lies not in the sheer act of beating but in the fantasy with which the scene is saturated. Pleasure in pain is the indissoluble linkage between reality and fantasy.

The woman, then, is appended to the masochistic fantasy to the extent that she fulfills the role of the cruel mistress demanded of her. Unlike what Gilles Deleuze has claimed, the maternal supremacy is not affirmed without restrictions on her authority. The masochist’s successful execution of disavowing the paternal function and creating a new definition of man under the maternal sign is fundamentally limited by this fact. What may escape notice in the narrator’s masochistic drama is how, despite all the endeavors he must make at the command of Number Two, her commands are left unfulfilled until he has gotten what he wants. Only after he is beaten does he “then docilely obey her orders and do the things she wants [him] to do.” It is not that obedience is given under the threat of possible punishment but, rather, that it is withheld until the punishment itself can be guaranteed. The aggressive penitent does not just demand his punishment but secures it through exhortation.

Even though the deployment of the woman shopkeeper, used things, and exchange values in “Endless Night” together with the prominence given to the cruel mistress in “The Past” would suggest that the formation of masculine identity and the confirmation it needs depend on the sacrifice of the woman to the conditions of sexual difference, our analysis should not end there. While the scene of fetishistic exchange would seem to corroborate the view that the foundation of masculinity—as a gendered identity—is grounded in sexual difference rather than prior to it, the case Yu Dafu presents in “Endless Night” is in fact even more complicated.

As the meaning of the masochist’s triumph and the pleasure therein becomes ever more complex, our inquiry is increasingly compelled in the direction not of its logic but of its necessity, its compulsion to flee from that which most intimately haunts it—from within. While the protagonist painstakingly stages the scene of self-mutilation in “Endless Night,” his temporal punctuations and pauses indicate and ensure a certain self-mastery over his own suffering and thus destiny. However, one should not overlook the fact that beneath each composed instance of stopping the action, he is reacting to a certain internal impulsion, responding to the exigency of reasserting his self-control. Just as the pleasure is from the stopping, from the interruptions that one is still able to make in the face of a catapulting rush toward a punishment that is supposedly externally imposed, the stopping itself is a response to the pressing anxiety inside, the paranoid or guilty conscience that necessitates a reassertion of some kind of subjective control, autonomous triumph. It is always a kind of “urge” or “impulse” (*chongdong* 衝動), an unexplainable force beyond the protagonist himself, that goads him into action, into pursuing his quest for ritualized punishment:

As his tense state of mind relaxes, Zhifu’s sexual urge, long having been dormant, again peeps out a little. Because of time and space, the memory of Wu Chisheng fades in his mind day by day. Thus what has risen in its place (*daici erxing* 代此而興) and commands his total attention is a desire that has simultaneously taken two directions. One is pure love, which he has concentrated on a young student. Another is an intermittent, irregular urge. When this urge acts up, he would become a wild beast without senses. Then, unable to suppress his sexual urge, he must go into town

and on the streets, bum around in the poor country neighborhoods near the school, and steal a few glances at some women.³⁷

What we discover in this passage is the startling revelation that this “urge” that takes the form of a perversion is in fact the replacement of something else (*daici erxing*, that which has risen in place of), of a former love that has “faded.” We might be surprised to find out that this former love, Wu Chisheng, is a man, but only because the moment to which our attention is cunningly directed, that is, the scene of self-mutilation and indulgence in the fantasy of feminine objects, has carefully precluded that possibility of homoeroticism. This preclusion, I should add, is also in keeping with the critical discourse surrounding Yu Dafu that received this episode of homosexuality with only denunciation and denial.³⁸ The ostensibly heterosexual content of the masochistic scene itself is not only successfully conveyed by the literary artifice but also affirmatively interpreted by its critics. The acknowledged issue at stake, as we have previously seen in the sympathetic as well as critical comments on “Endless Night,” is of the decadent and excessive indulgence in heterosexual lust and not of the homosexuality inherent within the definition of masculinity threatening to destabilize its identity, an issue that I have stressed as the more underlying one.

Flight into Fantasy

Rather than accepting the terms of fetishism and the status it ascribes to the fetishized objects—all of which centers on making good the woman’s lack, according to Freud—“Endless Night” leads us to pose the following questions: What compels the male masochistic subject to take refuge in fetishism in the first place, and what is its relation to a forlorn homosexuality? In other words, what is this loss that the fetishistic fantasy nonetheless tries to preserve from extinction? The questions Yu’s text forces open provide us with a critical point of entry into Freud’s treatment of fetishism. First, however, it would be helpful to orient ourselves in Deleuze’s account before proceeding to Freud’s text, as this will make clear the hidden presence of mourning and the melancholia it necessitates in masochism.

Relating the masochistic ideal to the mechanism of fetishism, Deleuze understands the former as the process of “disavowal,” a continual persistence in which the subject protects himself from, or claims not to know, the painful restraints and social sacrifices he must make as a subject.³⁹ He evades the truth threatening his own sexuality by giving the lie to another. Yet for Deleuze, the male subject’s fetishization is performed with such zeal and enthusiasm that it essentially usurps the threat of castration by reenacting and intensifying that threat through the hands of a woman. This usurpation takes the form of suspension, for suspending the paternal law neither affirms nor denies it but radically disavows it.

The masochist, for whom suspense and waiting are crucial, radically contests that which is in an act of disavowal. The masochist inhabits, as it were, the interdiction that conditions his subjectivity and attempts to open up a different temporal horizon on which his own truth—his own suffering and drama—usurps the dictates of the order imposed on him. In Deleuze’s words, “[Masoch] does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is to disavow and thus to suspend it, in order to secure an ideal which is itself suspended in fantasy.”⁴⁰

This suspended ideal is by no means only a private affair, as would be implied by its suspension in fantasy, for Deleuze—and this is where we see the influence of Theodor Reik on his formulation—also emphasizes the importance of “demonstration” for the masochist. That is, the masochist will never pass up a chance to confess, to draw attention to his guilt and sins. He is in constant need of an audience, an interlocutor, or a judge who would decree the kind of punishment the masochist would then dutifully, if not gratefully, carry out. In fact, Deleuze tells us, the masochist wants to be beaten to victimize not himself but, rather, the father image in him. As with Jean Laplanche, Deleuze refutes the transitivity or reversibility between sadism and masochism as supposed by Freud.⁴¹ In other words, it is that very paternal authority, barring the masochist from gratifying his desires and subjecting him to the stringent disciplines of reality, who is beaten in the masochist. As Deleuze puts it, “Is it not precisely the father-image in him that is thus miniaturized, beaten, ridiculed, and humiliated? What the subject atones for is his resemblance to the father and the father’s likeness in him.”⁴²

If in Deleuze's account, one might ask, the subject's phantasmic triumph is the structuring principle of masochism, then where does one place what appears to be the equally powerful principle of atonement? The father is always already in the subject, an image to be atoned for. After all, the miniaturization, ridicule, and humiliation of the father image in oneself do not permit that image to die but revitalize it—with all its severity—with each assertion of supposed triumph. Although I find Deleuze's analysis helpful in pointing out the subversiveness in masochism, its celebration of the male subject hence reborn under the auspices of the mother cannot adequately address the problem we are confronted with in "Endless Night": the affinity between a mourned homoeroticism and the ecstasy of masochism. How, indeed, can we reconcile these two very different, if not opposing, psychic economies, the first of which signifies the dejected state of melancholia, and the second the abandonment to pleasure? This issue proves to be just as insoluble in Freud's account, yet his text will allow for a reading against itself that reveals more precisely why.

In his 1927 essay "Fetishism," Freud proposed that the male child, upon perceiving biological difference as the woman's lack of a penis, protects himself from threatened castration by denying it through fetishizing a part of her body and endowing it with the significance of a penis.⁴³ Although fetishism is deployed in order not to recognize castration, it also cannot help but serve as a poignant testimony to this threat, for the energy put into erecting fetishism is directly measured against the perception of what it tries desperately to disavow. While keeping the threat at bay, the male subject is nonetheless related to it in a most intimate way that memorializes the threat against itself. However, for Freud, this compromise has certain advantages. The fetish "remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. It also saves (*erspart*) the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects."⁴⁴

By fetishizing the woman and thereby sustaining the belief in her possession of the penis, the male subject protects himself from the possibility that he may undergo the same castration. Yet the function of the fetish is apparently not exhausted by this heterosexual framework, for this tactic of diversion also "saves," or more precisely to the German original *erspart*, "saves" the

male subject from becoming (*werden*) a homosexual, as though homosexuality and not heterosexuality were the expected trajectory of sexual identity.⁴⁵ Thus, by Freud's explanation we are not only to understand the trajectory of fetishism as ensuring the continuation of a heterosexual aim, but also to accept the premise that the male subject has not been and is not homosexual, the threatening possibility of which is contained in the "becoming" and not already risked, as in another English translation, in "being."⁴⁶

Yet the way in which the male subject fetishizes raises more questions than it could successfully secure a protection against. Despite all his ostensible efforts at making good the woman's lack, the outcome of the endowment only seems to make the woman merely a "tolerable" (*erträglich*) sexual object. The triumphant moment of his fetishization, then, cannot be explained by only the felicity of fetishization, by only the successful overcoming of castration in fantasy. Indeed, the accent in Freud's proposition should fall on the homosexuality from which one is spared, for this menacing possibility haunts a heterosexual trajectory that forces the fetishist to take flight in fantasy. What the male subject attempts to relieve himself of is not castration but the homosexuality he is forced to renounce in a heterosexual paradigm. Freud himself remarked on the inexplicability of why, as a result of the threat of castration, some people become homosexual and others fend it off by creating a fetish. Yet as we have seen in "Endless Night," fetishization does not exclude homosexuality and in fact harbors it illegally in a mourning insoluble to itself. It should not surprise us that Freud saw the two as opposing reactions, for how can they be explained within a framework that privileges heterosexuality and forbids the male subject from recognizing his eroticizing allegiance to the father? To recognize the affinity between fetishism and homosexuality would be to upset a paradigm Freud himself was unwilling to give up, as he firmly stated at the beginning: "In every instance, the meaning and the purpose of fetish turned out, in analysis, to be the same. It revealed itself so naturally (*ungezwungen*, unforced) and seemed to me so compelling (*zwingend*) that I am prepared to expect the same solution in all cases of fetishism."⁴⁷ Under the simultaneous impulses of unforced compulsion, Freud's thesis is articulated under this double imperative of volunteering that which is at the same time exacted from oneself, reenacting that very mechanism of fetishism itself.

In Deleuze we have discerned, despite the affirmative emphasis he places on the triumph of the masochist, the recurring question of the incorporated father image from which the masochist may claim to disassociate yet to which he is nonetheless bound in atonement. Following the suggestion in Yu Dafu's text of attempting to console a mournful homosexual love by taking refuge in the fetishistic drama of masochism, we have been able to trace this question in Freud's text, where homosexuality reveals itself as an unresolved residue in a theoretical framework primarily concerned with heterosexuality.

Beating the Nation

What is revealed by the necessity compelling the masochist's elaborate scheme of expiation and subversion is crucial to our understanding of the phenomenon of literary masochism in Chinese writers such as not only Yu Dafu but also Guo Moruo. In fact, if masochism is economized, in the sense that the subject turns his abjection into affirmation, it is nonetheless incumbent upon us to ask what conditioned or necessitated that abjection which is then covered over. The question remains how one can understand this state of melancholia, a state in which the father image, or the embodiment of authority, though beaten, is nonetheless reinvoked with all its harshness and unappeasability every time it is ridiculed. With each lash, the masochist triumphs over the image in him that he cannot mourn or expel, dwelling in a state profoundly haunted by an unmournable grief.

It must be said that the problematic I am locating is not so much in the contestation of which sexual preference is articulated but, rather, in the question of what constitutes this shift from an act of mourning to masochistic ecstasy.⁴⁸ Before answering the question of mourning and masochism, however, it is necessary to point out just how fundamentally this sense of melancholia disturbs the literary works of writers such as Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo. A certain ungrrieved mourning is continually metaphorized as not only loss of assured sexual identity but also a humiliated national consciousness, both deeply embedded in and constitutive of the purported display of masculinity.

Five years after “Endless Night,” Yu Dafu’s first attempt at a novel crystallized in the 1927 piece *Stray Lamb*. A critic at the time lamented the failure of the novel to meet the general expectations produced by advertisements four or five years prior to its appearance in print. The author, according to the critic, was rather unsuccessful and squandered his energy on unnecessary disguises and disclaimers. Yu Dafu, however, was apparently not the only male writer at the time perceived to suffer this kind of artistic decline. Guo Moruo, the critic noted, had also been publishing some rather crude and awkward writings. In what ways, one may ask, has masculinity failed? Does the historical background against which subjectivity must be measured demand this failure as constituting a humiliated identity of a nation hence called to arms?

The sufferance of a national identity never fails to be psychologized and sexualized in masochistic narrations.⁴⁹ The sexualization of a nation enables the articulation of national humiliation as a profoundly subjective experience. Guo Moruo’s “Donna Carméla,” completed in August 1924, appears to indulge in a masochistic pleasure similar to that in both “Endless Night” and “The Past,” disguising the profound anxiety and loss it registers only later.⁵⁰ At first we are made to engage, through the constant second-person address, his fantasy of the Japanese candy girl, whom he “baptizes” as the Spanish temptress:

Did you know, friend, that Spanish women are the most vicious? I read somewhere that there was a man who asked a young Spanish woman to marry him, and she didn’t accept until after she lashed him with a horsewhip twenty-five times. And the man willingly bared his back for her to whip. After the twenty-fourth time, she stopped. As the man trembled to endure the last time, he was thinking already of the joy of love after the whipping. But the twenty-fifth whip never landed on him. Without it, the woman cannot agree. His back was already streaked with blood, and the woman, throwing the whip to one side, walked off. Such is the type of Spanish women. I don’t think there has been anyone like her in our culture. Even though I baptized her with Spanish rites, I believe her mind would not become like the Spanish woman! But, ah, friend! I have already suffered her incorporeal twenty-four lashes! I threw away

my dignity for her! My spirit and body have languished for her! For her, I've thrown away my career, and my family broke up. Even now I still don't know what she's thinking. I'm desperately seeking the beauty of an undying illusion. I long for the twenty-fifth lash! If only I could hear her say "I love you," I would be happy with death!⁵¹

Guo's choice of the Spanish temptress was most likely inspired by his reading and translation of the works of the Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. As the second-person addressee of the protagonist, the reader cannot help but be made into his confidant, and with that into the loyal audience of his confession, his desire for punishment. Throughout the story the protagonist refers to himself as "Mephistopheles" and "the crucified," the transgressor and the martyr.⁵² His repentance is unmistakable, even convincing. The desire to be expiated, as I have discussed, always already assumes the verdict of guilt. His audience, though intimately addressed as his confidant, is nonetheless made to recriminate him, to hold the very whip he presents as only the prerogative of the woman. For this reason—that is, the expiation of guilt—one can understand why for the masochist it is not the pleasure in unpleasure but, rather, the flight from the secret torment of guilt that continually goads him into action, however phantasmically that path of escape may be strategized. It is not surprising that the protagonist never receives the twenty-fifth stroke, for in that anticipation, that unreserved prostration before the punishment, he is for the time being freed from private self-torment. The judgment lies in the hand of another, the "you," the "friend." For a moment, a temporal duration sustained by the masochist himself in his pious anticipation, that guilt which constitutes him and which cannot be restituted appears recompensable by punishment. That possibility of redemption is sustained, conditioned not by its truth or falsity but by its very guarantee of the promise of restitution.

Underlying the manifestly indulgent scene with the Spanish temptress is an anxiety that the protagonist reveals only later. He never even speaks to the Japanese woman, and the reason for this abstention is revealed as a loss of identity, which he admits only much later and only in an unconscious stammer: "I want to talk to her, but we never speak somehow. She is shy and so am I. And I'm afraid that she knows I'm Chinese. I'm

afraid my Japanese is bad. . . . I want to write her. . . . I'm afraid she knows I'm Chinese."⁵³

The protagonist's desire is, in fact, not definable in what he claims he "wants." In every instance of his wanting to do something, be it to talk or write to Donna Carméla, he avoids carrying it out. Either stealing her writing instead or being jealous of someone else's letter to her, the protagonist never manages to communicate with her in any way. In every instance of wanting, we find, rather, its renunciation or avoidance. What is repeatedly uttered, however, is his fear that she would find out that he is Chinese. The assumption that he could—as long as he does not speak to her—and has thus far passed for a Japanese is more remarkable, for that is what the protagonist's anxiety disguises: an inability to mourn the loss of a Chinese identity, for it already had to be exchanged and sacrificed for the possibility that he could masquerade as Japanese. Although the focal point of this anxiety is played out as what the other, Donna Carméla, might know about himself, what is significant is less how her knowledge might confirm the protagonist's Chinese identity than how the possibility of her knowledge gives occasion to the self-recrimination that is the conditioning possibility of the protagonist's internal drama as well as of his claim to any identity, Japanese or Chinese. His own national identity becomes something he can admit to only under the condition that such knowledge entails punishment. What the masochist is afraid of is not the veracity of his guilt but the prospect that he would not be able to continue his pilfered existence under the titillating threat of being found out and punished accordingly. What Donna Carméla might know about the protagonist's identity is, in fact, only secondary to this complex way in which he wishes to be identified as a subject.

One of the events that the protagonist witnesses, after all, is the celebration of the Japanese victory over Russian naval forces during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–1905. This was a crucial turning point in Asia at which Japan, having defeated China only ten years earlier, was recognized as a world power, an event as ambivalent for the Chinese as much as it was cause for victorious identification. The Japanese victory brought to the fore the possibility of redeeming the Sick Man of Asia as much as it recalled China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War only a decade before and China's failure to match Japanese modernization. The protagonist's suppression of his Chinese

identity should be read against this backdrop. The critical interest here, however, does not lie in subsuming masculinity/masochism under the imperatives of national survival. Coalescing the two would not sufficiently explain why, in the works under examination, masochism is the preferred form of expression for national abjection, nor would it account for why this humiliation must be sexualized as masculine failure. In fact, it is only through the sexualization of nation, through its experience as masochism, that its abjection could be thematized. It is not coincidental that the protagonist in Yu Dafu's "Sinking" attributes the frustrating experience of an uneventful night with a Japanese prostitute to the "weakness" of the nation, and even resolves to take the nation instead as his lover, *qingren*.⁵⁴

What masochism enables to be expressed is a cause of suffering that otherwise would not be thematizable. The desire of the protagonist to renounce his Chinese identity in "Donna Carméla" is expressible only as a fear in juxtaposition to what he claims to really want. Similarly, the protagonist of "Sinking" distracts us from his own sexual identity with his loud wailing over the "mother country." A renunciation is made ahead of time to conceal what otherwise would be a constant threat and pain of loss. The celebratory execution of the masochist's torture and all the artistic attention lavished on staging its details, as it turns out, reveal an economy quite different from one based solely on pleasure in unpleasure. Indeed, the ungrieved renunciation that makes possible masochistic pleasure underlies the economy of the subject's psychic survival of shattered sexuality.

Mourning Gender

If, in our consideration of Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo, we are increasingly led from abjection to triumph and, ultimately, to an underlying melancholic grief as grounding the economy of masochism, its complexity will nonetheless not have been fully considered without uncovering a parallel affinity in psychoanalytical thinking. Yet before we begin our last discussion of Freud, it would be worthwhile to consider the story with which Guo acknowledges his specific link to Freud. Guo Moruo's own interest in psychoanalysis, and especially Freud's thesis on dream interpretation, led him to experiment with dream symbolism in "Canchun" [Late spring], the short story written

in the same year as “Endless Night.” Because the idea of spring usually has an erotic connotation in the Chinese tradition, the title thematizes the sexual content of the story. More recently, scholars have dealt with the short story in light of its Freudian associations.⁵⁵ Without exception, these interpretations converge on the point of the dream. Guo’s own synopsis of the dream is as follows:

The protagonist feels a certain attraction for Ms. S. However, he is a married man, and his love cannot be materialized. Thus, without knowing it, he has suppressed it in his unconscious. This is the main motive behind the dream work. In the dream, when Aimou and Ms. S stand on the mountain peak, this is the desire he cannot fulfill during the day and which is therefore manifested in the dream. This goes up to the point where he is about to perform a physical examination on her—that is, the moment when the two’s bodies are about to touch—and White Goat rushes in to inform him of the tragedy. This is based on what Aimou has vaguely sensed during the day, which is that White Goat is an obstacle to him. Hence he enters the dream to separate Aimou from Ms. S.⁵⁶

Although most scholarly discussions of this scene have meticulously examined how “Late Spring” utilizes Freud, no productive analyses have been provided that would enable the literary text to interrogate in turn certain theoretical issues within psychoanalysis. Within our framework of masculinity and self-inflicted punishments, one sees how the dream, as Guo construed it, responds to this masochistic exigency. For Guo, it seems, the Freudian dream analysis has enabled him to articulate a certain guilt of the masculine subject, a guilt visible in not only “Donna Carméla” but also a number of his other texts that deal with sexual guilt. Guo himself explained that the wife’s murder of the two children followed by her own madness is the most important obstacle informing the dream.⁵⁷ However, what the reader needs more clarification on is why White Goat should be an obstacle at all. The protagonist, Aimou, supposedly vaguely sensed some veiled threat to the fulfillment of his desire from White Goat, but only after the dream has taken place is the protagonist’s felt rivalry with the latter mentioned for the first time in the story.⁵⁸ The suggestion of rivalry is not confirmed by the

dream but, rather, strikes one as a detail out of place, an attempt at explanation made only after the fact. Up to the point of the dream, the relationship between Aimou and White Goat is depicted as no less than amiable. Aimou had found him odd looking upon receiving him at the door, yet this impression quickly gives way to a certain “sentiment (*qingqu*) of longing for his home,” as White Goat begins speaking to him in the dialect of his home province, Sichuan. White Goat has come all this way to inform Aimou of his former classmate’s illness and offers him lodging in his own apartment as they arrive. Even at Aimou’s first meeting with the nurse, White Goat helps him to impress her by telling her that Aimou studies medicine and is a future doctor. At no point does Aimou say or do anything to suggest that he senses—however vaguely—any kind of tension, let alone rivalry, between them.

Therefore, the sequence could not have been, as Guo later in “Criticism and Dreams” recapitulated, the threat of obstacle preceding the dream. Rather, White Goat’s appearance in the dream complicates what otherwise would have been an unproblematic understanding of his acquaintance with the protagonist up to this point in the story. Interestingly, as Guo wrote his explication of the dream, he remarked on how the content of the story was by this time not so clear in his memory, and he was not certain whether he could still correctly recall its plot. One may be surprised to realize that at this point it was scarcely a year since the publication of “Late Spring,” leaving aside the fact that the numerous critical responses published in the meantime would have kept the story fresh in Guo’s mind, especially since he even responded to one that was published only five months earlier.⁵⁹

What, then, is the status of White Goat, who has the peripheral role of the messenger yet nonetheless figures so centrally in the dream as an obstacle to the fulfillment of Aimou’s wish? If anything, White Goat would be the one person who makes possible the protagonist’s acquaintance with the nurse. Yet the situation is clearly more complicated, and our first point of entry will be his function. Even though White Goat enters the story as a mere messenger relaying He’s last dying wish, we never get a glimpse of He even as Aimou is standing next to his sickbed in the hospital room; He is referred to simply as the “patient sleeping next to the window overlooking the street.”⁶⁰

In fact, one should question why He on his deathbed would request to see Aimou of all people if, as Aimou's reminiscence clearly indicates, they never knew each other well at all. The fact that Aimou used to treat He like a "weak little retard" and has since not had contact with him only strengthens our suspicion.⁶¹ The narrative contrivance here is clearly to facilitate the acquaintance between Aimou and White Goat, a staging that, I argue, discredits Guo's professed focus on the protagonist's desire for the nurse and reveals, instead, a preoccupation with a suppressed homoerotic narrative.

What is most striking about the dream is not its occurrence but the source of its content. Spending the night in White Goat's apartment, Aimou falls asleep listening to what White Goat tells him about He and, later, Ms. S. White Goat says he likes her and gives Aimou information about her background, all the key pieces of which—the loss of her parents at an early age, her tubercular illness, and how she became a nurse—appear in his dream. White Goat's words serve as a point of fixation for Aimou, a point around which his unconscious desires find their outlet, just as his voice is capable of awakening a certain "sentiment" (*qingqu*) in the protagonist. Moreover, Aimou looks out onto the sea with Ms. S at the beginning of the dream, a view similar to one enjoyed earlier by not only the protagonist at the opening of the story but also White Goat shortly after. The image of two lovers by the seaside on the mountaintop in the dream enjoins these two previous instances in an eroticized content. The scene in which Aimou is about to examine her naked body is, after all, suggested in White Goat's introduction of Aimou when he identifies the latter to Ms. S as a future doctor.

If the protagonist's suppressed desire informs the wish fulfillment in the dream, then it is a desire aimed at materializing a libidinal investment not in Ms. S but in White Goat. Yet White Goat functions precisely to divert this libidinal investment away from the object of homoeroticism. It is important to note White Goat's function as a messenger, which is repeated, significantly, twice in the story. In the first instance, he relays He's wish to see Aimou—the reason for which, as I have pointed out, cannot be justified by the textual evidence we are given, unless we consider the possibility of homoeroticism, which is suggested in the second instance. The second deployment of White

Goat's function as messenger is in the dream, in which he bears the tragic news of the Medean revenge carried out by Aimou's wife. By way of this interruption, Aimou is fully reconfirmed in his heterosexual choice as well as steered back into identifying the properly conjugal object of desire. Once this has been identified, the rivalry between Aimou and White Goat of which we later learn only consolidates this effort to enforce a heterosexual trajectory. White Goat's role in literally dictating the prerequisites of heterosexual desire to Aimou and the latter's faithful reenactment of his words in the dream point to the primacy of Aimou's identification with White Goat. While White Goat's words provide the stuff Aimou's dream is made of, the wish fulfillment creates obstacles in order to enjoy phantasmically, and illicitly, an otherwise inexpressible homoeroticism. Even though the dream is interrupted and followed by grave consequences, the punishment is only the condition of pleasure. The rivalry that is so anachronistically placed in the text, then, is homoeroticism disguised as heterosexual desire.⁶² White Goat's function is essentially that of relaying desire, of redirecting homoeroticism from its preferred to its prescribed object.

If White Goat had not been so conspicuously central in the protagonist's economy of desire, one might have been easily content with Guo's explication of "Late Spring." However, as I have demonstrated, Guo's argument is attempting to work through its own set of censors, the significance of which is by no means exhausted by his own conscious staging of the dream. With this in mind, one can see how this sexual ambivalence discloses the homoerotic narrative as embedded in the expression of heterosexual longing. Immediately after the sentence that describes White Goat seeing Aimou off on the train taking him back home, we are told that Aimou "feels as though he has left something behind." At the very end of the story, when Aimou receives from White Goat three flower petals accompanied by a letter, his perusal of his words—this time on paper—evokes in him, again, a "sentiment (*qingqu*) of melancholy."⁶³ Whereas the usual interpretation would be that the object of this inexact loss is, in both instances, Ms. S, I suggest that the homoerotic object, White Goat, must be considered in conjunction with the professed heterosexual content, even if it remains only as a mournful trace.

Masochism and Melancholia

Guo Moruo once noted, as support for his denunciation of the institution of Confucianism as nothing but a sanitarium for sexual perverts, that masochism is a feminine perversion. While men demonstrate their perversion through foot-fetishism, Guo believed, women clearly show theirs in their willingness to accommodate by consenting to their own self-mutilation. Guo translated *masochism* as a kind of “passive sadism” (*shoudongde nueyingkuang*),⁶⁴ with the implication that while men are the agents of such infliction, women ascribe to themselves a certain voluntary servitude. Yet this gendered masochism placed within a larger context of Guo’s cultural critique deserves to be read against his literary thematization of masochism. Not only is masochism, as we have seen, the obsession of the male subject, but fetishism is less the culmination in the woman’s mutilation than the condition that enables the male subject to claim heterosexual masculinity. Although Guo’s attack on the Confucian tradition reflects the general milieu of intellectual discourse at the time, his attribution of masochism as a feminine perversion stands, as we have seen, in blatant contradiction to the literary obsession with masochism as a problem specific to masculinity in not only his own but also Yu Dafu’s works.

Freud’s work on fetishism corroborates the same narrative. Also using the example of foot-binding, Freud argued that fetishism originates from the necessity of disavowing castration. In this light, Freud remarked that Chinese men’s fetishism of women’s bound feet is actually the demonstration of their appreciation of the women for undergoing the castration to which they themselves otherwise would have been subjected. What is interesting about Freud’s explanation is how a certain nexus of identification is recognized between the male fetishizing subject and the woman. The male subject’s gratitude is possible only under the acknowledgment that somehow this castration would have to be undergone by him were it not for the woman standing between, as it were, him and the inevitable consequence this knowledge would entail. However, this identification and its implications for the male subject and the feminine masochistic position he actually sees himself occupying in the woman he fetishizes is a significant conceptual venue pursued by neither Freud nor Guo Moruo.⁶⁵ Yet what is

at least suggested in Freud's text can only be given full expression for Guo in the literary imagination. It is not coincidental that Freud identified masochism—in its most physical detail as being gagged, bound, and beaten—as a feminine perversion not only in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” but also in a work written five years earlier.⁶⁶ Although his cases are by and large of male patients, something about the observance of male subjects occupying a passive feminine role—and thus a love and sexual relation—to the father compels Freud to assert its pathological nature. It is important to note that in the few cases of women masochistic patients Freud examined, their passive role to the father is considered perfectly normal, for it falls within the restraints of heterosexuality. The question remains, therefore, What are the consequences of a masculinity unconsolated for an impossible homosexual longing in masochism? This question is raised in Yu's and Guo's texts but was never given due consideration in Freud's exposition of masochism. Yet its indissoluble presence will surface elsewhere in an essay properly titled “Mourning and Melancholia.”⁶⁷ To make our way into this text, however, we will have to consider how masochism is inextricably bound to melancholia.

Most scholarly evaluations of Freud's analysis of masochism have focused on the pleasure principle and the ontological struggle between Eros and Thanatos, a theoretical alignment that bears the imprint of Freud's enterprise since the formulation of the death drive in 1920. What has not been explored, however, is masochism's inextricable relation to refusal, dejection, and mourning, the significance of which is to be distinguished by the drama of suffering, its ecstasy, and subversion. The absence of such a theoretical linkage made in the Freudian corpus appears to be a diversion in itself to keep separate the economies of masochism, which ultimately signifies the subject's mastery through subversive perversion, and that of melancholia, which remains an inability to mourn and survive psychically. However, where these two different modes of subjectivization overlap is precisely the point of incongruity where the linkage between nationalism, masculinity, and masochism must be sought.

According to Freud, masochism is constituted in a moment of turning inward, a reflexive state in which the subject withdraws into himself; such a state, contrary to what would be supposed, denotes neither passivity nor activity but, rather, a “reflexive, middle voice.”⁶⁸ It is striking that

in Freud's description of the formation of masochism, whether in its original erotogenicity or its secondary introjection, masochism is inseparable from descriptions of a certain excess or remainder. According to Freud, the death or destructive instinct within the individual must, for the sake of the individual's biological survival, be neutralized by libido, which directs the self-aggression outward. What is successfully channeled in this manner is "true sadism," or sadism in the sexual sense in contradistinction to nonsexual aggression. However, Freud added that "another part is *not included* in this displacement outwards; it *remains* within the organism and is 'bound' there libidinally with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation."⁶⁹

What is striking for us is how this scenario of the "original erotogenic masochism" can only be described as that which is left behind, "bound" only through an abandonment. This suggestion is further corroborated by the following question Freud formulated: "How large a part of the death-instincts may *refuse to be subjugated* in this way by becoming attached to libidinal quantities is at present not possible to ascertain."⁷⁰ It should not be doubted now that this refusal to be subjugated can only be expressed through its exclusion, as Freud further elaborates: "After the chief part of it has been directed outwards towards objects, there remains *as a residuum* within the organism the true erotogenic masochism, which on the one hand becomes a component of the libido and on the other still has the subject itself for an object."⁷¹

At this point in Freud's thought, masochism has come to occupy a primary position preceding sadism; that is, the aggression against self, and which takes the self as object, is the first and foremost condition of one's psychic state. While taking oneself as object is nothing new to the idea of an autoerotic turn that constitutes, for Freud, the genesis of sexuality, suffice it to say here that what Freud described as an inward-turning state is no other than the condition on which sexuality is engendered.⁷² That is to say, the state in which the subject takes himself or herself as object, or the state of reflexivity, is the fundamental configuration of the subject's relation to an object. This structuring moment will then be replayed in the subject's relation to the "object" in the external sense, not identical to yet reminiscent of this original object harbored within oneself.

What is significant, I argue, is that this transposition outward is inseparable from a certain inconsolability. If masochism thematizes dejection and in fact cannot articulate itself as anything but a celebration or drama thereof, it is because it is enabled by rejection itself. Masochism is, after all, the residuum that can only choose to be bound through its own abandonment. It is the “witness” [*Zeuge*] and “remainder” [*Überrest*] of that struggle for life between Eros and the death instinct. In other words, it is both the overcoming and the relentless testimony to that struggle in which something had to be sacrificed for the reconciliation. However if, as Freud said, this remainder is the part of the destructive instinct that fails to be transposed outward, and if its ability to be bound this way is enabled through sexualization, then one must concede that this aggression against oneself is a love in dejection, a love of oneself sexualized through a violence that is not without narcissistic investment.

Love in dejection, therefore, is not an impossible love but, more significantly, a productive dejection. If we understand this as the point of reconciliation between the imperatives of the nation and the masochistic masculinity in the literary texts previously examined, it is not difficult to see how the two work complicitly. On one hand, a degraded nation is the source of self-beratement; on the other hand, this aggression toward nation transposed onto oneself is already a form of self-love, of clinging to that which can still be claimed as one’s own object. In the economy of masochism, the mastering of unpleasure becomes only secondary to the productive operation of continuing and regaining a certain mastery and self-anchorage in the phantasmic realm. What was necessary for continual psychic survival beyond the moment of trauma becomes the very mode proper to psychic existence. The relation between masculine masochism and nationalism is predicated precisely on this puzzling logic. For Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu, the degraded Chinese nation could be loved with only self-spite. To love the nation is to love it in the mode of one’s beaten sexual dejection. The “refusal to be tamed”⁷³ through the transposition of the death instinct outward is a strange concession to the memorialization of this continual violence against oneself. It is important to understand the origination of masochism in this light, for its moment of constitution is in the act of a mournful withdrawal, in an inability to expel that violence against oneself. The triumph with which the masochist is able to assert himself through suffering

thus bears this trace of a prior shattering, a loss that was never consoled or consolable.

In hindsight Freud acknowledged that “Mourning and Melancholia” was an important piece anticipating his formulation of the notion of the superego. Strikingly, we find the same language describing the mechanism of masochism and the formation of melancholia. Whereas the inhibition and loss of interest exhibited by the ego in mourning are “fully accounted for,” melancholia “seems puzzling because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely.” The melancholic’s inability to mourn is due as much to the impossibility of knowing the object of his loss as it is to the necessity of shielding himself from this loss by “taking refuge” in narcissistic identification.⁷⁴ Again, we are confronted with the inward flight from refusal to recognize the loss. More significantly, this melancholic turn inward operates under the compulsion of two simultaneous imperatives: it must, through its withdrawal into itself, succumb to the unknowability of the object of loss and hence “knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him,”⁷⁵ as well as testify to the recognizability of this loss through the necessity to flee from this anxious knowledge that, though postponed, nonetheless insinuates itself into the melancholic’s very being. In every way, stopping short of naming it, the melancholic recognizes that which he must refuse or relinquish to know.

Though the melancholic’s rebellion is “crushed,” Freud observes, he is not at all shy, nor does he display any sense of shame in front of people, as might be expected of someone who is sincerely plagued by self-reproach. He behaves rather like the masochist we have seen in the works of Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo, one who finds satisfaction in the persistent confession of his worthlessness and guilt and their confirmation in punishment, in an “insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.”⁷⁶ Here one might remember that in “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud remarked on the masochist’s “need for punishment” as the primary obstacle erected by the patient in his “refu[sal] to surrender” his state of illness.⁷⁷ All that mattered for the masochist was to maintain a constant degree of suffering, to harbor the secret of pain. For Freud, this disconcerting behavior of excessive communicativeness in the need for punishment led to the observation that, in fact, “everything derogatory that they say about

themselves is at bottom said about someone else.”⁷⁸ In other words, this ostensible self-reproach, the hyperbolic performance of which exceeds the bounds of credibility, is in fact a phantasmic reenactment of the subject’s relation to an object that is no longer attainable, because it has been lost or renounced out of necessity.

While the melancholic is in truth debasing someone other than himself in every instance of self-reproach, the purpose of his beratement is not to make a phantasmic other suffer but, rather, to “kill” it. It is not that “love escapes extinction” by “taking flight in the ego” but, rather, the subject escapes his own extinction by taking flight in the other’s death.⁷⁹ In Freud’s words, “countless separate *struggles* are carried on over the object, in which hate and love *contend* with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the *assault*.”⁸⁰ In order to withdraw the object-cathexis invested in the object, and hence to be able to mourn in the proper sense of accepting the loss of the object without replacing or re-erecting it within oneself phantasmically, each struggle between love and hatred seeks to “loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even *as it were* killing it.”⁸¹

What is the significance attached to this proper acceptance of the loss of the object, of the object’s fundamental inaccessibility? To approach this question that seems to underpin Freud’s argument, one should turn to Freud’s narrative of the event giving rise to the occasion of melancholia. As said earlier, the melancholic’s mournful self-recriminations are in fact directed at someone else. This someone else, remarked Freud, is the one “whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.”⁸² Elaborating on this love relation that must have taken place prior to the illness, Freud believed that this attachment of the libido to that person had at one point existed. However, “owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered.”⁸³ As a consequence, Freud continued, “the result was not the *normal* one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different.”⁸⁴

At this point in Freud’s argument, there can be no doubt that the “normal” scenario he is speaking of is the development of the positive Oedipus complex, in which the boy gives up his desire to be loved by and thus the passive,

feminine sexual relation to the father, in favor of a masculine trajectory on which he withdraws this libidinal attachment and displaces it onto a new object permissible within this heterosexual scheme.⁸⁵ In contradistinction, melancholia is the failure of sexuality to be normalized by the Oedipus complex. As Freud observed,

The free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way, an object-loss was transformed into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.⁸⁶

The last part of the above passage foreshadows the theory of the superego, the full genesis of which was not expounded by Freud until 1923 in *The Ego and the Id*. What is striking is that Freud acknowledged in 1924 that the formation of the superego, that is, the psychic introjection of parental authorities that at the reinforcement of disciplinary social institutions becomes the faculty of conscience, is essential to the passing of the Oedipus complex. "The object-cathexes," Freud stated, "is given up and replaced by identifications."⁸⁷ In other words, every identification is a desexualization of the libidinal cathexes. Yet in the case of the melancholic, the libido is only "withdrawn into the ego,"⁸⁸ still bound to an object of love. Identification has not successfully brought about a desexualization of a shattered love but only harbors this impossible love within oneself as insurmountable mourning. Freud acknowledged that in the melancholic, desexualization takes place quite slowly and painfully, only with each act of self-beratement and psychic killing of this unmourned love. However, this desexualization clearly cannot take place, since each act of violence against oneself can itself be resexualized, a way of preserving that which is prohibited. Taking our cue from masochism, we have seen how this melancholic process of detaching the libidinal cathexis in killing the object can be resexualized as a pleasure in violence against oneself, against that other which has been incorporated as part of self.

The fundamental problem that Freud failed to account for in positing the process of decathexis, of gradual desexualization through identification, is that if the melancholic does not and cannot recognize what he has lost in the object he identifies as the mourned object, then each instance of identification is destined to fail its mission of decathexis and hence doomed to reenactment. Moreover, this repetition, unlike what Freud believed, will not alleviate the process by slowly and gradually removing the libido from its attachment, for that decathexis has no object, properly speaking. That identification, in other words, can never be recognized as a proper substitute, for just as the melancholic cannot recognize what he has lost, he cannot recognize what he must give up as an object of loss and what he might replace with identification. The consequence of this can only be a masochistic reenactment in which each instance of “killing” of the object is actually a killing of oneself. In this way nationalism, as a mourned object, becomes invested and reinvested with a melancholic masochism. In the literary writings of Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu, the nation is looked to as a way out of personal and sexual despair, yet love for the nation is predicated on precisely the same unknowable object of melancholia.

As tempting as the suggestion would be that the psychic burden of nationalism, as expressed by masochism in Guo and Yu’s literary texts, is a displaced mourning over homoeroticism, the equivalence of nationalism with a grieved homoeroticism would fail to consider how nationalism is mobilized as a form of productive sexuality and propagated as being coextensive with a fulfillment in love.⁸⁹ That is to say, nationalism, though predicated on an impossible melancholic identification, offers the possibility of overcoming that inability to mourn. Hence, in the literary writings of Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo, it is always the nation that becomes the only viable alternative to sexual despair even if it is always indistinguishable from unfulfilled erotic love. At the same time, however, one should also keep in mind how sexuality, as a form of masculine melancholia particular to Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu, is yet to be exhaustively determined by the demands of nationalism. Love of the nation may be possible only through an impossible love, just as masculinity mourns the homoeroticism that can no longer be admitted as constitutive of its gender. The tension between nationalism and sexuality is found on this very incomplete logic of reconciliation where the only possible

mode of mourning is through the relentless self-beating of the masochist. That violence against oneself consecrated as pleasure, in turn, is the only way of reconciling, however precariously, what one must renounce as a sexual nostalgia and what one must accept as its proper substitute.

Love for the nation, the experience of nationalism, is refigured as this unappeasable masochistic torment against oneself, a melancholic refusal to move beyond that traumatic recognition of a nation endangered, perverting that very moment of trauma by incessant reenactment. If the male masochistic subject finds it impossible to properly mourn the fate of the Chinese nation, it is because this improper dwelling also makes possible a mode of painful self-reflexivity, yet to be fully exhausted and appeased. The melancholia that is constitutive of his masochism is also that which enables him to persist and linger in a nationalistic imagination that is embedded most intimately in the very psyche of Chinese literary modernity.

Notes

I thank Judith Butler and Leo Lee as well as two anonymous *positions* readers for their suggestions and comments.

- 1 Zhang Jingyuan, *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations, 1919–1949* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).
- 2 Lu Xun, “Butian” [Mending the sky], in *Lu Xun quanji* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1996), 2:345–354; Guo Moruo, “Xianglei” [Exile on River Xiang], in *Nüshen* [Goddess] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1978), 13–21. Although most scholars take “Late Spring” as Guo’s first work using dream analysis, Bu Guanghai points out that it is in “Exile on River Xiang” that Guo first uses the technique of stream-of-consciousness, which, properly speaking, would be his first experiment with psychological narrative. See Bu’s *Guo Moruo yanjiu xinlun* [New perspectives on Guo Moruo] (Beijing: renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1995).
- 3 The authority lent to scientific discourse at the time must be seen in light of the Chinese intellectuals’ equivalence of Western science with the secret of nation building. The familiar mottoes of democracy and science, personified as “Mr. De” and “Mr. Sai,” respectively, accompanied every call for modernization, not to mention the already familiar subscription to Social Darwinism. Not only did science carry the discursive capital of Westernized modernity—indeed, modernity was often indissociable from Westernization—it also provided an alternative order of knowledge in which scientific hypotheses and explanations offer “objective truths” and hence calculable solutions to the crisis of Chinese modernity and nationalism. One should keep in mind that the same consolation also engendered the discourse on

eugenics in China in the 1920s, a related issue that deserves a separate treatment. For the relation between eugenics and medical discourse in modern China, see Frank Dikötter, *Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects, and Eugenics in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

- 4 Not atypical of Yu Dafu's contemporaries, Li Chuli, a fellow member of the Creation Society, of which Yu Dafu was one of the founders, once remarked, "[Yu] Dafu may seem decadent, but in essence he is a Puritan" (quoted in Guo Moruo's "On Lun Yu Dafu," in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao* [Research materials on Yu Dafu], ed. Chen Zishan and Wang Zili (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1986). Similarly, others have defended or appropriated Yu Dafu's decadence as the nonconformist behavior of a true revolutionary. See, for instance, Leo Ou-fan Lee's *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); C. T. Hsia's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); and more recently, Xu Zidong's *Yu Dafu xinlun* [A new interpretation of Yu Dafu] (Zhejiang: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1984).
- 5 Because the details of this historical encounter have been related elsewhere in a work devoted to the topic, I restrict my essay to the more complex issue of appropriation. See Zhang Jingyuan, *Psychoanalysis*, and Yu Fenggao, *Xinli fenxi yu zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo* [Psychoanalysis and modern Chinese fiction] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1987).
- 6 The only direct historical encounter between Freud and Chinese intellectuals is a letter Freud wrote to Zhang Shizhao on 27 May 1929, apparently in response to the latter's previous letter, which, unfortunately, has not been found. In it Freud welcomes Zhang's idea of an intercultural exchange in the form of either introducing psychoanalysis to China or contributing an article to the journal *Imago* evaluating the hypotheses of psychoanalysis regarding archaic forms of expression as they manifest in the Chinese language. See Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China*.
- 7 Lu Xun, "Mending the Sky."
- 8 See Yu Dafu " 'Shenhuo yu yishu' shuhou" [Postscript to "Life and Art"], in *Yu Dafu wenji* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1982), 7:160.
- 9 See Lu Xun, "Tingshuomeng" [About dreams], in *Lu Xun quanji*, 4:469.
- 10 Interestingly, Yu Dafu himself writes precisely about men in some way emasculated and weakened by sexually insatiable women. See, for example, *Miyan* [Stray lamb], in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 2:1–93.
- 11 Guo Moruo, "Canchun" [Late spring], in *Moruo wenji*, 5:13–28 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1957).
- 12 As Guo explained how he must overcome his reluctance, "To footnote one's own story is already a most uneconomical task to begin with. Yet even a bird has to sing to its death just to please its mate. One might do well here to imitate the bird's cry" ("Piping yu meng" [Criticism and dreams], in *Guo Moruo quanji* [Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1985], 15:238).
- 13 *Ibid.*, 15:236.

- 14 See Guo Moruo, “Gushu jinyide wenti” [The problem of translating the classics into vernacular], in *Guo Moruo quanji*, 15:165.
- 15 See Chong Mi, “‘Chenlun’ [‘Sinking’]”, in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao* [Research materials on Yu Dafu], ed. Wang Zili and Chen Zishan (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982), 305.
- 16 Lu Xun, “Chule xiangya zhita: houji” [Postscript to “Out of the ivory tower”], in *Lu Xun quanji*, 10:243.
- 17 Illness, *nueji*, is often written with the radical for illness, but it appears also without it. See Luo Zhufeng, ed., *Hanyu Dacidian* (Shanghai: 1991), 8:811–812.
- 18 Zhang has shown that four of the five full Chinese translations of Freud’s works had no direct connection to Japanese translations. However, as will be made clear in this section, the word that concerns us in this article—*masochism*—clearly has the Japanese translation as its model in its various Chinese renditions. Cf. Zhang Jingyuan, *Psychoanalysis*, 40.
- 19 See “Zur Einführung” in *Deutsch-Chinesisches Wörterbuch*, ed. Hellmut Wilhelm (Shanghai: Max Nöbler, 1945).
- 20 See Huang Shifu, ed., *A Comprehensive English-Chinese Dictionary* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1939).
- 21 For the relation between mourning/melancholia and gender, see Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,” in her *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- 22 Yu Dafu, “Manmanyè” [Endless night], in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 1:116–146.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 128.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 133–134.
- 26 See Mao Dun (pseudonym Sun), “‘Chuangzao’ geiwuode yingxiang” [My impressions of “Creation”], in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao*, 308–309.
- 27 See Su Xuelin, “Yu Dafu lun” [On Yu Dafu], in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao*, 381–392.
- 28 To the stylistic criticism, Yu noted with appreciation that he, too, agreed that the “sincerity” with which he wrote “Sinking” is missing in this particular work, which he composed in one night. He lamented that at the time, he was “swimming in the cesspool of Shanghai” (“Manmanyè” *fabiaohou*) [Notes after the publication of “Manmanyè”], in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 5:124, mired in the hardships of professional as well as private life. Indeed, Yu conceded that he had “recently felt that he is no longer as sincere as before.” What exactly is lamented in the loss of sincerity, *shuaizhen*, however, is unclear, as the apology goes on to address the second type of criticism he received, which was moral. Directing their comments at the thematization of sex in the story, apparently five or six readers denounced Yu for inciting young students to descend into the bestial world of homosexual love. Defending himself against this injustice, Yu protested that one should not take the protagonist as the author himself. He further emphasized that he meant only to describe what he saw as a “tendency” of modern youths, rather than to promote a certain behavior as an imperative.

- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 125.
- 31 See Michael Egan, “Yu Dafu and the Transition to Modern Chinese Literature,” in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 309–324.
- 32 From Yu Dafu, “Chanyu dubai” [A monologue amidst remorse: Substitute preface to “A Collection of Remorse”] in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 7:249–252.
- 33 Yu, “Manmanyey,” 131.
- 34 Ibid., 143–144.
- 35 Ibid., 132–133.
- 36 Yu Dafu, “Guoqu” [The past], in *Yu Dafu wenji*, 1:377.
- 37 Yu, “Manmanyey,” 130.
- 38 See “‘Manmanyey’ fabiaohou,” 121–126.
- 39 Gilles Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty,” and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- 40 Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty,” 32.
- 41 See Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.
- 42 Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty,” 60. Deleuze’s argument centers on the supremacy of the mother figure, before whom the father, or the figure of authority, is made prostrate. This critical point, which seeks to bring to the fore the reign of the feminine principle in the masochist, however, must presume the constancy of this supremely tyrannical feminine figure and hence foreclose, unfortunately, the issue of feminine masochism that is present, however downplayed, in the text he considers. After all, Wanda, the feminine protagonist in *Venus in Furs*, is often quite unhappy with the dominating role she must play and does it only to “fulfill his dreams” and “to be agreeable to [him]” (Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, 230). At one point, she even flatly says, at his request for pain, “But it does not give me pleasure” (185). The omission of female masochism in narrative accounts of male masochism is even more striking in Yu Dafu’s “Guoqu,” which I discuss below.
- 43 Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 21:152–157.
- 44 Ibid., 154.
- 45 See Sigmund Freud, “Fetishismus,” in *Sigmund Freud Studienausgabe: Psychologie des Unbewußten* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1975), 385.
- 46 This translation is in Philip Rieff, ed., *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Collier, 1963), 216.
- 47 Freud, “Fetishism,” 152, and “Fetishismus,” 383.
- 48 For those interested in making a biographical comparison, see Guo Moruo’s “My childhood,” in *Moruo wenji*, 6:1–152, particularly 66–71, 90–96, and 101–106.

- 49 Here one might consider Ashis Nandy's notion of a "secret defiance," in which self-ascription or voluntary servitude also preserves the possibility of maintaining one's identity as one's own. See Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 50 Guo Moruo, "Donna Carméla," in *Guo Moruo quanji*, 9:205–238.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 213–214.
- 52 Western figures of suffering and redemption, from the sacrifice of Christ to the self-torment of Faust, and even the penitence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have been employed in Chinese writers' imagination of modern selfhood in the attempt to renarrate themselves against the claims of tradition. Although masochism and melancholia directly resonate themes of self-torment, it should be clear that my study is restricted to the specific transaction between Freudian psychoanalysis and the literary texts in question. The focus is on what psychoanalysis has to contribute to our understanding of male masochism in Chinese literature as well as, and this is important, what these literary works can reveal about the reticence of the psychoanalytical theoretical apparatus. The meaning of the use of Western figures in general in Chinese literature—Faustian or Nietzschean—would deserve a separate treatment. In any case, one could consult existing scholarship on the matter. See, for example, Raoul David Findeisen, "Die Last der Kultur: Vier Fallstudien zur chinesischen Nietzsche-Rezeption," *Minima Sinica* 2, no. 2 (1989): 1–42 (pt. 1) and 1, no. 1 (1990): 1–40.
- 53 Guo, "Donna Carméla," 230.
- 54 This reversion of sexual love to patriotism also deserves to be examined in female writers such as Lu Yin, who, in *Diary of a Mistress*, ends the story with the mistress abandoning her unfruitful affair with the resolution to serve the country. It would also be worth speculating as to what this relationship to the nation—taking it as one's lover—would entail, since *qingren* usually falls out of the purview of legitimacy.
- 55 See, for example, Yu Fenggao, Zhang Jingyuan, and Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- 56 Guo, "Criticism and Dreams," 238–239.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 239.
- 58 Guo, "Canchun," 26.
- 59 This is the criticism by Shesheng that occasioned Guo's "Criticism and Dreams." Although his argument is selectively paraphrased in Guo's reply, the part on "Late Spring" is quoted in full in Cheng Fangwu's "'Canchun' de piping" [Criticism of "Late Spring"], in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue yanjiu ziliao: Guo Moruo zhuanji* [Research materials on modern Chinese literature: Guo Moruo], ed. Zhang Daming (Sichuan: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 367.
- 60 Guo, "Canchun," 20.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 62 This is also true in Yu Dafu's *Stray Lamb*, in which Mr. Chen directs the protagonist's desire by serving as the go-between.
- 63 Guo, "Canchun," 27, 28.

- 64 See Guo Moruo, “‘Xixiangji’ yishu shangde pipan yuqi zuozhede xingge” [The evaluation of the artistry of “The Western Chamber” and the character of its author], in *Guo Moruo quanji*, 15:323.
- 65 For the analysis of this problem in Freud, see Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.
- 66 See Sigmund Freud, “‘A Child is Beaten’: A Contribution to the Study of Sexual Perversions,” in Strachey, *Standard Edition*, 17:177–214.
- 67 See Strachey, *Standard Edition*, 14:243–258. It should be clear that the way in which I discuss melancholia is very different from what Julia Kristeva takes as a deprived existence in depression. By juxtaposing masochism and melancholia, I am interested in their implications for a psychic survival affirmed in failure—national and sexual—and how that engages the Chinese texts in question. However, for those interested, see Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Rondiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) and her *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Rondiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- 68 See Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” in Strachey, *Standard Edition*, 14:128.
- 69 Sigmund Freud, “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” in Strachey, *Standard Edition*, 21:163–164; emphasis added.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 164; emphasis added.
- 71 *Ibid.*; emphasis added.
- 72 See Laplanche, *Life and Death*.
- 73 Freud, “Economic Problem of Masochism,” 164.
- 74 What I wish to address here is not the implications of melancholia as the resolution of the Oedipal complex and the formation of the superego, a discussion that must be postponed for the time being.
- 75 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 245; original emphasis.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 77 Freud, “Economic Problem of Masochism,” 166.
- 78 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 248.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 257.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 256.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 257.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 248.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 249.
- 84 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
- 85 In “The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex,” Freud stated that it is the fear of castration—that is, the fear of punishment from the father for the male subject’s desire to have intercourse with the mother—that compels the male subject to turn away from the Oedipus complex. Yet there is no reason why the castration should be preferred to the feminine

precondition, in which the male subject assumes the passive feminine role to his father, unless one considers—as Freud clearly did—a masculinity threatened with castration, which nonetheless abides to heterosexuality, as more socially preferable and plausible than one which prefers homosexuality in its feminine position to the father. See Strachey, *Standard Edition*, 19:173–179.

86 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 249; original emphasis.

87 “Dissolution,” 176.

88 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 249.

89 Here one might think of the numerous literary examples where the lover is abandoned for the nation and erotic love is rechanneled as patriotism, such as Yu Dafu’s “Sinking” and Lu Yin’s *Diary of a Mistress*.