The Stream-of-Consciousness Technique in Wang Wen-hsing's Fiction*

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I. Introduction

In 1981, Wang Wen-hsing published the first volume of his second novel *Pei-hai-te-jen,* or *The Man with His Back to the Sea,* which, to my knowledge, is the longest stream-of-consciousness novel yet produced in Chinese fiction.[1] In comparison with his first novel *Chia-pien,* literally, *Family Change,*[2] however, *The Man,* a product of an almost six-year painstaking effort of a serious writer who writes only about one hundred words per day, seems to be a pebble cast to the sea, immense and indifferent. Up to the very present moment, few ripples have been seen.[3] One of the main reasons is that in addition to maintaining the stylistic idiosyncracy of *Chia-pien,*[4] *The Man* has as its organizing principle the seemingly disorganized flow of consciousness of an anonymous, one-eyed narrator. This in itself is enough to constitute an insurmountable obstacle to the impatient or not well-trained audience.

Looking a little bit further into Taiwan fiction, we will find that stream of consciousness not only plays a significant role in the total output of Wang's creative writing, but also is a familiar technique to many Taiwan writers.[5] This paper is a preliminary study of the adoption of a foreign literary technique by a person who is at once a student of foreign literature, a creative writer, and a professor of fiction. My discussion will focus on his three short stories and the novel *The Man.*

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II. Discussions of Wang's Stream-of-Consciousness Short Stories

A. "The Wedding of a Civil Servant"

"The Wedding of a Civil Servant" was published in *Wen-hsüeh tsa-chih* (文學雜誌 *Literary Review*), when the author was a twenty-year-old sophomore at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Taiwan University.[6] It was among Wang's earliest writings which, having been regarded by the author as the works of his apprenticeship, have never been included in his collections of short stories. Like Ring Lardner's short story "Haircut," a work Wang had probably read before,[7] the whole story is presented through the mentality of a gossip. As we read, or rather, "overhear," this talkative neighbor's one-and-a-half-hour soliloquy, the main action of the story is gradually revealed.[8]

The narrator provides us with necessary information as she tells the event to her neighbor: how a thirty-year-odd-old college graduate, most probably a mainlander serving as a civil servant, came to wed a socially and intellectually inferior native maidservant who handled messing arrangements at the dormitory. We learn from this chatterbox incidents, large and small, which culminated in this infamous wedding between the "honorable" civil servant and the pregnant maidservant.

Rather than telling the story directly, the author chooses to have a narrator through whose mouth the story is exclusively told. By so doing, he not only gives us the narrator's version and criticism of the whole event, but also tacitly offers us an opportunity to judge for ourselves the whole event and the narrator's value system. A sense of the reader's participation is thus achieved, which adds significantly to the interest of the story.

The author's way of presentation endows an originally not unusual story with something rich and new. A very consistent story is told through the narrator's soliloquy which, in contrast to direct or indirect interior monologue, gains "a great coherence, since the purpose of it is to communicate emotions and ideas which are related to a plot and action."[9] What makes this story more profound and interesting is the discrepancy between the narrator's view and the author's. We observe that the criticizing narrator is also implicitly criticized by the author's vivid portrayal of her as a typical gossip. The beginning and concluding paragraphs show skillfully this chatterer who is bored at her own house and comes to her neighbor's for a chat in which the

listener cannot get a word in edgeways. Her criticism of this event reveals her value judgment – " This is truly a scandal! How can a maidservant become a madam? Ke-ke, it's very funny. Yes, it's too bad" (p. 41).

She keeps a very close eye on the affair. Yet her close observation is that of a peeping Tom. She even knows how these two persons came to spend the night together – "You must wonder how I could have known it so clearly. I wouldn't tell" (p. 43). From her knowledge of the details of the event, it is not difficult for us to infer her undue interest in this affair.

While re-telling old Mr. Wang's consoling words – "Society today would not allow such old-fashioned misconceptions" (p. 46) – she is herself among those who hold these misconceptions. The observer and criticizer is thus observed and criticized implicitly through her own words and actions. This is the special interest of the story which has been greatly benefited from the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

B. "Mother"

One year later, Wang published the short story "Mother" in *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* 現代文學 *Modern Literature,* of which he was one of the co-founders and editors.[10] In the preface to his *Fifteen Stories* published in 1979, Wang wrote

> "Mother" and "The Midsummer in the Prairie" – especially the latter – are the works that I can mention with a smile. I wrote in the way I pleased, despite what others might think. Go to hell with the story, the character, the psychology. I am sorry that after these two works, I have not stuck to my aspiration and think too much of others' understanding and agreement.[11]

Just as Wang wrote, the reader who is trying to find a story here will be greatly disappointed. For what is placed before him is not a story with the traditional structure of beginning-middle-end or exposition-complication-climax-denouement, but the putting together of scenes – external and internal (the latter in the sense of "psychological"). These scenes are presented by the cinematic technique of "montage."[12] The internal scene depicts the flux of the neurotic mother lying in bed and worrying about her only son. This presentation of the mother's inner movements is flanked by two external passages – the preceding, a description of this hot July afternoon; the

following, an account of her son's entrance into the house of a young and fashionable divorced woman.

One of the stylistic characteristics of this short story is the appearance of a space behind every sentence. This is unique among all his writings. A staccato effect is achieved by this typographical arrangement.

The fifth paragraph, which occupies two-fifths of the whole work, marks a sudden inward turning and is the only stream-of-consciousness passage. Yet its effect is amazing. This longest paragraph, with the exception of the last two sentences telling the heroine's falling into sleep, presents the flow of consciousness of the neurotic mother in bed. Let us map the stream of her consciousness from her awakening to falling asleep once again:

sentence	content
1 - 7	her worries about her only son who slipped away while she was asleep
8 - 14	her efforts to calm down, as advised by the doctor and her husband
15 - 22	her unfounded worries about her son's being mistreated by his schoolmates
23 - 42	her efforts to be a good girl for the doctor by having no fear
43 - 61	the game of hide-and-seek between the young mother and her son when he was a small boy
62 - 63	his totally different situation now (the estrangement between mother and son).
64	his boyish expression in the hide-and-seek scene (the once close relationship between mother and son)
65 - 73	the gap between mother and son now
74 - 98	her falling into unnecessary worries and picking herself up again
99 - 115	her thinking of something relaxing – Mrs. Chang's visit and gossip (mainly about the divorced woman) – and falling into sleep once again

From the outline, we can see how the movement of the mother's stream of consciousness is "controlled by the principle of free association through memory, the senses, and the imagination"[13] and how past and present are immediately juxtaposed.

By the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, the author makes us directly experience the unfounded worries of the neurotic mother who tries in vain to tie down her growing son.[14] We are in the stream and get the feeling of intimacy and immediacy.

C. "Typhoon"

"Typhoon," published in *Modern Literature* in 1961, tells about a middle-aged tricyclist riding out in a stormy night to carry passengers in order to earn more money for his sick wife.[15] Instead of a gossip or a neurotic mother, we are confronted with a male narrator of forty-two who, while struggling with the astounding natural phenomenon, narrates things admirable and abominable.

According to its way of narration, this story can be divided into two parts: the narrator's talking to the other characters (the two passengers and his wife) and his speaking to himself. Through his narration we know that the hero is faced with different natural and human antagonists. What impresses us most is how he fights against the typhoon (one of the most overwhelming natural disasters in Taiwan); how he gets hurt, yet remains undefeated; and how he comes home triumphantly with his gains.

The greatest conflict of this story is that between man and nature. By way of the narrator's live report, we thrillingly experience the horrible and destructive force of the typhoon as well as the petty man's self-reliance and perseverance in the face of such an enormous and hostile natural force. It readily reminds us of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* a novel Wang was reading at that time.[16] Encountering this tremendous force, man has nothing to rely upon except his own strength, experience, and endurance. The primary motivation of his struggle is survival – his and his wife's survival in the world. He could retreat. Yet where there is danger, there is profit; or, as he says, "The more violent the wind, the more difficult the ride, the more money" (p. 60).

It is in his struggle to survive that we perceive different forces at work which suggest the idea of the law of the jungle. As we mentioned earlier, he tries to survive the typhoon by keeping a stiff upper lip. Moreover, he is not

incapable of violence once his survival is threatened. The threat of the taxi introduced in the first paragraph appears in two forms – the danger of being hit and the competition to get passengers. The cruel beating of the lone taxi driver bespeaks the tricyclists' anger and revenge. Also in contrast to the taxi driver, the tricyclist has little mechanical aid to resort to. All he can rely upon is his flesh and blood. This adds much to his heroic stature.

When confronted with his passengers, he is able to practise deception in order to get more money than he should. He cunningly cheats the first passenger of two more dollars by saying that he has no change. As a matter of fact, he hides small change in another pocket. Cunning as he is, he is honorable in his own way. For besides his violence and deception,[17] he is careful, tender, and responsible, as shown by his saving of the girl and his taking thought of his wife. If his account to the second passenger is reliable, he is compassionate enough to carry the girl at an unbelievably low price, careful enough to detect that there is something wrong with her, and enthusiastic enough to call the police to prevent her from committing suicide.

By this vivid presentation of the narrator's feelings and thoughts through his flow of words, we experience intimately his various encounters and realize the noble and nasty sides of the hero who, in order to survive all kinds of challenges, must play tough, yet is not without tenderness.

III. The First Paragraph of *The Man With His Back to the Sea:* An Explication

The very first paragraph of *The Man,* an example of Wang's stream-of-consciousness work published twenty years after "Typhoon," poses some serious questions. Being one of the most obscene and offending passages in contemporary Chinese fiction, few readers will read it without a blush. At first sight, it seems to be nothing more than a long list of dirty words that people will never utter under normal circumstances. Seldom have we been thrown so immediately and blasphemously into the flux of a narrator-protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Does this paragraph merely aim at shocking the reader? After reading a few pages (if we are patient and tolerant enough), we realize that the situation is indeed unique and that it is necessary so far as sound, sense, and structure are concerned.[18] As we delve into the consciousness of the drinking and gradually intoxicating narrator, the necessity and even the merits of this passage slowly come into sight. In this section, I will make a somewhat bold attempt at analyzing in detail this paragraph

which in my opinion is the epitome of the whole book, by drawing internal evidence to support my argument. It is my conviction that a careful analysis of this paragraph will do justice to the author's craftsmanship and reveal to us many of the important aspects of this novel.

In the presence of the work by a serious writer who advocates "economy," who believes that "words are everything," who emphasizes the importance of reading closely and gruellingly (lip reading – one thousand words per hour, two hours per day), who practises the doctrine of writing slowly and surely, who strives at the combination of sound and sense, and who wants to apply poetized language to his story, the way to get the most out of it is to follow his doctrine and advice as far as our patience and ability can go.[19] However, nowhere in Wang's previous works have we seen such an intensity and complexity of words as in the first paragraph of this novel, a work whose diction in Wang's opinion follows the same direction of *Chia-pien* yet with more freedom.[20] To facilitate our discussion, it is necessary for us to put it down in the following way:

transliteration	ts'ao!	wo	ts'ao!	t'a	ma	le	ke	pi!	ts'ao	t'a	niang!		
word order	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
phrase order	1	2		3					4				
sentence order	1	2		3					4				

kou!	kou	pi!	kou	p'i!	tao	che	kuei	ti	fang	lai!			
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22			
5	6		7		8								
5	6		7		8								

ma	le	ke	wu	kuei.	chiu	shih	wu	kuei,	kuei	t'ou,			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33			
9			10				11		12				
9													

lan	chiao,	ch'ih	wo	te	lan	chiao!	ch'ih	t'a!	ch'ih!				
34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43				
13					14		15		16				
							10		11				

kuei	kung!	hsiang	kung!	t'u	tzu!	pai	t'u!						
44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51						
17		18		19		20							
12		13		14		15							

kou yang te!	kou p'i!	kou p'i!	kou chua!	kou t'ui!
52 53 54	55 56	57 58	59 60	61 62
21	22	23	24	25
16	17	18	19	20

kuo lan chiao!	kou t'ou!	kou shih!	kou ya!
63 64 65	66 67	68 69	70 71
26	27	28	29
21	22	23	24

kuo t'i!	kou pien!
72 73	74 75
30	31
25	26

It goes without saying that the transliteration loses much of the flavour of the original text, because in it we cannot find the characteristic Chinese *ssu-sheng* (四聲 , four tones) which contributes greatly to the sound effect. Meanwhile, the visual effect of the Chinese script has also been completely lost, Nevertheless, for the readers of the Chinese text, even the most careless ones will notice some striking points, such as, its obscenity, its long series of exclamation marks (26 in all), its debasing animal imagery, as well as the repetitions of the same words and sounds.

Generally speaking, this paragraph of condemnation not only sets the tone of the whole book, but also arouses and orients the reader's anticipation. It tells us the narrator's attitude toward his subjects and dictates our attitude toward them. But just as in "The Wedding of a Civil Servant," we are not going to take the narrator's words on trust. What we should do is, first and foremost, to see what he tells us, that is, his account of the events, and then, his vantage points and prejudices.

We can infer from this paragraph that the narrator is alone and is in one of the innermost and most private moments of his life. When a person is in company with others, he may utter some lewd words. But it is highly unlikely that he will utter such a long list of words of damnation. Only when he is absolutely alone, physically and psychologically, will he be able to express freely what has been so long suppressed. Immediately in the third page, we are told that he is drinking bad wine. As we all know, alcohol will make us garrulous, especially at the earlier moments of drinking. It is also beyond doubt that the intoxicating effect of alcohol will liberate a person from his daily restraints and reveal the deeper level of his mind. What is closely

connected is the revelation of his anti-social mentality, his feeling of abusing and being abused, his desire to condemn, to rebuke, and to shout loudly and lewdly against himself as well as the world in which he lives.

This paragraph can be said to be structured on free association, or, to be more specific, word association – one of the major techniques of the stream-of-consciousness novel. I will just point out some of the obvious associations in terms of sentences, phrases, words, and sounds:

A. same sentences: 7, 18
B. same phrases: 10, 11; 13, 14 (in addition to A)
C. similar sentences: 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
D. similar phrases: 13, 14, 26; 19, 20 (in addition to C)
E. same words: 1, 3, 9; 2, 37; 4, 10; 5, 23; 7, 25; 8, 14; 12, 13, 15, 52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74; 16, 58; 26, 30; 27, 31, 32, 44; 33, 67; 34, 39, 64; 35, 40, 65; 36, 41, 43; 45, 47; 48, 51
F. same sounds: 29, 69 (in addition to E)
G. alliteration: 8, 14, 50, 75; 16, 56, 58; 5, 23; 17, 20, 38, 54; 4, 10, 33, 42, 48, 51, 62, 67, 73; 6, 22, 24, 34, 39, 64; 28, 35, 40, 65; 7, 12, 13, 15, 19, 25, 27, 31, 32, 44, 45, 47, 52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74; 18, 60; 1, 3, 9
H. rime: 4, 5, 10, 23, 42; 2, 6, 7, 18, 24, 25, 37, 38, 54; 22, 50; 1, 3, 9, 17, 35, 40, 65; 34, 39, 64; 12, 13, 15, 33, 52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74; 8, 14, 16, 20, 56, 58, 73; 26, 30, 48, 51; 11, 46, 53; 45, 47; 19, 27, 31, 32, 44, 62

As to the discussion of its rhythm, the following list will be helpful;

3 one-word sentences: 1, 5, 11 (11.54%)
17 two-word sentences: 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 (65.38%)
3 three-word sentences: 4, 16, 21 (11.54%)
1 five-word sentence: 3 (3.85%)
1 six-word sentence: 8 (3.85%)
1 eighteen-word sentence: 9 (3.85%)

We can see that this paragraph is characterized by short sentences, mostly in the form of two-word sentences – the commonest form of curses. The

75-word paragraph is divided into twenty-six sentences by twenty-six exclamation marks – with the average of 2.88 words per sentence/exclamation mark. The shortest sentence is composed of one word, the longest, eighteen words (even the longest sentence is mainly composed of two-word phrases). This long sentence, separated by one dash and four commas, is placed there for rhythm's sake. With lower pitches and shorter pauses between phrases than those of other sentences, it creates the effect of variety. Compared with the number of sentences, the number of phrases in this paragraph is high in proportion (83.87%) – a very rare case in terms of syntax. The effect of rapidity and forcefulness is created by the combination of the shortness of the sentences, the large number of exclamation marks, as well as the repetitions of the sentences, phrases, words, and sounds.[21]

This paragraph of word association can be considered the apex of the Chinese dirty words with their characteristic obscenity and offensiveness. This use of word association is repeated later in the novel. Here I will cite three examples. On p. 32, the narrator tells us how the landlord gets water into the reservoir by connecting bamboo pipes overhead to a mountain spring. Then we have a series of seven expressions beginning with an appropriate phrase and ending surprisingly with the name of the American sex symbol Marilyn Monroe – from "flying spring" (a spring coming from above), to "bath water from heaven," to "joy from heaven" (a Chinese idiom meaning an unexpected joy), to "The water of the Yellow River comes from heaven" (a famous line of the Chinese poet Li Po, which also suggests the narrator's literary background), to "heaven(ly) river" (another name for the Galaxy, which hints at the fortune-telling motif), to "flying waterfall and angry tides" (a Chinese idiom describing the dangerous water scene and the Chinese translation of a movie starring Marilyn Monroe), and finally to Marilyn Monroe. The associative line is constructed on the water imagery, the dominant imagery of the story. Moreover, the Chinese translation of Marilyn Monroe's name is closely connected with the water imagery. For in China a woman is said to be made of water and sometimes even disparaged as *huo-shui* 禍水 (ominous water; the source of troubles) and the Chinese transliteration of "-roe" in Monroe is *lu* 露 (dew).

Then the word association, based on the sound "chung," appears on p. 119. There the director of the half-forgotton office says:

> Chung kuo ts'ai, chung ch'i shih tsu, chung hsin keng keng
> (Chinese dishes, very strong, most loyal!)

Here the semantically unrelated high-sounding words are forced together simply because they have the same sound "chung" by the ridiculous director of that superfluous office to create the effect of irony and laughter. In fact, the behavior of all the members of that office is absurd and laughable.

Word association that is of great thematic and structural importance again appears on p. 99. The narrator goes out to urinate and, seeing the light of the inspection station on the mountain, says that he often mistakes it for sunrise. He continues, "Deceiving light! – Deceiving Messiah! –" And at the very beginning of the next paragraph, he exclaims excitedly, "Halleluiah, halleuluiah – I remember – Chang Fa-wu. . ."

The passing from "deceiving light," to "deceiving Messiah," and to "Halleluiah, halleluiah" is clearly traceable. But all these utterances have a close connection with the whole book, for instance, the light/darkness imagery, the religious overtone, the ironical stance, and the image of the false prophet.

The transition from "halleluiah" to "Chang Fa-wu" at first reading seems somewhat abrupt. But in Chinese "Messiah" is pronounced as "mi-sai-ya" and "halleluiah" as "ha-li-lu-ya." So the transition from *"mi-sai-ya"* to *"ha-li-lu-ya"* is both religious and phonetic, while that from *"ha-li-lu-ya"* to "Chang *Fa-wu*" is phonetic, though not so obvious.

The association, nevertheless, is not so simple as it appears. For at the narrator's first acquaintance with Chang, the latter is playing a deceiving trick at the dock. With his gigantic stature and imposing deceptive behavior, Chang is virtually a deceiving Messiah. Therefore the narrator's exclamation of "halleluiah" is both sarcasm directed at Chang and an expression of his excitement at finding his lost thought stream.

This shift is of great structural significance. For ten pages earlier, the narrator's flow of thoughts, then concentrating on Chang Fa-wu, is interrupted by the crow of a cock. His thoughts then stray away from Chang to the cock. The runaway flow of thoughts is not recollected until "deceiving Messiah" reminds him of the subject dropped earlier – to play upon words, we may say Chang is both a deceiving Messiah and an abnormal subject to the narrator.

Nevertheless, these three examples, delicate and functional as they are, cannot match the delicacy and function of the first paragraph.

Also obvious in the first paragraph is the abundant usage of animal imagery: the dog (14 times), the turtle (4 times), and the rabbit (twice). All these images are used in a degrading sense. The dog, no longer a faithful animal, is downgraded and becomes one of the dominant images of the novel;

the turtle, no longer a symbol of patience and longevity, is used to describe the male sexual organ; the rabbit, no longer a lovely animal and pet, means a sexually perverted male (just as the once honorific title "hsiang kung" has degenerated into meaning a homosexual.)

Here I will swerve my discussion to the related dog imagery on the second page. In the fourth paragraph of the book, the narrator says,

> "What I cry out is like the barking of the dog, yea, meaningless dog barking, that will disperse in the boundless dark night, without a single trace.... once a person holds his pen, he will not have the desire to talk crazily as he pleases ... So what I am saying now is purely for my own hearing – no, no, even I myself don't want to hear it, I just want to talk, no, not talk even, I just want to *bark* and *bark*." (p. 2)

When rendered into English, *liu-shu* (六書 , the six principles of formation of Chinese characters, that is, pictograph, form indication, ideograph, sound indication, figurative extension of meaning, and making one form stand for another word) are almost done away with. The following interpretation does not mainly keep in line with these six principles. My purpose is different: to show the effect of montage, a cinematic technique having been derived by Eisenstein to a great extent from Chinese characters.[22]

ch'üan 犬 – a dog.

fei 吠 – the barking of a dog, coming from *k'ou* 口 " (mouth) and *ch'üan* 犬 (dog), meaning the sound out of the dog's mouth.

kou 狗 – originally a dog, coming from *ch'üan* 犬 and the phonetic of 句 ; here we may run the risk of interpreting it as *ch'üan* 犭 (dog) and *chü* 句 (sentence), so what the narrator utters is "dog's sentences" – nonsense, coming from the dog's mouth.

wang 汪 – originally a pond, now often used as the Chinese onomatopoeia for the sound of the dog; if separated into *shui* 氵 (water) and *wang* 王 (king), this character goes with the prevailing water imagery and the narrator's appearance as a living prophet and demigod (esp. p. 20 and p. 80) in this coastal village, deciding the life and death of the villagers like a king.

k'uang 狂 – originally crazy, coming from *ch'üan* 犬 and the phonetic of *wang* 㞢 ; if divided into *ch'üan* 犭 (dog) and *wang* 王 (king), it can be farther interpreted as "dog king" – thus a graphic

and onomatopoeic representation of the crazy sentences of the dog king.[23]

These words, except the first one, in themselves create the effect of montage. When put together and seen in the light of the whole book, the effect is enormously multiplied and the meaning, marvelously enriched. Therefore, the author's repeated uses of the dog imagery in the first two pages are more than clear; the effect of ambiguity and richness is striking; and his intention is not to be mistaken.

Food and sex, two major motifs in this novel, are also present in this paragraph. The verb "eat" appears three times, whereas "dog," "turtle," and "rabbit" are all edibles in China. Furthermore, what strings the whole book together is the narrator's drinking and smoking (in Chinese drinking and smoking are often expressed as "eating wine" and "eating smoke"). On the other hand, words carrying sexual overtones occupy more than half of the exclamations of the first paragraph.

Throughout the book, the narrator seems to be obsessed with these two motifs. In addition to "eating wine" and "eating smoke," which relate to the narrator's present moment, his thoughts center upon, among other things (the most prevalent of which might be fish, fate, and fortune-telling), food and sex. The narrator's observation of this place includes interesting statistics which seems to be a declaration of man's joy and equality in terms of food and sex:

> This place has more sex-selling brothels and teahouses than anything else. Next in number is the food-selling stands. Altogether: brothels: 4, teahouses: 3, snack bars: 5. The food-selling and sex-selling shops are more than anything else, so we can see that "eating" and "whoring" are indeed two of the most significant things of life . . . it seems that "eating" and "whoring" include all the happiness in the world. Yes, that's correct indeed, . . . with "food" and "sex" you will not miss gardens and mansions, gold and US dollars, cars and swimming-pools . . . So the happiness of "food" and "sex" is indeed the most, most inexpensive among all desires. You may even say that "food" and "sex" are the real, undiluted happiness of "THE DOCTRINE OF PEOPLE'S RIGHTS" – rich and poor alike will get them, the extent of the enjoyment of food and sex is the same regardless of their being rich or poor, it may even happen that the happiness of the rich cannot match that of the poor. (pp. 17-18)

Here is the equality of all men in food and sex. The food and sex images can be seen through out the book, and there are many passages wholly devoted to these two aspects: for example, his going to a food stand (pp. 20-22); his spiritual food and material food (p. 29);[24] his dinner in the superfluous office (p. 115-25); the longest passage on sex and his whoring experience, pp. 152-82, about one-sixth of the whole book.

But sex, the happiest and most democratic object in the world, is also a filthy and fearful thing. On p. 162, the narrator tells an allegory of man's dilemma as a sex-seeker: a person who jumps into a filthy pond over and over again in order to catch the moon.[25] The narrator cannot rid himself of the sexual desire, nor can he fully enjoy his sexual life. In addition to his impotence and premature ejaculation, his sexual act is also overshadowed by his fear of catching V. D. He will not enjoy his sexual life without a condom. Yet this protective measure either causes his temporary impotence (p. 157) or fails him at the crucial moment (pp. 160-61). And his being seduced by the Bodhisattva-like female sadist is his most painful and humiliating experience.[26] There he is an underdog, a plaything, and a mouse at the cat's paw – a sharp contrast to his role as a gallant (pp. 173-74), an aggressor (p. 170, pp. 171-72, and p. 176), or a happy companion (pp. 176-82).

Food and sex culminate in the last phrase/sentence of the first paragraph – dog penis, a Chinese folk aphrodisiac to be *eaten* for the sake of increasing one's *sexual* power.

The narrator's denouncement of this fishing village as *kuei ti fang* 鬼地方 "ghostly place," "place of ghosts," or "hell" carries much richer meaning than it appears. First of all, this condemnation fits perfectly with the name of the place 深坑澳 (literally, deep-pit-bay), the phantom-like people, and the prevailing gloomy atmosphere.

In Chinese mentality, ghosts and gods (*kuei shen*) 鬼神 are often mentioned together and are two indispensable factors of the Chinese religious life. Thus this phrase brings in some religious overtone. The traditional Chinese religious attitude as well as the invasion of foreign religion can both be detected in the following text.[27]

The phrase "ghostly place" contains the psychological implication in terms of contradiction found in the narrator's mind. Because some rascals claimed his only eye, he came to "deep-pit-bay" to save "the window of his mind" (p. 36) and to wait for fish, a symbol of life and hope.[28] But many of the expressions of this man "at bay" also unmistakably show his death-wish, for instance, his drinking wine is compared to drinking poison (p. 3), the

bathtub in which he sleeps is fit for a coffin (p. 25). . . . He is both expecting and forsaking life, maintaining and giving up the hope of resurrection, struggling between his psychological death-wish and biological instinct to survive.

Closely related to the religious and psychological levels of the book are the philosophical and mythical levels. So far as philosophical level is concerned, man stands between gods and ghosts, heaven and hell, a creature of life carrying the seed of death on his back, or, to go with the fortune-telling motif of this novel, carrying his fate on his palm, his face, and his birthdate. In Alexander Pope's philosophical poem "An Essay on Man," we have one of the best portrayals of man's dilemma and self-contradiction:

> Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
> With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,
> With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
> He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
> In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
> In doubt his mind or body to prefer,
> Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
> Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
> Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
> Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
> Still by himself abused, or disabused;
> Created half to rise, and half to fall;
> Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
> Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!
>
> (Epistle II, 11. 3-18)

The narrator's self-criticism is the same, "Contradiction! Contradiction! I am a big big big big and big contradiction! – I AM 'CONTRADICTION' (p. 31)."[29] His allegory of "Jumpers into the Pond" also shows vividly the absurdity and irrationality of man Pope describes.

On the mythical level, the narrator is greatly honored and worshipped because he delivered an oracle which, to his fortune and to others' misfortune, came true. He is even idolized. Yet his role as a prophet is also satirized. For, unlike the archetypal prophet Teiresias who loses his sight but gains insight and foresight, the one-eyed narrator with his self-title *tan-hsing-tzu*

(Master Lonely Star) can only "guess" fortune, not tell fortune.[30] He is so blind to his own fortune that his "fortunate" rendezvous with the Bodhisattva-like lady turns out to be "unfortunate," unforgettable, and formidable – another proof of his contradiction? Even he himself is aware of the contradiction and absurdity of fortune-telling and his role as a fortune-teller, though he pretends to be a prophet granting oracles of life and death.

Besides food and sex, word association, animal imagery, montage, and "ghostly" implications discussed above, we also notice different dialects at work not only in the first paragraph but also throughout the novel. His most extended use of the dialect can be seen on the first day of his fortune-telling. Advertising himself at length in Taiwanese, he is able to attract a big audience (p. 64). The narrator's comment also shows his talent in language acquisition. From his own words, we know that he wonders why most people cannot speak the local dialect after so long a period as fifteen years, and that he is able to learn a dialect even if he only lives in that place for one week (p. 63). His sufficient command of Northern and Southern dialects reveals his cosmopolitan character and his ability to adapt himself to different circumstances.

In the above analysis, I may run the risk of over-interpretation only to demonstrate that the first paragraph of *The Man* is well-structured and meaning-laden under the deceptive surface of disorder. It flows spontaneously from the consciousness of an outcast who is exiled from and exiling his society, but paradoxically clings to some hope half-heartedly and some "vision" half-wittedly. Hung between heaven and hell, church and redlight district (p. 1), he displays his personal dilemma and suggests the greater dilemma of human beings. This paragraph is indeed the epitome of the whole book.

From the discussions of the three short stories and the explication of the first paragraph of *The Man,* we can see Wang Wen-hsing's application of various stream-of-consciousness techniques, the characteristics of each story, and his artistic achievements. If we follow Humphrey's classification, "The Wedding of a Civil Servant" and "Typhoon" – with their greater coherence and unity and "with an audience tacitly assumed" – are soliloquies, while the stream-of-consciousness passage in "Mother" and *The Man* – with greater "incoherence and fluidity" and with "negligible author interference and with no auditor assumed" – are direct interior monologues.[31]

The reading of Wang's writings, especially his later works, is seldom easy, often challenging, and always stimulating. They are painstakingly written and should be read accordingly. By plunging ourselves into the narrator's flow

and being swept down the stream marked by many sudden turns and unexpected scenes, we enter the deepest and darkest region of human mind, marvel at the richness and profundity there, and acquire a new insight into our own mind and life. After finishing the last page of *The Man,* we emerge from the narrator's stream of feelings, thoughts, and impressions, which has been our companion all along the voyage and thus familiar, and with him, we utter, "IT'S DAYBREAK – "

Notes

1. Wang Wen-hsing, *Pei-hai-te-jen* 背海的人 or *The Man with His Back to the Sea,* Vol. 1 (Taipei: Hung-fan shu-tien, 1981), hereafter abbreviated as *The Man.* All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically in the text.
2. Such a vehement argument over a single novel is an unprecedented phenomenon in Taiwan literary circles. For the pros, see *Chung-wai Literary Monthly,* esp. I, Nos. 11 and 12 (1973), and the cons, *Book Review and Bibliography,* esp. No. 6 (1973). *The Man* was written from Jan. 6, 1974 to Oct. 19, 1979.
3. Wang Hsüan-yi's "Pei-hai Kuang-ts'ao," 背海狂草 , published from Sep. 11 to 12, 1980 in the literary supplement of *China Times* before its eight-day (Sep. 14-21) serial, was based on an interview with the author. The serial is one-sixth of the novel.

   The editor's notes on the serial publication of this novel in the magazine classified it as an anti-novel, cf. *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* IX, No. 5 (Oct. 1980), pp. 178-79. More than half of the novel appeared in three installments in this monthly from October to December 1980.

   Lin Hsiu-ling's book review, the only article of its kind, appeared in *T'ai-ta-jen yüeh-k'an,* Dec. 1982, pp. 30-34.

   Ch'en Jo-hsi, Wang's classmate at National Taiwan University, mentioned this novel in passing in her article appearing on the literary supplement of the *United Daily News,* May 17, 1983.

   Edward Gunn, "At Play in the Fields of the Word," April 1982; "The Process of Wang Wen-hsing's Art in *The Man Who Turned His Back to the Sea,*" October 1982. Both are unpublished papers.
4. As for Wang's remarks on the stylistic similarities between *Chia-pien* and *The Man,* see my interview with Wang, which will appear in the inaugural issue of *Modern Chinese Literature* scheduled to be published in September 1984. Hereafter, this interview will be referred to as "Shan's interview."
5. The case is especially true to those majoring in English and American literature, for instance, Shui-ching, Ts'ung-su, Pai Hsien-yung, and Ou-yang Tzu.
6. Wang, "Yi-ke kung-wu-yuan te chieh-hun" 一個公務員的結婚 , *Literary Review,* 5, No. 6 (1959), 41-47.
7. See Shan's interview.
8. In the second chapter of *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel,* Robert Humphrey divides the techniques of stream-of-consciousness novel into direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy. He defines soliloquy as "the technique of representing the psychic content and processes of a character directly from character to reader without the

presence of an author, but with an audience tacitly assumed." *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), pp. 23-41, esp. p. 36.

9. Humphrey, pp. 35-6.
10. Wang, "Mu-ch'in" 母親 *Modern Literature,* No. 2 (1960). There are some typographical errors (five spaces are missing) in *Shih-wu-p'ien hsiao-shuo* 十五篇小說 *Fifteen Stories* (Taipei: Hung-fan shu-tien, 1979), pp. 29-33. So the reader is advised to read this story collected in Wang's *Wan-chu shou-ch'iang* 玩具手搶 *The Toy Revolver and Others* (Taipei: Chih-wen ch'u-pan-she, 1970), pp. 33-38, though in that collection one space is still missing.

    Wang's importance as one of the editors of *Modern Literature* is respectively acknowledged by Pai Hsien-yung and Ou-yang Tsu, cf. Pai's *Mu-jan hui-shou* 驀然回首 *Looking Backward Suddenly* (Erh-ya ch'u-pan-she, 1978), p. 81; Ou-yang's *Hsien-tai-wen-hsüeh hsiao-shuo hsüan-chi* 現代文學小說選集 *An Anthology of the Stories from Modern Literature* (Taipei: Erh-ya ch'u-pan-she, 1977), Vol. 1, p. 28. This anthology is edited by Ou-yang Tzu and prefaced by Pai Hsien-yung, Wang Wen-hsing, Ch'en Jo-hsi, and Ou-yang Tzu – all classmates at National Taiwan University.
11. Wang, "Preface to *Fifteen Stories,*" p. 2.
12. As for Wang's appreciation of montage, see Shan's interview.
13. Humphrey, p. 46.
14. See Shan's interview.
15. Wang, "Ta-feng" 大風 , *Modern Literature,* No. 11 (1961); later collected in *The Toy Revolver and Others,* pp. 62-74, and *Fifteen Stories,* pp. 57-67.
16. See Shan's interview for Wang's admiration for Hemingway.
17. These are negative qualities so far as absolute morality is concerned, yet positive qualities in a world where the law of the jungle dominates. Although the appearance of the police in the first paragraph is a slight negation of the law of the jungle, the beating of the imprisoned tricyclist ironically proves that even for the police the law of the jungle prevails.
18. See Shan's interview for Wang's idea of sound and sense. As for his idea of structure, see Wang Hsuan-yi's "Pei-hai k'uang-ts'ao," *China Times,* 11 Sep. 1980, p. 8; and Li Ang's interview "Ch'ang-p'ao-hsüan-shou te ku-chi" 長跑選手的孤寂 "The Solitude of a Marathoner" in her *Chung-kuo tang-tai yi-shu-chia fang-wen* 中國當代藝術家訪問 *Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Artists* (Taipei: Ta-han ch'u-pan-she, 1978), pp. 81-82.
19. These ideas are expressed almost in each and every preface he writes and interview he receives.
20. See Shan's interview for the stylistic connection of these two stories; the characteristics and merits of the language of *Chai-pien* have been explored by Ou-yang Tsu in her "Lun *Chia-pien* chih chieh-kou-hsing-shih yu wen-tzu-chu-fa" 論「家變」之結構形式與文字句法 [On the Structure and Language of *Chia-pien*] in *Chung-wai Literary Monthly,* 1, No. 12, 51-67; and by Chang Han-liang in his "Ch'ien-t'an *Chia-pien* te wen-tzu" 淺談「家變」的文字 [A Preliminary Study of the Language in *Chia-pien*], *Chung-wai Literary Monthly,* 1, No. 12, 122-41.
21. Cf. Lin Hsiu-ling, pp. 31-32.
22. According to Eisenstein, "two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition" and

"Piece A (derived from the elements of the theme being developed) and piece B (derived from the same source) in juxtaposition give birth to the image in which the thematic matter is most clearly embodied." Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense,* trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1942), p. 4 and p. 11. Elsewhere, Eisenstein cites some Chinese characters to show that "by the combination of two 'depictables' is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable," Among them are:

a dog + a mouth = "to bark" [吠];
a mouth + a child = "to scream" [吵];
a mouth + a bird = "to sing" [鳴];
a knife + a heart = "sorrow" [忍];

Eisenstein, *Film Form,* trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949), p. 30.

23. In this novel, people seem to be the underdogs of fate, while the narrator, himself an underdog and fortune-teller, is also a "prophet" mediating between fate and man.
24. His spiritual food includes eleven pornorgraphic photographs, a self-copied collection of modern Chinese poetry, Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground,* Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Gide's *Fruits of the Earth,* and Tolstoy's *Resurrection.* All these reveal him as he is – a poet, a prophet, an exile, a sex-seeker, and a man in search of hope and rebirth. The book of fortune-telling, as a means to keep his body and soul together, is regarded by him as his material food.
25. Here, like the word association analyzed earlier, the author alludes to Li Po who, according to a legend, drowned himself because, when drunk, he wanted to catch the moon in the lake. Obviously, this legend has been burlesqued. Also here the absurdity of sex-haunted men, or, if I am allowed to burlesque the title of John Synge's famous one-act play, the absurdity of "Jumpers into the Pond" is in sharp contrast to the tragic sense of those who go to the sea to catch fish despite the "oracle" of the prophet, the death of his crew, and even the death of his beloved son: "Jumpers into the Pond" versus "Riders to the Sea." Yet these "Riders to the Sea" may also be "Jumpers into the Pond" – another illustration of man's contradiction. see pp. 75-76, pp. 84-86, and p. 1.
26. This is also symbolized by his being led upstairs by this goddess-like lady only to be mortified the more – the ascent to heaven turns out to be the descent into hell. With a knife on his neck, he is forced to sorely and ironically experience the Chinese proverbial wisdom, "Sex is a knife on one's head" 色字頭上一把刀 (p. 167). Like another proverb, "Patience is a knife on one's heart" 忍字心上一把刀 (cf. n. 22, the last Chinese character cited by Eisenstein), it is characterized by the fact that "by the combination of two 'depictables' is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable."
27. The religious overtone can be most easily found in p. 1, p. 16, pp. 19-20, and pp. 90-92. To a larger extent, the villagers' religious attitude reflects not only the traditional Chinese culture, but also the Chinese attitude towards foreign culture.
28. In contradiction to the dog imagery which serves to downgrade man, the prevailing fish imagery stands for something positive.
29. When asked whether he had Pope in mind when he wrote the above sentences, Wang replies that he did not pinpoint Pope, though he knew the same idea had been expressed by people before, including Pope. See Shan's interview.
30. Wang models this narrator after Teiresias, cf. Shan's interview.
31. Humphrey, p. 38, p. 36, p. 27. and p. 25.

Appendix: A Tentative Skeleton Outline Of *The Man With His Back To The Sea*

Utters a long series of damnation and condemnation (p. 1)

1. recalls his coming here (p. 1)
2. describes where he lives (p. 1)

Hears rain (p. 1)

1. condemns the world, the present, the past, the future (pp. 1-2)
2. criticizes memoirs (p. 2)

Observes the darkness inside and outside the room, and drinks bad wine (pp. 2-3)

1. condemns this place (pp. 3-6)
2. remembers his cheating and being cheated while gambling in Taipei (pp. 6-7)
3. rationalizes his cheating of his relatives and provincials as well as his ingratitude (pp. 7-11)
4. recounts his illnesses (pp. 11-13)
5. waits for fish here (p. 13)
6. says why he tells fortunes and comments on fortune-telling (pp 13-14)

Hears rain again (p. 14)

1. recalls his trip here (p. 15)
2. recounts the small shops here (pp. 16-17)
3. comments on food and sex (pp. 17-18)
4. sees the garbage around (pp. 18-19)
5. comments on the natives' religious attitude (pp. 19-20)
6. recounts food-selling stands here (pp. 20-22)

Guesses time (p. 22)

1. recounts the sole black eagle (pp. 23-24)
2. describes the joy of being an exile and the bathroom in which he lives (pp. 24-26)
3. describes the outside surroundings (pp. 26-27)
4. describes the inside setting (pp. 27-29)
5. recounts his collection of books and pornographic photographs (p.

29)

6. philosophizes about modern men's getting and spending (pp. 29-30)
7. describes himself as a big contradiction (pp. 30-31)
8. describes the sole rock withstanding the rushing and washing of the sea (p. 31)
9. describes the surroundings (pp. 31-32)

Smokes (p. 32)

1. comments on tea (pp. 32-33)

(The cigarette) tastes wrong (p. 33)

1. comments on smoking and man's absurdity (pp. 33-34)
2. comments on drinking and eating (p. 34)

Drops cigarette ash (p. 34)

1. comments on man and ash (pp. 34-35)
2. describes his countenance, its relation to smoking and fortune-telling, reveals his vanity (pp. 35-38)
3. comments on his unsightly stature and poor clothing (pp. 38-39)
4. comments on being rich and, as a result, being free (pp. 39-42)

Is burnt by the cigarette butt (p. 42)

1. curses his bad memory (p. 42)
2. tells his daydreaming and nightmare (pp. 42-43)
3. comments on the interpretation of dreams and condemns fortune-telling (pp. 43-47)
4. believes in fortune-telling secretly and unreasonably (pp. 47-51)
5. tells his life here and his making fortune-telling his profession (pp. 51-56)
6. watches the sea, the sand, and the people (pp. 56-61)
7. relates how he tells fortunes in the first two days (pp. 62-75)
8. tells how his fortune-telling partly comes true and he becomes famous (pp. 75-81)
9. tells how the boss deals with the shipwreck, and criticizes the capitalist mentality (pp. 81-82)
10. comments on Chinese funerals (pp. 82-84)
11. reports on the captain, who has just lost his son in the shipwreck, rides to the sea (pp. 84-86)

12. recounts his acquainting Chang Fa-wu at the dock (pp. 86-89)

Hears the cock crow (p. 89)

1. damns the cock that crows at midnight (p. 89)
2. recalls Freud (p. 89)
3. comments on the poor villagers' worshipping (pp. 89-90)

Forgets what he was thinking about (p. 90)

1. comments on the temple and its gods and goddesses of various origins (pp. 90-92)
2. recalls people's worshipping (pp. 92-93)
3. comments on Buddhism, Zen Buddhism in particular (pp. 93-94)

Drinks all his wine and, wineless and waterless, smokes (p. 94)

1. shows his admiration for a short poem by the great master of Zen Buddhism and turns to condemn Chinese poets, ancient and modern (pp. 94-95)
2. recalls his stopping creative writing – the confession of his career as a writer, especially as a poet (pp. 95-99)

Goes out to urinate and, seeing the light, remembers where he lost his thought flow (p. 99)

1. recalls Chang's visit to his room (pp. 99-100)
2. relates his joining meals in the office where Chang works (pp. 100-01)
3. comments on the office and its appearance (pp. 101-02)
4. describes its garbage-like members, their ridiculous interrelations and farcical performances (pp. 104-52)
   a. T'ang Lin (pp. 104-15)
   b. the director (pp. 115-25)
   c. Fu Shao-kang (pp. 126-27)
   d. Ch'iu, the cook (p. 128)
   e. Lin An-pang (pp. 129-33)
   f. Yu Shih-liang and his story (pp. 133-47)
   g. Chang Fa-wu (pp. 147-49)
   h. Ts'ui Li-ch'un (pp. 149-51)
   i. Sheng Ch'i-chih (pp. 151-52)
5. sees Sheng in the red-light district (pp. 152-53)

6. recounts his first whoring experience on his second night here (pp. 153-61)
7. worries about getting V. D. and comments on the necessity and irrationality of sex (pp. 161-63)
8. recounts his being seduced by the Bodhisattva-like sadist and his painful experience the night before (pp. 163-67)

Is without cigarette, wine, or water (p. 167)

1. continues his recount of his painful experience (pp. 167-68)

(His hips) hurt (p. 169)

1. recounts his visiting the sex-selling teahouse on his third night here (pp. 169-71)
2. turns to his only true love experience with a girl in a Taipei teahouse and his breaking promises with her years ago (pp. 171-74)
3. returns to the seaside teahouse and his abusing this sad girl (pp. 174-76)
4. recounts another girl in the teahouse, a born optimist (pp. 176-82)

Sees Daylight (p. 182)