Shame and Narcissistic Self in Yu Da-fu's *Sinking*

Self is a crucial concept in modern Chinese literature of the May-Fourth period. It is seen as a principal marker that sets the new literature fundamentally apart from the collective discourse of traditional Chinese literature. In fact, the May-Fourth literature centrally revolves around the concept of self and its literary depiction. The new self stands for the assertion of the individual, the private, against a cultural heritage that emphasizes conformity to tradition and to the public. Such a new trend is also particularly seen as reflecting the impact of Western literature, leading to an idea of the self that implies also a contrast between traditional Chinese culture (lack of and repression of self) and Western literature (valorization of self). Thus the May-Fourth "self is very much a site reflecting the conflicts between forces of nativity or isolation, and forces of a West-oriented cosmopolitanism or openness. The new concern with the self comes as part of a flood of new, West-informed ideas as a result of China's exposure to the outside world. Since the legacy of the traditional discourse is still heavily present, the modern self in its literary presentation is mostly seen in images of dislocation and alienation and antagonism, reflecting the self's efforts to break from the dominant collective discourse. Writers like Lu Xun see the whole history of Chinese culture as a chronicle of the negation of the self and the negligence of subjectivity (Li 234). To some, this negation is even attributable to China's backwardness and her victimization by superior Western powers. Thus in the May-Fourth era, the idea of self has taken on more than literary or cultural or cognitive significance. The heavily political dimension, the idea that advocacy

1 For more, see Jaroslav Pruskev's classic study "Subjectivism and Individualism in Modern Chinese Literature" (1980) and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (1985).

2 This article generally respects the romanization system originally used by the respective sources. Where translation is required, this author uses Romanized Chinese Pin-Yin for mainland Chinese sources, and the Wade-Giles system for Taiwan sources.
of selfhood and individualism, seen as pillars of Western values, could rejuvenate a debilitated Chinese society and rescue her from her modern position of political and economic inferiority, inevitably leads to the interpenetration of the private/personal and the collective/social. Thus the May-Fourth idea of the self, starting out as a gesture of breaking-up with the collective, ends up as being still intricately linked with the latter.

Of all modern Chinese writers, Yu Da-fu is among the earliest to pioneer the literary emphasis on the self and the individual. Yu's assertion of the self is seen as embodying the "awakened" modern men's "calls for individualism, for valorization of the self, for liberation and freedom" (Qi-qiang Chen 46). Special credit is given to his first short-story collection *Sinking*, whose 1921 publication proved to be an event of such importance that the publisher, Tai-Dong Bookstore, had to go through an unprecedented 12 re-printings within the first few months (Huang 1997, 152). Like his May-Fourth generation, Yu believes that the Movement's greatest achievement lies in the discovery of the "self/individual," and in the assertion that one lives for oneself, instead of for the emperor, for the Way, or for one's parents (Zeng 222). The standard-bearer of the new self, to Yu, is found in the Western literary precedents of Rousseau (Jean Jacques 1712-1778), Turgenev (Ivan Sergeevich 1818-1883), and the Western-impacted Japanese genre of the "I novel" (Zhu 226; Lee 110-13). However, while Yu's unabashed preoccupation with the private self is indeed a trailblazer for the later mushrooming of similar themes in modern Chinese literature, it has to be pointed out that Yu's idea of self is distinguishable from the representative May Fourth self of such dominant writers like Lu Xun or Kuo Mo-Ruo. Despite the fact that the latter writers' literary selves are invariably presented as being at odds with and antagonistic with the traditional collective discourse, the heavily didactic and social concern of such literary subjectivities, their "moral burden" and "allegorization of China" (Hsia 539), also implies that their position of antagonism is not to be equated with a position of complete severance or disinterest. Rather, such a position implies an ardent wish of re-engagement, of effecting changes and re-entering the scene once the old order is overturned.

A typical fictional subjectivity in Yu's works is, however, always private, apolitical and often intrapsychic. Differing from many of his literary compatriots, Yu mostly writes works that are not also at the same time what Fredric Jameson terms "national allegories," where a public political dimension is almost always projected onto a personal libidinal dynamic (Jameson 69). While Jameson's view may be true of most representative May-Fourth writers, Yu has achieved something quite atypical, by successfully severing his adherence to the centuries-old moral code of a Chinese scholar — i.e., the cultivation of the self is for the management of the family and finally the governance of the nation. Critics have claimed that the protagonist's famous crying at the end of Yu's "Sinking," the most significant story in the homonymous collection *Sinking*, blaming China's backwardness for his own personal sexual crisis, testifies to the significant presence of the national/public allegory in the seemingly private story. However, this paper sides with Michael Egan and Leo Ou-Fan Lee in emphasizing the "personal," "individualistic" and "psychological," rather than political or ideological, nature of this seeming nationalism (Egan 321; Lee 91). The dimension of national humiliation is certainly there, but it mostly aggravates a basically private and psychic crisis of the self that is already well in place. Not only is Yu's literary self private, but, left to explore the deeper and less frequented areas of the individual psyche, his fictional subjectivity demonstrates a particularly pronounced tendency toward the hychondriac, pathological and "decadent". This particular literary self is to be the subject of this paper.

The idea that there exists a "core," or "true," unitary self has in recent years been subjected to postmodernist contention (Mitchell 130-31). This paper takes the position of viewing the self not in spatial terms or as reified structures, but in temporal terms and as a matter of subjective experience of authenticity in time. Such a view focuses on felt experience, to the extent that the experience of oneself in time feels meaningful and authentic. It is commonly agreed that the literary self in *Sinking* is highly confessional and heavily autobiographical. This, of course, is also corroborated by Yu's famous


4 See, for instance, Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu (1993), pages 6-7. Lu claims that the personal libidinal dynamic expands in the ending of "Sinking" into a national allegory of the impoverished nation, testifying to Yu's representative status within the May-Fourth writers' fusion of the private and the public, or the lyric and the epic.

5 For more on this idea of the self, see Barbara Schapiro, ""The Dread and Repulsiveness of the Wild": D. H. Lawrence and Shame" (1999).

6 See Jaroslav Prusek, C. T. Hsia and Ming Dong Gu, to name just a few. However, there have been disagreeing voices, too. Michael Egan (1977) and Ma Sen (1997)
The psychic composition of Yu's literary self is essentially narcissistic. The protagonist's searing anguish, sense of inferiority and self-pity are all demonstrations of a shamed narcissistic self. The masochistic obsession with melancholy and the sick body denotes a bid to both win recognition and to protect the self from additional shame and injuries.

Shame occurs when the self fears contempt and mockery from the other after being exposed for its deficiency, flaws and failure (Wurmser 92-93). Classical Freudian psychoanalysis has traditionally privileged guilt over shame, linking shame to "genital deficiency" (Freud 132) and generally limiting it to libidinal areas. This is seen by recent researchers as too reductive, and failing to acknowledge shame's role as a powerful form of social control in enforcing the fusion of the literary persona with the authorial self. This paper tends to agree with the former.

For recent literary studies on shame and narcissistic selves employing Kohut's theory of self-psychology, see Adamson (1997 and 1999), Schapiro (1999 and 1983), Bouson (1989 and 2000), and Berman (1990).

For more details, see Hsia, Lee and Ma. Zhou Zuo-Ren, a contemporary writer of Yu's time, is an early example stressing the sexual approach. Employing Freudian terms, he claimed that "Sinking" demonstrated the importance of libidinal instincts in determining human behavior (Ma 32). A more recent example is Gu.

Yu Da-fu's Sinking
differentiate between the self and object, particularly the mother, and often regards the other as extensions of the self, or self-objects. The archaic grandiose self is rooted in the infant's narcissistic feeling of centrality and power, and the idealizing self tries to merge with and identify with the parent imago seen as all-powerful, in order to get security and calm. Narcissism is experienced in any child's development, but in normal cases, the grandiose self, responded to by the mirroring and nurturing parents, is gradually tamed to give rise to healthy self-esteem and ambition, and the idealizing self is internalized to become ideals and values. The child is thus able to satisfy its own psychological needs, and the boundary between self and other is established. However, if the archaic selves are not pacified and smoothly transformed, a narcissistic self without sufficient autonomy or sense of boundary is born. Lacking the ability of self-approval, it is unduly dependent on and sensitive to approval from outside sources. The longing for fusion with the selfobject leads to an unstable self, which in turn resents this dependence and weakness. When frustrated, the self's fear of fragmentation and annihilation is extreme, and responds with extreme shame, which may in turn lead to symptoms of fight (anger, violence) or flight (alienation, escape) and annihilation is extreme, and responds with extreme shame, which may in turn lead to symptoms of fight (anger, violence) or flight (alienation, escape) and annihilation is extreme, and responds with extreme shame, which may in turn lead to symptoms of fight (anger, violence) or flight (alienation, escape) and annihilation is extreme, and responds with extreme shame, which may in turn lead to symptoms of fight (anger, violence) or flight (alienation, escape)

In the three stories collected in Yu's Sinking, the protagonists demonstrate similar traits of a shamed narcissistic self. Thin, pale, bespectacled and dragging a sickly body, he is a lonely Chinese student in Japan with no family and few friends. Intensely yearning for external sympathy and attention, he is also excruciatingly vulnerable and fearful of possible rejection, and indulges in self-pity and self-imposed solitude. Shame is experienced both at the racial level (being a Chinese in a superior Japan), and the sexual level (inadequate masculinity and failure to live up to the ideal of a conscientious, abstinent scholar). This is also complicated by an unsuccessfully resolved feeling for the mother/motherland. The final suicide could be seen as a narcissistic protest at self-object neglect, as well as a sign of the breakup of the self as a result of the unsuccessful resolution of the equally overpowering yearnings for fusion/dependence and boundary/independence.

In the first story "Sinking," the emaciated-looking and slightly hunch-backed student chooses self-imposed solitude mainly because of his self-conscious suspicion that his classmates are all laughing behind his back. "He felt as if everyone was gazing at him. He tried to avoid his classmates, but everywhere he went, their malicious gaze was always upon his back." Then, "suspecting that they were laughing at him, he suddenly blushed" ("Sinking" 21). Adamson, in his study on Melville and shame, stresses the importance of the "evil eye," or the "imagined" rather than "seen" gaze by the other, in the feeling of shame (Adamson 1997, 4-7). The fear of exposure, of revealing the self as flawed, stems from an already deep-embedded belief in the unworthiness of the self. In "Sinking," the protagonist is mentally inhibited from communicating with his classmates largely because of this sense of innate shame and fear of exposure. He rationalizes this inhibition by blaming the racial superiority of the Japanese students. However, it must be pointed out that racial shame is not the cause of his predicament; rather, it is one more external element, albeit a powerful one, that mainly aggravates an already shame-prone narcissistic personality. The story includes an autobiographical section (which replicates exactly Yu's own earlier life) in which the protagonist recalls his growth in a Zhejiang village by the Fu-Chun River. Dissatisfied with the school teaching and resolved on a self-education back at home, the protagonist admits to suffering from "melancholia' ever since, a name he uses to describe his famed anguish now in Japan ("Sinking" 28-30). Thus his agony is not just brought on only after his arrival in Japan. Melancholy in his early adolescence was most likely produced when he deplored his inability to do something for his "war-torn" country, while deeply aware of this distance from an idealized role model of the society-reforming scholar that his long "immersion in classical learning" (29) has instilled in him. The move to Japan, while cutting off all external support from either family or friend, adds a new dimension to his already internalized sense of unworthiness in the form of racial shame.

At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is unable to flirt, like his Japanese classmates, with two passing Japanese girl students. "Breathing rapidly" and "blushing and trembling in panic," he runs away from the scene back to his hotel, where he is conscious of his inadequate masculinity and regrets his own "cowardice". It then occurs to him that the reason the Japanese girls did not look at him (probably because of his own abashed silence and lack of advance) is because they must know he is Chinese (a very unlikely reason since he never even opened his mouth). Since his blushing and trembling, all signs of the shame affect, take place at a moment when he is not yet aware of his racial inferiority, racial shame seems to be an afterthought and not significantly accountable for his reaction on the spot. He then projects his own shame onto his country and blames China's backwardness for all his
unhappiness in Japan. This suggests that, by blaming China's backwardness for all his unhappiness in Japan, he is more likely using racial shame and national humiliation to rationalize his own self-conscious withdrawal, and the flawed self that he believes and imagines the other to see in him. Withdrawal, and also in many ways his famed melancholy which literally drives away any classmate from approaching him ("Sinking" 22), are no less a mask protecting the self from shameful exposure and relieving it from possible rejection. The protagonist's later decision to move away from most human contact and to an isolated abode is also motivated by this desire to be rid of all imagined shameful exposure.

Other crucial scenes in the story could also be explained by a similar gnawing sense of shame, particularly as a result of the self being revealed as discordant with or lagging behind the ideal self. After succumbing to the charms of a prostitute, the protagonist is subject to deep remorse. "How could I ever go to that kind of place? I have become a most lowly person" ("Sinking" 52). Critics have generally used a biographical approach in analyzing this scene. Yu's own autobiographical account of his first sexual experience (also in a brothel) in Japan is often used to throw further light on this scene. Yu describes his own remorse thus: "Worthless! Too worthless! My ideals, my ambitions, my passionate devotion to my country — what is left now? What is left?" ("Snowy Night" 96). The critic Leo Ou-fan Lee attributes this remorse to the Japanese setting, and to the fact that Yu blames himself for falling for the women of a country that victimized China and considered him inferior. Thus sex, racism and even nationalism are all interwined in his psyche (Lee 980). Ming Dong Gu sees this guilt as stemming from Yu's oedipal feelings for his mother. Since he had wished his father to die (Yu's father died when he was three, a result Yu blamed on himself) (see later), he should remain faithful to his mother and not betray her by sex with another woman (Gu 23). C. T. Hsia sees Yu's remorse in the framework of a Confucian ethic, and argues that by engaging in amorous pursuits Yu suffers from "the awareness of his truancy as son, husband, and father" (Hsia 104).

All three views have a point. However, it must be indicated out that it is the disgraceful reputation of the brothel and the act of brothel-visiting, more than the Japanese nationality of the prostitutes, which seems to bother the protagonist. Also, his anguish, though it reaches a peak after his brothel visit, has started long before and is not just limited to sexual matters. This paper thus sides more with Hsia than with Gu or Lee. It is his awareness of the gaping distance from the idealized image of a responsible, hard-working and abstinent scholar instilled by his classical education and expected by his expectant family back in China, and the resultant sense of unworthiness and shame, that is plaguing him. In the story's autobiographical section, the protagonist mentions his quarrel with his elder brother who advised strongly against his switching from medicine to literature (30). The wish for self-vindication and success, to prove himself in the eye of his brother, must have made moral lapses and abandon additionally shaming. It is true that when he feels remorse after patronizing the Japanese prostitute, racial feelings and uneasiness over betraying his country are indeed there, but not of exclusive importance. Otherwise he could have very easily vindicated his own and his country's victimization by sexually victimizing the Japanese prostitute. Just as he is deeply ashamed of indulging in masturbation and violating the ancient Chinese code "Thou shall not harm thy body, flesh or hair or anything endowed by thy parents" ("Sinking" 33), it is the awareness of failing to exert self-control, or live up to the ideal of the hardworking, abstinent student that is troubling him deeply.

There is certainly a point in arguing that the protagonist's self-blaming is attributable to the author's own sexual guilt and his need to be loyal to his mother (Gu 23). In the story, motherland, nature, mother and lover are indeed connected images, all merging into the same image of the matrix. When the protagonist feels exposed to mockery by fellow students, he finds solace and happiness in mother nature. When lonely and frustrated, he hears a motherly, soft voice caressing him and sympathizing with his misery. When he indulges in masturbation, it is the plump figure of the middle-aged woman rather than the young virgin that proves most titillating and satisfying to his sexual fantasy. However, such longings for the maternal are not always or exclusively sexual. More importantly, it is the almost infantile yearning for external approval, recognition and comfort which usually comes from and is connected with the maternal that is of importance here. Such recognition from cooperative selfobjects is obviously the best proof to quell shame and demonstrate the self's worthiness or lovability.

The story abounds in evidence that shows external approval or affection is what the often infantile protagonist is really after. He is often plagued by profound self-pity as if abandoned by the world and especially by the mother/motherland. Subject to sudden fits of tears and melancholy, he finds temporary solace in mother nature, and expresses his desire to "spend the rest of his life in the mother-like cuddle of this sympathetic nature"
Feeling snubbed by the Japanese girl students, he exclaims that he wants neither "knowledge" nor "fame," except "a heart that can comfort me and understands me," "a warm and generous heart, and pity born out of such generosity, and love born out of such pity." Proving yet again that sympathy, more than sexual attraction, is what he is after, he yearns for "a woman, pretty or ugly, as long as she really wants me," and vows his "readiness to even die for her" (25). Alone in the cuddle of nature and shedding tears over his own loneliness, he hears a "soft" voice from the sky "...when he came near these girls, he almost cried like a child" ("Sinking" 46). Sexual prompting and the temptation of the taboo are certainly there, but the search for recognition, for company and comfort, also play a crucial role. Just as in "The Silvery Death," here the protagonist interprets the prostitute's attention to other clients as rejection and a negation of his own self-worth. In what Kohut would term a fit of narcissistic rage and an illusion of archaic grandiosity (Kohut 1971, 420), he curses women as "bullying bastards" and vows "revenge." He then cries bitterly that there is "no true-hearted woman" in the world, and that he would from that day on only love his own country "as a lover" (49). It is obvious that the search for recognition is at least as important, if not more so, as his sexual prompting. Even in a brothel where favors are plainly bought, he is still seeking "true heart" or genuine responsiveness. As he leaves the brothel, he suffers further humiliation and implied mockery when the prostitute refuses to take his meager tip. Hands shaking wildly, dreading further rejection, he takes out the last note in his pocket and almost begs her to accept the tip. It is straight after this rejection that he runs quickly outside and goes to the beach, "suddenly wishing to drown himself (52). Racial shame certainly plays a role, as testified by his final crying "My country! My country! My death is caused by you! Get strong quickly!" But it basically aggravates a more private feeling of shame and unworthiness that the rejection by the prostitute unleashes. The protagonist resents bitterly that the whole world is "hating and bullying" him, trying to "drive him out of this world." It is this total rejection in his search for external approval, of which the humiliation at the brothel proves the last straw, that is where the protagonist, cheated by his lover, believes death to be his only prospect ("Moving South" 86).

For the narcissistic self, love is important precisely because it provides recognition and approval, confirms his worthiness, quells his sense of shame and deficiency, and helps him merge with his ideal self. Lack of response from the other, however, means rejection of the self, confirmation of its flaws and unlovability, and leads very likely to its disintegration. Thus the narcissistic self both obsessively needs love and is mortally vulnerable to rejection in love. In "Sinking," the protagonist's final suicide is subject to various interpretations. A typical view is offered by Sen Ma, when he attributes a combination of reasons, including the protagonist's sexual and racial angst, his remorse in having sexually degraded himself by patronizing a prostitute, as leading to the final suicide (Ma 36). This, however, offers only part of the answer. It must be noted that the protagonist has approached the prostitute like a child:"...when he came near these girls, he almost cried like a child" ("Sinking" 46). Sexual prompting and the temptation of the taboo are certainly there, but the search for recognition, for company and comfort, also play a crucial role. Just as in "The Silvery Death," here the protagonist interprets the prostitute's attention to other clients as rejection and a negation of his own self-worth. In what Kohut would term a fit of narcissistic rage and an illusion of archaic grandiosity (Kohut 1971, 420), he curses women as "bullying bastards" and vows "revenge." He then cries bitterly that there is "no true-hearted woman" in the world, and that he would from that day on only love his own country "as a lover" (49). It is obvious that the search for recognition is at least as important, if not more so, as his sexual prompting. Even in a brothel where favors are plainly bought, he is still seeking "true heart" or genuine responsiveness. As he leaves the brothel, he suffers further humiliation and implied mockery when the prostitute refuses to take his meager tip. Hands shaking wildly, dreading further rejection, he takes out the last note in his pocket and almost begs her to accept the tip. It is straight after this rejection that he runs quickly outside and goes to the beach, "suddenly wishing to drown himself (52). Racial shame certainly plays a role, as testified by his final crying "My country! My country! My death is caused by you! Get strong quickly!" But it basically aggravates a more private feeling of shame and unworthiness that the rejection by the prostitute unleashes. The protagonist resents bitterly that the whole world is "hating and bullying" him, trying to "drive him out of this world." It is this total rejection in his search for external approval, of which the humiliation at the brothel proves the last straw, that is

A severe lack of such approval or cooperativeness is often fatal to the narcissistic self. Since the self is unable to internalize structures (self-esteem and ideals) provided by a healthy interaction with others and thus fails to develop a strong and autonomous sense of self, such lack of cooperation could threaten the breakup of the self and lead to extreme shame and rage (Basche 15). Since love for the opposite sex is a crucial and potentially traumatic experience where the self is tested for approval by the other, a narcissistic self would replicate in love his infantile search for maternal approval (a trait indispensable in a love-object), and would be doubly vulnerable if rejected. In "Silvery Death," the second short story in the collection Sinking, the protagonist, another lonely and miserable young Chinese student in Japan, believes the comforting words of the daughter of the wine-bar he frequents to be his only sustaining solace in the world. His affection for the Japanese girl rests on the premise of his own assumption that she "understands him" and "comforts him" ("Silvery Death" 7). Here sex or sensuality seems to play a limited role since the girl is remarked for her plain looks and lack of charm in attracting customers. Instead, approval and recognition the student believes to get from the girl is what he is really after. However, he is thrown into abysmal despair and "scurries away like a wounded animal" (8) when she turns to smile at and greet other customers. Overly dependent on and sensitive to external approval, he reads this as rejection by the selfobject. Such rejection proves intolerable and threatens the very survival of the self, when the girl is finally engaged with another young man. After pawning his few possessions to buy her a gift, the protagonist dies of a stroke. Love is obviously equated with approval, and rejection with death. This is also repeated in "Moving South," the third story in the same collection,
instrumental in his final fate. Obviously, his suicide can be seen as a gesture of protest at external negligence and rejection. Believing a twinkling western star for where his motherland is, he wades into the sea, as an answer to the maternal beckoning and in a desperate search for the ultimate, oceanic fusion with the matrix. Now that the journey to return "home," the symbiosis of child and mother is re-gained, the frustration over such separation will be gone, and the yearning for ultimate fusion finally appeased.

Biography cannot just be equated with literary creation, but it seems that Yu's heavily confessional works particularly merit a biographical approach. Yu has a habit of writing unabashedly and directly from his own life. Claiming famously that "all literature is autobiography," he sees that as a defiant and necessary departure from the traditional collective discourse of impersonality. Almost all the details in "Sinking," except the last act of suicide, replicate his own experience in Japan as corroborated by his own diary entries. A look at Yu's authorial self, and at the precarious nature of the maternal mirroring/supporting function in his childhood, seems to shed further light on the narcissistic and shame-prone literary subjectivity in Yu's works. Yu lost his father at the age of three, and described his own birth to his once prosperous but now dilapidated household as a kind of "tragedy," a burden to his already overworked mother. His widowed mother was away working most of the days, his two elder brothers were studying far away from home, and his grandmother was preoccupied day and night "moving her toothless, flat mouth and chanting Buddhist sutras." Apart from the maid, Yu's only sustaining and significant relationship as a child was with his often absent mother. Yu himself refers to his first three years of life when his father was still around as merely the "prelude," and the subsequent life of the "orphan and the widow" as the "main drama" of his childhood ("Birth of a Tragedy" 353). Ming Dong Gu, for instance, posits that this predicament was the cause of his father's untimely death. Yu himself writes that "the whole household was exhausted by the birth of this troublesome infant (Yu), and as a consequence Father was brought thereby to illness and death" ("Birth of a Tragedy" 353). Yu is famed for his inferiority complex even at the height of his literary reputation. Kuo Mo-Ruo, for instance, remarked on Lu Xun's resilience, Wen Yi-Duo's uncompromising integrity, and Yu Tafu's "self-abasement" as the three unique events in the literary scene. Yu's obsequiousness is seen by Kuo as even "pathetic." See Kuo, as quoted in Jin Li (170).

When asked whether his often "sullen and silent moods," his long "gazings afar" were because he missed his mother, the child would "turn back his head, and gave the maid a sad grimace of loneliness" (354). The child's timid and withdrawn nature is further aggravated by not daring to walk out of the family gate, for fear of his mother's "scolding." The old family house feels "as silent as a grave" when his mother was away, but when she did return, he was met not with demonstrable love or caresses but often with severe scolding. All available biographical sources suggest that Yu's mother had a stern personality. Yu himself remembers his mother as "fierce, crazy and even sometimes alcoholic" (Su 320). Left with the heavy responsibility of feeding a whole household after the untimely death of her husband, Yu's mother was often exploited by relatives in land and harvest transactions. The family was also regularly subject to burglary because of the absence of adult men in the household (Lee 82). When bullied at work, Yu's mother would return home and weep before her husband's portrait ("Birth of Tragedy" 356). The sight of a hungry and dilapidated household, and especially of a clinging and frail child yearning for her milk and love must prove doubly exhausting. No doubt Yu's sense of guilt and of being a burden and a "curse" to the family must be his internalization of his mother's bitter and impatient scolding. This is crucial in accounting for the failure of the archaic grandiose self to be pacified into normal self esteem, and for the deep sense of unworthiness and inferiority that plagues Yu well into his adult years.

Critics have mentioned the importance of guilt in Yu's formative years, particularly his internalized feeling of being a curse to the family, and of being the cause of his father's untimely death. Yu himself writes that "the whole household was exhausted by the birth of this troublesome infant (Yu), and as a consequence Father was brought thereby to illness and death" ("Birth of a Tragedy" 353). While acknowledging the validity of this perception, this paper must point out the importance of another affect, shame, in Yu's childhood years. Since the maternal response that the young Yu craves for is often absent, the
feeling of shame this leads to, the fear of the self's deficiency and basic unlovability, should impact strongly on his narcissistic personality that cannot stand rejection. Much of the adolescent Yu's "timid and shy" behavior as he leaves home for school and city-life, his "terror and fear in the classroom, all huddled up like a terrified snail not daring to pop the head out" (Yu, quoted in Jin Li 171), can be seen as stemming from his deep shame and fear of exposing the self as deficient. The same reason, in a more aggravated form, is detectable in his lonely and frustrated stay in Japan.

In Yu's adult life after his return to China, he is notorious for his frequent patronage at brothels, garnering a reputation for "decadence" and moral abandon. This almost "pathological" need for women (Ni 44) can actually be attributed to his narcissistic self's obsessive search for repeated recognition and approval. The above analysis has demonstrated the almost greater importance of love for Yu as a source for empathic comfort than as a source for sexual fulfillment. As he himself writes, "I am deprecated as a hedonist and decadent, but few understand why I indulge in sex and alcohol. As I sober up in the middle of the night and find this bought flesh by me on the bed, who is to understand my pathos and my lament?" (Tzu-shan Chen 186) Just as the protagonist in "Sinking" laments, right after blaming himself as "lowly" and "degraded" for his brothel visit, that "the kind of love I search for will probably always be beyond my reach" ("Sinking" 52), it seems that even in Yu's brothel visits could be detected this obsessive search for constant recognition, a "true heart" that does not reject him. That recognition from the female seems to be even more important than sexual fulfillment is reflected in Yu's frequent choice of old, ugly and clumsy prostitutes over young and pretty ones (Xiang-he Chen 111). Here a residual oedipal feeling for the matronly maternal body may play a part, where the protagonists

Such brothel visits are almost always followed by deep censure and remorse. Deep shame for failing to live up to the ideal self, rather than oedipal sexual feelings for the mother, seem to be the more likely reason. This can be seen when the protagonist in a later Yu story "Autumn Willow" blames himself after his brothel visits, "I am an immoral hypocrite, an animal in human clothes" ("Autumn Willow" 320). That such shame is not just limited to sexual areas is also testified to by his similar remorse after his drinking bouts. His diary entries in the months of 1927 when he was courting his later wife Wang Ying-hsia show a regular pattern of excessive drinking, followed by remorse and resolutions to "cut out smoking, cut out drinking, cut out serpent-like women" (Lee 100-01). When these resolutions invariably turn out to be forgotten the very next day, the same pattern begins again.

Drinking, just like brothel-going, compromises his internalized standards of an ideal self and thus leads to shame. However, drinking also provides a means of hiding shame, since by intoxicating the mind, it produces a state of illusion whereby the self reaches an imagined state of grandiosity or fusion with the ideal self. Thus like the patronizing of old prostitutes, drinking provides the possibility of illusory affirmation, of imagined invulnerability otherwise impossible in sobered reality. Such solace is inevitably disillusioning when the self sobers up, and proves in turn doubly humiliating as well as the even farther elusiveness of the ideal self. A vicious cycle of addiction and remorse is thus perpetuated. The narcissistic self's obsessive search for constant approval can sometimes take on a masochistic dimension. The confessional and heavily autobiographical style of the story collection Sinking is often acclaimed by critics as spearheading a brand new style in Chinese fiction writing (Huang 1997, 43), a new focus on the private and the individual that departs from what Yu himself terms as traditional literature's "external" and "social" concern ("The Path Trodden by the Modern Novel" 106). However, in emphasizing the work's foremost position at the beginning of a whole tradition of the new-style May-Fourth literature which it has helped to shape, such criticism tends to stress Yu's affinity with the other new-style writers and thus fails to pay adequate attention to the peculiar, almost pathological dimension of Yu's obsession with confession. In his later career after his return to China, Yu is almost notorious for his obsessive need to expose himself in his works, particularly his vices like brothel-visiting, alcoholism or opium-addiction. This is certainly very shocking to a Chinese public accustomed to a literary tradition of euphemism and indirection, and has led to the dubbing of the epithet "brothel literature" on Yu's writings (Su 321). Such a marked tendency to expose and confess the flaws of the self is already seen in Sinking, where the protagonists are emphasized for their gaunt and sick complexion, their inadequate masculinity, their "vices" like masturbation, sexual voyeurism, or brothel-visiting, and their effeminate traits like tear-shedding or self-pity. There is a very peculiar obsession with the sick body and the body's addiction to some kind of vice in almost every of Yu's stories. In "Sinking," the protagonist blames his indulgence in masturbation for his
increasingly emaciated appearance, yet cannot shake the addiction. In "Moving South," the protagonist is fresh out of the hospital and again thrown on the threshold of death by the desertion of his lover. Sometimes this leads to a deliberate courting of the sick and the melancholy, which in turn offers a kind of protective mask or even a source of satisfaction. This latter is achieved because the display of the flaws leads to the pity of the other.

Pity of the other is indeed what the narcissistic self seeks in its masochistic displays. In writing about why masochism could lead to a sense of relief and even satisfaction, Briere explains that physical and mental masochism in a way prepares the self for the actual event of shock and humiliation, thus leading to an anticipated sense of immunity from and control of the actual trauma when it does arise (Briere 66-67). Masochism by the narcissistic self stems from its belief in its own deficiency and lack, and its resultant fear of exposure, rejection and disintegration of the self. Thus by indulging in masochism, the narcissistic self in a way preemptively acts out the feared rejection and the pains that would lead to, thus protecting the self and endowing it with a better ability to withstand actual trauma. In "Sinking," the protagonist asks for pity born out of generosity, and for love born out of pity. Pity by the other, rather than genuine attraction, seems to be the basis of Yu's view on love. In his celebrated courting of his wife Wang Yin-hsia, Yu would not seek to win love by demonstrating his strong points, but rather seeks to win pity first through words of self-deprecation and descriptions of self-torture and self-mutilation (Li Jin 5). Because the self dreads the eventual rejection and exposure which it believes will inevitably happen (due to its innate belief in its own deficiency), deliberate self-exposure, paradoxically, seems to offer a certain defense.

In the same sense the laying bare of the self's vices relieves and assuages the feeling of shame, Yu makes a habit of publishing his private diaries, invariably to public outcry because of the many vices thus exposed. In interpreting why Yu carries on with the publication, fully aware of certain public condemnation, critics have either cited Yu's disdain of public opinion and his courage in asserting individuality, or his faith in the expanding accommodation and openness of the newly modernized Chinese public (Ma 37). It is the belief of this paper that Yu probably neither ignores the public nor desires its straight-forward accommodation. Rather, Yu seems to be deliberately seeking and relishing public exposure and censure of his flaws. Friends and acquaintances of Yu have often remarked on his "odd" trait, that he "Ekex to expose his bad traits" (Kuo Mor-ruo, qtd. in Lee 121). For a narcissistic self that has suffered maternal negligence and always hungered for attention, masochistic exposure of flaws or vices and the resultant censure by the self-object are, perversely, another means of attracting attention. The expectation of the gratification of such attention-seeking yearnings leads thus to a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. That such masochistic courting of censure probably revolves out of Yu's childhood relationship with his mother is further shown in a later story "The Past." The protagonist describes his "uncanny sense of satisfaction" after being "slapped on the face" and severely "scolded" by his lover. That the lover has a "fat and plump" hand, that she likes to "order me around," and "beats me and kicks me on the waist with her sharp-ended leather shoes," suggests the protagonist's infantile relationship with the maternal lover. Deriving intense pleasure out of this, and "yearning for such favor," the protagonist would deliberately disobey her orders and "invite" her beating and scolding ("The Past" 377). Such masochism as a means of winning recognition and attention is very likely behind Yu's obsession with displaying his own flaws in his works.

In the collection Sinking, the protagonists are admittedly lonely and there is no witness to offer pity or censure. But Yu as the author is acutely aware of the position of the reader as a sort of on-looker or spectator. The many scenes of masochism in the works also to a large extent reflect Yu's own narcissistic wounds. The characters in Yu's stories may vary, and so does the setting, but the stories basically enact the same plot of seeking recognition in love, encountering rejection, and wallowing in self-pity and self-mutilation, suggesting that Yu is re-playing and re-acting out repeatedly in his works his own injuries, fears and shame. By displaying the sick and the flawed, Yu invites the reader's pity or censure. Both are a means of providing external attention. Yu's characters all flaunt their loneliness and melancholy, and their discomfort in human company, yet Yu also seems obsessed with writing about, publishing and propagating their loneliness and discomfort, to make it known to everyone. Thus loneliness or melancholy is rather merely a mask, a means toward an end, and human company or attention is something wistfully sought after rather than genuinely detested.

The displaying of shame and wounds may stem from a deliberate, masochistic urge to seek censure or pity, but it cannot be denied that such an urge may also be the very impetus of the need to write (Hoeeveler 405). Between the burning feeling of inadequacy, of lack and shame, and the obsessive yearning for approval and quelling of shame, may lie an important source for creative writing. This is certainly the case with Yu Da-fu. Writing
obviously helps to exorcise and relieve his sense of shame, and the burden of his internalized ideal self. But again the solace it offers is temporary, as the narcissistic self’s need to keep on writing, and keep on seeking recognition, is constant and obsessive. Writing could have originally become an ideal therapeutic surmounting of shame, since it not just reflects a need for repeated replay and re-acting out of shame, it also involves to some extent a willingness to trust the reader as the other. Though a writer like Yu may very likely write out of deliberate exhibitionist desires, there could also be a simultaneous though conflicting desire that the reader/other may genuinely sympathize and not laugh at the exposed self. Thus to be able to write and publish presupposes by its very act an imaginary audience; by exposing his/her shame and putting his vulnerability in the hands of others, the writer in a way also puts his/her trust in the audience to accept him. Writing often allows an artful playing with masks, so that the writer can both hide him/herself behind the masks and also reveal him/herself, thus establishing with the other a trust and a surmounting of shame (Adamson 1999, 28-29).

However, in the case of Yu's narcissistic self, the feeling of shame and the need for recognition is constant and cannot be quelled once and for all. Despite writing's capability to relieve and control and surmount shame, the fundamental inautonomy in Yu's narcissistic self and its obsession with repeated approval is simply too strong to lead to a transcendence above what LaCapra calls the "compulsive fixation" in the re-playing and re-acting stage (LaCapra 193).

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Yu Da-fu's Sinking / 585