Wang Wenxing and the "Loss" of China

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1. The Historical and the Personal

During the Cold War, a recurrent issue in Chinese studies, particularly that strain connected to American foreign relations, was the question of who "lost" China; whose fault it was that the disintegration of China during the first half of the twentieth century did not lead to the ultimate reunification under a regime friendly to the United States and one that upheld "our" values. China's "loss" to the Communists set it on a trajectory whose recognition by the United States was long in coming. In Taiwan, "Free China,"

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as it was known, many historical novels were written, particularly in the 1950s, narrating a version of the events during the War of Resistance to the Japanese and the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The structure of such novels as Wang Lan's (b. 1922) *The Blue and the Black* (*Lanyu hei*) resembles the expansive style of historical romance: loosely written, exhaustive in detail, and expressing a singular point of view toward the consequences of the civil war.[1] In some ways, it seems, the current rhetoric toward China conjures these Cold War images of a brutal regime on mainland China, a place where even the preposition "on" as opposed to "in" suggests a degree of uneasiness with the permanence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a legitimate nation-state. Not everyone has accepted the phrase "*in* the PRC," and as a result, some are still more comfortable with the characterization "*on* the mainland." What this seemingly minor choice of prepositions implies is that the last battle of the Cold War, always fought on the terrain of ideology and discourse, has not been waged. And yet in the years since the publication of Cold War classics such as *The Blue and the Black* a different set of texts, whom many have referred to as "modernist," have been written and published in Taiwan that refract the historical image of twentieth-century China. For instance, Wang Wenxing's (b. 1939) novel *Family Catastrophe* (*Jiabian*) provides a different version of history, but not just one in content alone.[2] Indeed, as many critics have suggested, it is precisely the structure of *Family Catastrophe* that represents an innovation in Chinese literature.[3] What is it about this radically constructed novel that not only has raised serious questions about modern Chinese writing but now, one could say, even has implications for the apparatus by which we understand China and it understands itself? In

1. Wang Lan, *Lanyu hei* (Taibei: Chunwenxue Chubanshe, 1958).

2. Wang Wenxing, *Jiabian* (Taibei: Huanyu Chubanshe, 1973; reprint, Taibei: Hongfan Chubanshe, 1978). *Jiabian* was first serialized in *Zhongwai wenxue* (Literature east and west) in 1972 and 1973. All references are to the standard Hongfan edition. Susan Wan Dolling has completed an excellent and elegant translation titled *Family Catastrophe* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995). I have generally followed her translation in the quotations contained herein with a few exceptions for precision. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically within the text and abbreviated *FC* with the page number from the Hongfan edition first, followed by that from Dolling's translation.

3. Edward Gunn's characterization of *Family Catastrophe* as a "Brechtian epic," a novel that develops momentum and then undercuts it by changing structure abruptly, thus "alienating" the reader, is still one of the best insights into the overall structure of the novel. See his "The Process of Wang Wen-hsing's [Wang Wenxing's] Art," *Modern Chinese Literature* 1, no. 1 (September 1984): 33.

answer to that question, I would like to suggest that the so-called loss of China which so plagued the Cold War discourse and representation of the PRC in the United States, and in some ways continues to do so, be examined in its complex multivocalities, and that in so doing we might arrive at a better understanding of some of the issues central to Chinese intellectuals throughout the twentieth century.

First of all, how do we think of the notion of loss? One way, of course, is to repeat the stale Cold War debates over what happened to China, a set of issues that continue to be recast into questions such as "What will happen?" in China. Prognostication has for quite some time been the chief mode in which China experts assert their opinions. Attendant concerns are usually framed as "When will China modernize?" "When will it become a civilized member of the world community?" "When will it be free?" Those interested in modern Chinese culture instead should be asking what has happened and how these past events are rendered into text. What is the nature of the multivalent "loss" that underlies Wang Wenxing's novel, and how is it best understood? As I will suggest in the ensuing pages, Wang Wenxing is influenced in sophisticated ways by the modes of modernism, and still he manages to forge both his knowledge of and facility with Western aesthetics and his consciousness of China's past into a creative expression of inimitable brilliance and complexity. I am particularly interested here in Wang's ability to shape a literary narrative that fundamentally reshapes the historical narrative of the so-called loss of China in 1949. And this political loss is overlayed with the deeper, more profound loss of traditional Chinese values. Wang ingeniously weaves these two together with the personal loss of the protagonist's father in *Family Catastrophe*.

In Western theoretical discourse, when we think of "loss," we often think of the Freudian metaphor. In his 1927 article "Fetishism," Freud argues that a fetish is "a substitute" for that which is lost.[4] Freud has suggested problematically that the perceived lost object is the mother's penis, that there is some sort of primordial wholeness that, while always already absent, points toward an irretrievable time in which it did exist. Thus, the lost object is not simply a loss but a fracture of a prior unity that is no longer accessible. *Family Catastrophe* is just such a narrative of loss. The family has "lost" its father, and the novel consists of a search to regain him. Perhaps this loss of the father in Wang's narrative signifies the highly reified

4. Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," trans. Joan Riviere, in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Phillip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 215.

quality of China's patriarchal tradition, the absolute supremacy above all other relationships of the filial bond. While in Western society certainly there can be no question of the dominance of patriarchal values, the preeminent status of filiality as a device for the formulation of subjectivity in the Chinese tradition nevertheless is not matched by the more individualistic sense of subjectivity found in Western society. The other component of this machine of subject formation is the role of language. In the Chinese tradition, filiality, language, and subjectivity are inseparable. It is therefore not without reason that in the process of his narrative of the father's loss, Wang Wenxing is drawn into a fascination with language.

This remarkable obsession with the play of language has been the source of much criticism of Wang's writing. Some even have asserted that Wang's language play is a distraction to the primary subject matter of the novel. Two early symposia on this novel were largely conducted along such negative lines. Zi Yu has criticized the novel for developing a compelling theme in language that is alienating. Every time one gets drawn into the novel, Zi Yu observes, the language thwarts this identification and distances the reader from it. Later critics, including myself, would contend that this is exactly the point of the technique, or at least an important aspect of it. Criticism of Wang's language in these symposia include assertions that the innovations are "unnecessary" (Zhang Jian), "too lyrical" (Lo Men), or "unrealistic or uncharacteristic of ordinary life" (Lin Haiyin and Zhang Xiguo).[5] But if we remember the connection made by Freud between the fear or trauma of loss and the need to fasten oneself to another, ulterior object, in this case language itself, then the reason for Wang's fascination becomes clear. Language becomes the fetishistic substitute for that which is lost—the loss of the father, the loss of one's home on mainland China, and perhaps even the loss of tradition in an era not just of vast change but of the hegemony of Western values. These various levels of trauma are worked and reworked in the language of the novel until they take on an aesthetic

5. See Lin Haiyin et al., "Jiabian zuotanhui" (A symposium on *Family Catastrophe*), *Zhongwai wenxue* 2, no. 1 (June 1973): 164–77; and Wang Dingjun et al., "Tan Jiabian" (On *Family Catastrophe*), *Shuping shumu* 6 (1973): 80–113. In an eloquent defense of Wang Wenxing's linguistic project, not to mention a highly detailed semantic analysis of *Family Catastrophe*, Zhang Hanliang suggests that, as T. S. Eliot says, it is the writer's responsibility to preserve the language by expanding it. Wang Wenxing's mixture of vernacular (*baihua*) and literary Chinese (*wenyan*) is a move toward modifying modern Chinese, equipping it for the future, so that it can remain an elastic and viable modern language. See Zhang Hanliang, "Qian tan 'Jiabian' de wenzi" (A preliminary discussion of *Family Catastrophe*), *Zhongwai wenxue* 1, no. 12 (May 1973): 122–41.

form. Wang's literary project simulates the structure of a dream in the sense of working through and then textually resolving what is a personal example of a broader set of historical issues—the fissure of Taiwan and mainland China, the disintegration of traditional Chinese values.

Wang's trauma is further elucidated by reference to a related article of Freud's, "Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process."[6] In this article, Freud observes that the fear one encounters when confronting a risky desire is resolved through a "splitting of the ego." The ego is able to ignore any prohibition and at the same time recognize the danger of reality. In *Family Catastrophe*, the protagonist, Fan Ye, undertakes just such a course of action. He searches to restore order to the family structure while simultaneously disclosing the reason that no such restoration is possible. The novel consists of a "split" narrative. This split narrative is reminiscent of Freud's "rift in the ego." The rift never heals and tends to deepen over time. It is the price one must pay to indulge an instinctual desire and in the same breath to acknowledge its danger. The attack on traditional Chinese values seems reminiscent of Freud's discussion of risky desires, for what could be more dangerous than the repudiation of one's cultural icons?[7]

The twentieth century in general has been a period during which Chinese intellectuals have looked to the West for all sorts of models whereby to reconceptualize cultural values in China. This process itself reflects the rather unequal ideological relationship between China and the West, with traditional Chinese values characterized as "backward," "superstitious," and even "cannibalistic." Lu Xun's famous "Diary of a Madman" is considered the locus classicus of this radical critique of the Confucian tradition, an orthodoxy that, the madman observes, orders its adherents not to revere and respect but to "eat people!"[8] Could it possibly be a coincidence that

6. Sigmund Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process," trans. James Strachey, in Reiff, ed., *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, 220–23. I also have referred to the father/son conflict in *Family Catastrophe* as an Oedipus complex, but I have not cited Freud for this. The Oedipus complex is so pervasive in a wide variety of cultural texts, West and East, and it is so obviously a part of the writing of this novel, that Freud need not be cited. What I am suggesting, however, with respect to the notions of "loss" and the "splitting of the ego" is a certain reading that addresses several levels of the novel at once as well as the methods of reading it.

7. In his important article "Iconoclasm in Wang Wen-hsing's [Wang Wenxing's] *Chia-pien* [*Jiabian*]," James C. T. Shu, in *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan*, ed. Jeanette Faurot (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 179–93, reads Wang's novel in the tradition of May Fourth anti-Confucianism, particularly as it relates to filiality.

8. Lu Xun, "Kuangren riji," in *Lu Xun Quanji* (Lu Xun's complete works), vol. 1 (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), 425.

the madman discerns this from the *language* while carefully reading a book of *history*? In contrast to the rather inflammatory imagery used to describe and assess the Chinese tradition—by its own modern intellectuals—Western literature and thinkers generally have been assigned a privileged status in the twentieth century. Marx, Nietzsche, and Hegel have all been influential. Freud, too, has had his role, perhaps more so in the literary realm than in the political. In the 1930s and 1940s, in particular, there was a great deal of translation of Freudian texts and terminology in China. The Shanghai modernists were one group fascinated by the unconscious, the subjectivity of perception, fantasy, and in some cases what could be considered, in Freudian terms, sexual perversion.[9] During the Maoist period in China, Freud, of course, was banned.

But his influence still was felt in Taiwan as much as that of anyone else associated with modernism. During the 1960s, modernism was the most influential movement in Taiwan, flourishing under the leadership of writers such as Wang Wenxing, Bai Xianyong, Chen Ruoxi, and Ouyang Zi. The major journal *Modern Literature* contained many short stories that could be described as modernist—using interior monologue and alienation as a theme, or taking a certain stance that evoked the iconoclastic elitism of Pound and Eliot. These writers and others, such as Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence, were translated and published in this journal. In 1972, the year that *Family Catastrophe* was published, *Modern Literature*, of which Wang Wenxing was a founding editor and one of two or three of its most important voices, devoted two parts of two issues to a symposium on the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary art. This symposium included translations of Freudian interpretations of literature—*Moby Dick* was one, Kafka's *Trial* was another—as well as translations of works by Freud himself such as "The Moses of Michelangelo" and "Dostoyevsky and Parricide."[10] There is no question that Wang Wenxing, a highly literate and well-educated member of the intelligentsia, was very familiar with the major works of Freud and probably influential in choosing the theme of this particular double issue. As we will see, the theme of the Oedipus complex figures prominently in his novel.

I would maintain, however, that the turn to Freud is not simply a study in the influence of one major Western thinker on a Chinese writer, even if it is

9. See Jingyuan Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations 1919–1949* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell East Asia Series, 1992).

10. See *Xiandai wenxue* (Modern literature) 47 and 48 (1972): 5–130 and 220–49, respectively.

complicated by the subtle ironies of various power dynamics—West versus China, intellectual over the mass public, and so on. One could look at the work of Ouyang Zi, a contemporary of Wang's in Taiwan and a writer whose work almost always involves some Freudian theme, to illustrate that Wang Wenxing's work is far too sophisticated, complex, and unresolved to sustain a simple influence study. We should keep in mind that what Freud was most interested in was foregrounding the unconscious. The limitations of a writer such as Ouyang Zi do not rest in any stylistic flaw, for she is a careful craftsperson of language. The problem with such pieces as "The Vase" is that the Freudian metaphor is almost always *too* literal, *too* clear, that is, too *conscious*.[11] In Wang Wenxing's work, the issues are fraught with complexities, and Freud's influence is not restricted to the Oedipal theme. His work forces us to reassess the value of history and, in fact, what counts for history. For is history foremost composed of the major political events of an era, or is it made up of the minutiae of social interactions that together form some sort of picture of the rituals and cultural norms that pervade a given society? Is the representation of history always straightforward and objective, or is it twisted and reconfigured according to the restrictions of individual perspective? Investigating the fundamental relationships in *Family Catastrophe*, the way certain events are emphasized and others are diminished in stature, will help ascertain those aspects of the narrative that are least discernible, most repressed, and closest to the *unconscious*. What we discover is a fascination with language that nevertheless suggests the personal loss of the father as well as the larger loss of China, and most assuredly the loss of the traditional scaffolding of Confucian values. We also find a structure that is broken in two, in a manner that indicates that the loss is not just a loss but also a split, a bifurcation, an absence of the wholeness that, as we read the work, seems at one time to have been present but is now gone forever. To fully comprehend this, we must first examine the exact structure of this novel that is so unique yet so heavily weighted by history and influence.

11. Ouyang Zi is an accomplished minor writer. See her short story collection *Qiuye* (Autumn leaves) (Taibei: Chenzhong Chubanshe, 1971). She is also one of the best critics of her generation. I nevertheless would suggest that she is not in the same league with Wang Wenxing as a creative writer. Of course, such an extensive comparison would require a whole other article.

2. Fan Ye and the Predicament of Universal Subjectivity

In addition to being written in three long parts, *Family Catastrophe* consists of a bifurcated narrative, a novel divided into two alternating modes of development. These two halves develop in two different strains of the story, proceeding in a contrapuntal back-and-forth through the end of the novel. The first begins with the departure of Fan Minxian, the head of the household, from his home. This mode then develops the narrative of Minxian's son, Fan Ye, or Mao Mao, searching the island for him. This quest proves futile, for once the father has left home he is never heard from again. Each of these chapters, as I will call them for lack of a better word, begins with a letter, so that the novel progresses from A to O. Within each of these lettered chapters is the other narrative mode, numbering from 1 to 157. The numbered sequence of episodes traces the biography of Fan Ye from the time he first learned to read up to the present. The syntax of the novel becomes more convoluted as the narrative develops, and Wang has been variously applauded and impugned for mixing classical grammatical patterns with vernacular ones, for adopting English syntax, and for simply creating his own private language. He often reverses the order of Chinese characters in two-character combinations, purposely misuses diction, and chooses obscure forms of individual characters.

As Ouyang Zi has shown, each of these two separate narrative modes has its own tone.[12] The lettered chapters describe Fan Ye in the narrative present. The narrative present is the point at which the reader finds Fan Ye during his search for the father, though it begins with the father escaping the house. Fan Ye endeavors to restore the family order to what it supposedly used to be before his father's disappearance. His entreaty at the beginning of each of these chapters, written in the literary language, is a nostalgic reminder of what that order comprised: filial trust in the father's ability to resolve all the family's problems. Read within the Chinese context, the father would be culturally marked as the ultimate power figure and

12. Ouyang Zi's "Lun 'Jiabian' zhi jiegou xingshi yu wenzi goufa" (On the structure, form and literary style of family catastrophe), *Zhongwai wenxue* (Literature east and west) 1, no. 12 (May 1973): 50–67, is the first analysis of the narrative point of view of the two sequences. She suggests that the lettered chapters are written in the voice of an omniscient, distanced narrator and that the numbered episodes are closely associated with Fan Ye's point of view. This is generally true, but perhaps by virtue of this general tone in the novel certain "transgressions" that occur serve to undermine the attempt to establish a stable reading of the text.

as a sort of conduit to the traditional social formation in general, for he is the fulcrum of the filial relationship. The tone that this particular narrative develops is challenged by the action as retold in the numbered sequence of episodes embedded within the lettered chapters. In this numbered sequence, we learn of the gradual metamorphosis of the family, from a social unit that provides economic security and spiritual comfort to some sort of a prison. In chronological time, the events in the numbered episodes, which describe the family's disintegration, would naturally precede the action of the lettered chapters, the search for the father. But the narrative trajectory dictates that the quest precede this description. The quest, then, is encountered prior to the unraveling of the familial bond, although the narration of this quest is not apprehended by the reader "intact." This structure creates a doubly inscribed narrative tone, one in which each of the narratives, presented almost in conjunction, perpetually strives to displace the other. The skeletal structure of the novel can be diagrammed in this manner:

I. Beginning of the novel.
  A. The father surreptitiously leaves the home.
  B. Fan Ye and his mother realize the father is gone, and Fan Ye begins the search.
    1. The history of the family is narrated beginning with Fan Ye as he learns to read characters.
    2. The history proceeds, set in the past.
  C. The chapter begins with the entreaty to the father written in classical Chinese. Then, Fan Ye's search is described in the present.
    3. More of the history, still set in the past, is given.

The narrative continues in sequence, with four, five, six, and so on. Eventually there is a new lettered chapter, D, followed by more numbers and then E, and so on. About one-third of the way through the novel, the second part begins, then more lettered chapters, some number sections, and so forth. Finally, the novel concludes with the third part, comprising chapters N through O and episodes 124 through 157. The basic result is two narratives that eventually merge: the lettered chapters written in the present interspersed with the numbered sequence of episodes telling the history of the family.

This double inscription is the source of moral ambivalence that destabilizes the text. The development of the novel along two strains, wherein these narrative modes vie with each other, the first telling of the dutiful son's search, the second depicting his loathing for the father and the ritual of

filiality that serves to symbolically imprison Fan Ye within the family unit, raises the issue of closure, a topic I will address below. The numbered sequence increasingly becomes a narrative of Fan Ye's rage toward his father. For example, he begs his mother, Ye Qiufang, to repay a small debt his father has incurred with a relative. Fan Ye is likewise enraged when his father is cheated in a quick-profit money scheme. And he feels humiliated by his father's enfeebled behavior in old age. In one interesting scene, he becomes livid when his father gets up in the middle of the night and urinates loudly into a chamber pot for all the neighbors to hear. This loathing reaches a climax with Fan Ye's nightmare that he has stabbed his father in a fight. Of course, the anger he feels for his father, a fury that drives him to harass his father with greater frequency, most likely precipitates his father's flight from the family. And although he demonstrates sincerity in scouring the island in search of his father, he finally resigns himself to a peaceful life alone with his mother, thereby completing a symbolic Oedipal replacement.

The disturbing feature of this type of critique is that the Oedipus complex is invested with universal or archetypal significance by its exponents (or, conversely, dismissed as categorically false by its critics) while the implication is that the practice and ideology of filiality is specific to Chinese culture.[13] Thus the appropriation of the classic Oedipus complex of challenging, defeating, and replacing the father as a method of critiquing the cultural production of filiality typifies the universal/particular dialectic that leads to pathological descriptions of writers "obsessed" with China.[14] This type of reading is not restricted to Chinese novels but is, in fact, extended to them from a pervasive style of reading virtually all non-Western literature by a First World audience. A cursory glance at the back cover of almost any non-Western novel will usually reveal some sort of comment such as this: "It's not just about the local situation; it rises to the level of universality and speaks to the problems that all mankind faces." It stems from what I would

13. Lü Zhenghui, for example, posits a universal subject: the father/son conflict. While this conflict is universal, he argues, the family (*jiating*) is a problem specific to Chinese discourse. See his "Wang Wenxingde beiju" (The tragedy of Wang Wenxing), *Wenxing* (Literary star), n.s., 102 (December 1986): 115. This seems somewhat strange, since his use of Lukács (see footnote 22, below) would suggest a very historicist reading of the novel precluding any sense in my mind of a universal subject or conflict.

14. C. T. Hsia's "Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature," in his *A History of Modern Chinese Literature*, 2d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), 533–36, is the locus classicus for this influential method of viewing China. Subsequent notable examples include inter alia Leo Lee, "Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 451–53.

call a modernist, universalist style of reading that is still ubiquitous. A fascinating example is the back cover of a pocket edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, not a non-Western novel but nevertheless a classic "colonial" one: "For this story of the young seaman concerns not only an almost universal human dream but also an almost universal human speculation. As we follow the detailed account of the castaway's twenty-five solitary years, we find ourselves inevitably asking what we would do if faced with the same problems, how we would go about building a life with only the slender resources of nature and with no aid or comfort from any fellow being [*sic*]."[15] The most eloquent articulation of this sort of reading can be found in Dorothy Van Ghent's chapter on *Lord Jim*: "Jim himself is not enigmatic. The wonder and doubt that he stirs, both in Marlow and in us, are not wonder and doubt as to what *he* is: he is as recognizable as we are to ourselves; he is 'one of us.' "[16] Van Ghent even goes so far as to say that there is nothing really interesting about the native Jim beyond the mystery of his character, which reminds us of ourselves. According to this reading, then, we need only dispense with all those elements in the native's character that are different, and he is then "the same as us." Even the translation of *Family Catastrophe* has been packaged in a book cover that is seemingly straightforward yet still very ideological. On the front, almost as a subtitle, are the words "A Modernist Novel"—essentially dictating the way in which we are to read it. On the back is a quotation asserting that "the novel's artistic excellence and its universal theme . . . promise to provide an aesthetically gratifying experience for general readers as well." I would suggest that while it is true that the novel is an enormously accomplished work of literary mastery—and difficulty—the theme is not necessarily "universal." We should not read it solely for its formal excellence. Equally important is its ability to engage the specific historical situation of China and the diaspora and render it in a manner that also implicates certain trends in Western theoretical discourse and subject formation. The engagement of the predicament of universal subjectivity, which Naoki Sakai has referred to as a "particularism thinking itself as universalism," is what makes this work indeed appealing to the general reader.[17]

15. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974).

16. Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1953), 229.

17. "And," he continues, "it is worthwhile doubting whether universalism could ever exist otherwise." What Sakai is suggesting here is that the notion of a universal is really historically and ideologically produced to legitimate the dominant role of the West. Indeed, this dominance itself is, due to its historical situatedness, a particular. In order for it to

A closer examination of how the ritual system of filiality develops in the novel will begin to illuminate the connection with Wang's critique of subjectivity.[18] In an early scene, Fan Minxian accuses a young and willful Fan Ye of being unfilial. But the mistrust he and his wife feel stems from a fear that their son will not support them in their old age. The father looks at Fan Ye's face and concludes that the boy is rebellious and ungrateful, and that he will someday abandon his parents. Episode 93 begins like this: "No doubt about it, the child has no respect, no filial feelings whatsoever. People say, 'Store grain for the lean times, rear sons for old age,' but from what I can see, neither of us can count on this son for our future. We've raised him for nothing. Brand new, top quality gym shoes bought especially for him, but does he appreciate them? No!" (*FC*, 96; 112). For the first time in the novel, Fan Ye is shown bearing great resentment toward his father. When, throughout the novel, the father reflects on his suspicion that his son will abandon them, he often threatens to disappear and resort to life as a monk. In one such scene, Fan Ye is described as filled with a sorrow that stabs him in the heart, thus foreshadowing in an ironic way his subsequent dream of stabbing the father. In other scenes, he flaunts his disdain for filial rituals. To Fan Ye, who has been schooled in Western learning, the whole enterprise of ancestral worship seems empty, facile, and, most of all, superstitious. His anger and humiliation stem from the feeling that no "modern" individual should subjugate himself to another. The thrust of this issue becomes so strong that at one point it seeps into the third-person narrative as well. Perhaps to undercut any possible power that the notion of filiality may contain, Wang puts the term *filiality* in quotation marks. However, the statement "This sort of superstition should never have been allowed to exist!" is not in quotation marks. Thus, the power of Fan Ye's emotion has broken through his own speech and permeated the third-person narrative.

Fan Ye is confounded by his father's role in all this for one important reason: His father was a foreign exchange student in France. In his

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function as a legitimating ideology for colonialism, however, it must portray itself as a universal. See Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 98.

18. See A. R. Zito, "City Gods, Filiality, and Hegemony in Late Imperial China," *Modern China* 13.3 (July 1987): 333–70. Also useful are Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1973); and Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rite* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

reckoning, then, Fan Ye feels his father should have been able to internalize "universal" values of meaning and thereby debunk the Chinese myth of filiality and ancestral worship. The reason he fails to do this, however, stems from the fact that Fan Minxian was never really a serious student when abroad, that he never became a sincere inductee into the world of Western values. This too is a source of great pain and humiliation for Fan Ye, since he grew up thinking of his father as one of the educated elite who had returned early from Europe only because he had to tend to his own father's illness. Even if it were true that Fan Minxian came back to care for his father, why he exhibited this sort of filial conduct is lost on Fan Ye. Fan Minxian has proven impervious to "Westernization," but that fact, his continued adherence to filiality, is ignominious in the judgment of the son. Thus, since Fan Ye has invested Western values with a certain privileged status, he comes to view his father as a failure for not having emulated them. Fan Minxian's direct encounter with things Western, his excursion abroad and so forth, either never made an impact on him or inspired him to recede further into a "nativist" consciousness. Fan Ye, on the other hand, is disgusted by this retreat. One could argue with equal force, however, that it is the son whose mind has been "colonized" by ascribing such a privileged position to Western values.[19]

The most poignant contrast between what is viewed as the superiority of Western values versus the primitiveness of Chinese values comes in Episode 152, Fan Ye's diary chapter. In this scene, Fan Ye contemplates the need for a family as well as the importance of filiality. The characters for filiality are set off in quotation marks as if both to invoke them and to distance the reader from this invocation. Fan Ye cites a work of Western literature as proof of the moral inferiority of filiality. Wang Wenxing inherits this anti-Confucian cultural critique from the antitraditionalism of the May Fourth era, but as an author he carefully conceals or at least complicates

19. One could chart the son's attitude toward his father's training in France as it deteriorates through the course of the novel. In the first instance, Episode 40, the young boy is very impressed with his father's overseas experience. In Episode 110, Fan Ye is appalled by his father's superstitious ways, gasping, "And to think that he had been abroad to study in Europe!" By Episode 126, Fan Ye has concluded that his father never really received even the most rudimentary education in France but had, in fact, only participated in a brief excursion. A more telling characterization of his father's educational preferences is revealed in a much earlier episode in the novel, number 32. In this scene, Fan Minxian is described as reciting traditional Chinese poetry, indicating his induction into the elite culture of China's traditional scholar-gentry class.

his own views. In spite of its devastating attack on the cultural norms of Chinese society, Fan Ye's diary passage is poorly reasoned. Wang Wenxing's insertion of this reference to a Western literary work establishes a clear intertextual link between the characters in his work and those in the Western novel. It is reminiscent of a technique of ironic manipulation that Yu Dafu uses in his short story "Sinking" ("Chenlun"). In this May Fourth work, Yu Dafu often contrasts the florid prose of his self-absorbed hero with the English of such writers as Wordsworth. The effect is to mock the intellectual featured in the story, for that young man's melodramatic soliloquies are no literary match for his great romantic mentor's verse. Yu and Wang both develop a critique of the Chinese intellectual by textually juxtaposing him to a superior Western counterpart. This results in a cultural "subaltern" that incessantly conceives of the Western model in terms of a universal standard and the Chinese one as stricken, diseased, or otherwise bereft of moral value.[20]

The problem for Fan Ye is how to avoid a repetition of this predicament. Since repetition and recurrence seem to be favored techniques of the novel, one must therefore ponder whether any avenue of escape for this young Chinese intellectual is attainable. Fan Ye's development as a human subject in the novel is described as a series of reflections and repetitions of his parents, leading to his self-loathing. In several early passages, Fan Ye is shown repeating lyrics, traditional phrases, and even basic characters as a way of developing his language. When he recognizes that his self-identity is constructed of ever more embellished repetitions of his parents' habits and physical characteristics, his revulsion forces him to seek refuge in his bedroom. The bedroom becomes from this point on a symbolic extension of his own isolated and individuated subjectivity, a place where he can shut himself off from his family. Beyond a means of escape from his parents, this room provides a partitioned space where Fan Ye can recede deeper into his books of Western literature and philosophy. His reading constitutes the

20. Wang Wenxing also resembles the romantic writers in his interesting uses of nature imagery, both that of the third-person omniscient narrator and that more specifically pertaining to the thoughts and feelings of Fan Ye. Particularly in the episodes from 68 to 86, the developing adolescent Fan Ye is fascinated with romantic poetry and images of nature such as sunny days, the wind and rain, leaves, and so on. It is reminiscent of the work of writers such as Yu Dafu, as well as Guo Moruo, Xu Zhimo, and others. This romantic strain in twentieth-century Chinese literature is closely connected with the emergence of individuality. See Leo Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

other source of socialization that he is receiving, and it clearly runs against the grain of the socialization he is receiving from his parents. The result of these two forms of subjective development is an internal conflict in Fan Ye that leads him to despise any vestige of his resemblance to his parents.

The permutation that modernism takes in Taiwan, then, is that while the alienated intellectual is present, he is not alienated from the world at large, as in European modernism. Nor is he alienated from the colonizing West, as in other non-Western modernisms, such as Chinua Achebe's fiction. He is, rather, alienated from the Chinese world. He lives with the "affliction" of his feudal ancestors. His internal division against himself is the chief antagonism that typifies the modernist style of Wang Wenxing. The struggle between the mind and the body epitomizes the "split" that I referred to in the first part of this essay, the loss of the tradition that results in a splitting of the ego. Wang Wenxing inherits this conflict between traditional and Western values from the May Fourth iconoclasts. Even if Fan Ye is alienated and reified, then, in fact, by virtue of this alienation, his character is a synecdochical component of a larger cultural issue affecting Chinese intellectuals in general. He is not really a decentered subjectivity but one that attempts to recenter subjectivity in the form of a new hybrid cogito that attacks its own cultural reproduction by internalizing the European ideology of (what some have described as) the colonial subject. This cultural reproduction pertains specifically to the Chinese condition as enshrined in the critique of filiality. Thus, just as Fan Ye has caused one loss by driving the father into flight, he also is an emblem of the more philosophical notion of the loss of traditional Chinese values. However, the division caused by history, the unsalvageable loss of the homeland, is no better expressed than through the predicament of Fan Ye's awkwardly positioned brother.

3. Fan Lunyuan and the Predicament of Historical Particularity

The above analysis of Fan Ye's psyche is actually only possible by bracketing the issue of historical particularity. More precisely, modernism owes its attraction to the reader's complete attention to the universality of this subject. Any references to particulars should either support this reading or at most be ancillary to it. But such an attempt at reading *Family Catastrophe* according to the rhetorical modes of Western modernism belies a self-consciousness of its status as non-Western. Thus, the reading of non-Western literature, and even the appreciation of non-Western art, is often justified in terms of its reputed transcendent value—it articulates the

universal concerns of the human condition that "we all" share in spite of its historical particularities. Wang Wenxing's novel does indeed contain important elliptical references to history. But they are disclosed in repressed, almost lyrical ways. So, in contrast to the expansive historical romances of the 1950s, *Family Catastrophe* foregrounds the theme of exile and the stakes involved in historical representation by inverting the emphasis placed on the historical background. The historical reality of the family's life in Taiwan is displayed in ways that may be inexplicit but are nevertheless quite pervasive. Fan Ye's mother does not allow him to play with the neighbors. Second Brother is forbidden from cavorting with Taiwanese women. Fan Minxian leaves his identity card but takes with him a photograph of his deceased wife and eldest son, who were abandoned on the mainland. And ironically, Fan Ye takes up the study of history at a university in Taibei. It is as if his profession has turned out to be exactly that which the text tries so hard to suppress. A closer examination of Second Brother's situation illuminates this contrast between the notion of a universal subject position and the historical situatedness of this novel.

The specificity of the critique as centered on the Chinese self becomes no clearer than when one considers that the principal discursive unit of civilization in China is not the individual subject but the family. The reader is tempted to think that the family disintegrated when Fan Minxian left home, that there was something wrong in it that drove him to flee. In fact, though, the historical situation in which they exist, their status as a family dislocated on Taiwan, enjoys a repressed presence in a novel having much to do with the dissolution of the familial structure itself. Left back on mainland China prior to the 1949 Liberation, Eldest Brother appears only as a distant memory in the novel. Moreover, if Fan Ye provides a convenient template on which the problem of individual subjectivity can be mapped, then this mapping is only conceivable by virtue of the fact that the reader must temporarily hold in abeyance Fan Ye's status in the family, not as an only son or even as the eldest son but as Third Brother. With a preponderance of the depiction centered on Fan Ye, then, the other family members tend to fill supporting roles in what could perhaps be characterized as a non-Western bildungsroman. By contrast, however, Second Brother's disjointed and maladjusted status in the novel as the son who probably should have stayed behind but didn't quite seem to fade out of the novel is a vestige of the historical predicament in which the family is caught. Fan Ye's crisis, on the other hand, necessitates displacing the historical context in which he has been born. The foregrounding of this predicament, as encountered by

an alienated individual subject, conjures notions of a transhistorical human condition. With Second Brother, Fan Lunyuan, however, no possible imagination of him disconnected from his role as brother, son, stepson, husband, or father exists. He serves as a reminder that the historical situation is always immediately real and inescapable. The problems he faces thus all revolve around this historical connectedness.

Fan Lunyuan is indifferent to the father's disappearance from the outset. He does not share in the search for the father and merely cooly asks after Ye Qiufang, the stepmother whom he refers to as "Auntie" and with whom he does not enjoy a close relationship. Ye Qiufang treats Fan Lunyuan with suspicion and hostility. In one telling scene, they differ over how to take a set of family pictures. The episode ends with a great deal of tension. Divided by the partitioning of China and the memory of a previous life on the mainland, all the weight of the family's unsuturable historical predicament flows into Lunyuan's hand as he ends the photograph session with an unceremonious snap of the lens cover. Fan Lunyuan's presence in the novel never allows the reader to forget this dislocation that, in spite of whatever conflicts are to follow, already exists long before the father's disappearance from the home. In this sense, Fan Lunyuan embodies the historical and political loss of China.

Qiufang's silent contempt for Lunyuan turns to open suspicion of him in Episode 67, the long scene in which Lunyuan and Fan Ye go to a Peking Opera. In this scene, the mother, whose increasing paranoia will be dealt with below, explicitly warns Fan Ye that his brother may be dangerous. At this point in the novel her paranoia does not prevent the boys from going out to see the opera. Involving the great Song dynasty general Yue Fei, who was martyred by the corrupt leaders of the Southern Song regime, the opera plays to the national pride in Taiwan audiences—especially mainlanders. The opera praises service to the country, service that may entail the sacrifice of oneself and one's familial relationships, since Yue Fei's wife must remain back in China to demonstrate her chaste loyalty to her husband on the front. This opera assumes a somewhat allegorical role, since it implies a connection with the current political situation in China, a view of China under siege by the Communists. Fan Ye, and even Second Brother himself, find themselves absorbed in the drama of the play, the sensitivity of the love scenes, and the great acting by the beautiful Xia Peili, who stars in the role of Yue Fei's wife. Their impression is ruined, though, when, having forgotten their raincoats, they return to see the actress with the makeup smeared from her face, which "appeared a scummy yellow, making her look

much older than before" (*FC*, 76; 85). She also exhibits some rather crude behavior in front of them, shouting out an expletive now and then. What the two brothers witness perhaps disillusions them. It certainly serves as a stark reminder of the distinction between fiction and reality, for the opera that had briefly smitten them has been undercut by the very real situation before their eyes. As they once again depart for home, this time in silence, Fan Ye may still be thinking of his shattered love for Xia Peili, but Fan Lunyuan is thinking of the historical reality that no drama has the power to change: They are on Taiwan permanently. The next time Fan Lunyuan appears in the novel, his attention has clearly focused on initiating a relationship with a woman on Taiwan.

Fan Lunyuan's development of a stable relationship with a Taiwanese woman leads to the severance of his relationship with his father. In Episode 88, the family goes on a day trip to a park, but while the bulk of the description involves the natural setting, the amusement park where they play, and the picnic lunch they eat, the central issue of the scene is carried out peripherally. This issue is Lunyuan's discussion with his father on the subject of his girlfriend: His father opposes the relationship. By the end of the scene Lunyuan has resigned himself to his father's stand, so he decides to terminate the relationship with this woman. In Episode 113, however, Lunyuan returns to the narrative with another girlfriend. Now that this issue has arisen again, Lunyuan is determined to seek a different outcome. Lunyuan's situation has progressed since his relationship with the first girlfriend: By this time he is older and gainfully employed. Nevertheless, Minxian opposes the relationship not only because she is Taiwanese but because she is a bar girl, too.

Lunyuan's financial independence affords him the power to resist his father's opposition this time, though the victory he obtains may be a Pyrrhic one. As Yan Yuanshu has shown, the accumulation of capital has been Lunyuan's only means of achieving the requisite autonomy to maintain his relationship and eventually marry this Taiwanese woman.[21] The price, of course, is the irreconcilable break with his father, a rupture that may have been inevitable anyway. Throughout the novel, Fan Lunyuan has been

21. Yan Yuanshu, "Kudu xipin tan 'Jiabian' " (A painstaking reading and analysis of *Family Catastrophe*), *Zhongwai wenxue* (Literature east and west) 1, no. 11 (April 1973): 73. A very careful and sympathetic analysis, his article typifies the times, asserting that Wang's novel is much like a combination of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

unsuccessful in neutralizing the tension between the family's past and its present. In an ironic way, he now takes the first step toward its future. His financial independence partially evokes the notion of reification that eventually envelops the character of his younger brother.[22] Yet this too is ironic, since at this juncture in the novel Lunyuan is not escaping to his bedroom, as Fan Ye is, but is set free to do as he pleases unrestricted by the family. He is the closest of any of them to obtaining any sense of freedom, not because he can return to the mainland nor because he has discovered the means to suture the wound of historical displacement, but because he alone has come to accept a permanent life on Taiwan.

Fan Ye's visit to his brother near the end of the novel in Chapter N underscores the irony of Fan Lunyuan's position in the novel. Although disowned by the father, and although his relationship with Qiufang has been distant throughout, Fan Lunyuan has performed the ultimate filial act: He has produced a male heir. Admittedly, the father's severance of their relationship may annul any of the spiritual significance of the birth of a son. Nevertheless, the boy's surname is Fan and he is thus the ineluctable vessel that perpetuates the lineage into one more generation. The description of him and his wife as well fed and plump signifies the prosperous conditions in which they now live. And, of course, the most ironic aspect of this encounter between the two brothers is that Fan Ye does not even know his own nephew's given name.

Straddling the fissure between the family's past on mainland China and the reality of its present in Taiwan, Fan Lunyuan crystallizes the conflict between a universal humanistic discourse and the inexorability of the historical predicament in which they find themselves. I have suggested at the outset that Wang Wenxing's narrative style represents a departure from the expansive anti-Communist novels of the 1950s. There is still a residual strand, however, of the Cold War discourse embedded within the modernist, humanistic ideology informing Wang Wenxing's narrative. As William Pietz has observed in arguing that the structure of Cold War discourse resembles

22. For the concept of reification, the standard text is Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971). See especially "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 83–223. Also utilizing Lukács, Lü's "Wang Wenxingde beiju," 113–17, suggests that the contradictions in Fan Ye's character are caused by rapid Westernization—especially of the education system. See also Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang's highly informed analysis of *Family Catastrophe*, which includes a discussion of Lü's article, in her *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 112–24.

that of the colonialist language of orientalism, the "totalitarianism" of Communist states such as the Soviet Union, and, by extension, the People's Republic of China, derives from a submerged connection with the roots of these non-Western nations that, according to the Western account, are characterized by "oriental despotism." Pietz's analysis of George F. Kennen's writings, among others, suggests that the Cold War discourse sought to privilege "the values of Western Civilization" and set up the descriptions of the Communist bloc as straw men against it.[23] What this entails for Wang Wenxing's text is that the emergence of Fan Lunyuan serves as a reminder to us of the historicity of this predicament. While the narrative of the embattled human subject, as "universal" as that may seem, is the dominant theme of the novel, there are other crucial voices at work that serve to temper, complicate, and perhaps even *im*plicate the narrative voice in other ways. Fan Lunyuan reminds us that this "loss" of China was indeed very palpable for the family, and, in fact, perhaps because of the great trauma of the loss, necessarily repressed or refracted in the narrative. Even the so-called universal theme itself is one perhaps more nostalgic for the days of high modernism than anything else. The other important aspect of the brother's role is this repressed or refracted quality. Much like the structure of a dream, the historical reality of the situation is not laid out evenly or openly but rather is buried deep within the recesses of the novel's structure, and thus seems more like the sorts of irruptions from the unconscious that Freud describes in his notes on that ellusive terrain.

4. Ye Qiufang and the Loss of Language

Wang Wenxing's portrayal of Fan Ye's mother, like the critique of filiality, is in part influenced by the May Fourth critique of feudal attitudes toward women. Ye Qiufang is a pathetic figure whose resentment toward established social mores (as embodied by the father) grows from grievance to paranoia and jealousy until she eventually succumbs to near complete delusion. In an early scene in the novel, she gives birth to a baby girl, but after three months the child dies. She deeply resents the fact that her daughter did not receive adequate health care, since Minxian was unwilling to borrow money to purchase the necessary medicine to treat her illness. In addition, while her own father had encouraged her to study, her mother

23. William Pietz, "The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold-War Discourse," *Social Text* 19–20 (1988): 55–75, esp. 58, 59.

felt it was improper for women to have an education, so she was forced to withdraw from school. As a result, she never properly learned Mandarin, effectively nullifying any chance for her to become conversant in mainstream or "high" cultural institutions such as writing and the knowledge of literature, history, and thought. While Fan Ye's illness as a child is rendered from his perspective, highlighting his own resentments, this resentment is mitigated by the mere fact that at least he received medical attention. That his younger sister is neglected and eventually dies can only be understood as a classic example of the importance placed on sons over daughters in traditional Chinese values (*zhongnan qingnü*).

If Fan Minxian to an extent represents the decay of the educated elite, scholar-gentry class, of which his wife is also a descendant, then Ye Qiufang's character, by virtue of her gender, is severely undermined by illiteracy. In spite of her own disdain for the common ways of the native Taiwanese, she comes to represent the "superstitious" side of feudal Chinese culture. Throughout the novel, there are references to her ritual practice of ancestral worship and remonstrances against inauspicious behavior and speech. For example, Ye Qiufang cautions her son against discussing the death of a neighbor when his funeral procession passes by their house (*FC*, 36; 42); while his father recites Song dynasty lyrics, his mother suggests a home remedy for relieving hiccups (*FC*, 44; 51); and after they move to Taibei, Fan Ye, still rather young, discovers a shrine in a dark corner of their home: "Behind the rice barrel was a gloomy, dank, dead-end corner, full of spider webs. Ma had pasted an amulet here, and this was where she made her sacrifices to the gods. He dreaded this corner and kept away from it as much as he could. In fact, he had never dared look directly into it. Of all the corners of the house, this one aroused the worst fears in him" (*FC*, 62; 70). The motif of his mother worshiping gods and ancestors in the home as contrasted with Fan Ye's antipathy for them develops into one of the main subplots of *Family Catastrophe*. It reaches a climax with the scene in which Ye Qiufang tries to force Fan Ye to kowtow before the candles lit for ancestral worship. As crucial to the reading of the novel as Fan Ye's rejection of this ritual is, it is important to note the insistence on the part of the mother to uphold these rituals as well. And yet, when asked why she performs them, for what purpose, and why in this manner, she is at a loss to explain it. Like other women in modern Chinese literature, such as Lu Xun's Xianglin Sao, Zhang Ailing's Qiqiao, and Bai Xianyong's Madame Qian, Ye Qiufang is a complex character who has not mastered the language or understanding to articulate the contradictions of traditional society under which she suffers.

Possibly, it is this incapacity that brings her to the realization that she lacks power, in her relationship with her husband and in society. Certainly an attendant concern of hers is the lack of economic means or independence. Although Fan Minxian did not have the will to borrow money to save the life of their daughter, for example, he seems to have no problem borrowing jewelry from Qiufang's trousseau to pawn for cash. Finances are a salient topic in her relationship with Minxian, usually involving his spendthrift habits and insatiable appetite for her jewelry box. In Episode 47, Qiufang finally refuses to yield to his incessant lifting of her jewelry for pawn:

> "Nothing doing. Redeem it indeed! Which of my pieces would you redeem first? My earrings, my necklace, or my gold bracelet? When you have the money, whenever that might be, you'd find other more important things to attend to. Once you've pawned them, my things are lost forever and ever. I'm not going to let you trick me again this time. Among the many things Ma left me, this is the dearest to me. Don't you be looking at it with those hungry eyes of yours." Her tears came pouring down with this torrent of words.
>
> "All right, all, right, don't give it to me then!" Papa snorted at her resentfully.
>
> "I won't give it to you no matter what. If you need money, go borrow some. Or ask somebody to help you out. Don't pin your hopes on my letting you have my ring. Go wait for whatever you like," she retorted. (*FC*, 50–51; 58)

Ye Qiufang's lack of control over her situation, her impoverished status, the raiding of her dowry, and, perhaps most important, the lack of a fully developed language in which to articulate her grievances, lead to ever increasing bouts of paranoia and delusion. (Madness has been a major theme in literature of the May Fourth era and throughout the twentieth century, for that matter.) Her paranoia begins as part of a misrecognition of the family as perhaps a more highly structured and fortified unit than is natural. She has paranoid delusions that Second Brother, because he is not her biological offspring, is therefore a threat to the safety of Fan Ye. The tension between stepmother and stepson is first extensively illustrated in the picture-taking episode, as the discussion above has shown. This tension develops into fear by Episode 67, the theater episode, when Second Brother is asked to take Fan Ye to see a production of Yue Fei. Ye Qiufang takes Fan Ye aside and warns him that Second Brother could hurt him: " 'Listen to me. If, later, your Second Brother suggests that you go somewhere else

with him, don't go, no matter what. You understand?' He said, 'Uh . . . why not?' Mama looked momentarily embarrassed, recovered quickly, and said, 'Nothing really. Just in case. . . . You and him, you didn't come from the same belly, you know. I'm just afraid he might take advantage of you' " (*FC*, 71; 80).

The competition between wives and concubines, another classic submotif in the depiction of women in Chinese literature, both modern and premodern, seems to inform this tension. Female power in the family usually stems from the ability to produce a male heir. In this case, however, due to the political reality of their refugee status in Taiwan, Second Brother is, in a way, "stranded" between the connection with his deceased mother on the mainland and his unavoidable life on Taiwan. In any event, it is quite extreme and rather strange that his stepmother has taken such a dislike to him. He reminds her of a past of which she was not part, an element of their history that does not help foster the sense that this family is cohesive, normal, and without a traumatic past. On the contrary, Second Brother, as I have attempted to show above, is the best example that this is not a "universal" predicament at all, but rather one that is quite particular and, in fact, one that the family is always anxious to escape. The fact that she cannot escape the historical situatedness of their predicament means that Ye Qiufang must be considered one of the most important characters in this dubious tradition of madwomen. Illiterate and impoverished, she is unable to fully account for her own place in the family.

Her paranoid outbursts become more pronounced over time and eventually result in complete non sequiturs: fits of jealous rage toward her husband that are absolutely groundless; attacks, such as the one in which she falsely accuses a washerwoman of stealing a handkerchief; and fanatically protective behavior toward Fan Ye. In one such episode, she sequesters the young boy inside, not allowing him to be exposed to the hot Taiwan sun in order to preserve his pearly white skin. Perhaps this overprotectiveness is connected to the notion in elite traditional Chinese culture that darkened skin is an indication of working in the fields and thus an emblem of peasant status—something to be avoided by the gentry. So while Ye Qiufang desires to participate in elite culture and exhibits elite attitudes numerous times in the novel, she does not, in fact, inhabit this exclusive zone. Her grasp of spoken Mandarin is very uneven, and her financial savvy is practically nonexistent. Encoded into the novel as the character least able to make sense of the historical and cultural situation in which she resides, Qiufang is never secure in her stature as mother or as wife. Thus, at sev-

eral points in the novel she demands love and allegiance from her son Fan Ye, and at other points she vehemently accuses Fan Minxian of unfounded transgressions, such as having affairs with other women. As the character most dependent on the family for survival, since she can neither flee on her own nor retreat into the world of literature and history books, she is the only one for whom the option of escape is precluded. Qiufang's paranoia arises from this displaced lack of control in her life and also a lack of the means to fully understand, articulate, or critique her subaltern status. Ironically, then, Ye Qiufang serves almost as an alter ego for her son. She does not possess the language that comes with developing into an intellectual. She lacks what he has. On the other hand, she still clings to the elite values that are enshrined in this language. By virtue of her lack of education, and one could certainly say her gender, she does not have the means actually to occupy the role that she so desperately covets. Fan Ye, on the other hand, despises the elite, traditional Confucian system of beliefs as well as those of popular religion. He certainly possesses the language to articulate them, but by virtue of his education he rejects them just as he perhaps unconsciously causes the banishment of his own father. The cathexis of language in this novel, this fascination with its form and ideological implications, both in the third-person narrative as well as in the characters' use of and attitudes toward it, betrays the profound sense of loss of traditional Chinese values.

5. The Fetishization of Language

Ye Qiufang's outrageous public displays of emotion are an embarrassment to Fan Ye, the most self-conscious member of the family when it comes to how those displays are viewed by others in the community. Fan Ye is quite worried about the issue of "face." One can practically define the border of this family by the recurring image of the fence around their house, periodically adorned with the eyes of neighbors peering over it to see what is going on. The fence is one of the first images recorded in the novel, with the father casting a glance back at it as he slips out of the house. It is a dilapidated, bamboo fence, perhaps described to illustrate its stark contrast to the imposing walls erected around scholar-gentry homes in the premodern period. The fence or wall is a significant demarcation in traditional Chinese culture, designed not simply to physically keep out those on the outside but also to define spiritual space. Whatever is on the inside is part of "us," a certain notion of Confucian subjectivity (actually deriving from

The Book of Changes [*Yijing*] and notions of geomancy), and whatever is outside is part of "them." This rickety fence, then, is a paltry reminder of the glorious walls of wealthy homes in premodern China. The most famous literary example of this sort of walled-in home would be "Prospect Garden" (*daguanyuan*) from *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*). In *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, however, the development of the novel is connected to the resolution of the plot, referred to in traditional fiction as "the grand reunion" (*datuanyuan*). In *Family Catastrophe*, by contrast, just as there is no wonderful prospect garden, but only a grim shadow of it, the weedy, unkempt tiny little yard of the Fans, there is similarly no grand reunion either.[24] The father never returns and is never found. Thus, as the novel proceeds and more and more embarrassing incidents occur, stimulating people to gather around the bamboo fence for a peek, Fan Ye becomes more and more deeply humiliated. He thus more readily envisions the fantasy of himself dissociated from the family, taking up a position on the other side of the fence.

The subjectifying gaze in this case is not only that of the reader into the novel. As is the case in many instances in modern Chinese literature, the role played by the gazing bystanders is crucial to understanding the whole situation, because the issue of "face" is always present. "Face" is an important component in the construction of subjectivity in traditional Chinese culture. I have already argued above that the novel is composed of two contending narrative modes intertwined. The power of *Family Catastrophe* to persuade the reader of a conflict between the modern and the traditional, between the strength of the atomized, Western subjectivity over and above the sort of relational, superstitious, near supine subjectivity of the feudalistic tradition, rests in its ability to present a coherent contrast between itself and this premodern sensibility. If it were able to carry this out, then it would be part and parcel of the May Fourth ideological tradition. But it is not fully able to do so. Instead of creating two cohesive narratives that discretely contrast with one another, Wang Wenxing has established an unstable, doubly inscribed text that throws into question the whole project of

24. Chen Wanyi compares Fan Ye to the protagonists of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*) and the May Fourth novel *Family* (*Jia*), Jia Baoyu and Gao Juehui, respectively. His article is an important and detailed analysis of the family as it has evolved from the late Qing dynasty, through the May Fourth period, into the present, and even speculates on where it may go from here. See his "Nizide Xingxiang: Jia baoyu, gao juehui he fan ye de bijiao (The image of the unfilial son: A comparison of jia baoyu, gao juehui, and fan ye)," in *Wenxing* (Literary star), n.s., 102 (December 1986): 125–29.

Chinese modernity. In Episode 5, for example, Fan Ye as a little boy has a vision at night of a monster. While the narrative is written in the third person, it states, "He was not dreaming." Thus, the omniscience of the narrative voice, its ability to seep into the mind of the child and take on *his* voice, creates problems of distance and of credibility for the narrator. In the final analysis, we are reading the account of an unreliable narrator. The narrative basically is conducted in the third-person voice, even though it is told from the point of view of Fan Ye. In some cases, however, the use of the first person, "I," slips into the third-person narrative. The first example of this occurs when young Fan Ye is closed up in the house while his mother goes shopping in Episode 81. Fan Ye becomes psychologically absorbed with himself precisely as he is physically closed within the confines of the home.[25] At other points in both the lettered and the numbered narrative, such as Episode 118, Fan Ye's thoughts and feelings are narrated by the third-person narrator in such a way that it almost seems as though it were Fan Ye doing the talking. In Fan Ye's long dream episode, number 149, a bizarre sequence in which he imagines his father has killed him, as Fan Ye stands over his own vanquished body, the narrative once again slips into the first person. And while most of these examples occur in the numbered sequence, there is one instance in Chapter H where in a prayer of petition for the return of his father, the narrative again slips into the first person. In fact, the last such instance occurs in Episode 153, shortly after Fan Ye severely attacks the values of his parents, when he again takes over the narrative in a moving expression of remorse and sympathy for his father: "Do I really not love my own father? No, in actual fact, I do. Deep in my heart I love him. If he were to become critically ill, I would, without hesitation, use all my resources, sink every cent I have into making him well again, even if it meant getting myself into serious debt. So thinking, he felt the burden lift and fall away into insignificance. And thus calmed, he drifted serenely into the land of sweet and peaceful dreams" (*FC*, 185; 236).

This consistent slippage of the narrative voice and referent leads to the instability of the narrative. On its face, this novel seems like a radical critique of traditional Chinese cultural institutions from the point of view of May Fourth iconoclasm. Although that is certainly one possible reading of the novel, *Family Catastrophe* is a far more carefully constructed and important work than most of those written during the Republican period in

25. Regrettably, the translator has overlooked this slippage in the Chinese and translated what appears in the original text as "I" (*wo*) as "he."

China. This is a complex, multifaceted, and brooding narrative containing many cobwebs. The result of the incoherent narrative voice is not simply that the *narrative* tone is unclear at points but that the *moral* tone is complicated and unclear also. The questions concerning ethics are reflected in both the structural and the stylistic, or linguistic, construction of the novel. In the final pages of the book, for example, a fascinating intersection occurs that undercuts any cohesive assessment of the novel's moral tone.

The final numbered episode in the novel, 157, is written from the perspective of Fan Minxian instead of from that of Fan Ye. All but a few of these scenes, which generally recall the life of Fan Ye, are written in the third person from the son's perspective. This last one, however, takes the father's point of view, describing him as he leaves home. It therefore completes the narrative that began in Chapter A at the beginning of the novel, although the language is different. A literal translation of the last two sentences might take this form: "Not a day or two after that, this father, he—with utmost stealth, no one knowing his motives—went out that door, vanished" (*FC*, 194; 248). The last clause, *de chumen bujianle*, does not make clear grammatical sense with the "de" particle at the beginning of a clause, but it is the function of a "suspension" of the actual action of the sentence so that this main clause is modified by a string of loosely structured dependent clauses. This suspension also invests the short, staccato monosyllables of the main clause with an onomatopoeic finality to the description. This method of linguistic structuring is rather unique to Wang Wenxing, although he himself claims that it is an example of what he would call "unplanned speech."[26] Whatever the case, the conscious shift in point of view in this numbered sequence cannot have a stabilizing effect on the reading of the text. Indeed, the final chapter of the novel, O, shifts the perspective as well, though in a much subtler fashion. The lettered chapters have charted Fan Ye's progress searching the island of Taiwan for the father. Chapter O nullifies the search since it depicts the young man in his "present home, he and his mother, living a simple life together, seeming to get along much more happily than it appeared they did in their previous situation" (*FC*, 195; 248). The two juxtaposed scenes supply the final element in the Oedipus complex. With one scene described rather sympathetically from the point of view of the father, and with the other described with equal sympathy from the point of view of the son, judging the parties would be futile. Thus, the reversal in tones,

26. Wang Wenxing suggested in an interview with me that these and other seemingly convoluted grammatical structures were actually what sounded to him like speech. Wang Wenxing, "Interview" (Taibei, 11 December 1988).

the sympathetic portrayal of the father in contrast to the animosity directed toward him in the rest of the numbered sequence, along with the mother and son's acceptance of his loss in the final lettered chapter, is emblematic of the ideological conflict between Confucian filiality and anti-Confucianism. Ultimately, this conflict, which originates in style and structure, is elevated to the plane of moral value. The ideological implications for Wang Wenxing's novel are thus quite significant, for as the text remains ambivalent in the final analysis, the moral value is a question that is similarly left unresolved.

To return to the issue of reification mentioned earlier, this novel that interrogates the traditional Confucian virtue of filiality as expressed in ritual form, linking it to a reified subjectivity that becomes atomized in a system of commodity relations, is still a work that resists such commodification itself. Wang Wenxing's inimitable art sets itself up as the last vestige beyond this set of relations based on exchange. Within the ideology of the aesthetic, there is nothing that can stand in place of the work of art. Of course, this too is doubly inscribed, since every linguistic "transgression," if Wang's lexical and syntactic liberties can be called such, is answered with the repetitive entreaty written in the form of a newspaper advertisement that begins almost every lettered chapter. This entreaty is inscribed in the formal and regular literary language that Confucius himself strove for in his appeal for a rectification of the names. Wang Wenxing's interrogation on this level destabilizes the referential code of the novel itself. The language of *Family Catastrophe* accomplishes an extraordinary feat: It manages to become a unique, almost bizarre creative expression and at the same time performs the struggle and resistance against tradition. This fascination with, or, if you will, fetishization of language itself establishes Wang Wenxing as one of the consummate stylists of his age.

6. The Loss of the Loss

Why should Wang enact such an unflagging critique of the culture and language of China? A partial answer derives, perhaps, from the marginalized historical situation in which he finds himself as an intellectual shut out from the educated elite in China and from the majority of Taiwanese in Taiwan. Another factor is the power of Western literary tropes and techniques, features of the hegemonic discourse that have trickled into vernacular Chinese through the process of Europeanization. Thus Wang Wenxing's situation may be said to resemble that of Franz Kafka, who was writing as a "minor writer" in the "major language" of German. In their study

Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that Kafka was culturally marginalized as a Jewish intellectual in the diaspora, conversant in a language that was always already foreign to him. Estranged from the source of dominant cultural expression, Kafka sought to "deterritorialize" the German language by consciously disorganizing the conventions used to write it. Thus, instead of repressing the historical fact of cultural life on the margins, Kafka embraced it and even extended it.[27] Similarly, Wang Wenxing upsets the conventional modes for narrating a text and thereby accentuates his own marginality as a Chinese intellectual cut off from his roots on the mainland. Instead of depicting the historical predicament by emphasizing the major events that occurred at that time, he chooses to ignore them altogether. In a classic modernist turn, he inverts the emphasis by focusing only on the minute aspects of life. The family's flight from the mainland is mentioned in only one short, imagistic sentence, and nothing is ever stated about the historical reasons for that flight (*FC*, 42; 49). The importance of the East-West dynamic is similarly not disclosed in an overt fashion, but rather insinuates itself in the text in subtle, complex, often masked ways. The father's education abroad and his "failure" to imbue himself with the cultural constructs of the West diminish Fan Ye's respect for him. And structurally, the parodic depiction of Fan Ye as the universal subject trapped in the historical specificity of a Chinese body subverts the dominant trope whereby characters epitomize the universal problems of the human condition. Accordingly, this subversive gesture disappoints any desire on the reader's part to "identify" with the protagonist.

If anything in the novel is offered as the stable ground upon which the author deterritorializes the Chinese language, it is the work of art itself. Like the ultimate legitimacy of the pristine work of art in modernist discourse, *Family Catastrophe* does at times revalidate art itself. Episode 101 finds Fan Ye actually "worshiping" art. He even replaces one of the religious idols that sits in a niche with one of his paintings. "He adores this dark blue

27. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). David Lloyd has expanded upon Deleuze and Guattari's thinking on "minor literature." He provides an excellent elucidation of how a work on the margins of modernism can undermine the process of identification that goes on in reading by creating "a disjunction between the desire of the characters and the effort of the text." His notion of a "parodic mode of minor literature" is quite similar to that used by Wang Wenxing. See his *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 19–26.

watercolor painting," the text reads. "He placed it far away from himself and worshiped it. To worship it, he set it high up on the white wall in the niche where an idol goes" (*FC*, 101; 119). But this "hybrid" form of modernism, one that resides in the specific locale of China yet appropriates the tropes of the master discourse, never fully commits itself to any such validation. Homi Bhabha's thesis that the seeds of colonialism's critique are sown in the colonial discourse itself, yielding agency out of the authoritative discourse, complements Deleuze and Guattari's thesis on deterritorialization. For Wang Wenxing's narrative does not simply interrogate the mechanisms of the dominant discourse of modernism. It creates a counterdiscourse, one that might not be imitated but that nevertheless stands on the frontier of contemporary Chinese literature by disorganizing the standard idiom from which it emerges. Thus, if any word could summarize the novel it might be *neologism*. *Jiabian* is ultimately untranslatable not because of convoluted sentence patterns or complicated subject matter but because it is so jarring in the original Chinese that there are no established conventions for ascertaining a stable text. The new, the previously unspoken, has no basis on which to be translated into another language. The resistance to domestication, then, lies in the fact that any strategy for entry into the novel is, in fact, a highly fraught attempt to reterritorialize it. Therefore, Wang Wenxing's monument to linguistic anarchy,[28] like the characters in his book, attempts to negotiate the infirm ground of a non-Western world, a world where the native place itself is as much contested as it is sought after.

With regard to language, it was the early critics who expressed the most consternation about, and the most detailed analysis of, Wang's writing. Zhang Hanliang's defense of Wang's style includes examples of how the author merges classical and vernacular terms into one sentence and even combinations of words. Yet, while Zhang's impassioned plea on behalf of this writer is detailed and precise, his appeal to an Eliotic ideal of organic language can only partially account for Wang's innovation.[29] It is true that Wang Wenxing seems to have made a concerted effort to create hybrids, for even the title itself is an instance of the transitional nature of what the author is trying to describe. *Jiabian* is the sort of classical structure in which the first word, *jia* (family), a noun, is modified by the second, *bian* (to change), a verb. These sorts of structures could actually be freestanding sentences in classical Chinese writing. Many, in fact, have become "combinations" or

28. As Edward Gunn might refer to it. See his *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Modern Chinese Prose* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 161.
29. Zhang Hanliang, "Qian tan 'Jiabian' de Wenzi," 140–41.

complex single words in modern vernacular Chinese. The "combination," *jiabian*, epitomizes the two antithetical tendencies of this novel: the stability and constancy of "family" and the instability of "change." It is true that the word *bian* can also mean "incident," or "tragedy." Thus, the translator's use of the title "Family Catastrophe" is not without merit. However, neither it nor any other English title could adequately convey both the meaning and the structural importance of the original Chinese. The compact quality of classical Chinese, not to mention the neologistic aspect, is lost in any translation that makes sense. Nevertheless, I would translate it as "Family Metamorphosis," since the word *metamorphosis* both conveys the idea of gradual change and carries a certain negative connotation for the modern reader who, inevitably, would be familiar with the work of Kafka.

The crucial difference between Kafka and Wang Wenxing, however, is that while the former was interested in a critique of *individual* subjectivity, given the historical context of European thought and culture, Wang Wenxing naturally takes the family as the irreducible unit of critique. Wang Wenxing is operating in the Confucian sphere. And clearly it is Confucian authority that Wang is most interested in attacking. Confucius, in fact, as Fan Ye argues in this novel, suffered his own loss. Fan Ye suggests that it was Confucius's loss of his own father that served as his impetus to seek office and to develop his philosophy. Interestingly, then, this loss of the father has resulted in a system of thought that pervades traditional Chinese culture. Perhaps Confucius's own attempt to "rectify the names," a project implicitly attacked in the novel, is motivated by this loss. The loss of the father in Wang Wenxing's novel, then, works on several levels at once: It intersects with this original loss of Confucius, but it also attacks the institutions that have grown up as a result of it. And it establishes an important articulation of the fractured state of affairs that still dominates, and will continue to dominate, the concerns of the Chinese state, the whole issue of national identity and cohesion, of which the world outside China is now only beginning to hear. But this analysis of Wang Wenxing's literature within the context of China, this argument against reifying "Taiwan," is not an argument for a third "United Front" for China, an attempt to elide the differences between mainland and island (*tongpai*). Nor is a recognition of the importance of cultural production in or associated with Taiwan an argument for a separate culture or state outside the PRC (*dupai*). Rather, assigning a deserving place to literature such as *Family Catastrophe* is more a recognition of many lesser Chinas vying for space in which forced continuities tend to obscure our vision of what China is. The loss that Freud speaks of is best

understood as a split, the split in language, the split of the psyche, of the family, of mainland China and Taiwan, of the *jia* and the *bian*, of tradition and modernity. If we can bracket the oppressive image of a cohesive nation-state, China will not seem lost at all. It is, on the contrary, our lens onto this constellation of cultures, histories, and minor literatures that needs to be recovered and that occasionally requires a good polishing.